The first time we see Paul Farmer, he is in a position which will soon become familiar to us throughout the pages of Tracy Kidder's book: listening to a patient. This patient comes from Farmer's beloved Haiti, and is speaking in Haitian Creole, the language of Haiti that arose from the admixture of the French of the colonizers and the West African languages of imported slaves. Farmer is comfortable and conversant in Haitian; his facility with the language plays no small part in his ability to be able to break down barriers of class, race, and economics to connect with the poor of central Haiti, the constituency that both depends upon and reinforces him.

As a linguist, then, I would like to address two points which are recurrent in if not central to *Mountains Beyond Mountains*: language and listening. Let us first consider Farmer's mastery of Haitian Creole. This is a language spoken in the United States largely by those in economically lower strata: janitors, taxi-cab drivers and the like. When I was in graduate school, our office cleaning woman, Maria Louisa, came from exactly this background. When we talked about her family, she would reveal things like: "My daughter, he not go to church." It would be fallacious to stigmatize this as illiterate speech. Indeed, most Creole languages do not make the distinctions English does between he/she/it in the 3rd person singular pronoun, and similarly they do not decline verbs, relying on bare stems such as "go". In fact, the language is pared down to eliminate redundancy: from the subject "my daughter", we can easily induce the person and number of the pronoun and verb. Rather than considering Haitian Creole as a simplified language, we would be more accurate to look upon English as having a clunky and unnecessarily over-developed structure. Maria Louisa was not so much producing ungrammatical English as translating her own, more elegant and economical, Haitian language structure into its English equivalent. Furthermore, she was communicating not in her first language (Haitian Creole), nor in her second (French, which most Haitians speak fluently), but in a third, and notoriously difficult language, English. This linguistic plurality holds true for all those cab drivers, janitors and cafeteria workers, and for others in better-paying jobs. And there are many of them in the United States: Haitian Creole is the third most common language spoken in New York City, after English and Spanish.

Haitian Creole is a language of particular interest to those raised in Louisiana. We have here a nativized version of French, that is, Cajun French. Its origins are different from Haitian Creole, in that the Creole is an admixture of many languages, while Cajun French is a dialect that developed when the Acadiens had been forcibly moved from the north. Nonetheless, the two languages have many features in common, and native speakers of Haitian Creole and Cajun French can understand each other if they communicate slowly. Many of the Creole phrases scattered throughout Kidder's book will seem familiar to those who know Cajun: *cherie* 'dear', *maji* 'voodoo', *blan* 'white', etc. Our bond is closer than the universal bond that unites all mankind: we share a close linguistic connection.

Finally, I would like to turn to the connection between language and listening. It is a common misconception that children are taught language by their caretakers. However, there is a great body of evidence to disprove this: what caretaker has ever produced forms such as *foots* or *growed*? In fact, English-speaking children listening to the language of the world around them learn that the plural of *dog* is *dogs*, or the past tense of *bake* is *baked*. They then extend these rules in situations where they don't belong, before finally coming to construct an adult grammar. This pattern is replicated by

children all over the world. The crucial element in this acquisition is listening. This is a skill which Farmer seems to have developed early, as his mother claims his popularity with girls in high school stemmed from the fact that he listened to them. But as he moves out into the world, it is precisely this same sort of listening that Paul Farmer does when learning the language, not only of Haiti, or of Peru, or of Russia, but of poverty and disease. When you hear the language, when you thus learn to speak the language, you can understand. And this language of poverty and disease is not limited to one area or one country. In the words of a Haitian Creole proverb, which will look very familiar to Cajun French speakers: *tout moun se moun* 'all the world is (one) world'.