

CHAPTER 7

Papiamento: An Official Caribbean Creole Language from Legal Repression to Full Recognition

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Pierre Lauffer – Mi Lenga

Mi lenga,
Den nesesidat Sali
Fo'alma di aventurero
Kultivá na boka di katibu
A baj drecha su pará
Den kwentanan di jaja.

Su kurashi sin keber
– E marka brutu di su nasementu –
A butele rementá busá
I fórsa di su gan 'i biba
A lant'e di swela
Den un warwarú di pusta-boka.

Su kantika tin kandela
Su simplesa tin koló.
Ku su wega di palabra
Mi por 'nabo bo sojá
Ku su ritmo í su stansha
Mi por sinta namorá.

Na mi lenga di kriojo,
Ku su zjèitu di zonidu,
No tin dwele ni legría pa herami,
Ni tin sort'i sintimentu
Ku mi n'tribi machiká.

My Mother Tongue by Pierre Lauffer

My mother tongue,
Born out of necessity
Of the adventurer's soul
Developed at the mouths of slaves
Proceeded to enhance its standing
In maids' nursery tales.

Its daring courage
– The rough mark of its birth –
Triggered the blowing up of its muzzle
And the power of its craving to survive
Rose it anew to its feet
Amidst a whirlwind of discussions.

Its tune is fiery
Its plainness is colorful.
With its wordplay
I can call you everything under the sun
With its rhythm and its poise
I can court along at ease.

In my creole mother tongue,
With its spirited sounds
No sorrow, no bliss can pass me by,
Nor is there any kind of feeling
I didn't dare put into words.

Source: Pierre Lauffer, *Raspá*, 1962; translation by Frank Williams

Three Islands, Two Orthographies, One Speech Community

The division of the Caribbean into four areas—the English-speaking, the Spanish-speaking, the French-speaking, and the Dutch-speaking—is a colonial legacy. However, there are also two official Creole languages in the region: Haitian Creole, the official language of the first independent black nation in the Caribbean; and Papiamentu, which is spoken in the non-sovereign Dutch territories of Aruba, Curaçao, and Bonaire.¹

DeGraff holds that the term “Creole language” intends to distinguish the Creole languages from those of the European colonial rulers, implicitly making a value judgment about Creole languages.² Creole languages originated during colonisation and slavery. Depending on the circumstances, the place, and the time of origin, Creole languages developed similarly to other languages. Creole grammatical structures differ substantially from those of European languages—no verb conjugation, no noun declension, no gender distinction—and in the opinion of colonial officials creole languages were not languages at all and great efforts were made to discourage their use. Creole language speakers eventually came to believe that their language and culture were inferior to those of Europeans.³ However, worldwide awareness is growing that one’s language, one’s mother tongue, is of crucial importance for the development of the individual and, therefore, of the nation. Such is the case with Papiamentu. This chapter illustrates that the colonial linguistic discourse was based on the supreme ethnocentric self-confidence of the colonisers, the oppression of the mother tongue of the colonised,⁴ and the struggle to debunk deep-rooted colonial myths and hence the recognition of the Papiamentu Creole language by both local and metropole governments and even its own speakers on the ABC islands. This last process is far from complete.

Papiamentu (or Papiamentu) is the language of Aruba (officialised in 2003), Curaçao (2007), and Bonaire (2007, until 2010). Its speech community also includes Papiamentu speakers in the Netherlands. The island variants are 100% intelligible between their speakers; differences such as vocabulary and sentence melody enrich the language and make it more interesting. In 1976, the Aruban Parliament enacted a law that legalised the Aruban etymologically based orthography (examples: *stoel*, *conexion*, *cas*, *Papiamentu*). In that same year, Curaçao and Bonaire legalised their phonologically based orthography (examples: *stul*, *konekshon*, *kas*, *Papiamentu*). This chapter uses “Papiamentu.”

