

**The Effect of Socio-Political and Economic Factors  
in the Creation of Caribbean Creoles**

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**Map of Pidgins around the World**

<http://www.mangolanguages.com/blog/around-the-world/language-stew-pidgins-and-creoles/>

## Introduction

Language change is a crucial and often unavoidable aspect of spoken language. The process of language creolization<sup>1</sup> that occurred in the European colonies of the Caribbean is a prime example. Throughout history, language contact and evolution have in some way affected most spoken languages; the linguistic changes they underwent through contact with several different groups resulted in the creation of several new languages. In the Americas, though, vastly different ethnic groups were brought together from across the world and the New World, resulting in languages influenced by European, African, and Amerindian<sup>2</sup> languages, among others. Contact between several different peoples and languages came about as a result of the socio-political and economic actions of a number of European colonizing groups. These socio-political and economic factors had a direct influence on how these creolized languages were formed, and continue to do so today, particularly on how they are used and preserved.

Two major European colonial actors in the Caribbean, the French and Spanish, and the Portuguese, to a lesser extent, had a direct and indirect influence on the colonization of the New World. As a result, they had extended linguistic influence on the region, as well. Even today, French and/or Spanish and Portuguese are spoken somewhere in the Americas, but back even before the European colonial period, close contact amongst several indigenous, Caribbean

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<sup>1</sup> A Creole is a language that is newly formed from various influences, affecting lexicon, syntax, and phonology. Because many Creoles take large amounts of words from older languages and applies them to a different language creating the appearance of a poorly spoken version of the older language, until the 20<sup>th</sup> century linguists did not study these languages in depth. For more information see John A. Holm. *Pidgins and Creoles*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988

<sup>2</sup> Amerindian languages are languages indigenous to the Americas that were and are spoken by native populations. For more information on Latin American indigenous languages see [http://www.ailla.utexas.org/site/la\\_langs.html](http://www.ailla.utexas.org/site/la_langs.html)

groups resulted in a particularly varied linguistic outcome<sup>3</sup>. Yet, after European intervention, Creolized languages—Pidgins—emerged as mixtures of languages, as an attempt to facilitate mutual understanding amongst the different groups of colonial European colonizers, native Amerindians, and Africans workers, who were imported as inexpensive labor<sup>4</sup>. These Pidgin languages, usually reserved for contact situations between groups that would otherwise not understand each other, for example, Europeans and Amerindians, Europeans and Africans, or amongst all three groups. However, over time, portions of the populations in the colonies began to speak these Pidgin languages amongst themselves, and with their families, which allow them to evolve into their own Creole languages<sup>5</sup>.

Three examples of Caribbean Creoles that have separate, distinct histories from are Haitian Creole, spoken in Haiti (and by migrants in the Dominican Republic, United States, and other Caribbean islands), Papiamentu, spoken in the former Dutch Antilles (Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao), and Palenquero, spoken by a small community on the Caribbean coast of Colombia. There was limited study of these languages until well into the twentieth century, thus there is much speculation as to how these languages were formed. Yet, it is still clear that several languages have influenced this process. In studying Caribbean Creoles, one must also understand the socio-economic and cultural influence the Portuguese had in the region, mostly due to the slave trade. The resulting effect is that the Portuguese language exerted influence on the creation

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<sup>3</sup> Many native groups migrated from their original homelands, gaining dominance in other parts of the Americas. For more information, see: Eakin, Marshall C. *The History of Latin America: Collision of Cultures*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007: 31-38.

<sup>4</sup> A Pidgin is a “reduced [language] that results from extended groups of people with no language in common; it evolves when they need some means of verbal communication, perhaps for trade...no group learns the native language of any other group” (Holm I 5). For more information, see John A. Holm. *Pidgins and Creoles*.

<sup>5</sup> A Pidgin becomes a Creole when children of the speakers of the Pidgin are “exposed more and [find] it more useful” to learn the Pidgin than their ancestral language, replacing the parents language with the Pidgin language in everyday speech (Holm I 7).

of a number of these New World Creoles, particularly Papiamentu and Palenquero. Throughout the history of many Caribbean communities, socio-politics and economics had and continue to have a direct influence on many of the languages spoken today, and how they are perceived. The study of the colonization of the Caribbean demonstrates the connection between the socio-political and economic motivations behind the process and the resulting creation and usages of various Creole languages.

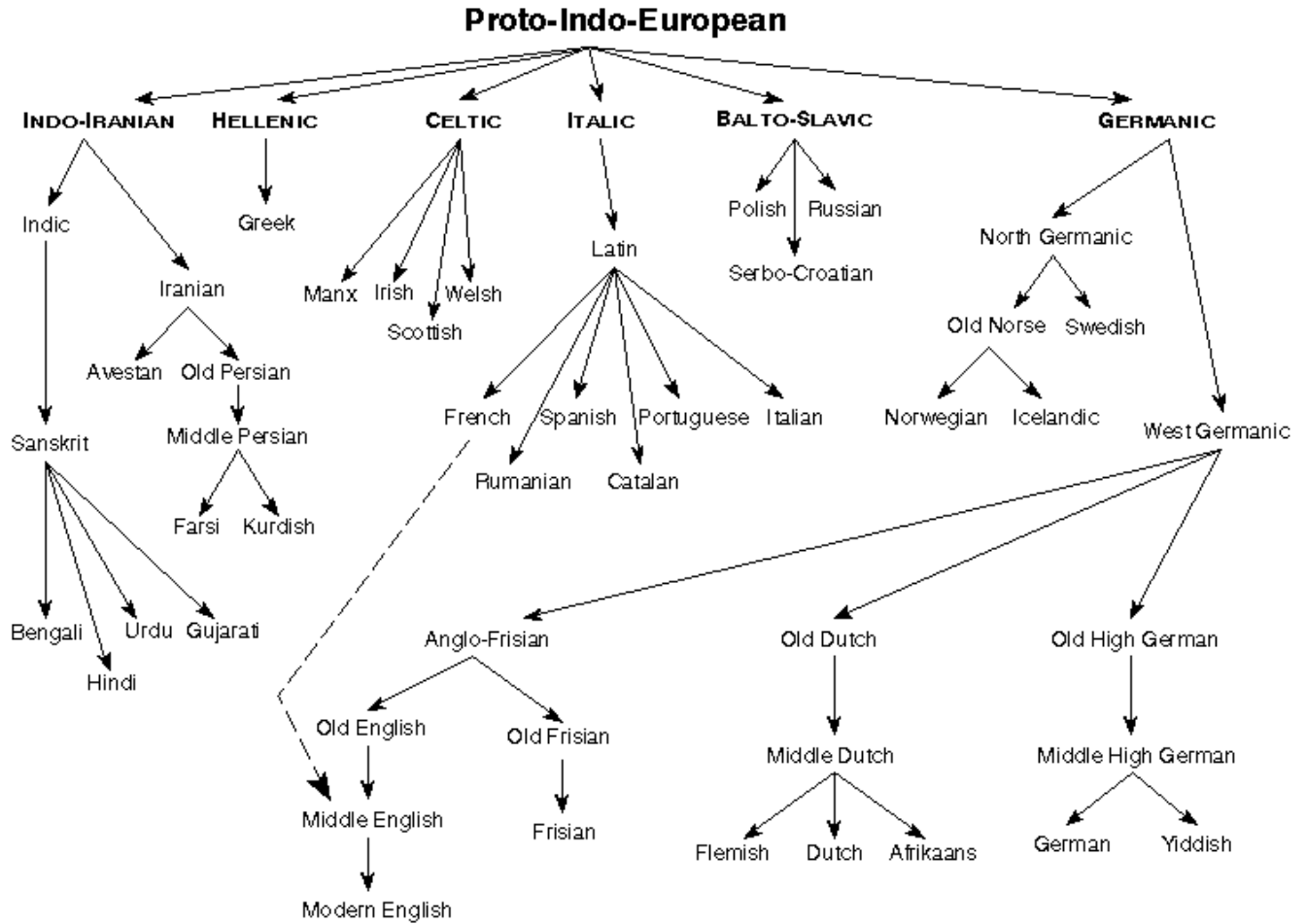
### **Romance Languages in Europe and their diffusion**

The process of language change has resulted not only in the multitude of French, Spanish and Portuguese-based languages of the Caribbean, but also in the creation of these three languages themselves. Present-day French, Spanish and Portuguese are the result of linguistic evolution from Vulgar Latin<sup>6</sup> (the form of Latin spoken daily by citizens of the Roman Empire), which emerged from Classic Latin, the written form of Latin usually seen in literature and oration (Resnick 5). Similarly, Latin evolved from its own prehistoric, parent language, Proto-Indo-European, which seems to have originated from nomadic tribes of the Baltic (2).<sup>7</sup> In the same way that French, Spanish and Portuguese have emerged from Latin, Proto-Indo-European is the parent language to Latin, Sanskrit, Proto-Germanic, and others (3), as the illustration below shows.

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<sup>6</sup> In this context, 'vulgar' signifies 'of the common people or masses.' For further discussion, see W.D. Elcock, *The Romance Languages*. London: Faber & Faber, 1960.

<sup>7</sup> For more information about the development of Proto-Indo-European, see <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/286368/Indo-European-languages> and <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/lrc/ielex/>.



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<http://www.roebuckclasses.com/105/regions/europe/eurohuman/europeanlanguage.htm>

This transformation of Latin into its daughter languages began with the diffusion of Latin throughout the Roman Empire between 27 B.C.E. and 476 C.E. During the beginning of the expansion of the Roman Empire, the separation between high Classic Latin and low Vulgar Latin became more apparent. Classic Latin is the traditional, written form of Latin found in works of Roman literature, while Vulgar Latin was the slightly simplified version of Latin spoken daily in the Roman Empire. Classic Latin remained virtually unchanged, while Vulgar Latin would continue to change to result in several different regional dialects, and later, separate languages. Roman domination in present-day Spain began in 218 B.C.E., before the establishment of the

Roman Empire. Total Roman domination of the Iberian Peninsula was achieved in 19 B.C.E. (Resnick 7). Similarly, Roman presence in present-day France began in approximately 120 B.C.E, with the founding of the colony *Provincia Narbonensis* in the present-day region of Provence, in southern France. In 58 B.C.E., Julius Caesar arrived in Gaul to conquer the rest of the region to expand the Roman Empire (Walter 54).

During the rule of the Roman Empire, which lasted several centuries and ended with the fall of Rome in 476 C.E, Latin became the primary language of several parts of the empire, including Gaul and Hispania,<sup>8</sup> as Roman culture and customs quickly diffused throughout the empire. Not only was Latin the required language of law, but cultural and religious institutions also pushed for the usage of Latin. Languages previously spoken in these regions were of Celtic origin, including the now extinct Gaulish (Walter 39) and Celtiberian<sup>9</sup> languages (Resnick 6). During this time, the divisions between Classical and Vulgar Latin became more apparent. According to Elcock, these were not drastic differences, but rather “stylistic difference[s].... As in all languages, a person writing Latin sought in the first place to write ‘correctly’....Forms of declension and conjugation...in contemporary speech were being discarded in favour of different linguistic possibilities” (Elcock 19). This form of Latin was not only spoken in what is now present-day France or Spain, but throughout the Roman Empire (Resnick 1). Some characteristic pronunciations of Vulgar Latin included (but were not limited to) a decrease in the number of vowels from ten to seven, the simplification of diphthongs, as well as the deletion of several

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<sup>8</sup> Present-day France and Spain.

