
GRAMMATICOGRAPHY OF VIRGIN ISLANDS DUTCH CREOLE (NEGERHOLLANDS) FROM THE DANISH WEST INDIES: OLDENDORP AND MAGENS

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Abstract

The writing of grammars of creole languages started in the 18th century in the Danish colony of the Virgin Islands, where a Dutch-based creole was spoken. The grammars were written as part of the activities of the Moravian missionaries as well as by the missionaries of the Danish Lutheran church. The historian C.G.A. Oldendorp describes the Creole language on 50 pages of the manuscript of his *Historie der caribischen Inseln...* This manuscript was published in its complete form in 2000/2002. Only a very abridged version of the grammatical description had already been printed in 1777. A few years earlier, in 1770, the *Grammatica* of the Creole by the Danish colonist Magens was published in Copenhagen, in Danish. This was the first grammar of a creole language ever printed as a book. The following article will present the three early grammatical works in their historical context. It will provide a comparative study in order to show the merits as well as the weak points of the three texts.

Keywords: Dutch creoles; Danish West Indies; Moravian Brethren; grammaticography; grammars; Virgin Islands; Creole

1. Introduction*

Creole grammaticography began in the 18th century, more precisely in the 1770s in the small Danish colony of the Virgin Islands, made up of the three islands, St. Thomas, St. John (St. Jan) and St. Croix, then known as

*An earlier version of this article (Stein 2023) was published in French in the journal *Archipélices*, in a special issue on grammar writing in the Caribbean and French Guiana between the 1700s and the 1900s. We are grateful to the editors of *Archipélices* and the author for granting permission to reuse the material for this English version. The author of the article is grateful to the translators and editors Peter Bakker and Kristoffer Friis Bøegh.

the Danish West Indies. Denmark sold their colonial possessions to the United States in 1917, and since then the islands have been called the US Virgin Islands. The Moravian Brethren (see a.o. Stein 2014b) arrived there in 1732 and brought the Christian faith to the enslaved population. About twenty years later, the Danish Protestant Church followed their example. They began to establish a slave congregation, working within essentially the same framework as the Brethren, very soon after their arrival. They recognized the importance of the local Creole language in establishing contact with the enslaved population, whom they considered their brothers and sisters. The Creole language was Dutch-based, as the majority of European settlers were Dutch. The Creole was increasingly replaced by English from the mid-19th century onwards and is now extinct.

The Moravian Brethren learned the Creole language of the enslaved, and they also began to write it down, with catechetical texts, hymns, and translations of the Bible. They began to teach the enslaved to read, and some of them were also able to write and communicate through letters. The first printed and extant Creole book dates from 1765 (Anon. 1765). It was not, however, the first printed text, because the Count of Zinzendorf, during his visit to the islands in 1739, had written a farewell letter to the enslaved. This letter, and two letters from enslaved islanders addressed to the King and Queen of Denmark, were printed in Germany “in cariolischer Sprache” (in the cariole [Creole] language) in 1742, in a large volume of works by Zinzendorf, written in various languages (Zinzendorf 1742, especially pages 453–457 and pages 483–487 in Volume 1). In 1759, the baptism register already numbered more than a thousand people.

In 1767–1768, Christian Georg Andreas Oldendorp, who had studied theology in Jena, spent 17 months in the islands, tasked with writing a history of the first 35 years of the mission of the Moravian Brethren. The result was a manuscript of more than 3,000 pages, approximately 50 of which provide a description of the Creole language, including illustrative texts. And it was not only a detailed, day-by-day history of the activities of the missionaries and the small community of enslaved, but also an encyclopedia of the islands and life in the islands. It was considered too long a text to be published at the time, and it contained data on life in a slave society that could not be published in Europe at that time without serious risks for the mission and the missionaries. As a result, the text had to be reworked and shortened. The new version written by Oldendorp was not much

shorter, however, so a certain Johann Jakob Bossart was commissioned to rework the text. The result did not satisfy Oldendorp, who protested, but he had to accept and withdraw. Bossart's version, which was published in 1777 (Oldendorp 1777), was still more than 1,000 pages, including nine pages covering an essay on and a grammatical sketch of the Creole language. When creolists talk about Oldendorp's grammatical description today, they usually refer to this early printed text; it was not until 1987 that Bossart's version was translated into English and edited by Highfield and Barac (Oldendorp 1987).