Language, Education and Oppression

The valorisation of Papiamentu is closely intertwined with the colonial history of the islands. Papiamentu has its origins as an Afro-Portuguese pidgin language that developed along the transatlantic slave trade route during the Dutch West India Company (WIC) era (1634–1792). For this reason Papiamentu and Cape Verdean Creole (or Kriolu, Kriol) speakers are mutually understandable. Intense kinship, cultural, and commercial interaction with Spanish-speaking countries on the South American mainland resulted in the Spanish relexification of the original Afro-Portuguese creole.⁵

In the colonial setting of Curaçao under the WIC, Papiamentu evolved from the language of the enslaved to that of practically the entire population. It was next to impossible for the enslaved population to learn the Dutch language. To protect their superior and elite position, the Dutch colonists excluded the enslaved people from learning Dutch and from joining the Dutch Reformed Church.⁶ In their pastoral work, Catholic priests used Papiamentu, the language of the enslaved people; Dutch colonists and Sephardic Jews preferred to speak Papiamentu to the enslaved; the daily speech between Dutch colonists and Sephardim was in Papiamentu and the Papiamentu speaking “Yaya” (nanny) was an important figure in Dutch and Sephardic households. The Dutch-speaking population was small compared to the ever-increasing group of enslaved people and people of colour. Moreover, because of its role in trade, Papiamentu became an essential language in the region. Under the dominion of the West India Company, the islands of Bonaire and Aruba were initially closed off to settlement. After 1750, the colonial authorities permitted Curaçaoan colonists and their enslaved to settle on these islands. Papiamentu rapidly took root there.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Papiamentu was fully developed and used by several generations. The colonial authorities did not consider Papiamentu a valid language, and argued “in a Dutch colony people should speak the Dutch language.” The authorities discouraged the use of Papiamentu and went to great lengths to discredit the language, hoping to eliminate it as quickly as possible. In 1819, through the introduction of the decree *Provisionele Reglement op het Schoolwezen*, the Provisional Regulations on the School System (P.B. 28), Dutch became the only language of instruction permitted in schools. Subsequent language policies aimed to reinforce the position of the Dutch language and eliminate Papiamentu, which de facto became an oppressed language.⁷

Visitors from the Netherlands were astonished and outraged by the language situation on the ABC islands. Public school teacher Van Paddenburgh called Papiamentu an “unbearable cackling with a turkey-like sound,” a “spoilt” mixture of Spanish, Amerindian, and Dutch.⁸ Visiting Dutch Reformed Pastor Bosch⁹ was of the opinion that the Dutch colonists themselves were responsible for the fact that not only the African descended and coloured inhabitants but also European descended children and women used Papiamentu instead of the language of the mother country, as was the case in the English, Spanish, and French colonies. Bosch blamed their Dutch mercantile spirit for being harmful to the Dutch language. He continued to accuse Catholic priests of using Papiamentu to make the Dutch language redundant. Writer-traveller M.D. Teenstra¹⁰ raged against the language of Curaçao. He described the “*zamengelapte Papiement*”—lumped together Papiamentu—as a poor patchwork of indigenous, Spanish, and Dutch words, with an African accent, which was unbearable to the civilised ear. Again, the underlying assumption was that languages had to be European to be good and accepted.

Because the colonial government did not have the financial means to provide public education for the poor and the enslaved, the Catholic mission acquired a dominance in the education of the poor and the enslaved population in the run-up to the abolition of slavery. The mission favoured using Papiamentu for education and was in charge of most schools. The prominent presence of Papiamentu in the ABC Islands remained a thorn in the side of the Dutch. In the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, scores of education decrees were promulgated to ensure that the islands’ populations would understand that Dutch was the language of instruction and not Papiamentu. Dutch as a language of teaching became a condition for schools to qualify for government subsidies in decrees in 1907, 1913, and 1935. Imposing higher licensing requirements on teachers threatened to end the activities of the missionary sisters and brothers and make popular education unaffordable.¹¹ Dutch colonial views and the many myths about the inadequacy of Papiamentu dominated the discussions. Some local advocates for Papiamentu deemed this situation undesirable, but the authorities refuted their opinions. Finally, even the Catholic clergy relented and shifted its position. Eventually, pro-Papiamentu orders such as the Dominicans left the islands to be replaced by Roman Catholic Orders such as the friars of Tilburg and Dominican nuns, who were willing to accommodate the colonial educational and linguistic policies. The earlier policy of “one nation, one kingdom, one language” of King William I during 1813–1840 was reconfirmed in what around the turn of the twentieth century became the “*ethische politiek*” (ethical politics), the Dutch version of Europe’s self-imposed imperial “civilising mission”—the white man’s burden. A prolonged period of renewed “*Hulandisacion*” was set in motion.¹²