<sup>9</sup> The Celtiberians were a group of people of Celtic origin that inhabited present-day Spain and Portugal during pre-Roman ancient times. For more information about the Celtiberians, see Lorrio, Alberto J. and Gonzalo Ruiz Zapatero. "The Celts in Iberia: An Overview," *The Celts in the Iberian Peninsula*. Milwaukee: Center for Celtic Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2005: 167–254.

atonal vowels (Huchon 42). Other characteristics of this change include the deletion of [h] and final [m], the loss of intervocalic [v], and certain instances of corresponding hypercorrection.<sup>10</sup>

Classical Latin *mensa* > Vulgar Latin *mesa* > Spanish *mesa*/Portuguese *mesa* (table)

Classical Latin *ansa* > Vulgar Latin *asa* > Spanish *asa* (handle)

Classical Latin *numquam* > Vulgar Latin *nunqua* > Spanish *nunca*/Portuguese *nunca* (never)

Classical Latin *rivus* (stream) > Vulgar Latin *rius* > Spanish *río*/Portuguese *rio* (river)

Classical Latin *pavor* > Vulgar Latin *paor* > French *peur* (fear)<sup>11</sup>

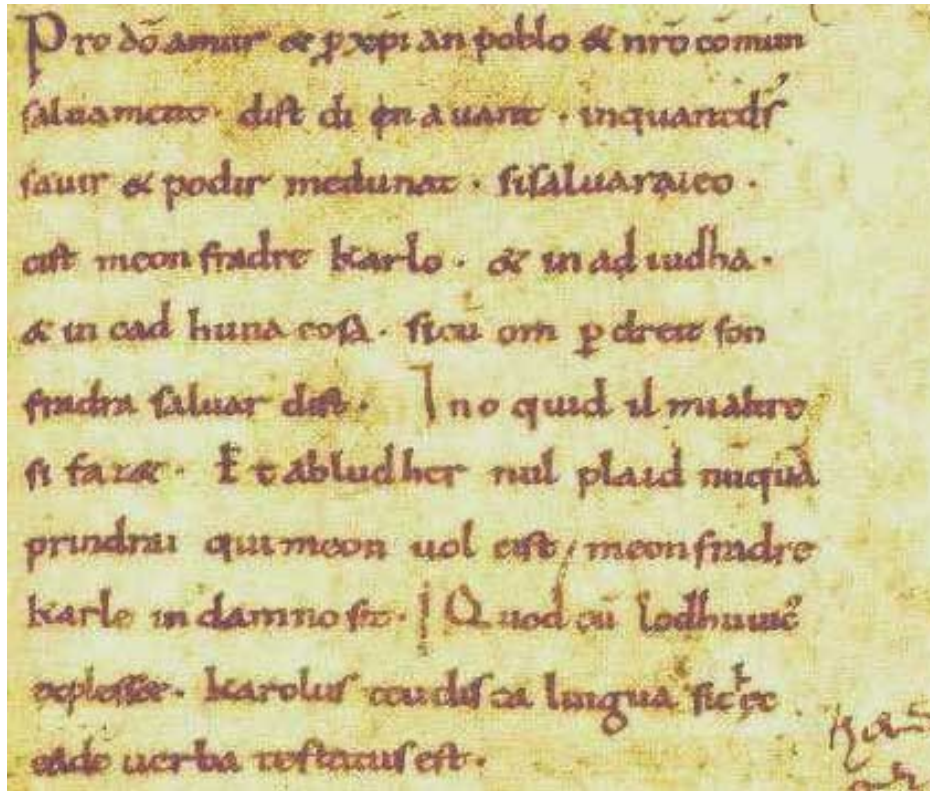
Several declension groups (divisions into which nouns and adjectives were grouped based on form and gender) were simplified, combined or eliminated, as were certain declensions (Elcock 30). While Vulgar Latin was not vastly different from Classic Latin, its evolution and change over centuries led to the creation of several dialects, and then later, Latin-based languages.

The first of these languages to be acknowledged as its own language (and no longer a dialect of Vulgar Latin) was the early French language of the *Serments de Strasbourg* in 842, today considered the earliest extant document in proto-French (Huchon 27).

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Hyper-correction’ in historical linguistics refers to changes made in spoken languages to remedy previous changes in the language though the item in question had not changed in a similar manner. For instance, Latin “ostium” changed to “osteum” to account for the frequent change from e to i, though “ostium” existed before this change happened elsewhere. For more information, see Elcock, W. D. *The Romance Languages*.

<sup>11</sup> In historical linguistics, the arrow > signifies that change of one phoneme or morpheme into another over time. In these examples, the arrow shows that Spanish and Portuguese *mesa* came from Latin *mensa*.



*Serments de Strasbourg (842 C.E.)*

[http://schlomoh.blog.lemonde.fr/2006/02/14/2006\\_02\\_la\\_feuille\\_de\\_c\\_20/](http://schlomoh.blog.lemonde.fr/2006/02/14/2006_02_la_feuille_de_c_20/)

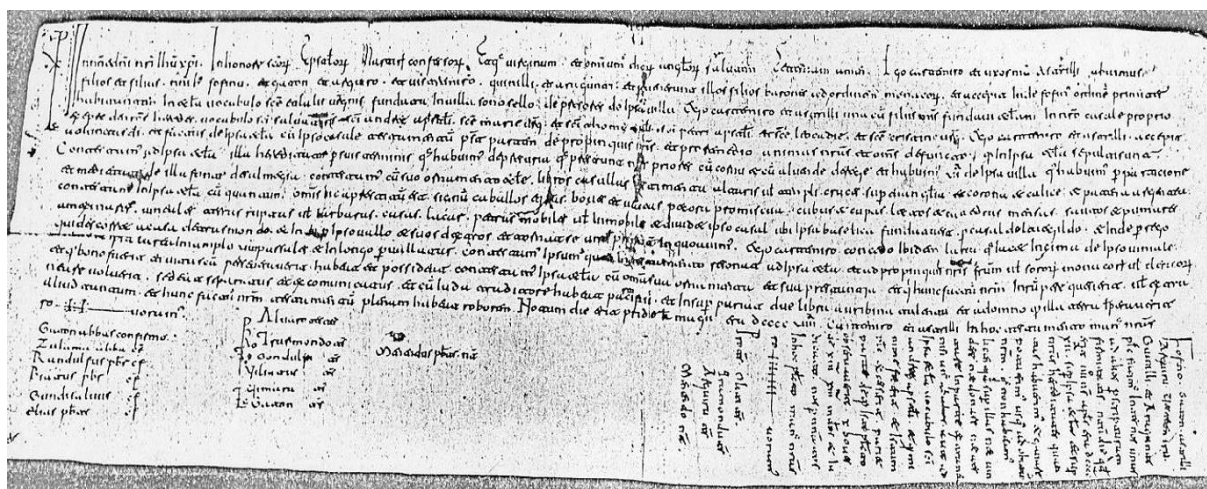
While the new language of this document is far from spoken or written French today, it is still significant as the first document emerging from a Latin speaking area whose language had significantly evolved beyond the structure and patterns of Latin. However, it should be noted that marking a date or origin for a language is misleading, as linguistic change and development is a process that takes many years and generations to take place. Some early examples of Iberian texts may be seen below.





Early extant document in Castilian  
*Fuero de León (1017 C.E.)*

[http://www.catedralesgoticas.es/mi\\_reinoleon.php](http://www.catedralesgoticas.es/mi_reinoleon.php)



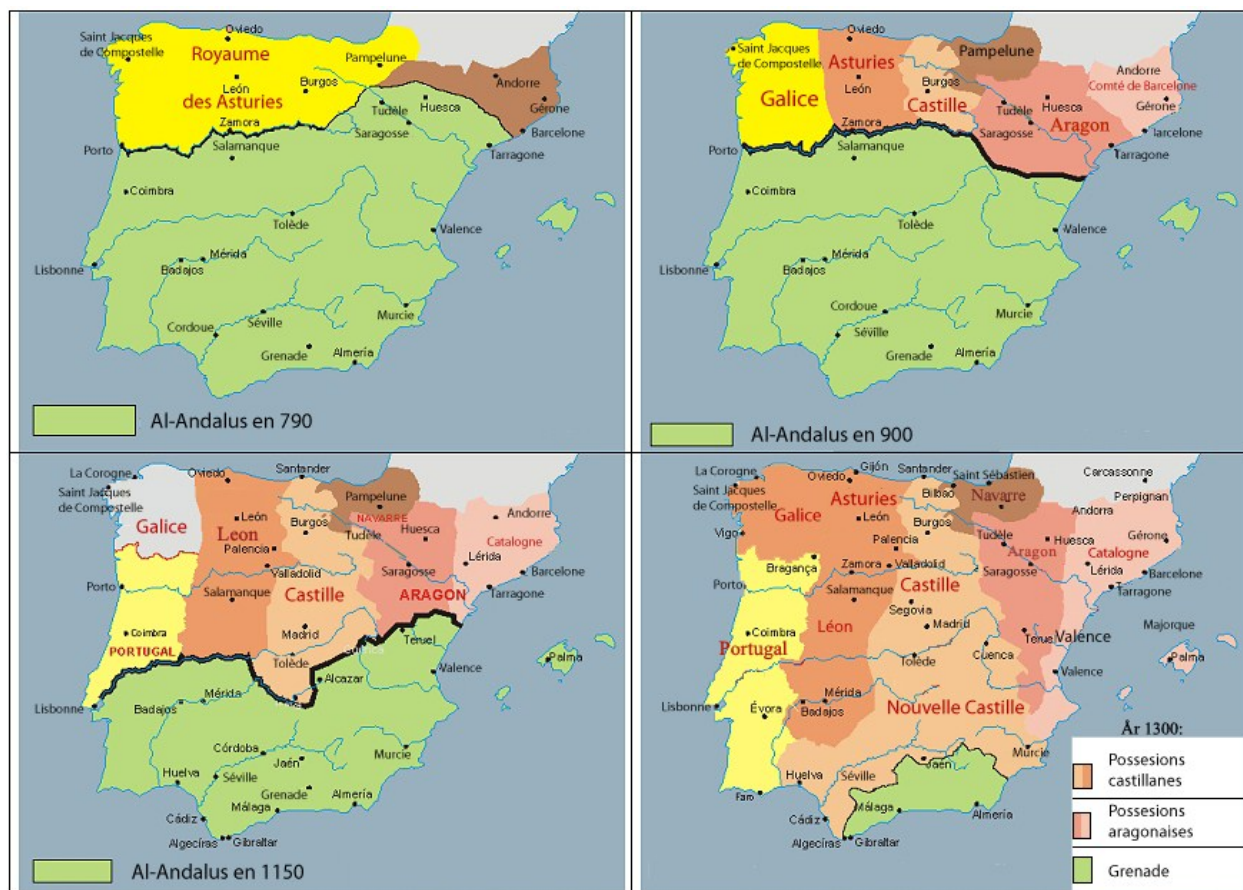
Early extant document in Galician-Portuguese (870 C.E.)  
*Doação à Igreja de Sozello*

<http://www.novomilenio.inf.br/idioma/200009a.htm>

## **Influence of Other Languages in the Creation of the Romance Languages**

While Latin clearly had the strongest influence on the Romance Language family, all of these languages, including French, Spanish, and Portuguese, received several other linguistic influences, too. The Celtic languages present in France, Portugal and Spain before the domination of Latin left their small but significant mark on the way these languages are spoken today. Approximately 70 words in French are Gaulish in origin, and there is a similar handful of words of Celtibero or Celtic origin in Spanish (Walter 45). It is interesting to note that the Latin verb *cambiare*, source of *cambiar* in Spanish, was also of Celtic origin (Resnick 13).

