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INITIATING READING IN CREOLE: CONTENTS AND CONTEXTS OF PRIMERS IN THE DANISH WEST INDIES, 1770–1825

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Abstract
In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Danish and German missionaries in the Danish West Indies produced educational materials for converted enslaved adults and their children. Over nearly a century, these missionaries used the local Dutch Creole for instruction, with five printed primers, or ABC books, surviving from this period. In this article, we focus on these five primers, used to initiate reading and religious teaching, including a newly discovered primer in Creole dated 1782. This recently discovered primer is compared with two other Lutheran primers in the same language, printed in 1770, compiled by Kingo and Wold, as well as with two later, nearly identical ones (dated 1800 and 1825), produced by the Moravian Brethren and printed in Germany. The analysis begins with an exploration of the physical attributes, structure, and contents of these publications. Next, they are contextualized within the broader historical framework of catechism primers (Juska-Bacher et al. 2023), schooling and of colonial teaching (Grenby 2023a, 2023b).

Keywords: Creole; Dutch creoles; Danish West Indies; Virgin Islands; Lutheran; reading; printed primers; ABC books; colonial teaching; Moravian Brethren

1. Introduction: Five Dutch Creole primers and their potential[*]

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, two different Christian missions were active in the Danish West Indies: The Moravians, mainly of German origin, and Lutherans from Denmark/Norway. Both used, or ended up using, Dutch Creole as their main language of communication in their efforts to stimulate Christian conversion, education, and daily devotional life among the enslaved people on the islands. Both missions produced language teaching materials, including printed primers, some of which are still extant. So far, five Creole primers printed in the period 1770–1825 have been identified, three originating from the Lutheran and two from the Moravian mission. These early attempts to codify, and effectively create, a written Dutch Creole language provide extraordinarily rich sources for investigating the early development of a creole language – also from a global perspective. Hvenekilde & Lanza (1999) demonstrated some potential in comparing the two primers from 1770; however, additional primers are now available for analysis. Robbe & Bakker (this issue) undertake a new, detailed examination of four primers (excluding the fifth, which is a reprint), tracing linguistic developments over the course of half a century.

The purpose of the present article is twofold. First, we intend to give an outline of the actual contents of these exceptional linguistic sources. Following a brief introduction to the historical setting, we examine the structure and contents of the various primers to identify the specific texts and topics they include. Through an analysis of book-historical features as well as textual components, we characterize the relationship between the various editions and present a comparative analysis, highlighting a number of differences as well as similarities (see also Robbe & Bakker, this issue, for a comparison of linguistic traits). Second, it is our intention to explore the broader contexts surrounding the Dutch Creole primers by examining how they relate to the prevalent genre of catechism primers in the contemporary European book market, particularly in Lutheran Denmark.

We'll draw attention to features that reveal the West Indian primers as typical examples of their genre and their time, while also identifying several unique characteristics, and we will explore the primers in a colonial context with comparisons to strategies applied in Danish and Moravian

[*] We are grateful to Peter Stein, Kristoffer Friis Bøegh and anonymous referees for their comments on this manuscript and to the American Philosophical Society for providing a photographic copy of the Barby 1800 primer.

missions in Tranquebar (India), Sami territory, and Greenland. Our focus is on the choice of a local language and we compare the VICD primers with those from the other areas mentioned. All of these had little or no tradition of literacy training or printed language learning materials. In this way we hope to inspire new research into the linguistic and historical aspects of these unusual primers in the language Virgin Islands Dutch Creole.

2. Setting the scene: Colonial and missionary contexts

The three Islands known as the Danish West Indies (today the US Virgin Islands) did only gradually turn into a Danish colony. St. Thomas was established as a colony by the Danish West India–Guinea Company (*Vestindisk-Guineisk Kompagni)* in 1672. Over time, a production of sugar cane was organized, based on enslaved workers, forcefully transported from the West Coast of Africa or bought from other parts of the Caribbean. In this way, Denmark became fully involved in the infamous phenomenon of the triangular trade. In 1718, the island of St. John (also known as St. Jan) was put under the control of the same trading company, and in 1733, the much larger island of St. Croix was bought from the French, thereby tripling the size of Danish possessions in the Caribbean region. The sugar production soon became concentrated on St Croix, organized by planters of various national backgrounds. On St. Croix, most of them were of British descent, on the other islands, Dutch settlers were the most numerous among the Europeans (Olsen 2017).

In 1754 the Danish King formally took over the control from the Danish West India–Guinea Company and made the islands into a crown colony. The following decades marked a peak with regard to import of enslaved workers, sugar production, and enormous profits to the European planters and their trading relations. Many stately homes in and around Copenhagen were built with profits from the triangular trade.

Until well into the eighteenth century, Danish clergymen on the island only served the Danish inhabitants and their guests, that is, tradesmen, plantation owners, sailors, and their families. The first missionaries to begin work with the enslaved majority on the islands were the Moravians (the shortened form for Moravian Brethren / Mährische Brüder, in German: Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine, (renewed) Unitas Fratrum). By the beginning of the 1730s, the Moravians were in good standing at the Pietist court of Christian VI, King of Denmark (1730–1746). Their leader, Count Nicolaus

Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760), paid a visit to Copenhagen and its royal court in 1732, and there he met a Black chamber servant who used to be enslaved as a boy in the Danish West Indies, Anton Ulrich, who told him that his people was suffering, in need of help and that they wanted to know more about Christ. This meeting was later said to be Zinzendorf's main source of inspiration, and he soon received the King's approval of his plan to initiate a mission on the islands (Sensbach 2009, Gerbner 2018).

When the first Moravian missionaries arrived on the islands in December 1732, they encountered a complex language situation, with a.o. German, Danish, Spanish, African languages and (creolized versions of) Dutch spoken on the islands. They first used Dutch as a language of instruction, but then they realized that most of the enslaved used a language called Creole (or *Carriolse*), which was better suited to communicate with the enslaved population. With the goal of sharing their faith, the Moravians intended to use written texts, as was common in Europe. From the 1740s onward, they developed Christian texts and literacy materials in Dutch Creole for the enslaved (Lawaetz 1980). Like elsewhere, most of the Moravian missionaries were German-speaking laypeople, many with a background as craftsmen, and only a few had a formal theological training.

In 1757, following the transition of the Danish West Indies into a fully-fledged Danish colony, it was decided by Frederik V (King, 1746–1766) that also Lutheran missionaries should start activities on the islands (Lose 1891: 3; Larsen 1950), providing religious services to the enslaved as well as to the Danish population. At this point in time, the population of the islands had grown dramatically (some 17,000 inhabitants: 325 adult White people and 3,949 enslaved on St. Thomas in 1755, 213 White people and 2,031 enslaved on St. John, and 1,303 White people and 8,897 enslaved on St. Croix; Hall 1992: 5; Stein 1996: 5; Bøegh 2021: 221). Also, religion had never been regulated on the islands, in sharp contrast to the strictly mono-confessional society of Denmark. A Caribbean of Irish descent from Montserrat, Nicholas Tuite, had successfully petitioned the Danish Crown for religious toleration of Catholics on St. Croix in 1754 (Power 2010, 2011). In 1757, a formal right to freedom of religion had been announced. While this had been considered a pragmatic (or necessary) decision, the situation was not considered ideal, and this was an important part of the background for initiating a Lutheran mission. In order to be as efficient as possible, the Danish mission also decided to use Creole as a language of

instruction, after having briefly experimented with using standardized Dutch (Hvenekilde & Lanza 1999: 274).

Background information on educational and religious activities on the islands can be found in both contemporary writings by the missionaries themselves, e.g. Oldendorp (Oldendorp 2000–2002, written in the 1760s) and in later studies by historians and other researchers (Lose 1891, Dewitz 1899, 1907, Larsen 1950, Lawaetz 1980, 1981, Johansen et al. 2008, Appel & Fink-Jensen 2013, Larsen et al. 2013).

An important tool to support missionary work was the arrival of a printing press on the Island of St. Croix in 1770. Daniel Thibou, originally from Antigua and Barbuda, was a printer on the Caribbean Island St. Kitts, and he relocated from there in 1769/1770. On St. Croix, he immediately started to publish the biweekly *Royal Danish American Gazette* on his new premises in the town of Christiansted, with contents in both English and Danish, and occasionally other European languages. This printing press was also used by the Lutheran mission. A primer in Dutch Creole was printed in its first year, compiled by Johan Christopher Kingo (1770). Only Kingo's primer indicates the printer. A strategy of printing several religious texts at the same time was frequently applied at this time, especially in colonial settings across the world (see more below, section 6). Furthermore, a Creole grammar was compiled by Joachim Melchior Magens and printed in Copenhagen in the same year, clearly after years of preparation (Larsen 1950: 113–115). Thus, it seems that 1770 became a turning point in the establishment of written – and now printed – Dutch Creole on the Islands. A newly discovered primer from 1782 belongs to this early phase.

In 1787, the local government on the Danish West Indies issued a decree, ordering the foundation of schools for enslaved children in towns, independent of the missionary activities. Four such schools were immediately organized, and five more added in the following decades. In these schools, Dutch Creole was made the official teaching language (Larsen et al. 2013: 284). Far less is known about contemporary schooling in the rural districts on the islands, but interestingly, as early as the late 1730s, missionary gatherings were often described as "schools" (Lawaetz 1980: 14), and some planters allowed these activities, hoping that they might lead to more disciplined behavior among the enslaved. In other plantations, little or nothing happened. In 1839, however, the governor Peter von Scholten issued an ordinance making schooling compulsory for all enslaved children

and he ordered the organization of schools in the countryside, free of charge for pupils. The Moravians were given the task of providing teachers for this new public school system, and soon eight rural schools were erected. But soon after, however, English was chosen as the teaching language (Lawaetz 1980: 26–32, Larsen et al. 2013: 284).