Colonial myths and legacies are difficult to erase. In 1954, under the terms of decolonisation, the Dutch Antilles obtained an autonomous status within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This entailed, among other things, that the former colonies could make their own decisions about their educational and language policies. The prolonged exclusion of Papiamento and an alienating educational system has had long-lasting effects. The lengthy absence of Papiamento and the prominence of Dutch, English, Spanish, and even French and German in education weakened the position of Papiamento. Most Papiamento speakers have never had Papiamento in school, neither as a subject nor as an instructional language. Their language proficiency consists of what they learn at home and their living environment; few achieved continued academic development in their language. In the 1950s and 1960s few politicians, academics, teachers and parents realised that ignoring the mother tongue and learning in a foreign language discourages educational achievement. Due to a lack of local educational and linguistic expertise, it took a while before the debate on educational and language reform took shape.

The Struggle for Recognition

It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that the first publications appeared denouncing the language problems in the educational system, launching a movement for change.¹³ In the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s teachers' unions of the ABC islands encouraged the public and political debate. Similar to the pro-Papiamento Roman Catholic clergy in the nineteenth century, educational and linguistic specialists and educators acknowledged the value of the mother tongue, as it is that language that is by far the best basis for learning. Students must develop their mother tongue to the highest level in order to realise their full linguistic, academic and human potential. Quality education is frustrated when blunt memorisation replaces comprehension in primary school and other levels of formal education. Such language policy imposed insurmountable obstacles for both teachers and students, a fact which is often not acknowledged, and is even trivialised.¹⁴ Consequently, the struggle for recognition of Papiamento has become a long and difficult one, with few willing to commit their time and energy.

Recurring counter-arguments to these (not so) new language and educational perspectives have been continuously brought up in discussions about educational renewal and the introduction of Papiamento in the ABC islands. Common arguments include: the community is not ready for it; there are no teaching materials available; it is not possible to learn via Papiamento; it hinders the learning of Dutch, et cetera. Through all of this, islanders have a dualistic attitude towards

their language: “*Mi stima Papiamento, pero no pa enseñansa. Mi no por haci nada cu ne.*” (“I love Papiamento, but not for education. I can not do anything with it.”) They assign Papiamento a low status and cannot see it as a language of instruction and school subject.

Nevertheless, Papiamento caught the attention of the governments. The decades that followed were lucrative when it came to educational innovations. Following the May 30, 1969 revolt in Curaçao and in the slipstream of Aruba’s separatist movement, leading to the island’s separation of the Dutch Antilles in 1986, the political climate gradually created space for innovative ideas, and in relatively quick succession, educational innovations took place.

Achievements for Papiamento, 1976–2021

- Since 1976, Papiamento has had an orthography: etymological in Aruba; phonological in Curaçao and Bonaire.
- In 1979, the special education track switched to Papiamento as the language of instruction.
- In 1986, Papiamento was introduced as a subject in the primary schools of Curaçao and Bonaire.
- In 1987, Frank Martinus founded Kolegio Erasmo in Curaçao, the first primary school with Papiamento as the language of instruction; in 2022 the school has lower secondary education in Papiamento and bilingual Papiamento-English pre-university sections.
- In 2002, Papiamento was introduced as a subject in the lower grades of secondary education in Aruba.
- In 2003, Papiamento became an official language in Aruba.
- In 2007, Papiamento became an official language in Curaçao and Bonaire.
- In 2012, the pilot project Scol Multilingual (Multilingual School) started in Aruba in two primary schools, with Papiamento as the primary language of instruction.
- Aruba, Curaçao, and Bonaire have graduated teachers with bachelor’s and master’s degrees in Papiamento.
- In 2015, Papiamento became an optional exam subject in secondary education in Aruba.
- The government of Aruba decided that from 2018 on, the Scol Multilingual model will be introduced gradually in all (subsidised) primary schools. The Scol Arubano Multilingual is ready to be rolled out.
- On March 16, 2022 the Minister of Education launched the Language Policy Project and the Minister of Culture launched the Cultural Policy Project.