Arabic was extremely important in the development in Spanish, and had the greatest influence on the development of the language except for Latin. Over 4000 Spanish words are of Arabic origin, resulting from the nearly 800-year presence of a Muslim empire on the Iberian Peninsula, from 711 to 1492 (Resnick 14). The strong influence Arabic may also have been strengthened by the fact that the Muslims began their conquest on the peninsula in 711, when the Romance Languages were just beginning to differentiate themselves from Latin. Initially, the Muslim conquerors dominated most of the Iberian Peninsula, their nation Al-Andalus reaching the border of French territories at the end of the eighth century. Soon after the expansion of the Muslim empire into much of Spain, Christian Spaniards fought back through during the reconquista (re-conquest) of the Peninsula, eventually limiting Muslim influence to the southernmost tip by the fourteenth century, and finally defeating the last of the Iberian Muslim state in 1492, as the chronological maps below indicate:



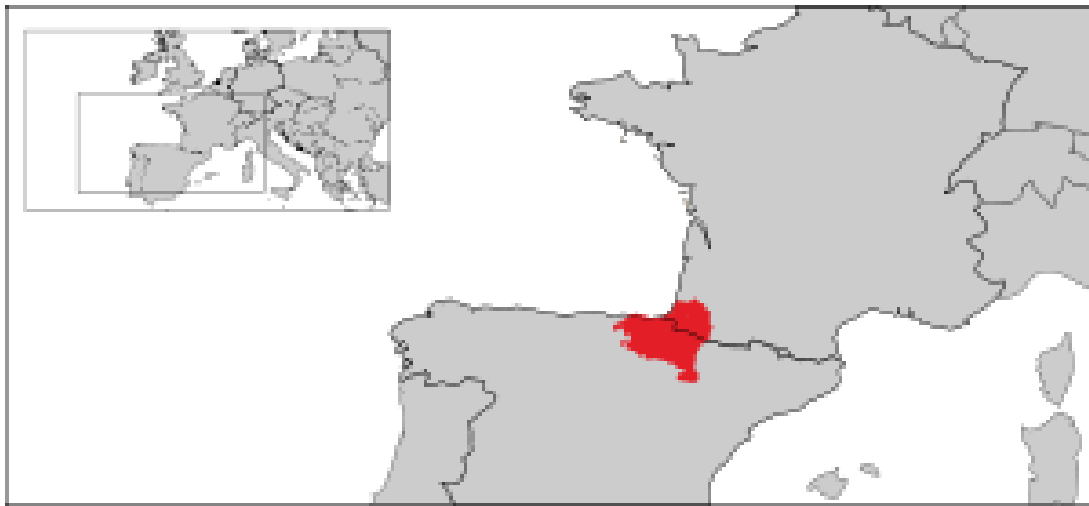
[http://crab.rutgers.edu/~rushing/roland\\_background.htm](http://crab.rutgers.edu/~rushing/roland_background.htm)

The influence of Arabic in the region can also be seen in some French and Portuguese vocabulary, as the following examples illustrate.

- Arabic *kutn* > Spanish *algodón* / Portuguese *algodão* / French *coton* / English *cotton*
- Arabic *sukkar* > Spanish *azucar* / Portuguese *açúcar* / French *sucre* / English *sugar*
- Arabic *naranj* > Spanish *naranja* / Portuguese *laranja* / French *orange* / English *orange*
- Arabic *al-kuhl* > Spanish *alcohol* / Portuguese *álcool* / French *alcool* / English *alcohol*

The vocabulary that entered into Spanish and Portuguese was often later also adopted into French and, in some cases, even into new lexical items in English as well. These new terms were

often adopted because of the previously limited access to certain practices and goods that the Muslim conquerors brought to Spain. Spanish also adopted words from the Basque language, Euskara, currently spoken in a small region on the Spanish-French border. The Muslim conquerors never truly conquered this isolated region between France and Spain. Additionally, the region had likewise been isolated during the Roman conquest of the area, allowing the inhabitants to continue to speak their traditional language not stemming from Latin nor related to French, Spanish, or Portuguese.



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Basque\\_Country\\_Location\\_Map.svg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Basque_Country_Location_Map.svg)

Some examples of words of Basque origin that have been adopted into Spanish (and eventually Portuguese) include ("Nature of the Basque Language"):

Basque *ezkar* (left) > Spanish *izquierda* / Portuguese *esquerda*

Basque *zugur* (clever) > Spanish *zorro* / Portuguese *zorro* (fox)

Basque *pizar* (fragment) > Spanish *pizarra* / Portuguese *piçarra* (slate)

French, Spanish and Portuguese adopted words of German origin that had already been present in Latin and were therefore diffused into several resulting Romance Languages. Several common words were adopted from Germanic influences (Resnick 13):

Old High German *werre* (quarrel) > French *guerre*/Spanish *guerra*/Portuguese *guerra* (war)

West Germanic *\*saipo* (resin) > Latin *sapo* > French *savon*/Spanish *jabón*/Portuguese *sabão* (soap)

Additionally, French experienced several pronunciation and phonetic changes as a result of the proximity of Northern France to the Franks and other Germanic people.

The diffusion and changes in Latin did not only result in the widely spoken languages of French, Spanish and Portuguese. Several dialects and unique languages were formed throughout present-day France and Spain, including Provençal, Catalanian, and Galician, and other sub-dialects of these. Throughout this process, French, Spanish and Portuguese are shown to be malleable languages during their formation, allowing further developments through new influences.

### **Transmission to the New World and Contact Situations**

By the end of the XV century, Latin had evolved into several languages across the Iberian Peninsula and France. At the same time, explorers were in search of more efficient means of traveling from West Europe to the Far East, which would result in the “discovery” of the Americas, as well as their peoples, resources, and languages, for Europe. Over centuries, several European countries were able to exhibit cultural and linguistic influence over both native

inhabitants as well as Africans who were transplanted to the Americas, which resulted in rich cultural and linguistic diversity in the area.

Contact between Europeans and the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean officially began in 1492, when Christopher Columbus arrived in the Americas after his first transatlantic voyage. Immediately upon contact with the native peoples in the late fifteenth century Anxious to secure further support from the Spanish crown for his explorations, Columbus began to assess their qualities as workers and discussed in his journal what he considered to be the simplicity and naivety of several of the native populations. He also discussed the possibility of controlling large populations to aid in Spanish economic development, comparing the natives to animals (Colón 61). Columbus established La Navidad, the first Spanish colony in the New World, in order to take advantage of the riches promised on Hispaniola. However, before Columbus returned to the settlement in 1493, the Tainos had destroyed the colony due to the aggressive nature of the crew that Columbus had left (Eakin 58, 63). Despite the lack of permanent settlements, Columbus traded with several different tribes of indigenous peoples during his first voyages, particularly interested in the possibility of finding gold.

After the ‘discovery’ of the “New World” by Columbus, other Europeans quickly began to explore the Americas for their own crowns. During this time, several native populations were enslaved to either work in mines (more commonly on the South American continent) or on plantations known as *encomiendas*. Encomiendas were rewards to Spanish conquerors in Americas consisting of large plots of land as well as control over large numbers of the native population who had to work it. The Spanish conqueror was “entrusted” with his group of indigenous people, and “had the responsibility of Christianizing them and the privilege or making them work for [them]” (Chasteen 49). However, over time, the toll of the work combined

with the new diseases that had been brought over by the Spaniards became too great for the indigenous population, which resulted in high death rates and the near or total extermination of many indigenous communities (Eakin 63). In addition, efforts by such Spaniards such as Bartolomé de las Casas<sup>12</sup> fought against the enslavement of the native populations, insisting that they commanded the same respect as fellow humans. However, his objections to slavery did not apply to Africans, and the African slave trade became crucial in Spanish colonies to provide a work force to replace the diminishing force of manual workers (Chasteen 54). As a result, enslaved Africans replaced many positions previously held by indigenous workers, adding to the complexity of the contact between cultures.

The obligation of the Spanish to Christianize the religious population resulted in additional contact beyond the enslaved workers of the *encomiendas*. Initially, religious workers would learn the languages of the indigenous populations first to then translate the bible and teach Catholicism in the native tongues of the converted population. This process of study and translation of the indigenous languages comprises much of what is known about these languages today. However, over time Spanish replaced indigenous languages in religious study as well as in contact through working conditions, leading to the extinction of several native languages (Lodares 27). Meanwhile, African slaves arrived in large numbers, allowing work in the mines and *encomiendas* to continue.

That is not to say that all Africans in the New World were slaves. Navigators and early colonists were occasionally of African descent, but after the beginning of the slave trade in the

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<sup>12</sup> For more information, see Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, available through Project Gutenberg at <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/20321> for an account of the Spanish treatment of Native Americans in the West Indies.

New World, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the African population was forced to significantly shift to becoming poor and enslaved workers. The Portuguese dominated the African slave trade, though the British, the French, the Dutch, and the Spanish also imported Africans slaves at some point (Eakin 100). A majority of the slaves were brought from West and Central Africa, in what was known at the time as the “Slave Coast.” The slave trade began in the 1440’s, while first African slaves arrived in the Caribbean on the island of Hispaniola in 1502, and slavery of Africans was not eradicated everywhere in the Caribbean until the mid nineteenth century (100). While sugar was a crucial crop in the Caribbean, the Spanish did not develop as large sugar plantations as in other colonies, resulting in a faster diffusion of Spanish to its slaves (McWhorter 33). Additionally, slaves that came under Spanish power often were under the control of other Europeans, either in transportation or on a plantation, and therefore Spanish was not the first non-African language encountered by many slaves. As a result, there are far fewer prominent Spanish-based creoles in the Caribbean than there are Creoles based on other European colonizer languages.

