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PIDGINS, CREOLES, AND LANGUAGE CONTACT IN DANISH AND DUTCH COLONIAL CONTEXTS: A PRESENTATION OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

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1. Introduction*

One of the key developments in modern world history, both in terms of its overall disruptive and transformative effects and in terms of its linguistic consequences, is the European expansion and colonization of the world (see e.g. Stuchtey 2011 for an overview). In the 15th century, the onset of the European "Age of Discovery" marked the beginning of a new era, characterized by an unprecedented increase in cultural encounters on the global stage. This unfolded against the backdrop of a dark chapter in world history, shaped by centuries of European-driven imperialism and accompanying colonialism, including racialized slavery. The colonial era witnessed countless encounters, varying in intensity and duration, between indigenous and exogenous populations, transplanted to new territories and, consequently, new sociohistorical and sociolinguistic settings. The encounters

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profoundly reshaped not only the lives of the people involved but also, through contact-induced linguistic change and language shifts, the language landscape and the varieties brought to and developing in the affected territories, compared to the pre-contact era.

Languages generally evolve through transmission from one generation to the next, meaning that the growth of new dialects and their eventual development into distinct languages result from gradual changes that accumulate over many generations. Accordingly, it is usually not possible to establish when and under what circumstances languages "begin" and become new languages. The question is, from what point on can their development be tracked as a new language, for instance the transition point from Latin to Italian, or from Old Nordic to Danish. There is, however, one fascinating exception: languages whose existence derives from contact between other, older languages that appear to develop quickly into a very different language. A *contact language* can be defined as a "new" language – one that did not exist prior to having emerged from a situation in which the repertoires of linguistic codes available to the people in contact did not provide a sufficiently effective tool for sustained communication (cf. Bakker & Matras 2013b: 1). Specialists in contact linguistics generally distinguish three main types of contact languages: pidgins, creoles, and mixed (or intertwined) languages. For an overview of contact linguistics as a field, including further discussion of different types of contact languages and their different social and structural characteristics, see, for example, Bakker & Matras (2013a), Velupillai (2015), and Grant (2019).[1]

Because of its origins in group L2 acquisition traceable to a specific time and place in recorded history, it is possible, broadly speaking, to establish with a relatively high degree of accuracy when, where, and under what circumstances a given contact language initially formed. Accordingly, it is often possible to explore who was involved in this process, what the linguistic inputs were, how these inputs manifest in the resulting lan-

[1] To this, one could opt to add partially restructured varieties (in the sense of Holm 2004), among other types of contact-influenced varieties. As discussed for example by Thomason (2001: 158), there is no uniform or universally accepted definition of the term "contact language" in the literature; rather, two main usages exist. In addition to the definition already provided, some scholars apply the term to all languages of wider communication used in intergroup interaction. Here, we use the term in the former, more restrictive sense.

guage, and, ultimately, what all this might reveal about human beings' capacity for language creation and their underlying motivations. This, in contrast, is not possible with older languages. It also depends, of course, on the specific documentary record.

In addition, after the initial, formative stage, many contact languages remain embedded in complex, evolving, and multilingual contact "ecologies" that continue to exert influence on their development. If we extend our focus to the post-formative stage, then also in this sense, the study of contact languages offers a fascinating perspective on the crossroads of language evolution and social history. Such an approach tends to yield intriguing sociolinguistic insights, both synchronic and diachronic in nature. Thus, each contact language – and each contact setting – presents a range of research opportunities, offering a testing ground for (what often ultimately boils down to) evaluating the respective contributions of cognitive, linguistic-typological, and social factors in scenarios of language emergence and development. Among other, related topics, this lies at the heart of empirically driven contact linguistics.

This special issue of *Scandinavian Studies in Language* presents a series of contributions aimed at shedding new light on the historical contexts and sociolinguistic dynamics of contact linguistic phenomena related specifically to Danish and Dutch activities and spheres of influence in colonial settings. This focus extends to a range of territories, and to a range of types of contact languages and situations. This special issue focuses principally on discussions of creoles and multilingualism in the former Danish West Indies (now the US Virgin Islands) and the highly interconnected Dutch Caribbean, in the northern and southwestern Lesser Antilles, as well as pidgin and contact influences in Iceland (which was under Danish(-Norwegian) control since 1380). In addition, the focus could be extended to several other territories and topics that are not directly addressed in the contributions featured in this publication.

