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Student name: André Cordice
Student ID no.: 816013823
Degree Program: Bachelor of Arts, French
Supervisor: Madame Mathilde Dallier

Title of Thesis:

The Stigmatization of French language learning in Antigua



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ABSTRACT



This study aimed at investigating the preconceived beliefs that students hold towards the French language and its culture in order to determine if there is currently a negative stigma attached to the learning of the aforementioned language. Previous studies have shown that experiences contribute to the overall belief of the foreign language learner and subsequently add to the propagation of negative views towards foreign languages in any given community and student population. Moreover, these studies describe these experiences as influential factors exterior to the learner themselves taking various forms i.e.: parental influence, gender-based, social or cultural preconceived ideas. In conducting research for this study, both primary and secondary sources were used with the goal of gathering data and information. Quantitative data were extracted from questionnaires generated and completed electronically via Google forms. Secondary data such as books, articles and online journals were also used to inform this study. The study’s findings revealed that general language stereotypes are outdated and that students generally have a positive attitude towards language learning; that there is a greater growing appreciation for language learning within the secondary schools in Antigua. Moreover, some teachers accredited the erroneousness of certain language-based pre-established notions with their affirmation of students’ genuine interest in the language through self-established goals and through general intrinsic ability to do language. The findings also indicated, however, that societal biases play a role in the perception towards a language and thus instigates the formation of preconceived negative attitudes.

Key words: francophonie, preconceived beliefs/notions, pre-established views, French, Antigua

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INTRODUCTION

Myth and reality [...] affect how foreign language learners understand a target language and its culture (Drewelo 748). These myths or beliefs by foreign language learners cause them to approach a specific language learning task differently (qtd in Mohebi, et al 292) and can thus result in the intrinsic development of attitudes towards learning experiences



(292). Therefore, such experiences contribute to the overall belief of the learner as it pertains to language learning and subsequently add to the propagation of perceptions - sometimes negative or positive - towards foreign languages in any given community and student population. French language learning is no exception to the aforementioned development of perception surrounding foreign language learning due to rooted and preconceived beliefs. According to research conducted by Isabelle Drewelo, the French language is often stigmatized as a difficult language to learn - more so for the pronunciation - as well as an elitist or snobbish language (Drewelo 753).

Lack of Proximity to the French language also influences the likelihood of negative stigmas. This is demonstrated by a lack of contact and access to the language, which determines the marginalization of the French language. There is however a lack of empirical evidence to accredit the frequency of this “proximity stigma” yet to be documented in Antigua. Therefore, this study on the predominant beliefs by students is significant because it will add to the literature of the beliefs of students towards the French language. Moreover, it will offer a form of empirical evidence as it pertains to the prevalence of such attitudes in the education system of several schools.

The beliefs about the French language gave way to its stigmatization and thus presents the cornerstone for the purpose of this study. The study aims to investigate the preconceived beliefs that students hold towards the French language and its culture in order to determine if there is currently a negative stigma attached to the learning of the aforementioned language. Students from several schools will be used in this research. The different beliefs of students hailing from several different schools presents an asset to the research. This is thanks to the fact that each student has different socio-economic backgrounds, thus allowing for a deeper insight into the stigmas that exist around the language.

In order to conduct this study, quantitative research was conducted in the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021. Primary data was gathered using an online questionnaire (see Appendix A) created through an online application called Google Forms and interviews. This study comprises four (4) chapters. Chapter one deals with the literature review of the topic being studied. Chapter two outlines the methodology used for the data collection process and chapter three is the presentation and interpretation of data. The final chapter focuses on the conclusion and the tentative recommendations for the potential stigma attached to French language learning.



CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents the literature review concerning the area of research.

Part A: Beliefs about Foreign Language Learning

A belief is a declarative mode - a method of conditioning the future by presuming what is already the case. The degree to which belief conditions the future is - of course - an open question, but it has long



been recognized as reality-configuring. (Schneemann) Contemporary Anglophone philosophers of mind generally use the term 'belief' to refer to the attitude we have, roughly, whenever we take something to be the case or regard it as true (Schwitzgebel). Beliefs help individuals to define and understand the world and themselves, and they are instrumental in defining tasks and play a critical role in defining behavior (White, 1999) (qtd in Abdi 104).

Therefore, such beliefs and by extension attitudes to affirming a case as true would affect every aspect of an individual's life. The attitude that one develops overtime is unconsciously transmitted and ultimately causes different perceptions to the different facets of a person's life.

The case of language learning perception is no different. Learners' attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs about themselves as language learners have been associated with outcomes like enjoyment and achievement on proficiency measures or grades (qtd in Wesley S103). A student's enjoyment and goals concerning language learning is thus tied to their personal attitude. This therefore shows that the beliefs held by students is a determining factor for a learner's ability to pursue a second language.

Ahmed 2014's study equally revealed that there exist, on the part of the learner, positive or negative attitudes towards such objects or phenomena concerning beliefs (1); in this case second language learning and these phenomena are mostly determined by a set of relevant influential factors. These factors are brought on by preconceived language attitudes not always publicly articulated and likewise, individuals may not always be conscious of them (Garrett 1). For instance, it is commonly noted that for young learners, parents' involvement in and attitudes toward language learning are two important factors in L2 (second language learning) development (qtd in Sung 206). This indicates that influential factors exterior to the learner themselves may take many forms, for example: parental influence, gender-based influences and social or cultural influence; preconceived ideas based off of these forms play a vital role in language beliefs and attitudes.

Added to this, is the fact that [.....] students frequently come to language learning with positive or negative attitudes from the society in which they live; those beliefs in turn influence their motivation to learn a foreign language (qtd in Ahmed 7 - 8). These attitudes and beliefs are therefore considered very important as they can affect the learning process (Ahmed 6-7): important also as these attitudes affect students' self-confidence to achieve in a language and thus can translate to worsening of the current perceptions they hold.

Horwitz's 1987 research showed concern that some misconceptions or erroneous beliefs may undermine learners' success in language learning (qtd in Abdi 105). Most often, these important misconceptions about language beliefs or attitudes could simply and surreptitiously transmit to a rooting of negative views towards a language; in other words a language may become stigmatized.



