

26 March 2024

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY – KREOL MORISIEN – PROPOSED INTRODUCTION

(No. B/1) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the proposed introduction of Kreol Morisien in the National Assembly, he will state where matters stand.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply to Parliamentary Question B/405 of 09 May 2023, I gave an overview of the numerous initiatives undertaken by different institutions with a view to paving the way for the introduction of Kreol Morisien into the National Assembly. These institutions, which include the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, the Akademi Kreol Repiblik Moris, the University of Mauritius, the Mauritius Institute of Education and the Creole Speaking Union, have indeed been doing a lot of work to prepare the ground for the introduction of Kreol Morisien into the National Assembly and the importance of such preparatory works cannot be overstressed. I have, on several occasions, in this House, emphasised the need to pursue the teaching, learning and training of Kreol Morisien, over a period of time, with a view to developing a critical mass of people with a mastery of the language. Apart from the language issue, we also have to put in place the necessary logistics in terms of information and technology hardware and software at the National Assembly, including the training of Members of National Assembly, particularly, the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker and staff of the Hansard Unit - including all of us, Members of the National Assembly.

Mr X. L. Duval: All of us!

The Prime Minister: Yes, and I shall come to that a bit later.

Mr Speaker, Sir, besides, most experts and knowledgeable people in this field do agree on the need to proceed in stages, while at the same time, adopting a holistic approach. The House will surely recall what late Mr Narendraj Virahsawmy, G.C.S.K., also known as Dev Virahsawmy, had stated in November 2015, in regard to the introduction of Kreol Morisien into the National Assembly. To remind, I quote – « Je ne crois pas que les députés sont prêts pour l'utiliser au Parlement. Pour pouvoir manier une langue, quatre compétences sont nécessaires. Outre l'écriture, il faut maîtriser l'écoute, le parler et la lecture. Je vous fais remarquer que même

ceux qui sont pour l'introduction du kreol au Parlement, ne maîtrisent pas parfaitement son aspect oral. Ils font un mélange de français et de kreol. Bien souvent, ils écoutent mal. Pire, ils ne savent pas lire et écrire correctement le kreol standard. Il est essentiel de s'assurer au préalable que tous les parlementaires maîtrisent la graphie du kreol morisyen, car après leurs interventions, ils sont appelés à corriger leurs textes avant qu'ils ne soient publiés dans le Hansard. Cela dit, pour résoudre ce problème, il faut que le kreol devienne le médium d'enseignement. Cela va permettre à tous les Mauriciens de savoir comment lire, et écrire le kreol... Ne mettons pas la charrue devant les bœufs. Maîtrisons bien le kreol, avant de l'introduire dans les institutions... Ce qui me fait peur, c'est qu'on utilise un kreol approximatif au Parlement et, de ce fait, on sème la confusion au sein de la population. » Mr Dev Virahsawmy is also on record for having said the following in March 2018, and I quote – « Nos parlementaires ne savent pas parler créole correctement. Pourquoi leur demander de s'exprimer dans une langue qu'ils ne maîtrisent pas ? »

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like here to seize this opportunity to pay tribute to the pioneering work and outstanding contribution of late Mr Dev Virahsawmy for the development and promotion of the kreol language in the Republic of Mauritius. His seminal works and legacy on the kreol language will surely remain a source of inspiration for generations to come. Mr Speaker, Sir, Prof. Arnaud Carpooran, O.S.K., who is another renowned linguist in this field and also the current Chairperson of the Creole Speaking Union, is presently driving a project entitled "Promoting Institutional Democracy through Language Access in Kreol Repiblik Moris and Digital Media". This project is being financed by the Higher Education Commission. One of the objectives of this project is precisely to prepare the ground for the introduction of Kreol Morisien in the National Assembly. Prof. Carpooran has also highlighted the importance of the preliminary works before introducing Kreol Morisien in the National Assembly. In this connection, he has submitted the following, and I quote – « Le projet est objectivement, réellement « sur les rails », et que bien que les avancées ne correspondent pas toujours au rythme que souhaiterait une bonne partie de l'opinion publique (...), nous ne pouvons que nous plier aux exigences calendaires qu'impose un projet de recherche d'une telle ampleur. Comme, de surcroît, ce sont des institutions publiques qui sont désormais impliquées, que ce soit au niveau de la recherche, de l'encadrement et de l'appui financier, nous ne pouvons, pour l'heure, qu'être optimistes quant à l'avenir, en espérant pouvoir apporter dans un futur pas trop lointain, des livrables concrets à nos responsables politiques pour leur laisser prendre alors, les décisions qu'ils estimeront justes à leur niveau. »

