



And then there was Carriolsch! A study of the earliest stages of Virgin Islands Dutch Creole

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Between 1991 and 1995, Hein van der Voort and I entered hundreds of pages of eighteenth century Dutch Creole manuscript into the so-called NEHOI database. Our goal was to encode the philological aspects of these texts in such a way that future researchers of all kinds of disciplines could use them for their own research. However, since most of the translations were made by missionaries, the corpus was soon criticized for being too bookish and artificial.

But... the texts are there. Obviously the missionary translators considered their work to be helpful for their services and mission and they even prepared hundreds of pages. Already in the eighteenth century printed work in and about this Creole language was available in the Danish Antilles (where Dutch Creole was spoken) and in Europe. The available bible texts, grammars, abc-booklets, etc. were a starting point for some early linguists to study contact languages.

In my dissertation I focus on possibilities or strategies to get as close as possible to the language as it was actually spoken. Alan Bell's Audience Design Model helped me get to know more about the people to whom the texts were addressed. Contemporary metalinguistic comments provide insight into the language community in which Dutch and Dutch Creole seem to have been used next to each other. Philological tools turned out to be very useful to focus on the ongoing improvement of the translations by the missionaries.

In my presentation I will also show some newly found Dutch Creole texts, not only in Virgin Islands Dutch Creole, but also in the most mysterious Dutch Creole: Skepi Dutch Creole, which was spoken in Essequibo, but shows a lot of similarities with Virgin Islands Dutch Creole.