Furthermore, this marginalization of second language learning could stem directly from the delicate period through which a student begins to learn a language, i.e, at secondary school. The aforementioned is corroborated in a research conducted on Turkish university students: “students’ beliefs about language learning originate from their second language learning experiences, particularly in secondary schools” (Ariogul 187). Given that other studies revealed similar concerns, this indicates that secondary school is the pillar that supports the formation of student attitudes towards life experiences. They are, thus, a contributing factor to development of students’ perception. Moreover, it is clear that foreign language peripheralization is a current issue still deeply rooted in the language learning process and indeed requires some level of attention.

Additionally, “researchers have - in recent years - realized the important influence of language beliefs in the foreign language learning process and have increasingly focused on students’ beliefs about language learning and their effect on students’ motivation and anxiety [.....]” (qtd in Mohebi 291-292). Indeed, a certain degree of attention should be placed on the potentially damaging effects to language learners brought on by preconceived beliefs - sometimes derived from personal experiences. Therefore, it is logical to assume that such beliefs will consequently affect the likelihood of students acquiring the general foreign languages taught: Spanish and especially French.

Part B: Beliefs about French Language Learning - Inclusion of Certain Antiguan Information

In the foreign language classroom, learners and their instructors bring predispositions, beliefs, and assumptions toward the target culture that originate in their collective history. These assumptions or beliefs have been shaped by their own experiences, their peers, past and present instructors, family, friends, instructional material, the media and all factors that surround the learning context (Drewelow 751). The predispositions ‘forged’ by such personal experiences contribute to the likelihood of biases as well as stereotypes in the foreign language learning context. The existence of such stereotypes or biases can be detrimental to different facets of people’s personal and professional life, thus resulting in social disadvantages - seeing as biases promote linguistic stereotyping [.....] (Lindberg 822).

The French language is no exception to this fact. For instance, Ariogul’s questionnaire results revealed that 97% of French university students in Turkish was in accordance with the proposed claim: “some people possess a gift for languages” (1502); that acquiring another language is a special ‘gift’ that some people have and that others do not (qtd in Graham 173). Moreover, the same aforementioned French students at 60% agreed to another proposition that women are better than men



at learning languages (1502). These examples of pre-established notions of students indicate accordingly that stereotypes are already fundamentally rooted in the minds of learners; and are therefore continuous as "history repeats itself" and the status quo is perpetuated" (qtd in Drewelow 757). The perpetuation of the status of French stereotypes is even more probable due to the fact that a false perception of the French culture: mannerisms, articulations and pronunciations, cuisine etc. According to Verdaguer (1996), that set mental picture of France and the French is maintained by public productions in the press, television commercials, films made in the United States, cartoons and travel brochures. (qtd in Drewelow 29). It is thus difficult to truly not succumb to and unconsciously appropriate publicized and imposed - indirectly - language beliefs of the majority.

Due to a lack of proximity to Francophonie influence (specifically concerning native speakers), students have probably been exposed to many common and sometimes contradictory notions about language learning (Horwitz 283). The constant transmission of misinformation or stereotypes about foreign language learning can thus take many forms due to such adverse language exposure: firstly, fallacies about the 'proper' French accent. Many cultures may claim that an individual must achieve full oral competency in French in order for one to be dubbed "a real" French speaker. Furthermore, certain students affirm that "nothing should be said in the foreign language until it can be said correctly." (qtd in Drewelow and Theobald 492) However, "the likelihood of attaining a native-like accent is very small. For Marx (2002), "becoming a fully competent speaker of a foreign language, especially with regard to accent, is extremely difficult." (qtd in Drewelow and Theobald 492) The pre-established and apparent firm belief of students point towards a misunderstanding of true language acquisition possibilities; thus this misconception of achieving full competency in French weighs on the establishment unrealistic goals and finally affect self-confidence and motivation when not achieved.

Secondly, the strictness and thus lack of flexibility of French, and thirdly disinformation concerning the closeness to native French speakers; i.e., the presence of native speakers of language is indispensable for foreign language learning to take place. Additionally, there are false ideas regarding French grammar in terms of its difficulty - especially learners who have mastered other languages - and the time necessary to fully apprehend French. Further adverse language-oriented conditions surrounding the French language may include: misinformation that teachers could be perpetuating and transmitting to students. Such a conundrum is a constant issue for the number of French learners in Antigua given the minuscule number of Francophonie influence - particularly natives living there (See Appendix C). Moreover, the education system incorporates the learning of



Spanish in numerous primary schools - which infers that Spanish is the preferential second national language. (See Appendix D).

Such lack of proximity to the French language and its native speakers can cause others to view it with indifference and indirectly foster self-induced mental limitations on learners' capacities to acquire new languages. This, consequently, makes it difficult for students to make the considerable effort required for foreign language learning if the community - and by extension the education system and the country - to which they belong (qtd in Ahmed 8) continually lacks the proper contact with francophone culture; dissipating any conceptions about the possibility of French language learning.

CHAPTER TWO:

Methodology

The following chapter will outline the different methodological approaches to this study including: the participants, the data collection method employed, and the administrative procedure through which the research was facilitated.

Part A: Participants

This language belief study encompassed thirty (30) third form students, between the ages of 13 and 16, hailing from six (6) different high school institutions in Antigua. From each school, these participants were chosen for the reason that, at such a level, students are faced with the option of



discarding a certain number of subjects - by way of the option sheet and in which French and Spanish are included.

Part B: Data Collection

Data was procured through the use of both primary and secondary information. Firstly, as it concerns the primary data, the instruments: online questionnaires and face-to-face as well as online interviews were conducted to gather information. Secondary sources of information were gathered through the intermediary various online sources: books, articles, journals, scholarly texts: dissertations, research conducted on language beliefs etc. In doing so, it allowed for an insight into the system of learning and underlying issues concerning language beliefs in the Antiguan population; not to mention the copious and invaluable information derived from the Ministry of Education as well as their personnels to the research.