The period 1770–1840 had been a time of change in the Danish West Indies and in most of the Caribbean. In 1792, the Danish government prohibited the trading of enslaved people across the Atlantic (however, not with enforcement until 1803). Enslavement as such was still allowed, and Denmark did not follow suit when the English agreed to abolish slavery in 1833. In 1755, the islands had housed around 15,000 enslaved people (compared to fewer than 2,000 so-called free colored inhabitants), and in 1797, the numbers were over 32,000. Thus, in just forty years, the numbers had more than doubled. In 1848, when the enslaved on the Danish West Indies were finally set free, following an uprising on St. Croix (see Bøegh & Bakker, this issue; Miller, this issue), the numbers were about the same (see Olsen 2017).

During the first decades of the nineteenth century, enslavement and sugar production met with increasing difficulties. Another factor causing an end to the blooming economy on the islands was that the English occupied the islands twice as part of the Napoleonic Wars (1801, 1807–1815). The economy of Denmark had also weakened, due to the wars in Europe. Nevertheless, missionary activities continued, but by now the Moravians were left alone on the scene. As early as 1798 the Danish-Norwegian mission had been called off, which may also explain why no more primers belonging to this tradition were produced. However, schooling of enslaved children was becoming more widespread. In 1787, such schooling became mandatory in all towns, and from 1839, also in the rural districts, as mentioned above (Lawaetz 1980, 1981).

Two Dutch Creole primers, produced in Germany by the Moravians are still extant, from the first decades of the nineteenth century, printed in 1800 and 1825 respectively (see 4.2. and 4.3. below). From 1814 onwards, Det Danske Bibelselskab (the Danish Bible Society) also became an active organization, producing New Testaments and Bibles in Dutch Creole for the Danish West Indies, all printed in Copenhagen (Bach-Nielsen 2017: 100), but – as far as we know – no primers. A local Bible Society, founded on St. Croix in 1828, did also facilitate publications in the local Creole as

late as 1834 (Anonymous 1834, Prætorius 1834a, 1834b), and these were printed in Copenhagen, based on earlier texts. The publication history is described in Bach-Nielsen (2007: 100–102).

Soon, however, the use of Dutch Creole as a language of the church and of the local mission was abandoned (Lose 1891). This happened by the end of the 1830s, as a consequence of English having become the most common language used by the enslaved people in the West Indies. Bøegh (2021: 87 ff.) tracked the language shift on St. Croix between the 1810s and 1840s (see also Brother Wied in Stein 1986, item 3.3.2). Still, many words from Dutch Creole survive(d) in Crucian English Creole (Bøegh & Bakker 2021). Only sporadic use of Dutch Creole for missionary purposes after 1839 has been reported (Larsen 1950). Thus, an era in the linguistic history of the islands had come to an end. The Dutch Creole language survived, among a very small group of users, until 1987.

From the entire period of mission and schooling with Dutch Creole as the main language, 25 printed publications in this language have been preserved, the first one from 1765, but there were printed ones as early as 1761 (Stein 1986, Van Rossem & Van der Voort 1996, Van Rossem 2024), as shown elsewhere in this article. The last one dates from 1839. To this material can be added an unknown number of manuscript pages (see Stein 1986, Hinskens 1995 and Van Rossem & van der Voort 1996 for overviews). The five catechism primers, to which we shall now turn, constitute an important, but still only a minor part of the entire corpus, and that body of material may lend itself to further linguistic investigations.

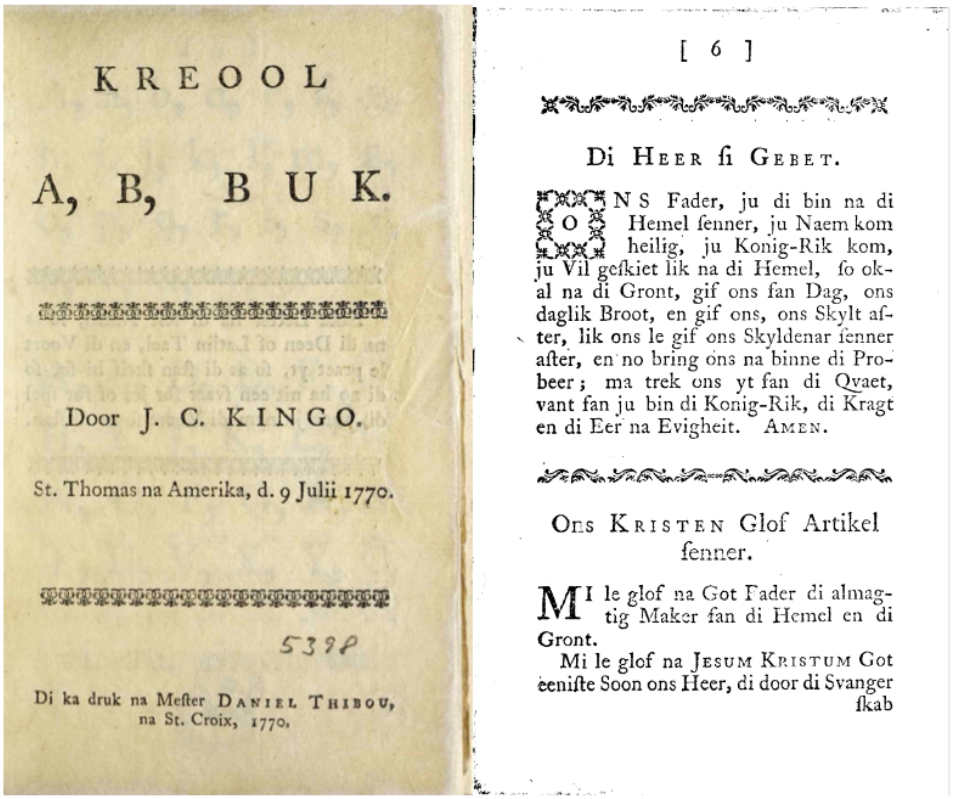
3. Five primers in Dutch Creole: Chronology and outer characteristics

Having set the scene, let us now present five surviving primers in Dutch Creole, printed for use in the Danish West Indies, which are the ones that are still extant today. Focus will be on establishing information about authors, editors, place of print and on characterizing the primers as books or booklets, that is, as material objects, whereas contents will be analyzed below in section 4. For an analysis of the language in these primers, see Robbe & Bakker (this issue).

3.1 Kingo's primer from 1770

From the year 1770, two primers are known. The first one was printed by the aforementioned Daniel Thibou in Christiansted on St. Croix. This was

stated on the title page, also (and quite unusually) announcing the exact date of publication: 9 July (see Figure 1).



KREOOL

A, B, BUK.

Door J. C. KINGO.

St. Thomas na Amerika, d. 9 Julii 1770.

539

Di ka druk na Meſter DANIEL THIBOU, na St. Croix, 1770.

[6]

Di HEER ſi GEBET.

ONS Fader, ju di bin na di Hemel ſenner, ju Naem kom heilig, ju Konig-Rik kom, ju Vil geſkiet lik na di Hemel, ſo okal na di Gront, gif ons ſan Dag, ons daglik Broot, en gif ons, ons Skylt after, lik ons le gif ons Skyldenar ſenner after, en no bring ons na binne di Probeer; ma trek ons yt ſan di Qvaet, vant ſan ju bin di Konig-Rik, di Kragt en di Eer na Evigheit. AMEN.

Ons KRISTEN Glof Artikel ſenner.

MI le glof na Got Fader di almagtig Maker ſan di Hemel en di Gront.

Mi le glof na JESUM KRISTUM Got eeniſte Soon ons Heer, di door di Svanger ſkab

Figure 1. Kingo's 1770 primer

The name of the author or rather compiler was also given: J.C. Kingo. Johan Christopher Kingo had arrived with other Danish missionaries to the West Indies in 1756 (Lose 1891: 17). He was based on St. Thomas and is known to have finished a translation of Luther's small catechism as early as 1764 (Lose 1891: 18). It has recently been argued that this translation was printed in 1770 along with a hymn book, also by Kingo (Bach-Nielsen 2007: 97), but most likely these anonymous 1770 publications were not the result of his work (see below section 3.2). Kingo died in 1784.

The actual title of Kingo's primer is interesting, as it gives a name to the language applied, namely "Kreool", and it uses the term "A, B, Buk" instead of the common European form "ABC". This may be due to the fact

that the letter |c| was rarely used in Dutch Creole at the time (and not at all in Kingo's primer) or that it can represent both the speech sounds /k/ and /s/, making its omission beneficial for learnability. From a missionary history perspective, the choice to avoid |c| might also have been influenced by the contemporary Greenlandic mission which similarly avoided the letter |c|, and also called their primers AB-books rather than ABC-books (Nielsen & Kjærgaard 2023). The oldest Greenlandic primer dates from 1739 (Nielsen & Kjærgaard 2023: 127). Kingo's primer is known in only one copy, in the Royal Danish Library in Copenhagen.