We would like to emphasize at this point that, contrary to what might appear to be the case at first glance, it makes excellent sense to treat the Danish and Dutch colonial settings and influences together in connection with research on pidgins, creoles, and language contact. Denmark and the Netherlands were relatively minor as colonial powers. Both the Danes and the Dutch were involved, in different extents, in the transformation of the

language landscape in various colonial contexts. Accordingly, there are important shared historical circumstances, such as the transatlantic slave trade and colonial administration, which led to similar linguistic outcomes in territories affected by these colonial powers. Additionally, it should be highlighted that, in the Danish West Indies – the primary Danish-owned exploitation colony, located in the Lesser Antilles in the Caribbean – the majority of the early European-derived population had a background in the Netherlands and were often not speakers of Danish, but of Dutch (cf. Bakker & Bøegh 2021: 128 ff., with further references). Thus, in this context, the modern, clear-cut national distinction can, in fact, obscure recognition of the actual interconnectedness that existed between Danish and Dutch colonial activities and spheres of interest (cf. Simonsen & Christensen 2023 for some illustrative examples from the Lesser Antilles).

In contact linguistics, recent years have witnessed a renewed increase in research exploring the diachronic development and typological status of individual contact languages, based on examination and contextualization of sources of historical textual evidence uncovered through archival research (e.g. Jacobs & Parkvall 2020; Bakker 2022; Bøegh et al. 2022, to list just a few relevant studies). This includes critical investigations into the contexts in which these languages were embedded and were documented historically, yielding new insights into the social circumstances and sociolinguistic dynamics that influenced them over time (for a general overview and further discussion, see e.g. Huber 2020).

After a slow start in Scandinavia compared to other broadly comparable national contexts, there is now a burgeoning interest in empirically exploring the diachrony of contact languages in various Scandinavian-related contexts (for an early discussion on Scandinavian contact languages, cf. Bakker 2003). By comparison, it is worth noting the rich tradition of contact linguistic research within Dutch linguistics. In fact, much of the existing work on Danish colonial language history has its roots in Dutch academic environments (an excellent example in illustration of this being Van Rossem & Van der Voort 1996). Still, when compared to other European colonial powers operating in similar regional, temporal, and sociohistorical contexts, there is no doubt that many relevant varieties and activities remain largely underexplored and insufficiently accounted for, including in contact linguistic research. Thus, there is still much essential work to be done in this area, including, paraphrasing Sabino (2012: 4, citing Price

2007: 30), "epistemological stone walls" yet to dismantle. Doing this is achievable with effort and the use of appropriate methods and materials.

The motivation behind designing this special issue was a wish to provide a forum for scholars to address historically oriented linguistic research questions, specifically engaging with empirical gaps as well as new research potentials in general, related to Danish and Dutch colonialism and the diverse outcomes of language contact in such settings. A secondary aim was to increase the visibility of this type of research within a Scandinavian context. We wanted to place focus on, and hence stimulate a renewed exploration of, sources for Danish and Dutch overseas language history and colonial influences. Also other, interconnected encounters and intersections, including with Africa, North America, and beyond, were of interest in connection with discussions of pidgins, creoles, and language contact.

One vision behind the journal *Scandinavian Studies in Language* is to "connect Scandinavia and the world through the publication of papers and special issues that bring together multiple perspectives and traditions" (quoted from the journal's website, last accessed 10 December 2024). The contents of this special issue show that we have successfully achieved this goal. In line with the journal's stated aim of bridging Scandinavian and global research trends, and its interdisciplinary commitment, we were able to bring a set of compelling articles together under the headline of "Pidgins, creoles, and language contact in Danish and Dutch colonial contexts". The end result is a special issue featuring a total of nine contributions. We are pleased to note that, when considered as a collection under an overarching theme, the contributions reflect the interdisciplinary nature of scholarship within this field of inquiry. This is evident both in their contents and focus areas, as well as in the range of authors behind the various works. The articles are authored by a combination of linguists, philologists, and historians, demonstrating how this field is open to, and to a degree contingent on, interdisciplinary standards of evidence. The field thus benefits from a range of expertise, insights, and cross-pollination of scholarly perspectives. The articles are also reviewed by scholars from across these disciplines.

It is our hope that the articles in this special issue will reach a wide readership, in Scandinavia as well as internationally, and will help inform new empirically driven, historically oriented contact linguistic research in the coming years. The remainder of this introduction is structured as follows. In Section 2, we provide summaries and additional contextualization

for the various contributions featured in the special issue. In Section 3, we present some notes on the different contributors.

