

## WRITING IN NDYUKATONGO A CREOLE LANGUAGE IN SOUTH AMERICA<sup>1</sup>

*This article is one of the two papers that I presented at the conference 'Ecrire Les Langues de Guyane', held in Cayenne, French Guiana from 9 to 11 May 2003, and published in SIBOGA, 13 nr. 1, 2003. The conference was organized by the Laboratoire des Sciences Sociales IRD Guyane, concerning the languages spoken in French Guiana. My paper includes the following items: the history of the Maroon languages, writing in Ndyuka, ideophones, changes and difficulties if you don't have knowledge of the Ndyuka language. Ndyukatongo is the language that is spoken by the Ndyuka or Okanisi, a Maroon group of Suriname.*

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A language is one of the means to unite people. A person will feel quite at home in a country, if he can speak and understand the language that is spoken. He will not feel himself an outsider. When a child is born, the first language he will be confronted with is the language that is spoken by the midwife and her assistants. But the language in which the child will learn to talk and think is the language of the mother, or the language of the person who will bring him up. This language will be the native tongue of the child.

### Hypotheses

There are various hypotheses that the Afro-Surinamese languages, such as the Maroon native languages Ndyuka, Saamaka, Pamaka, Matawai, Kwiinti and Aluku, and the Sranantongo (a lingua franca, mostly spoken by the Creoles), originated in Suriname itself. However, history shows that these languages began in the depots in Africa where European slave traders brought thousands of Africans together for transportation to slavery. The Afro-Surinamese languages are languages, which linguists classify among the Creole languages. They are in origin artificial (Pidgin) languages, in other words, which arise through trade contacts. Languages, which originate and develop through the meeting of groups of people who cannot understand each other (Pakosie, 2000-2:2-12 and Pakosie, 2002:121-131).

An example of a Pidgin, was the so called 'Businengee *patuwa*', derived from the 'patoi' (Guianais) a Creole French. The Businengee *patuwa* was made by the French Creoles and the several Maroon groups to communicate with each other during the '*bagasiten*' (the period of cargo transportation to the inlands of French Guiana and Suriname). Nowadays there are few people who speak and understand the Businengee '*patuwa*'. The present-day Maroons who are domiciled at a French speaking area, prefer to learn French directly.

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## Instrumental and vocal languages

This article primarily concerned one of the Maroon native languages, the Ndyukatongo. For the sake of clearness when we talk about Ndyukatongo, we have to divide this language into two main groups: *Vocal languages* and *Instrumental languages*. The following languages of the Ndyuka are numbered among the vocal languages: (the present-day) *Ndyukatongo*, *Loangu*, *Anpuku*, *Papa*, *Kumanti*, *Amanfu* and *Akoopina*. The instrumental languages include: *Wanwi-apinti*, *Kumanti-apinti*, *Kwadyo*, *Agbado*, *Benta*, *(Botoo)Tutu* and *Abaankuman*. *Abaankuman* is a sound or tone code language, related to particular events. For example, in a traditional Maroon society, the sound of a gunshot means that game has been caught, so there is meat to be had. The sound of the *Apinti* means that a public event is taking place. Hearing the sound of a bell means a public worship is going on (Pakosie, 2000-2:2-12 and Pakosie, 2002:121-131).



Participants at the conference in Cayenne (Foto: André R.M. Pakosie)

## The origin of the Maroon languages

The present-day Ndyuka language is not the same as in the beginning of the Ndyuka community. According to history, about 353 years ago, in 1650, slavery of black people was started in Suriname. In that year, West Europeans - among them English, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese - began to use thousands of black people as goods for the slave trade. These people were captured in different parts of Africa to be transported into slavery in Suriname and other places in South and North America. Speaking about Africa, it is a continent with different countries and nations. Each nation and ethnic group has his own culture and language. One group would not be able to understand the language of the others. The Europeans held people from all these various ethnic groups captive in the depots. One of these depots was Saint George d'Elmina Castle on the coast of modern-day Ghana. The forebears of the Afro-Surinamese people were held captive in these depots for weeks,

months, sometimes years afterwards, before being transported to their eventual destinations, the slave plantations of Suriname and other places in the Americas (Pakosie, 2000-2:3 and Pakosie, 2002:125). We can certainly say that the slavery of the African people, who were transported to the Americas, began from the time that they were held captive in the depots. From that time, they were not free to do as they wanted. The West-European slave traders controlled their whole being.