While significant steps have been taken, an educational system with Papiamento as the primary language of instruction alongside other languages still encounters resistance. An example is the 2003 *Landsverordenening Officiële Talen* in Aruba. Although Papiamento was officialised as a national language (next to Dutch), the national ordinance at the same time discriminates against Papiamento. Articles 5, 6, 8, and 9 exclude Papiamento as the language of the law. Moreover, Articles 8 and 9 explicitly exclude the possibility to draw up notarial deeds in Papiamento. To many, these restrictions overshadowed the officialisation of Papiamento. A recent example of Papiamento resistance is the “Protocol of collaboration on the policy areas of Education, Culture, Science and Emancipation between Aruba and The Netherlands” of July 4, 2012.¹⁵ The protocol required the Aruban secondary education system to be fully embedded in the Dutch school system by 2016 and final exams to be in Dutch to guarantee the connection with the Netherlands.

Accepting a socially non-functioning language as the primary language in replacement of your own proved impossible. Since the introduction of the Dutch-language education system, educational results have been poor, with high percentages of repeaters, dropouts, and students scoring below their potential as indicated by their actual intelligence level. There is a waste of talent, energy, motivation, and finances; there are many socio-psychological and socio-economic consequences. Table 4 illustrates educational level according to the most spoken language in Aruban households. Papiamento-speaking households score lowest at the secondary and highest educational levels.

Table 4. Level of Education by Household Language in Aruba, 2010 (in %)

	Pap	Spa	Eng	Dut	Other
Lower Vocational/MAVO (LE)	84.4	75.4	77.1	43.5	77.9
HAVO/VWO/Middle Vocational (IE)	10.6	20.4	13.6	26.7	15.6
HBO/University (TE)	4.8	4.2	10.7	29.9	6.4

Source: CBS 2010; Pap=Papiamento; Spa=Spanish; Eng=English; Dut=Dutch.

While Dutch became mandatory in education, justice, and government offices, Papiamento flourished in the community in different ways. Papiamento developed into a strong, thriving language, conquering more and more sectors of society. Papiamento is the language of most families, theatre and literature, music, art, the press, integration, even of Parliament and government agencies, and is the lingua franca between language groups. The imposition of Dutch as the only language of instruction has led to Dutch remaining a minority language and the least popular language (Table 5).

Table 5. The Popularity of the Main Languages Spoken in Aruba

	Census 2010 Household	YES 2015 Popularity
Papiamentu	76%	62%
English	7%	24%
Spanish	12%	9%
Dutch	4%	4%
	99%	99%

Sources: Central Bureau for Statistics Aruba, 2010; Peterson, R. (2015). *Youth Engaged in Sustainability – National Youth Study Aruba 2015*. University of Aruba.

In a survey,¹⁶ teachers and parents in Aruba also favoured educational reform with Papiamentu as the language of instruction. They wanted their children’s schools included in the multilingual school project Scol Multilingual. This aspiration is understandable because on a daily basis they experience how their children struggle with a system that does not take into account their language and cultural background. They understand that “[l]earning is almost impossible if you do not understand.”¹⁷

Bonaire is a shocking case. In 2010 Bonaire became a special municipality within the Netherlands, and the Dutch government turned the clock back. Without any discussion, Papiamentu lost its official status, with all its consequences, especially for education. The TaalUnie (Language Union) even dared to give the Dutch Ministry of Education this advice: use Dutch for cognitive development and Papiamentu for identity and culture.¹⁸ It appears that the Dutch government does not dare acknowledge that Papiamentu is the majority language in Bonaire (and English in Saba and St. Eustatius). The website Rijksoverheid.nl reads: “On the islands of Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba (BES islands), Dutch is the official language. In Bonaire, people speak a lot of Papiamentu; in Saba and St. Eustatius, a lot of English. The languages Papiamentu and English may be used in education, contact with the government, the administration of justice.”¹⁹ In Bonaire, the struggle to provide Papiamentu with the place it deserves started all over again; new research on the functions and value of Papiamentu in the Bonairean community had to be conducted. This yet unpublished study, requested by Fundashon Akademia Papiamentu of Bonaire and conducted by Faraclas, Mijts, and Kester, shows that Papiamentu in Bonaire has the most significant number of native speakers, is the community language, and should be the school language.²⁰ In the final pages of this chapter we discuss the need for a language policy and planning for the ABC communities.

