



Image: Robert Borges (https://stemmenvanafrika.nl/meer-taligheid-op-het-strand-wat-borden-en-posters-zegen-over-talvrijheid-op-aruba)

4 | Language policies in language contact situations

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INTRODUCTION

In many parts of the world, language policies are based on a colonial heritage language that has a dominant position in institutions for education, governance and the judiciary, while not being the home language of the majority of the population. In our paper we will specifically address language policies in the education systems of the Caribbean islands that are part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The Caribbean part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands consists of six territories: the Dutch Windward Islands of Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten, and the Dutch Leeward Islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao. The home languages of the great majority of inhabitants of these two islands groups are varieties of English lexifier Creole, on the Windward islands, and the Spanish/Portuguese Lexifier Creole Papiamentu/u, on the Leeward islands. Varieties of English and Spanish play an important role as well, due to migration, tourism, and the increasing influence of the media (television, the internet).

Papiamentu and Papiamento

The variety of the language spoken on Bonaire and Curaçao is known as Papiamentu, whereas the Aruban variety is referred to as Papiamento. The varieties are mutually intelligible, but they make use of different spelling conventions.

Since 1954 the six islands constituted the country of the Netherlands Antilles (according to Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands) up until 1986, when Aruba received ‘Status Aparte’ as an autonomous country within the Kingdom. After the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles on October 10 2010, the larger islands of Curaçao and Sint Maarten also adopted a status as autonomous countries within the Kingdom, whereas the smaller islands of Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius became exceptional municipalities (‘public entities’) of the European Netherlands.

LANGUAGE POLICY IN THE FORMER NETHERLANDS ANTILLES

For centuries, Dutch was the only officially recognized language in the six islands, dominating the administrative and educational systems, as well as other formal domains of the public sphere. This situation changed when Papiamentu/u was recognized as a co-official language with Dutch in Aruba (2003) and with Dutch and English in the Netherlands Antilles (2007) leading to increasing use in the administrative and education systems as well as in the media. Nevertheless, the language policy in the islands is still Eurocentric and tends to be dominated by European discourses that assume monolingualism in Dutch to be the norm for communities and individuals that are characterized by multilingualism and cultural diversity. For most inhabitants of the Caribbean islands Dutch is not a first language they learn

at home, nor a second language they learn in their communities, but rather a foreign language they primarily learn at school and almost never encounter outside the classroom.

Knowledge of Dutch is considered important for tertiary studies (in the ABC-islands and in the European Netherlands) and for local government employment. Many speakers disfavor the use of languages other than Dutch in the education system, due to negative attitudes toward multilingualism in education in general and persistent myths raising doubts about the adequateness of Creole languages (such as Papiamentu/u) for academic purposes. There are also many practical and financial concerns about the availability of school materials and teachers

to carry out a new language policy that is different from ‘Dutch only’. These negative attitudes, myths, and concerns have been restraining change and advocating the submersion of Caribbean students in a European-based system with Dutch as the only language of instruction. High drop-out rates, grade repetition and exam failure characterize the outcomes of the education systems of the six islands (Dijkhoff & Pereira, 2010; Pereira, 2018).

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Over the past decade a number of successful innovations have been implemented that contribute to increased use of home languages as languages of instruction in the islands.

More community-based research is needed to contribute to the development of equitable and sustainable language policies.

The Scol Arubiano Multilingual (SAM) in Aruba (Croes, 2011) uses Papiamentu as the language of instruction and initial literacy, whereas Dutch, English, and Spanish are taught as second or foreign languages. In Curaçao, two schools use Papiamentu as the language of instruction for primary education (Kolegio Erasmo) and secondary education (Skol Avansá Integrá Humanista), respectively (Kester, Mijts & Faraclas, 2022). Saba and Sint Eustatius have recently implemented a transition to English as the medium of instruction throughout the school system (Faraclas, Kester & Mijts, 2019). In addition, the support provided by the Taalunie for the development of materials and curricula for Dutch as a Foreign Language demonstrates that policies are not only shifting toward increased use of home languages as languages of instruction, but also toward teaching Dutch as a foreign language, rather than as a first or second language, in the education systems of the islands (Mijts, Kester & Faraclas, 2020).

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY BASED RESEARCH

Sociolinguistic research utilizing a community-based approach is key to the development of language policies in colonial language contact situations, as it aims at acknowledging and mobilizing the knowledge and expertise of the researched community (Faraclas, Kester & Mijts, 2019). The engagement of community members as co-researchers is

not only important for the research tasks of description and analysis of the problems the community encounters, but also for achieving adequate solutions to those problems. Moreover, community involvement increases the likelihood of valorization of the research project and acceptance of its outcomes and recommendations (Faraclas, Kester & Mijts, 2019). Hence, by recognizing and respecting local knowledge and expertise, the community-based approach is able to contribute to the development of an equitable, sustainable language policy for an education system that will serve students to achieve their full potential.

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