Precisely in such circumstances, the need to communicate with each other was urgent. This situation forced the captive Africans to create a new means of communication. In this way, a new language originated to overcome the Babylonian confusion of speech created by the enforced togetherness of the ancestors of the Afro-Surinamese people. This new language is built up from the respective languages of the captured Africans from different ethnic groups. This means that it is derived from African languages. For the sake of convenience, I give this new language the name Afro-African (Pakosie, 2000-2:2-12 and Pakosie, 2002:121-131).

Together with this Afro-African language, another new language emerged through the language contact between the captive Africans and the West-European slave traders. This was formed of words from the European languages, words from the native languages of the various African ethnic groups and words from the Afro-African. This second language I give the name Afro-European or Euro-African. These two languages, Afro-African and Afro-European (Euro-African) are the origin of the present-day Afro-Surinamese languages, such as Sranan tongo, Ndyukatongo, Saamakatongo, Alukutongo, Pamakatongo, Matawaitongo and Kwiintitongo (Pakosie, 2000-2:2-12 and Pakosie, 2002:121-131).

The passage of slaves from a depot in Africa to, sometimes directly to the respective plantations, sometimes first to the central depot in Curaçao, an island in the Atlantic Ocean, took also a couple of months or weeks. The transportation of slaves from Curaçao to the respective plantations of those to whom the slaves were sold, took another couple of weeks or even months. It may be clear that during such a passage to the slave plantations and on the plantation themselves, further new languages originated in order to communicate with each other. A language that was formed of words from the European languages, words from the native languages of the various African ethnic groups and words from Afro-African.

After being placed definitively on the respective slave plantations, other new languages will be originated if there is a new Babylonian confusion of speech among the majority of the slaves on the same plantation.

#### Language development among the Maroons of Suriname

After the forming of Maroon groups in the tropical rainforests of Suriname and French Guiana, the process of language development was continued. This is because the formed new societies consisted not only of people of different African ethnicities but, significantly, also of people from different types of Surinamese slave plantation, and slave plantation experiences. The new originated languages were formed by words from the different languages they already knew, added by words from the languages or dialects that were spoken by the owners of the respective slave plantations where each of the group came from (Pakosie, 2000-2:3-4 and Pakosie, 2002:125-126).

This means that words from the old languages which could no longer be used, disappeared and new one came in their place. It shows us that after the ancestors were forced to leave their native languages for a new language, they developed many languages before the

present-day Maroon native languages such as *Ndyuka*, *Saamaka*, *Pamaka*, *Matawai*, *Aluku* and *Kwiinti*.

Among the languages the Maroons distinguish, which lie in between their original African native languages and their current languages, are *Loangu*, *Kumanti*, *Papa*, *Anpuku*, *Amanfu*, *Akoopina*. Nowadays these languages are only used in religious ceremonies.

As mentioned, in any of the present-day Maroon languages you will find a number of words from many European languages, such as English, Portuguese, French and Dutch. But English and Portuguese have more affected the present-day Maroon languages. That is why we may divide the six present-day Maroon languages into two main groups:

1. *Surinamese Afro-English*: *Ndyuka*, *Pamaka*, *Aluku*, *Kwiinti* and
2. *Surinamese Afro-Portuguese*: *Saamaka* and *Matawai*

It may be clear that since the *Aluku* are French citizens, their native language is also strong affected by the French language. The same happened with many Dutch words, which you will find in the other Maroon languages, used by the youth of these Maroon groups.

### Writing in *Ndyuka*

In spite of the fact that already in 1908, the *Ndyuka* Maroon *Afáka* created a script for writing *Ndyukatongo*, until the last three decades, Maroon didn't have a literate culture and therefore not a writing history.

In the past, even *Sranantongo* was not a regular language that was used to write, except church book translations. Until the middle of the 1980's, there was also not an official way to write *Sranantongo*. Anyone could write it as they like. It was minister Alan Li Fo Sjoie (1984-1988) who brought the change. He installed a commission of linguists that produced an official form of writing *Sranantongo*. Nevertheless, there are still many people who write *Sranantongo* in their own way. And also because there is no official way to write *Ndyukatongo*, we are confronted with the same problem as writing *Sranantongo*. To solve this problem, one should learn first how to write *Ndyukatongo* in the right way. Knowledge of the *Ndyuka* alphabet is necessary.

These are the letters or alphabet to may write in *Ndyuka* in the right way.

Vowels: *A, E, I, O, U*.

The following letter are also to be used: *Á, É, Í, Ó, Ú*.