The Oldendorp manuscript, or rather both manuscripts, were kept in the Archives of the Moravian Brethren in Herrnhut, Germany, and the full text was finally published in 2000–2002, more than 200 years after its writing, by a team of researchers, in four large volumes (Oldendorp 2000–2002). The description of Creole or Creole grammar is not only much longer than in Bossart's version, published in 1777, but it also differs in certain aspects. Oldendorp noted and wrote dialogues, expressions and proverbs as well as texts used in the religious service: they accompany the grammar to illustrate the language.

Around the same time, probably after Oldendorp had left and returned to Europe, but before his book was published, the Danish colonist Joachim Melchior Magens, an island inhabitant ("en paa St. Thomas Indföd Mand", i.e., a man born on St. Thomas), wrote a Creole grammar for use by the Danish mission. This grammar was printed and published in Copenhagen in 1770 (Magens 1770) in Danish, and it was thus the first grammar of a Creole language ever printed, a book of 80 pages. 20 of those were devoted to the description of the language, and there were 50 pages of examples of the language, daily expressions, dialogues, and sayings and proverbs, as well as 14 pages of catechetical teaching. For Oldendorp, the texts accompany and illustrate his description of the language, but for Magens they seem to dominate it by their abundance. A partial translation of Magens' grammar into English has appeared, but without the important texts and dialogues (Magens 2008). Magens' grammar was also the topic of an MA thesis, including a discussion of Oldendorp's abbreviated grammar as published in the 1700s (Dyhr 2001), in comparison with Magens' grammar.

We thus have three grammars which describe a creole language spoken (and also written) in the 18th century. We will now embark on comparing the three grammars and demonstrate their value and differences.

2. The three grammars or descriptions of the Creole language

The first grammar to appear was that of Magens, printed in 1770. More than half of the 80 pages present texts, and when we look at the dialogues more closely, we realize that the subjects discussed mainly concern the lives of the white inhabitants and much less the living conditions and the lives of the enslaved. The grammatical part, which precedes them, consists mainly of morphological tables and lists of grammatical words (cardinal and ordinal numbers, names of days and months, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections), with the Creole text in columns on the left and their translation into Danish on the right side of the page, thus following the model of Latin grammar. The list of tenses and modes and the terminology corresponds to that of Latin grammar. Magens thus describes Creole as he would describe any inflected European language, and he forces Creole more or less into this matrix. Alongside the tables and lists of words, there are some remarks and explanations, which have the merit of describing and analyzing typical structures of Creole. We also find those treated by Oldendorp, where, in Bossart's version, printed in 1777, they are as brief as in Magens (1770). On the other hand, they are much more numerous, longer and richer in Oldendorp's manuscript text, and they deal with certain subjects which were not retained by Bossart.

The description of the language given to us by Oldendorp (pages 681 to 715 of the 2000 edition which correspond to pages 771 to 811 of the manuscript, followed by 10 pages of Creole texts, and pages 424 to 434 of the book printed in 1777, followed by two pages of Creole texts) is very different. It is part of his very rich and voluminous history of the mission of the Moravian Brethren and more precisely of his encyclopedic description of the Danish Virgin Islands and the whole of the Caribbean islands. It is not a grammar in the proper sense of the term, but a description of the language, of which Bossart, in his shortened version, retained only the most important features and those which seemed to him to deserve to be communicated to its readers in Europe. Oldendorp himself says that he did not intend to write a grammar ("Sprachlehre") of the Creole, but only to give examples of it and offer a broad descriptive sketch, and Bossart entitles the

chapter simply “Von der creolischen Sprache der Neger¹” (‘About the Creole language of the Black people’). In Zinzendorf (1742), we find the word in the form “Cariolisch”; Oldendorp writes “criolisch” in his manuscript, written after 1767, and Bossart, ten years later, in 1777, writes “creolisch”. For Magens, in 1770, it was “Creolske” (adjectival form).

