Embedding Papiamentu in the mixed language debate*

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This paper takes as a point of departure the hypothesis that Papiamentu descends from Upper Guinea Portuguese Creole (a term covering the sister varieties of the Cape Verde Islands and Guinea-Bissau and Casamance), speakers of which arrived on Curaçao in the second half of the 17th century, subsequently shifted their basic content vocabulary towards Spanish, but maintained the original morphosyntax. This scenario raises the question of whether, in addition to being a creole, Papiamentu can be analyzed as a so-called mixed (or intertwined) language. The present paper positively answers this question by drawing parallels between (the emergence of) Papiamentu and recognized mixed languages.

**Keywords:** Papiamentu, Upper Guinea Portuguese Creole, Spanish, mixed languages, relexification, grammar–lexicon split, contact scenarios

1. **Introduction**

The status of Papiamentu as a creole language is quite uncontroversial. However, it has also been noted regularly that, unlike most creoles, Papiamentu is characterized by a mixture of two major source languages: (Afro-)Portuguese and Spanish (e.g. Schuchardt 1882, Lenz 1928, Holm 1988:315, Smith 1995:373, McWhorter 2000:14–17, *inter alia*). This raises the question of whether, in addition to (or instead of) being a creole, Papiamentu can (or should) be analyzed as a so-called mixed (or intertwined) language. The present paper elaborates on and positively answers this question by drawing parallels between (the emergence of) Papiamentu and recognized mixed languages.

1.1 Creoles and mixed languages

Creoles and mixed languages (alternatively referred to in the literature as ‘bilingual mixed languages’ [particularly Thomason 1997] or ‘intertwiners’ [e.g. Bakker...
Embedding Papiamentu in the mixed language debate

1997]) can be grouped together in as far as both are contact languages that “necessarily involve some disruption in the natural transmission of language from parent to child” (Comrie 2011: 599, 600). However, two language-structural characteristics crucially distinguish creoles from mixed languages. First, the formation of creoles involves significant morphosyntactic reduction, while language mixing does not (see also Thomason 2003: 31, 32, Noonan 2010: 61). Second, as their label suggests, mixed languages consist of more than one (typically two) clearly identifiable source languages, whereas the typical creole has one dominant source language, also known as the lexifier language.¹

A small number of languages, however, appear to straddle the line between creole and mixed language: while their status as creole is unquestioned, their core vocabulary shows an etymological split, atypical of creoles (cf. Goyette & Parkvall forthcoming, who list these as exceptional):

- Berbice Dutch Creole (Guyana). Its core vocabulary derives from Dutch and Eastern Ijo (Smith, Robertson & Williamson 1987, Kouwenberg 1994)
- Saramaccan (Surinam). The core vocabulary of this maroon creole consists of Early Sranan and (a possibly already restructured variety of) Portuguese (cf., e.g., Bakker et al. 1995: 168, Muysken 2008: 198–201, Good 2009: 926, 927)
- Angolar. This is a maroon variety of São Tomense Portuguese Creole. Around one third of its core vocabulary has a Kimbundu origin (Parkvall 2000: 133, 134)

The present paper is concerned with a fourth such anomalous case: Papiamentu, the language of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao. While the Papiamentu lexicon is predominantly Spanish-derived, Schuchardt (1882: 895) had already noticed that its grammar contains several (Afro-)Portuguese words and features.² This mixed vocabulary has been the source of major controversy on whether Papiamentu is an originally Spanish-based creole formed in situ, or whether it is a descendant of some imported variety of restructured Portuguese that was subsequently relexified by or towards Spanish. This paper adopts the latter view and thereby assumes that the imported variety of restructured Portuguese was in fact Upper Guinea Portuguese Creole.

1.2 Papiamentu and Upper Guinea Portuguese Creole

Based on the linguistic and historical evidence presented in Martinus (1996), Quint (2000) and Jacobs (2008, 2009a–b, 2010, 2011a–c), this paper takes as a point of departure the view that Papiamentu descends from Upper Guinea Portuguese Creole (Upper Guinea PC), a term covering the closely related varieties spoken on the Cape Verde Islands, in Guinea-Bissau and in the Senegalese province of

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Casamance. Overwhelming linguistic evidence for this view is found mainly in the morpho-syntax: the phonological, semantic and syntactic correspondences between the functional categories of Papiamentu and Upper Guinea PC are of such an idiosyncratic and paradigmatic nature that chance cannot plausibly account for them (see Section 3). The claim of relatedness between Papiamentu and Upper Guinea PC is gradually finding acceptance in the literature (Baptista 2009, 2011, Hagemeijer 2009, Hagemeijer & Alexandre 2010, Green 2009, 2011, McWhorter 2010, Schwegler 2010, Mark & Horta 2011, Clements 2012).

1.3 Papiamentu: A mixed language?

Undeniably, the (basic) content vocabulary of present-day Papiamentu is predominantly Spanish-derived. If Papiamentu descends from Upper Guinea PC, which the evidence unambiguously suggests (Section 3), we must necessarily assume that Upper Guinea PC, in becoming Papiamentu, underwent a thorough process of lexical shift or relexification from Portuguese to Spanish. This raises the question of whether, in addition to or instead of being a creole, Papiamentu can be analyzed as a mixed (or intertwined) language (Bakker & Mous 1994, Bakker 1997, Thomason 1997, Matras 2000, Bakker & Matras 2003a, Siemund & Kintana 2008) composed of an Upper Guinea PC morphosyntactic matrix and a Spanish-derived embedded lexicon. The present paper will positively answer this question by drawing parallels between Papiamentu and recognized cases of language mixing.

As will become clear, the benefits of analyzing Papiamentu as a mixed language are manifold. In general, it allows us to disassociate the very notion of relexification from the field of creole studies, where it is met with skepticism owing to its firm association with the now largely moribund monogenesis school of thought as well as with Lefebvre’s Extreme Relexification Hypothesis. In particular, it will further our understanding of certain aspects of the relexification of Upper Guinea PC towards Spanish, such as the time span and the socio-linguistic setting in which it was carried out.

1.4 Overview

Section 2 sketches how Papiamentu and the notion of relexification became inextricably bound up with conventional monogenesis, and how this correlates with the fact that the view of Papiamentu as an originally Portuguese-based creole has been disregarded in recent scholarship. In Section 3, I briefly outline the nature of the correspondences between Papiamentu and Upper Guinea PC. Following this, Section 4 explains why the lexical shift of Upper Guinea PC towards Spanish, from which Papiamentu resulted, should indeed be analyzed as a case of relexification.
and not of heavy lexical borrowing. I then examine whether and to what extent the definition of ‘mixed language’ is applicable to Papiamentu by drawing parallels with recognized cases of language mixing (Section 5). In the final section (Section 6), the possible source(s) of the Spanish elements in Papiamentu are investigated, including a critical discussion of several contact scenarios in which the relexification towards Spanish may have occurred.

