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NEW LANGUAGES FOR OLD IN THE WEST INDIES

It is usually assumed that most if not all “natural” languages spoken today are the products of slow but continual change, obsolescence, innovation and borrowing; and that divergence among members of a clearly related group, like the Romance languages, can be fully accounted for by the gradual fragmentation of what once was, to all intents and purposes, a single linguistic community. This assumption, though well founded, is rarely susceptible of positive proof, even in the comparatively rare case of languages with a long written record; for writing is always more conservative than speech, and especially so at times and places in which this skill is acquired only by a small minority; so that the presumably gradual transition from late Latin to, let us say, Old French is largely undocumented. On the other hand we know of some languages, like Sabir or Lingua Franca (once used in the Levant), that began—and often ended—as nobody’s mother tongue, but serve or served to facilitate communication between members of different speech communities who became—often rather suddenly as the result of some historical accident—interdependent. Such most likely had been (but no longer was) the so-called “men’s speech” of the 17th-century Island Carib, which largely consisted of Karina (Cariban family) lexemes articulated by means of phonemes, inflexion and syntax belonging to the indigenous Arawakan language; for if it be true, as tradition had it, that the Carib conquerors of the Lesser Antilles killed all the indigenous males and took the women to wife, some sort of linguistic compromise must have been an urgent necessity.¹ In what follows I shall attempt to discuss the occurrence and development of other such languages in the West Indies subsequent to the introduction of negro slaves, and the part that they play or played in the life of the communities concerned.

In Guiana, the Caribbean and Louisiana various new languages such as Sranan (Negro English), Saramakkan, Papiamentu, Negro Dutch and several forms of French Creole have emerged within the past three hundred years, and, for the most part, prospered. At first “pidgins” or jargons employed only between African and European, and between Africans of different

¹ See, s. v. “Galíbi” (p. 229) et passim: Raymond Breton *Dictionnaire caraïbe-français* (Auxerre, 1665); réimprimé par Jules Platzmann, édition fac-simile (Leipzig, 1892).

provenance, all of them later became "creolized"—adopted, that is to say, as the first and in general only language of whole communities; and with the exception of Negro Dutch (formerly spoken in the Virgin Islands, but probably now extinct), they remain that to this day. These languages are peculiar in combining rather similar grammatical structures of a non-Indo-European and seemingly West African type with vocabularies that are preponderantly of English, Portuguese or Spanish, Dutch and French ancestries respectively. By far the most widespread and diversified of them is French Creole, whose four main dialects (excluding those of Mauritius and Réunion in the Indian Ocean), each containing an indeterminate number of mutually intelligible subdialects, are spoken in French Guiana, certain of the Lesser Antilles (Trinidad, Grenada, St. Lucia, Martinique, Dominica, Guadeloupe and dependencies and St. Thomas), Haiti and Louisiana. Sranan is spoken mainly in Surinam, as the name implies; but as a second or trade language it is also used to some extent, by Amerindians and others, in the neighbouring French and British territories to the east and west. Saramakkan is spoken only by the Bush Negroes on the upper reaches of the Surinam or "Saramakka" river. It has not yet been thoroughly investigated; but appears to be a tone language containing Portuguese, English and African elements. Papiamentu is confined to the three Dutch islands of Curaçao, Aruba and Bonaire. It is usually assumed to be the only Spanish Creole in the Americas; but Tomás Navarro and, more recently, H. L. A. van Wijk have shown that the many Portuguese items in its lexicon are basic, and that its hispanicization must have taken place at a time long after the Spaniards and other Spanish speakers had left Curaçao for the mainland.²

