



A Demolinguistic Profile of St. Vincent and the Grenadines or a Successful Attempt at Linguistic Disenfranchisement

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Abstract. – We address the demolinguistic dynamics between the Arawak and Carib Indians and succeeding settlers in St. Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG). The language blending between indigenous varieties subsisted well beyond the arrival of the Europeans. The chance arrival of African slaves to SVG had a considerable impact on the demographic reality and the linguistic canvas. We show that the absence of a variety of Island Carib today is a direct result of the extirpation of the Garifuna population, of the linguistic rupture occasioned by their deportation, and of the colonial assimilation policies imposed with a view to fostering national development. [*Island Carib, Garifuna, Arawak, language loss, colonisation*]

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The loss of a language is like the loss of a cherished museum or library. A language bears, in its lexical and semantic features, in its ways of saying things, a significant measure of the civilisation of its speakers (Hale 2000).

1 Introduction

It was commonly believed and stated in the old literature on St. Vincent that the island was “dis-

covered” by Christopher Columbus on January 22, 1498. Putting aside the fact that the word “discovery,” as used here, is a loaded Eurocentric term, Christopher Columbus was actually in Spain on that date and no evidence is currently available to indicate that any of his crew had actually landed on or been near St. Vincent at that time. Furthermore, despite the name “Point Espagnol” (Spanish Point) at the northern tip of the island, there is even some doubt that the Spaniards had landed here at any time. Even the name St. Vincent is clouded in mystery as it is tied in with the issue of discovery on January 22, 1498, making reference to the patron saint celebrated on that day. Over the centuries, the early history of the islands remained scantily documented. The first mention of the name Saint Vincent as “San Vicente” appeared to have been in 1512 (Sauer 1966: 193; Gullick 1985: 43). Apart from the fact that the early Europeans decided to focus their attention further north in the Greater Antilles and in Central America, the presence of the Caribs¹ who fiercely defended their country and the myths,² which had surfaced about

1 Throughout this article, we will use the designation “Carib” as a cover term to refer to both the Island Caribs and the Garifuna or Black Caribs.

2 The issue of cannibalism among the Caribs is an issue that is still very much debated. Some researchers who accepted the view of cannibalism have attributed it to ritualistic rather than gastronomic reasons (cf. Petersen 1997: 129). Even Labat, writing in 1722/III: 238 f.) had raised question about this common view, stating that it was an error to believe that they were anthropophagi. Labat (238 f.) observed that as a

their supposed cannibalistic behaviour, deterred European presence and colonisation. This can be seen even with later English attempts to establish themselves in St. Vincent. (Hulme and Whitehead 1992: 57, 64, 177–179).

Given the minimal contact with St. Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG), much of what is said about the country and people was often engulfed in stereotypes, myths, and legends and these had seeped into the general literature throughout the centuries. Early English settlers reinforced a lot of this in their efforts to steer their home government toward adopting a policy geared to driving the indigenous inhabitants into exile in a bid to secure prized sugar lands. Even Shephard who lived in St. Vincent in the early decades of the 19th century and served in different positions within the administration could write: “the early history of the lesser colonies in the West Indies is so obscure, and of such little importance in the present age that it is hardly worthy of any research.” Shephard’s so-called history of St. Vincent is described by Goveia (1956: 98) as an “exercise in ex-parte history.” Shephard, however, recognised the shortcomings of some of the early writings. He noted: “there are few records to be found in any writings of those who first visited them, which are not either enveloped in fiction, or distorted by ignorance or prejudice” (Shephard 1997: 19).

St. Vincent was one of the last strongholds of indigenous resistance and consequently a late victim of European colonisation. By the time, serious efforts were made with regard to colonisation, more so by the English than by the French, the indigenous Indian population had integrated people of African descent into their fold. It is believed that the intermarriage of these peoples had produced a population called Black Caribs (Garifuna) who were fierce defenders of the country until their defeat and exile in 1797.

This article seeks to address the demolinguistic dynamics of the contact period between the Indians and succeeding settlers on Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. We will outline the degree of intercourse between the clandestine European settlers (Russell 1778/I: 102; Martin 1837: 212) and Island Caribs, Garifuna, and Africans. To that end, we will begin by attempting to retrace the origins of the first attested settlers.

sign of victory and merit, they smoke dried body parts of their enemies. Fabel (2000: 154), quoting the 17th-century writer John Scott, supported the view of this ritualistic practice and gave some detail of it.

2 Origins of the Island Caribs and Garifuna

In the literature, one reads that during the early arrivals of Europeans to the Caribbean, groups of Indians had already established themselves in the islands. It is generally accepted that Arawakan-speaking groups had settled on SVG prior to the arrival of the group that was later identified as the “Caribe.” Juan López de Velasco used Arawak (from *aruaca* or *arouage*) as an ethnic name in his geographical treatise of 1574 (1971). It was considered a revolting term designating those who ate manioc, with reference to the Indians who lived between the Corentyn and Pomeroon rivers in Guiana. This group of Indians called themselves *locono* or *lukkunu* meaning human beings (cf. Brinton 1871; Gillin 1948: 802).

On the other hand, Carib (from *calina* or *galibi*) is a term of self-ascription. Some early accounts point in this direction. Sieur de La Borde’s (1674) account in Hulme and Whitehead (1992: 139) states: “I will not try to uncover the origins and descent of the Caraïbes, island savages of America; they themselves know nothing of it . . . Old Savages have told me that they derive from Galibis from the mainland, neighbours of their enemies the Alouagues; because their language, the customs, & the religion have a lot of conformity with their own, & because they have entirely destroyed a nation of these isles, except for the women whom they took for themselves, & this is the reason that the language of the men does not resemble that of the women, in several particulars.”