2. The contributions

Since the onset of European transatlantic expansion, the circum-Caribbean region has functioned as an intersection where Europe, Africa, and the Americas "meet". One chapter in this much larger history is the story of Denmark (or, until 1814: Denmark-Norway) colonizing three of the Virgin Islands: St. Thomas (1672), St. John (1718), and St. Croix (1733/34), which became known as the Danish West Indies (and, since 1917, as the US Virgin Islands). For an overview of the history of the Danish West Indies, see, for example, Olsen (2017). The majority of the contributions in this special issue revolve around the language history of these islands. They emphasize the linguistic variation and diversity found there, spanning from the early 20th century back to the 18th century. Adopting various modes of analysis, some contributions introduce and explore newly discovered sources, while others provide new perspectives on already-known empirical material, all in connection with discussions of the islands' creole languages and/or historical multilingualism. For the presentation order of these contributions, we have opted for a broadly understood (though not strictly adhered to) reverse chronological approach, starting with creole language documentation in the 1920s and then working our way back in time.

In his article, "The suspicion confirmed: J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong's 1923 linguistic fieldwork in St. Thomas and St. John on Virgin Islands Dutch Creole", **Cefas van Rossem** (Meertens Institute, Amsterdam) examines the Dutch anthropologist J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong's (1886–1964) 1923 linguistic fieldwork in the US Virgin Islands, focusing on his documentation of Virgin Islands Dutch Creole (VIDC) on St. Thomas and St. John. The article highlights De Josselin de Jong's efforts to preserve the remnants of VIDC by engaging with some of its last native speakers and recording their stories. His results, stories and a word list, were published in De Josselin de Jong (1926). Van Rossem's article offers a comprehensive overview of De Josselin de Jong's fieldwork activities, emphasizing the importance of his findings, and evaluating his contributions to the documentation and study of VIDC. In a meticulous analysis, based on an examination of De Josselin de Jong's fieldwork diary (De Josselin de Jong 1922–1923), Van Rossem traces the chronology of De Josselin de Jong's

interactions with native speakers, addresses various challenges he faced during the fieldwork, and discusses the influence of his work on later creole studies. By revisiting and analyzing a pivotal moment in the history of VIDC documentation, the article brings new insights to our understanding of this ground-breaking fieldwork in the early 20th century and its impact on contemporary perspectives on VIDC.

Shifting the focus to the mid-19th century, and changing the perspective from VIDC as spoken on St. Thomas and St. John to Virgin Islands English Creole as heard on St. Croix, in the next article **Kristoffer Friis Bøegh** (Utrecht University, Aarhus University) and **Peter Bakker** (Aarhus University) present an introduction to a diplomatic edition of a recently (re)discovered 78-page manuscript titled *Recollections of a West-Indian Home and Slave-Insurrection* by the Caribbean-born writer and educator **Dora Richards Miller** (1835–1914). Finalized around 1886, Miller's *Recollections* contains an account of her memories of the 1848 slave uprising on St. Croix, which resulted in the emancipation of the enslaved population in the Danish West Indies. From a linguistic viewpoint, this document is valuable because it contains a considerable number of direct quotations and the lyrics of an 1848 song in a historical form of Crucian English Creole. (*Crucian* is an adjective meaning 'of St. Croix'.) The introductory study to this valuable text situates Miller's manuscript within its historical context, providing an overview of the life and work of the author. It also establishes why the account was not published by Miller, in her version, during her own lifetime. The article also provides a linguistic discussion of Miller's Crucian English Creole texts, thus adding to our understanding of the linguistic repertoires of the Danish West Indies in the 19th century. The diplomatic edition of Miller's text is edited and annotated by the authors of the introductory study. Miller's account is also of interest, as it reveals many new facts, and views on the events from the perspective of both the European settlers and the enslaved.

The next article takes a look at the multilingual reality of the Danish West Indies, placing focus on the potential in an as yet underutilized but important set of sources for adding to our understanding of the historical sociolinguistic situation in the islands. In his study, "'Stutters very much' and speaks 'bad English': Displays of communicative struggles and linguistic diversity among enslaved people in the Danish West Indies, 1770–1807", **Aske Stick** (Uppsala University) draws upon a corpus of runaway

slave advertisements sourced from newspapers published in St. Croix between 1770 and 1807. Stick's article explores ways in which speech impairments, ways of speaking, and language competences were represented in St. Croix newspapers, specifically in this text type of runaway slave advertisements, printed as a means of identifying individuals on the run. The author provides examples in illustration of how members of the enslaved population's speech, including their knowledge and uses of African languages and the Dutch- and English-lexifier Virgin Islands creoles, but also the prevalence of (perceived) "language-related difficulties" among them, were described through the eyes of their enslavers. This is used by the author as a basis for highlighting broader aspects of the enslaved experience in the Caribbean and reflecting an often-neglected history of language in slavery studies. The Danish West Indies were marked by extensive African ethnolinguistic diversity, as the enslaved population spoke more than 25 different African languages (cf. Oldendorp 1777, 2000; Bøegh 2024).

