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# Island language policy and regional identity east of Africa

*Claudia Schlaak*

## **Abstract**

Since 2011 the Comorian Island of Mayotte has been France's 101<sup>st</sup> *département*, thereby becoming part of the European Union. As a result, France has consolidated and strengthened its strategic position in the Indian Ocean.

With the change of political status in 2011, new developments have occurred in Mayotte. It is still unclear whether the expected economic boom, extensive social benefits or injection of EU regional funds can help to alleviate poverty and raise living standards. There is concern, however, that massive immigration to Mayotte from the surrounding territories is diminishing any progress and will continue to do so. Not only France but also the EU will have to adapt to new immigration problems due to this new external border.

In this situation one thing is clear: the language contact between French and the local languages, which is the result of political developments, is leading to new dynamics. The diglossic situation east of Africa, between French as the dominant language and local languages like Shimaoré or Shibushi spoken in Mayotte will become more marked in the next few years.

## **1. Introduction**

The island of Mayotte, geographically part of the archipelago of the Comoros, which from a political and administrative point of view are a French overseas territory, is a special case: to begin with its state affiliation is disputed. While the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros claims Mayotte to be part of its territory, the territory has been French without interruption since 1841. Unlike most other colonies, the island never opted for independence from “La Grande Nation” in the wake of decolonisation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although situated far away from the “mother country” and despite many similarities with the other Comorian Islands, the former colony even today sees itself as being an integral part of metropolitan France. In fact, there are strong indicators that the commitment of the inhabitants of Mayotte to France is growing even stronger. What are the origins of this feeling of “French identity” in the middle of the Indian Ocean? Furthermore, what role does language play in this context?

The aim of this study is to discuss the position of the French language on Mayotte and to identify reasons why a former French colony intends to remain an integral part of France, or to become even more integrated into the European Union. In this context, I will also analyse the role of France and the position of French on Mayotte. Against the background of linguistic and cultural diversity as well as migration policy developments in Mayotte, the longing of the population for a “French identity” will also be discussed in the paper. References to similar developments taking place in other parts of the world will also be made.

The methodological approach will be to gather information from earlier studies and to supplement this with current data and analyses of newspaper articles and of discussions in internet forums.

If we reviewing the state of research, what is noticeable is that we hardly find any linguistic literature about Mayotte. There are many sources which analyse the French language in the French-speaking world, with examples from different parts of Europe (such as Belgium, Switzerland), of North America (e.g. Quebec, Louisiana) or Africa (for example the states of North Africa) but detailed linguistic analyses of the language situation in Mayotte are very infrequent. Only a few monographs and collections of articles, mainly with their focus on the historical and political development, are of any use as research sources. Up to date information is almost exclusively restricted to the internet, in discussion forums or in newspaper articles.

## 2. The Francophone World

French is used by 200 million people as a means of communication (cf. Erfurt (2005: 12)). The language communities are spread across all five continents. French has a co-official status or is the official language in many countries and is a working language in major international organisations such as the United Nations (cf. Pöll (1998: 19-20)).

The French state pursues a rigorous language policy in support of its national language. Since 1992, with the amendment of article 2 of the French Constitution, French has been the language of the Republic.<sup>1</sup> Strengthening the French language was thus proclaimed explicitly as a national objective. The intentions behind this step seem to be twofold. On the one hand, after promoting French as *langue de la liberté* since the final stages of the French Revolution, now the aim is to strengthen the common identity of the French in terms of *égalité* and *fraternité*. On the other hand, France wants to (re-)intensify its strategic position in the world by propagating its national language (cf. Pöll (1998: 6)). Defenders of the French language also wish to combat the growing influence of English. In this context, it is not surprising that the “Grande Nation” maintains close links to its former colonies.

The *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)* integrates its members' interests on this common ground, which is to support French worldwide. (cf. Erfurt (2005: 3)). In 2012 the OIF consisted of 75 states and governments; the status of French is, of course, not the same in each member state (cf. [www.francophonie.org](http://www.francophonie.org) (accessed: 21.07.2012)). At first sight, it is surprising

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1 See Article 2 (1): “La langue de la République est le français.”



that non-francophone countries such as Bulgaria or Moldova also joined the OIF (<http://www.francophonie.org/-Etats-et-gouvernements-.html> (accessed: 21.07.2012)) – however, this shows the global importance of the OIF and is also proof of the efforts by the francophone community to gain and maintain a strong position in the modern world. The Comoros, where French is the official language, entered the OIF in 1977 (cf. Erfurt (2005: 20)).

