

THE QUESTION OF DECREOLIZATION IN PAPIAMENTU PHONOLOGY

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Although modern urban Papiamentu almost passes for a dialect of Spanish, older traditions and rural usage indicate originally great differences. Hypercorrections frequently carry Papiamentu even further in the direction of Spanish. Minimal contrasts by tone are, however, characteristic of native speakers of Papiamentu at all sociocultural levels and do not disappear in hypercorrect speech. Penetration of Spanish and Dutch phonology into Papiamentu is exemplified by such phonological factors as slight palatalization (rather than complete palatalization), use of a velar fricative rather than a glottal fricative, and the occurrence of a wide variety of consonants in final position.

Richard E. Wood in his interesting article "The Hispanization of a Creole Language" (1972) which he dedicates primarily to morpho-syntactic decreolization, states that a parallel process may also be operative in Papiamentu phonology. Navarro Tomás expresses similar feelings (1953: 189) under the subtitle "Desacriollamiento": "La influencia del español no se ha limitado al vocabulario. La primitiva fonética afroportuguesa ha ido cediendo el campo a la española." I would like to make some brief observations on current tendencies in Papiamentu's phonology with the hope of encouraging further work of a sociolinguistic nature in this area.

A word should be said briefly about the relative social positions of Spanish and Dutch in the Netherlands Antilles of Curaçao, Aruba, and Bonaire. Dutch is the official language; it is the almost exclusive language of the schools. As of very recently Papiamentu grammar and literature are being taught in the public schools but Dutch remains the principal linguistic medium in education. As a result, the contribution of Dutch to Papiamentu has been significant.

Spanish is offered on a wide scale as a foreign language due to Curaçao's geographic proximity to Venezuela and Colombia. Despite the persistent presence of Dutch, primarily in the schools, it still does not possess in the minds of the people the essential quality that Spanish surely does possess: popularity. This situation is reflected even in such