Today, the term Island Carib would suggest the need to underscore the difference between the mainland Galibis and those who migrated to the islands and came in contact with the Arawaks. Early writers would have it that the Island Carib men were a defiant force and soon caused the assimilation of the Arawakan-speaking Indians. However, according to Allaire (1980b), there is no archaeological proof that confirms that the Arawakan-speaking groups were conquered. Allaire contends that the exact opposite scenario may have occurred following the arrival of the Europeans in the Lesser Antilles.

It must be noted that most of the early writers who attempted to explicate the linguistic habits of these first settlers identified similarities between the languages spoken by the different groups (Labat 1722/III: 241). While the mainland origin of the Island Caribs seems to be undisputed, there is a lot more speculation as to the origin of the Black Caribs who, according to all reports, were cultural-

ly assimilated to the Island Caribs.³ The origin of this group is somewhat controversial. It is generally agreed that they were the descendants of unions between Carib women and Negro men. Even the provenance of the Blacks is a source of contention between historians and ethnologists alike, particularly since Van Sertima's contention that they came before Columbus. The early chroniclers (planters and administrators, but also explorers, seamen, and missionaries) have largely focussed on a shipwreck for which different dates are given as the means by which Africans first came to St. Vincent and from whom the Black Caribs descended. The early settlers chose to emphasise this in order to support their view that the Black Caribs were usurpers. We will briefly review some theories put forward to account for their presence on SVG.

The most widespread theory supposes that the indigenous population, through integration with African escapees of a shipwreck off Barbados, had produced a population called Black Caribs (Garifuna), fierce defenders of the country until their defeat and exile in 1797. No figures have been suggested to indicate the number of Africans that might have survived the shipwreck and neither is there anything to indicate whether Europeans were among them. It is even thought that there may not have been a single shipwreck. According to Moreau (1988: 156, 186) as early as 1611, a French slaver carrying 200 Negroes to Martinique and 400 between St. Vincent and Grenada ran aground. Bastide (1971: 77) cited in Ellis (1991: 176) reports that in 1635, two Spanish vessels transporting Blacks from Efik and Ibo tribes of the Niger Delta sank off St. Vincent (cf. also La Borde's 1674 account in Hulme and Whitehead 1992: 150). As a matter of fact, shipwrecks were constantly reported until at least 1675.⁴ To give one last example, in 1672, an English slaver is reported to have sunk off St. Vincent (Ellis 1991:176). The likely dates are 1672 and even an earlier date of 1635, given the deposition of Major John Scott as reported by Hulme and Whitehead (1992: 171). What is uncontested though is that the Caribs relentlessly came to the rescue of shipwrecked Africans destined for West Indian plantations and that during the 17th and 18th centuries runaway slaves of Yoruba, Fon, Fanti-Ashanti, and Congo origin continued to augment the St. Vincent population (Ellis 1991:176).

3 The question that remains open to debate is from which mainland did the Indians arrive: North (Labat 1722/III: 242; Rochefort 1665) or South (Pelleprat 1655a; La Borde 1674).

4 Anderson 1800: 45; Shephard 1997: 22; Duncan 1955: 2.

The claim that the ex-African slaves found themselves among the Indian settlers becomes even more compelling considering the geographic mobility of the Island Caribs. The Caribs travelled long distances in their pirogues and reached surrounding islands almost effortlessly. For instance, a night's journey would put Martinique within reach (Craton 1997:121). It is, therefore, quite likely that the Caribs fished out Africans once they were offshore from Barbados (Labat 1722/III: 296) and Martinique (Report of Intendant Robert⁵ [1700], in Hulme and Whitehead 1992: 173).

Another line of reasoning, advanced by the Rev. Fr. Le Breton (1998), is that the Black Caribs are descendants of "Ethiopians," whose ship had been wrecked during a storm off the northern part of the island. According to Le Breton, this group of "Ethiopians"⁶ were the only survivors from the wreckage of this Spanish vessel. Interestingly, the Rev. Fr. Le Breton did mention that intermixing of the Caribs and the "Ethiopians" produced offspring that allowed them to equal the Carib race without overtaking it. One is left to speculate on whether this changed during the course of history. However, Moreau de Jonnès, a French soldier who wrote about his experience of fighting alongside the Island Caribs and the Garifuna (referred to by him as Red Caribs and Black Caribs respectively), seemed to give no currency to the intermarriage line of reasoning. Moreau de Jonnès (1895: 127) refuted the idea that the group of people referred to as the Black Caribs were offspring of Negro slaves. Nonetheless, he *likened*⁷ them to the Ethiopians,⁸ given their physical traits. They had smooth, long, black hair, similar to that of a horse's mane. They had a straight nose and thin lips that in no way resembled those of the Negroes.

A more recent argument has arisen, that Negroid elements were present in the region in pre-Columbian times. According to Van Sertima (1977: 14), the Spanish sighted, but either suppressed or ignored, African settlements and arte-

5 Archives Nationales de Paris: Colonies C8-a, 12, 1700.

6 The mere fact that quotation marks appear around Ethiopian may be an indication that this was hearsay rather than proven fact.

7 Moreau de Jonnès had the opportunity to observe and relate closely with the Caribs. Although he did call into question the claim that the Black Caribs were the result of a mixture of Red Caribs and Negroes, he did not advance any theory about their origins. He stated that "they had the traits of Abyssinians" (our translation).

8 Moreau de Jonnès used the term "Abyssinians": Abyssinia being the former name for Ethiopia.

facts along the South American coasts. This view by Van Sertima has not been widely accepted and in fact a group of social scientists from Central America have severely challenged Van Sertima's arguments (Haslip-Viera et al. 1997). If we were to accept Van Sertima's arguments, then we would need to reexamine the dynamics of the pre-European society. At what point did these Blacks arrive and how did they fit in with the commonly held stories about the interplay between Caribs and Arawaks? The very early accounts of visits to St. Vincent make no reference to Blacks but later accounts in the 17th century began to highlight their presence.