### 3. Mayotte and France

With a total of 375 km<sup>2</sup> Mayotte is located in the Mozambique Channel in the Indian Ocean, north of Madagascar. The distance to France is about 8,000 km, to the island of Réunion 1,500 km and 400 km to the East African coast. Anjouan, Mohéli and Grande Comore, which all three form the *Union des Comores*, are situated northwest of Mayotte.

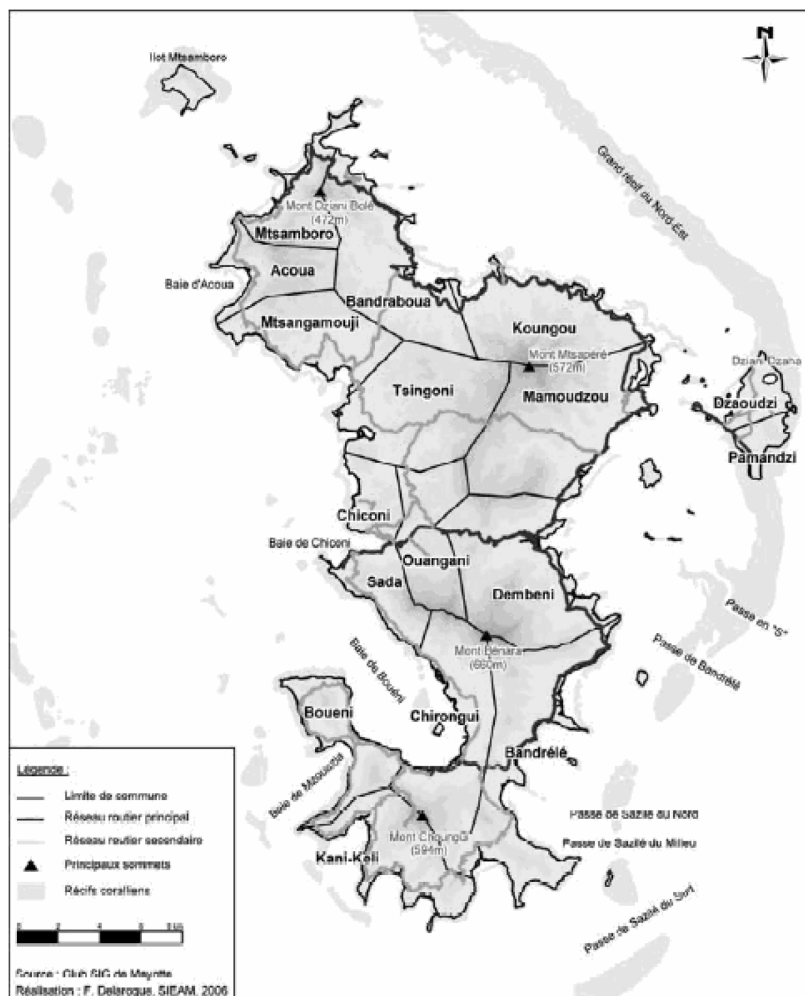


Fig. 1.1: Map of Mayotte

Mayotte consists of two main islands, the smaller Petite Terre and the larger Grande Terre, as well as several very small, uninhabited islands (cf. Fontaine (1996: 100) and Rombi (2003: 305)).

### *3.1 Historical and political development*

The island was colonised between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries of the Common Era. Dutch, Portuguese, and, since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, also English and French colonists used Mayotte as a supply station on their way to India (cf. Munzinger (2007c)). At that time, the population consisted mainly of migrants, traders, and also slaves (cf. Alnet (2009: 12-15)). In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Mayotte and Madagascar were in intense contact with each other. The result was, for instance, that a whole Madagascan tribe settled in the south of the island. In 1841, the island was sold by Sultan Andriansouli to France and thereafter declared a French protectorate. In 1886, the other Comorian Islands joined the French protectorate (cf. Fontaine (1996: 104), Cassagnaud (2007: 126) and Lavoux (2004: 57)). Due to its location between Africa and Asia there has always been strong migration to the island. A census of the local people in 1852 showed that the inhabitants of Mayotte consisted of very different groups (cf. Fasquel (1991: 100)). Cassagnaud describes the diversity of the present-day population structure as follows: “Ce peuple est composé de trois catégories raciales (africaines, asiatique et méditerranéennes) et de trois familles linguistiques (bantoue, sémitique et malayo-polynésienne).” (Cassagnaud (2007: 21)).