Table 6. Most Spoken Home Languages in Aruba, Curaçao, and Bonaire

	Aruba	Curaçao	Bonaire
Papiamento	72%	78.6%	68%
Spanish	14%	6%	19%
Dutch	6%	9.4%	11%
English	7%	3.5%	2%
Other	1%	2.4%	4%

Sources: Central Bureau for Statistics Aruba, 2019; Central Bureau for Statistics Curaçao, 2011. Central Bureau for Statistics Netherlands, 2011.²¹

Literature and Music in Papiamento

Through the centuries it proved impossible to stop the development of arts and culture in Papiamento. The development of literature and the language of music is very tangible. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Joseph Sickman Corsen of Curaçao surprised the community with his poems in Papiamento. His “*Atardi*,” (“Afternoon,” 1905) was the first published Papiamento poem and became a symbol of the lyrical qualities of Papiamento. Other important authors who wrote in Papiamento in Curaçao in the first half of the twentieth century were William Hoyer, Willem Kroon, Miguel Suriel, and Manuel Fraai.²² In Aruba, Frederik Beaujon can be seen as the first published poet. His “*Atardi*,” (“Afternoon”) “*San Nicolas*,” and “*Ay! Mi ta cansá*” (“Ay, I am tired”), were published in 1907 and 1919. In 1918, Beaujon translated Byron’s poem “The prisoner of Chillon” into Papiamento as “*E prisonero di Chillon*.”²³

During World War II, the collection “*Cancionero Papiamento*” (1943) was published by “Julio Perrenal,” a combination of the names of its Curaçaoan authors Jules de Palm, Pierre Lauffer, and René de Rooy. These three young authors composed Papiamento songs to arouse the people’s love and appreciation for their language and culture. After World War II, it became increasingly normal to write songs in Papiamento. Singers, composers, and music groups produced work almost exclusively in Papiamento and became wildly popular. At yearly festivals, the Carnival Tumba on each of the three islands is elected. In Aruba, where initially Creole English was the language of the Carnival Calypso, people started using Papiamento as well.²⁴ The islands also have annual song festivals for new compositions in Papiamento: “*Un Canto pa Aruba*” and “*Un Kanto pa Korsou*.” The Aruban children’s Papiamento song festival *Voz-I-Landia Escolar* is popular. Theatre in Papiamentu

became more and more popular, and over time numerous theatre groups became active. There were many theatre performances and inter-island and international theatre festivals in which Papiamentu had a glorious presence.

Youths became enthusiastic about the art of Papiamentu spoken word. As of the 1998–1999 academic year, Papiamentu became a mandatory subject in secondary education in Curaçao. This fact gave the impetus to *Arte di Palabra* (“Art of the Spoken Word”), a competition of poetry and stories in Papiamentu. *Arte di Palabra* aims to develop young literary talent. Young people, divided into different age categories, recite poems and stories, either their own or existing poems and stories. The competition was held for the first time in Curaçao in 2000. Bonaire and Aruba have participated since 2006 and 2009, respectively. The joint final takes place on a rotating basis on one of the islands. The organisers of *Arte di Palabra* also present an award, the *Tapushi Literario*, to a person or organisation that has made a significant contribution to the position of Papiamentu. Adults have their own poetry competition, organized by the Department of Culture in Aruba. For one year, the writer of the best poem may hold the title “*Poeta di Patria*,” “Poet of the Country.” Since 2018, the *Fundacion Lanta Papiamentu* (FLP) has organised a tribute to authors who had an informative, literary, or scientific publication in the current year.