Surely, the Indians already had Blacks among them before the Europeans established slavery in SVG. This is no mystery since Blacks arrived before the formal establishment of slavery. Judging from the letter of M. de Beaumont in Hulme and Whitehead (1992: 176), prior to the arrival of the Africans who had survived the shipwreck of the 1670s, there were some 3,000 Blacks on St. Vincent. Moreau (1991: 109) recounts that Luisa Navarette observed 40 Blacks along with 30 Spanish captives to the Dominican Indians in 1587. Gullick (1985: 144) also reports that the Caribs had Negro slaves among them before 1649. It is known that the Caribs had captured slaves from plantations in the northern Caribbean before the establishment of any European presence in the Lesser Antilles. The Black Carib population was also increased by the presence of escaped slaves from Barbados (Labat 1722/III: 296) and Martinique, who, having been aware of the enmity between the Caribs and Europeans, saw St. Vincent as a place of refuge. Long after this initial marooning, which brought runaway slaves to seek refuge in St. Vincent among the Caribs, Mrs. Carmichael (1833/II: 46) related that the slaves considered "[justly] the Charaib country of St. Vincent as the land of milk and honey." This obviously had to do with the fact that the Caribs still offered slaves refuge from plantation oppression.

Whether the intermarriage between the Negroes and Indians is in fact the origin of the Garifuna race is open to discussion and much speculation. By their cultural practices, the Garifuna could be considered descendants of the Galibis, or at least of their lineage. Of course, William Young and his fellow British planters viewed the fact that the Garifuna considered themselves as Caribs as a usurpation of Indian customs by African Negroes (Shephard 1997: appendix xli). In the next section, we will examine the linguistic habits of the earlier settlers of St. Vincent. We will also explore the

role men, women, and children may have actively played in shaping the linguistic landscape of the Carib civilisation.

3 Linguistic Profile of the Indian Populations

3.1 Island Carib as a *bona fide* Contact Language

We know very little about the nature of language contact existing between the Caribs and the Arawaks on St. Vincent. Breton, a Dominican priest who had spent a little less than 19 years on Guadeloupe from 1635 on, gives evidence in favour of linguistic duality (Hulme and Whitehead 1992: 107; Ralston 1985: 21). In Breton's view the women used a language, different from that of the men. Later another missionary, Father Labat, who arrived in 1693, also reported the same linguistic state of affairs but went further to state that there were three sorts of languages, the first being one that everyone spoke, but which was typical of the men's speech. The second, specific to the women, was understood by the men but, not used by them, and neither dared the women to address the men in this language. The women used this language only among themselves. The older men of the community used what appeared to have been a war jargon when they met during the war councils and which neither the women nor the young Carib men understood (Labat 1722/III: 241 f.).

Farr (1993) as quoted by Cooper (1997: 194 f.) suggests that before the Europeans came, women and men took part in trade and spoke Island Carib as a trade jargon. However, in their efforts to defend themselves from European aggression they became increasingly militarised and witnessed the transformation of trading and warfare into male dominated activities, a shift which reflected an increased distinction between women and men's language. Farr further contends that the Island Carib language was not restricted to men. Given our ignorance of pre-Columbian Carib society, it is difficult to dismiss Farr's position. What we can assert is that the language spoken by the Indians in the Caribbean by the 17th century bore all the marks of a *bona fide* contact language. The sociocultural and linguistic context which we are focussing on was far from being a static one.

An anonymous pirate, dubbed "l'anonyme de Carpentras" by Moreau (1990: 117) and who had had the privilege of observing the Indians on the French islands for 11 months between 1619–1620, i.e., some 15 years before Father Breton, com-

mented on the differences between the language of the men and that of the women, provided below in (1).

(1) Women's Language	Gloss
<i>cati</i>	"the moon"
<i>mabiorgnora hi</i>	"good day my son"
<i>acquietios</i>	"come here"
Men's Language	Gloss
<i>nouna</i>	"the moon"
<i>maboiqua immouro</i>	"good day my son"
<i>accabou ou ou</i>	"come here"

In the literature, the lexical elements recorded varied according to the observers. Pelleprat (1655b: 17) recorded *mourou* "son" (Galibis), and *noúno* "the moon" (1655b: 15). Breton himself also provided *máboüica* "good day," *ímoulou* "my son," and *niraheu* "my son." More evidence of variation can be seen in Breton's (1665–66) dictionary entries for *hake* or *haakêtêkê* "come" and *accábo* "come." *Hác ím* "come here, son" and *íte yéte* "come here" were also recorded by Breton. Regrettably, Breton provided no explanatory notes to indicate who used these lexical entries nor under which circumstances.

The issue of linguistic duality that is generally accepted has spawned some debate about the origin, even when the gender differentiation issue is considered. This has reinforced the view started with Columbus that the Galibis (Carib or Karina-speaking) men coming from their Amazonian settlements to trade eventually conquered the Ignéri (Arawakan-speaking) groups. From this also arose the commonly held view that the Caribs ate the men and usurped possession of the female folk (cf. Breton 1666; Pelleprat 1655a: 68).⁹ The latter were reported to have kept their language.

This is an interesting phenomenon, which calls for some remarks. Twentieth-century linguists have ascertained that the language spoken by the Island Caribs was in reality an Arawakan language. Taylor (1977: 27 f., 98), for instance, has shown that at the time Breton compiled his French Carib dictionary and grammar Island Carib men were in fact diglossic or partially bilingual but not bilingual.

If the concept of a conquered people and the implications arising thereof are accepted, it means that the language of the Arawakan women held its own among speakers of 17th-century Island Carib. It has often been stated that a conquering group

⁹ The issue of cannibalism evidently arose from this, but as we have shown in section 1, the question of Carib conquest of the Arawaks has not been fully resolved.

of people does not typically adopt the language of those they conquered unless the conquerors arrived in small numbers, as was the case of the Normans who invaded England and who ended up speaking English. The counter example is that of the Anglo-Saxons, who, although they arrived in relatively small numbers in the 7th century, did not adopt Celtic languages (Crystal 2005: 29).