A *pidgin* may then be defined as a linguistic compromise that is nobody's mother tongue; and a *creole* as a mother tongue that began in a pidgin, and has not come to be identified with any previously existing traditional language (see now footnote 14). I think it was Voltaire who said that while a foreign language may be learnt in two or three years, it takes half a lifetime to master one's own; and in the same sense it seems obvious that the process of creolization presupposes and entails considerable enrichment and regulation of the original pidgin, whose formation for the requirements of a rapidly learnt second language necessarily involved a notable reduction of two or more speech communities' means of expression and communication. All creoles are therefore "regular" languages in that each has its own pattern of distinctive units of sound, its own grammatical signs and conventions, and a vocabulary adequate for the cultural demands of its native speakers. Moreover, such languages evolve, once creolization has taken place, in much the same ways as do other idioms, and in accordance with their native

² Tomás Navarro, "Observaciones sobre el papiamentu", *NRFH*, VII (1951), p. 188 ff., and H. L. A. van Wijk, "Orígenes y evolución del papiamentu", *Neophilologus*, XLII (1958), p. 169 ff.

speakers' changing needs of communication. But they differ from languages with a longer tradition in having basic grammars whose source cannot clearly be identified with that of their basic vocabularies, and in being comparatively free from such fossilized historical débris as result in our own irregular noun plurals and verbal conjugations.

Of these creolized languages' short history little, unfortunately, is known; for few writers of the past took any serious interest in them, and the slaves themselves were, almost without exception, illiterate. However, we know that the first French settlers and missionaries employed a sort of *petit-nègre* in their attempt to make themselves understood by the slaves; for toward the middle of the 17th century, Father Chevillard wrote: "Les nègres . . . se familiarisent rapidement avec le langage de l'euro péen, langage volontairement corrompu pour faciliter sa compréhension"; and at about the same time Father Pelleprat remarked: "Nous nous accomodons à leur façon de parler qui est ordinairement par l'infinitif du verbe, comme par exemple: 'moi prier Dieu, moi aller à l'Eglise, moi point manger'; et y ajoutant un mot qui marque le temps à venir ou le passé, ils disent: demain moi manger, hier moi prier, et ainsi de suite." Moreover, both these priests have left us samples of the language in which religious instruction was given to slaves in their time.³ So, from Chevillard:

Toy sçavoir qu'il y a un Dieu: Luy grand Capitou, luy sçavoir tout faire sans autre l'aider: luy donner à tous patates; luy mouche manigat pour tout faire, non point comme luy. Vouloir faire maison, non faire comme homme, car toy aller chercher hache pour bois, puis couper roseaux, prendre mahoc et lianes et ainsi pequins faire case. Or Dieu mouche manigat, luy dit en son esprit, moy vouloir homme, luy preste miré homme. Enfin luy envoyé meschant en bas en enfer, au feu avec maboya et autres sauvages qui n'ont vouloir vivre en bons chrétiens. Mais tous bons chrétiens, luy bons pour mettre en son paradis où se trouve tout contentement, nul mal, nul travail, et nulle servitude ou esclavage, mais une entière joye et parfaite liberté.

And from Pelleprat:

Seigneur, toi bien savé que mon frère lui point mentir, point lui jurer, point dérober, point lui méchant. Pourquoi toi le voulé faire mourir!

Mon frère, toi te confesser, toi dire comme moi: Seigneur, si moi mentir, moi demander à toi pardon; si moi dérober, si moi jurer, si moi faire autre mal à toi, moi bien faché, moi demander pardon.

But this is something very different—apart from a couple of resemblances

³ Citations from Chevillard and Pelleprat are both taken from L. Calvert, "Histoire de la formation du langage créole", *Martinique*, December 1944. The latter author himself took them from, respectively: C. A. Banbuck, *Histoire politique, économique et sociale de la Martinique* (Paris, 1935), and Pierre Pelleprat, *Relation des missions des pp. de la Cie. de Jésus dans les isles, et dans la Terre Ferme de l'Amérique méridionale* (Paris, 1656). Calvert does not say what edition of the latter he used; but the spelling—evidently modernized in the case of Pelleprat, and not (or less) in that of Chevillard—is as given by him.