M. le président, les autres principaux objectifs du projet sont comme suit –

(i) Création d'un corpus écrit d'au moins 300 000 mots en Kreol Morisien – Cet ensemble de données cherche à être représentatif du langage institutionnel utilisé à Maurice et comprendra un corpus de textes à caractère institutionnel, initialement écrit en anglais et traduit en Kreol Morisien. Le seuil de 300 000 mots est considéré par l'équipe de recherche comme le nombre minimal nécessaire pour qu'un correcteur orthographique expérimental commence à être vraiment opérationnel.

(ii) Mise-en-place d'un module de correcteur orthographique en Kreol Morisien.

(iii) Création d'un ensemble de données audio d'au moins 600 000 mots en Kreol Morisien. Cet ensemble de données serait obtenu à partir du même corpus de 300 000 mots traduits en créole mais qui serait transcrit oralement dans au moins deux ensembles de voix différents, où l'équipe de recherche tentera de respecter le critère de représentativité en genre, tout en faisant varier les accents.

(iv) Configuration d'une base de données de reconnaissance vocale et construction d'un système de reconnaissance vocale automatique, basée sur l'intelligence artificielle en Kreol Morisien.

(v) Développement d'un outil de transcription en utilisant le modèle pour reconnaissance vocale automatique.

(vi) Développement d'une terminologie appropriée pour faciliter l'utilisation institutionnelle du Kreol Morisien.

(vii) Développement d'une typologie des registres de parole et des normes sociosituationnelles en Kreol Morisien, en vue de son emploi institutionnel, et

(viii) Conception, évaluation et développement d'outils informatifs et éducatifs à l'aide de l'audiovisuel et des outils multimédias à des fins de diffusion régulière des données obtenues au gré des avancées du projet. M. le président, le Prof. Carpooran nous a également expliqué que le projet a connu des avancées substantielles de juin 2022 jusqu'à février 2024 comme suit

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- Mi-juin 2022 : publication d'annonces pour le recrutement de Trainee Project

Assistants pour la traduction ;

- Mi-juillet 2022 : processus de sélection des candidats ;
- Août 2022 : recrutement de 11 Trainee Project Assistants pour la traduction de –
 - (i) la Constitution de Maurice;
 - (ii) les Standing Orders de l'Assemblée nationale et de l'Assemblée régionale de Rodrigues, ainsi que
 - (iii) des extraits choisis des transcriptions du Hansard.
- Octobre 2022 : à l'occasion de la Journée internationale créole, un atelier a été organisé au MIE où ont été rendues publiques, par le biais des médias, les premières retombées du nouveau projet.
- Décembre 2022 : publication d'annonce de recrutement de Trainee Project Assistants pour les enregistrements vocaux.
- Janvier 2023 : création d'un site internet dédié pour diffuser des informations sur le projet.
- Février 2023 : recrutement de quatre Trainee Project Assistants pour les enregistrements vocaux, distribution des tâches et mise en circulation d'une première vidéo des quatre premiers articles de la Constitution de la République de Maurice en Kreol Morisien. Je dois préciser que la traduction de la Constitution a déjà été complétée. La vérification et l'harmonisation linguistique seront effectuées dans un deuxième temps. Dès que cette étape sera terminée, on entamera la validation par des experts légaux et constitutionnels.
- Mars 2023 : soumission de la phase 1 des enregistrements audio à l'équipe informatique pour entraîner l'algorithme de transcription parole-texte. Celui-ci comprend des textes contenant 13 961 mots et des enregistrements correspondants d'une durée de 2 heures et demie.
- Mars 2023 : première esquisse d'un prototype de correcteur orthographique développé en Python qui est un langage de programmation d'une application logicielle. D'autres approches comme des modèles d'apprentissage en profondeur sont à l'étude.
- Mai 2023 : soumission des phases 2 et 3 des enregistrements audio à l'équipe informatique pour entraîner l'algorithme de transcription parole-texte. Ces données comprennent des textes contenant 73 583 mots et des enregistrements correspondants d'une durée de 11 heures et demie et le développement de la première version du modèle CMU Sphinx Automatic Speech Recognition.