Technically speaking, the Island Caribs spoke a language containing many Karina or true Carib affixes. Their speech clearly showed that grammatical morphemes came from the Arawakan family of languages whereas lexemes were borrowed from the Karina language family (cf. Taylor 1977: 98, fn 4). Some examples follow in (2):

- (2) a. *Nemboüàtina tibónam* "I came to her" (Breton 1667: 18)
- (i) The stem *nemboui-* from Cariban means "come"
- (ii) The stem *-ibónam* from Cariban means "to"
- b. *chileàtina tóne* "I came to her" (Breton 1667: 18)
- (i) The stem *chile-* from Arawakan means "come"
- (ii) The stem *-óne* from Arawakan means "to"

The common grammatical affixes *-à-ti-na* (perfective aspect), (1st sg.), and *-ti* (3rd sg. feminine) are Arawakan.

In addition to the syntactic mixing, there was some morphological mixing (Taylor 1977: 27). Thus, where affixes from the men's language were used for (3a) to (3c), affixes belonging to the females' speech were used elsewhere in the paradigm (4a) and (4b):

- (3) a. *ichánum* "my mother"
- b. *achánum* "your mother"
- c. *kichánum* "our mother"
- (4) a. *lichánum* "his mother"
- b. *tichánum* "her mother"

According to Taylor, these same affixes could also be used for all persons and even with stems of Karina origin. The Karina stem glossed "belly" in (5a) was combined with the Arawakan affix and inflected as in (5b) and (5c).

- (5) a. *uhuémbou* "belly"
- b. *nuhembou* "my belly"
- c. *buhuémbou* "your belly"

Alleyne (2004) eloquently articulated that there have been discrepancies as per the genetic and/or typological relationships of the indigenous lan-

guages of the Caribbean.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Alleyne (13) has argued for a state of language mixing, granted that speakers of Island Carib went further than merely adopting lexical morphemes from Carib to incorporate functional grammatical morphemes as well.

There is enough evidence to show that the Caribs on the islands understood the Galibis language of the mainland (cf. La Borde's [1674] quote in Hulme and Whitehead [1992: 139] cited in section 2). Pelleprat (1655a: 89) observed that the language of the Galibis was as universal on the mainland as Latin was in Europe. In fact, Pelleprat took advantage of the status of Galibis to evangelise among the different mainland nations in order to touch a maximum number of souls, noting that despite the diversity of nations only the Comangotes did not understand but that all others, including the Caribs who came from the islands to visit their friends, understood his messages. This would suggest that the language was widely understood, having the status of a lingua franca in the classic sense of the term (Schuchardt 1979: 29); no doubt, competence in this language would have promoted trade and commerce in the area. Fabel (2000: 136) suggests that one might consider the concepts of migration and amalgamation as more possible reasons rather than the matter of invasion and displacement to explain the presence of so many Arawakan words in the language of the Caribs. This leads us to explore the idea that there may have been more gradual circumstances that favoured transmission.

3.2 The Role of Women

It appears to be generally accepted that the men used "a widespread trading language in South America" (Allaire 1980a: 181; Taylor and Hoff 1980). Taylor also noted that the Island Carib contained Arawakan and Karina words common to both sexes. Earlier, he had stated that the first record of Carib language even of the men was basically Arawak as was Taino, with no more than a Carib overlay of mainly lexical character (1951: 24–27). It would appear that the Island Carib men saw preserving a Karina variety as essential once trade continued with those on the mainland. Furthermore, Taylor (1977: 98) stresses that the Karina variety was "nurtured through a sort of machismo

as the language of a more prestigious nation." Yet, the idea that men from "a more prestigious nation" operated a significant number of structural transfers into Karina does bring a rather pertinent question to the surface. How did the Arawakan women succeed in imposing their language?

Firstly, we have every reason to believe that the women played a pillar role in the defence of the Carib nation. Although it has been made to appear that the Carib women were totally excluded from men's affairs, it must be stressed that at least one report points to the total involvement of women and girls in military affairs. According to Moreau de Jonnès, women and children were taught to bear arms and did it successfully in the defence of their land. He wrote about two young Carib girls, descendants of the mother of the chief of the Black Caribs, that these little Carib girls equalled the warriors' strength and intrepidity despite their tender age (1895: 130). Later on, Moreau de Jonnès (177) made mention of the general firearm training of girls. The women's places in the society were well defined, but be that as it may, they were so omnipresent in the life of the men that it is difficult to believe reports that depicted them as entirely servile creatures. The men would take along one woman with them on expeditions. When the men went to the mountains in search of manioc or fruit, they took along their women and children as well (Moreau 1990: 117). Unless it can be proven that the men forbid their wives to participate verbally in these undertakings, then there is nothing to reveal that the women's presence among the Carib men was a purely passive one. As we see it, their mere presence would have presented as many opportunities to pass on their language as there could have existed.

Secondly, the women were practically solely responsible for educating not only the girls but also male children, at least until the age of 5 years. Rochefort (1665: 395) reported that boys would follow their fathers and brothers from the age of 5 to 6 years. By this time, according to Rochefort (395) they could understand the speech of their mothers and sisters. A likely consequence of this is that the children born in these mixed unions began a new kind of linguistic hybridisation, incorporating structures and lexical items from both their father's and mother's tongues.

The issue then might not have been about the Arawakan women imposing their language but of maintaining elements of proto-Arawakan and passing them on to successive generations given their marked presence in community affairs. In any event, although it has been made to appear

¹⁰ The keynote address given by Alleyne marked the opening of the 14th Biennial Conference of the Society for Caribbean Linguistics in 2002.

that the Carib women were totally excluded from men's affairs, this might not have been totally true throughout their period of history. In an attempt to preserve their nation the involvement of women in civil and military affairs must have become inevitable.