Concerning its outer characteristics, the primer contains 16 printed pages in octavo format (ca. 165 x 102 mm, column 144 x 75 mm), corresponding to similar European publications, but without pictures (see below, section 5.1). Another important feature is that all pages were printed in Roman letters (or Antiqua), just like contemporary French and English primers, and not in Blackletters (or Fraktur), which was the standard choice for several other vernaculars languages, including Danish, German and (to some extent) Dutch. For this, there could be several explanations. Maybe Kingo followed the Dutch example, where the use of Roman letters was more common, or he and others recognized the fact that Roman letters were easier to learn. An additional and probably more decisive reason was that Thibou simply did not have access to Blackletter typeface. No publications with this typeface are known from his printing press, and in his newspapers both English and Danish texts were set with Roman letters, in contrast to European tradition, according to which language and typeface were closely connected, and bilingual books and newspapers would therefore often contain both types. It can also be noticed that the pages of Kingo's and Thibou's primer have a well-composed and quite spacious layout, with lines, vignettes, and open spaces that separate different elements of the text.

The contents of Kingo's primer partly consist of alphabets and syllables (to practice spelling), and partly – in fact, mainly – Lutheran religious texts, the so-called chief parts of the catechism, followed by a selection of prayers. A detailed survey will be provided below in section 4. Only one more feature should be mentioned at this stage, namely the inclusion of a hymn entitled "O! Planter man", which has no parallel in European nor any other Dutch Creole primers, thus pointing to Kingo's role as an independent compiler, trying to create the best possible primer through his choice of

language as well as relevant contents. This hymn is known in seven Creole versions (Van Rossem 2017: 402–409).

3.2 Wold's primer from 1770

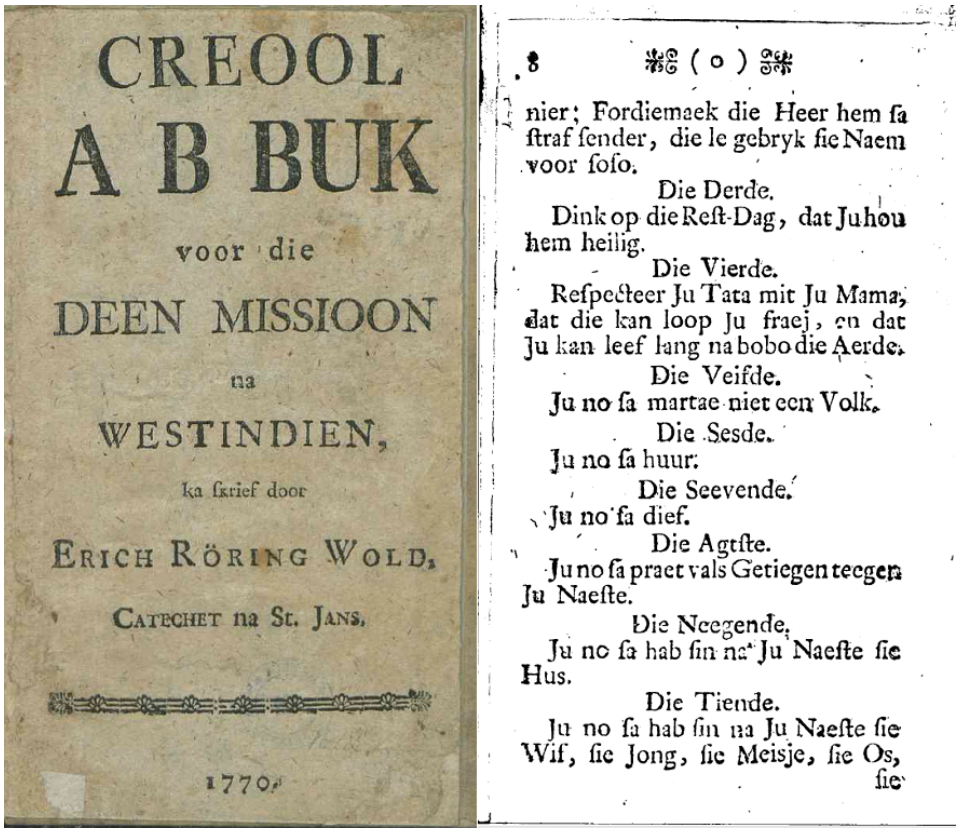
Also in 1770, another "Creool" ABC book was published, compiled by the Norwegian Lutheran missionary Erich Röring Wold, "Catechet na St. Jans", that is, (religious) teacher on the island of St. John. Wold had arrived in the Danish West Indies in 1766. He suffered much hardship as a teacher on St. John and survived for a time as a private teacher in the household of Joachim Melchior Magens, who was the *Statshauptman* (Governor) of the island and the man behind a.o. the first printed grammar of Dutch Creole (1770). Magens and Wold collaborated closely in their translational work, but Wold died towards the end of 1770.

On the title page of Wold's primer (see Figure 2 below), neither printer nor location is indicated. A closer inspection of the typeface – or other sources – may in future help reveal whether it was also produced by Thibou (not likely), by another printer in the Caribbean, or (most likely) in Copenhagen, where Magens had many contacts and where he had his own grammar printed by G.G. Salicath at the printing office of the Royal Danish Waisenhaus (Det Kongelige Waysenhusets Bogtrykkerie).

As a book, it had similarities to Kingo's primer, following a standard Lutheran pattern, consisting of 16 pages in Roman letters. However, instead of the classical octavo format, Wold's primer was printed in 12mo format with considerably smaller pages (ca. 136 x 81 mm, column 122 x 62). This made it suitable for being placed together with catechisms and hymn books, also printed in this smaller format. In fact, two out of three extant copies of Wold's primer have survived in such combined volumes (Bach-Nielsen 2019: 96–97), and in at least one of the cases (Royal Library, sign. Pdg 11510), the same sheet of paper has been used for both primer and (the first eight pages of) the catechism. For this reason, and due to clear similarities in typeface, pointing to all three texts being printed at the same time, it seems most likely that Wold (and not Kingo) was the man behind all three texts. Preliminary linguistic research (by Robbe) also points to Wold as author of the 1770 hymn book; Kingo can be excluded.

Another small difference, if we compare Wold's primer to Kingo's, is the inclusion of the letter |c|, even in the title. Also in Wold's primer, multiple typefaces are applied to distinguish headings and ordinary text,

and open spaces and some ornaments are used to separate different parts of the text. However, this is not done to the same extent and with the same variation in typographic expression, as in Kingo's primer, printed by Thibou. This confirms the impression that Wold's primer was printed elsewhere.



CREOOL
A B BUK
voor die
DEEN MISSIOON
na
WESTINDIEN,
ka ſkrief door
ERICH RÖRING WOLD,
CATECHET na St. JANS.
1770.

8 (o)

nier; Fordiemaek die Heer hem ſa ſtraf ſender, die le gebryk ſie Naem voor ſoſo.

Die Derde.

Dink op die Reſt-Dag, dat Ju hou hem heilig.

Die Vierde.

Reſpecteer Ju Tata mit Ju Mama, dat die kan loop Ju fraej, en dat Ju kan leef lang na bobo die Aerde.

Die Veifde.

Ju no ſa martae niet een Volk.

Die Sesde.

Ju no ſa huur.

Die Seevende.

Ju no ſa dief.

Die Agtſte.

Ju no ſa praet vals Getiegen teegen Ju Naeſte.

Die Neegende,

Ju no ſa hab ſin na Ju Naeſte ſie Hus.

Die Tiende.

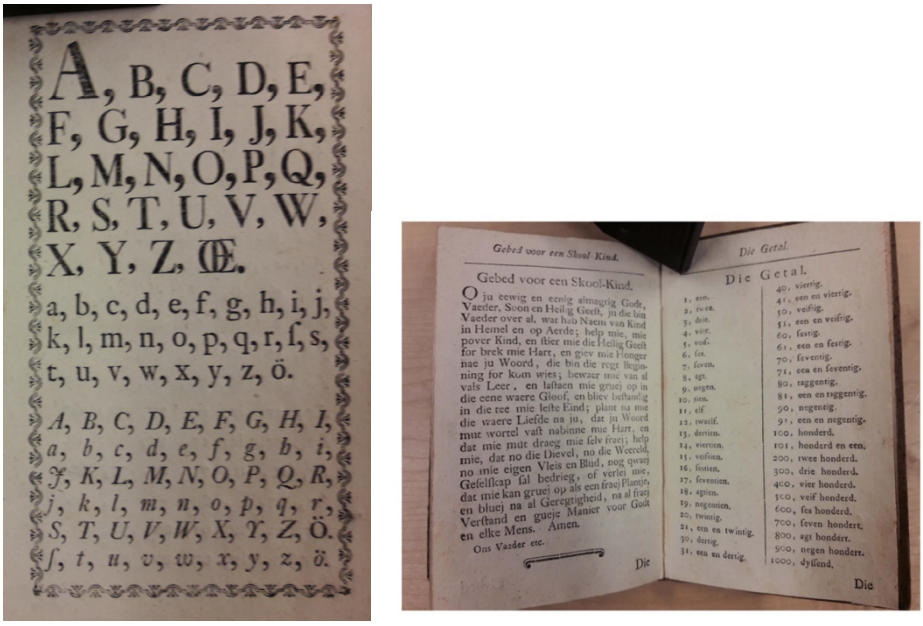
Ju no ſa hab ſin na Ju Naeſte ſie Wif, ſie Jong, ſie Meisje, ſie Os, ſie

Figure 2. Wold's 1770 primer

As our analysis will soon demonstrate (section 4), structure and contents are quite close to Kingo's version, with a few exceptions, whereas the language contains or represents many variations from the Dutch Creole, as used by Kingo, thus making it clear that the texts for the two primers were constructed independently from one another.