In 1946, together with the other Comorian Islands, Mayotte was given the status of a so-called TOM<sup>2</sup> (cf. Colliard (2004: 680)). Since that time the inhabitants of the island have been French citizens. They also elected deputies to the National Assembly for the first time in 1946 (cf. Alnet (2009: 16)). During the founding process of the Fifth Republic and in the process of decolonisation, Mayotte, like the other Comorian Islands, was given the option of autonomy (cf. Burr (1990: 795)). In September 1958, a first referendum was held, in which more than 80 per cent voted for the adoption of the new French Constitution and thus rejected independence. Similarly, all the Comorian Islands remained part of France and continued to be a TOM (cf. Béringer (2004: 44-45)).

In 1975, France offered independence to the Comoros Islands, but Mayotte refused again: although this time, in 1974, more than 94 per cent of each of the other Comoros Islands voted in favour of independence, only the residents of Mayotte voted against (65 per cent). However, there was a problem: it was not clear whether all the islands together should decide on their future or on an is-

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2 TOM is short for “Territoire d’Outre-Mer”.

land-by-island basis. This controversy resulted in the decision to hold a new referendum (cf. Alnet (2009: 17-18)). In February 1976, the inhabitants of Mayotte confirmed the results of the previous vote: more than 99 per cent of the eligible population wanted to remain part of France (cf. Lavoux (2004: 63)). This meant that despite the creation of the independent state of the Comoros, Mayotte decided to remain politically tied to France. Mayotte was thus an “outsider”, because “une île qui refusait d’être décolonisée” (Fasquel (1991: 7)) did not follow the trend towards independence of almost all the other colonies. The African Union, but also the United Nations, ignored the developments and declared the Mahoran vote invalid (cf. Caminade (2003: 52), Kamardine (2007: 12) and Béringer (2004: 53)). In several resolutions<sup>3</sup> of the United Nations General Assembly, the UN Member States declared Mayotte to be part of the Comoros’ territory, and that the “unité et l’intégrité territoriale de l’archipel des Comores composé des îles d’Anjouan, de la Grande Comore, de Mayotte et de Mohéli” (Caminade (2003: 70)) had to remain intact. On several occasions, the United Nations urged France to accept the sovereignty of the Comoros and declared the territorial integrity of former colonies. However, by doing so the UN was at the same time negating the principle of self-determination.

Despite the fact that France was attacked in international forums because of the disputed attachment of Mayotte to France, Mayotte was tied even more closely to France in the aftermath. In 1986, it was given the status of a *collectivité territoriale*. Hence, for the first time, the territory had a legal basis in the French constitution – in Article 72 (cf. Luchaire (1992: 6, 138) – making it a politico-administrative hybrid, sharing elements of a DOM<sup>4</sup> and a TOM (Burr (1990: 794)).

In 2001, Mayotte received the status of a *collectivité départementale* (cf. Erfurt (2005: 104) and INSEE (2010: 8)), which was changed again in 2007 into a *collectivité d’outre-mer (COM)*. Despite its remoteness from the French mainland, since that time the President of France has been head of state of Mayotte and the island has had a French prefect. The Mahorans are also represented by one delegate in the French National Assembly. However, up to 2011, the territory was not part of the European Union. In a referendum in March 2009, more than 95 per cent of Mayotte voted in favour of the *processus de départementalisation*. Two years later, in March 2011, a new administrative structure was created: with the election of the General Council, the island was accorded the status

3 Such as A/Res/3161 of 1973, A/Res/3291 of 1974, A/Res/31/4 of 1976, A/Res/32/7 of 1977, A/Res/40/62 of 1985, A/Res/41/30 of 1986, A/Res/42/17 of 1987, A/Res/43/14 of 1988, A/Res/44/9 of 1989, A/Res/45/11 of 1990, A/Res/46/9 of 1991, A/Res/47/9 of 1992, A/Res/49/18 of 1994, cf. Resolutions under [www.un.org/](http://www.un.org/) (accessed: 21.07.2012).

4 DOM is short for “Département d’Outre-Mer”.

of a DOM, so that Mayotte is now also part of the European Union. Since that time Mayotte has been the fifth DOM and the 101<sup>st</sup> *département* of France (cf. INSEE (2010: 8, 12)).