The primary data was firstly collected via the online questionnaires disseminated to the third form students in six schools via an online forum, 'Google Forms': Saint Joseph's Academy, Princess Margaret School, Saint Anthony's Secondary School, The Antigua Girls High School, The Christ the King High School and finally the Sir Novelle Richards Academy of Science. The data gathered from the large corpus of six secondary schools generated essential quantitative data with the aim of providing a statistical analysis of the research topic. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: section one contained four (4) demographic questions: 1 option question and three open-ended questions. Section two (2) consisted of seven (7) degree-type statements, which asked students to which degree they agreed, strongly agree, disagree, etc., to the statement posed. The same manner of degree-type "questioning" was utilized for section 3 consisting of seven (7) statements.

For sections two (2) and three (3), the researcher opted to use a Likert scale to devise a questionnaire in such a way to measure the frequency of students' beliefs towards the French language. This scale type was used given that they have the advantage of not requiring a simple yes or no answer for the respondent; they require rather a response that gives a degree of opinion (McLeod). Therefore quantitative data is obtained, which means that the data can be analysed with relative ease (McLeod). Additionally, the researcher aimed to tailor a non-extensive or complexe questionnaire for students at the secondary school level. The method of data collection, the questionnaire, was chosen notably for its cost-effective nature and for a wide range of data collection from various institutions. Moreover, questionnaires facilitate the presentation of trends, frequency etc., through graphical representation.



Secondly, the primary data was also collected through interviews with two current French teachers in Antigua as well as a personnel of the Department of Culture and Development Division. This allowed for an in-depth understanding of the way individuals view French language learning and by extension the French language thanks to years of personal experience in the foreign language field.

Secondary data was sourced from books, websites, scholarly articles, journals etc. The data collected served as an insight into the current state of stigma surrounding the French language as well as the lingering beliefs that, not only students, but teachers carry concerning language learning in general.

The interviews - data collection

The researcher held two interviews with two teachers from two different secondary school institutions in Antigua. The first interview was done face-to-face while the other was done online to accommodate the busy schedule of the volunteer teacher. The researcher asked six questions based on the topic of the research paper (see Appendix B). After each teacher's research, the researcher noted all that was uttered. No audio recording was used to aid in the interviews.

Part C: Administrative Procedure

The questionnaire was created using the online programme referred to as Google Forms. By way of this online medium, students had the advantage of quick and easy access to the material despite their geographical location in Antigua. In the same vein of advantages, the researcher managed to have quick access to responses. This instrument also permits students to have anonymity, complete privacy and lack of pressure to complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire also included a cover page outlining the research topic, some general information about the researcher and the purpose of the research study. Moreover, a disclaimer was written stipulating that the respondent's name was hidden - even to the researcher - and that a full assurance of confidentiality was guaranteed. The questionnaire was shared through the Antigua and Barbuda Association of French Teacher's WhatsApp group. The teachers then uploaded the questionnaires to the online teaching portal for each secondary school third form student to fill out the document. The researcher distributed the questionnaire in semester 1, academic year 2020-2021 in the last two weeks of December. The process was completed near to the end of the secondary



school year, 2nd September, 2020 - 16th December, 2020 with a total of thirty questionnaires filled out.

Part D: Data Analysis

The completion period marked the beginning of the review stage of the questionnaires answered. Graphical representations were extracted for empirical analysis and data interpretation; all of which are displayed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

This chapter focuses on the presentation of data acquired and generated as well as its interpretation.

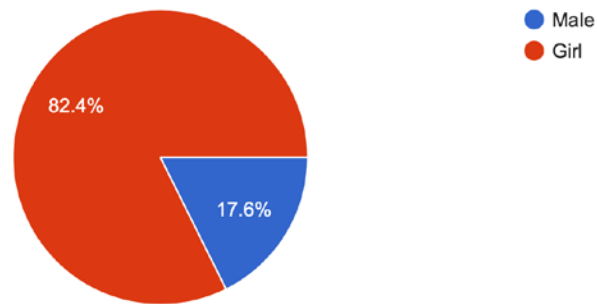
PRESENTATION OF DATA

Part A: Personal Information of the Third Form School Students

Figure 1: Gender of the Third Formers

1. What is your gender?

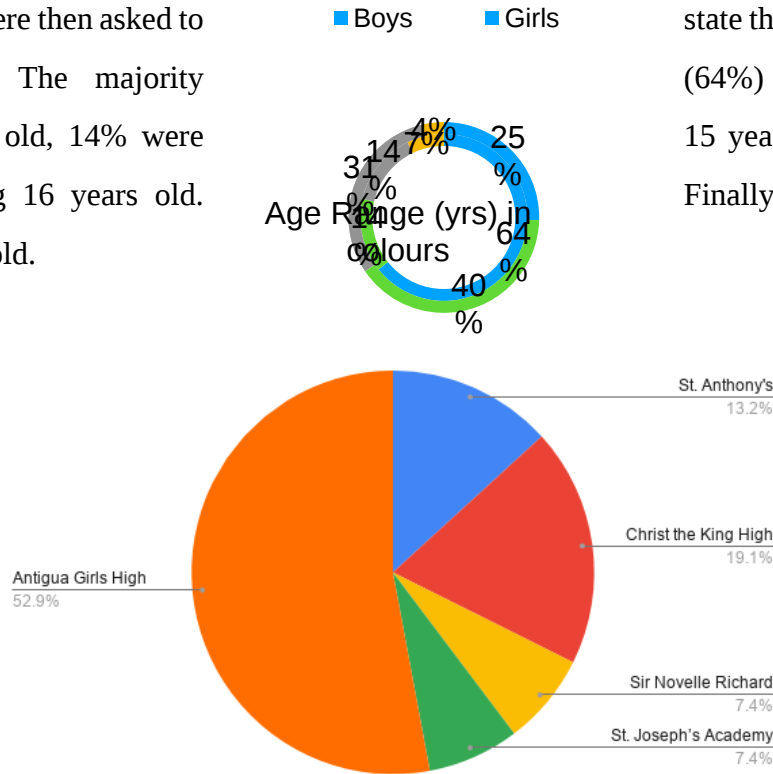
68 responses



The first three questions sought to ascertain the background information of the respondents as it pertains to age, gender and the school that they attend. Thirty candidates were asked to state their sex to which 66.7% responded “Girl” and 33.3% responded “Male” as seen in Figure 1 below. All figures are extracted from Google forms.

The students were then asked to figure below. The majority fourteen years old, 14% were indicated being 16 years old. were 17 years old.