such as the absence of a copula (*luy grand Capitou*) and the employment of *moi*, *lui*, etc. as subject (*moi demander*, *lui envoyé*)—from the language used a hundred years later as portrayed in the first French Creole texts, and which differs little from that current at the present time.⁴ So, for example, no French Creole employs the objective personal pronouns *me*, *te*, *le* or *se* (*toi te confesser*, *toi le voulé*, *où se trouve*), the auxiliary verb *avoir* (*qui n'ont vouloir*), or the conjunction *que* (*toi bien savé que*); while Chevillard's *toi savoir* and *moi vouloir* vs. Pelleprat's *toi bien savé* and *toi le voulé* suggest a jargon in the making rather than one already established.

Then was this incipient jargon a model, as is usually assumed, imitated and modified by the African slaves; or itself a kind of imitation of these Africans' speech, as we are told ("We adapt ourselves to their manner of speaking . . .")? Most probably both. Surely Fr. Pelleprat was not claiming, for himself and others who had never before come into contact with Negroes, a familiarity with West African languages. But the first French settlers and missionaries got their slaves from the Spaniards and, more especially, from the Dutch; who in their turn got them from the Portuguese settlements or "factories" on the west coast of Africa, where a Portuguese pidgin had been in use since the 15th century. And as Van Wijk has shown, slaves bought or captured in the interior usually remained in these "collecting centres" quite long enough to learn the pidgin, which served henceforth not only in their dealings with Europeans of whatever nationality engaged in the slave-trade, but also as a lingua franca between fellow slaves whose mother tongues were not mutually intelligible. It was, I suggest, this "façon de parler" to which the first French settlers and missionaries sought to adapt themselves, and whose vocabulary they sought to gallicize.

There can be no doubt that they succeeded in the latter part of this enterprise; for few words of Ibero-Romance ancestry are to be found in modern French Creole, except in the Guianese and Haitian dialects, where they are a little more common (cf. Guianese *briga* "to fight" and *fika* "to be in a situation or state", from Ptg. *brigar*, *ficar*; and Haitian *kachimbo* "pipe" and *mantèg* "lard", from Ptg. *cachimbo*, *manteiga*—or Sp. *manteica*). However, Portuguese *pai*, *compai* and *mãe*, which have been naturalized in the "normal" Spanish dialects of Trinidad, Puerto Rico and probably other of the

⁴ On p. 234 of her *Du français aux parlers créoles* (Paris, 1956), Élodie Jourdain gives the text of a message sent by a Guianese Amerindian, pupil of the Jesuits, to the French Governor d'Orvilliers in 1744; and which she believed to be the oldest monument of French Creole: *Anglai pran Yapok, yé méné mon père allé, toute blang foulkan maron dans bois* "(the) English have taken (the) Oyapok (post), they have carried off (the) priest, all (the) white (people) have cleared out (and) taken refuge in (the) woods". The same message would be conveyed in the same words in the Guianese dialect of today.

⁵ See: Robert Wallace Thompson, "A Preliminary Survey of the Spanish Dialect of Trinidad", *Orbis*, VI (1957), p. 353 ff., and Manuel Álvarez Nazario, *El arcaísmo vulgar en el español de Puerto Rico* (Mayagüez, Puerto Rico, 1957).

Spanish-speaking Antilles,⁵ are also employed—though only as friendly or endearing terms of address, without any reference to kinship—in French Creole of the Lesser Antilles, whose *iche* (French spelling) “son(s), offspring” apparently derives from an early dialectal form (with hushing sibilant but no *f* or aspirate *h*) of Sp. *hijo*, *-ja* or Ptg. *filho*, *-lha*. And had the slaves arrived in the French islands speaking nothing but their native African languages, it is most unlikely that Frenchmen there should have taught them words like: *capitou* (cf. Ptg. *capitão*) “chieftain, leader”, *pequins* (cf. Ptg. *pequeno*) “little ones”, *miré* (cf. Ptg. & Sp. *mirar*) “look at” and *mouche* (cf. Sp. *mucho*, Ptg. *muito*) “very, much, many”.⁶