Quite often affairs about and observations of the Caribs are treated as though they existed in static rather than dynamic conditions. By the 17th century the world of the Caribs had been subjected to a variety of influences including some even from those Europeans who did not settle in St. Vincent and of course from the Africans. True enough the Caribs' linguistic diversity has been attributed to their geographic mobility. They would manoeuvre pirogues throughout the waters of the Americas thus the importance of being able to communicate with potential trading partners. Rochefort (1665, in Hulme and Whitehead 1992: 118) made reference to a "bastard speech intermixt with several words taken out of foreign languages" which the Caribs have framed for the purpose of commerce. However, Cooper (1997: 194) assumes that the language of the Kalinago people¹¹ was largely "a dynamic communication system that reflected the sociocultural flexibility needed for adaptation to maritime travel, trade, warfare, and natural disaster, especially after the encounter with Europeans." He argues, too, about the possibility that the Kalinago's language was derived from a South American Carib language that was related to Island Arawak. While as time went by the language became separate and unintelligible to the South American parent variety, the Kalinago through repeated trade with their South American relatives adopted a language used for trade and warfare (Cooper 1997: 194).

It is difficult to ascertain just how many years of contact there were between the Arawakan- and Karina-speaking groups at the time Breton's seminal dictionary was compiled and ultimately, before the advent of the Blacks who, clearly, represented diverse languages (Pelleprat 1655a: 52). It is also an almost impossible task to establish how many generations of Garifuna people were necessary to acquire Island Carib beyond the interlanguage state. In the next subsection we will focus on the influence the Europeans had on the linguistic profile of the Garifuna who shared many cultural aspects with the Island Caribs.¹²

11 Cooper uses the designation "Kalinago" to refer to the Island Caribs (1997: 186).

12 Breton 1665; Labat 1722; Le Breton 1998; Pelleprat 1655a; Taylor and Hoff 1980.

3.3 The European Languages Influence

In the literature, the Garifuna are conveniently referred to as Black Caribs, given their darker skin pigmentation. González' research has shown that there was no justification for distinguishing the Island Caribs and the Garifuna on racial grounds, for, by the middle of the eighteenth century, the Black Caribs of SVG were culturally and biologically indistinguishable from the "Yellow Caribs." González posits that the British insisted on the racial component as a means of preserving the distinction (1997: 200). In any case, given the events that ensued, the portrayal added legitimacy to William Young's and the rest of the plantocracy's call to dispossess them of their lands (Shephard 1997: appendix xli).

There is reason to believe that, besides sharing varieties of Karina-influenced Arawakan, the Garifuna, like the Island Caribs, showed an undisguised preference for French when communicating with Europeans. The account of John Braithwaite, a British captain (in Hulme and Whitehead 1992: 178), provides some elements which could give us an idea of the Caribs' linguistic competence in French, the language which they were more often called upon to use, since French planters had clandestinely settled on the island: "Our people had not been long returned, but their General sent a canoa, with two Chief Indians, who spoke very good French . . ."

Subsequently, Braithwaite was to meet the brother of the Black chief with an army of 500 Blacks. He reported: "The Negroe Chief spoke excellent French, and gave answers with the French complements." Moreau de Jonnés, who fought alongside the Caribs and the Garifuna in 1795, reported that they understood French very well and even spoke it with ease (1895: 128). It is not difficult to understand why this is so. The Caribs had an understanding of the geopolitics of the region and in particular the enmity between the French and the English. The English appeared the more aggressive in their desire to acquire Carib lands. Being conscious of this, the Caribs forged alliances with the French and actually allowed a limited number of them to settle in St. Vincent. The French, in fact, assisted the Caribs in their struggles with the English in 1763 and 1795–96 and remained their trading partners throughout.

The French and English in their desire to settle and control these islands tried to play off the Island Caribs and Garifuna against each other. The Caribs despite their more amicable relationship with the French made it clear, however, that they

were not prepared to surrender their independence to anyone. In 1700, French Commissariat Officer Robert touched on this issue in a report to his headquarters. He wrote: “What is certain and what makes me believe that these Caraibes will never consent to allow the French to land on their part of the leeward coast and to give them passage to penetrate to the windward side, is that all their greatest consideration is given to not letting anyone set foot on their island, neither the French nor any other kind of person; it is a very steadfast sentiment that they prefer to see 2,000 Negroes settled in their island than to see embarking here only fifty armed Frenchmen” (Hulme and Whitehead 1992: 173 f., quoted in Fraser 2002: 14 f.).

In 1768, seven years after the conquest of St. Vincent by the British, the Abbé Valladares who the Caribs had used as their public agent in 1762 to advise them and negotiate for them, had to be sent to the Carib country to explain the conditions of the settlers’ land policy (Young 1795: 38). Nine years after Britain’s control of St. Vincent that was provided by the Treaty of Paris of 1763 the Caribs were still not easily conversant with English. More crucially, the treaty that ended the 1772 war was neither available in the Carib language nor in French, and it was later alleged that there was some uncertainty by the Carib chiefs over precisely what they had signed, claiming to have signed a lease concerning a few acres of land and not to have authorised their sale (cf. Townsend 1772: 5). Certainly as contact developed with the English in the period after 1773, the Caribs and English would have been able to communicate, largely in English or at least in a version of it. Sir William Young, for instance, refers to his relationship with the Black Carib Chief Chatoyer. Methodist missionaries trying to preach among the Caribs would also have been able to establish some form of communication.