In his article, "Grammaticography of Virgin Islands Dutch Creole (Negerhollands) from the Danish West Indies: Oldendorp and Magens", **Peter Stein** (University of Regensburg) explores aspects of the early writing of grammatical descriptions of creole languages.[2] This began in the 18th century in the Danish West Indies, with studies of VIDC by islanders and missionaries. Stein places focus on language descriptions written by German Moravians and an islander of Danish descent. He centers on the key works produced by the Moravian missionary historian C.G.A. Oldendorp. An abridged version of his detailed account was published as Oldendorp (1777). The complete manuscript was published as Oldendorp (2000–2002). The Danish administrator J.M. Magens (Magens 1770; partial translation published as Magens 2008), born on St. Thomas, was the author of a grammar. Stein discusses these early works in their historical context, offering a comparative study of selected grammatical features that shed light on the respective merits and shortcomings of the descriptions. Stein

[2] As hinted by the title of Stein's article, the Dutch-based creole language of the Virgin Islands was previously best known as "Negerhollands" in the literature (for further information, see Van Rossem & Van der Voort 1996: vii). Since the 2010s, the term VIDC (Virgin Islands Dutch Creole) has generally been favored in the literature. Another term, which finds good use in the present special issue, in several of the articles, is "Carriolse" (or "Carriolsche"), which Stein (1982, 1986) documented as being in use already by the 1730s in the Danish West Indies for this Dutch-lexifier creole.

points to the continued relevance of these important early works for contemporary creole studies, and contact linguistics in a broader sense, highlighting, for example, Oldendorp's documentation and pioneering description of serial verb constructions in VIDC, and thus emphasizing the potential for further research into these and other early descriptions and extant missionary sources from the Danish West Indies. Magens' grammar is the first printed grammar of a creole language, and also therefore important.

Following this lead, in their article, "Initiating reading in Creole: Contents and contexts of primers in the Danish West Indies, 1770–1825", **Charlotte Appel**, **Peter Bakker**, and **Joost Robbe** (all Aarhus University) analyze five VIDC catechism primers produced by Danish Lutheran and German Moravian missionaries in their efforts to proselytize Christianity among enslaved people in the Danish West Indies. One of the five booklets is a recently discovered anonymous Lutheran primer text (Anon. 1782), not previously discussed in the historical or linguistic literature. The authors compare the texts' organization, layout, and contents, highlighting changes over time. Moreover, they situate the primers within the context of European religious print production and other Lutheran and Moravian missions to Greenland, the Sápmi region in Northern Scandinavia, and Tranquebar (India). The article sheds new light on these sources used for the literacy of the enslaved population in the Danish West Indies, and illustrates the importance of studying early colonial catechism primers in both European and colonial contexts.

Adding a linguistic component to the analysis presented by Appel and colleagues, **Joost Robbe** and **Peter Bakker** (both Aarhus University) conduct a linguistic comparison between four of the five primers, thus including the new addition (Anon. 1782) to the corpus of known VIDC missionary texts. They examine to what extent the (written) forms of Creole represented in the primers differ from each other and how close they are to Dutch and the most relevant Dutch dialect, and to the Creole as later documented and described in the 20th century. Investigations are carried out on four levels, which differ methodologically from each other: i) a variable-related study of grammar (morphology and syntax); ii) based on this: a comparative analysis using software of computational phylogenetics; iii) a graphematic system analysis; and iv) a (tentative) phonemic analysis. The

results obtained from the different levels of analysis indicate that the primers were produced independently from each other. They also reveal that the anonymous 1782 primer was, in fact, produced by Magens.