The importance of the Portuguese elements in Papiamentu, beginning with the name of the language itself (*papia* “speak” < Ptg. *papear* “chat” + nominalizing *-mentu*, a fully productive suffix, < Ptg. *-mento*), has never been denied; but their presence has usually been attributed to the Sephardic Jews who sought refuge in Curaçao in the second half of the 17th century and later. Van Wijk argues that these refugees were not at that time either numerous or powerful enough to have exerted such an influence; although they most probably helped to de-africanize the Portuguese pidgin spoken by the incoming slaves. Moreover, he has found in the vocabulary of Curaçao: “more than 70 Portuguese words that occur also in the Negro English of Surinam [Sranan] in the same characteristic shapes as in Papiamentu”. This is not the place to argue either for or against such a hypothesis; but if a Portuguese pidgin or creole spoken in a Dutch island could be hispanicized to the extent that is seen in modern Papiamentu by visiting missionaries and others coming from the adjacent mainland of South America, it would not be surprising if an originally Afro-Portuguese pidgin left still fewer remnants of its vocabulary in creolized languages that emerged among slaves belonging to English and French masters. Finally we may mention, as not irrelevant to our discussion, Whinnom’s opinion that the Spanish Creole dialects now spoken in the Philippine Islands evolved from the imitation, by Spanish soldiers, of a Portuguese pidgin that was widely used as a trade language in the Eastern Seas during the 16th, 17th and early 18th centuries, not only by the Portuguese themselves, but also by the Dutch and English.⁷

The West Indian slave-owners’ precautionary policy of mixing together Africans belonging to different tribes must have led to general use of the local pidgin, and to its creolization in the second or third generation born

⁶ It is true that *mouche manigat* “very skilful” is said to have occurred also in the jargon used between Europeans and Island Caribs; and some have attributed *manigat* to the latter’s language. Breton denies this; but if he was mistaken, these Indians must have had a peculiar sense of humour; for the most similar word in their language, *manikati*, means “unable or not disposed to do (something)”.

⁷ Keith Whinnom, *Spanish Contact Vernaculars in the Philippine Islands* (Hong Kong–London, 1956). In a review of this book, in *Word*, 13 (1957), p. 489 ff., I have mentioned some similarities between the languages therein described and the West Indian creoles.

in the American colonies. But the importation of African slaves continued, with some interruptions, throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries; and in Martinique, where 5,435 individuals of African birth were reported to be living as recently as 1905, it was renewed between 1857 and 1860 under the new label of "indentured labour (*engagés*)".⁸ It therefore seems justified to say that these new West Indian languages have been throughout most of their history the mother tongue of some, but a second language for other of their speakers.

Understandably, their importance has varied enormously with time and place. Father Labat, who was in the islands (principally Martinique) between 1693 and 1705, appears not to have considered them worthy of mention; though he discusses the speech of the Island Carib, and tells us that he learnt the African language of his "Arada" slaves. A hundred years later ("Paris, 17 Brimer, an 10 République francé, yon et indivisible"), Bonaparte and Leclerc considered French Creole important enough to have their proclamation "a tout zabitans Saint-Domingue" translated into it; and during the second half of the 19th century, the indigenous (Island-Carib) Indians of Dominica gradually gave up their own language for it. At the present time, French Creole is the mother tongue of more than 95% of the population in Dominica and St. Lucia (not more than a third of whom can express themselves in English) and Haiti (where less than a third can express themselves in French); while it is rapidly dying out in Trinidad and Grenada, where it is probably not understood by more than 10% of the inhabitants. It is probably safe to say that in French Guiana and the French islands every native inhabitant (excepting perhaps some Amerindians in the former) is now more or less bilingual in French and Creole; a circumstance which tends to bring their dialects of Creole much closer to 'normal' French than they were even fifty years ago. And owing to the prestige of Spanish, something of the same sort appears to be happening—or to have already happened—to Papiamentu; which is, according to Van Wijk:

casi el único idioma criollo — más exactamente idioma semi-criollo — que tiene además valor cultural, pues en él se escriben no sólo diarios y revistas, sino también novelas, cuentos y hasta poesía. Lamentable es que el papiamentu carezca de una ortografía uniforme, ya que las distintas ortografías basadas en argumentos etimológicos vacilan entre la transcripción española y la holandesa de los sonidos.

