

St. Kitts and the Atlantic Creoles: The Texts of Samuel Augustus Mathews in Perspective (Westminster)

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Creoles in Education A Discussion of Pertinent Issues

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1. Introduction

The last three decades have seen a steady increase in the use of Pidgin and Creole (P/C) languages in public life.¹ In many P/C-speaking communities, P/C are now widely used in health education, vocational training, political campaigning and in the media (Migge & Léglise 2007: 314). These developments demonstrate – if it has to be demonstrated at all –² that P/Cs are viable means of communication and are well able to express as wide a range of issues as the European languages with which they coexist.³

Despite on-going social change in most Creole communities, formal school instruction in Creole-speaking communities has seen comparatively little change. While students are mostly no longer actively discouraged or punished for using their native P/C, their use is generally also not officially encouraged. Few P/Cs are officially recognized as viable means of instruction. They are mostly informally tolerated to varying degrees as a transitional measure to facilitate acquisition of the official language(s) and (European) language(s) of education. In addition to the transitional use of P/Cs as an auxiliary medium, it also tends to be restricted to the oral domain. This creates a vicious circle where no orthography development and other language engineering takes place as a result of the presumed unsuitability of the P/Cs to serve as a means of writing. This in turn, bolsters teachers and politicians' claims with regard to the very claim of inadequacy.

¹ We use the terms Pidgin and Creole (P/C) here without prejudice. Linguists refer to some of the languages that arose due to colonial expansion and/or contact with European languages as Pidgins and to others as Creoles depending on their usage patterns. Pidgins are generally second languages while Creoles are defined as mother tongues. These distinctions have come to be blurred over time due to social changes and more often than not, it is difficult on linguistic grounds to distinguish between. The speakers of these languages often use these technical terms in different ways, referring to their mother tongue as Pidgin, for instance, or not using these terms at all.

² After all, on linguistic terms, no language is more appropriate than another to serve as a means of communication or instruction. The debates concerning the possibility for a language to be used in school, for example, are always based on political and ideological arguments: "A creole is inferior to its corresponding standard language only in social status." (Decamp 1971: 16)

³ We would like to observe, however, that there are authors who consider the essential criterion for distinguishing Creoles from Pidgins not to be nativization but the ability to serve all the communicative functions of a community (cf., e.g., Bartens 1996: 9, 137). As a result of adopting this point of view, varieties previously called "extended Pidgins" have to be considered Creole languages.

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Creolization. Samuel Augustus Mathews in Perspective. (Westminster Creolistics Series 4). St Kitts and the Atlantic Creoles: the texts of Samuel Augustus Mathews in perspective. (Westminster Creolistics Series, 4.) 4. London: Univ. of Westminster Press. Pidgin and Creole studies have come to be seen as important for the development of linguistic theory (particularly in the areas of language). Have their views changed? Westminster Creolistics series 3. Baker, P & Bruyn, A. St Kitts and the Atlantic Creoles. The texts of Samuel Augustus Mathews in perspective. In: St. Kitts and the Atlantic Creoles: The Texts of Samuel Augustus Mathews in Perspective, ed. Philip Baker and Adrienne Bruyn. London: University of Westminster Press, Google Scholar. A Merchant's Perspective: Captain Jacobus Boelen's Narrative of His Visit to Hawai'i (Westminster Creolistics Series 3.).

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