Figure 3.
Schools of



state their age shown in the next (64%) of the students were 15 years old and another 14% Finally, 7% of the students

Outline of the
Students

The next question aimed at determining the school that the students were attending. A considerable amount of students attended the Antigua Girls High School (52.9%): others attended St. Anthony's Secondary School, Christ the King High School, Sir. Novelle Richards Academy and St. Joseph's Academy with a percentage of 13.2%, 19.1%, 7.4% and 7.4% respectively. All the aforementioned figures are displayed in the circular graph below:

Table 1: Respondents' thoughts towards the evocation of the word, 'French'.

Statement (“..... ”)	Percentage of Students Who Indicated these statements
France and Paris	28.1 %
A foreign Language	6.8 %
Bonjour	4.4 %
Baguette	4.4 %
It is fun	3 %
The subject I do in school, a foreign language	2.9 %
A language that I am really interested in learning more about	2.9 %
French	2.9 %
Going to France	1.5 %
I think of travelling to France, mainly Paris. I want to experience all the aspects of French culture and enjoy it as well.	1.5 %
It is a language that is hardly spoken in the Caribbean	1.5 %
quora	1.5 %
Guadeloupe	1.5 %
I think about France or Paris and their beautiful sceneries	1.5 %
Paris and French Food	1.5 %
The Eiffel Tower	1.5 %
Beautiful and unique	1.5 %
A language that I can learn so if I go to a French country, I can understand what everyone is saying even if they don't speak English.	1.5 %
A nice language: I don't really take it that seriously in school. It was something that I was interested in but now I'm over it.	1.5 %

Statement (“..... ”)	Percentage of Students Who Indicated these statements

The students were subsequently asked an open-ended question, “When you hear the word ‘French’, what comes to mind?”. The results showed a diverse range of answers by the students.

The reigning figure (1.5%) is represented by a number of thoughts concerning the word, ‘French’.

One student indicated envisaging a trip to Paris and others specified being elated to experience and enjoy the culture there; represented by 1.5% in **Table 1**. This thus imply that they have a positive outlook as it concerns the language that could stem from numeric contact with the francophonie.

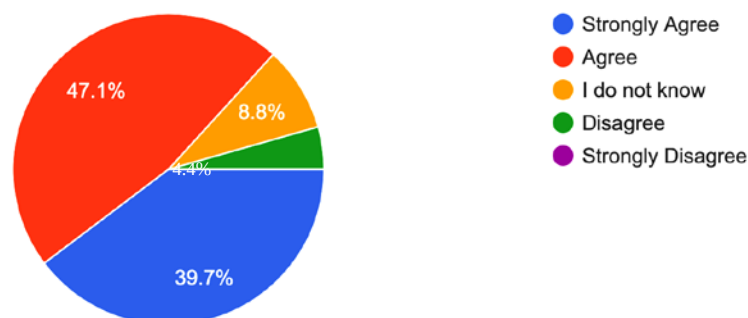
Other percentages display other ideas sparked by the evocation of ‘French’. One respondent stated that the language was hardly spoken in the Caribbean; this belief would most likely stem from the lack of evident contact with the Francophone culture. A significant percentage (28.1%) was linked to those students who thought of France and its capital, Paris. Another figure (6.8%) indicated that the thought “foreign language” came to mind. Other students indicated that the words “Baguette” and “Bonjour” came to mind with the figure of 4.4%.

In another light, students also stated that the word, “fun” (3%) after having mulled over the word ‘French’. Additionally, students also specified that upon hearing the word, “a subject in school”, “a language that one holds some interest”, and “F” came to mind - all at 2.9% as the indicating table 1 above.

Part B: Questions on the general beliefs of language learning

This section of the questionnaire dealt with the current beliefs students held concerning language learning.

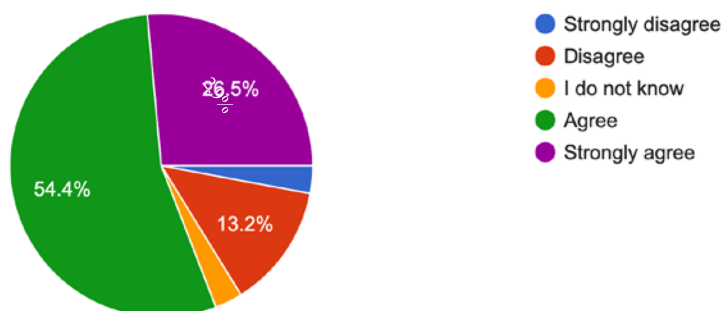
Figure 4. Second Language



The above-illustrated pie-chart represents the degree to which students agreed or disagreed with the pertinence of learning a second language. As is displayed, the majority of the students at 47.1% favoured learning a second language. This is complemented with 39.7% of students who strongly agreed with the above-mentioned notion of importance of second language learning. The figure 8.8% represents those students who are currently uncertain as to the pertinence of another vernacular, indicated by a “I do not know”. The evident neutrality of this 8.8% could imply that those students are ignorant to the potentialities of being bilingual. It is possible that those students have no preexisting ideas about the language resulting from non-existent contact with the language before secondary school. Finally, a mere percentage of 4.4% represents those respondents who disapproved the claimed importance of second language learning; it may be that these students already hold preconceived notions regarding learning another language, which coincides with the Isabelle Drewelo’s research on the prevalence of stigmas pertaining to foreign language learning because of phonological and phonetic constraints.

Figure 5. Beliefs about Language

Learning in Secondary School.



The above-displayed graph focused on the idea that students are most likely to do a foreign language in secondary school. Most of the students were of the same opinion shown by the figure 54.4%. In the same vein, some students even strongly agreed to the proposed idea of the likelihood of language learning in secondary school (26.5%). Inversely, a fair amount of answers revealed that some students disagree with the proposition (13.2%); others, noted by the minuscule figure 2.9%, are completely opposed to the idea that students are more likely to do foreign languages. This may be seeing as there are a variety of subject options available to students and that some students may favour doing a foreign language. The remaining respondents indicated that they were uncertain as it pertains to proposition and this is represented by the figure 2.9%.