### *3.2 Demographics: Cultural and linguistic diversity in Mayotte*

In 2002, there were 160,265 Mahorans living on the island (cf. INSEE (2010: 6)). In recent years, the island has experienced an enormous increase in population. INSEE records that there were more than 186,387 inhabitants in 2007 and according to the World Factbook of 2010, the population has now increased to more than 230,000 residents (cf. Central Intelligence Agency: The World Factbook under <https://www.cia.gov> (accessed: 09.08.2010)). There is a great deal of migration to the island, resulting in a strong ethnic admixture in the population. Immigrants are mainly of African, Malayo-Polynesian or Madagasy, Arabic and Persian origin (cf. Munzinger (2007b)).

If we look at the educational level of persons aged 15 years and older, 44 per cent have “no level“, 20 per cent “elementary level“, 19 per cent “secondary level“, 10 per cent of the people have the “baccalaureate” and only 7 per cent a university degree (cf. [www.insee.fr/fr/regions/mayotte/](http://www.insee.fr/fr/regions/mayotte/) (accessed: 14.05.2012)).

Mayotte is characterised by immense poverty: at least one quarter of the population is unemployed, and many residents do not even earn the minimum wage. However, thanks to the financial support of France, today Mayotte has a significantly higher living standard than the other Comorian Islands (cf. Fontaine (1996: 112) and Cassagnaud (2007: 276)). More than 95 per cent of the population are Muslims; the “identité mahoraise est liée à l’Islam” (Fontaine (1996: 106) and cf. Cassagnaud (2007: 221)).

A distinctive feature of Mayotte is its broad linguistic diversity (cf. Fontaine (1996: 106)). The following languages are spoken: Shibushi, a Madagascan dialect, Arabic, French and Shimaoré, a Bantu language. The two traditional languages, Shibushi and Shimaoré, are used in oral communication, but the position of French is likely to become much stronger. According to a study by INSEE in 2002, 80,140 Mahorans speak Shibushi, 54,784 French and 23,876 other Comorian dialects. Malagasy has 23,561 and Arabic 3,199 speakers (cf. Cassagnaud (2007: 22)).

### *3.3 Demographics: Migration movements and population growth*

Mayotte is very attractive for migrants because the island has numerous advantages in comparison to the other Comoros Islands due to the fact that it be-

longs to France: a good medical care system, a sophisticated public education system, a stronger economy and political stability.

The illegal immigration rate is very high. In 2007, the French National Assembly discussed this problem. In a related report it is estimated that approximately 45,000 persons in Mayotte are illegal immigrants (cf. Assemblée Nationale (17 September 2007)). It is assumed that illegal migrants come mostly from the surrounding islands, i.e. the Comoros. From 2002 to 2007, the average population has increased by 3.1 per cent per year (cf. INSEE (2010: 28)). Ahmed Rama, the head of the *Cabinet du service des Collectivités territoriales de Mayotte (Collectivités françaises d'outre-mer)*, explained: “L’immigration clandestine à partir des Comores pose un gros problème à Mayotte – elle a toujours été importante, mais depuis 2006-2007, le nombre de migrants augmente chaque jour” (cf. [www.afrik.com/article13414.html](http://www.afrik.com/article13414.html) (accessed: 14.05.2012)). It is estimated that between 200 and 500 immigrants per year die during the sea crossing while attempting to migrate illegally to Mayotte.

Pregnant women often come to Mayotte in order to give birth. By law these children are eligible for French citizenship (cf. Cassagnaud (2007: 33)). It is therefore not surprising that the average population of Mayotte is very young. In 2007, the average age was 22 years, 17 years younger than in metropolitan France. More than 110,000 inhabitants were below the age of 24. From the age of 50 years onwards, the population decreases drastically: about 8,000 inhabitants were aged between 50 and 59, and 5,000 between 60 and 74; only about 1,500 people were older than 75 (cf. INSEE (2010: 31)).