- Juin 2023 : préparation de la Phase 4 comprenant des textes de 44 308 mots et des enregistrements correspondants d'une durée de 6 heures et le début du développement du deuxième modèle utilisant la fonction Automatic Speech Recognition de DeepSpeech qui est un logiciel de reconnaissance vocale.

- Février 2024 : soumission d'un rapport technique intérimaire à la Higher Education Commission sur l'état d'avancement du projet. M. le président, je crois comprendre que suivant la soumission du dernier rapport, la Higher Education Commission a déjà déboursé les fonds nécessaires pour la phase suivante de ce projet, qui comprend, entre autres, de nouveaux recrutements pour –

(a) étoffer l'équipe de traducteurs où l'équipe de recherche vise de constituer une base de données de 300 000 mots en Kreol "institutionnel" jusqu'à la fin du projet;

(b) étoffer l'équipe responsable des enregistrements vocaux pour la partie speech-to-text du projet;

(c) procéder à l'étape finale de la programmation aussi bien pour le spellchecker que pour le logiciel speech-to-text. Mr Speaker, Sir, my Government has maintained its sustained efforts for the promotion of Kreol Morisien at all levels within our education system. The House will recall that the successful implementation of Kreol Morisien at the upper secondary level in 2021 culminated in the first cohort of Kreol Morisien candidates sitting for the National School Certificate Examinations in 2023, that is, in Grade 11. Out of a total of 188 school candidates who took part in the 2023 National School Certificate Examinations in Kreol Morisien 2023, 181 were successful, representing a pass rate of 96.28%. The pass rate stands at 98% for girls and 93.75% for boys. It is also to be noted that for the National Certificate of Education Assessment 2023, that is, Grade 9, a total of 2021 pupils took part in the examination and the pass rate was 90.5%. Mr Speaker, Sir, these achievements are testimony to the progress made to integrate Kreol Morisien into our education system. Moreover, it serves as compelling evidence of our ability to surmount any challenge in assessing the subject and its accreditation, as previously highlighted by Cambridge International. I must also add that for the current year, a total of 22,506 pupils of the Primary Sector, that is, from Grade 1 to 6, are enrolled for Kreol Morisien. Regarding the secondary sector, from Grade 7 to 11, a total of 8,200 pupils are currently enrolled for Kreol Morisien.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the 'Akademi Kreol Repiblik Moris' has also continued its efforts to promote the Kreol Morisien. In fact, since 2022, it has started 'Lir-Ekrir Kreol Morisien' courses, in