Papiamentu for Nation-Building

Papiamentu functions as the number one unifying factor in nation-building in the ABC islands. UNESCO, UNICEF, scientists, educational reformers in Aruba and Curaçao, and NGOs defend the proposition that language, any language, is invaluable to the individual and the people whose mother tongue that language is. Language is part of the cultural heritage of a people and should be preserved, especially in these times of threats like globalisation, modernisation, and the blending of international culture.²⁵ Also it is widely accepted that when a language dies out, an entire culture becomes extinct, including the knowledge, traditions, heritage, and ancestral memories that are acquired in that language.

It has proved challenging to receive the support of the ABC governments for creating language awareness programs and policies. NGOs fill the gap. NGOs in Aruba, Curaçao, Bonaire, and the Netherlands that represent the interests of Papiamentu have been working together for years in the *Plataforma Union di Papiamentu* (“Unified Papiamentu Platform”).²⁶ Their shared goals concern raising awareness among the Papiamentu-speaking communities concerning the value of their language, shaking off the colonial yoke and changing the negative mentality towards their own language into a respectful and responsible attitude (which is so important for real development) and, of course, working to achieve

the recognition of Papiamentu in the Netherlands, being the majority language in Bonaire, which since 2010 has been a Dutch Public Entity. Language activism covers a wide variety of activities and includes research on all aspects of Papiamentu; lectures and conferences about the language Papiamentu (grammar, orthography, literature, history, sociolinguistics, education, language rights); courses to stimulate the development of Papiamentu language proficiency on different levels, from beginner to advanced; storytelling, poetry, and other oral performances; spelling bees and dictation competitions; book publication; Papiamentu celebrations (Day of the Mother Tongue, February 21; officialisation of Papiamentu, May 21), the Year of Papiamentu), and awards and special recognition.

An example of a Papiamentu campaign in Aruba was the establishment by ministerial decree on October 17, 1995, of *Grupo Pa Promove Papiamentu* (GP3). This was the result of recommendations laid out in the document “*Pa un enseñansa bilingual na Aruba*” (“Towards bilingual education in Aruba”).²⁷ GP3 was installed as an interdepartmental and multidisciplinary commission with members from almost all pertinent organisations and bodies and representatives from the media and the fields of theatre, music, and literature. GP3’s aims included raising awareness related to Papiamentu, promoting better knowledge of Papiamentu, and fostering a more careful, general, and ample use of Papiamentu. GP3’s founding was remarkable and highly significant because the authorities openly recognised the value of Papiamentu as a national language and proved their willingness to prepare the community for new language policies and changes in education. GP3 organised activities such as “*Aña di Papiamentu*” (“The year of Papiamentu”) in 1997 and introduced a special award, “*Cadushi di Cristal*,” for people who excelled in the promotion of Papiamentu.²⁸ Papiamentu translators were trained for all government departments. GP3 has been inactive since 2008 due to expenditure cuts by the government. A group of translators started the NGO *Fundacion Traductor di Papiamentu* (“Foundation Papiamentu Translators”) (FCP). FCP together with *Fundacion Lanta Papiamentu* and the Department of Culture organised the “*Aña di Papiamentu*” in 2013 and 2018.

ABC linguists have a regular linguistic exchange with their colleagues abroad and are active members of organisations such as the Society for Caribbean Linguistics (SCL), Caribbean Studies Association (CSA), and International Linguistic Association (ILA). Foreign universities, such as Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana, U.S.A., and the University of Mannheim in Germany, teach Papiamentu language and culture courses with the help of Dutch Caribbean linguists. International students come to our islands to research Papiamentu for their master’s or PhD thesis. At the first meeting of the editors of the new *Journal of Caribbean Social Studies*, the representatives of the ABC islands proposed Papiamentu as one of the languages in which to publish. Everyone accepted this proposal, without discussion, by acclamation.

Papiamentu for Nation-Branding

Language is the most significant identity marker of a community and a nation and Papiamentu sets the ABC islands apart from other countries in the Caribbean. The community has long been aware of this and presented their “product” Papiamentu not only on the islands themselves, but also abroad. The theatre groups Thalia (Curaçao), Mascaruba, and FARPA (Aruba) participated in international Papiamentu-language theatre festivals. Mascaruba performed in Suriname, Japan, Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Cuba, and the U.S. Papiamentu scholars introduced Papiamentu at international conferences and received enthusiastic responses.