2. Papiamentu, monogenesis, and the notion of relexification in creole studies

Drawing mainly on Schuchardt (1882), Lenz (1928) was the first to explicitly postulate that Papiamentu was imported from elsewhere as an originally Portuguese-based variety, only to subsequently shift its lexicon towards Spanish. This claim was based on the observation that, although the Papiamentu lexicon has a pronounced Spanish character, its morpho-syntax resembles that of the Portuguese-based creoles of West Africa (Lenz 1928:323). Furthermore, with the whole of Schuchardt’s oeuvre at his disposal, Lenz (1928) firmly speculated about monogenesis, i.e. the view that all creoles descend from one Portuguese-based proto-variety spoken along the coast of West Africa. Allegedly, after, or even during, their journeys across the Atlantic, speakers of this proto-variety would shift their lexicon towards whatever the European language it was that prevailed in the place of destination (Lenz 1928:41, 80, 323, 326). He thus formulated the process of linguistic change that supporters of creole monogenesis would come to call relexification and used Papiamentu as his case in point.

Much owing to Lenz (1928), starting in the mid-20th century, Papiamentu indeed became firmly embedded in the monogenesis framework and was put forward as a prime example of the diffusion and subsequent relexification of a West African Portuguese-based proto-pidgin in the Caribbean. Some examples from forerunners of monogenesis:

- According to Thompson (1961:112), “Papiamentu is […] a development of the West African slavers’ jargon. This jargon […] may have been the pattern for all the West Indian Creoles.”
- Whinnom (1965:527) believed that “a process of relexification, from Portuguese to Spanish, explained completely and satisfactorily the Portuguese elements in Papiamento.”
- Cassidy (1971:207) claimed that “The Pg [Portuguese] element in JC [Jamaican Creole] could have entered as a part of PgP [Portuguese Pidgin] spoken in the Caribbean: it formed the basis of Papiamento.”
Hancock (1971:513) classified Papiamentu as a “Spanish creole derived from an earlier Portuguese pidgin.”

These claims were based on quite plausible arguments. After all, as Lenz (1928) had already pointed out, the Portuguese elements cluster in the grammatical categories of Papiamentu, whereas the Spanish material is predominant in the (basic) content vocabulary (see also Kramer 2004:104, 113). In light of the relative stability of functional categories as opposed to content words (see, e.g., Thomason & Kaufmann 1988:14, Muysken & Smith 1990:883, Comrie 2000:39, Bickerton 2001:1104, Tadmor 2009:59), this particular distribution suggests quite clearly that the Spanish content vocabulary was embedded into an already existing Portuguese-based grammar. Moreover, the claim that (a precursor of) Papiamentu was imported from elsewhere also provides an answer to what Kramer (2004:136) refers to as Curaçao’s ‘Paradoxon’, i.e. the fact that a Dutch-based creole never emerged on Curaçao in spite of the fact that (a) the Dutch were at all times the dominant slave keeping power on the island and (b) Dutch creoles did emerge in other Dutch colonies (Holm 1988:322–352).

In sum, the hypothesis that Papiamentu resulted from the relexification towards Spanish of an imported Afro-Portuguese proto-variety provides a plausible and straightforward account for the particular distribution of Portuguese- vs. Spanish-derived material as well as for the fact that a Dutch-based creole never emerged on Curaçao. One may now legitimately wonder why this hypothesis has hardly been taken seriously in the past three decades or so. Two exceptions are Martinus (1996) and Quint (2000), particularly the latter providing compelling linguistic evidence that Papiamentu is genetically related to Upper Guinea PC (see Section 3). However, there is a remarkable absence of references to these two works in subsequent scholarship. An important reason for this negligence seems to be exactly the strong association between the Papiamentu-relexification hypothesis and conventional monogenesis.

Conventional monogenesis gradually but inevitably lost support from the 1980s onwards due to the fact that other, more satisfactory and arguably less far-fetched — traditional monogenesis went as far as to propose that relexification towards Dutch of the Portuguese-based proto-variety had given birth to the semi-creole Afrikaans — theoretical models of creole genesis emerged. In fact, from the 1980s onwards, the similarities among creoles world-wide were increasingly explained as a result of either shared substrate languages (e.g. Alleyne 1980, Boretzky 1983) or universal faculties of language creation and acquisition (e.g. Bickerton [1974]1980, 1975, 1981, 1984). Simultaneously, the various pan-creole correspondences that had nourished the emergence of monogenesis in the first place were now met with a growing scholarly awareness of significant typological
discrepancies between creoles owing to increasing access to comparative data (see, for instance, Thomason & Kaufman 1988:195). Due to these developments, the monogenesis hypothesis finds little to no support in present-day creole studies (McWhorter 2005:379, but see, e.g., Portilla 2008). To be sure, McWhorter (2005:379) wrote “an official obituary for the grand old monogenesis hypothesis.”

The popularity of monogenesis thus drastically plummeted from the 1980s onwards and it may not be a coincidence that, also since the 1980s, the view of Papiamentu as a relexified offshoot of an imported Portuguese-based variety is no longer subscribed to either. Claiming a relexification scheme for Papiamentu had become intrinsically associated with supporting monogenesis and it is as if the demise of monogenesis thus dragged the Papiamentu-relexification hypothesis along in its downfall, preventing this scenario — including the paradigmatic and relatively straightforward linguistic ties with Upper Guinea PC — from being studied with scrutiny in recent scholarship. The before-mentioned works of Martinus (1996) and Quint (2000) are exceptions, but then again, these studies have hardly been received in Papiamentu-related literature.

In the 1990s, the term ‘relexification’ was shortly revived by Lumsden (e.g. 1991) and particularly Lefebvre (1986 and beyond) who developed what is known as the Extreme (or Strict) Relexification Hypothesis. This polygenesis model for creole formation views creole languages as the complete (or at least extreme) relexification of one of their African substrate languages by the dominant European language. According to this hypothesis, the near-complete relexification of mainly Fongbe by French resulted in Haitian Creole. Todd (2004:23) strikingly describes Lefebvre’s Extreme Relexification Hypothesis as the “rewriting [of] the relexification theory, making an African substratum rather than a Portuguese pidgin the syntactic base of today’s pidgens and creoles.” As far as I am aware, like monogenesis, Lefebvre’s Extreme Relexification Hypothesis enjoys little support among creolists today (for particular objections to Lefebvre’s relexification model, see, e.g., Thomason 2001: 179, 180, DeGraff 2002).

Consider now the following comment by Todd (2004:23) in describing the demise of relexification schemes for Caribbean creoles: “Paradoxically, the relexification theory would probably be more acceptable if it had been less successful; if it had, in other words, left larger traces of the original pidgin, particularly in terms of core vocabulary.” While Todd is spot-on for most Caribbean creoles in as far as these show no or hardly any tangible traces of relexification, Papiamentu in fact continues to offer quite straightforward linguistic arguments — the wholesale correspondence of its morpho-syntax with that of Upper Guinea PC (see Section 3) — in support of a scenario of relexification of an originally Portuguese-based creole. Consider also the following comment by DeBose (1975:77), in his monograph on the history of Papiamentu, who finds that the Papiamentu-relexification
hypothesis has to be “viewed with suspicion since relexification is a rather unusual thing for a language to do, even so remarkable a language as a creole.” DeBose’s claim is of course not incorrect — relexification is indeed an extraordinary process. However, recent insights from the mixed language debate have shown that we need not be suspicious of it either: given the right social conditions, migration scenarios may be accompanied by thorough and complex processes of language mixing, including relexification.