The first part of this statement, if not altogether exact, shows that the social aspects of the several creoles are very different. Some stories and more poems have been written and published, during the past two hundred years, in various dialects of French Creole and in Sranan; though the earlier writings were not—understandably, in view of the slaves' enforced illiteracy—produced by what we should call native speakers. They employ, for the

⁸ L. Calvert, *op. cit.*, *Martinique*, June 1944.

most part, an inconsistent spelling that leans heavily on the conventional orthography of one or another "national" language. This also is understandable; for only in Haiti and within the past decade, so far as I know, have the schools begun to teach reading and writing in a creole mother tongue; and even there the standardized orthography based on a phonological analysis of Haitian Creole has had to be abandoned under pressure from people who think that their language should at least "look like" French!

But native speakers of French Creole (of whatever dialect) who also possess a modicum of French or English have come to regard the use of their mother tongue in much the same light as speakers of standard French do the use of *tu* instead of *vous*—with this difference, that the former will often change from the "intimate" to the "polite" form with the same interlocutor when coming within earshot of 'respectable' strangers. Some years ago, in Dominica, a very good variety show, composed and performed in Creole by local talent, was rather widely deplored as being "unprogressive". I myself have served, by request, as interpreter between a Dominican and a Martiniquais whose mother tongues, always employed in the family circle, differed less than those of a Bostonian and a Baltimorean; but who, being hitherto unacquainted, both felt it incumbent on them to converse only in their respective "national" languages. And from Guadeloupe to St. Lucia, if not elsewhere, many people who themselves habitually speak Creole are wont to chide any children whom they hear using it in the street.

The antecedents for this attitude are sufficiently clear. The various pidgins arose, persisted and became creolized under conditions in which social status was determined mainly by racial identity; the ratio of "white" to "black" was constantly decreasing;⁹ and the former, once they themselves had become bilingual, actively discouraged the latter from learning the "masters' language". The abolition of slavery brought no immediate change in these conditions; but with the decline of the old plantation system (Fr. *habitation*) it soon became evident that these coloured populations would be a burden on the mother country unless and until they became literate and learnt the national language. It was hoped to accomplish this end by the introduction, several generations ago, of public schools (whose numbers and equipment are still inadequate). But the attainment of bilingualism in a community where there is little opportunity of practising the second language in contacts with its native speakers is always and everywhere a difficult task; and it has

⁹ L. Calvert (*op. et loc. cit.*), citing Martineau & May, *Trois siècles d'histoire Antillaise*, says: "Les noirs sont moins nombreux en 1652, avec Pelleprat. Ils tendent à l'égalité en 1658, avec Rochefort; ils sont supérieurs en nombre en 1660, d'après la relation des îles. C'est donc entre 1658 et 1660 que la population noire dépasse la blanche pour suivre un mouvement continuellement ascendant. Elle la double en 1720, la quadruple en 1740, époque à laquelle les blancs étaient eux-mêmes cinq fois plus nombreux qu'en 1660. Le nombre des noirs augmentait sans cesse: Il atteignait 70.000 en 1763 et 90.000 en 1789."