3.3 The 1782 primer

The third Lutheran primer in Dutch Creole dates from 1782 (see Figure 3). This ABC book has not previously been mentioned in the literature. It was discovered by Charlotte Appel in the Royal Danish Library in 2019, and until then misclassified in the library catalogue as being in Dutch ("Hollandsk"). The primer has no mention of author, publisher, printer, or place of publication. The reason we believe it is from 1782 is that "MDCCLXXXII, 1782" is given as a last example of a numeral in the text.


A, B, C, D, E,
F, G, H, I, J, K,
L, M, N, O, P, Q,
R, S, T, U, V, W,
X, Y, Z, Œ.

a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j,
k, l, m, n, o, p, q, r, ſ, s,
t, u, v, w, x, y, z, ö.

A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I,
a, b, c, d, e, f, g, b, i,
J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R,
j, k, l, m, n, o, p, q, r,
S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z, Ö.
ſ, t, u, v, w, x, y, z, ö.

Gebed voor een Skool Kind.

Gebed voor een Skool-Kind.

O ju eewig en eenig almagtig God, Vaeder, Soon en Heilig Geeſt, ju die bin Vaeder over al, wat hüs Naem van Kind in Hemel en op Aerds; help mie, mie pover Kind, en ſtier mie die Heilig Geeſt for brek mie Hart, en giev mie Honger nae ju Woord, die bin die regt begin-ning for kom wies; bewaar mie van al vals Leer, en laſtaen mie gruej op in die eene waere Gloof, en bliev beſtandig in die ree mie leſte Eind; plant na mie die waere Lieſde na ju, dat ju Woord mue worted vaſt nabinne mie Hart, en dat mie mut draeg mie ſelv fraei; help mie, dat no die Dievel, no die Weereld, no mie eigen Vleis en Blüd, nog ewaj Geſelſkap ſal bedrieg, of verlei mie, dat mie kan gruej op als een fraej Plantje, en bluej na al Geregtigheid, na al fraej Verſtand en gueje Manier voor Güd en elke Mens. Amen.

Ons Vaeder etc.

Die

Die Getal.

Die Getal.

1, een.	40, vierrig.
2, twee.	41, een en vierrig.
3, dre.	50, veifig.
4, vier.	51, een en veifig.
5, vof.	60, ſeerig.
6, ſes.	61, een en ſeerig.
7, ſeven.	70, ſeventig.
8, ag.	71, een en ſeventig.
9, negen.	80, taggentig.
10, tien.	81, een en taggentig.
11, elf	90, negenetig.
12, twalf.	91, een en negentig.
13, dertien.	100, honderd.
14, vierrien.	101, honderd en een.
15, veftien.	200, twee honderd.
16, ſeftien.	300, drie honderd.
17, ſeventien.	400, vier honderd.
18, agtien.	500, veif honderd.
19, negenien.	600, ſes honderd.
20, twanig.	700, ſeven honderd.
21, een en twintig.	800, agt honderd.
30, dertig.	900, negen honderd.
31, een en dertig.	1000, dyſſend.

Die

Figure 3. First page and two pages of the only known copy of the 1782 ABC book in Creole

Like Kingo's primer, the 1782 primer consists of 16 pages in octavo (158 x 100 mm, column 142 x 78 mm), set in Roman letters. In contrast to the 1770-primers, it has no separate title page. This was, in fact, a standard feature of most contemporary Danish and other European primers (see section 5.1). By using the first page for the alphabet, set with different types (here: both higher and lower case in ordinary Roman letter typeface as well as in italics), precious space could be saved.

The layout is well-organized and spacious, applying headings in italics as well as simple lines (rather than vignettes) to separate different parts

of the text. A new feature, characteristic of this period, is the addition of a slim line with all letters of the alphabet, printed right at the top of every page, thereby facilitating the children's reading of the texts in prose. Another reading-aid, not included in the 1770 primers, is the insertion of hyphens between all syllables in the first two texts in prose (The Lord's Prayer and the Creed), also pointing to increased attention to the process of teaching the children to read.

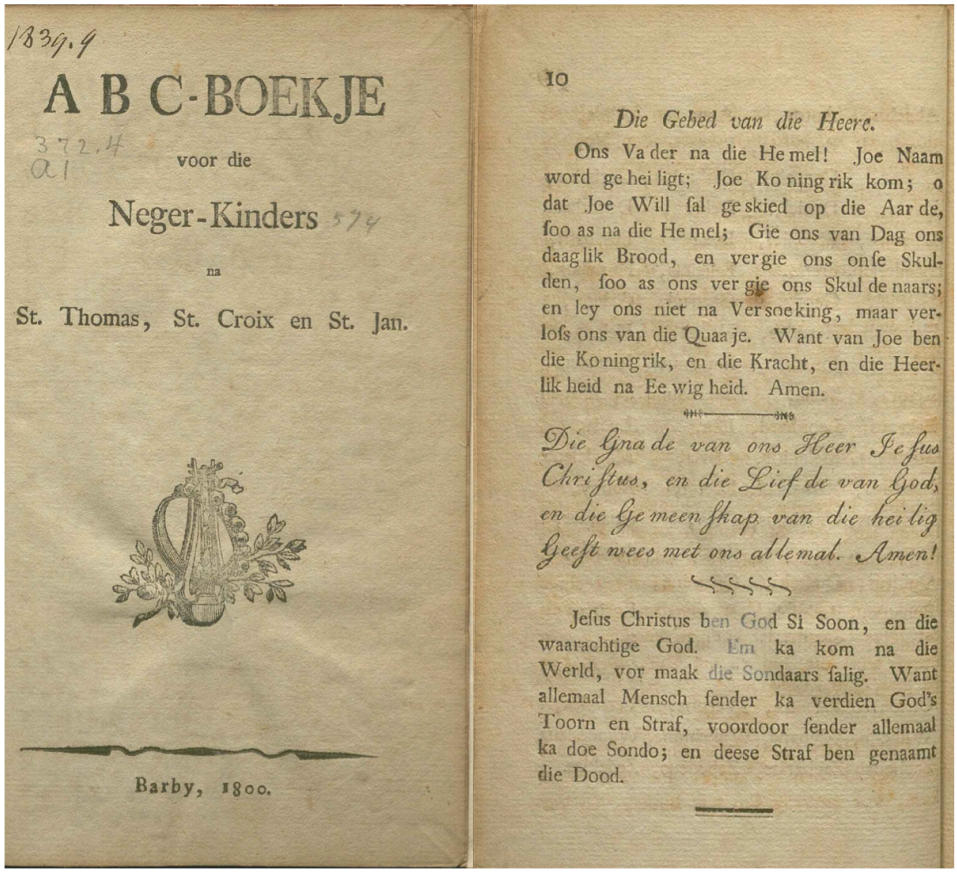
The textual content largely corresponds to both 1770 primers, with one major exception: the insertion of two pages with numerals at the very end. This, too, had become a widespread feature in other contemporary primers, including many Danish ones. Given the fact that the aforementioned J.M. Magens had insisted on making a new and better translation of the New Testament into Dutch Creole, which was printed in 1781 (Lose 1891: 23–24), it seems very probable indeed that he also made sure to provide a new primer, teaching new readers in the 'right' way. Thus, it is our hypothesis that Magens was the translator behind the 1782 primer, and that it was printed in Copenhagen, just like Magens' 1781-edition of the New Testament (Magens 1781).

3.4 Two Moravian primers from 1800 and 1825

In 1800 and 1825, new primers in Dutch Creole appeared. They were printed in Germany, in Barby and Gnadau respectively, hubs of Moravian printing at the time. Nothing is at present known about the authors or editors behind the 1800 primer, but most likely it was composed by one (or a group) of the active missionaries in the Danish West Indies. The printed title is *A B C – BOEKJE voor die Neger-Kinders na St. Thomas, St. Croix en St. Jan* (see Figure 4 below), thus specifying the target group of readers (Black children), rather than mentioning the language. By including the letter |c| in the title (although still not frequently used in the main text), the lineage to traditional literacy instruction was emphasized.

The editions from 1800 and 1825 are almost identical. Apart from deviating information concerning time and place of print on the title pages, only a few minor variations in type face, punctuation and in the vignettes inserted, confirm that these are indeed different editions. As they are identical in terms of contents and spelling, the 1800 and 1825 primers will be described together on the following pages, with the former as main example, as it had served as the model for the latter (van Rossem & van de Voort

1996: 294). Two copies of the 1800 primer and four copies of the 1825 edition are at present (September 2024) known to have survived, and are registered in Worldcat.org.



1839.9

A B C-BOEKJE

372.4
Al

voor die

Neger-Kinders 574

na

St. Thomas, St. Croix en St. Jan.

Barby, 1800.

10

Die Gebed van die Heere.

Ons Vader na die Hemel! Joe Naam word geheiligt; Joe Koningrik kom; o dat Joe Will sal geskied op die Aarde, soo as na die Hemel; Gie ons van Dag ons daaglik Brood, en vergie ons onse Skulden, soo as ons vergie ons Skuldenaars; en ley ons niet na Versoeking, maar verloss ons van die Quaaje. Want van Joe ben die Koningrik, en die Kracht, en die Heerlikheid na Eewigheid. Amen.

Die Gnade van ons Heer Jesus Christus, en die Liefde van God, en die Gemeenskap van die heilig Geest wees met ons allemal. Amen!