collaboration with the University of Mauritius, the Mauritius Institute of Education the Creole Speaking Union, for the general public, for people involved in administration and mass communication as well as for press people. Each year, the 'Akademi Kreol Repiblik Moris' celebrates major events such as Zourne Internasional Kreol, Zourne Internasional Lang Maternel and Zourne Internasional Tradiksyon in collaboration with other Kreol Morisien stakeholders like Creole Speaking Union, University of Mauritius and the Department Kreol Repiblik Moris at the Mauritius Institute of Education. Moreover, in 2023, the 'Akademi Kreol Repiblik Moris' has undertaken the publication of a bilan of the teaching of Kreol Morisien in schools and is currently updating the orthography of Kreol Morisien, which will represent major advancements pertaining not only to Kreol Morisien but also on the written usage of the language.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that the Ministerial Committee set up in 2021, under my Chair, to look into the development of a roadmap for the teaching of Kreol Morisien at the upper secondary school level, recommended that the University of Mauritius be designated as an awarding body for a National Certificate in Kreol Morisien and that Kreol Morisien be introduced as an optional examinable subject at National School Certificate level. As a result, the National Examinations Board was set up in 2023 and the University of Mauritius was conferred the power to award certificate in the secondary sub-sector. Mr Speaker, Sir, Government has also concurrently invested heavily in the training of Educators in Kreol Morisien. In fact, some 407 Educators in Kreol Morisien have already been trained and the training of some 110 at different levels, that is, at Teacher's Diploma level, Bachelor of Education level and Post Graduate Certificate in Education level is still ongoing. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also advised, that at the level of the National Assembly, the existing Hansard Production Cycle will have to be reviewed in order to accommodate Kreol Morisien and this will also require a phased training of staff and Members of the National Assembly, particularly, the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker and the Deputy Chairperson of Committees in the use of Kreol Morisien in the Assembly. I would like to mention here that based on the model of short course 'Lir-Ekrir Kreol Morisien' offered by the University of Mauritius to the public, a similar course would be devised for the Members of the National Assembly and the staff of the National Assembly.

In addition, the existing schemes of service of all the grades in the Hansard Unit will have to be amended to include Kreol Morisien as a qualification requirement. I am also informed that

the Centre for Innovation in Parliament of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in Geneva has agreed to extend assistance to the National Assembly, through a Peer Assist Program, drawing upon the experiences of the House of Commons of Canada and the Parliament of Scotland, both of which have undertaken similar projects. I understand that the National Assembly is also planning to undertake benchmarking visits to the Lok Sabha in India where I am informed that 22 languages are allowed to be used. I am further informed that a similar visit is planned to the National Assembly of Seychelles. In Seychelles, according to Standing Orders, proceedings of the Assembly shall be conducted in Creole. However, a Member may, with the permission of the Speaker, express in English or French.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government will continue to extend its full support to sustain the groundwork undertaken by all the institutions concerned. The House will appreciate that it is only when all the conditions are met that the necessary amendments to the relevant section of the Constitution and the Standing Orders and Rules of the National Assembly can be introduced. Mrs Navarre-Marie: Le Premier ministre a repris les citations de feu Dev Virahsawmy et du Prof. Carpooran plusieurs fois, reprises ici-même dans cette Assemblée. De plus, il y a eu plusieurs recherches entreprises et des documents produits. Ma question est simple : le Premier ministre peut-il donner l'assurance à la Chambre que le Kreol Morisien va être introduit à l'Assemblée nationale avant la fin de son mandat ?

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: En 2029.

Ms Anquetil: Trop tard ! Trop tard !

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the hon. Member has not understood what I have stated in my answer. This is according to experts...

(Interruptions)

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Mo konpran zis kreol mwa!

The Prime Minister: Do you want to answer in my place?

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Mo konpran zis kreol mwa!

The Prime Minister: Koze!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: L'arrogance!

The Prime Minister: This hon. Member does not have the decency to listen to my answer!

(Interruptions)

When she put her supplementary question, I did not make any comment. So, please, listen to what I have to say in reply to your supplementary question.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have purposely taken the time of the House to explain in detail the different steps that we are taking in order to be able, at the end of the day, to introduce the Kreol Morisien in the National Assembly.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Échec lamentable!

