THE ROCKY ROAD TILL EDUCATION IN CREOLE: EXAMPLES FROM PORTUGUESE-, SPANISH- AND FRENCH-BASED CREOLE SPEAKING COMMUNITIES

EL CAMINO DIFÍCIL HACIA LA EDUCACIÓN EN CRIOLLO: EJEMPLOS DE COMUNIDADES DE HABLA CRIOLLA DE BASE PORTUGUESA, ESPAÑOLA Y FRANCESA

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> *Una lengua criolla*
> *es inferior a la lengua estandarizada*
> *correspondiente*
> *solamente en cuanto a su condición*
> *social.*
> *(DeCamp 1971:16, traducción propia).*

Resumen

A partir de esta cita se proporciona un panorama conciso de la situación sociolingüística general y de las actitudes lingüísticas hacia las lenguas criollas, inclusive las actitudes de los propios hablantes. Eso constituye el fondo necesario para entender los problemas que engendra la promoción de las lenguas criollas y particularmente su introducción en los currículos escolares.

En la primera parte de esta contribución resumo los componentes principales de la promoción de una lengua que se pueden dividir, de manera preliminar, en normalización e instrumentalización (status & corpus planning). Introduzco además los dos modelos educativos propuestos por Craig (1980) con respecto a comunidades de habla criollas, bilingüismo monoliterario y bilingüismo parcial (monoliterate & partial bilingualism).

En la parte principal de este artículo, resumo experiencias realizadas con lenguas criollas en el sistema escolar en varias partes del mundo (criollo caboverdiano en el archipiélago correspondiente y en las comunidades de emigrantes en los Estados Unidos; kriyôl de Guinea-Bissau; los criollos de base

lexical portuguesa de las islas del Golfo de Guinea; papiamento; palenquero; criollo francés de las Antillas Menores, de Haití y de las Seychelles).

En las conclusiones, trato de relacionar lo anteriormente planteado al contexto de San Andrés, Providencia y Santa Catalina.

Introduction

> *A creole is inferior to its corresponding*
> *standard language only in social status.*
> *(De Camp 1971:16)*

This statement, a well-known quote from the Proceedings of the second creolist conference held at the UWI in Mona, Jamaica, in 1968, one of the major events which initiated the era of modern creolistics, has retained its validity in both senses I choose to attribute to it: significant advances in our knowledge of the languages of the world over the past few decades have only consolidated the conviction linguists have had for a while already that there is no such a thing as a language which is superior because of some structural features it possesses. Languages which are nowadays widely spoken are just varieties at some point diffused by nations with powerful armies and/or commercial fleet.

On the other hand, most creole speaking communities continue to struggle with the prejudice that dates from creole genesis according to which creoles are merely degenerate forms of the correspond-

ing lexifier language without a grammatically coherent structure. To the ears of the European masters, who defined the terms of language acquisition in the plantation colonies —the typical historical context for the genesis of creole languages and communities under survey here— it was just bad or broken English, French or Portuguese.

This has led to a deplorable situation which Kremnitz (1983) describes in terms of the Occitan sociolinguistic school as auto-odi: creole speakers have been inculcated to such an extent with the disdain for their mother tongue that it has become part of their language identity. In most creole-speaking communities, diglossia with the former lexifier language is the predominant power relationship which defines language choice in each given situation. Reports of the following type of situations abound from creole speaking communities and could fit a description of any of them: Parents claim to stop speaking creole to their children from a certain age onwards in order to assure that their off-spring isn't hampered in their acquisition of the prestige language, necessary for social mobility (and sometimes relapse into creole once the researcher has turned his/her back) and decidedly do not favor attempts at introducing creole into the school curriculum; a marriage proposal, quite recently still most likely to be successful if executed in the form of a letter written by a scribe, had to be made in the European prestige language; returned migrants from the colonial metropolis may feel they have acquired so much culture they couldn't possibly be expected to understand, let alone speak creole (on the other hand, in intellectual circles, the opposite phenomenon may be observed: persons of limited creole proficiency at their departure may actually acquire and restart cultivating the creole language in the metropolis as a symbol of négritude or, more recently, antillanité and créolité).

Therefore, it is not hard to understand that the first hurdle pro-creole language policy has to take are the attitudes of the speakers themselves. It is futile and even impossible to impose the creole against the collective will of the speech community. On the other hand, the institutionalization of a creole language constitutes an important opportunity for establishing or at least approximating the sociocultural —and hence socioeconomic— stability creole and other post and neocolonial societies have been notorious to lack. By consequence, a great deal of delicacy is required in the initial stages of the valorization of a creole language, which precedes the bulk of both status and corpus planning of the same.