What the discussion provided above shows is that, in order to lend credibility to the hypothesis that Papiamentu results from the relexification of Upper Guinea PC by Spanish, it is necessary to revisit the notion of relexification, disassociate it from creole studies, and place it in the wider context of contact linguistics.

3. From Upper Guinea PC to Papiamentu: Identifying the inherited component

Building on work by Martinus (1996), Quint (2000) proposed to link Papiamentu exclusively to Upper Guinea PC, providing compelling linguistic evidence in favor of the claim that they descend from a common ancestor creole. Quint attributed the dominance of Spanish-derived vocabulary in Papiamentu to a process of (partial) relexification towards Spanish, though without proposing a historical contact scenario. To be sure, Quint’s account, to which I subscribe (see Jacobs 2008 and beyond) and which underlies the present paper, coincides with monogenesis only in as far as both rely on the notion of relexification. It differs crucially from monogenesis in that the scheme of diffusion exclusively entails the language transfer from Upper Guinea to Curaçao. Moreover, whereas traditional monogenesis was unfalsifiable, the claim that Papiamentu and Upper Guinea PC are related can be tested empirically by means of straightforward language comparison (see Martinus 1996, Quint 2000, Jacobs 2008, 2009a–b, 2010, 2011a–c). The principal evidence in favor of the hypothesis that Papiamentu and Upper Guinea PC are historically related is outlined in Martinus (1996), Quint (2000) and Jacobs (2008, 2009a–b, 2010, 2011a–c). As noted in Section 1.2, the hypothesis is currently finding broad acceptance among specialists. This is not to say that the hypothesis is uncontroversial (cf. Maurer 2009), however.

Historical research done by the present author (2009a, forthcoming) suggests that the slave trade between Upper Guinea and Curaçao started in 1659 and quite abruptly came to a halt in the late 1670s, when the Dutch were forced to abandon nearly all their forts and factories in the Upper Guinea region. Thus, we may estimate the cut-off point between Papiamentu and Upper Guinea PC at around 1680. This, in turn, means that there are over three centuries separating the two creoles.
In spite of this time-depth and the distinct socio-cultural and linguistic settings in which they have since developed, their shared kinship is still clearly visible, and particularly so in the domain of the morpho-syntax. In the remainder of this paper, by the terms ‘inherited’ or ‘native’ I refer to those Papiamentu features that are traceable back to Upper Guinea PC while the term ‘borrowed’ refers to those features derived from Spanish. Below is a brief summary of the inherited domains of the Papiamentu grammar based on Martinus (1996), Quint (2000) and Jacobs (2008, 2009a–b, 2010, 2011a–c):

- Derivational and inflectional morphology
- Rules for word order and clause combining
- Functional categories
  - Pronouns
    - personal pronouns (emphatic and oblique)
    - reflexive pronouns
  - Basic prepositions
  - Basic interrogatives
  - Basic conjunctions (coordinate and subordinate)
- Verbal system
  - Tense and aspect markers
  - Auxiliary verbs

As this summary shows, the original Upper Guinea PC morphosyntactic skeleton has been retained almost in its entirety. Of course, synchronically, there are some important morphosyntactic differences between Papiamentu and Upper Guinea PC such as the overt perfective marker *a* (Papiamentu) vs. Ø (Upper Guinea PC) or *nan* (= 3PL pronoun and nominal pluralizer in Papiamentu), which has no equivalent in Upper Guinea PC. Crucially, however, none of these distinctive features results from the substitution of native material; instead, they are analyzable as relatively straightforward cases of gap filling as defined by, e.g., Heine & Kuteva (2005: 128). (A diachronic discussion of Papiamentu *a* and *nan* is provided in Jacobs 2010 and 2009b respectively.) Perhaps the only noteworthy exception is the substitution of the Upper Guinea PC negator *ka* (< Portuguese *nunca*) by Spanish *no* (that is assuming that *ka* was the original negator in the ancestor variety). Note, however, that the syntactic negation patterns of Papiamentu still coincide neatly with those of Upper Guinea PC.

In addition to the morphosyntax, the phonology of Papiamentu is also largely inherited, although the phonological correspondence with Upper Guinea PC is somewhat clouded by the introduction into Papiamentu of several new phonemes found mainly in borrowed Dutch and Spanish lexical material (cf. Quint 2000: 127).
Could the correspondences between Papiamentu and Upper Guinea PC in the above mentioned categories have resulted from independent processes of creolization, that is, could they be due to mere chance? The nature of the correspondences is such that the answer must be in the negative. There is no space to repeat the linguistic evidence provided elsewhere (Martinus 1996, Quint 2000, Jacobs 2008, 2009a–b, 2010, 2011a–c). A brief discussion of the prepositional paradigm will suffice here, as it allows for some basic points to be made.

Both Papiamentu and Upper Guinea PC have a paradigm of six basic (monomorphemic) prepositions. These are identical in the two creoles: na ‘in, on, to’ (< Port. na ≠ Sp. en + la), te ‘until’ (< Port. até ≠ Sp. hasta), di ‘of’ (< Sp./Port. de), ku ‘with’ (< Sp. con / Port. com), pa ‘for, to’ (< Sp./Port. para), and riba ‘on, over’ (< Sp./Port. arriba) (cf. Quint 2000: 140). That these are unlikely to be chance correspondences becomes clear in light of the following:

- For Papiamentu, the prepositions na and te are of clear Portuguese origin. The remaining four could be either Portuguese- or Spanish-derived. In other words, Portuguese etyma predominate in the prepositional paradigm of Papiamentu. Note, however, that if Portuguese was ever spoken on Curacao in the first place, it probably ceased to be vital on the island in the mid-18th century. Therefore, if not by way of Upper Guinea PC, it is unclear how such basic and highly frequent Portuguese-derived items could have been incorporated in the Papiamentu grammar.

- It is rather unlikely that two creoles, independently of one another, would so consistently choose identical paths of grammaticalization. For instance, unlike the respective etyma, (1) Papiamentu/Upper Guinea PC na has lost its definiteness; (2) Papiamentu/Upper Guinea PC te has been decategorialized, functioning only as a preposition, not as an adverb; (3) Papiamentu/Upper Guinea PC ku means not only ‘with’ but also ‘and’; (4) Papiamentu/Upper Guinea PC pa serves as a complementizer after verbs of volition; (5) Papiamentu/Upper Guinea PC riba is used as a preposition, not as an adverb; (6) Papiamentu/Upper Guinea PC di is used in the formation of ordinal numbers. In other words, each of the six prepositions coincide in Papiamentu and Upper Guinea PC in terms of phonetic shape, semantic scope and syntactic behavior, while differing in one or more of these respects from the Iberian etyma.

- This prepositional paradigm is unlike anything found in other Atlantic creoles. Most Atlantic creoles show a drastic reduction of the prepositional paradigm, using other syntactic devices to express prepositional relations. For instance, in the Portuguese-based creole Sãotomense, nouns and verbs assume the role of prepositions (Hagemeijer 2007: 86) and in the Spanish-based
creole Palenquero, mostly the locative adverbs *akí, aká, aí and ayá* take on a prepositional function (Schwegler & Green 2007: 302).