Children later on acquired a mixture of the varieties present in the community. Moreau de Jonnés (1895: 132) wrote of Oualou-Couma (Morning Star) and Illehué-Arahou (Flower of the Wood) speaking French quite imperfectly though intelligently for, when they did not know a word, they would replace it by an English or Carib one. This would suggest that members of the Carib community had recourse to some code switching. However, whether or not this tendency to mix codes went beyond lexical borrowing to mixing functional grammatical morphemes from the three languages is open to speculation unless some solid linguistic data should become available for analysis.

The evangelisation efforts made by Roman Catholic and Methodist missionaries also impacted on the linguistic habits of the Island Caribs and Garifuna. Both seminal works compiled by Breton viz. French-Carib dictionaries and “Grammaire caraïbe,” were done with the sole aim of “retirer les peuples anthropophages de leurs ténèbres”¹³ (Breton 1667). With specific reference to SVG, the French missionaries reported little success in converting the Caribs and had to abandon the mission in 1708, as the natives only seemed to pay lip service to the Christian religion (Rouse 1948: 548). The Methodists were also forced to abandon their mission in St. Vincent as the Caribs viewed their move to evangelise them in English with suspicion (Young 1993: 31).

As the White and Black slave populations increased massively after 1763, a new linguistic situation was created even though the contact between the slave and Carib populations was likely to have been limited as stipulated by one of the terms of the 1773 Treaty (Shephard 1997: 32). Moreover, we can assume that the Whites who settled on SVG added a few touches to the linguistic picture (Prescod 2004: 15). Mrs. A. C. Carmichael, the spouse of a British planter who boasted about the privilege of having close ties with her domestic and field slaves, wrote the following as a comment to an expression used by one of her slaves: “. . . she used to say to me ‘no tease me, misses, me one very good nigger; let me be.’ Let me be is a frequent expression among Negroes, and they probably learnt this and other decided Scotticisms from the number of Scotch managers and overseers” (Carmichael 1833/I: 303).

In 1795, before the Carib defeat, the islands of SVG were shared with French planters who were prepared to accept the conditions laid down by the British for remaining in the territory, and with those who were commonly referred to as *petits blancs*¹⁴ (cf. Hulme 2000). On account of the Caribs’ relationship with the French in Martinique through trade and the supplying of arms, any relationship between the French population and the Caribs was always viewed with some degree of suspicion. The Garifuna, we have been told, in order to distinguish themselves from slaves opted to adopt the traditions of the Island Caribs, which probably included the language. This might also have applied to Maroons and others who wanted to

13 “taking the anthropophagus people out of their darkness” (our translation).

14 The *petits blancs* were “small Whites” comprising merchants and property owners.

set themselves apart from the slaves. Many aspects of the Caribs' culture and traditions were perceived as exotic to the slaves (Young 1993: 40). It is puzzling that by the time Ober arrived among the Carib descendants, they were practically assimilated by the British. Ober found that many of them spoke a creolised variety of English, noting, however, that some of them could boast "an uncontaminated line of descent from cannibal ancestry" (Ober 1904: 379). One can sense a tinge of regret when he related the linguistic state of affairs with respect to those Caribs who had never been able to speak native tongue (Ober 1880: 113). Fenger (1917), who lamented that they were a dying race, echoed this sentiment.

3.4 Preserving the Island Carib Language

Subsequent to the deportation and just about around the period Ober visited the Caribs, we learn that on St. Vincent, only 3 senior females among the Caribs at Point Espagnol spoke the "natal language" (Fenger 1917). There is little doubt that this natal language he elicited from an elderly Carib lady was a mixture of both Karina and Luku. In Table 1 we provide a comparison between some words that were recorded by Fenger and those found in other word lists.

As the table shows, many of these words are of Karina origin and it is noteworthy that they were solicited from a female member of the community.

Table 1: Comparative "Carib" Word List.

Fenger's selection	His comments as per the natal language	Derived from (cf. Fenger)	Gloss	Other linguistic sources cited by researchers
<i>wey-u</i>	merely softened	<i>vehu</i>	sun	<i>we:yu</i> , Karina/True Carib (Taylor 1977: 143) <i>huéyu</i> (Breton 1666: 365) <i>hueiou</i> (Pelleprat 1655b: 15)
<i>wah-tuh</i>	merely softened	<i>what-hò</i>	fire	<i>uátu</i> from CAIC* Karina (Taylor 1977: 140); <i>waxto</i> , Karina/True Carib (144) <i>oüato</i> (Pelleprat 1655b: 15)
<i>oodu</i>	changed slightly	<i>otò</i>	fish	<i>údu(rao)</i> , CAIC (Taylor 1977: 138), from <i>wo:to</i> , Karina/True Carib (142) <i>oüóto</i> (Pelleprat 1655b: 16)
<i>doonah</i>	changed slightly	<i>tona</i>	water	<i>dúna</i> , CAIC (Taylor 1977: 139) from <i>tu:na</i> , Karina/True Carib <i>toúna</i> (Pelleprat 1655b: 16)
<i>haat</i> <i>hátí</i>	changed completely	<i>móné</i>	moon	<i>nu:no</i> , True Carib/Karina (Taylor 1977: 143) <i>káthi</i> , Arawakan (Taylor 1977: 27), but <i>mónha</i> is glossed "land"(compare Breton 1666: 378) <i>noúno</i> (Pelleprat 1655b: 13)
<i>wèh-wey</i>	common practice of onomatopoeic words in many savage languages		tree	<i>uéue</i> , CAIC (Taylor 1977: 138) from <i>we:we</i> , Karina/True Carib (142)
<i>he-wey</i>	pronounced with soft breath suggesting the noise of the snake in the dry grass		snake	<i>(h)éue</i> , CAIC (Taylor 1977: 140), compare <i>oko:yu</i> , True Carib/Karina (144) and <i>óri</i> , Arawak (133) <i>occóiu</i> (Pelleprat 1655b: 16)
<i>àh-túgah</i>			to chop	<i>ácuga</i> , CAIC (Taylor 1977: 48) "to chop or fell wood." Compare <i>ácugua</i> "to chop up in lengths."