The two versions, Oldendorp’s manuscript and Bossart’s abridged version, do not have tables, but have the form of a continuous text, where nonetheless the same categories appear, namely those of the Latin grammar tradition. Bossart reduced the size of the original manuscript text without reducing its content. He points to, from the perspective of European languages, a certain simplicity of the Creole language and thus what he considers to be its inferiority compared to European languages, due to the formal invariability of words. Oldendorp also speaks of a form of simplicity of language, but rather in a positive sense:

It is as if we had invented this language on purpose to allow Black people who just arrived from Guinea [i.e. Africa], to converse more easily with white people and to teach them this language in a very short time. They learn it very quickly and they are very good at learning languages (Oldendorp 2000: 711, our translation²)

And while Oldendorp himself speaks of the Creole language (“die criolische Sprache”), Bossart uses the term ‘language’ while saying that he doubts such a label is, in fact, appropriate. Magens speaks in the title of his *Grammatica* of the “Creolske Sprog” (Creole language), like Oldendorp.

While relying on the categories of Latin grammar, Oldendorp observes and describes structures that go beyond those of the Latin model, structures that lie outside of what we find in traditional Latin grammar, and this is where Bossart only partially follows him. In addition, Oldendorp is interested in practical aspects and thus does applied linguistics. He seeks an appropriate spelling located between the phonology of Creole and the

¹ Oldendorp uses the two words “die Schwarzen” (‘the Blacks’) and “die Neger” (‘the Negroes’) as synonyms and without apparent semantic differences and without an apparent difference in frequency. This was the terminology in use at the time and well into the 20th century.

² The original German text: “Es ist, als wäre diese Sprache mit Fleiß erfunden worden, den ankommenden guineischen Schwarzen das Reden mit den Blanken recht leicht und sie in kurzer Zeit dazu geschickt zu machen. Sie fassen sie auch sehr geschwind und haben überhaupt eine große Fähigkeit, Sprachen zu lernen”.

Dutch spellings in use, and he shows the problem of the use of syntactic structures too close to European languages and far from the uses of Creole, or of lexical neologisms foreign to enslaved, to translate biblical and other texts.

3. The verbal system

In order to better understand and see how both authors view Creole and its structures, let's take the verbal system as an example.

Over ten pages (14–23), Magens deals with the verb, first, in §12, [*de*] *Verbo auxiliari*, concerned with *wees* ('to be'), where he provides conjugation tables for the six persons, although the verb is invariable, except for the present where we find *bin* instead of *wees*. *Bin* or *ben* corresponds to the first person singular in Dutch and German. Our Creole stands out here from other creoles for having chosen the form of the first person singular. In Dutch dialects, however, forms like *bennen* (plural) are also heard. In Creole, only the subject personal pronoun changes (*mie*, *ju*, *hem*, *ons*, *jender*, *sender*). Magens gives the names of the tenses in Latin, as follows:

- Praesens Indicativi: zero particle
- Praeteritum Imperfectum: *ha*
- Praeteritum Perfectum: *ka*
- Praeteritum Plusquamperfectum: *ha ka*
- Futurum: *sa*
- Paulopostfuturum: *sa ha*
- Imperativum:
- Conjunctivus: equal to the indicative, apart from *ha sa* in *Praeterito imperfecto*
- Infinitivus: *for* precedes the verb

Then, §13 deals with other *Verbis*, and it repeats the same tables with the verb *vervolg* ('to pursue' – why, one might ask, the particular choice of this verb?), and in the same paragraph follows the *Verbum Passivum* and, once again, the same pattern. The passive voice, moreover, is formed, according to Magens, as in Dutch, by the auxiliary *wees* (in the present tense *bin*), 'to be', followed, in our case, by the verbal form *verfolgt* ('pursued'), which corresponds to the past participle form of the two European languages.

A few notes follow, saying that most of the time the particle *le* is used to mark the present (*ape* in Haitian, *ka* in Guadeloupe and Martinique, *de* in Jamaican and *a* in Creolese of Guyana, *a/da* in Virgin Islands English Creole), which is also found in combination with the particle of the imperfect *ha*, namely *ha le*.

Regarding *ka* as a marker of the accomplished in our Creole, Magens notes that the word *ka* is often used in place of the copula *bin*, that is, ‘to be’. The following examples are taken from Magens (1770: 16):

Die Man ka trou ‘The man is married’
Die Meisje ka beloof ‘The girl is engaged’
Die Vrouw ka sjansee ‘The lady is well dressed’
Die Kabaj ka sael ‘The horse is saddled’
Die Hus ka bou ‘The house is built’