Because French colonization in the Caribbean did not begin for several decades after the Spanish first arrived, the French did not have the same early contact situations with the Caribbean natives as the Spanish.<sup>13</sup> However, on their island colonies of Saint-Domingue, Guadeloupe, and Martinique, the French established large plantations with hundreds, and later thousands, of African slaves. While the Spanish were able to make early contact with several different groups of people, the French in the Caribbean primarily had contact with African workers on plantations, which was greatly limited. These limited contact situations lead to the

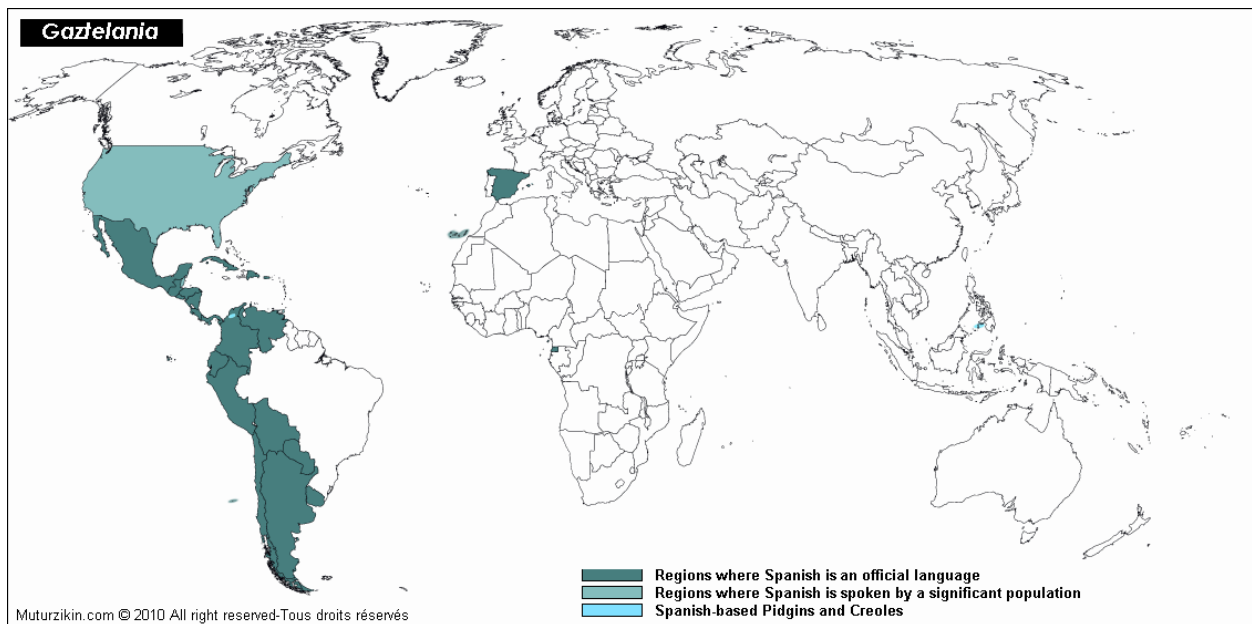
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<sup>13</sup> Though the French did not have as much contact with natives in the Caribbean, they had strong relations with Native Americans in North America, resulting in additional linguistic contact situations.



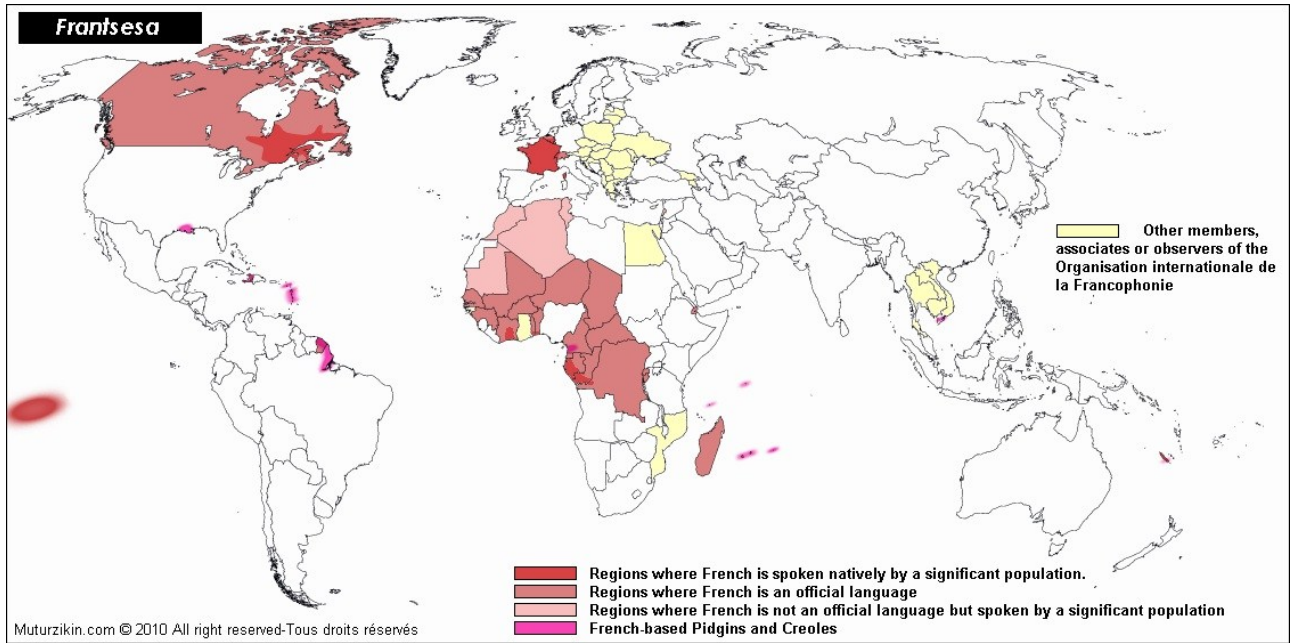
need for a common language in which to communicate, leading to the formation of several Pidgins, some of which later became Creole languages (McWhorter 32). Additionally, the Portuguese did not become a major colonial force in the Caribbean, instead focusing on present-day Brazil. However, Portuguese power in the slave trade allowed for their influence in the Caribbean even without the establishment of colonies.

Over time, European influence spread across the Americas, bringing with it their language and occasionally catalyzing the formation of new Pidgin and Creole languages. The full extent of Spanish, French and Portuguese linguistic influence, and instances of Pidginization and Creolization are highlighted in the maps below:



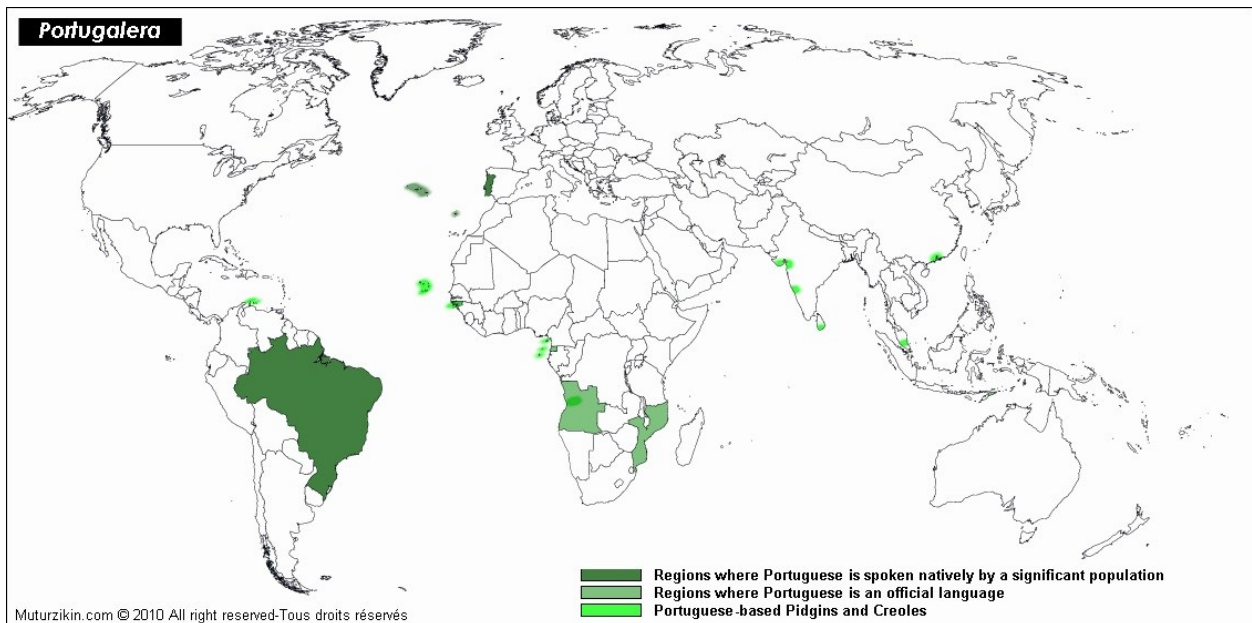
**Map of Spanish-based Pidgins and Creoles around the world**

<http://www.mutzurzikin.com/cartepidgin.htm>



Map of French-based Pidgins and Creoles around the world

<http://www.muturzikin.com/cartepidgin.htm>



Maps of Portuguese-based Pidgins and Creoles around the world

<http://www.muturzikin.com/cartepidgin.htm>

## Colonial Policies and their Impact on Caribbean Languages

The colonial policy of the Europeans in and around the Caribbean during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had a direct influence on the linguistic diversity in the region found even today. As the Spanish were the first to arrive in the region, their actions had great implications, especially in the form of the preservation of the native languages spoken in the Caribbean. During the early years of Spanish influence in the Caribbean, documentation indicated that the Arawak family of languages was spoken in the Antilles, the Bahamas, and parts of Uruguay (Bernal 57). From his early contact with the native of the Caribbean, Columbus adopted several words for his own use to better describe what he found in the New World. Even before pre-Columbian times, language contact occurred between natives groups that had existed in the Caribbean islands for generations and Arawakan tribes that had originated in South America but later migrated towards the Caribbean<sup>14</sup> (“Arawak”). Even today, Spanish speakers in the Caribbean use certain words of Taino origin, a dead language that is related to Arawak. Some of these examples include *haba* (basket), *kokuyo* (firefly), *maní* (peanut), and *behuko* (vine) (“Taino”).

Initially, the Spanish used inaccurate, ill-fitting words from Europe to describe what they found in the New World. Later, descriptive terms (such as “sleeping web” for hammock) and Arabic loan words were employed as more accurate descriptions (Bernal 59). Indigenous lexical terms were used, adding words such as *hurricane*, *hammock*, *canoe* and *barbeque*, among several others. Contact between the Spanish and the native populations resulted in the exchange

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<sup>14</sup> For more information concerning natives languages in the Caribbean, see <http://www.cariblanguaje.org/>

of tools, customs, and vocabulary, occurring between the arrival of the Spanish and the mid XVI century. However, the process of linguistic change in the area was very long and slow.

From the earliest explorers in the region, the Spanish worked to gain linguistic and cultural understanding of native populations. Columbus put special importance in learning the lexical items of Arawakan languages even before native languages were used to teach Christianity, and he brought back ten men to assure that the native words were spelled correctly with the Latin alphabet (65). Additionally, through direct intervention, marriages between Spanish and natives, and religious conversion, the Spanish were able to gain “cooperation” with native populations (64).