- Despite the relative wealth of prepositions in Papiamentu and Upper Guinea PC, both lack reflexes of the Iberian high-frequency prepositions *por* ‘by, for, through,’ *a* ‘to’ and *sobre* ‘on, over’. One of the reasons why a cognate of Iberian *a* was not integrated in Papiamentu and Upper Guinea PC is that in both creoles, verbs of movement occur without a preposition when followed by an indication of place. The functions of Iberian *sobre* and *por* have been taken by Papiamentu/Upper Guinea PC *riba* and *pa* respectively.

This discussion of prepositions is but a fraction of the body of linguistic evidence that links Papiamentu to Upper Guinea PC; similar, more detailed, analyses can be made for each of the grammatical categories listed previously.

In spite of the structural morphosyntactic correspondence, mutual intelligibility between uneducated speakers of Papiamentu and Upper Guinea PC is likely to be complicated if not impossible, due to far-reaching differences not only in the periphery but also in the fundamental parts of the content vocabulary. As should be abundantly clear by now, I believe these differences are attributable to a process of relexification of Upper Guinea PC by and towards Spanish.

4. From Upper Guinea PC to Papiamentu: Relexification rather than (heavy) lexical borrowing

The term ‘relexification’ is not seldom used in the literature in too broad a sense to designate more or less regular processes of lexical borrowing (as pointed out also by Bakker 1997: 23). In the current field of contact linguistics, however, there is a need to clearly distinguish between the two processes (relexification vs. lexical borrowing) in order to better understand and analyze the development of languages such as Media Lengua (Muysken 1981), Michif (Bakker 1997), Saramaccan (Good 2009) and others that do not conform to the common rules and patterns of ordinary lexical borrowing (cf. Tadmor 2009: 61). I will make the distinction here as well, as I believe it is necessary also to understand the development of Papiamentu out of Upper Guinea PC. This distinction, then, is primarily a matter of (a) degree — relexification affects the most basic parts of the vocabulary; ‘regular’ lexical borrowing only sporadically affects the basic vocabulary, and (b) rate — relexification is an abrupt process; ‘regular’ borrowing is a much more gradual process (see Muysken 2006: 316–319 for similar remarks).

Below, I discuss two arguments for why the present case should indeed be regarded as a case of relexification by (or towards), rather than heavy borrowing.
from, Spanish. The first argument is that the degree of lexical shift was much more far-reaching than the degree witnessed in normal cases of heavy borrowing (Section 4.1); the second argument is that this shift occurred abruptly, rather than gradually (Section 4.2).

4.1 Replacement of basic content vocabulary

Lexical borrowing, even when heavy or massive, does not significantly affect the most basic parts of the vocabulary and rather manifests itself primarily in the more peripheral domains. In the words of Greenberg ([1971] 2005: 16, 17), lexical borrowing “tends to cluster in nonfundamental vocabulary and makes only rare and sporadic inroads into basic vocabulary” and Muysken (2006: 316) speaks of “semantic restrictions” on heavy lexical borrowing. By contrast, there are no such constraints or semantic restrictions on relexification, which by definition involves the substitution of native lexical items in all areas of the lexicon including, and prominently, in the most fundamental parts of the vocabulary (see also Tadmor 2009: 59).

Accordingly, French influence on the English lexicon, for instance, does not qualify as relexification: though English borrowed heavily from French, Thomason & Kaufman (1988: 308) note that this borrowing process was “no more extreme than the kinds found in many other normal cases in history” (cf. Holm 1988: 437 for similar remarks). Indeed, it was already pointed out by Bennett & Smithers (1968, in Thomason & Kaufman 1988: 314) that “one can compose a piece of English conversation without using a single French word; and one can often hear or take part in conversations containing very few”. Furthermore, the number of French loans in English is inversely proportional to the basicness of the vocabulary; that is, the more basic the vocabulary, the smaller the number of French loans (Bakker 2003: 121, Grant 2009: 375). This can be seen in the fact that on the English Swadesh-100 list (still commonly used as a yardstick for identifying basic vocabulary) no more than six or seven items have a French etymology (Thomason & Kaufman 1988: 329, Parkvall 2006: 325). Similar observations apply to the cases of Italian borrowings in Maltese, Spanish in Chamorro (see Stolz 2003 for both), German in Danish (Bakker 2003: 120) or Arabic in Swahili (Schadeberg 2009: 88). All these recipient languages show a much greater percentage of borrowings in the periphery of the lexicon than in the basic vocabulary, so that the term ‘relexification’ is not called for (Bakker 2003: 121).

The Spanish contribution to the Papiamentu lexicon is quite a different matter all together and differs significantly from the above mentioned cases. By this, I am not referring to the fact that Spanish-derived items predominate in the periphery of the Papiamentu lexicon, or that a number of adverbs and peripheral prepositions and conjunctions are derived from Spanish; though these are facts, this could
in principle all be the result of normal to ‘heavy borrowing’. The lable ‘relexification’ is rather justified by the fact that the most essential part of the original basic content vocabulary of Upper Guinea PC has been replaced by Spanish-derived lexemes. Unfortunately, unlike in the case of French influence on English, a percentage count of the Spanish contribution to the Papiamentu Swadesh-100 list is bound to be inaccurate, due to the fact that roughly half of the items on it can be attributed to either Spanish or Upper Guinea PC with equal likelihood (including a few loanblends). Still, however, a look at the remaining 50% of the Papiamentu Swadesh-100 list is quite revealing: while only 10% is native (i.e. inherited from Upper Guinea PC), no less than 40% is clearly borrowed (i.e. Spanish-derived). Among that 40% borrowed share, we find the Papiamentu words for the most basic concepts, such as man, woman, child, person, bird, tree, skin, blood, bone, hair, tooth, foot, hand, breast, to see, moon, star, water, stone, night, warm and name, all of which are of clear Spanish origin and etymologically unrelated to the corresponding lexemes of Upper Guinea PC. To be complete, two items on the Papiamentu Swadesh-100 list are derived from Dutch, and two others can be either English or Dutch loans.

As a consequence of the predominance of Spanish-derived basic vocabulary, conversing in Papiamentu without taking recourse to borrowed Spanish lexical items is pretty much impossible, which is why so many linguists have classified and continue to classify Papiamentu as a Spanish-lexified creole without hesitation. Also, as noted, in heavy-borrowing languages such as English, Chamorro or Maltese, the number of loanwords is high in the peripheral vocabulary, but diminishes as we approach the basic vocabulary. This is clearly not the case here: Spanish loans are predominant both in the periphery and in the fundamental part of the Papiamentu lexicon; to my knowledge, even languages such as Romanian or Swahili do not display the borrowing of such an extensive subset of the most basic vocabulary items. In sum, the degree (quality and quantity) of the borrowed Spanish component in Papiamentu is such that it warrants the label ‘relexification’ rather than ‘heavy borrowing’.