been rendered particularly arduous in English islands like St. Lucia and Dominica, where children have been—and are—taught that their mother tongue is “only a monkey language”—or no language at all, that it “has no grammar”, cannot be written and is a mark of social inferiority.¹⁰ Poorly trained and poorly paid local teachers might be excused for spreading such false doctrine; but as recently as 1945 the Educational Adviser to the Comptroller for Development and Welfare in the West Indies published a report in which he stated his opinion that: “The aim should be not to make the children bilingual, but ultimately to make English the mother tongue.” I cannot conceive how a shift of language without an interim period of bilingualism might be achieved—except by removing all infants from their homes and parents, and taking full charge of them until the age of puberty! Moreover, most educationalists are now agreed that children who learn to read and write first in their mother tongue subsequently make better progress in the second language than those others whose schooling is in the latter from the start.¹¹

Some readers may ask why it is that no pidgin or creole is current in the Spanish-speaking Antilles, or in English islands such as Jamaica, Barbados and St. Vincent. So far as the former territories are concerned, R. W. Thompson has answered the question as follows:¹²

In addition, a more serious effort was made by the Spaniards and Portuguese to plant their New World territories with peasants of European stock. As a result, their subjects of African descent did not greatly overwhelm in numbers those who spoke a European language in conformity with native usage, as happened in the English, French and Dutch colonies of the West Indies. Today there is no Spanish *creole* dialect in the New World, where the negroes of Cuba, of the Dominican Republic and of Porto Rico pronounce the voiced dental fricative δ every bit as well as their white or mulatto compatriots.

On the other hand, Cromwell did make a serious effort to provide the English planters (no island south of Montserrat other than Barbados was at that time in English hands) with the enforced labour of as many “convicts, vagabonds and light women” of British stock as he could lay his hands on; the last two categories designating, in the main, Catholic priests, boys and girls. “In four years”, we are told, “sixty-four hundred white slaves rounded up in Ireland and Scotland were sent out to the West Indies. The population of Jamaica seven years after its conquest was fifteen thousand.”¹³ But

¹⁰ See: Pierre V erin, “The Rivalry of French Creole and English in the British West Indies”, *De West-Indische Gids*, 38 (1958), p. 163 ff.

¹¹ See: UNESCO, *The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education* (= *Monographs on Fundamental Education*, No. VII) (Paris, 1953).

¹² Robert Wallace Thompson, “The ‘th-Sounds’ and Genetics”, *Phonetica* I, 3/4 (1957).

¹³ Germ an Arciniegas, *Caribbean Sea of the New World* (New York, 1946), p. 213 ff.

though black slaves proved more efficient than white, and gradually replaced the latter in the English islands, the Africans had time to learn from their British fellow sufferers, and to pass on, a dialect which, though far from standard English, is not in my opinion a creole.¹⁴ Nevertheless, there are some remarkable correspondences between the Negro English creole of Surinam (Sranan)—which colony the Dutch received in compensation for the theft of New Amsterdam, alias New York—and the English dialects of Barbados and Jamaica.¹⁵

The linguistic history of St. Vincent is another story. Until 1763 this island was, like Dominica, in the hands of the Caribs; and its language was Island Carib. But in 1635 (the year in which the French occupied Guadeloupe and Martinique), the living cargoes of two wrecked slave-ships had sought refuge there; and been joined in the course of the years by numerous fugitives from neighbouring islands, particularly Barbados. These Negroes soon adopted the language and customs of their Indian hosts, and stole as many of their women as possible; the more readily, no doubt, because only identification with the indigenous Caribs preserved them from recapture. After the Treaty of Paris in 1763, the English moved in, bringing their own slaves; and ten years later the Caribs, "red" and "black" alike, were confined to the northernmost quarter of the island. But the black outbred the red to such an extent that after the unsuccessful Carib war of liberation (1795-96), very few pure Indians were left in St. Vincent; and the modern descendants of the 5000-odd Caribs who were deported to Central America in 1797, now numbering some 30,000, are of preponderantly negroid stock, although they alone today have retained the Island-Carib language.¹⁶