Consonants: *B, D, F, G, H, K, L, M, N, P, S, T, U, W, Y, Z*.

A vowel is a letter or symbol that is used to represent a vowel sound in writing. Consonants are letters or symbols that can be used in combination with vowels to form words.

How to use vowels in *Ndyukatongo*:

*a* like in *ana* or *alisi*

e like in *eke* or *ete*

i like in *ini* or *ipi*

o like in *opu* or *osu*

u like in *buku* or *bun*

To write Ndyukatongo these letters are also to be used:

á like in *ná* or *Abáan*

é like in *feefeé* or *geénge*

í like in *kiípi* or *guligulí*

ó like in *kódo* or *boóko*

ú like in *fuúdu* or *fufuú*

In Ndyukatongo you may also use double vowels:

aa like in *tamaa* or *taa*

ee like in *feelee* or *beelee*

ii like in *biifi* or *siibi*

oo like in *booki* or *botoo*

uu like in *buguu* or *buuse*

Sometimes you also have to combine consonants to make a letter to form a word. For example:

dy like in *dyalusu* or *dyebii*

ny like in *nyan* or *nyoni*

ty like in *tyapoba* or *tyatyali*

Mm like in *mma* or *mmá*

Except words that are borrowed from another language, there are no words in Ndyukatongo that can be written with the letters C, J, Q, V and X.

Writing in Ndyukatongo and speaking Ndyukatongo are two different things. The correct way to write Ndyukatongo, is to write the words as they are spoken in their full form. For example, if you say: *y' á mu taigi en taki m' be kon ya*, then you should write it as: *Yu á mu taigi en taki mi be kon ya*.

For a legible and understandable text, you also have to put an 'accent aigu' on the right vowel. For example writing or saying: *na en* or *ná en*, have two different meanings. *Na en* is an affirmative, it means, that is it. But *ná en*, is a negative, and means, that isn't it.

This is equal for writing or saying: *sama* or *sáma*? If you write or say *Sama*, you mean, people in general, for example, *den sama fu Soolan* (the people of Saint Laurent ). But writing or saying: *sáma*?, is a question to know who this person is.

In Ndyukatongo words end on *A, E, I, O, U*. In other words, the last letter in each Ndyuka word is a vowel. There is also a hypothesis that Ndyukatongo don't have the letters *H* and *Z*. But looking at the words: *hou, hinsii, ho, he, azeman, ze, zekanti*, it is clear that these two letters are also part of the Ndyuka alphabet.

In contrast to the African and West-European languages, from which it is derived, Ndyukatongo does not have the letter *R*. Were the *R* has been dropped from the original word, it is replaced either by a compensatory lengthening of the associated vowel. For example, *boofu* instead of the Akan (African) word *brofo* from which it is derived.

But not only the *R* change into a vowel: *a, e, o, i* or *u*, also an intervocalic *D* in a word will change in Ndyuka into a *L*. For example, the Sranantongo word, '*brede*', which is derived from the English word bread, is in Ndyukatongo, '*beele*'.

## IDEOPHONES

A common similarity of the Maroon languages, and as far as I know, also of the Black-African languages in Africa, is that they have several ideophones. These are words that are used to distinguish meanings, sounds, colors, movements, emotions and other physical characteristics.

For example:

Writing or saying: *A kaba kellé* or *A kaba kelékelé*, describes how someone is all ready.

*A kaba gbólon*, describes the way it is all gone or it is over.

Some other ideophones are:

*Bodoo* (grade of softness, limpness)

*Píí* (quiet, calm, grade of blackness or darkness)

*Biogóo* (grade of blackness or darkness)

*Tóin* (grade of small)

*Títítíí* (grade of small)

*Yuwíí* (grade of coldness)

*Fáán* (grade of whiteness)

*Nyáán* (grade of redness or shines)

*Dududuu* (grade of swollen)

*Buwabuwa* (grade of heavy steps)

Modern-day Ndyuka language

A language is not static; it is liable to the changes of the community who uses it. The rapidity of the changing of a language depends on the fastness of the social changing of the community.

Looking at the Maroon languages, we have seen that from the beginning until now, they are liable to changes. Sometimes the change goes fast, sometimes slowly. For example, the Ndyukatongo has made a big change in the last 30 years, especially the last 15 years.

A change in a language not only concerns the new words adopted from other languages which replace old words, but also the fact that a set of customs and rules for polite behaviour get lost in the language.