Jesus Christus ben God Si Soon, en die waarachtige God. Em ka kom na die Werld, vor maak die Sondaars salig. Want allemaal Mensch sender ka verdien God's Toorn en Straf, voordoor sender allemaal ka doe Sondo; en deese Straf ben genaamt die Dood.

Figure 4. ABC-Boekje – Moravian, printed in Barby 1800

In contrast to the 16 page long Lutheran primers, the Moravian publications both consist of only 12 pages and seem to be printed in 12mo format, even though no signature on the pages can provide a definite proof. According to van Rossem and van de Voort (1999), the pages are quite large, 176 x 107 mm, but this may not be correct (judging from the assumed 12mo format). The two Moravian primers are slightly more elongated than the Lutheran ones.

Again, Roman typeface has been used throughout. Both Moravian primers have a separate title page, with page 2 left blank, and page 3 beginning with the alphabet in several different (Roman) typefaces, including a typeface representing written letters. At the bottom of this page, seven lines have been reserved for both Arabic and Roman numerals. This page in particular is much more densely printed than the corresponding ones in the early Lutheran primers.

Overall, the contents consist of the same two types of material as the Lutheran ones, that is, linguistic contents for spelling and reading exercises followed by religious texts. However, in the Moravian primers, the balance has been changed decisively with only the last three pages containing religious texts in prose, while nine pages have been reserved for letters, syllables, and words to practice reading and spelling. These pages are set with relatively small typefaces (compared to previous primers) in order to allow as much text as possible but placing the examples in different columns. Also, italics are used for headings to help the reader find the relevant lines, and long lines or vignettes are inserted to mark the borders between different examples. Much has clearly been done to ease the reading.

Thus, despite many similarities, the Moravian primers can easily be distinguished from the Lutheran ones, based on their physical-bibliographical data: They are shorter and they present a different lay-out, thus putting relatively more emphasis on giving instruction in reading compared to religion. This impression will be confirmed when we turn to the contents.

4. The contents of the five Dutch Creole primers

In this section, we intend to describe and analyze the contents of the five extant primers in Dutch Creole, that is, the three Lutheran publications, two from 1770 and one from 1782, and both the Moravian primers from 1800 and 1825. We will then compare the similarities and differences among them.

4.1 Three Lutheran catechism primers – structure and contents

All Lutheran primers follow the same overall structure, beginning with a presentation of letters in different typefaces, followed by some spelling exercises, before moving on to a number or religious texts. In Table 1, we present an overview of the contents of the three primers.

	Kingo	**Wold**	**N.N.1782**
(1) Title page	+	+	–
(2) Reading instruction (brief)	+	–	–
(3) Single letters (2–4 versions)	+	+	+
(4) Two-letter combinations	+	+	+
(5) The Lord's Prayer	+	+	+
(6) The Creed	+	+	+
(7) The Ten Commandments	+	+	+
(8) Of all the commandments (Moses)	+	+	+
(9) The sacrament of Baptism	+	+	+
(10) The sacrament of Holy Communion	+	+	+
(11) Prayer before meal	+	+	+
(12) Prayer after meal	+	+	+
(13) Morning Prayer	+	+	+
(14) Evening prayer	+	+	+
(15) Prayer for school children	+	+	+
(16) O! Planter-Man	+	–	–
(17) 1 Petr. 1 Kp 13, 14, 15, v	+	–	–
(18) Ebr 13 Kp 20, 21, v	+	–	–
(19) Arab numerals 1–1000	–	–	+
(20) Roman numerals	–	–	+

Table 1. The contents of the first three Dutch Creole primers (Danish Lutheran mission)

The parallels between the three primers are striking. They all follow quite typical patterns of catechism primers of the time, in particular Lutheran primers, printed in Denmark (more below, section 5).

Concerning the first pages, providing tools for reading instruction, all primers reserve three pages, although Kingo has also added five lines on a separate page with a brief instruction for teachers. The spelling tables with two-letter-combinations are almost identical, with Wold including |c| and |w|, which are letters that Kingo did not use. The 1782 primer aligns with Wold, but it includes a |z| as well. All three primers include the character |ö|, which, however, is not used in the subsequent texts. None of the other diacritical or special characters found in Danish appear in Dutch Creole.

Only the 1782 primer includes four different alphabets on the first page, presenting upper and lower cases in ordinary print, as well as in italics. Italics are not presented separately in the 1770 primers.

Concerning the 10–11 pages with religious texts, the five chief catechetical parts take up most space, in the traditional order of a Lutheran primer, starting with the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. Due to the insertion of hyphens (as a learning-aid), the first two parts take up more space in the

1782 primer. In all three books, the text of the Ten Commandments is the longest one, including a sentence toward the end, taken from 2 Mos 20, 5–6. The texts of the sacraments are accompanied by references to the Bible in both 1770 primers, whereas references have been left out in 1782. Kingo has included a third text on Holy Communion (John 6, 54–56), not found in Wold.

The five Christian prayers, taking up 3–5½ pages, are printed in the same order: prayers before and after a meal, morning and evening prayers, a schoolchild's prayer. Some variations can be found, e.g. a longer version of the prayer before a meal in the 1782 primer. Whereas the latter and Wold's primer end with the schoolchild's prayer, Kingo and Thibou have found place for the hymn "O! Planter-Man", to be sung to the tune of "Na Jesu Naem", as well as two short Biblical sentences.

Thus, the Kingo primer can be characterized as the most elaborate or original one, and the 1782 primer as the one most clearly prioritizing reading instruction. Seen as a group, the three early primers are rather different from the two Moravian ones.

4.2 Two Moravian primers: Structure and contents

As mentioned above, the two primers from 1800 and 1825, printed by the Moravians in Barby and Gnadau respectively, not only look the same – 12 pages with similar typefaces – but they also contain exactly the same contents. This is summarized in Table 2 (shown below).

The two small books may still be characterized as "catechism primers", as most of the proper texts in prose are religious and known from the traditional corpus of Protestant primers. However, seven pages are reserved for reading and spelling exercises, compared to only three with religious texts, thus pointing to a clear focus on literacy teaching.

Following the first page with individual letters, printed four times in different typeface, and with both Arabic and Roman numerals inserted, the second and third pages move on to two-letter syllables and examples illustrating differences between single and double vowels, specific diphthongs in the creole language, as well as other particularities, such as the differences between the use (and pronunciation) of |b| and |p|, |d|, and |t|. On page 6, five columns are listed with one-syllable-words in alphabetical order, most of which relate to everyday life (such as *Beeld*, *Dank*, *groot*, *Kind*, *Melk, Nacht*, *praat* etc., 'image, thank, big, child, milk, night, talk'), and

only a few refer to Christian religion (such as *Psalm*, *Toorn*, *Hert*, 'hymn, anger, heart'). The following pages (7–8) contain words with two and then three or four syllables, gradually with more outspoken religious references (e.g. *Saligheid*, *Sacrament*, *Zabaoth,* 'blessedness, sacrament, Zabaoth'), and next (p. 9) men's and women's names, many of which are Biblical. Religious terms tend to be longer than everyday words. Thus, the contents are clearly selected to help the readers acquire, practice, and develop their reading skills.

	1800	**1825**
(1) Title page	+	+
(2) Single letters (four versions)	+	+
(3) Numbers, Arabic and Roman	+	+
(4) Two letter combinations	+	+
(5) Spelling of single and double vowels,	+	+
diphthongs/digraphs, trigraphs, minimal pairs	+	+
(6) Monosyllabic words	+	+
(7) Bisyllabic words	+	+
(8) Trisyllabic words	+	+
(9) Personal names	+	+
(10) The Lord's Prayer	+	+
(11) Blessing (Die Gnade van ons Heer)	+	+
(12) On Jesus, God, and Death (J.C. ben God si Soon)	+	+
(13) The Creed (Jesus Christus ka nem)	+	+
(14) Prayer (Liefe Heere God! Maak ons wakker)	+	+
(15) Thanks (Pries en dank)	+	+
(16) Prayer (Heilig God)	+	+

Table 2. The contents of two Dutch Creole primers, published by Moravians

Finally, on page 10, the Lord's Prayer ("Die Gebed van die Heere") is the first full text to be read, followed by a blessing, set in handwriting-like typeface, and a short piece on Jesus, God, and Death as God's punishment. Page 11 contains the Creed in an adapted version, followed by a short prayer to "Liefe Heere God" (Dear Lord God), thanks and a blessing. Thus, the first two of the traditional catechetical texts are included, while the Ten Commandments and the texts on the two sacraments have been left out. In the short section of religious texts, more space is devoted to texts that can be read and spoken by Christian people themselves – in dialogue with God. They are prayers expressing a personal faith, rather than performing a ritual in a group.

4.3 A comparison of the Lutheran and Moravian primers

When comparing the Lutheran and Moravian primers, several similarities and differences emerge. These distinctions are particularly evident in the thematic content, pedagogical approach, and emphasis on practical versus religious instruction.

First, and most noticeable among similarities, is that fact that both the Lutheran and Moravian primers are written in Dutch Creole, which shows that both missions shared the recognition of the linguistic realities of their West Indian congregations (certainly from 1770 to 1825) and a shared commitment to making Christian teachings accessible to the enslaved population. Second, both sets of primers contain essential Christian texts, including the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. Prayers – albeit with different contents – are prominent in both traditions, reflecting a strong emphasis on daily spiritual practices and Christian devotion. Third, both the Lutheran and Moravian primers include letters and combinations of letters as part of reading instruction. The inclusion of single letters, two-letter combinations, and syllables, present in both Lutheran and Moravian primers, testifies to a shared focus on basic literacy.