Though prediction is impossible, it seems likely that the future fortunes

¹⁴ *Pāce* Professor Robert Le Page formerly of the UCWI (and others), who holds that "broad Jamaican Creole stands in much the same relationship to English as does Haitian Creole to French" (personal communication). The clue to what I regard as an essential difference is the qualification, "broad". So far as I could ascertain, there is a continuous gradation in the speech of Jamaicans—such as exists within perhaps most fairly large speech communities—from the broadest dialect to the local variety of standard English; and everybody normally uses the nearest approximation to the latter with which he or she is familiar. But there is not and cannot be any such gradation from a French Creole to any dialect of French because of great differences in basic grammar; and it is always clear which language is being spoken, even though it be a variety of Creole that is full of gallicisms or a variety of French that is full of creolisms. I do not doubt that "broad" Jamaican (or Barbadian) began in a pidgin that became the mother tongue of some; but this mother tongue has evolved continuously in the direction of "normal" English, as which it should now be identified for the reasons stated above.

¹⁵ For some examples of such correspondences, see: Merville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York, 1941), p. 282.

¹⁶ For further details of this people's history, see the Introduction to my monograph, *The Black Carib of British Honduras* (= *Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology*, No. 17) (New York, 1951).

of the West Indian creoles will largely depend on their speakers' ability to adapt them to new requirements of communication—with regard to both speech and writing—in a changing world. So far as speech is concerned, this should offer little difficulty in places where the present national or official language is a later stage of that from which the creole's basic vocabulary was drawn, as in the French territories and in Haiti. But elsewhere, lexical borrowing is apt to be replaced by "code switching"—by the use, that is to say, of whole phrases or sentences lifted from the source-language. In Dominica, this is particularly common among chauffeurs, truck-drivers, clerks, typists and salesmen; while the introduction of such things as fertilizers, spraying and contour draining have made it not infrequent even among peasants. On the other hand, fishermen, hunters, sawyers and other woodsmen, sugar-cane workers in field and factory, bakers, carpenters, coopers and others who practise a conservative handicraft usually have, pertaining to their occupation, a rich Creole vocabulary that has been passed on without change throughout many generations, and that differs little—and if at all, then only by greater conservatism—from its counterpart in Martinique or Guadeloupe. Moreover, native speakers of Dominican Creole are not given to extending the meaning of a word as they know it; so, *hwazwè* (Fr. *rasoir*) "razor" is replaced by *réza* (Eng. *razor*) when a "safety razor" is referred to, *vè* (Fr. *verre*) "glass drinking-vessel" and *vè butey* (Fr. *bouteille*) "broken glass" are replaced by *glas* (Eng. *glass*) in any other reference, and *dis nwè* (Fr. *dix noirs*) "sixpence" has not been extended to "ten cents" of the new currency, which is called *tensens*.

The net result of numerous such changes and innovations, which have been gaining ground during the past forty—and especially the past fifteen—years, is that conversation between native speakers of French Creole belonging, respectively, to the English and to the French islands (of the Lesser Antilles) is today much more hampered and restricted than was the case only a generation ago; hampered because, in the French islands, the phonology is becoming closer to that of French (introduction of front rounded vowels, loss of the aspirate *h* and its replacement by velar *r*; whereas in the English islands *h* has been retained and velar *r* merged, for most speakers, in a non-distinctively velarized *w*); restricted because there is not and has never been a common vocabulary pertaining to things and institutions unknown in the islands before the present century, but which have recently become commonplace.