Until now, tourism boards have not used Papiamentu’s potential for nation-branding, but rather English, the language of global tourism. Aruba adopted the slogan “Aruba, One happy island.” Curaçao first used “Curaçao, real different!” as its slogan and now “Curaçao, feel it for yourself!” Bonaire promotes itself as “Bonaire, Diver’s Paradise.” Another example is the English tourism promotion



Balashi, a recent Aruban beer brand referring to tradition; traditional funci (corn flour) with text in Papiamentu; Aruban brand of rum named ‘Papiamentu’; Sushi restaurant ‘Ganikome’, the name sounds Japanese, but it is a Papiamentu contraction of ‘Gana di kome’, meaning craving for food (collage by the authors)

slogan: “I♥Aruba/Bonaire,” which would translate as “Mi stima Aruba/Bonaire”; “Mi♥Aruba” or “Mi♥Bonaire” would have been an easy option to familiarise tourists with Papiamentu, the authentic cultural marker of the ABC islands. Curaçao sets a positive example: “Dushi Curaçao” means “My beloved Curaçao,” “Curaçao My Love,” or “Sweet Curaçao.”

Although English is still widely used in advertisements and other texts for the general population, there is a steady improvement in attitudes towards Papiamento.²⁹ A recent development is providing products from the islands with a Papiamento brand name. The products are eagerly purchased by tourists and the local people themselves to send or take abroad as gifts. Proper management of this development could result in tremendous branding of the product, the country, and the language. These are bottom-up examples of the creative use of Papiamento for nation-branding.

Planning, Policy and Prestige for Language Emancipation

The previous paragraphs provide ample arguments that language planning and policy must be a joint venture between the government and the NGOs. A language planning and policy institute on the islands working under an umbrella Papiamento/Papiamentu language union is necessary to rescue this most important cultural heritage of the ABC communities. Baldauf Jr.’s table “The Evolving Framework for Language Planning Goals by Levels and Awareness” (2004)³⁰ offers a four-tiered framework that focuses on the goals of language policy and planning (LPP). LPP includes four essential areas: status planning, corpus planning, language-in-education planning, and prestige planning. Each area has its specific policy and implementation planning goals, but they are all intertwined and interrelated, as shown in Figure 3. These intertwined areas operate at all levels of decision-making and execution.³¹

1. *Status planning* focuses on the functions of the languages in a given community. The objects of status planning are primarily the recognition by the government of the position of the various languages spoken in the community³² and the legal regulations which follow naturally from that recognition.
2. *Corpus planning* refers to language cultivation, reform, and standardisation.³³ It includes such activities as producing all kinds of materials in the target language(s) for education and the community, especially for all the levels of acquisition planning.
3. *Acquisition planning* relates directly to creating possibilities for all groups in the community to acquire multiple types and levels of knowledge and competence in the target languages.

4. *Prestige and image planning* (PIP) increases the acknowledgment, appreciation, and valorisation of the target languages.³⁴ It significantly impacts how the community receives corpus, status, and acquisition planning and eventually owns them. The focus of prestige and image planning is the promotion of the target languages among the possible users, aiming to develop a positive mentality and attitude towards those languages.