One might argue that, if the cultural pressure from Spanish were sufficient, the three centuries separating Papiamentu and Upper Guinea PC would have sufficed for the original Portuguese-based basic content lexicon to be replaced through ‘normal’ processes of contact-induced change, say, scale five on Thomason & Kaufman’s (1988) borrowing scale. However, if this were the case, we would have expected the variety of Upper Guinea PC that arrived on Curaçao to not only replace its basic content vocabulary, but to also substitute basic morphosyntactic categories causing a (significant) alteration of the original typological profile (Thomason & Kaufman 1988:75). As pointed out in Section 3, however, this has not happened in the transition from Upper Guinea PC to Papiamentu:
unambiguously Portuguese-derived functional morphemes such as the previously mentioned prepositions na and te (Section 3) have not been replaced by Spanish equivalents (Sp. en and hasta). Rather, the morphosyntax is almost completely inherited and, as a consequence, the typological make-up of Papiamentu still conforms more to Upper Guinea PC than to any other language.

What is more, for scale-5-borrowing to occur, strong cultural-linguistic pressure over a *prolonged period of time* is required (Thomason & Kaufman 1988:94). Crucially, however, the available historical and linguistic clues suggest that the lexical shift towards Spanish had already been completed by the turn of the 18th century, on which more will follow below.

4.2 Abrupt lexical shift

Another property that distinguishes relexification from more normal processes of lexical borrowing is the rate at which the lexical shift occurs. While relexification is considered to be an abrupt process that may take no more than a few decades (more on this in Section 5), processes of (heavy) lexical borrowing (e.g., the massive integration of Chinese loans into Classical Japanese [cf., e.g., Schmidt 2009:549] or of French into English [cf., e.g., Thomason & Kaufman 1988:326]) will usually take much longer (cf. also Golovko 2003:191, Haspelmath 2009:41 and Muysken 2006:318 on the gradualness of ‘regular’ lexical borrowing). As shown below, also in this respect the development of Papiamentu out of Upper Guinea PC is classifiable as a case of relexification by, rather than as heavy borrowing from, Spanish.

In order to understand the time span in which the original Upper Guinea PC lexicon was relexified towards Spanish to form Papiamentu, one should recall that the first Upper Guinean slaves probably arrived on Curaçao in 1659 (and stopped arriving after ca. 1680). We may thus take 1659 as a *terminus post quem*. Now, if one analyzes the first written attestation of Papiamentu, a 1775 love letter written by a Sephardic Jew to his mistress, it is easy to see that this Early Papiamentu document shows roughly the same quantity of Spanish-derived lexical material as modern-day Papiamentu does. Clearly, this suggests that the most important lexical shift towards Spanish had already been completed by that time, which leaves us with a time span of some 115 years or less for the relexification towards Spanish to have occurred. A second historical-linguistic clue, however, allows us to significantly reduce the *terminus ante quem*: as early as 1704, the polyglot Father Alexius Schabel reported in his travel account that what the slaves of Curaçao spoke sounded much like ‘broken Spanish’. Provided that the Father’s assessment is reliable (i.e., that he was capable of distinguishing Spanish from Portuguese, more on this in Section 5), we may assume that a far-reaching lexical shift towards Spanish had already been
accomplished by the turn of the 18th century. Thus, we are left with a space of time of some four and a half decades (1659–1704) or less for this lexical shift to have been carried out. If these calculations are correct, this remarkably short time interval provides another argument in favor of labeling the mentioned lexical shift as ‘relexification’ rather than as ‘heavy lexical borrowing.’ (In Section 5, I will show in more detail that this short time interval is indeed perfectly reconcilable with recognized cases of language mixing including relexification.)

Based on the above, we can now make a rough time-based division between the earliest, most decisive lexical shift from Upper Guinea PC towards Spanish — the actual process of relexification completed by the turn of 18th century — and all changes that occurred afterwards up to present (cf. Holm 1988: 315 for a similar, albeit largely intuitive assessment of the diachronic development of Papiamentu). This division implies, for instance, that several replacements of native lexical as well as structural material by Spanish borrowings (which can be observed quite neatly in 19th/20th-century Papiamentu texts) are not the result of the early process of relexification, but rather of regular processes of borrowing from Spanish. For instance, Early Papiamentu texts testify to the use of the modal verb *fika* ‘to stay, remain, become’ (= Upper Guinea PC *fika*) which came to be replaced by the Spanish-derived form *keda* (< Sp. *quedar*) or of the Early Papiamentu derivational suffix *-dadi* (= Upper Guinea PC *-dadi*) which is *-dat* (< Sp. *-dad*) in present-day Papiamentu. The same observations apply to the significant contributions made to Papiamentu by Kwa and Bantu languages (cf. Maurer 1987, 1989, 1991, 1994), Dutch (cf. Wood 1970, 1972b, Kramer 2004) and, to a lesser extent, English (cf. Wood 1971); these contributions also result not from relexification but from normal contact-induced language change.

5. Analyzing Papiamentu as a mixed language

If Papiamentu results from the relexification of Upper Guinea PC towards Spanish, this logically brings up parallels with the class of mixed languages, relexification — a term whose use in the mixed language debate owes much to Muysken’s (1981) account of Media Lengua — being one of the principal mechanisms involved in the formation of mixed languages.

An uncontroversial definition of a mixed language would be Comrie’s (2008: 21): a mixed language is “one which reflects […] the combination of different major components from different historical sources.” We can translate this to the case of Papiamentu and *grosso modo* distinguish between two major components, a functional and a purely lexical, and two corresponding historical sources: an Upper Guinea PC morphosyntactic matrix and Spanish embedded
lexicon. One classical, but more controversial, definition of a mixed language is that of a language showing a grammar–lexicon (or functional–lexical) split, with one source language providing the grammatical categories and another providing the lexicon. Specialists agree, however, that this definition is idealistic and that, in reality, an ideal grammar–lexicon split seldom occurs and that the type and nature of the split differs from one mixed language to the other. Evidence from a sample of seven mixed languages allowed Matras (2003) to redefine the split: according to him, a language is a mixed language if the bulk of its basic content vocabulary is from one source, while the verbal system and the rules for word order and clause combining are from another source (Matras 2003:155–156). Papiamentu indeed also meets these criteria, so that, at least from a language-structural point of view, it seems warranted to classify Papiamentu as a mixed language.

A recognized mixed language that seems appropriate for comparison is Media Lenga. It is spoken in Central Ecuador and shows a split comparable (though not identical) to that of Papiamentu. While Media Langa’s morphosyntactic framework is Quechua, Spanish relexified 90% of the Quechua lexicon (adapted to Quechua phonology), except affixes, which are still Quechua (cf. Muysken 1981, 1997, Dikker 2008). Media Lenga was formed within a group of Quechua speakers temporarily residing in Quito (Muysken 1997:373–376). An important difference between Media Lenga and Papiamentu is that the lexical roots of the function words were replaced by Spanish roots in the case of Media Lenga, but not in the case of Papiamentu. The lexical closeness between Spanish and Portuguese could have been one reason why in the case of Papiamentu the original function words were not replaced by Spanish roots (Mikael Parkvall p.c.).