Status planning is a cover term for all the cultural and legal actions, which can be taken to promote a creole language in order to become the medium of many if not all linguistic functions of a language community. It usually lies in the hands of politicians, administrators and educators. Corpus planning, on the other hand, involves all practical work necessary to develop a language from a vernacular to a written standard language. This work is done by linguists. While both status and corpus planning are needed, frequently they are not well coordinated. This then slows the language promotion process down in a significant manner.

Among the corpus planning measures, the first and perhaps most difficult step is constituted by the creation of an orthography. Doubtlessly individuals have experimented with writing creole in most creole communities. Usually those attempts at writing a formerly oral creole language guide themselves quite closely by the orthography of the lexifier language. Would these efforts lead to a coherent orthography, we would be dealing with an etymologizing orthography. Present-day linguists, however, usually advocate a phonematic orthography, which in the case of creole languages would have the advantage of clearly demonstrating that they are not merely degenerate dialects of the corresponding European language. Interestingly enough, near-phonematic orthographies are frequently promoted by socialist governments. Conservative governments may downplay the role of pro-creole language policy altogether. In most cases, a compromising solution is sought for more than one reason: first of all, literacy in creole is often seen as a first step towards literacy in the corresponding lexifier language. Second, the elites who usually play a fundamental role in the status planning process might be alienated by a phonematic orthography —after all, they acquired literacy in the standard language—. It may take quite a while until an agreement is reached on an orthography (see below).

Further corpus planning measures include the compilation of dictionaries, grammars, teaching materials and the creation of a literary canon, a virtually

essential attribute of a standardized language. It is not difficult to understand that none of these further corpus planning measures are truly worth the while as long as no agreement upon a suitable orthography has been reached. It is also these further corpus planning measures which require considerable financial and human resources and which result in pro-creole language policy being a luxury many creole-speaking communities cannot seem to afford.

Among the status planning measures, the decision on which languages should be used in the educational system and to what extent, is perhaps the most crucial issue although the impact of the mass media upon the use of languages in the society at large is also of fundamental importance. Language policies, which have excluded creole languages from the educational system, have contributed to the reproduction of the elites. The most notorious case is probably constituted by Haiti where 85% of the population are monolingual creole speakers but where creole has taken over as the medium of instruction only in recent years. In such cases, making creole not only a school subject but also the actual medium of instruction constitutes the only opportunity to democratize the distribution of knowledge and, by consequence, political and economic power.

In many creole-speaking communities, the language policy to be adopted in education is not as obvious as in the case of Haiti meaning that every situation has to be carefully analyzed before any serious recommendations can be made.

It is common knowledge of language acquisition studies that especially during the first years of formal instruction, it is of utmost importance that this happen in the child's native or primary language. By consequence, receiving instruction in one's native language constitutes a human linguistic right (Skuttnab-Kangas et al. 1992; Hamel 1995). However, the exact function exerted by creole in the school system depends on other factors such as the stage to which it has been standardized, the structural distance to the lexifier language, etc.

Craig (1980) essentially distinguishes between monoliterate and partial bilingualism in the educational systems of creole communities. "Monoliterate bilingualism" means that creole is used only as an oral medium, especially during the first years. Because of the scarce availability of resources in the majority of creole communities, Craig advocates this model for most of them. In "partial bilingualism", literacy is acquired in both creole and the standard language; again, it is during the first years that the creole language plays a very important role. The only creole languages where Craig (1980) insists on partial bilingualism are the French creoles of the Antilles, for the above-mentioned reasons, Haiti to a still greater extent than the ones of the D.O.M. Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyana, as well as Papiamentu and Tok Pisin. In all other cases, Craig advocates monoliterate bilingualism. This seems like a sober and realistic way of looking at things. As a matter of fact, except for a few extreme cases like Haiti, nobody seriously advocates that creole become the only official language. It would just not be feasible to sever the umbilical cord that the prestige language constitutes to the outside world at this point when the world is becoming smaller and smaller because communications are getting easier and faster by the day.

A Review of Attempts at Introducing Pidgins and Creoles in Education

At this point when the role of San Andres and Providence Creole English in the educational system of the Departamento Archipelago is under discussion, it may be useful to look at the experiences of other creole communities. Because of my own specialization, the cases I will discuss are all communities where a Portuguese-, Spanish-, or French-based Creole is spoken.