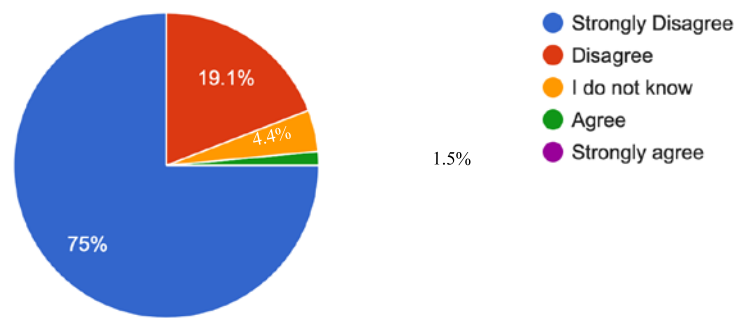


Figure 6. Gender Beliefs about Language Learning.

Students were then asked to comment on a postulation concerning gender beliefs. More than half of the respondents indicated the undoubtable ← erroneousness of the statement - shown by the figure 75%. 19.1% also contested the falseness of the idea while a mere 1.5% of the students concurred with the postulation. In another light, 4.4% of the students stated that they are uncertain as to whether or not language learning is gender-based.

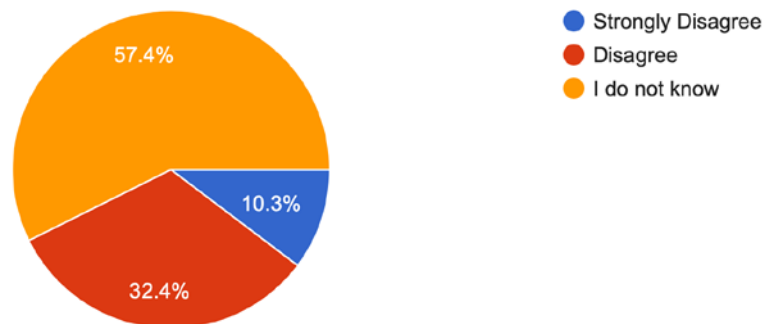


Figure 7. The Parental influence on Language Learning.

The above-displayed pie-chart sought to determine if there were any parental influence in choosing foreign language subjects. A considerable amount of respondents (57.4%) declared to be unsure as to whether or not parents truly influence, to such an extent, their choice in foreign language learning.

Other students at 32.4% and 10.3% respectively expressed that they disagree - and more so strongly disagree - to the idea that their parents impact their choice in reference to the foreign language.

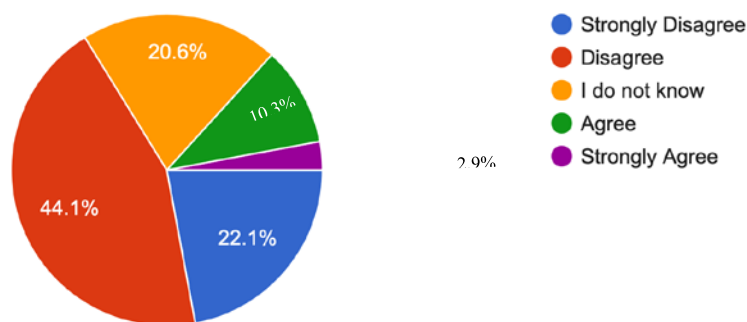
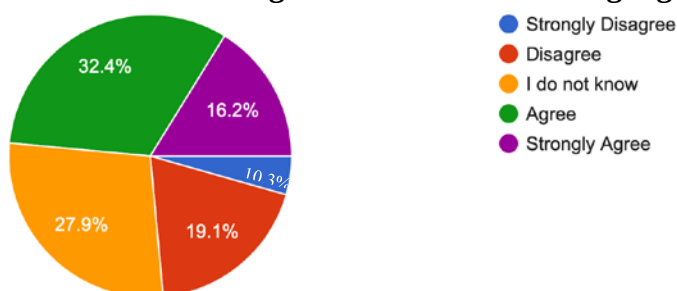


Figure 8. Beliefs about Native Speakers' Influence on Language Learning.

Subsequently, students were asked if the presence of native speakers of other languages is the only means by which the choice of language subjects comes into consideration. A great deal of respondents (44.1%) indicated their opposition to the idea. Added to this, are the set of students who - at 22.1% - are strongly against the proposed notion of native speakers' indispensable presence to learn a language. However, certain others have expressed that native speakers are indeed necessary - illustrated by the figure 10.3% - for the consideration of language learning; some other students (2.9%) are more inclined than others to believe that foreign language natives' presence is key to choosing a language.

Figure 9. Idea concerning an Official Second Language in Antigua.

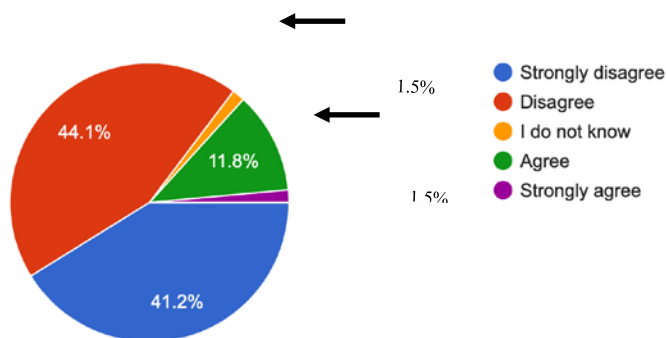


Moreover, students were asked to rate the possibility of a second official language in Antigua. Majority of the respondents agreed to the proposal - indicated by the figure 32.4%. Additionally, certain others (16.2%) were more so of the opinion that a second national language would be an appropriate idea. On the other hand, a considerable amount of students (19.1%) disagreed with the proposition of another language and some others (10.3%) were completely opposed to the idea of another official language: this implies that the students may not wish to adopt another lingo. In another light, a substantial number of students seemed unsure as to whether they were for or against the idea; the generated figure was indicated as 27.9%.