* Taylor uses CAIC for Central American Island Carib.

We may recall that the women were said to be of Arawakan origin and that they had preserved the Arawakan language. Although this slim corpus bars us from drawing any conclusions, we note here that words of Karina origin constitute part of the repertoire of a female's language 250 years after the first "Carib" dictionary was compiled. This would mean that the Carib men's language impacted on the women's speech. This is not in the least an absurd idea, as Labat (1722/III: 241) had pointed out that the women addressed their peer males in the language of the latter (see also Taylor 1977). We do not know under what conditions this linguistic investigation was carried out, but this is nonetheless an interesting finding. What is intriguing, too, is that Fenger did not seem to succeed in eliciting the Karina word for "moon." His female informant produced the Arawak lexeme *haat*, *háti* which led Fenger to surmise that the Karina equivalent for "moon" had completely changed from *mòné* to *haat/háti*. Interestingly, Taylor recorded *haati* as an Arawakan word (compare with *káthi* in Taylor 1977: 132). Even so, we ought to emphasise that the language recorded by the missionaries and travellers was not a written one. The Caribs and Arawaks had an oral tradition so the differences identified in accounts from the various observers is impressionistic, based on phonological criteria rather than on the graphic representation of the sounds. It matters little whether one wrote *káthi* or *casi*, since the background and native language of the observer would have greatly influenced the way the words were transcribed.

What precedes clearly allows us to conclude that by the turn of the twentieth century the Caribs had to operate a linguistic shift to a variety of English. In the remainder of this article, we will outline some of the factors that facilitated and or motivated this shift.

4 Imposing British Supremacy and Ensuring Extensive Assimilation

The Treaty of 1773 that ended the war of 1772 with the British stipulated "no undue intercourse with the French Islands shall be allowed" (Shephard 1997: 32). It also declared "no strangers or white person are to be permitted to settle among the Caribs, without permission obtained in writing from the Governor" (Shephard 1997: 34). The Caribs were to "bear true allegiance to His Majesty George III" and to acknowledge the King as "rightful lord and Sovereign of all the Island of Saint Vincent, and that the lands held by us

the Caribs, are granted through His Majesty's clemency" (Shephard 1997: 35). Of course, in a society where the Carib population was considered a threat and obstacle to the development of British plantations the settlers considered the separation of slaves and Caribs as absolutely necessary. In fact they argued for the removal of the Caribs particularly after the war of 1772.

Duncan misses the point in noting that prior to the apprenticeship era: "Slaves [were] compelled to speak English. – Of course, broken English at the beginning; but it was a blessing in disguise, for St. Vincent and the rest of the West Indies could not have progressed as rapidly as has been the case, if the people spoke a number of different languages" (1955: 35). What was at stake was not the development of a nation but the provision for the establishment of plantations and sugar for the benefit of English settlers who never at this stage really considered St. Vincent a home. Duncan particularly viewed the Caribs as enemies and for him the English language would have been necessary for the development of civilisation as he saw it. The issue of power would have come into play here. The British saw the imposition of their culture, language, and institutions as being vital. Not knowing the language of the Caribs and Africans would have put them at a disadvantage in not knowing when there might be talk of revolt. As subjects, even inferior ones, it was necessary for the Caribs and Africans to adopt the English language to make communication possible. As the "superior race" the British were not going to attempt even to learn the language of the colonised people. The dynamics of colonial rule also ensured that the indigenous languages would have disappeared. As a result of colonial brainwashing, to be educated was to learn the language of the masters and adopt their culture.

The linguistic implications of the terms under which the Caribs were to be settled were far-reaching. The issue of the Caribs passing on their language would have been tied in with the power relationships within the society. Once they were relegated to a state of marginalisation this would have impacted on their language and cultural influence. It also meant that there was no need for anyone outside this community to learn Island Carib, as they were not inclined to have any meaningful dealings with them. Laws affecting the lives of the Caribs were not made available to them in the language they could understand. This, in a nutshell, is tantamount to language stifling, or in political and economic terms, language disenfranchisement.

The concept of language disenfranchisement is discussed in Ginsburgh and Weber (2005) to account for the problems resulting from public policy that restricts the linguistic rights of a language community. According to Ginsburgh and Weber, the move towards restricting the number of languages used in official documents within the European Community results in relative numbers of citizens losing the ability to understand and communicate. Admittedly, present-day Europe is not comparable, politically, culturally nor economically with the Carib period we are focussing on in this article and it would be ludicrous to pretend that both situations are parallel. Nonetheless, as we see it, the Carib situation was one where people of a particular ethnic and linguistic background were deprived of their linguistic rights and explicitly excluded from the political affairs of the territory where they were legitimate citizens. This was achieved chiefly by not making matters concerning the political and social process of nation building available to the Caribs in the language they could understand. In denying access to the sociopolitical process, they were denied rights and recognition. This had implications for the Carib language and culture given the limited opportunities to interact with others. Any interaction with the British was expected necessarily to be in the English language or some version of it.

The British relationship with the Caribs, particularly after 1763, was one not of coexistence but in the nature of a "cold war." The Caribs might not at this stage been seen as cannibals, but although they were not enslaved they might have been regarded, like the slaves, as a form of property. Indeed a future relationship was not a serious consideration since the main concern was to have them removed from the colony. This course of action continued and intensified beyond 1797. Despite occasional raids by Caribs who had escaped exile, the Caribs were no longer a major obstacle to the development of British society and economy. Even so before this, there were strong pressures against the maintenance of traditional practices and there was no record, equal to the mine of documentation secured by the French, of the British attempt to learn or document Island Carib. The Caribs, therefore, were muted and by extension, so was their language. As a result, they were unable to preserve their linguistic heritage beyond the 19th century. This became so particularly with the expulsion of their main culture bearers in 1797. After the eruption of the volcano *soufrière Saint Vincent* in 1812, many of them had to be removed from areas in the north because of the effects of this volcanic

eruption. They became dispersed, some of them even being forced to migrate to Trinidad then. In situations where the community remained intact in the period after emancipation they began to include freed Blacks. By this time much of the language had disappeared although Ober reported that in the 1880s a handful of the older men and women remembered the original language (1880: 100).