Portuguese- and Spanish-based creoles

Among the Portuguese-based creoles, Kabuverdianu occupies a special place —and not just in my heart although I've felt a particular interest in this complex creole community ever since I started out in creole studies a number of years ago—. At least among the Portuguese-based creoles of the West African Coast, Kabuverdianu has been the variety (or, actually, a cluster of varieties; cf. Bartens 1999; Bartens forthcoming) best described.

It has also always been the Portuguese-creole-speaking community where educational standards as well as language awareness and pride in the mother tongue have been the highest (cf. Valkhoff

1975:43). This applies to the island community as well as to the diaspora, which conserves a strong sense of linguistic and cultural affinity to the islands. As a matter of fact, the promotion of Kabuverdianu has reached a more advanced stage in the New England States of the US, especially Massachusetts, which host a community equalling the permanent population of the Archipelago.[5]

After independence from Portugal in 1975, the creole language was declared the national, albeit not the official language of Cape Verde Islands.[6] In 1979, a colloquium was organized the main conclusion of which was that the creole language should be progressively introduced into the different spheres of public life. The dialect of the main island, Santiago, was chosen as the basis for the standardization of the language.

This had different kinds of motives: from the political and demographic point of view, it is the island where Praia, the capital, is located and where half of the resident population of the Archipelago lives. Until the coup d'etat of 1980 in Guinea-Bissau, a state union was planned with this other former Portuguese colony. Within the dialectal continuum of Cape Verde Islands, the variety of Santiago is historically the oldest, structurally the most basilectal, i.e., it differs most from Standard Portuguese as far as the Kabuverdianu cluster is concerned, and for these reasons it is also the variety most closely related to Guinea-Bissau Kriyôl. However, not only the political developments in Guinea-Bissau but also within Cape Verde Islands led to stagnation of pro-creole language policy. A phonematic orthography devised by linguist and politician Manuel Veiga upon the recommendations of the 1979 colloquium did not meet approval from the most conservative elites. At some point, all Kabuverdianu varieties were to be standardized separately,

an option that did not really exist for the high costs it would have implied. In the diglossic situation of Cape Verde Islands, where approximately 40% speak Portuguese as a second language and 70-80% have at least a passive knowledge of it, standardization is necessary in order to counter the linguistic insecurity many speakers have started to feel after the euphoria of independence and after the demands to make Kabuverdianu not only the national, but also the official language of the islands have waned.

In spite of the apparent inertia there has been some concrete progress in the islands themselves, e.g. the founding of the "Comissão Nacional para a Língua Cabo-Verdiana" and the "Forum de Alfabetização Bilingue" in 1989 and of the "Comissão Nacional para a Padronização do Alfabeto" in 1993. The ALUPEC or "Alfabeto Unificado para a Escrita do Crioulo", a compromise betweenVeiga's original phonematic orthography and more conservative writing systems, is still awaiting ratification by the Cape Verdean Parliament while it is already being used in bilingual education programs in Massachusetts. The fact that the communities of the diaspora should adopt pro-creole language policies more eagerly than the mainstream society of the ancient colony is reflective of the mental colonization of centuries. As Baptista (1996) signals, bilingual programs in Kabuverdianu, even though currently available only in Massachusetts, are far from efficient there, either. Bilingualism is the goal the Cape Verdean Community is striving for (Veiga 1995). In the Archipelago, this means bilingualism in creole and Portuguese, in the US, it means bilingualism in creole and English.

The main hurdle the standardization of Kabuverdianu has to take is the ethno linguistic heterogeneity of the Archipelago. In Guinea-Bissau, another former Portuguese colony on the opposite mainland of the West African coast, this problem is virtually inexistent. Although historically related to Kabuverdianu, especially the variety of Santiago, the local Kriyôl went through a major stage of expansion only during the struggle for independence from Portugal. It then became the only vehicular language understood by the majority of the population of approximately 1 million, which is otherwise linguistically very fragmented. Since independence, in the case of Guinea-Bissau already in 1974, Kriyôl has been acquiring native speakers

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5 Due to adverse ecological and resulting economic conditions, two thirds of all Cape Verdeans live outside the Archipelago, approximately half of them in the New England States of the US and the rest dispersed in smaller communities in Portugal, several African countries such as Senegal, São Tomé e Príncipe and Angola, the Netherlands, etc.