There are, however, also significant differences in text length and focus. The Lutheran primers consist of 16 pages, while the Moravian primers are shorter, at 12 pages, although a denser layout of the latter means that this difference is not that striking. More important is the divergence in focus. The Lutheran primers keep the reading aids short and they are much more comprehensive in their inclusion of all chief catechetical parts as well as prayers, compared to the Moravian primers. In the small group of Lutheran primes, the latest one from 1782 stands out by including several new features to support instruction in reading. Nevertheless, overall, the Lutheran primers are more heavily weighted towards religious instruction, and the few pages with letters and syllables are only included as reading aids in relation to the main purpose.

In contrast, the Moravian primers lean towards a more general education and the training of reading skills, reserving a significant portion of their content for spelling and reading exercises with words from everyday life. While the earlier Lutheran primers incorporate a complete set of catechism elements, the Moravian primers omit several of these traditional texts (the Ten Commandments and both Sacraments), while at the same time expanding the initial pages for the training of literacy. This suggests a

shift towards prioritizing the acquisition of reading skills over comprehensive catechetical knowledge – or of postponing these to a later stage, also in line with more general trends in contemporary pedagogics and didactics.

Also, both traditions demonstrate – with some variations – a very conscious use of a reader-friendly layout, incorporating visible headings, open spaces, lines or vignettes for separation of sections. The Lutheran 1782 primer has reserved two full pages for numerals, and this material is also (in a more condensed form) included in both Moravian primers. The latter also include a typeface representing handwritten letters, thereby presenting the first step towards the reading of manuscripts and, possibly, towards actual writing, also in line with more widespread teaching of this skill in nineteenth-century schools.

5. Danish and European primers as context

5.1 The old genre of catechism primers

The Danish West Indian primers should be seen against the background of a long tradition of printed primers with Christian texts, beginning in Europe in the sixteenth or, in some countries, as early as the late fifteenth centuries. They became ever more widespread and more varied during the early modern period (Juska-Bacher et al. 2003). The European reformations led to a trend towards confessionalization with a focus on dogmatic uniformity within a certain territory, and distinctions between Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic primers soon crystallized. For example, the "Hail Mary" prayer disappeared from Protestant primers, while the inclusion of an explanation of the two biblically founded sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion, became a standard feature of Protestant, certainly Lutheran primers. Reformed primers would often include a section on church discipline as a separate (sixth) part, as well (Laine 2023).

Regarding contents, structure, and layout, the first three West Indian primers are typical of other Lutheran, certainly Danish, eighteenth-century primers – with a few noticeable exceptions, as will be explained. Recently, an edited volume (Juska-Bacher et al. 2023) provided the first survey ever of similarities and varieties across different European versions of the catechism primer genre, mapping variations within – and across – national, linguistic, and confessional borders, while also trying to characterize certain main types. One of these types is referred to as a "Type 2" ("A catechism primer in the narrow sense of the word"), and defined as "A textbook for

reading instruction, in which the reading exercises consist entirely or predominantly of catechetical texts, either with no book title or with the title referring first to the acquisition of reading skills, and then to the acquisition of religious faith, or with the title mentioning reading skills only" (Juska-Bacher et al. 2023: 12). The three early Danish West Indian primers clearly belong to this category, as do virtually all Lutheran primers printed in Denmark and Norway (see Appel 2023: 102), from the sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries. This kind of catechism primer remained common in Denmark until well into the nineteenth century, albeit by then no longer as the dominant model.

What characterized these widespread Lutheran primers was the octavo format (ca. 160 x 100 mm), a length of 16 pages, a page (often the very first one) with letters, another one with simple combinations of two letters (vowels and consonants), followed by the religious texts, considered essential to children's Christian upbringing in a Lutheran country, often termed "Kinderlehre" in German (in Danish: "børnelærdom"). Five chief parts are typically included, namely the Lord's prayer, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, Baptism and Communion, supplemented with a selection of short prayers on the last two or three pages. Most early modern primers of this type would also include a woodcut of a rooster, symbolizing the need and duty to wake up and be alert, which gave rise to the term *Hane-ABC* or *Rooster primer* (Sroka 2023). The early Dutch Creole primers, despite otherwise following the Danish model closely, do not include this woodcut. Most certainly, Thibou, who printed for Kingo in 1770, was simply not in possession of the woodblock in question.

The five chief texts also constituted the basis of Martin Luther's famous *Small Catechism*. This book from 1529 had been translated into Danish as early as 1532 and once more in 1537, and it was soon made available in most other vernaculars that were used on Lutheran territories. The *Small Catechism* was printed in numerous editions and different formats, but from the late seventeenth century onwards, the most common 'shape' of Luther's catechism, certainly in Denmark, would be a small booklet in 16mo format (and therefore cheap and handy), consisting of c. 80 pages (see the studies in Juska-Bacher et al. 2023). This specific format was not used for West Indian catechisms, however, which were printed in 12mo format, so that they would fit together with other religious publications. In

1770, not only primers, but also the small catechism and a hymn book were printed in 12mo formats.

In his small catechism, Luther had presented his own explanations of the most important Christian texts for children, making a stop after almost every sentence and explaining "that is". Because of this, Luther's text almost quadrupled in size, compared to the elementary texts in their 'pure' form, as presented in e.g. a primer. Luther's catechism also lent itself to be used for the classical pedagogical model of questions and answers (Burke 1989), as every sentence could easily be changed into: "What is?" by a teacher. In this way, Luther's small catechism provided its reader with the answers. Thus, Luther's small catechism was an educational tool, an expansion of the key Christian texts, and clearly an interpretation according to Lutheran teachings, in reality presenting a confessional handbook for Lutherans. Significantly, Luther also changed the order of the texts, in comparison to traditional primers and catechisms, so that The Ten Commandments came first, and he added some extra texts, first of all his Table of Duties (in German *Haustafel*), which can be characterized as a short guide to early modern society, family life, and Christian morals, stressing the importance of reciprocal responsibilities and of obedience (*Gehorsamkeit*) to authorities (Koefoed 2019).

5.2 Teaching literacy based on Catechism primers

For printers and booksellers, primers were part of a standard repertoire, providing a steady income (with little risk, due to the limited use of paper). For more than two centuries, primers for children formed a very conservative genre across most European countries, with very few variations or changes. Numerous almost identical print runs left the printing presses, and were distributed by booksellers, tradesmen, peddlers, clergymen and all sorts of teachers. They were considered tools for children's first reading instruction; usually, they were not given proper book bindings, and they were not considered 'worthy' for library collections. Therefore, very few copies of sixteenth and seventeenth-century primers are extant, exactly because they were so widespread and so cheap. Many European primers are known today due to only one extant copy, thereby making us realize that many once existing editions or print runs have been lost: editions having made the last critical 'step' from one to zero copies left (Appel 2006, Sroka

2023). There were no institutions that systematically collected printed matters of this kind.

Therefore, it is highly likely that there were more editions of printed primers in Dutch Creole than the five books analyzed here. Likely others existed, but they have been lost. In fact, Oldendorp mentions having seen printed texts, a church litany, from 1761 (Oldendorp 2002: 1968), and he makes the following remark about additional texts printed in Dutch Creole: "This orthography has long been used and introduced in the Creole hymn book [of 1764] and other small printed pieces" (2000: 684).[1] Neither the hymnbook nor "other small printed pieces" from these years have been located so far (Bach-Nielsen 2007: 99; Van Rossem & van der Voort 1996: 298–299). However, considering the generally accurate details of Oldendorp's observations and what we know about Moravian missionary practices, there is absolutely no reason to doubt this information. Primers would very likely have belonged to the group of "other small printed pieces".

In Post-Reformation Northern Europe, the small Catechism was given a key function as the provider of the essence of Christian faith in Lutheran territories, including the remote parts of the Danish Kingdom. It became the most important schoolbook in all schools; pastors had to include expositions of one of the chief parts in every sermon; and young people's knowledge of Luther's small Catechism had to be examined prior to their first communion (from 1736: confirmation). To achieve these goals, one method in particular stood out: teaching the children to actually read, prior to learning the contents by heart. In Denmark, and in most other protestant countries, several initiatives to promote basic literacy can be documented during the seventeenth and particularly the early eighteenth centuries: from above (national legislation, episcopal campaigns, sponsored publications, etc.) as well as from below (pastors, teachers, the printing trade, and parents offering their services and encouraging literacy) (cf. Appel & Fink-Jensen 2013).

[1] German original text: "Es ist ein paarmal etwas für sie gedruckt worden. Das allererste war im Jahr 1761 die Kirchenlitanei, und im vorigen Jahre 1767 bekamen sie das erste gedruckte Gesangbüchlein. Durch solche gedruckten Sachen werden noch mehrere gereizt, sich aufs Lesen zu legen". And: "Es ist auch diese Orthographie schon längst in dem criolischen Gesangbüchlein und andern kleinen gedruckten Stücken gebraucht und eingeführt worden".

For the elementary instruction in how to recognize letters, and how to read printed syllables and words, teachers would use short, printed primers with the traditional Christian texts in their 'pure' form (without Luther's long explanations and additions), building on medieval teaching traditions. The contents made sense, as the main aim of literacy instruction (certainly from the perspective of the church) was to teach the children religion. Moreover, the use of texts that were already well-known to the children through oral culture, not least the Lord's Prayer as the very first text, was a tool to help them decipher the letters and syllables. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, these texts were often printed with a separation (space or a hyphen) between syllables, as is also the case in the 1782 primer, and the Moravian primers, precisely to support this method. Thus, it is somewhat misleading, when the contents of such primers are sometimes referred to as "fragments" of Luther's catechism (see e.g. van Rossem & van der Voort 1996: 299).