A crucial step in the linguistic history of the Caribbean (as well as much of South America) was the decision by the Church to learn the native languages and use them to teach Christianity to the native people. Although objected by some clergymen who claimed that native languages “could not convey the subtleties of Christian dogma and thought (Echávez-Solano and Dworkin xviii), Indigenous languages were a key tool in spreading Christianity. At first, Fernando Ordóñez explains that Emperor Charles V acknowledged the importance of learning local languages in the conquest of larger territories in the Americas, but still ruled that Spanish be forced upon the Natives.

According to the Law of Burgos of 1513, the sons of caciques were to be taught reading and writing skills as well Catholic doctrine—in Spanish—by priests. After four years, they were to return to their native communities to teach writing, language and Catholicism to their people (Ordóñez 37). However, due to the vast demographics of the Americas, this plan was dropped in favor of the use of native languages for preaching and teaching of Catholicism (37). In 1578,

Philip II ruled that one must know a native language in order to become a doctrinaire priest in the Americas, as well as the “implementation of courses on Native languages at the Universities of Lima and Mexico, as well as in major jurisdictions (37). Not only were indigenous languages emphasized in the teaching of Christianity throughout the Americas, they were also at times compulsory. Fray Rodrigo, one of the first Franciscan friars to come to the New World, discussed with the king his opinion that the Church’s teaching in the New World could not be successful, due to the fact that many priests had no knowledge of them, and in 1567, the Council of Lima suggested the punishment of priests who did not learn Quechua<sup>15</sup>. Yet, many Missionaries preferred to indoctrinate their flocks in their native language, as this allowed a better indication as to whether their teaching had been correctly understood or not (37).

The difference in French and Spanish or Portuguese plantation size and structure in the Caribbean may have resulted in crucial implications for the formation of their respective creoles. In the first Spanish colonies on the Caribbean Islands, plantations were much smaller than their French counterparts. Given the Spanish crown expected its conquerors to Christianize the native people who worked the land (Eakin 97), its early Caribbean plantations were much smaller, allowing for greater contact between the ruling European class and the working native class. Over time, as African slaves began to replace the dwindling native population, the combination of existing Spanish-speaking workers with the smaller farm setting likely allowed new African slaves to learn the Spanish language from their new surroundings (McWhorter 33). Eventually, during the nineteenth century, these Spanish plantations in the Caribbean grew to become giant,

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<sup>15</sup> Quechua is an indigenous language spoken in modern-day Peru. While not part of the Caribbean, this move by the Church indicates the emphasis it put on learning the indigenous languages.

single-crop plantations, but by this time the slaves on these plantations were assimilated and could speak the Spanish of their owners (34).

On the other hand, the plantations established by the French in the Caribbean during the sixteenth and early seventeenth century were already large single-crop plantations with several hundred slaves working on each one. These large-scale farm operations did not allow for close contact between the French and their African slaves, as was the case for the slaves on the Spanish plantations (33). Additionally, before the arrival of the African slaves to the French plantations, they did not already have native workers on them who would be able to aid the new workers assimilate into the French system. As a result, these new workers had to find a common language—a *lingua franca*—not only with which to communicate with their French superiors, but also to speak with each other, since the slaves had been brought from several different parts of Africa and spoke many different languages. As a result of the need for a *lingua franca* in these multilingual communities, groups of slaves under European control began to speak a Pidgin using lexical items of the dominant French in order to communicate (Lefebvre 1). Pidgins often apply lexical items from the dominant language to the structure of the languages spoken by the substratum layer of people, creating a new language from the source language (2). Additionally, Pidgins tend to feature a simplified grammatical structure to allow for greater ease in communication between the two groups. An example of this kind of Pidginization in English occurs in Jamaican Creole English (Holm II 471):

*Di uol liedi sie, tan! A wa de go hapm? Wilyam sie, wa de go hapm yu wi fian out.*

The old lady said wait PROG go happen. William said what PROG go happen you will find out.

Over time, the subordinate group adopts these Pidgin languages as their primary language, changing the Pidgin's status to that of a Creole.

Although the Portuguese did not have colonies of their own in the Caribbean their role in the slave trade was still crucial to the linguistic history of the Caribbean. Prior to the 'discovery' of America, the Portuguese already had experience with the African slave trade, having brought Africans to work on the sugar plantations of Madeira and the Azores during the 1440s. Additionally, the Portuguese had large plantations in their own colonies in South America in present day Brazil. In fact, by the beginning of the sixteenth century, more than ten percent of the population of Lisbon was of African descent (Eakin 99). During the mid sixteenth century, large numbers of indigenous workers in the Portuguese colony of what is today Brazil were dying off due to the hard work, and smallpox and measles epidemics brought there by the Europeans (100). Because the Portuguese had already established the slave trade with Africa prior to the discovery of the New World, they became the automatic leaders of the trans-Atlantic slave trade that brought tens of thousands of slaves to the Caribbean plantations. The extended presence of the Portuguese in Africa likely resulted in creolization taking place between Portuguese and African languages around the area of Portuguese forts in on the continent. This exposed slaves to this new language even before making the voyage across the Atlantic. However, the presence of the Portuguese in the Americas, on the other side of the Atlantic, not only resulted in the creation of Portuguese-based creoles in Portuguese territories there, but also in the use of Portuguese-based creoles by the Africans after arriving on Spanish plantations. Both Papiamentu and Palenquero, which I will describe later on, are often considered Portuguese-based Creoles that over time shifted toward becoming Spanish-based, due to the increasing influence of the Spanish language over the two languages.

Because the genesis of Creoles occurred hundreds of years ago, and was not studied in depth until relatively recently, there is much uncertainty about the way in which many Creoles actually might have come into existence. This has resulted in a myriad of theories as to how the movement of people and contact between different groups resulted in the creation of several new languages. According to some linguists, such as John McWhorter, the ‘limited contact situation theory,’ which explains that the formation of Creoles is the result of limited contact between a substratum group and a controlling group, does not help explain the structure of several Creole languages (McWhorter 39). Rather, he favors an ‘Afro-genesis theory,’ which states that most, if not all Creoles spoken by slaves brought over by the Atlantic slave trade were created in or near African forts before transmission to the Americas.

The selection of Haitian Creole and Palenquero is due to that the former is French-based, whereas the latter is Spanish-based. Their relation does not only stem from their related roots in Latin, but also as examples of Creoles from two dominant colonial forces in the Caribbean. The selection of Papiamentu is based on the unique of the Creole in that it has been influenced by unrelated European languages – Iberian languages as well as Dutch – in addition to the native and African influences of other Caribbean Creoles. Additionally, as these Creoles all stem from different sources, their creation and implementation also differs among the three, allowing for understanding of a broad range of influences and current use.

### **Haiti and the Roots of Haitian Creole**

Current day Haiti is on the western third of the island of Hispaniola, where Columbus had founded Santo Domingo in 1493 on the eastern end of the island. During the seventeenth



century, French pirates began to work off of the island, resulting in Louis XIV insistence to Spain in 1697 that the Spanish recognize French control of what became Saint-Domingue. The island, like many of its kind in the Caribbean, became a major exporter of sugar during the seventeenth century, and by the end of the eighteenth century Saint-Domingue was the greatest sugar plantation in the Caribbean, if not the world, exporting 100 million tons of sugar to Europe each year (Eakin 166). Naturally, labor was crucial to the success of the colony, and during the late eighteenth century, 30,000 Africans slaves were brought to the colony yearly. By the end of the eighteenth century, slaves comprised more than ninety percent of the population Saint-Domingue, with 400,000 slaves of African origin to 25,000 whites and 20,000 mulattos (166). Additionally, French buccaneers would raid English and French colonies in search for additional labor, resulting in additional contact English and Spanish speaking slaves (Holm II 383). By 1753, up to 91% of the population were slaves, and given the large numbers of slaves coming directly from Africa during this time it has been stated that “The evidence for the period from 1711 to 1740 suggests that the two most important African language groups for the formation of Haitian Creole are Mande and Kwa, particularly Bambara-Malinke-Dyula and Ewe-Fon” (Holm II 383). The large influx of slaves from around present day Angola and Congo working for a distant French master resulted in the creation of a Pidgin language that was eventually adopted by slaves as a primary language to also communicate amongst each other, laying the foundation for the Haitian Creole of today.

The structure of the island colony, which also produced cotton, coffee, and indigo, resulted in great hardships for the slaves while their owners enjoyed enormous profits (Eakin 166). Many revolts were planned before the revolution that finally officially began in 1791. Various slaves groups, as well as mulattos inspired by the French Revolution, sought an increase

of rights and (more so in the case of the mulattos) a greater share in power (167). During an uprising of the mulattos in 1790, the slave population began plans for their own uprising. François Dominique Toussaint L'Ouverture, an educated American-born slave who planned to become governor after the revolution, led forces to take control of the colony and in 1801 invaded the Spanish colony of Santo Domingo (168). In 1802, Napoleon Bonaparte sought to regain control of the colony, and his forces captured L'Ouverture and jailed him in France. The continued battle resulted in an alliance between slave and mulatto forces, and in 1803 the French finally withdrew (169). Jean-Jacques Dessalines proclaimed the establishment of Haiti on January 1, 1803. However, the harsh government system as well as the class system kept in place after French rule continued the stratification among Haitians, seen even today.

The contact situation between several African ethnicities and French as well as Amerindian, Spanish, and English resulted in the creation of a Pidgin early in Haiti's history. The oldest known Haitian Creole text is a song from 1757 written by Duvivier de la Mahautiere, and the presence of words and phrases in this song that were already considered archaic in France by this time indicate the Creole was formed even earlier (Sylvain 8).

### **Description of Haitian Creole**

Consonants founds in Haitian Creole are as follows:<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Most sounds listed about are pronounced the same in English and in the International Phonetic Alphabet. Exceptions include: [ʃ], pronounced like English "sh"; [ʒ], pronounced like the "s" in "measure"; [tʃ], pronounced like English "ch"; [dʒ], pronounced like the "j" in "joy"; [ŋ], pronounced like the "ng" in "sing"; [ɲ], pronounced like the "ny" in "canyon"; and ʎ. For more information about IPA, see <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/ipa.htm>.

	Bilabial		Labio-dental		Alveolar		Palatal		Velar	
<b>Stop</b>	p	b			t	d			k	g
<b>Fricative</b>			f	v	s	z	ʃ	ʒ		ʁ
<b>Affricate</b>							tʃ	dʒ		
<b>Nasals</b>	m		n				ɲ		ŋ	
<b>Approximant</b>					l		j		w	

These consonants are all also found in French; however, missing in Haitian Creole from French are the labial-palatal approximate [ɥ], the guttural R and /h/. Missing in Haitian Creole from the inventory of Fongbe (believed to have a strong influence in Haitian Creole) are only the voiced retroflex plosive and the labio-velar consonant clusters. However, this may be explained by the fact that so few words (approximately 170) in Haitian Creole are of African origin, and therefore certain phones were no longer needed in the spoken languages (Sylvain 401). For consonant sounds present in French but not present in African languages, many words underwent modification to better fit the existing phonological system. Some examples of this include French [h] and [r] becoming [ʁ] or null in Haitian Creole (Lefebvre 401).

