

**MICHEL**

So one good thing about this course is that the students who take it, they seem to already be aware that there's something that they need to, I would say, unlearn about Creole languages. So because you can see that in the answers to the first questionnaire I give, because I start the course by asking them some basic questions to know where they are in terms of what they know about Creole languages.

And I think most of them, the answers reflect what they would have learned in the typical linguistic textbooks, which I've been myself critiquing. So the idea that Creole languages are mixed languages, and that makes them special languages, exceptional languages, or the idea that Creole languages are somehow oversimplified, they are reduced languages that are lesser than others. So that came up in some of their answers.

But at the same time, many of them, from the very beginning, they would share very, I would say, fine answers in terms of understanding that Creole languages emerged in the context of very drastic power imbalance. And as such, attitudes towards them reflect this power imbalance. And so they came ready to critique what they had learned in the linguistic textbooks, which to me was very heartening to start the course with.

So one way that we start by unpacking these misconceptions is by comparing attitudes towards languages with attitudes towards race and ethnicity. And what they get to see very quickly is that, in fact, there is perhaps as much misconceptions about language as there is about race. So they get to see very early in the course that language can be used as a proxy for race. Though now it's impolite to say certain things about, say, black people or Asian people, yet it's still polite to say pretty negative things about language.

And then at that point what we do, we introduce some basic linguistic analysis tools for them to be able to see that in terms of linguistic structure, there is nothing at all that's inferior about Creole languages. In fact, what we do from the very beginning is to show that, structurally, there are patterns, both in the syntax or morphology of Creole languages, that are quite similar to patterns in the syntax and history of English or French, of Mandarin Chinese. And so they quickly get a sense that empirically and theoretically, one cannot argue that Creole languages are any way lesser than non-Creole languages, the same way that there are no biological measures that would deem black people to be inferior to white people.

So they get very quick to understand the power of this myth that, often, they themselves have brought along in terms of how they view different languages-- in some cases Creole languages, and in other cases just even dialects of English, say, Southern English or black English. They are attitudes that are very demeaning to us as varieties that have no basis in science, that are rooted in hierarchies of power. And they get to see that very quickly.