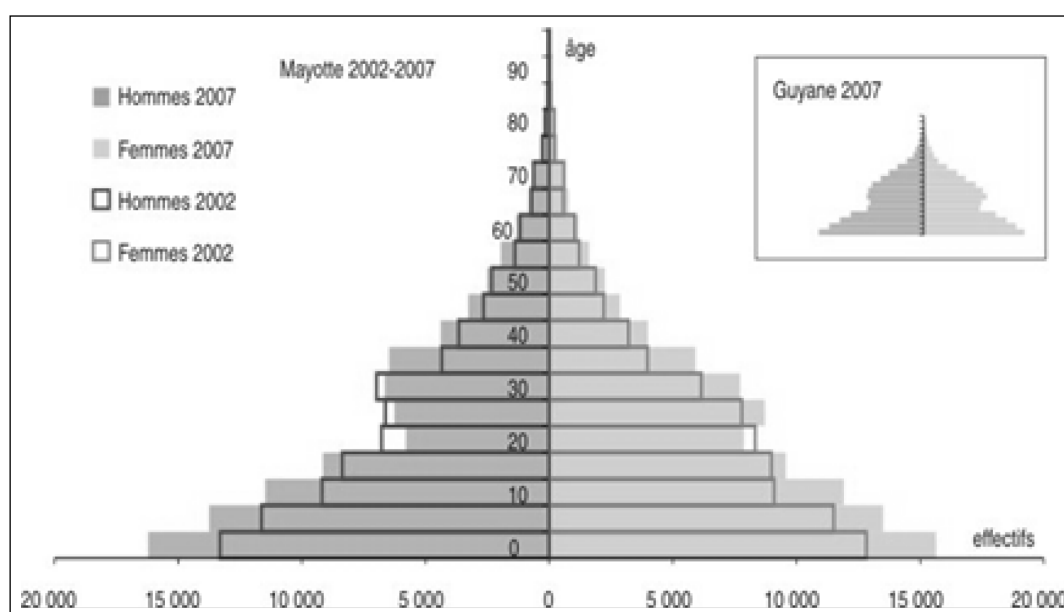


Fig. 1.2: Population pyramid of Mayotte (INSEE (2010: 31))

Even though there has been a decline in immigration in recent years, it still strongly influences the political, economic and social situation of Mayotte. The decline can be explained by the fact that emigration is increasing, mainly because young people are leaving the island to study abroad (cf. INSEE (2010: 28)) – this can be seen in the decreasing number of 20- to 30-year-olds in the population pyramid.

|              | 2002           |      | 2 007          |      | annual rate of change (in %) |
|--------------|----------------|------|----------------|------|------------------------------|
|              | Number         | in % | Number         | in % |                              |
| French       | 105,001        | 65.5 | 110,579        | 59.3 | 1.1                          |
| Comorian     | 52,851         | 33.0 | 72,039         | 38.7 | 6.3                          |
| Madagasy     | 2,267          | 1.4  | 3,168          | 1.7  | 6.8                          |
| Others       | 182            | 0.1  | 601            | 0.3  | 27.0                         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>160,301</b> |      | <b>186,387</b> |      |                              |

*Table 1.1: Population composition (cf. INSEE (2010: 35))*

Table 1.1 shows clearly that the population of all the listed ethnicity groups increased between 2002 and 2007. It is noticeable that the average annual increase in people of French nationality at 1.1 per cent is much less pronounced than that of Comorian, Madagasy and other citizenship groups (even if in this last case, due to the low absolute numbers, the percentage seems to be not very significant).

Due to consistent measures to stop illegal immigration, many migrants are now regularly deported back to their place of origin. However, the migrants usually undertake several immigration attempts, so that the work of the immigration authorities remains a thankless task.

Moreover, there is also the important factor of legal migration: for example, many people who emigrated from Mayotte are now returning, e.g. from the island of Réunion. They mostly speak “Réunionnais Creole, or Reunion Creole French” (Alnet (2009: 30)) so that this remigration adds to the growing linguistic diversity on Mayotte (cf. Alnet (2009: 30)). This increase in immigrants, however, has no influence on the fact that French is the official language of Mayotte.

### *3.4 French in everyday life*

Despite French being the main language in the education system and in administration for more than a century, the majority of the population did not use the

language in 1980. With a change in educational policy in 1981, the linguistic situation developed in favour of French (cf. Burr (1990: 794)). Primarily as a result of this new policy there were approximately 56,500 speakers of French in 2001 compared with only 2,900 in 1981. However, apart from the *Métropolitains*, there are no monolingual speakers of French in Mayotte yet (cf. Rombi (2003: 308)).