5.1 More on the rate of relexification

The parallel between the case of Papiamentu and other recognized cases of abrupt relexification/mixing gains significance in the context of the long-lasting debate on the Spanish vs. Portuguese origins of Papiamentu. Interestingly, Father Schabel’s previously mentioned description of Papiamentu as ‘broken Spanish’, already in 1704, had been put forward by several proponents of the Spanish origins of Papiamentu as a decisive argument against the creole’s alleged Afro-Portuguese roots (e.g. Maduro 1965:5): if in 1704 Papiamentu was already Spanish-based, Papiamentu had presumably always been Spanish-based. If Papiamentu had originally been a Portuguese-based creole, surely the polyglot Schabel would have noticed. Scholars defending the Papiamentu-relexification hypothesis could only counter Schabel’s observation by claiming that the Portuguese language may not have been part of his otherwise formidable linguistic repertoire, supposedly preventing him from recognizing the Portuguese character of Early Papiamentu (e.g. van Wijk 1958:169).
New insights from the mixed language debate, however, show that language mixing (such as relexification) is in fact a remarkably rapid process that can be brought to completion in a single generation’s space of time. For instance, the formation of Media Lengua (i.e., the relexification of 90% of the original Quechua vocabulary by Spanish) must have occurred sometime between 1920 and 1940 (Muysken 1997: 374) and most likely in a time span of less than a decade (Pieter Muysken p.c.). Not just Media Lengua, but also several other recognized mixed languages are thought to have emerged in remarkably short periods of time (cf. Bakker 2003: 136). Mednyj Aleut (a.k.a. Copper Island Aleut = Aleut + Russian) and Michif (= Cree + French) were presumably created in the space of a single generation (i.e., two to three decades at most) according to Comrie (2008: 25) and Thomason (2007: 55). Moreover, Gurindji Kriol, a mixed language composed of Gurindji (an Australian aboriginal language) and Kriol (an English-based creole), developed in the 1960s–70s out of the regularization of code-switching patterns and subsequent nativization. This process took no more than two decades to be carried out (McConvell & Meakins 2005: 15). Another interesting example of abrupt mixing is provided by the Surinamese creole Saramaccan, mentioned in the introduction. The available historical and linguistic documentation suggests that the process that gave rise to Saramaccan, i.e. the partial relexification of Sranan towards (Creole) Portuguese, was completed between the late 1660s and 1680, i.e. in slightly more than one decade (Cardoso & Smith 2004: 117).

These examples show that we need not insist on Schabel’s failure to recognize an earlier more pronounced Portuguese character of Papiamentu, but may instead assume that, at the time of his observation, the relexification had already been completed, indeed, in the time span of some four decades or less.

Like Schabel’s observation, the previously mentioned Papiamentu love letter from 1775 had also been used as an argument against Portuguese-to-Spanish relexification hypotheses. As noted previously, the quantity and quality of Spanish-derived vocabulary in this Early Papiamentu text is pretty much equal to modern-day Papiamentu and, conversely, the letter does not contain any additional Portuguese lexical material in comparison to modern-day Papiamentu. This discovery, Wood (1972a: 28) claimed, crucially challenged the hypothesis that Papiamentu is a relexification of an originally Portuguese-based variety, since, if that were the case, the 1775 letter should have revealed more Portuguese lexical material. This reasoning shows that Wood and with him many others involved in the debate on the origins of Papiamentu have uncritically assumed that relexification is a gradual process. However, the evidence from mixed languages suggests that the far-reaching lexical shift towards Spanish may, or perhaps must, have happened well before 1775. Thus, in an Upper Guinea PC-to-Spanish relexification
scenario, the predominance of Spanish-derived content vocabulary at around 1775 is merely predictable.

To sum up, rather than constituting evidence against the Afro-Portuguese roots of Papiamentu, Father Schabel’s testimony and the 1775 Papiamentu letter in fact provide valuable clues as to the rate at which Upper Guinea PC shifted its original Portuguese-based core vocabulary towards Spanish: this process must have been carried out in the time span of three to four decades at most, providing a compelling link between Papiamentu and several recognized cases of language mixing.

5.2 From Upper Guinea PC to Papiamentu: Deliberate relexification?

The very nature of mixed languages (e.g., the absence of simplification processes in their genesis) clearly suggests they arise in communities where fluent bilingualism is the norm (e.g. Winford 2003: 171, Matras 2009: 304). Scholars therefore agree that, unlike creoles, mixed languages do not arise out of a strict communicative need, but that the main driving force behind their creation is the need or desire to flag a new group identity. This, in turn, implies that the process of language mixing is to an important extent a conscious, intentional, or deliberate act (Muysken 1997: 376, Bakker & Matras 2003b: 13, Thomason 2003: 32, but see McConvell & Meakins 2005: 16 for an opposing view). At least two factors suggest that the relexification of Upper Guinea PC towards Spanish was a conscious, intentional act of linguistic change as well.

First, though to my knowledge this is not discussed in the existing literature on mixed languages, I assume that the conscious, intentional character of language mixing is one reason why it can be carried out in such a brief space of time. If language mixing were an unconscious and unintended by-product of (intensive) language contact, one would expect this to occur, if at all, at a much slower rate. The correlation between intentionality/deliberateness and rate of lexical replacement can be illustrated by means of so-called taboo languages. These are languages in which the use of certain words can, for different cultural-religious reasons, suddenly become forbidden, obliging their speakers to replace these words by others, be it through borrowing or through coining (cf. Comrie 2000, Mous 2003: 219). Evidently, the word replacement in taboo languages is a conscious and deliberate speech act (viz. an act of lexical manipulation) and, indeed, can occur at a remarkably high rate (Comrie 2000: 38). While the motivation behind language mixing/entwining is of course different from taboo-motivated change, the two phenomena are comparable in that they concern drastic linguistic change which is both intentional/deliberate and abrupt. Of course, this is not to say that all intentional change will be abrupt, but rather that, in the absence of other factors, intentional change is more likely to be abrupt than unintentional change. For Papiamentu,
this means that the abruptness of the relexification (Section 5.1) can be understood and explained more easily by assuming the relexification was carried out consciously viz. intentionally.  

A second clue is that when the two languages, Spanish and Upper Guinea PC, came in contact there must already have been some degree of mutual intelligibility between them due to the closeness of their lexicons. Pieter Muysken (p.c.) correctly observes that this intelligibility may have cancelled the strictly communicative necessity for relexification. If not for communicative reasons, the primary incentive for the shift towards Spanish must have been the desire to mark the emergence of a new group identity and/or to flag acculturation to the dominant Spanish culture. It is implied that this shift was indeed to some degree a conscious and intentional act of change.

If the relexification of Upper Guinea PC towards Spanish was indeed a conscious process, the notion of ‘lexical re-orientation’ as defined by Matras (2000) might turn out to be applicable:

Lexical re-orientation is the conscious shifting of the linguistic field that is responsible for encoding meaning or conceptual representations away from the language in which linguistic interaction is normally managed, organised and processed: speakers adopt in a sense one linguistic system to express lexical meaning […] and another to organise the relations among lexical symbols, as well as within sentences, utterances, and interaction. The result is a split, by source language, between lexicon and grammar.

(Matras 2000: 82, cf. the discussion in Golovko 2003: 192–196)

Note, finally, that the view that the relexification of Upper Guinea PC towards Spanish was an intentional, conscious act of identity correlates well with the fact that Papiamentu is an important identity marker for most of its speakers and enjoys comparatively high social status vitality, which is not at all obvious for a creole language (cf. Parkvall 2003 in this regard).

6. The source(s) of the Spanish content vocabulary

Although the discussion of the origins of Papiamentu has thus far been dominated by the quest for the source(s) of its Portuguese elements, the search for the origin(s) of the Spanish elements in the creole’s basic vocabulary is an equally complex matter: who provided the Spanish linguistic input and/or target necessary for the rapid and far-reaching relexification of Upper Guinea PC towards Spanish to occur?