The two final articles in this special issue shift the geographical perspective and, thematically, move in somewhat different, albeit related, directions compared to the contributions discussed thus far. In his article, "Zones of intense linguistic contact and the situation of the Southern Caribbean", **Anthony Grant** (Edge Hill University) takes a look at a number of territories and creoles in the Southern Caribbean, particularly the former Netherlands Antilles, Suriname, French Guiana, and Guyana, all influenced by Dutch colonialism. Intense language contact has led to a number of typologically less common linguistic phenomena, including partial relexification and extreme borrowing. These territories showcase rare patterns of borrowing and linguistic change, affecting not only the Periphery but also the Core, which normally would only consist of inherited morphs (cf. Grant 2019). Adopting a comparative perspective, the article focuses on three creoles – Saramaccan of Suriname, Papiamentu of the Dutch Antilles, and Berbice Dutch of Guyana, each of which is strongly influenced by Dutch. Grant explores how historical and linguistic documentation and evidence from related languages reveal the development of this zone of intense linguistic contact, which sheds light on it within its global context.

Finally, in her article, "Representation of Icelandic-Basque contacts in a Finnish novel", **Kendra Willson** (University of Turku) examines how Tapio Koivukari's novel *Ariasman* (2011) depicts an extinct Icelandic Basque pidgin from the 17th century. This pidgin is documented in 17th century word lists (Bakker et al. 1991). As Iceland was at that time under Danish trade monopoly, exchange with whalers who approached the Icelandic coast was illegal and dangerous. Koivukari's book explores the contact situation connected with a massacre that took place in Iceland in 1615, in which the crew of a wrecked Basque whaling ship were killed by locals in the West Fjords. Willson explores the novel's use of historical word lists, the author's use of modern languages, and the use of imaginative reconstruction to create novel pidgin phrases focused on semantic fields such as animals, food, clothing, religion, and interpersonal relationships. She also analyzes the adaptation of Icelandic names to Basque phonology, multilingual wordplay in the text, and the historical context. Additionally, she highlights how the novel addresses communication challenges and strategies,

offering a creative lens on the dynamics of historical language contact, specifically as found in an Icelandic setting. She discusses the relationship between artistic speculation and scholarly reconstruction, examining how this modern example may inform the interpretation of older literary representations of contact language varieties.

3. Notes on the guest editors and the contributors

- Kristoffer Friis Bøegh (guest editor) works as a postdoctoral researcher at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. His research project "The Danish West Indian Missionary Creolistic Tradition" is funded by the Carlsberg Foundation (Grant CF23-1162) and runs for a two-year period from December 2024. At the time this special issue was announced and throughout its preparation until the finalization stage, he was employed at the Department of Scandinavian Studies and Experience Economy at Aarhus University in Denmark. Email: k.f.boegh@uu.nl
- Peter Bakker (guest editor) works as associate professor in linguistics at Aarhus University and is PI of the research project "Digital Demography, Creole Creation, Light on Letters", running for a two-year period from ultimo 2024, funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark (Grant 10.46540/4256-00026B). He is a specialist in contact languages, including pidgins, creoles, and mixed languages, and the world's linguistic diversity. Email: linpb@cc.au.dk
- Charlotte Appel is associate professor in history at Aarhus University. She specializes in topics related to church, book, and educational history. Email: chap@cas.au.dk
- Anthony Grant is professor of English at Edge Hill University in Ormskirk, Lancashire, England. He edited *The Oxford Handbook of Language Contact* (2019). Email: granta@edgehill.ac.uk
- Dora Richards Miller (1835–1914) was a writer and educator, born in the Danish West Indies, who witnessed the insurrection of the enslaved on St. Croix in 1848, quoting different Crucian people in their version of English Creole in her *Recollections*.
- Joost Robbe works as a researcher in linguistics at Aarhus University. He is connected to the project "Digital Demography, Creole Creation, Light on Letters". Robbe is a philologist specializing in Dutch language evolution, literature, and history. Email: gerjr@cc.au.dk

- Peter Stein is emeritus professor in Romance linguistics at University of Regensburg, Germany. He has worked extensively on "Cariolisch" or Virgin Islands Dutch Creole. He discovered a range of documents in this language in the archives in Herrnhut, Germany. Email: steinpeter47@gmail.com
- Aske Stick is a historian pursuing a PhD at Uppsala University in Sweden. His research focuses on fugitive slave life in the Danish West Indies, a.o. based on newspaper announcements from the islands and the detailed archives of the Danish Caribbean colonial state. Email: aske.stick@hist.uu.se
- Cefas van Rossem is a guest researcher at the Meertens Institute of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in Amsterdam. He is a specialist in the philological study of Virgin Islands Dutch Creole. Email: cefas.van.rossem@meertens.knaw.nl
- Kendra Willson was a researcher in Nordic languages at the University of Turku in Finland. She is now connected to Jagiellonian University, Kraków. Email: kendra.willson@uj.edu.pl

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