5.3 Reforming schools – reforming primers

In the 1730s, schooling was made mandatory for all children in Denmark and Norway, as part of a wave of Pietistic reforms, initiated by king Christian VI and his advisors (at the same time as St. Croix became Danish). A formal ritual of confirmation was introduced (1736), and schooling for all boys and girls was made compulsory as a prerequisite for this (1739). A new Pietist exposition of the catechism was also composed, thus adding this to the standard list of 'children's first books'. From the 1740s onwards, most Danish and Norwegian children would meet, first, a primer (called *ABC-bog*), to train functional literacy, next Luther's Small Catechism, followed by a small book of gospels and the new, extensive explanation of the Catechism. Sources such as extant school protocols allow us to follow how children moved from one book to the next one, but with some overlap. Once they had learnt to spell and read in the primer, they were given the small Catechism. They were expected to not only read it properly *indenad* ("inwardly"), but also to learn it *udenad* (by heart). For this reason, Luther's catechism was read over and over again, while at the same time, the children would continue training their functional reading skills using the small book of gospels. When a satisfactory level had been achieved, in functional reading as well as in rote learning, a child could embark on book no. four, that is, the exposition with its 759 questions (c. 200 pages in 12mo

format). Children who did well, might then be introduced to the New Testament, a hymn book, or a book with Biblical stories for further 'extensive' reading. To Pietist clergymen it was an important ambition to encourage laymen to read not only the catechism, but also the Bible itself – or at least parts of it (Appel & Fink-Jensen 2013).

For most eighteenth-century children, also in a European country like Denmark, school teaching was focused on reading and religion. For centuries, writing and arithmetic were something extra, which parents had to order specifically and pay for. Therefore, the skill to write (and to read handwritten texts) was acquired more often by boys than girls, by children living in urban environments rather than the countryside, and in well-off families rather than poor ones. Consequently, the Scandinavian languages (as in German) distinguish between the ability to read and the (advanced) skill of writing (*læsefærdighed* and *skrivefærdighed* respectively) (Appel & Fink-Jensen 2013).

From the 1780s onwards, this traditional way of schooling was challenged by keen reformers. New (transnational) ideas about childhood and the upbringing of children were launched not only by Rousseau in France, but also by – of special relevance to Denmark-Norway – a number of German philanthropists (Larsen et al. 2013). In Denmark, these ideas coincided with ambitions to reform the social and economic structure of traditional agricultural society: Several influential estate owners, including Ernst Schimmelmann who also owned extensive plantations in the Danish West Indies, introduced school reforms in conjunction with agricultural reforms on their private estates. They wanted a new generation of more independent and innovative farmers to cultivate their lands, and therefore the peasant children should not only learn reading skills and religion, but also writing and arithmetic. These skills were made compulsory, and regular school attendance became mandatory on Schimmelmann's and other noblemen's estates. Soon new national legislation was also under preparation, resulting in a series of quite ambitious school laws of 1814 for all parts of the Danish Kingdom, stipulating that not only reading and religion, but also writing and arithmetic should be taught to all children. This increased focus on writing and elementary arithmetic can be found across many parts of Europe in the early nineteenth century.

New teaching aims resulted in the development of new teaching aids. In Denmark, too, pedagogical thinkers, pastors and teachers took up the

challenge. Some radical reformers wanted to completely abolish the Catechism and dogmatic contents from children's early reading, and some suggested to begin with a new type of primer: with letters, syllables, and the very first texts describing children and their everyday life (Appel & Christensen 2023). Other authors and publishers developed a spectrum of alternative primers and readers, rather merging or combining new and traditional contents and methods (ibid.). In general, a higher proportion of beginners' books were devoted to reading exercises, and new types of primers with nothing but letters, syllables, and words were published. Other schoolbooks were explicitly devoted to the teaching of writing, with applied typefaces mimicking handwritten letters (Markussen 1988: 216–230). Thus, a variety of new methods and corresponding teaching aids were available on the European market from the 1790s onwards. Some of these early adjustments resulted from an increased interest in reading instruction and the consequences can be found in the West-Indian 1782 primer, while several key features were also adopted by the Moravian editors for the 1800 and 1825 primers.

Some of the Danish primers, published in the latter part of this reform period, from ca. 1800 onwards, can be categorized as a "Type 3" primer (Appel 2023: 103–104), according to the classification system, introduced by Juska-Bacher et al (2023: 11). This type contains "predominantly secular texts and some catechetical elements", clearly aiming to provide more and different materials for the initial phases of learning to read. Many such primers also contained illustrations (Appel 2023: 104–105). Just as the editors behind the Moravian primers had decided to take over several aspects from other contemporary primers, it must also be underscored that they abstained from copying other features. Like in other colonial and missionary settings, focus remained on the teaching of Christian faith and dogma – with little interest in introducing other, more secular topics. Another constant concern was to print as many primers as cheaply as possible, as the Moravian producers had to pay themselves, in contrast to most European printers who tried to appeal to private consumers. Still, it is noteworthy that the Moravians included many words relating to everyday life on the islands, probably to ease the process of teaching and stimulate functional literacy skills among the enslaved people and probably in particular: their children.

6. Using and combining religious texts in colonial contexts

In 1770, a catechism and a hymnbook in Dutch Creole were also published, as already mentioned, no doubt coordinated with the publication of primers, printed in the same year. In fact, the primers have in some cases survived, exactly because they were put into a solid book binding together with such longer religious texts. Some interesting similarities and differences between the European and the Colonial printing contexts must be noticed in this connection.

In Europe, too, different religious texts and genres were often used in combination with each other, or rather following upon each other, certainly for school children being trained in the traditional 'curriculum of the catechism' (see above, section 5). The books were, however, produced and printed independently from each other, and they were most often bought by the parents themselves, frequently letting siblings inherit books from one another. However, in some cases religious books were also co-produced in Denmark (as in most other European countries): in combination with voluminous hymn books, sometimes called spiritual handbooks ("aandelige haandbøger") (Malling 2008).

This tradition began in the sixteenth century and fully blossomed in the seventeenth century. By then, the hymnbook would often be among the most frequently used books in the population at large. Some hymnbooks were termed *Klodser* ('bricks'), as they were thick and heavy as building blocks, containing hundreds of hymns, but also much more. Among typical 'extra' parts, were the catechism and the gospels. When these texts were printed with the purpose of being integrated into a hymnbook, the printer chose the same format for all texts. As a hymnbook would usually be printed in 12mo, so were the other texts. Because separate editions of catechisms and gospel books were regularly produced for school children in the even smaller 16mo format, very few separate copies of the 'hymnbook-accustomed' catechisms are extant, and therefore this model of co-printing has often been overlooked in Scandinavian church and book history (Malling 2008).

The practice of coordinating the production of different Christian texts in the same format, printed in the same year, can thus be found in Denmark as well as in the West Indies around 1770. One difference is striking, however. To our knowledge, no volume has yet been found, in which a plain Danish primer with children's first reading exercises (*ABC-bog*) has

been placed together with other religious books, such as a catechism or a hymn book, within the same binding. Apparently, Danish primers were never printed with the intention of being included in a hymnbook, and no private owners seem to have made this combination either. Danish primers clearly belonged to the initial teaching of reading skills, when children were typically 5–6 years of age. Once elementary literacy skills were acquired, the book was put aside – or passed on to siblings.

In a colonial context, much was different. M.O. Grenby has recently published a pioneering study demonstrating how religious commonplace literature must be considered the earliest genre of 'children's literature' (Grenby 2023a). When Europeans colonized other parts of the world, missionary activities were often part of the scene. This could be done in a variety of ways, depending on political, cultural, and linguistic factors. However, in many cases Christian primers, catechisms, and hymnbooks would be imported or even printed locally as a key 'weapon' in a colonial religious-cultural offensive. Not least when Pietist or Moravian missionaries were taking the lead in eighteenth-century missions, teaching materials in the local language would usually be used. The situation in the Danish West Indies fits well into this pattern.

In Europe, paper was a scarce and expensive resource, even more so in the colonies. Moreover, when books made for 'export' to missionary initiatives were printed in Europe, the books took up valuable space on board the ships – space which could be used for other goods. Therefore, the printing of religious books for teaching and edifying purposes had to be carefully planned by the people involved. One strategy was to set up printing presses in the colonies, another – often for the early phases of mission – to use a printing formula combining more texts into one book. Thus, even though separate copies of the West Indian primers were most likely also distributed and used as individual books, they were printed so that they could also immediately be fitted together with a catechism and a hymnbook in a common binding. Such combined volumes have survived till today and may well have been in common use.

7. The use of the mother tongue in colonial teaching

7.1 Teaching in the vernacular

In the Middle Ages, many boys had been introduced to reading and writing in Latin, that is, in a language which was not their mother tongue. However,

the vernacular was increasingly used to teach young children the first steps in reading. In Northen Europe, this became the standard method, strengthened by the Protestant Reformation, and with printed primers substituting handwritten ones. Also, in most "Latin schools" or grammar schools, also in Denmark, the vernacular would be the dominant teaching language during the first school year(s). Only a minority of the pupils, later joined by boys who had received private tuition in clerical or other well-educated families, would acquire a full proficiency in Latin. Some children, especially boys, would also learn some German and possibly some French; however, the majority of Danish children were exclusively taught to read in the vernacular.