A second construction that both Magens and Oldendorp describe, but in different contexts, is that with *da* (‘here’, ‘there’) and with a repetition of the verb. Similar constructions are found in other creoles, including Berbice Dutch Creole *da*, where *da* corresponds to a large extent to *se* (‘it is’) in creoles based on French, and *da* in many English-lexifier creoles (Sranan, Belizean) or *na* (Krio). An African origin seems very likely here. Magens classifies *da* among relative and interrogative pronouns, because it often precedes question words, as in *Da wie ben daeso?* (‘Who is there?’), etc. And in the same way we can put *da*. Here are the examples that Magens gives just before dealing with the *Verbo auxiliari* and presenting the conjugation tables of *wees/bin* (Magens 1770: 13):

Da loop mie le loop ‘I am walking’
Da kurrie mie ha kurrie ‘I ran’
Da slaep mie ka slaep ‘I have slept!’
Da jeet mie ha ka jeet ‘I had eaten’
Da doot mie sa doot ‘I will die’
Da leef mie ha sa leef ‘I should have lived’

Oldendorp also talks about *ka* as a copula, but he focuses on *da* only, after discussing and presenting the tenses and moods of the verb.

As for the verb itself, Oldendorp, as we have just remarked, renounces tabulations. He presents the forms one after the other in the body text, which allows him to avoid too frequent repetitions, and he follows the terms of Latin grammar with their translation: “Perfectum/complete tense, Imperfectum/incomplete tense, Plusquamperfectum/ overcomplete tense, Futurum/future time”. He begins with personal pronouns using a slightly different spelling than Magens, closer to Dutch: *mi*, *joe*, *em* (‘he’, ‘she’), *die* (‘it’), *ons*, *jender*, *sender*, adding not only the neuter *die* to Magens’ list, but also the word *volk* (‘people’, ‘one’), which corresponds to the German *man* and the French *on*. It is similar to (*enn*) *dimoun* (<[there are] people), ‘someone, people’ in Mauritian and other creoles. Oldendorp (2000: 694–695, our translation³) writes:

The verb *I am* is used in the following way. The present tense is said in the singular *mi ben* ‘I am’; *joe ben* ‘you are’; *em ben* ‘he or she is’; *die ben* ‘that, it is’; *volk ben* ‘somebody is’; in the plural: *ons ben* ‘we are’; *jender ben* ‘you (plural) are’; *sender ben*, ‘they are’. The imperfect tense is said *mi a wees* ‘I was’; *joe a wees* ‘you were’; and so on for all the people until *sender a wees* ‘they were’. The perfect tense: *mi ka wees* ‘I have been’; *joe ka wees* ‘you have been’ etc. The pluperfect tense: *mi a ka wees* ‘I had been’, etc. The future tense: *mi sal wees* ‘I will be’; *joe sal wees* ‘you will be’ and so on until: *sender sal wees* ‘they will be’; and in the same way *mi sal ka wees* ‘I would have been’; *joe sal ka wees*, etc.

Oldendorp continues with the imperative, the infinitive and the so-called gerund, formed by *voor* (‘for’) + verb (in the infinitive). There is no explicit subjunctive, but we can add *moe* and *moet*, which are phonetic variants of the same word, before the verb. The meaning is ‘must’, which, in a broader sense, may approach ‘may’ in certain contexts. In his description, Magens goes in the same direction, but in a much more succinct way.

³ Original German text: “Das Verbum *ich bin* gehet auf folgende Weise. Die gegenwärtige Zeit oder das Präsens heißt in der einzeln Zahl: *mi ben* ‘ich bin’; *joe ben* ‘du bist’; *em ben* ‘er oder sie ist’; *die ben* ‘es ist’; *volk ben* ‘man ist’; in der mehrern Zahl: *ons ben* ‘wir sind’; *jender ben* ‘ihr seid’; *sender ben* ‘sie sind’. Die unvollkommene Zeit oder das Imperfectum heißt: *mi a wees* ‘ich war’; *joe a wees* ‘du warst’, und so weiter durch alle Personen bis *sender a wees* ‘sie waren’. Die vollkommene Zeit oder das Perfectum: *mi ka wees* ‘ich bin gewesen’; *joe ka wees* ‘du bist gewesen’ u.s.w. Die übervollkommene Zeit oder das Plusquamperfectum: *mi a ka wees* ‘ich war gewesen’ u.s.w. Die zukünftige Zeit oder das Futurum: *mi sal wees* ‘ich werde sein’; *joe sal wees* ‘du wirst sein’, und so weiter bis *sender sal wees* ‘sie werden sein’; ingleichen *mi sal ka wees* ‘ich werde oder soll gewesen sein’; *joe sal ka wees* u.s.w.”.