Admittedly, nations do not preserve languages, speakers do. For one thing, the deportation of the Garifuna people was not in the least tantamount to language attrition per se since varieties of Garifuna language are still spoken by descendants in the Garifuna diaspora outside SVG. Neither does extirpation rime with linguistic disenfranchisement. Furthermore, the condition sine qua non for the continued existence of a language is not only the survival of its speakers but also, and more crucially, the freedom to use it. Manifestly, this was not the case for the defeated Caribs. Not only were they assimilated; the British administrators did not encourage ethnic mixing or linguistic diversity. To avoid being characterised as "other," the Caribs had to fit into the mould of linguistic imperialism that also sought to create a homogeneous culture. The only alternative for the subdued group of people would have been to operate a language shift from their own to the dominant one. Myers-Scotton (2002: 183) underlines that speakers may shift languages for two reasons.

1. They shift due to a shift in the balance of the instrumental and sentimental values associated with languages.
2. They may just drop the composite (matrix) language and shift to the dominant one.

Myers-Scotton (2002: 180) also stresses that the factors promoting language attrition among individual speakers or community shift are of a social and psychological nature. Furthermore, it can be assumed, along the lines developed by Myers-Scotton (180) that speakers of Island Carib would have been even more obliged to shift to a variety of the dominant language as they saw their own as less useful and less valued in and out of the community. The language shift became even more important as the native was made to feel that social mobility and ascendancy were equated with the ability to conform. There might have been little effort to resist assimilation since the stereotypes about the Caribs continued and increasingly the view that their future depended on their ability to operate a language shift and adapt the linguistic and cultural customs of the colonisers. As Hale (1998: 215) forcefully expounds, the propaganda encourages the belief that the choice is not viable

since it is perceived as being incompatible with the “proper vision” of the future.

Once the majority of the Caribs were sent in exile this was bound to signal the end of their language use on St. Vincent, and to a great extent their customs. Numerically, the Carib population had become quite an insignificant one and they lived at first in the remote parts of St. Vincent even after their “pardon” in 1805. González (1988: 17) conjectures that given the figures for captives from 1795–96 and those of battle mortality, there may have been between 7,000 and 8,000 Caribs before their exile. Some 4,338 (21) were estimated to have been captured and taken to Balliceaux. It is difficult to estimate the number of Caribs remaining on St. Vincent. By 1833, Alexander (1833: 279) suggested a total of 1,000 Caribs. Because of their skills at sea they were employed particularly on the windward side in getting the sugar out to the boats that had to stay some distance away from the shore owing to the rough seas on the windward side. In this situation they would be forced to communicate with the English in the latter’s language. They were cut off from the rest of the residents as outlined in the Treaty, since any outsider to the Carib territory had to have written permission from the British Governor (Shephard 1997: 34). As we know, the British displayed greater political and military presence than the French (Young 1993: 24) to ensure that the rest of the Negro population did not entertain ties with the Caribs. Needless to say, given the fact that the Caribs freshly represented a force to be reckoned with, there was no way they were going to be allowed to regain strength and valour.

Furthermore, the Caribs were victims of a number of myths and thus highly stigmatised. These can be seen even in textbooks published after 1838. The Caribs even began to internalise and believe much of what was said about them, including the issue of gratuitous cannibalism. They developed a sort of inferiority complex and in many cases even denied that they were Caribs. After the volcanic eruptions of 1812 and 1902 they were forced out of the Carib country areas although later the majority returned. Some of them, however, stayed away and integrated themselves into other communities. The Caribs in the Carib country lived very outcast lives and were victims of a lot of scorn, the women even regarded as sex slaves or easy sex pickings. This type of situation continued until the “quincentenary” in 1992 when a whole new consciousness, part of a wider American consciousness, began to impact on them.

5 Conclusions

We can ask ourselves a number of questions. If there were no deportation of the Island Carib speakers, what would the language have become? How would it have changed? What role would it have played in present-day SVG?

Answers to these questions may seem only speculative but much of this would have depended on the power situation and the relationship of the population to the rest of the society. In fact, the Dominican situation will be instructive in this exercise. The Dominican Caribs were not sent into exile but were put on reservations. The power situation would have been a critical one in such a context. To examine the linguistic outcome of the Dominican experience will draw us away from the goals we have set out to achieve in this article. Suffice it to say, however, that the Dominican Caribs situation is equally as complex, though in a much different way, as that of SVG. The Carib language is not spoken by a wide cross section of the Carib community there. They too were marginalised until their chief was vested with special status and granted the right to participate in the implementation and benefits of development policies on behalf of the community towards 1975.

In relation to the rest of the community, however minimally, the Caribs on St. Vincent may have lost their language, or they might even have retained some of it as their exiled brothers and sisters did. One of the features of migration is that migrant groups tend to stick together and preserve their culture and accustomed ways of doing things, but it all depends on the different influences that are brought to bear on them. The Garifuna who were sent into exile met a different environment, not one dominated by the English. They entered at a period of conflict between the British and Spanish. There were a lot of other forces at play, and not many years after the issue of the wars of independence arose. With respect to the situation on St. Vincent, Island Carib might have continued to exist and intermingle with subsequent varieties spoken there. But then again, some variety of Island Carib might have survived and with it “a significant measure of the civilisation of its speakers” (Hale 2000).

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