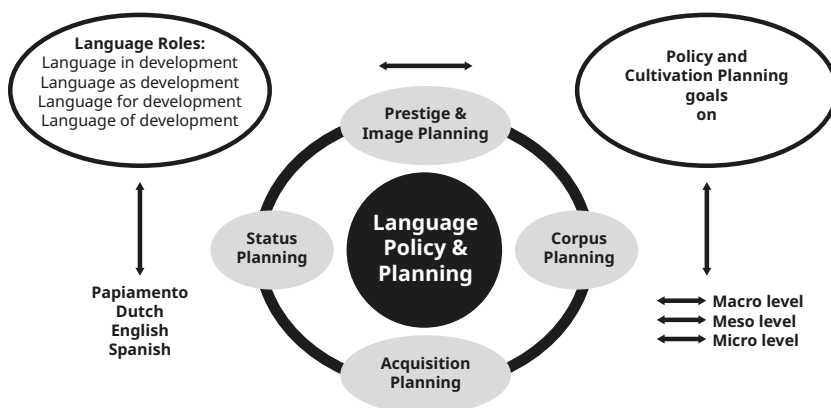


Fig. 3. A Model for a Language Policy and Planning Institute

According to Spolsky, successful language planning and policy depend on the beliefs and consensual behaviour of the members of a speech community.³⁵ Although a relatively recent addition, prestige and image planning (PIP) is an area of language policy and planning that needs urgent attention.³⁶

Lack of knowledge about one's language creates a vicious circle, wherein every generation is less able to model the proper use of Papiamentu for the next generation. Lack of maintenance and expansion means that even a relatively strong language like Papiamentu becomes threatened. English, the "killer language,"³⁷ is on our doorstep. Five-year-old children speak English, which they learn from cable television and the internet, better than their mother tongue Papiamentu. Unnecessary is the continuous code-switching and code-mixing with English and Dutch. The awareness or ability to be creative with new concepts is absent: words and whole sentences are just taken over instead of being translated or transformed to conform with the structures of Papiamentu. Code-switching and code-mixing are phenomena that are usually associated with healthy multilingualism in a community. In the ABC islands, however, they occur so often and in such an excessive way

that we consider them signs of severe loss of vocabulary and decay in fluency in the mother tongue.

PIP is not simply a vehicle for public relations, rather it is responsible for the dissemination of information and knowledge about Papiamento and healing wounds caused by a hostile colonial language policy.³⁸ It must guarantee that nations become aware of and have access to the content of all publications and have the opportunity to follow the discussions about them and participate in these discussions. Working to increase awareness and spread knowledge of Papiamento among communities contributes to their sense of responsibility toward and pride in their language and culture, which is essential for nation-building. The fact that Aruba, Curaçao, and Bonaire have a cooperation agreement in the development and promotion of Papiamento (2019) paves the way for the creation of a joint ABC island institute for language planning and language policy, with PIP as the trail-blazer, that can play a crucial role in the process of creating a shared responsibility for language, culture, and the nation, hence nation-building.³⁹

Concluding Remarks

Three islands with two orthographies and one language. The colonial setting casts a veil over their Creole linguistic heritage. Despite recent improvements in its status, Papiamento is still struggling for recognition—even amongst its speakers—as a language that can cover all academic and emotional registers. Anti-Creole colonial language policies cast a long shadow. ABC communities still experience the consequences of the 1819 education decree and the 1935 regulations. Papiamento's image is of a deficient non-language or “dialect.” Ministries of education, policymakers, and the ABC community must come to terms with the overwhelming scientific evidence that students' home and community languages are optimal languages for instruction and initial literacy. Teaching materials, informational materials, and literature for young and old must become available to strengthen the realisation of human talent and the creation of resilient communities, open democracies and viable economies with a strong labour force. Hence, nation-building.

Papiamento is the single most important intangible heritage expression in Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao. In spite of colonial oppression and stagnant emancipation, islanders have used the power of Papiamento to survive and let their cultures flourish. Islanders capture their thoughts and experiences in the language through poetry, stories, theatre, song, dance, and music. The arts continuously enrich the language for the sake of identity formation and dissemination. Papiamento as a vehicle for cultural expression offers limitless possibilities for branding the islands as cradles of local arts, science, and Creole tourism, hence nation-branding.

Non-sovereignty matters. Despite each nation's context after the 2010 constitutional reforms—Bonaire being part of the Netherlands; Curaçao and Aruba being non-sovereign countries—the many NGOs and universities mentioned in this chapter continued to work together, producing textbooks, reading books, grammar, and dictionaries, organising bachelor's and master's courses for language teachers, and designing language policies. A joint institute for language planning and policy can ensure that Papiamentu, the Caribbean's second officially recognised national Creole language, is valued, passed on from generation to generation, and promoted in the ABC speech community and abroad.