The second auxiliary verb is *ha* ('to have'). It does not, however, have an auxiliary function in Creole, which Oldendorp does not seem to have noticed. It functions in the same way, and all the other verbs too. The verb Oldendorp chooses as an example is *skriev* ('to write').

Like Magens, Oldendorp notes the particle *le*, which is frequent, instead of zero marking, to express the present, but he observed its precise function better and he thus notes that there are some verbs which do not allow it: *mi ben* ('to be'), *mi ha* ('to have'), *mi moet/moe* ('must'), *mi sal* ('to have to'), *mi kan* ('to be able to'), *mi wil* ('to want'), *mi daerf* ('to have permission'). Oldendorp was thus the first to have noted the difference in behavior between stative and non-stative verbs. He subsequently explains this as follows:

It is a marker of the present, without being obligatory. It is used to make speech more melodious and more fluid. Its real function is to express that something is happening (Oldendorp 2000: 697, our translation⁴)

Before talking about the passive voice, he observes, like Magens, that the particle of the past perfect, which is *ka*, can replace the copula *ben*:

People say *mi ka moe* instead of *mi ben moe* 'I'm tired'; *allegaar goed ka klaar* 'everything (all things) is ready'; *die kaschoe sender ka riep* 'the cashew nuts are ripe'; *die pot ka vol* 'the pot is full'; *die kawai sender ka saddel* 'the horses are saddled'; *mi no ka kleed* 'I am not dressed' and so on. (Oldendorp 2000: 697, our translation⁵)

Both Magens and Oldendorp thus evoke, without knowing it, a question currently discussed by creolists, of whether there are in fact adjectives in creole languages. For a summary of this discussion, see Stein (2021).

⁴ Original German text: "Es ist ein Zeichen des Präsens, das aber auch ausgelassen werden kann. Um des Wohlklangs willen bedient man sich seiner am meisten, weil es die Rede fließender macht. Eigentlich soll es anzeigen, daß etwas schon geschieht und im Werden ist".

⁵ Original German text: "Für *ben* ist es sehr gewöhnlich, *ka* zu setzen. Man sagt: *mi ka moe* anstatt *mi ben moe* 'ich bin müde'; *allegaar goed ka klaar* 'alles ist fertig'; *die kaschoe sender ka riep* 'die Caschu sind reif'; *die pot ka vol* 'der Topf ist voll'; *die kawai sender ka saddel* 'die Pferde sind gesattelt'; *mi no ka kleed* 'ich bin nicht angezogen', und dergleichen eine Menge".

Oldendorp continues with *da* and the double use of the verb to highlight the verb or express emphasis. Here are the examples that Oldendorp gives for the emphasis by *da* (see also above what Magens writes about *da*).

The verb is often put twice in a particular way to affirm something and to reinforce it, and in this case it is preceded by *da*. To the question *Joe no le kom?* ‘You are not coming?’, they answer *Da kom mi le kom* ‘Yes yes, I’m coming’ or ‘Of course I’m coming’. *Joe no a koeri?* ‘You didn’t run/You didn’t hurry?’. And the answer: *Da koeri mi a koeri* ‘I did run’. *Voor wagoed joe no loop?* ‘Why don’t you go?’ The answer: *Da loop mi le loop* ‘But look, I am going’. In the same way people say: *da slaap mi ka slaap* ‘Of course I slept’; *da jeet mi a ka jeet* ‘Yes, I had eaten’; *da dood em sal dood* ‘he’s going to die, that’s for sure,’ and so on”. (Oldendorp 2000: 698, our translation⁶)

For Oldendorp, *da* is part of the verb phrase, it is not a pronoun. He returns to it later, in the context of discussing particles, namely prepositions, conjunctions and adverbs. He notes:

Da is very often used to designate things which are present, which we maybe point at, which we want to highlight, which we speak of with joy, surprise or with other emotions, especially when we pose questions and when to answer. We say: *da mi wiefben da* ‘Look, here is my wife’; *da die* ‘That’s exactly it’; *bring mi die kaussen*. *Da welk mi sal bring?* ‘Go get me the socks. Which ones do you want me to bring you?’; *da ons ha die faut*, ‘It’s **our** fault’; *da joe Benina?* ‘Is it (really) you Benigna?’ *da jender le doe soo goed!* ‘Are you guys the ones who do such things?’ *da wie le kom? Da mi Meester le kom*. ‘Who is it who is coming?’ ‘It’s my master who’s coming’. There are many other examples. (Oldendorp 2000: 708, our translation)⁷