Part C: Questions on the beliefs of French language learning

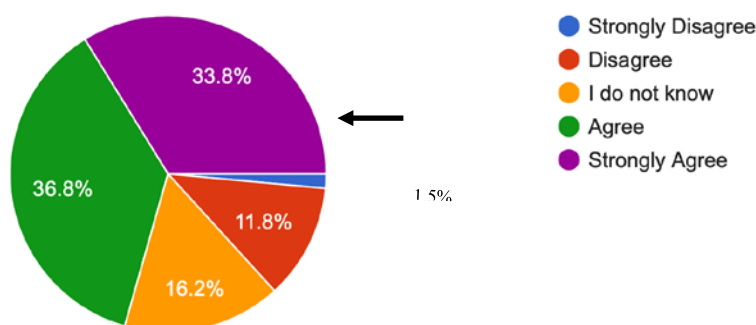
This section of the questionnaire deals with the current beliefs students held concerning French language learning in secondary schools.

Figure 10. Proposition of Preexisting Innate Capabilities Concerning Learning French.



In the beginning of this section, students were questioned on the possibilities of preexisting “gifts” innate to certain individuals, in this case students. The results of 41.1% and 44.1% as seen in the diagram above, indicate that students were indeed in opposition to the idea. However, these 11.8% of the respondents declared that they agree with the above-mentioned notion; added to this is the 1.5% of the respondents who strongly believed that the capacity to do French was reserved to some gifted select few. Moreover, 1.5% of the results shows that a small amount of respondents are unsure as to whether such a case of inherent, special abilities specific to learning French is coherent.

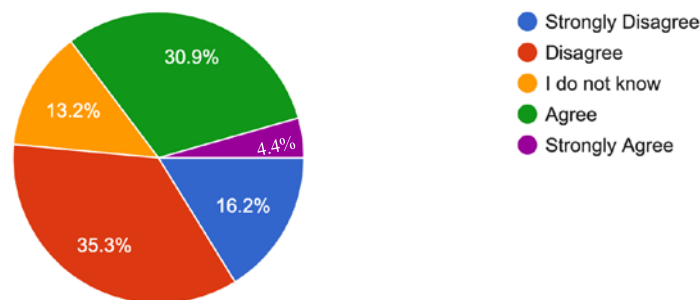
Figure 11. Student Foreign Language Preference.



Following the beliefs of innate abilities particular to each individual, the successive question was targeted to the notion: “Students gravitate more to Spanish than French”. The figures 36.8% and 33.8 respectively revealed that respondents agreed to the claimed proposition. In another light, a large

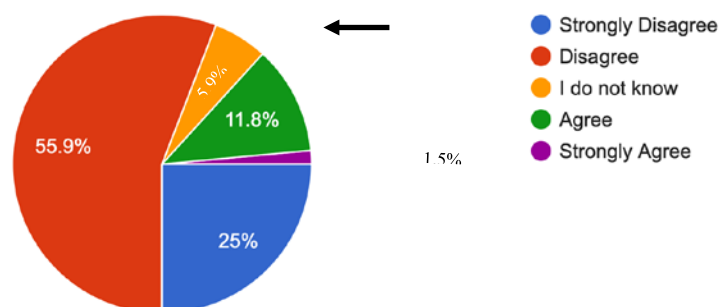
number of students declared being ignorant to the answer; this is displayed by the figure: 16.2%. Unlike those students who manifestly advocate for the proposed statement, 11.8% of the students disagreed - as well as other respondents (1.5%) - with the idea that others are more likely to gravitate to Spanish than French. It is safe to assume that these students have their own perception of how the French language is viewed in the education sphere.

Figure 12. Students' Perception of the Necessity of an "Impeccable" French Accent for French Acquisition.



A myriad of students' answers were analogous in that they stipulated a strong opposition to the fallacious claim put forward: the diagram indicates this with the figures 35.3% and 16.2% respectively. On the other hand, a substantial amount of responses (30.9%) revealed that students held veritable beliefs of a compulsory and irreproachable accent in French in order to study the language; the figure 4.4% indicates, along the same lines, the same few who share the same opinion of an irreproachable accent for French language learning.

Figure 13. French Language Perceptions Pertaining to Travelling to the francophonie.



Finally, participants were asked their opinion on whether going to France, Guadeloupe or any other French speaking country is all you need to learn French. The majority of the students disagreed with the proposed statement and this is represented by 55.9%. This may imply that students recognize the importance of studying the language in the academic context plays a large role in the learning and



retention of the language. Moreover, several other students - indicated by 25% - have strongly objected to the question put forward. Others have expressed being in accordance with the proposed notion and this is represented by 11.8% and 1.5% respectively. Additionally, 5.9% of the students stated to be unsure of the perceptions pertaining to travelling.

INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The data collected proved fruitful in regards to highlighting the current beliefs of students. Firstly, figure four (4) of the general questions section sort to discover students' views concerning the word, 'French'. Results disclosed that students' views are akin to generally known beliefs of the French culture and country; i.e., 'French' is Paris, beautiful cities and the Eiffel Tower; the French cuisine is the famous 'baguette' among others. These stereotypical facts indicate that students are already predisposed to societally-established beliefs about French based on their personal experiences and to mentally appropriate them. Lindberg's research corroborates this with his claim that such linguistic, cultural and societal exposure attributes to the rooting of stereotypes in the foreign language contexte (822). Therefore, this indicates that societal biases play a role in the perception towards a language.

On the other hand, a small portion of the respondents indicated a lack of ubiquity in matters of the francophonie language in the Caribbean. This indicates that French is, in part, fundamentally perceived as hardly existing seeing as the contact with the language, or even with native speakers, is hardly prominent. Furthermore, such absence of French influence is accredited in figure eleven (11) with the majority of respondents agreeing to the predilection of Spanish over French. Consequently, this implies that there are, in some way, unspoken or unpublicized stigmas attached to the learning of the French language in Antigua. This is most likely due to linguistic biases that are perpetuated by societally-preconceived French stereotypes. Moreover, Horwitz's 1987 research expressed similar claims in that erroneous views can "undermine learners' realizations in the language learning process" (qtd in Abdi 105).

Inversely, the contrary is proven in some other data graphs: for instance, figure eight (8) aimed to determine the veracity of the notion that the presence of native francophones is sufficient to learn a language. The results showed that the majority of the respondents were in opposition to the proposition. This shows therefore that there is no correlation between proximity to natives and the effective learning of French. Furthermore, this also indicates that not only is the French language not stigmatized as previously deduced, but the same can be implied for other languages. For instance, although in figure nine (9) - which focused on the proposition of an official second language in Antigua - showed that its implementation is favoured by a large portion of the respondents, only a



medium percentage preferred the contrary. This suggests that there is a greater growing appreciation for language learning within the secondary schools in Antigua.