As for writing, so long as only those who have first become literate in another language can attempt to write and read a creole mother tongue, there will continue to be some wavering between an 'etymological' spelling (mainly where the second or school language was the source of the creole's lexicon) and one that is "phonetic"—not in a scientific sense, but in terms of the second language's conventional orthography (mainly where the second

language was not the source of the Creole's lexicon). So, perhaps, for Papiamentu: *gaap* or *haap* from Dutch *gapen*, *loer* or *lur* from Dutch *loeren*, *yuda* or *joeda* from Spanish *ayudar*, *joven* or *hoben* from Spanish *joven*, *bij* from Dutch *bij* but *bai* from Portuguese *vai*. And in the case of a French Creole dialect some of whose speakers have French and others English as the language of literacy, the situation is much more serious. So, one and the same utterance, which might be transcribed phonematically: *se joomu yon ki sav fôs kuto ki ã cè-y* "it's the pumpkin alone that knows the strength of the knife in its heart", would be likely to appear, when written by a Martiniquais, as: *c'est geo'omon yonne qui save fô'ce couteau qui en tchoeu'-y*; and when written by a Dominican or a St. Lucian ignorant of French as: *say zhowomoo yon kee sahv force cootow kee ahn chair ee*. But were a Creole word of English ancestry to be recorded, "etymologist" and "phonetician" would most probably change places, the one writing, for example, *saïbòte* and the other *sideboard* for what is, phonologically, *saybod*.

Under the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that even personal correspondence is usually written—often by the intermediary of an interpreter-scribe—in what passes for the national language. But a better and more general knowledge of the latter, spoken and written, could, I suggest, be achieved most rapidly and painlessly by way of literacy in the creole mother tongue; for writing which some adequate, consistent and simple orthography should be agreed upon. Conventional French spelling clearly has none of these qualities; but since the vast majority of those who speak a French Creole have or wish to acquire French as a second language, some concessions should be made by the others; and it would be wise for the educational authorities of the W. I. Federation to adopt such digraphs and trigraphs as are or may be used to represent similar distinctive sounds of both English and French; for example, *ou* as in *you* and *vous*, *tch* as in *clutch* and *tchèque*. Thus the Creole proverb cited in the preceding paragraph would appear as orthographic: *se joomou yon ki sav fôs kouto ki ã tchè-y*.

In conclusion I should perhaps apologize for having given what may be a disproportionate place in my discussion to French Creole. But though I have done so mainly because I know most about it, having spoken one of its dialects almost daily for the past twenty years, there are reasons why it may be considered more important than some of the others of its kind, in respect to the rôle that it has played in the past, and may still play in the future. French Creole as a whole is more widespread and diversified and has a greater number of native speakers (between three and four million in Haiti alone) than any other creole language. However, size is no guarantee of longevity when the ability or the will to adapt is lacking; and there can be little doubt that, thanks to encouragement from Holland and to native speakers' own volition, the creoles now spoken in Dutch territories have made most progress in that direction. In token of which I shall end with

a poem by Trefossa, written in Sranen (Negro English), and for whose translation I must plead guilty.¹⁷

wan tru puëma na wan skretji-sani.
wan tru puëma na wan stree te f'dede.
wan tru puëma na wan tra kondre,
pe ju kan go
te ju psa dede fosi.

a real poem is a frightening thing.
a real poem is a strife with death.
a real poem is another land,
where you can go
once death has been outrun.

wan tru puëma na den wortu d'e tan abra
te ala trawan n'in ju libi wasi gwe;
wan koko soso,
ma wan di kan sproiti
njun libi.

a real poem is the words that stay
when others from your life are washed
a naked kernel, [away;
but one that can put forth
new life.

lon na mi abra dan,
Arusubanja fu grontapu.
kande wandee, wandee
mofo fu mi sa broko opo
fu tatji dji onoosruwan tu wortu
di, te den gro, sa trowe lepi stari,
di mi suku noo.

then let pour over me
the world's Arusubanya.
perhaps one day, one day
my mouth will open up
to tell for simple souls a double tale
which, when it grows, will cast ripe
that now I seek. [stars

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¹⁷ From: Trefossa (puëma fu), *Trotji*; p. 19. Published for the Bureau of Linguistic Research in Surinam (University of Amsterdam) (Amsterdam, 1957). Arusubanja is the name of a rapid in the Surinam river; and means, literally "shakes the ribs loose".