⁶ Original German text: “Das Verbum is oft auf eine besondere Art doppelt gebraucht, um etwas zu bekräftigen oder einen Nachdruck darauf zu legen, und alsdann wird immer *da* vor gesetzt. Auf die Frage: *joe no le kom?* ‘kommst du nicht?’ wird geantwortet: *Da kom mi le kom ja ja* ‘ich komme oder ich komme ja’. *Joe no a koeri?* ‘Bist du nicht gelaufen?’ Antwort: *Da koeri mi a koeri* ‘ich bin wohl gelaufen’. *Voor wagoed joe no loop?* ‘warum gehst du nicht?’ Antwort: *Da loop mi le loop* ‘ich gehe ja’. Ebenso sagt man: *da slaap mi ka slaap* ‘ich habe freilich geschlafen’; *da jeet mi a ka jeet* ‘ja, ich hatte gegessen’; *da dood em sal dood* ‘ja ja, er wird gewiß sterben’, und dergleichen mehr”.

⁷ Original German text: “*Da* wird sehr häufig von Dingen gebraucht, die gegenwärtig sind, auf die man gleichsam zeigt, auf die man einen Nachdruck legen will, bei denen man Freude, Verwunderung und andere Affecten äußert, sonderlich in Fragen und Antworten. Man sagt: *da mi wiefben da* ‘da ist meine Frau’; *da die* ‘das ist es eben’; *bring*

Subsequently, at the end of his grammatical description, Oldendorp mentions and discusses three more phenomena that are not found in Magens (1770). The first of these is the word *kabaa*, which follows *ka*, to emphasize that an action is truly finished. At the origin of both *kabaa* and *ka* is the Spanish verb *acabar* ‘to finish’. Thus, Oldendorp notes, people say: *die ka kabaa* ‘it’s finished, it’s done’; *die sal kabaa mee em* ‘it will be over with him’; *mi ka kabaa die werk* ‘I finished the work’; *die sukker ka riep kabaa*, ‘the sugar (the cane) is very ripe (for the harvest)’ (Oldendorp 2000: 709).

Right after that, he then talks about “superfluous words” (Oldendorp 2000: 709). He provides examples of subject repetition, which expresses a sort of emphasis: *Mi Meester em a see* ‘My master he said’; *mi God en Heiland em alleen ben mi betrouw* ‘My God and Savior, he alone is my assurance’.

Finally, he touches on serial verb constructions. Creolists became aware of these constructions not very long ago – Oldendorp preceded them by more than 200 years. After talking about subject repetition, he continues with the following examples:

Bring kom mi die goed hieso ‘Bring me the things here’; *mi bring die kom*, lit. ‘I bring it come’. These are common expressions in which *kom* (‘to come’) is all the more superfluous as it follows the word *bring*. The same is the case for *loop* (‘to go’) in an expression like *kom mi sal draag joe loop na Sanct Jan* ‘come I’ll take you to go to St. John’. (Oldendorp 2000: 709, our translation⁸)

4. The passive voice

Let’s return to the passive voice, for Oldendorp shows a particular interest in this construction. Magens also deals with it and he concludes that it is rarely used and that the active voice is used in its place. If we find it, it is almost always among white inhabitants, who construct it using the auxiliary verb *wees/ben*, that is, ‘to be’. Despite its very limited use, Magens

mi die kaussen. Da welk mi sal bring? ‘Bringe mir die Strümpfe. Welche soll ich bringen?’ *da ons ha die faut* ‘**wir** haben die Schuld’; *da joe Benina?* ‘Hey, is it you, Benigna?’ *da jender le doe soo goed!* ‘**ihr** tut so etwas!’ *da wie le kom?* *da mi Meester le kom.* ‘Wer kommt? Mein Meister kommt’, und so vieles mehr”.