Further addressing the issue of the stigma and stereotypes surrounding French and language learning, some data proved these socially-perpetuated biases as fallacies. This is seen in figure six (6) which aimed to determine if gender played a vital role in the choosing of foreign languages. The findings revealed that a large proportion of the participants did not subscribe to the idea that gender had a strong influence on choosing a foreign language. Such findings imply that students genuinely have an unbiased view towards foreign language learning, while others consider it as a language that is generally done in secondary school. The data displayed in figure five (5) corroborates this seeing as most respondents thought that students are very likely to do a foreign language in secondary school. Moreover, Teacher one (1) and two (2) in Table 2 shared that statistically more girls pursue and excel in language studies. This indicates that language learning is not inherently gender-based but rather influenced by self-established goals set out by students, in particular male students.

In the same vein, figure ten (10) also tackled another preconceived belief of students: the idea of preexisting innate aptitudes concerning learning French. The intriguing findings illustrated that most respondents disagreed wholeheartedly with the idea of an ‘innate gift’ for learning French. Moreover, the same can be said for Teacher one (1) and two (2) in the Table 2, part C as both expressed that each student is normally intrinsically driven and has the capabilities to do language. This shows that students do not harbour nor perpetuate any stigmas surrounding the language and also that the aforementioned is acquirable by any willing student. Although some respondents thought the contrary, it appears that students have a generally positive attitude towards the French language; thus proving Ahmed’s remarks on the importance of attitude and beliefs towards the efficiency of the language process (6-7).

Moreover, it is just to claim that beliefs form the basis for the language learning process. For example, figure twelve (12) dealt with the proposition of the essentialness of an ‘impeccable’ French accent. The data collected indicated a myriad of students’ opposition to the idea and thus do not believe that an impeccable French accent is absolutely necessary for French language acquisition. Therefore, this suggests that the accent does not determine success in language learning and is not a cause for the language’s stigmatization; this irrespective of the fact that a considerable number of students agreed with the idea of having a ‘proper’ accent to succeed in French. From this, one may assume that some students approach the French learning process with this pre-established fundamental attitude and this thus influences and amplifies the probability of language stigmas.



Therefore, this study discloses that students studying French hold both mostly positive attitudes towards the language and conversely do not subscribe to possible false preconceived notions surrounding the language. Likewise, the teachers interviewed do not perpetuate nor hold language stigmas that could be unintentionally transmitted to their pupils. The results of this study proved there is a change from the outdated beliefs and stereotypes in students and thus a favourable language evolution in the secondary schools.

CONCLUSION

Language learners hold beliefs inciting the perpetuation of stereotypes that affect the language process. These stereotypes or biases are based on societal and cultural experiences that shape one's perception of language learning, which in turn gives way to the stigmatization of foreign languages - in this case French. Although the aforementioned language has a reputation for perfection in matters of a 'impeccable accent' and its difficulty, the study's findings proved that such general stereotypes are outdated and that students generally have a positive attitude to the language; that there is a greater growing appreciation for language learning within the secondary schools in Antigua. Moreover, some teachers accredited the erroneousness of certain language-based pre-established notions with their affirmation of students' genuine interest in the language through self-established goals and through general intrinsic ability to do language.

However, the findings also indicated that societal biases play a role in the perception towards a language and thus instigates the formation of preconceived negative attitudes; thus influencing and amplifying the probability of language stigmas. Having taken into account the influential role society plays in the development of language stigmas, it is recommended that further research be conducted to better understand the origins of such influences on students.

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APPENDICIES

APPENDIX A:

Questionnaire:

The Stigmatization of French Language Learning in Antigua

My name is André Cordice and I am a final year French major student at the University of the West Indies. I am conducting a research project on the stigmas that surround the French language, particularly those that negatively influence French language learning. This survey consisting of fourteen topic-specific statements and four general questions, is designed solely for the purpose of data collection for said Final Year Project. Please answer all questions and statements as best and as honestly as you can.



DISCLAIMER: Complete confidentiality is assured for whomever answers this survey; no personal information is required.

General questions

Demographic Information

1. What is your gender?

Male

Girl

2. How old are you?
-

3. What school do you attend?
-

4. When you hear the word “French”, what comes to mind?
-

Beliefs about language learning

For the following statements, state whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree or I do not know.

5. A Second Language learning is important.

Strongly Agree

Agree

I do not know

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

6. Anybody can learn a language.

Strongly Agree

Agree

I do not know

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

7. Students are more likely to do a language course in secondary school.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

I do not know

- 
- Agree
Strongly agree
8. Only girls do foreign languages.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
I do not know
Agree
Strongly agree
9. Students have parental influence in choosing French and Spanish.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
I do not know
Agree
Strongly Agree
10. Learning a foreign language is only an option if natives are present in your community.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
I do not know
Agree
Strongly Agree
11. There should be a second national language in Antigua.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
I do not know
Agree
Strongly Agree

Beliefs about French language learning

Determining the conceptions towards the French language

12. Only certain gifted students can do French.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
I do not know Agree
Strongly agree
13. Students gravitate more to Spanish than French.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
I do not know
Agree
Strongly Agree

14. Having a “proper” French accent is essential in doing the language.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
I do not know
Agree
Strongly Agree
15. Going to France, Guadeloupe or any other French speaking country is all you need to learn French.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree

I do not know
Agree
Strongly Agree



APPENDIX B:

Interview done with teachers and a ministry official concerning the preconceived notion about the French language and its in Antigua:

1. Do you think that language learning is gender specific?
2. Do you believe that one must have a certain set of inherent skills to learn a language?
3. In your opinion, what is currently the status of the French language in Antigua?
4. Do you think that language learning, specifically French Language learning, generally has negative views in the eyes of Antiguan natives?

5. Are there, as far as you know, a lot of French natives living in Antigua?
6. What is your opinion of the idea, “there are no French people around so, why learn it?”
- 7.