Overall, French is used today by more than one third of the population in writing and speaking; in addition, two thirds speak French at least moderately or sufficiently (cf. Munzinger (2007b)). The analysis of language skills presented in the following table ([www.insee.fr/fr/regions/mayotte/](http://www.insee.fr/fr/regions/mayotte/) (accessed: 14.05.2012)) shows that the majority of Mayotte's population (14 years or older) – 57 per cent – speak French plus at least one local language. In relation to nationality and place of birth, only 6 per cent are monolingual speakers of French, i.e. know no local language. While nearly two thirds are able to use French, more than one third of Mayotte's population (37 per cent) does not speak French at all, the foreign nationals born abroad being the most important group in this respect. If we compare male and female speakers, it is striking that a more important proportion of Mahoran women (43 per cent) do not speak French (the figure for men being 30 per cent):

|              |                                    | speak French<br>and at least one<br>local language | speak French<br>but no local<br>language | do not<br>speak<br>French | Total          |
|--------------|------------------------------------|--|--|---------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Total</b> | French national<br>born in France  | 37,588   | 5,363                                    | 12,937                    | 55,888         |
|              | French national<br>foreign-born    | 4,016  | 884                                      | 1,464                     | 6,364          |
|              | foreign national<br>born in France | 1,108  | 29                                       | 494                       | 1,631          |
|              | foreign national<br>foreign-born   | 18,956   | 420                                      | 24,928                    | 44,304         |
|              | <b>Total</b>                       | <b>61,668</b>                                      | <b>6,696</b>                             | <b>39,823</b>             | <b>108,187</b> |
| <b>Men</b>   | French national<br>born in France  | 20,601   | 2,989                                    | 5,054                     | 28,644         |
|              | French national<br>foreign-born    | 2,166  | 466                                      | 610                       | 3,242          |
|              | foreign national<br>born in France | 566  | 12                                       | 203                       | 781            |
|              | foreign national<br>foreign-born   | 9,710  | 225                                      | 9,500                     | 19,435         |
|              | <b>Total Men</b>                   | <b>33,043</b>                                      | <b>3,692</b>                             | <b>15,367</b>             | <b>52,102</b>  |

|              |                                 |               |              |               |               |
|--------------|---------------------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>Women</b> | French national born in France  | 16,987        | 2,374        | 7,883         | 27,244        |
|              | French national foreign-born    | 1,850         | 418          | 854           | 3,122         |
|              | foreign national born in France | 542           | 17           | 291           | 850           |
|              | foreign national foreign-born   | 9,246         | 195          | 15,428        | 24,869        |
|              | <b>Total Women</b>              | <b>28,625</b> | <b>3,004</b> | <b>24,456</b> | <b>56,085</b> |

Table 1.2: Analysis of language skills

From a linguistic point of view, we have a diglossic situation<sup>5</sup> in Mayotte: French dominates the local languages. Due to factors such as the influence of the media, education policy and career opportunities, French has become the “langue du pain”. Nevertheless, Shimaoré still prevails in oral communication (cf. Cassagnaud (2007: 114, 210)). For a sociolinguistic survey a spokesman predicted that Shimaoré would be abandoned over time if the language is not given either space or recognition: “D’ici quelques années, si on ne donne pas plus de place au shimaoré, nous aurons perdu l’un des meilleurs éléments que nous pouvons apporter à la richesse nationale.” (Cassagnaud (2007: 114)). Interestingly, there is also a diglossic situation between the local languages. Back in 1870, there were many Madagascans in Mayotte, but today their language, Shibusshi, is a minority language (cf. Cassagnaud (2007: 205)).

The majority of media products are produced in French; there are for example several daily and weekly journals as well as radio and television networks of the *Réseau France Outre-mer*. Most of the programmes and contributions come from Paris. It was not until 1989 that the first local television station started broadcasting. Today, there are, however, several private radio stations broadcasting in French and Shimaoré.

Even if the direct influence of French from France (e.g. via the media) is very strong, some specific linguistic features of local languages can be found in Mayotte. In the field of phonetics/phonology there are numerous assimilations: *-on* is *-o* (*charbon* → *charibo*); *-in* is *-é* (*du pain* → *dipe*); *-u-* is *-i-* (*bureau* → *biro*) (cf. Cassagnaud (2007: 160)). However, French influence can also be detected in the lexis of Shimaoré: *latabu* comes from *la table*, *licoli* comes from *l’école* or *dite* comes from *du thé* (cf. Cassagnaud (2007: 77)).

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on the “diglossia” concept see Ferguson (1959).