The present ways of greeting in the Maroon societies, for example has changed a lot in the last 30 years. Thirty years ago, you had two main forms of greeting, a familiar form and a respectable form. The respectable form was used for greeting respectable persons such as father- and mother-in-law, son-and daughter-in-law, elders and strangers.

To greet a respectable person, you should first take the right attitude, putting your one hand in the other, and than greet. After that you should wait until your greeting was answered completely before you will ask permission to continuing your way. The following example is a demonstration of a respectable form of greeting used in the past in the morning between a man (*pai*, in this case a son-in-law) and his *mai*, (in this case) a mother-in-law

Pai: A kiin un baka oo Mma

*Pai: Mrs. a new day has come*

Mai: A kiin un baka ye baa

*Mai: A new day has come indeed*

Pai: U doo en

*Pai: Have you reached it well?*

Mai: U doo en baa, u seefi doo en?

*Mai: We have reached it very well, you too?*

Pai: U doo en so mooi ye

*Pai: Yes, we too have reached it very well*

Mai: Ai baa, den taa sama doo en mooi tu? *Mai: That is fine, have the others reached it too?*

Pai: Den doo en wanséwanse baa

*Pai: They have reached it all very well*

Mai: Ai baa

*Mai: That is fine*

Pai: A dda doo en mooi tu?

*Pai: The father, has he too reached it well?*

Mai: A doo en so mooi ye, ma a komoto ya *Mai: He too has reached it very well, but he has gone.*

Pai: Ai baa. We mma da u o gi piimisi baka *Pai: Well mrs. I ask permission to continuing my way*

Mai: Ai baa, da u poti daa fosi *Mai: That is good, thanks a lot*

Pai: A ná a daa baa. *Pai: You are welcome*

Nowadays, you suddenly hear a voice of someone who says: Fa!(How are you)'. And before you turn to see the person who is greeting you, he disappears. The respectful form of greeting has lost.

As mentioned before changes in a language concern also new words adopted from others. The present generation Maroons dwelling in the whole world, includes many strange words in their Maroon languages. Things are no longer called by the traditional names. For instance where someone of the old generation Maroons would say: *mi boliman* (the one who takes care of my food, meaning my wife), because according to tradition it is impolite to speak about 'my wife' in the presence of elders, one of the present generation would just say: '*mi uman*', my wife.

Some expression also lost their values, because of the changes in the societies. In former days a woman could say: 'that person is my '*kiiman*' (killingman) or my '*goniman*' (gunman, the one who bears the gun), and everyone would know that she means, her husband, the man who bears the gun to kill the meat for her to cook. This is because in the past time a man would not bear the gun if he wasn't going hunting. People would also not use a gun to kill another human being. But things are changes now, if a woman would remark her husband as '*kiiman*', it could also be taken literally, since a gun is no longer used only to hunt but also as a weapon to murder.

Before ending this paper, I want to make the following two notes. The first note concerns the complexity of the Ndyuka and other Maroon languages. Even as in Aluku and Pamaka, for instance, there is a variant called '*Nengee*'. The term *Nengee* in linguistic sense is not the same as what is called *Nengeetongo*. The term *Nengeetongo* is used to indicate the Maroon languages (and Sranantongo). But *Nengee* is a variant in Ndyuka, Aluku and Pamaka (and as far as I know, also in Saamaka), which is sometimes very difficult to understand if you don't have knowledge of the language. One may say in Nengee to you: '*yu a si a de a pe, nyan ala!*' (There is it, eat it all!). In Nengee, this doesn't mean that you may eat all they referred to. But it is just a warning for not to eat all the food. If one means that you may eat all, he would said: '*a sani di de ape yu sa nyan ala o*' (do you see that thing over there, you may eat it all).

The second note is, as I mentioned before, the Maroon languages can be divided into two main groups: *Surinamese Afro-English*: Ndyuka, Pamaka, Aluku and Kwiinti; and *Surinamese Afro-Portuguese*: Saamaka and Matawai. The fact that some of the languages, for example, Ndyuka, Pamaka, Aluku and Kwiinti are classified in the same group, don't mean that these four languages are the same. They may have common words with the same meaning, but they also have common words but with different meaning. For example the Aluku word *kali* (to call), means in Ndyukatongo, to propel a boat. In Alukutongo and Pamakatongo the word '*weli*', means dress. But in Ndyukatongo it means tire or weary. The Ndyuka word for dress is *wei*, the same word for fornication. In Pamaka and Aluku *wei* means only fornication.

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