When it comes to reading instruction in a colonial setting, the situation was different. Often, European missionaries would optimistically bring thousands of primers in their own language, as it was done by e.g. Spanish missionaries in South America or English ones in North America, thus trying to teach a foreign language, reading, and religion to the native populations, all at the same time (Grenby 2023a: 20–24). Soon, however, experiments were made by providing instructional material in the native population's mother tongue, e.g. in Natick Algonquin in 1691 (Grenby 2023a: 24), but also in Sami in Northern Sweden as early as 1619 (Lindmark 2023: 157). Such early primers were usually bilingual, printing the native and the colonial languages alongside each other, also to promote language learning either way. It is worth noting that this procedure was never used in the West Indies, certainly not in printed materials, as far as we know. One explanation could be that the enslaved people should learn to read in order to become good Christians, not to learn more languages. Another explanation was that there was no obvious 'masters' language'; Danish (and later English) being the language of the administration, whereas planters used different languages themselves (Dutch, English, French, Danish).

7.2 Experiences from Tranquebar, the Sami region, and Greenland

In relation to missionary activities under the auspices of the Danish King, the first literacy experiments were made in Tranquebar, on the South-East Indian coast. Here, two Pietist clergymen, educated in Halle, Germany, had been invited to start missionary activities in 1705, and teaching was organized in Danish and Portuguese, as well as in the local language Tamil

(Jeyaraj 1996). In the beginning, all books in European languages were imported, but soon missionaries began to translate and produce teaching materials in Tamil, written on palm leaves. After a few years, however, they applied for a local printing press, which was granted and paid for by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) of London. In 1712 (eight years before the trading station was formally made into a Danish colony), a printing press was sent to India, and the process of creating Tamil typefaces could begin. From 1714, primers and catechisms were produced in this language (Grenby 2023a: 28–29; Appel & Fink-Jensen 2013; Bakker & Bøegh 2021). From 1760, Moravian missionaries were allowed to work in Tranquebar in collaboration with the Danish mission.

Meanwhile, the Danish King and his government had become much more experienced with regard to missionary activities. In 1714, a new missionary department had been established (*Missionskollegiet*), and the Sami populations in Northern Norway had been targeted as the first goal. First, the vernacular language had been used, with the printing of a Sami primer and a Sami catechism. For centuries, Sami and Norwegian people had had contacts, and some people would know both languages (to varying degrees). Nevertheless, the mission kept running into problems, and it was increasingly difficult to find clergymen and teachers who felt sufficiently confident in Sami. In the mid-1750s, Danish-Norwegian was increasingly accepted and even promoted as a teaching language in the Sami mission, so that the Sami had to learn this language while simultaneously being taught reading and religion. The argument was put forward that the Sami population had had plenty of time to adapt to being Norwegian – and some even claimed that Sami was such an inferior language that it was unsuitable for teaching the Christian religion (Appel & Fink-Jensen 2013: 258).

A different strategy was pursued in Greenland. In 1721, a missionary expedition was sent out, led by Hans Egede. For centuries there had been no contact with the inhabitants of this part of the Danish King's realms. The local Inuit did not understand Danish, and neither Egede nor anybody else from Europe knew Greenlandic. From the very beginning, Egede had the ambition to do his teaching and preaching in Greenlandic, so he made a concerted effort to learn the language, as did his two sons, who reached bilingual standards and were brought up together with two Greenlandic foster brothers. Together, father and sons translated religious texts, and in this process, they created a written form of Greenlandic (Kjærsgaard 2011).

Bilingual primers in Greenlandic and Danish played an important role, and the first one was printed in 1739 in Copenhagen (Nielsen & Kjærsgaard 2020, 2023). Groups of Greenlandic boys were taught Danish, and an increasing number of children grew up in mixed Danish-Greenlandic families, making the sons from these families the obvious candidates for positions as teachers of the catechism (*kateketer*). Until the 1850s, all Greenlandic primers, catechisms etc. were printed in Copenhagen and from the mid-eighteenth century, they were all monolingual. For centuries, there was no attempt by the Danish mission to impose Danish as an instructional language – or as a second foreign language.

In 1732, Christian VI had also accepted a Moravian mission in Greenland. Interestingly, the Moravians first tried to use German alongside Greenlandic as a teaching language, but gradually they had to give this up. The Moravian's first primers in Greenlandic only, were probably printed around 1772; the oldest extant copy is from 1798 (Nielsen & Kjærsgaard 2023: 131). In fact, it is a story of poor survival rates, probably with parallels to the story of extant and surviving Moravian primers in Dutch Creole.

Thus, a range of experiences had been made by European missions, and also more specifically by missions initiated and (partly) controlled by the Danish government. We do not know yet exactly which experiences and models, the missionaries in the West Indies drew on, but know-how and teaching aids from other regions were available, also, of course, from other parts of the Caribbean.

7.3 Applying Dutch Creole in the West Indies

Even though Danes had been present on St. Thomas as early as in 1666, no missionary activities were carried out for decades. The main reason was probably that the planters and the administrators did not want that valuable working time was used for classes, when they preferred work hours of their enslaved. Primers, catechisms, hymnbooks and other religious publications were imported, but only in small numbers and only for Danish inhabitants. European planters with a different national and linguistic background (in fact the majority, often Dutch or English) would use the religious literature familiar to themselves, most often representing reformed Protestantism. In contrast to the strict mono-confessional constitution of Lutheran Denmark, many confessions co-existed on the West Indian islands.

When the Moravians initiated their missionary activities in the early 1730s, they discovered to their astonishment that the enslaved had their own language. And in accordance with their general attitudes and world view, they saw the enslaved population as humans – brothers and sisters. Therefore, they immediately embarked on learning the most widespread language among the enslaved people, in order to use it for missionary purposes. From this early period, some sources close to early Dutch Creole exist. Some letters from (or written on behalf of) enslaved people exist in manuscript, other early texts in Dutch Creole from the 1730s were printed in Europe in 1742 (Zinzendorf 1742: 453–457, 483–485, 485–487). Quite likely, early teaching would have focused on oral instruction, so that the first primers in Dutch Creole were mainly intended for the missionaries themselves to support their communication with and teaching of the enslaved people. For this early phase, they may have used limited numbers of handwritten primers. However, in order to prepare the enslaved population for true Christianity, more than a few prayers were needed. The Moravians would teach native populations to read wherever they worked as missionaries, e.g. in Greenland, and once they had embarked on missioning among the Black, enslaved inhabitants in the West Indies, the wish to teach them to read was a logical next step. Just as they had made sure to produce printed primers in Greenlandic (in ca. 1772, see section 7.2), it seems quite likely that they also acquired printed primers and maybe other short religious texts for their mission in the West Indies. In section 5, we have pointed to evidence that such texts existed from the 1760s, and we have argued that they were probably in use even earlier, just as we find it highly probable that more printed editions of Dutch Creole primers once existed, but have gone lost (see above, section 5.2).

As early as the mid-eighteenth century, a number of enslaved islanders who had adopted the Christian faith, had also acquired some level of literacy or were certainly acquainted with the usefulness of written communication. Some 150 letters written by/attributed to enslaved Africans between 1737 and 1768 have been preserved in the holdings of the Unitäts Archives (Stein 1985b, 1989, Van Rossem & van der Voort 1996: 64–86). Most of the letters were probably written by others than the enslaved people themselves, but they testify to their familiarity with handwritten texts. It remains to be seen how widespread writing abilities were, as the slave letters have many senders but significantly fewer distinct handwritings.

8. Conclusions

Dutch Creole was in active use as the main language of missionary teaching on the Danish West Indies from the 1730s until well into the nineteenth century. During the first decades, only Moravian missionaries were active, also in creating (hand-written, later printed) teaching aids in Dutch Creole, the most common language spoken by a significant part of the population, especially the enslaved people on the islands. Printed texts in Dutch Creole are known to have existed from the early 1760s, at the latest, most likely also primers in this language.

The Danish-Norwegian Lutheran mission, since 1757 operating in a state-run colony, decided after some time to follow the Moravian's strategy and begin teaching and preaching in Dutch Creole. For this mission, it was also important to start an offensive, given the increasing number of enslaved people as well as the muddled confessional situation among the rest of the population. Thus, in 1770, the Lutheran mission organized the printing of primers in Dutch Creole, along with Lutheran catechisms and hymn books in the same language, to be used as key instruments in the teaching of reading and religion to the enslaved population.

The earliest extant primers, produced by Danish-Norwegian missionaries (two from 1770, one from 1782), were composed in close correspondence with a long-established European tradition of printed Lutheran primers. Interestingly, it was never stated on the primers that they were Lutheran. Most educated persons would probably have recognized them as such, but an explicit confessional stamp was quite likely left out on purpose. In this way, the primers could be acceptable or even appeal to a wider audience and come into use across the islands, irrespective of the national or confessional background of individual planters – whose acceptance was often needed prior to missionary activities.

The other group of printed primers in Dutch Creole originates from the Moravian mission. Two editions, from 1800 and 1825, are extant, but more may have existed, as evidence testifies to Moravian teaching from the 1730s onwards, including use of "small printed books".

The Lutheran primers had some initial spelling and reading exercises while they focused on key religious texts (the five chief parts of the catechism, and daily prayers), the Moravian primers on the other hand prioritized the contents the other way round, expanding contents which supported instruction in literacy, while reducing pages in full (religious) prose.

Both groups of primers demonstrate state-of-the arts methods of their day with regard to literacy pedagogics as well as printing technology.

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