As noted previously, for quite obvious reasons, mixed languages are thought to typically emerge in communities where a high degree of bilingualism is the
norm. If we are to continue the parallel between Papiamentu and mixed languages, this poses a historical problem, since pockets of native Spanish speakers are not officially documented on Curaçao during the second half of the 17th century. Although the Amerindians present on the island may have spoken Spanish (see pertinent remarks in Maurer 1998: 185–187), it seems justified to exclude them from this analysis, since there are no indications of any intimate contact between them and the African slaves (Hartog 1968: 29–42). Also, even if there was contact, it is not clear why Upper Guinea PC-speaking slaves would drastically adapt their speech habits under the influence of the Amerindians, whose demographic relevance was negligible and who probably lacked the social prestige necessary to exert any linguistic pressure. Hence, it is more plausible to look for other sources for the Spanish. Curaçao’s principal colonizing powers and slave keepers, the Sephardim and the Dutch, are the first to come to mind.

Before proceeding, it should be borne in mind that Curaçao was a transitory slave trading post. Most slaves were briefly held in slave camps and subsequently redistributed throughout the Caribbean. Since these transit slaves quickly disappeared from the island, I assume they did not have any significant impact on the shaping of the linguistic landscape of Curaçao. In the discussion below, therefore, I will not take the transit slave camps into consideration and rather focus my attention on the slaves that stayed on the island as domestic and/or field slaves.

6.1 Sephardim or Dutch WIC officials?

Though the Curaçaoan Sephardim are traditionally thought to have spoken Portuguese and in the literature are sometimes held responsible for the Portuguese elements in Papiamentu, the truth is that we have no historical evidence of what the Curaçaoan Sephardim spoke at home and it may have differed from one family to the other. In fact, like the Sephardic community of Amsterdam in the 17th century, I assume that the Sephardim of Curaçao were fully bilingual in Portuguese and Spanish and that Spanish, not Portuguese, must have been the main in-group communication vehicle (even though Portuguese remained the principal language of the synagogue well into the 18th century). After all, trade with the continent was conducted in Spanish only. Spanish-speaking Sephardic slave holders may thus very well have provided the source for the Spanish elements in Papiamentu.

Another possible source for the Spanish is the officials of the Dutch West India Company (WIC), who were also the principal slave owners. Though we know little with certainty about their actual Spanish competence, it is historically documented that some of them, especially those occupying the higher ranks within the WIC, knew Spanish fluently (Kramer 2004: 135). It seems important to note,
furthermore, that there were in fact Spanish Catholics among the higher ranked WIC officials on Curaçao (Kramer 2004: 124).

6.2 On community size

From a strictly demographic point of view, it might appear more plausible to hypothesize a relexification process within Spanish-speaking WIC circles than among the Sephardim, given that the WIC owned three or four times as many slaves as the Sephardim did (Maurer 1998: 199). This demographic fact, however, need not be as decisive as it seems. Indeed, a relatively small mixed bilingual community with speakers of Spanish and Upper Guinea PC may in principle have sufficed, or even have been favorable, for rapid relexification to take place: as Comrie (2000: 37) points out, “in the absence of other factors, one would expect more rapid change the smaller the community involved”. The reason for this, he explains, is that, “[i]n a small community, innovations introduced by one individual can rapidly become known to all members of the community; the chance of some other member of the community rejecting the innovation is relatively low because the number of other members of the community is low” (Comrie 2000: 36, cf. Thomason 2003: 32, but see Bowern 2010, 2011). Accordingly, it is unsurprising to learn that, in as far as it can be determined, most mixed languages are indeed thought to have arisen in relatively small communities of perhaps only a few hundred speakers (Golovko 2003: 198). It follows that the relexification of Upper Guinea PC by Spanish may have been carried out and brought to completion in a small but influential bilingual speaker community, small enough for the relexification to be rapid and influential enough for the speakers to subsequently spread their speech to newly incoming slaves and other segments of the society.

6.3 Language mixing in the absence of full bilingualism?

Thus far, I have focused on the Sephardim and the WIC officials in search of a bilingual Spanish-Upper Guinea PC community in which the relexification could have been carried out. However, bilingualism is of course not a sine-qua-non for one language to exert pressure on another. As is well known, prestige can offer a sufficiently strong motivation for borrowings from and changes towards a target language to occur, even if the direct access to that target is limited (see Goyette 2000). For instance, Haspelmath (2009: 48), in discussing loanword integration, points out that, even though “prestige is a factor that is very difficult to measure independently, [it seems] undeniable that prestige is a factor with paramount importance for language change, going far beyond our current topic of loanwords.” Goyette & Parkvall (forthcoming) provide a case in point when pointing out that
the cultural prestige of Latin in the post-Renaissance era was so high as to trigger numerous borrowings of words and productive morphemes from Latin into several Indo-European languages, in spite of the fact that only very small percentages of the recipient speaker populations had knowledge of Latin (cf., furthermore, the particular case of French influence on Romanian mentioned by Goyette & Parkvall and discussed also in Schulte 2009: 237–238). Note, though, that these borrowings occurred more gradually, that is, certainly not at the rate at which full-scale language mixing tends to occur.

A more pertinent case in point is Thomason’s (2001: 213) discussion of “the unnamed mixed language spoken in Ternate in North Maluku (Indonesia)”. This mixed language combines a Ternatean lexicon with a Malay morphosyntax. Importantly, the mixed language arose abruptly and in the absence of full bilingualism, along the following lines:9

[Malay] is the children’s first and only language until they reach an age when they find themselves in social situations where Ternatean is the appropriate language. They […] do not bother learning Ternatean grammar, but instead simply attach Ternatean lexicon onto Malay grammar so that they can imagine that they are speaking Ternatean. (Thomason 2001: 214)

Translated to the present case, we can hypothesize a scenario in which the members of a community of Upper Guinea PC speakers realize that Spanish is the appropriate language in certain social settings on Curaçao and, instead of fully switching to Spanish, commence attaching Spanish lexicon onto their native grammar, so as to pretend to speak Spanish, viz. to flag acculturation (cf. Matras 2003: 155). If this is what happened, full bilingualism would not have been required for Upper Guinea PC to develop into Papiamentu.

Like Ternatean in Ternate, Spanish was doubtlessly the most appropriate language in certain social contexts on Curaçao. One such domain was the domain of religion. Although, unfortunately, quite little is known about the religious habits of the slaves, we do know that already in the late 17th century Spanish-speaking Catholic priests would occasionally come over from the Venezuelan mainland to perform a variety of clerical services (Hartog 1968: 145–154, Munteanu 1996: 85–86). These Catholic priests visited not only the transit slaves (i.e., those destined for resale), but notably also those permanently residing on Curaçao (Hartog 1968: 152). The Catholic priests were given full freedom to operate on Curaçao, first, because this was included in the terms of the asiento contract obtained by the Dutch WIC and, second, because Curaçao’s Protestant Dutch and Sephardic Jewish elites did not want their slaves to be members of their church (Hartog 1968: 148).10 Quite early on, as a consequence of the Catholic missions, Curaçao’s
slave society had indeed become predominantly Catholic, rather than Protestant or Jewish (Hartog 1968: 178).