APPENDIX C: Official Written Letter from the Desk of The French Consulate

APPENDIX D: Information from the desk of Ministry Official Rene Young Romero: Education Officer for Modern Languages, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

SECONDARY SCHOOLS			
PUBLIC SECONDARY	SUBJECTS	PRIVATE SECONDARY	SUBJECTS
1. All Saints Secondary School	French and Spanish	1. Devine Academy	Spanish
2. Antigua Girls high School	French and Spanish	2. Baptist Academy	Spanish
3. Antigua Grammar School	French and Spanish	3. Christ the King High School	French and Spanish
4. Clare Hall Secondary School	French and Spanish	4. Island Academy	Spanish
5. Glanvilles Secondary School	French and Spanish	5. Seventh Day Adventist	French and Spanish
6. Jennings Secondary School	French and Spanish	6. St. Anthony's Secondary	French and Spanish
7. Ottos Comprehensive School	French and Spanish	7. St. Joseph's Academy	French and Spanish
8. Pares Secondary School	French and Spanish	8. Trinity Academy	Spanish
9. Princess Margaret School	French and Spanish		
10. Sir McChesney George Secondary	None		

11. St Mary's Secondary School	French and Spanish		
12. Irene B Williams Secondary School	French and Spanish		
13. Sir Novelle Richards Academy	French, Mandarin and Spanish		
PRIMARY SCHOOLS			
PUBLIC PRIMARY	SUBJECTS	PRIVATE PRIMARY	SUBJECTS
ZONE 1		ZONE 1	
1. Five Islands Primary		1. Post Millennial Academy	
2. Golden Grove Primary School	Spanish	2. Grays Crescent Primary	
3. Greenbay Primary School	Spanish	3. St. Peters Primary	
4. Jennings Primary School	Spanish	4. T.O. R. Memorial Primary	
5. Old Road Primary School	Spanish	5. Temple Academy	
6. S R Olivia David Primary	Spanish	6. Nyahbinghi Theocracy Church School	
7. Urlings Primary School			
ZONE 2		ZONE 2	
8. Freetown Primary School	Spanish	7. Christian Union Jr. Academy	
9. Newfield Primary School	Spanish	8. Foundations of Faith Tutorial	
10. Pares Primary School		9. Kids Unlimited Primary	Spanish
11. Parham Primary school	Spanish	10. Sea View Academic Foundation	
12. Potters Primary School	Spanish	11. St. John's Catholic Primary	Spanish
13. Nelvie Gore Primary School	Spanish	12. St. Michael's Primary	Spanish
		13. Sunnyside Primary	
		14. Sunnyside Tutorial	Spanish
ZONE 3		ZONE 3	
14. J. T. Ambrose Primary School	Spanish	15. Foundation Mix	
15. Liberta Primary School	Spanish	16. St. John's Lutheran	
16. Buckley's Primary School		17. Baptist Academy	
17. Cobbs Cross Primary School		18. Island Academy	
18. C T Samuel Primary school		19. Minoah Magnet	
19. Freemans Ville Primary School	Spanish	20. Tabernacle Academy	
20. Seaview farm Primary	Spanish		
21. Bendals Primary School			

ZONE 4		ZONE 4	
22. Adele School		21 Better Chance	
23. Cedar Grove Primary	Spanish	22 Divine Academy of Excellence	
24. Holy Trinity Primary		23 Friends Developmental Centre	
25. Mary E Pigotts	Spanish	24 Gospel Light Elementary	Spanish
26. New winthropes Primary		25 Grace Christian Academy	Spanish
27. Pigotts Primary School	Spanish	26 St. Andrews Primary	French and Spanish
28. School for the Deaf		27 St. Nicholas Primary	
29. T N Kimon Primary	Spanish	28 Wesleyan Jr. Academy	
30. Villa Primary School	Spanish	29 Victory Centre	

APPENDIX E:

Table 2: Comparative table: Interview with Teachers and Their Remarks on the French language Influence in Antigua.

Question (?)	Teacher 1 (Answers)	Teacher 2 (Answers)
Is language learning gender-specific?	- Known fact that girls excel in language studies - Not gender-specific on the grounds that boys lack a necessary goal to achieve perpetual motivation.	- Girls generally outshine boys in language studies. - Also noted that there is an evidently larger influx of female students studying languages than male students; this could also be a significant factor influencing this gender disproportion in languages. - Also noted that boys excelling in language learning are outstanding individuals.
Must one be inherently gifted to learn a language?	- Any individual possesses the natural capabilities to study a language. - Must be driven to do as such.	- Nothing to do with intrinsic skills: language learners are naturally driven. - Believes language learners develop certain language skills throughout the learning process.

Question (?)	Teacher 1 (Answers)	Teacher 2 (Answers)
What is currently the status of the French language in Antigua in your opinion?	- A peripheralized standing next to the Spanish culture and learners. - Antiguan regulations accommodate Spanish migrants; policies and the current economy are geared towards Spanish, in terms of cultural assimilation. - Development of the francophonie in Antigua is manifestly slower.	- French is somewhat stagnant. - A clear minority who does French. - Few students pursue it to the tertiary level
Language learning, particularly for French, has a negative perception by Antiguan natives in your opinion?	- Not necessarily and nor is it entirely intentional - People want to learn French for the cultural aspects: there exists a genuine love for the language. - However, Spanish reigns in matters of proximity advantages. - Spanish products are normalised into the Antiguan system and way of life.	- Clear lack of appeal by students for the reason of the great effort it takes to learn the language. - Phonological constraints: its pronunciation carries a negative and daunting view. - Morphological and semantic constraints such as: silent letters, complex sounds nonexistent in English.
Are there any Francophone natives living in Antigua?	- Around 100 to 150 known natives. - It was difficult in the past for French natives to come to Antigua. - Natives needed a visa and Vice Versa.	- Very few natives living in Antigua - Omnipresence of Spanish Immigrants
What is your opinion of the idea, "There are no French people around, so why learn it?"	- A remark often repeated by children due to lack of close proximity to the language. - Some children only learn the language to one day migrate.	- Not in agreement. - Despite the lack of persons who speak the language, there are some who benefit from articulating themselves in French: such as job and travel opportunities.