The French and Haitian Creole inventories of vowels also contain several differences. While standard French comprises thirteen oral and between three and five nasal vowels, Haitian Creole contains, at most, seven oral and five nasal vowels (398). Particularly, all front rounded vowels found in standard French are gone, as well as certain lower vowels. However, when compared to the vowel system found in Fongbe, the only difference is the absence of nasalized [e] and [o] from Haitian Creole (401).

French had the greatest influence by far on Haitian Creole lexicon, though there are examples of words OF English, Spanish, African and Amerindian origins. Some examples of words of French origin include (Sylvain 36; Lefebvre 81):

*du riz* (some rice) > *diri* (rice)  
*la lune* (the moon) > *lalin* (moon)  
*apprendre* (to learn) > *apprann*  
*chaud* (hot) > *cho*  
*tête* (head) > *tèt* (head, roof)  
*plume* (feather) > *plim* (feathers, hair)

Examples OF other linguistic influence on lexicon include (Sylvain 36):

Spanish: *garganta* (gorge) > *gagan*  
*afuera de* (outside) > *lafwerad* (need to leave)

English: *surfing* > *seyfin*  
*corn flakes* > *konnfleks* (cereal)  
*Colgate* > *kòlgat* (toothpaste)

Additionally, there are certain words and phrases of native origin, such as “lian” (vine), from the Taino word for “spouse,” and the use of onomatopoeias as adverbs and adjectives, for example, “piti-piti” (lightly) and “klap-klap” (slapping, like sandals) (Sylvain 146). Many of these items were added to the language centuries after the original formation of the language, and therefore have not exerted formative influence on the language. Rather, these words are similar to loanwords that are borrowed between languages, a common occurrence in languages around the world.

Haitian Creole syntax generally follows a system more similar to that of West African languages than to French. The primary sentence structure is subject-object-verb, common in both French and West African languages. However, the use of verbs differs greatly. Where in French verbs are conjugated using different endings to indicate time, mood, and person, Haitian Creole uses tense markers to modify verbs. These markers include “te” for past and past perfect, “ap” for the definite future, “a-va” for the indefinite future, “pou” for the subjunctive, and “ap” or “tap” for the imperfect (Lefebvre 112). No additional marker or conjugation is needed based on then number of actors for the verb: verbs do not have number. Some examples of verbs using these markers are:

Mari te kònnèn Jan

Mari PAST know Jan

“Mari knew Jan.”

Li te vle mouri

She PAST want die

“She wanted to die.”

In the present indicative, no markers are used:

Mwen pale Krèyol

I speak Creole

Haitian Creole, like many African languages, does not have a verb to signify “to be.” Instead, the adjective can be used alone without a verb and take on a verb form of that adjective (Holm 174, Sylvain 40).

Sik     la     dous

Sugar   the     sweet

“The sugar is sweet.”

Articles and adjectives are used both before and after nouns to modify them. Unlike French, these articles and adjectives do not change to fit the noun’s gender or number, but they will change based on preceding sounds, a process known as ‘assimilation.’ The indefinite article has two forms, “on” and “yon,” which are only ever placed before singular nouns. The indefinite article has additional forms and can also attach after the noun. “La” is the general form of the definite article, as in “liv la” (the book). However, “a”, “lan”, “an”, and “nan” may all be used, depending on the nasality and presence of vowels in the preceding word. The general form of the indefinite article in the plural is “yo”, used in “chyen yo” (the dogs) (Sylvain 27). Like French, adjectives follow the noun, except in certain cases such as “ti” and “bon” (from French “petit” and “bon”, meaning “little” and “good”) that would likewise be found before the noun in French (41).

Although several important structural aspects of Haitian Creole are West African in origin, and most lexical items are French in origin, there is clearly a mix between several sources that affects phonology, lexicon and syntax.

## **Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao and the Roots of Papiamentu**

Unlike many other islands in the Caribbean, the soil on the present day island of Curaçao (the largest of the three islands where Papiamentu is spoken today) is particularly dry and rocky, and therefore was not suitable for the same large plantations found on other islands (McWhorter 14). Because of this, Europeans generally used the island as a holding camp for slaves coming from West Africa before they were shipped to other Caribbean colonies (14). Alonso de Ojeda, Spaniard and lieutenant of Columbus, discovered the island in 1499 while exploring the Venezuelan coast. Many of the native Arawak people living on the islands were exported to other colonies to meet the growing demand for labor, and the Spanish soon abandoned the colony (“Curaçao History”). In 1634, the Dutch West Indies Company claimed the island. During this time, the Dutch had become prominent in the international slave trade, and by the mid-1650’s the island became a center to hold slaves (“Curaçao History”). During this time, Portuguese-speaking Jews from present day Brazil brought slaves back to the island, while there was still extensive contact with trans-Atlantic slave traders from Portugal (McWhorter 14). The first permanent Jewish settlers arrived in 1659, a group of 70 settlers of Sephardic descent that became successful traders and respected in the community (“Curaçao History”). However, there were few, if any, Spanish speakers left on the island, most of which were likely Indians (McWhorter 14). Later, an influx of Spanish-speaking Jewish immigrants from Holland and close contact with Spanish colonies in South America resulted in greater contact between the island and the Spanish speaking population (14). The complexity in the history of Curaçao and its neighboring islands, as well as the several actors present during the formation of the Papiamentu Creole language, owing to the difficulty of finding the original source of the language.

Various theories exist to explain the emergence of Papiamentu. John Lipski cites three likely possibilities that are generally considered. The first is the possibility is Papiamentu may be the result of the “relexification of an Afro-Portuguese proto-creole” that existed before being brought to the island and that served as a base for other Caribbean Creoles (6). The second is that Papiamentu was originally a Portuguese-based Creole (not a Spanish-based Creole, as it is often categorized today) that resulted from influence of the Portuguese speaking Sephardic Jews (7). Finally, he proposes that Papiamentu may be a Spanish-based Creole that adopted aspects of Portuguese from the Portuguese speaking Jewish population and slave traders (7). The linguistic situation is further complicated by the presence of the Dutch, British and French: while the Dutch held possession of the island and its neighbors for most of its recent history, Britain controlled the island from 1807 to 1815, during which the French also attempted several times to take over the island (“Curaçao History”). It is important to note the strong similarities between Spanish and Portuguese, and when a greater Spanish-speaking population began to migrate towards Curaçao was the greatest instance of Hispanization. It has been noted that African slaves on the islands may have not even noticed the difference between the two languages, especially centuries ago before the languages had evolved further apart (McWhorter 15). Despite the confusion as to how the Creole originally formed, due to its increasing contact with Spanish over time as well as its close ties with Venezuela, it is generally considered to be a Spanish-based Creole.

### **Description of Papiamentu**

Papiamentu phonology shares many features with American Spanish phonology. Phonological features shared by the two are as follow, where consonants in parentheses are



present in American Spanish but not Papiamentu (Holm II 316).<sup>17</sup> Additionally, there is less differentiation between the flap r and rolled r, as they are allophones of the same phoneme in Papiamentu.

	Labial		Labial-dental	Dental		Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	
<b>Stop</b>	p	b		t	d			k	g
<b>Fricative</b>	(β)		f	(ð)			s	x	(ɣ)
<b>Affricate</b>						tʃ			
<b>Trill</b>						r			
<b>Tap</b>						ɾ			
<b>Nasal</b>	m					n	ɲ		
<b>Lateral</b>						l			

In addition, Papiamentu contains the sounds /ʒ, ʃ, z, h, v, ɲ / as well as nasal glides from various influences (316; Faingold 80). In addition to vowels found in Spanish, Papiamentu has also adopted front rounded vowels /y/ and /œ/ and nasal vowels from Dutch (316). Additionally, though traditionally Papiamentu did not contain [β], [ð] or [ɣ] in its inventory of consonants, the increase in of words of Hispanic origin has resulted in an increased use of these sounds (Faingold 81).

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<sup>17</sup> Most of the above consonants are pronounced similarly in English as they are in the International Phonetic Alphabet. Exceptions include β (similar to “b”, but elongated similarly to “v”), ð (similar to the “th” sound at the beginning of “the”), x (similar to the “ch” sound at the end of the Scottish “loch”), ɣ (like x, but voiced) ɾ (similar to the “d” in “ladder”), and r is always rolled.

The lexicon of Papiamentu is primarily based on Iberian (Spanish and Portuguese) languages. A study of 2,500 Papiamentu words found that two-thirds were of Iberian origin, about a quarter from Dutch, and additional words from various sources such as English, French, and African languages (Holm II 316). Of the words of Iberian origin, it was found that 28% could be either of Spanish or Portuguese origin, 25% must be from Spanish origin, 4% must be of Portuguese origin, 3.5% must be of Galician origin, and 5.5% could be from any of these Iberian sources (316). There has not been an extensive etymological study conducted on the language, and so the scope of Judeo-Spanish and Judeo-Portuguese influences has not been fully measured (316).

Examples of lexical items derived from various sources include (Fish 93):

- Portuguese: *então* (then) > *antó*  
*papear* (chatter) > *papia* (talk)  
*tudo* (all) > *tur*
- Spanish: *demasiado* (too, very) > *mashá*  
*creer* (believe) > *kere*  
 (Old Spanish) *agora* (now) > *awor*
- Dutch: *zorg* (care) > *zorg*  
*hoop* (much, many) > *hopi*

More loans from English include (Wood 177-8):

*black, boot blacking* > *blak* (shoe polish)

*box* > *boks* (mail box)

*chop* > *chapi* (v. to clear land or n. spade)

Vestiges of Iberian, Dutch and African influences are all apparent in Papiamento syntax. Like Haitian Creole, Papiamento is a subject-object-verb language and determiners for number and gender are rare, while many verbs are modified with similar tense markers. These markers include the present “ta,” past perfect “a,” past imperfect “tábata,” future “lo,” and conditional “lo...a” (Agard 238). Another interesting use of verbs can be seen in the parallel construction between these two sentences (Holm Vol. I 83):

Nan ta yam'é Maria    “They call her Maria.”

E yama Maria         “She is called Maria.”

In these sentences, not only is the reflexive pronoun missing in Romance languages structure in this situation (“Me llamo” translates to “I call myself” in Spanish) but the verb “yama” is used in both a passive and active meaning, a quality of verbs common in West African languages (Holm I 84). However, the option to allow a completive marker to sentences with passive structure does exist and seems to have been introduced by the Dutch to fix the passive construction (I 84).

Additionally, like Haitian Creole, many adjectives in Papiamento have the ability to become verbs as well, a pattern found across West Africa (Holm Vol. I 85). Some examples of this include:

Machete      si      bueno nu

Machete      your      good      not

“Your machete is not good.”

Again, as in the case with Haitian Creole, a variety of sources (even Hebrew, through Judeo-Spanish) had effect on several different aspects in the formation of the Creole, allowing for the creation of a completely new language with several different shared qualities.

