

Translator's Note: Philippe R. Girard's
“What Language Did Toussaint Louverture Speak?
The Fort de Joux Memoir and the Origins of Haitian Kreyòl”

Below are some of the translator's reflections on possible approaches to rendering Louverture's writing in English:

The translation of a text that deals with translation and linguistic nuances is not necessarily straightforward. For the long passages from Louverture's writing and the letters to Sonthonax, it is necessary to understand standard French to appreciate the linguistic diversions and misuses. While a translation into a form of pidgin English with similar spelling and grammar mistakes would be very evocative for the Anglophone reader, it would, of course, be inauthentic. For the section involving linguistic analysis, I have chosen to do a translation into standard French and then into standard English so that the reader can visually appreciate the divergences and still follow the meaning.

In the following passage for example, using broken English would give an Anglophone reader an immediate idea of the feeling of the language in French, but the errors are, of course, not the same (which is problematic given the close analysis that follows):

Pompée writes: 'I am inwaiting of your hordes [orders]. I wishes you a Better health.' His style of writing is reminiscent of that of the rebel Pierrot, active near Cap-François, 'I beg you let go of my mens wot was took.

The other option would be to keep the original language in the text:

Pompée writes 'Je suis annatendant apres vos horde [ordres]. Je vous soite un Meilleur sante' (in standard French, 'J'attends vos ordres. Je vous souhaite une meilleur santé,' in English 'I await your orders. I wish you the best of health.' His style of writing is reminiscent of that of the rebel Pierrot, active near Cap-François, 'Je vous pri de faire laché me gense que lon apris' (instead of the standard French 'Je vous prie de faire relacher me sgens que l'on a pris,' in English 'I beg you to free my men who have been taken')

The second option renders the passage very long and somewhat bogged down. Again, this is not so much a problem for the linguistic analysis section, in which there are more single

words and the double translation can be easily inserted in the phrase without rendering it overly long. In the earlier section, however, the double translation breaks the reader's attention. Consider the following example: "Suzanne's letter to her 'dear usband' on July 13, 1794, or her letter to her 'cher epous' (instead of 'cher époux' in standard French, 'dear husband' in English)."

A compromise would be to provide translations of the original French and pidgin English (in parentheses) so that the Anglophone reader has the meaning, the feeling, and the authentic text. The disadvantage here is that there is no standard French for comparison. But perhaps this is not necessary in this section.

Pompée writes, 'Je suis annatendant apres vos horde [ordres]. Je vous soite un Meilleur sante' ('I am inwaiting of your hordes [orders]. I wishes you a Better health.') His style of writing is reminiscent of that of the rebel Pierrot, active near Cap-François, *'Je vous pri de faire laché me gense que lon apris' ('I beg you lego of my mens wot was took')*.