Mr Bérenger: Yes!

Hon. Members: Oh!

Mr Speaker: Please, try to be polite! This is bad manners! Please, continue!

The Prime Minister: She is talking of échec lamentable and hon. Paul Bérenger says ‘yes!’

Mr Bérenger: Yes! Échec lamentable!

The Prime Minister: Yes!

Hon. Members: Échec !

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order! You do not have the right to reply!

(Interruptions)

You do not have the right to reply!

An hon. Member: 17!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You do not have any right! Please, continue!

Mr Balgobin: Ramgoolam pou vine ...

The Prime Minister: Let me remind hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie and particularly hon. Paul Raymond Bérenger of a question that was asked on 01 April 2008 by the then Member of Parliament, Mr Eric Guimbeau. The then Prime Minister, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, answered with regard to Kreol Morisien, and I quote – “(...) Section 49 of the Constitution provides that the official language of the National Assembly shall be English and that any Member may address the Chair in French. The question, therefore, of amending the Constitution to declare

Creole as an official language does not arise at this point.” Hon. Members: Shame! Shame! La honte!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: 16 banane nanye!

The Prime Minister: And then, Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Paul Raymond Bérenger asked a supplementary question: ‘Is the hon. Prime Minister prepared to review that?’ The answer of Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam was...

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Be li pa la!

The Prime Minister: ... I quote – “(...) the danger...

Li pa la? He is your leader! He is your leader!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Members: La honte!

The Prime Minister: You want him to become Prime Minister!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Members: La honte!

The Prime Minister: Li pa la! Li pa la!

Hon. Members: Shame! Shame!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

Order, both sides of the House!

An hon. Member: To rev limem! To rev limem!

The Prime Minister: Let me remind them what was the reply of Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam at that time, and I quote part of his answer –

“The danger...

(Interruptions)

Ms J. Bérenger: 2024 la!

The Prime Minister: “The danger...

Ms J. Bérenger: Vinn dan to lepok!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Evoluer!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Ekoute!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Ekoute seki to leader inn dir !

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: “(...) the danger I think is, if we start using Creole here, everybody is going to swear at each other ...”

(Interruptions)

Because - Mr Speaker, Sir - it is easier to swear in Creole than in English or French. And I think there is a danger that the level – already we see what the level is sometimes – might get even worse.”

Ms J. Bérenger: Gro zoure finn ena...

An hon. Member: Shame!

The Prime Minister: Can you imagine, what I would say, the frivolous reasons put forward by Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam to say: ‘no, we are not going to introduce Creole as an official language and, therefore, cannot be used in the National Assembly’. I just wanted to say that because he is their leader; they want him to become the Prime Minister of this country!

An hon. Member: Li pas la !

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: They are saying he is not here! He is not here, but he is there with you!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: So, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me remind also...

An hon. Member: Maryaz pankor fer, pe rod fer program!

The Prime Minister: ... what are the measures that have been taken. It is an ongoing process. It cannot happen du jour au lendemain. Let us take the example of, as I quoted, India. In India, do you know how long it has taken for them to be able to allow other languages to be spoken?

Because there is all to do with logistics also at the level of the National Assembly. In Seychelles also, since they got independence and since they made Creole become the official language – in 1978, I believe – how long it has taken for them to prepare and to officialise a dictionary in Creole itself before Creole becomes an official language in Parliament. So, there is a lot of work to be done and I have enumerated in my answer all the measures that are being taken. Now the hon. Member is asking me whether I can give an assurance. You know, there have been other previous governments. I don't know how many years they have been in government; they have not been able to do anything about it. We are doing it, and I hope that there will come a time when Kreol Morisien will be able to be spoken.

Mr Speaker: Time over!

An hon. Member: Ki lamerdman tonn al rode la ! The Deputy Prime Minister: Programme gouvernemental!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Get to ban keston kin poser!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, the Table has been advised...