6 Declaring a language the national language of a country is a symbolic gesture by its Government. Only declaring a language the official language of a country implies concrete obligations for its Government.

especially in urban centers. Only an infinite fraction of the population speaks Portuguese. The fact that adult alphabetization has been carried out even in French speaks for itself.[7] At the beginning of the 1990es, the atmosphere in Guinea-Bissau seemed quite favorable to the standardization and officialization of the creole language, precisely for constituting the only neutral vehicular language. Recent warfare, the progressive diminution of resources and the petering out of enthusiasm make things look much gloomier now.

In the small island state of Sao Tomé e Príncipe, another former Portuguese colony located in the Gulf of Guinea, three different Portuguese-based creoles are spoken. Forro or "the language of the Free [slaves]" is spoken by the majority of the santomenses but has such low prestige that even its existence is often denied in front of strangers, a situation by no means unique to this creole community. There is a small ethno linguistically separate group of people who speak a creole they call Angolar. Principense or luge iye, the language of that island, has presumably been menaced of extinction for the past 25 years or so although no one seems to know for sure. In any case, the introduction of any of the creole languages into the curriculum has not been discussed at any point. As a matter of fact, the Government emphasizes the role of Portuguese in the construction of the nation, in combating illiteracy and as a language of international communication (Espírito Santo 1985).

Fa d'Ambu, Annobonese or the Portuguese-based creole of the island of Annobón, which is geographically close by, is worth mentioning in this context not because of any plans to use the native language of the 4,000 islanders in education but as an example of the gross violation of the linguistic human rights of this community which, since independence from Spain in 1980, has been condemned to a clear policy of extermination by the central Government of Equatorial Guinea precisely because of its creole language.

Papiamentu is a creole language which seems to have been both Spanish- and Portuguese-based from its very genesis, perhaps due to the specific circumstances under which it crystallized on Curaçao, a Dutch colony, during the second half of the 17th century.[8] Today, it is spoken by approximately 250.000 people on the Netherlands' Antilles and in the diaspora, mainly in the Netherlands. Papiamentu is perhaps the creole language that has been most thoroughly developed. This is also presumably due to the fact that the language of the colonial power was different from the lexifier languages of creole and that Dutch practiced a linguistic apartheid which made them resort to creole as the language of interethnic communication.

Nowadays, there is a clear difference between the language policies adopted on Curaçao and Bonaire, the islands of the Federation of the Netherlands' Antilles where Papiamentu is spoken, and Aruba, which gained a status a parte in 1986. The creole of the latter island is more heavily influenced by Spanish and consequently language policies, orthographies, etc., tend to be much more conservative than on Curaçao and Bonaire [9].

Literary creation in Papiamentu dates back to a love letter written in 1775. The first catechisms date from the first half of the 19th century. Papiamentu language newspapers start appearing during the second half of last century. Literary production starts around 1900 and intensifies in the 1940s.

Papiamentu was used in the Catholic mission schools, especially as a medium of religious instruction, until 1936 when the Central Government of the Netherlands ratified a law that made Dutch the only language of instruction. Dutch continues to be the medium of instruction but in 1983, a

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8 Papiamentu was transplanted to Bonaire around 1700 and to Aruba only at the end of the 18th century.

9 Between Curaçao and Bonaire, Curaçao has always had a much higher population (at present approximately 144,000 inhabitants vs. 11,000 on Bonaire). Until quite recently, there were only a few government plantations on Bonaire. By consequence, the social structure was much simpler than on Curaçao. The groups responsible for cultural creation have been missing altogether and innovations from Curaçao have been assimilated only slowly. Aruba presently has a population of approximately 61,000.

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7 Guinea-Bissau is under siege from the neocolonial cultural and economic imperialism of France, a temptation it will hardly be able to resist since it is located in a largely Francophone region of Africa, and Portugal has no economic, cultural or linguistic alternatives to offer.

daily half-hour of Papiamentu instruction was introduced in the primary schools of Curaçao where the creole debate gained impetus in the 1990s. For example, in 1993, a plan according to which Papiamentu was to replace Dutch as the medium of instruction was made public. In spite of the high prestige Papiamentu enjoys compared to other creole languages, the proposal still awaits ratification.

Palenquero or "lengua", as the inhabitants of Palenque de San Basilio, Department of Bolívar, call their creole language, constitutes an enigma: it is the only known fully Spanish-based creole in the New World. The 1991 Constitution of Colombia as well as educational legislation passed in 1994 have led to the development of ethno education programs by and for different national minority groups. Palenqueros are very much involved in this process but there is still much that can and must be done for the promotion of this language, which had previously only been used as an oral medium.