### **Colombia and the Roots of Palenquero**

Like Papiamentu, Palenquero also has possible European roots in both Spanish and Portuguese. Its formation began in the early 1600s, when a group of around thirty African slaves escaped from Cartagena, Colombia, and established a settlement further inland. Their establishment of El Palenque, Spanish for “fortified village or palisade,” became a haven for other maroons and fugitive slaves (Clements 54). It is believed that the Pidgin that became Palenquero was at least partially formed before the establishment of Palenque de San Basilio, and is thought to have been at least partially based on the Portuguese Creole of São Tomé<sup>18</sup> (Lipski 5). It is also generally assumed that Palenquero is just one of the Pidgins and Creoles spoken by maroon communities in Latin America, though it is the only Spanish-based one to survive (8).

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<sup>18</sup> São Tomé is an island in the Gulf of Guinea off of West Africa colonized by the Portuguese during the late fifteenth century. For more information, see <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tp.html>

Unlike many other Creoles, there exists written documentation describing this Creole during its early stages. A 1627 document made a reference to “a highly corrupt and backwards form of Portuguese” spoken by slaves that had lived in São Tomé, and that it was called the language of São Tomé (McWhorter 17). This suggests that Palenquero had some origin in Portuguese, though much of its later contact was with Spanish. The origin of the slaves who escaped to El Palenque has been largely traced back to Angola, as was the case with those slaves brought to São Tomé. However, documents dating back as far as 1772 describe “the inhabitants of Palenque de San Basilio as already being fluent in Spanish as well as in ‘a particular language’ which they used among themselves” (Faingold 81). Yet, because Palenquero has been in significant contact with Spanish for hundreds of years, the influence of Spanish on the Palenquero spoken today is undeniable.

### **Description of Palenquero**

Like Papiamentu, the inventory of consonants in Palenquero is very similar to that of American Spanish (Faingold 84). In particular, the phonology is very similar to that of Colombian Spanish, for example, [h] is found in both Colombian Spanish and Palenquero, though not present in most Spanish dialects (83). However, the practice in Palenquero of nasalization before stops, such as in “nda” (from Spanish “give”) results in consonant clusters not found in Spanish, likely as a result of Bantu influence (Faingold 83).

	Bilabial		Labial-Dental	Dental		Alveolar	Palatal	Velar		Glottal
<b>Stop</b>	p	b		t	d			k	g	
<b>Fricative</b>	β		f	ð	s			x	ɣ	h
<b>Affricate</b>					tʃ					
<b>Trill</b>					r					
<b>Tap</b>										
<b>Nasal</b>	m				n		ɲ	ŋ		
<b>Lateral</b>					l					

Likewise, vowels in Palenquero are similar to Spanish vowels, though there are still differences in distribution. However, vowel nasalization, such as the nasal found at the end of [muhẽ] (“woman”) from Spanish “mujer” seems to be a feature inherited from Portuguese (83).

Like other many other Creoles, Palenquero shares many lexical items with the dominant language or languages. Again, much of Palenquero is based on Iberian languages, but there is still a presence of African lexical items.

Examples of Spanish lexical items include (Piñeros 2; Schwegler 693):

*partir* (to leave) > *patí*

*juntar* (to put together) > *fundá*

*gente* (people) > *hende*

*corazón* (heart) > *kolasó*

*desde* (since) > *desde*

Over 150 words in Palenquero have been identified to be of Kikongo origin, including “moná” (son/daughter), “kankamana”(leader, boss), “lumbalú” (funeral song, chant), and “chimbumbé” (devil) (Dieck 139).

Again, like the other Creoles discussed here, Palenquero primarily uses tense markers in place of conjugation for modifying verbs. These include “ta” indicating present tense, “a,” indicating the perfect past tense, and “tan,” indicating future tense (Escure 151). It should be noted that both the present and perfect past tense verb markers are the same in Papiamentu and Palenquero, owing to their related histories. Additionally, it is possible that the marker “ta” comes from the Spanish “está” used in compound tenses to indicate the present progressive tense (151).

In addition to the tense markers used before verbs, Palenquero also features two verb suffixes that can be traced back to Spanish influence (Clements 53). These ending include the “-ndo,” a gerund used in the present progressive, and the “-ba” ending used for the pluperfect. When the suffix “-ndo” is used, the verb marker “ta” is also used, again like the helping verb “estar” in the present progressive tense (Schwegler 706).

i ta ablá        “I talk”

i ta ablá-ndo    “I am talking”

Palenquero possesses qualities shared by many Creoles, but the use of both suffixes and markers to denote tense is a much more rare feature among Creole languages.

## The Status of these New World Creoles in the Twenty-First Century

### Haitian Creole today

Much of the linguistic change and diversity that developed in the Caribbean is due to social, political and economic influences. Yet, today's social, political and economic decisions and policies are also greatly influence by the presence of these languages across the region. It is nearly impossible to talk about the status and role of Haitian Creole today without comparing its role to that of French, in terms of education, business, and government. Like many regions with Creole-speaking populations, the relationship between French and Haitian Creole in Haiti and outside of Haiti is diglossic<sup>19</sup>. In a bilingual or multilingual situation, such as in Switzerland, one can speak French, German, or Italian and be considered more or less equal, diglossia often implies the existence of unequal roles between two or more languages in a specific region or country. Haiti and many other locations in the Caribbean where Creoles are spoken “are classic cases of social inequality and its reflection in linguistic differences” (Winford 346). Even today, with actions being taken towards recognition and application of Haitian Creole as a legitimate language in its own right, there still a diglossic situation and limited respect for the Creole language.

Although Haiti was the first of the Latin American countries to achieve independence in “the only successful slave rebellion in history” (Eakin 165), the Creole spoken today by *every* Haitian did not achieve national status until 1983, or an official status in the constitution next to

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<sup>19</sup> Diglossic situations occur when two or more languages are spoken in a particular country or area, but one language holds certain prestige and allows for greater opportunities than the other languages spoken. For more information, see: Winford, Donald. “The Concept of ‘Diglossia’ in Caribbean Creole Situations.” *Language in Society* 14: 3 (1985): 345-356. *JSTOR*. 11 Mar. 2011.



French until 1987 (Civan). In fact, the standardized, widely used orthography used today did not exist until 1975. Although Creole has existed in written form since the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, its low status resulted in the fact that only “until recently [that] there [had] been [any] interest in writing anything but French” (“Haitians: Their History and Culture”). It was not until 1936 that widespread literature was produced describing Haitian Creole (Valdman 166). In education, attempts to raise the status of Haitian Creole closer to that of French have been a slow moving process. The Constitution of 1805 “mandated free and compulsory primary education,” however, “even today, the majority of Haitian receive no formal education, and only a small minority are educated beyond primary school” (“Haitians: Their History and Culture”). A restructuring of the school system in 1978 that included the use of Haitian Creole as the main language of instruction for the first four years doubled primary school enrollment in urban areas by 1981. Previously, the school system had focused primarily on the French language and classical French curriculum (“Haitians: Their History and Culture”). The inclusion of Haitian Creole in education and administration was a huge step towards the legitimization of Haitian Creole, but this process has not yet been fully realized (Valdman 169). Although education is free and public, many rural Haitians do not have access to it, or cannot pay for the additional fees and materials required (“Haitians: Their History and Culture”). In 1982, “more than 65% of the population over age of 10 had received no formal education at all, and only 8% of the population had received more than a primary education” (“Haitians: Their History and Culture”). Furthering the use of Haitian Creole in education has been resisted, resulting in French and education as markers pertaining to only the privileged upper and middle classes (“Haitians: Their History and Culture”).

Finally, the decision to include Haitian Creole in early years of study to allow children to more easily become literate serves mostly as a stepping-stone for later study in French, still

preventing Haitian Creole from becoming a recognized, legitimate academic language. The combined cost and limited access to a comprehensive education has allowed for the use of French and a complete education to be limited to the elite ("Haitians: Their History and Culture").

Despite the fact that Haitian Creole is one of the most widely spoken Creoles in the world, with 7 million speakers in Haiti, and an additional 700,000 speakers in the United States, Canada, the Dominican Republic and elsewhere, there is still a great disparity between the status of Haitian Creole and French, in Haiti. The fact that French has always been seen as the language of social status spoken by whites and mulattoes<sup>20</sup> before the revolution made it possible to distinguish who had been free beforehand, ensuring the “superior status of mulattoes” ("Haitians: Their History and Culture"). Though literacy is easier to achieve in one’s native language, many Haitians “do not see the value of becoming literate in Creole” ("Haitians: Their History and Culture"). Because Haitians see education as a means of escaping poverty, they want their children to learn French, the language of higher education and status. This division between the two languages of Haiti, and the perceived status of Haitian Creole, may have resulted in fewer translation systems between Haitian Creole and other languages. As Robert Frederking, a language technology systems scientist explains: “Nobody is going to make money on a Haitian Creole translator” given the extreme poverty (“Carnegie Mellon Releases Data”). This lack of translation software led to several difficulties for rescue workers after the January 12, 2010 earthquake, because there was no easily accessible way to communicate with the Haitians affected by the disaster (“Carnegie Mellon Releases Data”). The division between French and Haitian Creole results not only in social and economic disparity, but has also further contributed

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<sup>20</sup> A mulatto is a person of African and European descent.

to confusion and problems for Haitians needing basic help after the disaster. For Haitian immigrants coming to the United States to be able to claim Haitian Creole-French bilingualism holds great value, because “French is considered the language of social mobility and success” (Zéphir 396). Among many Haitian immigrants, there is anger at the racial class system still found in the United States that would place them at the bottom among other black; rather, they want to be recognized for their higher class through bilingualism (Zéphir 397). In the immigrant community, even after its relocation to the United States, French is still considered to be linguistically superior for bilingual Haitian immigrants because it sets them apart. In the words of one Haitian immigrant: “un noir qui parle français, c’est quelque chose de très rare” [A black person who speaks French is a very unusual thing] (398).

### **Papiamentu today**

As with Haitian Creole, Papiamentu also obtained greater status in the Caribbean islands of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao (the former Netherland Antilles) over time, where it is mainly spoken. Though there are only approximately 250,000 speakers of Papiamentu on these islands, compared to the millions of speakers of Haitian Creole, Papiamentu still has a strong presence, which is not the case with several other colonial Creoles (Romero 2010). Despite the language’s long history, it only received official status in the Netherland Antilles, at the level of as Dutch, in 2003, on Aruba and, in 2007 on Curaçao. However, up till and even after the dissolution of the Netherland Antilles in 2010, which separated the three islands as distinct nations, the language has experienced great variation in usage around the region. Papiamentu still holds official status on Aruba and Curaçao, and is spoken by approximately one-third of the inhabitants of the former

Netherlands Antilles (as well as on the islands of Sint Maarten, Saba and Saint Eustatius, or Bonaire). Because of the separation of the islands, the administrative, educational, and social uses of Papiamentu vary by location, as does the orthographic system.