⁸ Original German text: “*Bring kom mi die goed hieso* ‘bringe mir das her’; *mi bring die kom* ‘ich bringe es’, sind gewöhnliche Redensarten, worin *kom* desto überflüssiger ist, weil es dem *bringen* nachgesetzt wird. Ebenso ist es mit *loop* in der besondern Redensart: *kom mi sal draag joe loop na Sanct Jan* ‘komm, ich will dich nach St. Jan mitnehmen”.

presents it on almost four pages (19–23) using conjugation tables, similar to those for the active voice, and he even, almost mechanically, includes the imperative.

Oldendorp also notes the limited use or even virtual non-existence of the passive voice and the preference for the active voice. But he goes further than Magens and notes constructions that escaped Magens. Oldendorp notes that there is not only the verb *wees/ben* ‘to be’, but also the verb *kom* ‘to come’ (as in Italian, by the way) as well as the particle of the perfect/completive *ka* when it is a matter of an accomplished fact (the *Zustandspassiv*, the state passive voice of German), and this construction, *ka* + verb, corresponds according to him, in certain contexts, to the past participle of German. Regarding *ka*, Magens had only noted its use as a copula.

These possibilities are sufficient for everyday use of the language, but, as Oldendorp notes, they are not sufficient for adequately expressing the matters of spiritual life, for translating the Bible or hymns. It is for this reason that German constructions of the passive voice were introduced into the Creole language, namely the auxiliary verbs *woord/woor* or *wees* followed by the past participle of German or Dutch verbs like *geliefd* (‘loved’), *vervolgd* (‘pursued’), *pardoneerd* (‘forgiven’), *trakteerd* (‘treated’), *verhoogt* (‘raised’). However, we can also use the construction with *kom*, mentioned above: *mi kom geliefd* ‘I am loved’, etc. The modern reader will be surprised that the German/Dutch participle form remains in the examples given by Oldendorp.

And, in Oldendorp’s summary (Oldendorp 2000: 700) we learn this: Black people understand such passive verbs, but they use them very rarely. We must not use them too often, otherwise we no longer speak Creole, we then speak “uncriolisch”, that is to say, non-Creole, because there are only a limited number of verbs which accept such participles, and these are, it seems, verbs borrowed from German and introduced into Creole by missionaries. The verbs of more casual language form their participles with the particle *ka*; Oldendorp had already spoken about it previously: *ka doe* (‘done’), *ka maak* (‘made’), *ka praat* (‘spoken’), *ka hoor* (‘heard’), *ka voel* (‘felt’), *ka hou* (‘held’), *ka trek* (‘pulled’), *ka morss* (‘spilled’, ‘wasted’). The participles formed in the European way would not be understood, or only by those who know the two European languages; such neologisms would compromise the Creole language.

Oldendorp then distinguishes between the Creole spoken daily by the enslaved and the Creole written and used and partly also created by the missionaries for written use, and which, to a certain extent, is also their daily language. Magens seems rather to have described this variety of Creole, the Creole of the whites – he only speaks here of the passive voice formed using *woord* or *wees* – while Oldendorp was mainly interested in spoken Creole, more exactly, the variety spoken by the enslaved. When Pontoppidan, a century later, distinguished between “hochkreolisch” (i.e. high Creole) and “plattkreolisch” (low Creole), he referred to these two varieties (Pontoppidan 1881; Stein 2014a).

In a broader perspective, we are dealing here with the problem of older Creole documents, because it is the missionaries, and more generally (white) Europeans, who knew how to write, and it is their version of Creole which has been transmitted to us. This must be taken into account, and the data should be interpreted with some caution. Oldendorp seems to have been aware of this. He knew how to distinguish the two ways of speaking Creole, and the (dia)lect or variety that he transmitted to us is that of the enslaved population. It is the Creole spoken in the 18th century, the first grammar, or more modestly, the first description of the spoken variety of a Creole language. This is what also distinguishes his grammar from that of Magens, who only makes a few remarks relating to the particularities of Creole in relation to the languages traditionally described in grammars.

And what does Bossart do with Oldendorp’s text and with the information contained therein? In the context of the verb, it is the preference of the active voice he focuses on, and he only mentions two possibilities for expressing the passive voice, the one with *kom* and the one with *ka*. The construction with *ben/wees*, borrowed from Dutch or German, remains absent from the presentation. He clearly saw that it was a form of written language produced by the missionaries.