French-based Creoles
As far as the French-based creoles are concerned, those spoken in the Départements d'Outre-Mer have to compete with Standard French. Therefore, teachers who struggle to introduce them into the curriculum meet first of all with the opposition of the parents (cf., e.g., Kremnitz 1983). However, during my short visit to Guadeloupe in 1996, I witnessed a renewed concern for creole issues in the society at large and among school teachers in particular.

Nevertheless, the two independent states where the majority of the population speaks a French-based creole and where this creole language has been introduced into the school system are Haiti and the Seychelles. Haiti is one of the poorest countries of the world and approximately 85% of the population of over 7 million are monolingual creole speakers. The first proposal to introduce creole into the school system dates back to 1804, the year of independence. However, the French-speaking elites managed to keep French as the language of education until 1982, a clever way to avoid the democratization of information and the subsequent empowerment of people. Considering that, now, more Haitians speak English than Standard French[10], it had become clear that the situation

was no longer tenable and that the introduction of creole as the medium of instruction constituted the only chance to make progress. So far, the results leave much to be desired. For example, in 1993, 90% of the teachers were not familiar with the official orthography adopted in 1980. This is due to the scarcity of both financial and human resources (Dejean 1993; Chaudenson et al. 1983).

The Seychelles constitute an island state in the Indian Ocean, which is much smaller as far as both size and population are concerned. The majority of its population speaks creole as their native language but French and especially English are also spoken. Revenues from tourism result in a much higher gross national product than in the case of Haiti.[11] Thence, the Seychelles dispose of much better financial and human resources than Haiti. This explains in part why the results of promoting the creole language since independence in 1977 have been much better.[12] A further crucial difference is constituted by the fact that the educational reforms were much more profound in the Seychelles than in Haiti. In the Seychelles, the school has been integrated into the socialist concept of the nation. The use of creole as a medium of instruction receives support from its use in the media, as a language of a literary production, which is important considering the size of the nation, etc. (Bollée 1993; Chaudenson et al. 1983).

Evaluation: What Can Be Learned from These Situations for the Context of San Andres and Providence?

What can the people of San Andres and Old Providence learn from these or comparable situations where the introduction of a creole language into the curriculum has been attempted? The most essential points can be summarized as follows:

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10 This is a result of emigration to North America.

11 At present, the Seychelles have a population of approximately 75,000 inhabitants. In 1994, the GNPs of Haiti and the Seychelles were US $ 220 and $ 6,210, respectively.

12 In 1979, Seselwa (the French creole of the Seychelles) was declared one of the three official languages of the young nation and in 1981 the first official language before English and French. It has been used as a medium of instruction in primary schools since 1982.

There is no denying, not even in contexts such as the one of Sao Tomé e Príncipe, that language plays a crucial role in the shaping of a person's identity. In order for a child to have optimal learning conditions, instruction must be imparted in his/her mother tongue, using teaching materials and methods that are culturally adequate. For a long time the self-perception of minority groups all over the world has been distorted by the linguistic, historical and ideological miseducation they have received from the mainstream school system (cf. Minority Rights Group 1994).

Doing all these things right requires a lot of resources, both funding and human expertise. Usually resources do not abound meaning that their use has to be carefully planned. Every minority language situation is unique and thence language promotion requires specific measures, which have to be devised for that very situation and cannot be copied from other contexts without previous analysis.

The adoption of a coherent orthography is only the first step: language tools of all kinds from dictionaries to primers are needed. School teachers have to be trained to become aware of the specific problems of their students and to be able to concede creole the space provided by official language policy (for example monoliterate or partial bilingualism). However, practically all creole as well as many other minority languages have been stigmatized during most of their existence and the initial resistance to language promotion is very high as can be seen from the case of Papiamentu. By consequence, corpus and most status planning measures have to be preceded by a successful revalorization campaign of the language. Such a campaign is perhaps the most likely to succeed if language is promoted alongside with other cultural phenomena such as oral traditions, traditional games, etc.

But in the long run it really depends on the willpower and the need felt by the community itself to claim their language rights. In the context of San Andres and Old Providence this means that linguists like those present here today can only offer their help when a community stands at the crossroads of deciding which is the exact role they want to attribute to their mother tongue in education or any other domain of public life for that matter.

Fortunately, the Colombian Constitution of 1991 and the educational legislation of 1994 constitute a legal framework for minority language promotion and the introduction of minority languages into the curriculum by means of the new concept of ethno education.

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