### 3.5 *The special ties between Mayotte and France*

We can see that there are several reasons for Mayotte's "attachment" to France: 1. in history there were always conflicts between Mayotte and its neighbouring islands, 2. the inhabitants of Mayotte ignored the political regime of Sultan Ahmed Abdallah, who ruled the Comoros Islands from 1973 onwards, 3. it needs to be remembered that Mayotte was occupied by the French fifty years earlier than the other Comorian Islands, so that the island's population was more affected by the colonial power than the population of the other islands (cf. Caminade (2003: 52)).

Today, thanks to generous support from Paris, Mayotte enjoys a better standard of living than the other Comoros. The inhabitants of Mayotte have regarded themselves for generations as French: "Je ne comprends pas toujours la haine des 'Métropolitains' quand on parle de Mayotte. En fait les Mahorais ne demandent pas à devenir Français, ou à rentrer dans la République ... Ils sont Français, comme leurs parents, grands-parents et plusieurs générations avant ... (...) Alors arrêtez de raconter des inepties sur le coût, la religion ou les soucis à venir de cette départementalisation. C'est juste le simple respect des Mahorais, qui sont autant Français que les Basques, les Bretons ou les Aveyronnais." ([www.bakchich.info/spip.php?page=forum&id\\_article=5237&id\\_forum=82506](http://www.bakchich.info/spip.php?page=forum&id_article=5237&id_forum=82506), contribution of 17 March 2009 (accessed: 09.08.2010)). In their opinion they have the same status as minorities living in France. Therefore, they cannot understand that in the process of *départementalisation* the cost or the religious question have been a point of issue.

There can be no doubt that Mayotte has gone its own way in comparison to other former colonies and also existing French overseas territories. In French overseas départements, such as the Caribbean islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique, but also Réunion, the population is currently in favour of greater rather than less degrees of independence. The situation on Mayotte becomes at least partly understandable when seen against the background of the extreme poverty in the Republic of Comoros. The Mahorans cherish the hope that the link with France and the European Union will ensure support in the economic field, financial incentives for infrastructure and tourism, and help it to maintain and achieve progress in the social sector, such as the introduction of the French social security system ([www.nzz.ch/aktuell/startseite/mayotte-1.2271279](http://www.nzz.ch/aktuell/startseite/mayotte-1.2271279) (accessed: 21.07.2012)).

Yet Mayotte – however special its history and current situation might seem – is not completely unique. The circumstances of the Malvinas or Falkland Islands are very similar. The territory has already been the cause of a number of

conflicts, both armed and diplomatic, because of its disputed status between Argentina and the U.K. The majority of the archipelago's population in the South Atlantic east of the Argentinian coast feels British. A referendum on the future political status of the Falkland Islands has been announced by the British government for the first half of 2013 (<http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2012-06/falklandinseln-referendum-status> (accessed: 21.07.2012)).

#### 4. Future prospects

Since 2011, the Comorian Island of Mayotte has belonged to France as its 101<sup>st</sup> *département* and has therefore also been part of the European Union. The Union of the Comoros, i.e. the federation of the other islands of the Comorian Archipelago, does not accept this fact.

Where does “French identity” in the middle of the Indian Ocean derive from and what role does language play in this context? The historical developments on Mayotte – with colonisation by France as early as 1841 and close relations to the “Grande Nation” over more than 150 years – have been quite different from those of the other Comoros Islands. Gradually, over time, the French state has infused Mayotte with its very nature, so that today's citizens of Mayotte feel wholeheartedly French. The language has two main roles: It acts as a link to the French “mother country” and it is the *langue du pain* giving the financial support that France is providing to the island.

Whether poverty in the small territory of Mayotte can be alleviated and living standards raised through economic growth, social benefits or financial assistance from the EU regional aid funds, is as yet unclear. Further developments on Mayotte are unpredictable: the new dynamics are resulting in enormous linguistic, cultural, and political pressure. The danger is that the strong immigration movement will jeopardise any progress. Not only France but also the EU still has to adapt to the new external border and to the new migration situation.

However, with Mayotte forming an integral part of France and thus of the EU, the strategic position of France in the Indian Ocean is consolidated and strengthened because France remains “le seul pays européen à être présent dans les trois océans” (Caminade (2003: 43)). Even though France also possesses Réunion in this geographical area, Mayotte seems to be an important site for political, social, cultural and linguistic reasons. It becomes apparent how successful French language and expansion policy still is even today. The French and their language will have a dominant position in Mayotte for the foreseeable future, with the francophone world being strengthened by Mahorans opting for France.

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