Thus, the fact that Spanish was heavily associated with the slaves’ religious instruction may have granted it the necessary prestige and accessibility necessary to initiate far-reaching relexification of the basic vocabulary. On the other hand, as noted, the interaction between the Catholic, Spanish-speaking priests and the Curacaoan slaves in the early period has remained scarcely documented and warrants future research.

Finally, in the search for the origin(s) of the Spanish elements in Papiamentu, it should not be forgotten that Spanish was the language of Curacao’s external trade. A possibility is that the relexification was performed among a community of freed (Upper Guinea PC-speaking) slaves involved in the trade, but this idea remains highly tenuous for now.

6.4 Relexification among domestic or plantation slaves?

An important issue still to be explored is whether the relexification of Upper Guinea PC by Spanish occurred among field slaves or among the domestic slaves. Some scholars assume an important role for the Curacaoan yayas, who were house slave nannies of African origin tasked with the upbringing of the master’s children (Eckkrammer 1999: 61, cf. van Wijk 1958: 181). Martinus (1998), however, claims that Papiamentu established itself first among the field slaves only to subsequently diffuse to the house slaves — “the language moved from the fields into the Big Houses, not the other way around” (Martinus 1998: 114) — a view shared by the historian Krafft (1949, cited in Maduro 1965: 18).

In 1683, no less than 75% of all the slaves residing on Curacao worked as domestic slaves (Hoetink 1958: 58, Bartens 1996: 243). As noted previously in Section 6.2, however, community size does not necessarily correlate positively with degree and rate of contact-induced change. In other words, these demographic figures do not annul the possibility that the relexification occurred on one of the agricultural farms in the interior and from there spread into the colonial houses, as Martinus (1998) claims.

Still, however, two factors speak in favor of the idea that the house slaves were pivotal in the relexification of Upper Guinea PC. First, the yayas were women. A relexification scenario involving Upper Guinea PC-speaking yayas and Spanish-speaking masters would thus be a perfect parallel with several established cases of language mixing, involving mixed marriages in colonial settings, in which the bulk of the morphosyntax is derived from the language of the mothers, while the lexicon is predominantly from that of the fathers (see, e.g., Bakker & Matras 2003b for some cases in point; cf. also Bakker’s 1997 intertwining model).
Second, the number of light-skinned slaves on the agricultural farms was relatively low, but they constituted the majority among the group of domestic slaves (Hoetink 1958:75, Allen 2007:73–74). This is important in light of the fact that most of the Upper Guinea PC-speaking slaves, drawn from the creolized societies of the Cape Verde Islands and Cacheu, were of mixed descent and, consequently, lighter skinned than the slaves from the Gold Coast, Congo and Angola, who were also present on Curaçao.

It is a small step from assuming that the majority of the first Curaçaoan yayas were Upper Guinea PC-speaking women working for Spanish-speaking masters (be they Sephardic Jews or WIC officials) to understanding how a Spanish-relexified variety of Upper Guinea PC could emerge and spread on Curaçao.

7. Final remarks and conclusions

The present paper discussed whether, and to what extent, Papiamentu can be analyzed as a mixed language composed of an Upper Guinea PC morphosyntactic matrix and an embedded Spanish content lexicon. I explained how the perspective on Papiamentu as a mixed language allows us to disassociate the notion of relexification from creole studies, which, eventually, may lead to a broader recognition of the hypothesis that Papiamentu is a relexified offshoot of Upper Guinea PC, brought to the island in the second half of the 17th century.

The split in the grammar of Papiamentu (Spanish content lexicon vs. Upper Guinea PC morphosyntax) warrants the creole’s classification as a (rather typical) mixed language. The available clues suggest that the development of Papiamentu (viz. the relexification of Upper Guinea PC), like recognized cases of language mixing, (a) was an abrupt process and (b) was to a certain extent a deliberate and conscious effort to flag the creation of a new group identity.

The most promising contact scenario for the emergence and spread of Papiamentu, I believe, is the one involving (the offspring of) Upper Guinea PC-speaking yayas and Spanish-speaking slave masters (be it Sephardim or WIC officials). However, since the existence of such a bilingual setting on 17th-century Curaçao cannot be proven historically, we must alternatively consider the possibility that Upper Guinea PC was relexified in the absence of full bilingualism. Therefore, an alternative scenario involving Venezuelan Catholic priests, in which native speakers of Upper Guinea PC (consciously) shifted their lexicon under the pressure of Spanish as the language of religion, should also be looked into in future research.

Some of the issues raised above of course remain more tenuous than others. However, I feel at least some speculation is necessary if we want to advance in a
case such as the present (in which clear-cut historical documentation is scarce) and come to a plausible account of the history of Papiamentu and the circumstances under which it managed to develop into the mother tongue of the people of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao.

Notes

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1. Goyette & Parkvall (forthcoming) dedicate an interesting paper to showing that, contrary to popular belief, there is nothing particularly ‘mixed’ about creoles and hence that there is no good reason to treat creoles and mixed languages in the same manner.

2. Note that, in this paper, I am not concerned with the Dutch contribution to Papiamentu, since scholars agree that this contribution is not constitutive either of the core grammar of Papiamentu or of its basic vocabulary. Indeed, Dutch-derived function words in Papiamentu can be counted on the fingers of one hand, and the Dutch contribution to the Papiamentu Swadesh-100 list is restricted to two items.

3. The Surinamese maroon creole Saramaccan was also important in this discussion, owing to its mixed Portuguese-English vocabulary. Like Papiamentu, Saramaccan was initially believed to constitute an offshoot of the alleged Portuguese-based proto-variety relexified towards English (e.g. Voorhoeve 1973). Today, however, there is a broad consensus that the Portuguese elements were added to an already existing English-based creole, probably Sranan (Smith 1987, Bakker 2009: 155, McWhorter 2011: 172, 173).

4. This can be checked quite easily via the splendid online World Loanword Database (WOLD); see Haspelmath & Tadmor (2009).

5. Note that the hypothesized lexical shift of Upper Guinea PC towards Spanish, besides the actual relexification (i.e., the replacement of base and native content vocabulary), inevitably also involved regular lexical borrowing with the mere purpose of vocabulary expansion, but since we do not know the original size of the vocabulary of the Upper Guinea PC variety that arrived on Curaçao, it is impossible to estimate the relative proportions of relexified versus borrowed vocabulary in that early period.


8. Of course, as Muysken (2006: 328) correctly stresses, “[t]he word ‘conscious’ should not be taken too literally, since we are dealing with speech communities without a tradition of metalinguistic reflection.”

9. Tadmor’s (2007) account of the core vocabulary borrowings from Malay into the Austroasiatic language Ceq Qong is quite comparable. Haspelmath (2009: 46, fn) summarizes this account as follows: “Speakers tried to assimilate to the strongly dominant Malay people, but had very little access to the Malay language, so they borrowed what they could, the basic vocabulary that they knew.”

10. The so-called asientos were contracts or trading agreements that would give their owner the exclusive right to trade with Spain in a specific region.

11. For an interesting case study of language creation in the context of employers and their maids, see Bizri (2010).

References


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