5. Oldendorp under the pen of Bossart

Bossart, finding himself in front of Oldendorp’s lengthy manuscript, had three duties to fulfill: shorten the text, present a clearly readable and understandable text to his readers, namely cultivated European men of the end of the 18th century, and present a text which does not arouse the distrust of the administration and the government. The third aspect does not concern (or only very little) the chapter on the Creole language; it is the first aspect

and especially the second that concerns us here. The question then is whether Bossart remains faithful to Oldendorp or whether he betrays him so as not to create difficulties for his readers in Europe, more precisely in Germany. A comparison of the two versions shows that he succeeded well, although he shortened and even deleted certain parts of Oldendorp's text, such as the long list and examples of the use of prepositions and conjunctions, of which only some remained. But the essentials have been preserved. What he did not keep were the pronouns *die* and *volk* and the passive voice expressed by *woord* or *wees*, which he does not even mention. On the other hand, he writes about the particle *le* and points out that certain verbs do not go with it, but he does not mention its progressive aspectual value. He mentions the subject repetition, and the highlighting of the verb by *da* and its double use, but – and this is the only point that must be regretted – he ignores the serial verb constructions. But leaving this point aside, Bossart succeeded in summarizing the essentials, which does not prevent the few pages from remaining far from the richness and depth of the version by Oldendorp himself.

6. Conclusion

At this point, for the sake of comparison, one might wonder which point we have reached with regard to the grammatical description of other creole languages – and there is nothing, nothing comparable for almost two generations to come. It took 60 years before Treu's manuscript grammar of Sranan was written in 1838, followed by Wullschlägel's book printed in 1854 relating to Sranan – two works again written in the context of the missionary work by the Moravian Brethren. For French-based creoles, we find the catechism of Abbé Goux in 1842, then the grammar by J.J. Thomas in 1869, Saint-Quentin's grammar of Guyanese Creole in 1872, Turiault's study of Martinican in 1872–1875 and finally the grammar of Mauritian by Baissac in 1880. What the reason for this delay in the French-speaking world is, we don't know. In other words, where did the early interest of the Moravian Brethren in their Creole come from, with, as a result, Oldendorp's masterpiece in the form of his description of the language? Why this special and extraordinary place for what might otherwise have been an insignificant and largely forgotten creole language, had events not granted him this opportunity and the good fortune of his written work being printed?

The answer lies in the social, political and historical context: a Danish colony that existed within a limited space, a Creole language based on Dutch, spoken in a multilingual and multi-ethnic society, on the African side as well as on the European side. Oldendorp mentions the Danes, English, Irish, Scottish, Dutch, German, Spanish, French and Jews (Oldendorp 2000: 330) on the islands. Furthermore, he questioned the enslaved among other things about their African languages, and identified more than twenty African languages, of which he established a brief comparative vocabulary and the translation of a brief sentence (Oldendorp 2000: 457–465). There was perhaps more awareness of the variety and diversity of languages than elsewhere.

It takes the right circumstances and a bit of luck, and perhaps even more so the right people. The arrival of the Moravian Brethren, whose practical sense allowed them to adapt to circumstances, says it all. They had no prejudices, for them enslaved people were human beings, people who lived in conditions of extreme distress. They wanted to bring them their Faith and guide them, in their own words, to the Lord and the Savior. And in order to do that, they had to communicate, they had to find, even create, a common language. St. Thomas and the other Virgin Islands were their first destination, a completely new and unprecedented experience.

They were told that Dutch was the dominant language. They learned it during the crossing of the Atlantic only to realize that it was not, in fact, the language of the enslaved. They discovered, so to speak, a new language, which they had learned on the island and then called Cariolse, as attested to in the diary of the missionary Friedrich Martin, eight months after his arrival (Stein 1982). And there was a settler who suggested that the New Testament be translated into this language – you need the right people at the right time and in the right place. Finally, there was Oldendorp who observed, studied and described this language, in only a modest part of his work, but which represents an immense work for the study of creole languages and the history of linguistics in general. Oldendorp not only studied the grammar of the Creole, but he also compiled a dictionary (published as Oldendorp 1996) with more than 4,000 entries. The dictionaries produced by the Danes have been largely lost, only a few hundred words remain, published in the same volume as the Oldendorp dictionary of 1767/1768 (Oldendorp 1996). And at the same time, there was a Danish colonist named Magens who also studied and described this language. Without

these two witnesses, what would we have known about this Creole? There would likely be translations of catechetical texts and the Bible. But there would be neither a grammatical description nor a dictionary.

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