Papiamentu is often used as an informal community language around the Caribbean. Dutch is still the legal language on all three of the islands, and many speakers of Papiamentu speak Dutch, and often English or Spanish, as well (Romero 2010). However, unlike even Haitian Creole, Papiamentu has a special role in the mass media and society. Nearly all radio stations and newspapers in Curaçao translate into Papiamentu; books and songs are written in Papiamentu; and, government officials conduct business in Papiamentu (Romero 2010). Yet, despite the widespread use of Papiamentu on these islands, the need there for education, vis-à-vis today's world, focuses on Dutch. Though it has been proposed, Papiamentu is not used for education on Bonaire ("Bonaire"), while on Curaçao and Aruba, it is used for early schooling. Yet, Dutch is often crucial later in education, often due to the economic opportunities available in the Netherlands (Romero 2010). However, there is some criticism of the usage of Dutch in schools as it is not particularly useful in the region, and therefore sometimes correlated with high failure rates in high school (Holm II 315). As a result of this economic exchange, there is also a significant Papiamentu speaking population in the Netherlands (Narin). In the 18<sup>th</sup> and into the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Papiamentu was often used for school and church books on the islands, but subsidies for education from the Netherlands required that teaching be conducted in Dutch until recently ("Language of Aruba"). The first primary school to use Papiamentu as its language of instruction was established in August 1987 ("Papiamentu"). Though there have been efforts to standardize orthography across the islands, Aruba continues to utilize a Spanish-based, traditional orthography, while Bonaire and Curaçao use a more phonetic orthography common of

many Creoles. For example, even the name of the language, Papiamentu, is spelled “Papiamentu” on Curaçao and Bonaire, but as “Papiamento” on Aruba, and “four” can be spelled either as “kwater” or “cuater,” respectively (“Papiamentu”).

The relative strength of the Papiamentu language compared to other Creoles may be contributed to “radical politics and pragmatic planning” of the Antilleans. The resurgence of Papiamentu is often tied to the “Trinta di Mei”<sup>21</sup> uprising against Dutch power on May 30, 1969 (Romero 2010). However, there is still influence from stronger languages that may become detrimental to the longevity of Papiamentu. In addition to the prominence of political and economic ties with the Netherlands and the importance of Dutch, Papiamentu may also be threatened by Spanish broadcasts coming from the nearby Venezuelan coast, or by English as the general international language (Romero 2010). Unlike other Creoles in the region, Papiamentu is spoken “across the social spectrum, and is used in religion, mass media, literature, and in social contexts (“Papiamentu” *Oceanic Linguistics*). However, there is an ever-increasing influence of Spanish on the islands, starting with “further commercial links, missionary activity, and marriages with Spanish speakers and, more recently, the impact of the media – radio, TV, newspapers, and magazines from Venezuela and Colombia” which has been pushing the language towards Spanish influences (Faingold 80). For example, certain linguists from the earlier part of the twentieth century do not list [β], [ð], or [ɣ] as sounds represented in Papiamentu, but an inventory of sounds made in 1976 does include these sounds that are only present in words of Hispanic origin (Faingold 85). Around the same time as these changes in consonants were taking place in Spanish during the 1960’s and 1970’s, Dutch rounded vowels

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<sup>21</sup> ‘Trinti di Mei’ was major revolt resulting from labor protests to challenge the dominance of European-born Antilleans in high positions of government and business. See <http://www.caribseek.com/Curacao/curacao-history-post-world-war-II.shtml>.

also began to appear more frequently in spoken language. These two sound changes may be partially the result of de-creolization, when Creole languages again take qualities from their parent languages left during the Creolization process (Faingold 85). In this case, more complex vowel and consonant sounds limited to one of the Creole language's parent languages are reappearing despite having been dropped during the simplification of the language and its sound inventory hundreds of years ago. However, it is important to note that hispanization much more likely that version of Papiamento spoken in Aruba, which is just 15 miles from the Venezuelan coast, as opposed to that spoken on Curaçao (Holm II 315). Even among ethnic groups there is a certain divide in language across these islands. For instance, "Protestant whites attend services in Dutch, Jews tend to prefer Spanish, while the black and mixed populations belong largely to the Catholic church, which uses Papiamento (Holm II 315). Despite this regional and ethnic divides on language, the use of Papiamento is still strong in the Dutch Antilles, which enjoys a literacy rate of nearly 100%, and the language continues to be used across several social groups with prestige (Holm II 315).

### **Palenquero today**

The language of San Basilio de Palenque is, by far, the most endangered of these three languages. Currently, only half of the 3,000 inhabitants of the village speak Palenquero, although younger citizens can understand and often speak some of the language (Romero 2007). Unlike most escaped slave villages, San Basilio de Palenque has endured until today, but recent connections to the outside world threaten the preservation of the village's unique language and culture (Romero 2007). Although only 30 miles from the Port of Cartagena, for centuries the

village was ignored after the colonizers no longer tried to reclaim the land from the escaped slaves ("Fort of Runaway Slaves Spawns Masters of Ring"). This isolation allowed for the preservation of the village's racial purity, matriarchal structure, music, African customs, and of course, its language. Though there is evidence that bilingualism existed in the community since 1772, but the search to work outside of the Palenque resulted in some young workers using Spanish instead of Palenquero with each other (Faingold 83).

However, this isolation was threatened in 1972, when Antonio Cervantes, or Kid Pambele, won Colombia's first world boxing title, and thrust the village into the spotlight. Journalists and anthropologists came to study the unique area, and up by the nearest paved road went a billboard advertising a beer company boasting it was "the cradle of world champions" ("Fort of Runaway Slaves Spawns Masters of Ring"). As a result of this publicity, the son of the then-president worked to bring electricity to the village. Yet, this fame not only brought with it threats from the outside world to Palenque de San Basilio, but also opened the door for many young men to dream of lives outside Palenque. In fact, of Colombia's titleholders in boxing in 1987, three have roots in Palenque ("Fort of Runaway Slaves Spawns Masters of Ring"). Kid Pambele's success also allowed for the fomenting of a national pride in a region that had typically suffered discrimination from the rest of Colombia ("Fort of Runaway Slaves Spawns Masters of Ring"). Even so, when working on outside plantations, many inhabitants still feel ostracized by their language (Romero 2007). Today, school, named after its founder, Benkos Biohó, has Internet access, which allows for a connection to the outside world for those inside the village (Romero 2007), while inside the classroom, and it uses Spanish as its language of instruction (Holm II 311). Yet, there is still extremely limited Internet access for the population as a whole. Another factor that increases a low chance of survival for this Colombian Creole is

the village's poverty, for which reason many Palenqueros leave in search of better work (Romero 2007).

Despite threats to the survival of the language, there are several efforts underway that are attempting to preserve the language, whether or not it ceases to be spoken by the population. In the late 1980s, classes were introduced to revive the use of Palenquero, and have continued on till today. Some educated Palenqueros living in the village and in the port town of Cartagena have established "Onward Palenque," an organization to aid in the preservation of their language and culture. Every year, competitions are held to celebrate unique aspects of their culture, including competitions for best-spoken dialect, best food, best traditional hairstyle, best dance, and best music ("Fort of Runaway Slaves Spawns Masters of Ring"). Additionally, the strength of the culture's African roots of the Palenqueros has fomented greater national pride for descendants of Africans, and the "Cimarron Group" works to connect these African ties to others blacks in the Caribbean and Pacific ("Fort of Runaway Slaves Spawns Masters of Ring" ). UNESCO proclaimed the village, and its culture and language, to be on its list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, because of its role as a "unique cultural space" ("The Cultural Space of Palenque San Basilio"). The description of the Palenquero cultural community on UNESCO's website mentions the importance of several aspects of Palenquero culture, including the social structure of groups called *ma kuagro*<sup>22</sup>, funeral rights, medical practices, music, and Palenquero Creole as the only surviving Spanish Creole in South America ("The Cultural Space of Palenque de San Basilio"). However, facing the seemingly unavoidable disappearance of the

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<sup>22</sup> *Ma kuagro* are groups based on age and family networks, in which daily work is performed. Membership in a *kuagro* entails certain rights and duties, and these groups establish "strong internal solidarity." For more information, see <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00102>



language, linguists are working towards completing a lexicon and creating Palenquero dictionaries (Romero 2007).

## **Conclusion**

Just as language contact usually results in language change, it can often result in language death. Language death describes when a language ceases to exist in its spoken form, usually after the last of its native speakers die. Language death is not particularly rare: some linguists estimate that in the next hundred years, the world's thousands of languages will shrink to only a few hundred ("Languages don't kill languages; speakers do"). Globalization and ever increasing contact across the world result in "small communities come out of their isolation and seek interaction with the wider world" ("The Death of Language?"). As a result, small, isolated languages are dropped in favor of languages spoken by much larger populations. The loss of these languages also implies to loss of evidence of a culture and way of thinking. As one linguist states, "languages are not simply a collection of words. They are a living, breathing organism holding the associations that define a culture" ("The Death of Language?").

Although it was language contact that resulted in the creation of several Creole languages in the New World, the mass media and globalization are constantly putting pressure on speakers of less spoken languages to conform to the dominant language. Hegemonic and neocolonial powers often take the blame for the death of languages, as they often require the use of their languages to branch out in today's world. Linguist Salikoko Mufwene argues that the speakers of these endangered languages who choose to completely abandon their language for a more dominant one are to blame for their declining use. Yet, he contradicts himself when he

acknowledges the social and economic factors involved. However, for the three Creoles discussed above, a combination of these factors—internal preservation efforts and external pressure to abandon them—may lead to their preservation or demise. While it is interesting that contact between different cultures and people resulted in the creation of these languages, now this contact is also threatening the very existence or survival of these languages.

Clearly, Palenquero is the most endangered language of the three, as most of the young inhabitants of Palenque now speak Spanish over Palenquero, resulting in a dwindling number of native speakers. The young had a choice to not continue using their Creole, and their elders did not create an infrastructure for them to really learn it. The poverty and lack of opportunities, as well as the limitation of coming from a village of only a few thousand, have left few options for those trying to make a better life for themselves in the globalized world.

On the other hand, although Papiamentu lacks a large base of native speakers, the language is nonetheless being protected and preserved by the community that speaks it. Even as inhabitants are learning Dutch, English and Spanish, to better adjust to the international climate, the use of the Creole on the island has not seemed to decrease. They speak global languages elsewhere, for other purposes, but the main language for many native speakers is still Papiamentu. This may begin to change as influence from Spanish-language, mass media from Venezuela threatens to overtake Papiamentu, but the efforts of Papiamentu native speakers indicate a desire to keep using their own language.

Finally, while Haitian Creole has a large number of speakers (over 7 million), years of repression has resulted in the language's limited use in business or education. A combination of French's historical importance and the consequent desire of many Haitians to learn French today

have not allowed for the promotion and development of Haitian Creole. However, unlike Papiamentu or Palenquero, there are not similar dominant language forces threatening the use of Haitian Creole. Thus, even though the language is not threatened in the same way as other Creoles, it still lacks a high status that would allow it to become important on a global scale.

Palenquero, Papiamentu and Haitian Creole emerged from a situation of languages in contact. The rise of mass media and globalization have also put languages in contact. Yet this time, these language contact situations threaten the very survival of these languages. A desire for economic domination, the movement of workers to meet a labor demand, and the spread of hegemonic ideas on the part of leading economic powerhouses (imperial powers) were responsible for the creation of these languages; these very same factors, now promoted by the world's economic leaders, may also ultimately lead to their demise. The role of these, and many others languages in today's world, one that continues evolving into an ever more globalized society, has yet to be seen.

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