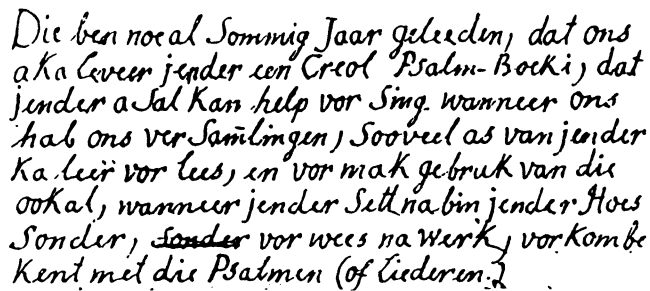


Negerhollands

Cefas van Rossem and Hein van der Voort

0. Introduction

The following figure shows an illustration of late-18th century manuscript.¹ It is a piece of metalinguistic comment from an introduction to the Negerhollands Creole translation by the Moravian Brethren of the *Evangelienharmonie*, a compilation of the four gospels.



Die ben no al Sommig Jaar geleeden, dat ons
aKa leveer jender een Creol Psalm-Boeki, dat
jender aJal Kan help vor Sing. wanneer ons
hab ons ver Samlingen, Sooveel as van jender
Ka leir vor lees, en vor mak gebruk van die
ookal, wanneer jender Seth na bin jender Hoes
Sonder, Sonder vor wees na Werk, vor Kombe
Kent met die Psalmen (of Liederen).

Figure 1

¹ This text comes from a manuscript in Negerhollands and it forms part of a very large corpus. The project which is presently being carried out at the University of Amsterdam concerning the storage into the computer of this body of data, together with the publication of an edition of it, has the purpose of making it more accessible to further linguistic research. The Negerhollands edition project is financed by the Netherlands organization for Scientific Research (NWO) and the P. J. Meertens Institute for Dialectology, Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences (KNAW). Due to Hans den Besten and Pieter Muysken, the present paper has notably improved. We would like to thank them for their valuable comments. Furthermore, we want to thank Peter Bakker, Frans Hinskens, David Lipscomb, Leen de Vink and the editors of the LIN-papers for their comments.

At first glance, one is struck by the strong resemblance of the Netherhollands in the text to Dutch. Still, a number of equally strong Creole characteristics clearly surfaces in this text, like exclusively S - V - O order and preverbal Tense and Aspect particles.

In figure 2 below, a morphemic translation is given.

Die ben noe al sommig Jaar geleeden, dat ons
 It COP now already some year.pl ago, that we
 'It has now already been several years since we

a ka Leveer jender een Creol Psalm-Boeki, dat
 PAST ASP supply you.pl a creole hymn-book, that
 delivered a creole hymn-book to you, that

jender a sal kan help vor sing wanneer ons
 you.pl PAST FUT can help CONJ sing when we
 you could help singing when we

hab ons versamm^ling-en, sooveel as van jender
 have our meeting-pl, so.many as of you.pl
 hold our meetings, as so many of you

ka leer vor lees, en vor mak gebruik van die
 ASP learn COMP read, en CONJ make use of it
 have learned to read, and to make use of it

ookal, wanneer jender sett nabin jender Hoes
 also, when you.pl sit in your.pl house
 also, when you are at home

sonder, [-sonder] vor wees na Werk, vor kom be
 without [-without] CONJ COP PREP work, COMP come ..-
 not being at work, to become familiar

kent met die Psalm-en (of Lied-eren.)
 known with DET hymn-pl (or song-pl.)
 with the hymns (or songs).'

Figure 2

1. *The emergence of Negerhollands*

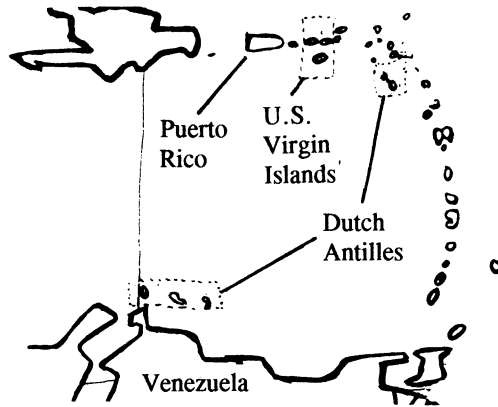


Figure 3

Figure 3 is a sketch of the western part of the Caribbean. Because of the language contact involved in the slave trade in this area, many Creole languages have emerged here. These are characterized by lexicons of European origin. Their grammatical systems diverge from the European colonial languages, however.

Most of the Creole languages in this area are English, French or Portuguese-based, but on one little group of islands, curiously enough the Virgin Islands which were never Dutch, a Dutch-based creole language was spoken, called Negerhollands. Very rarely have Dutch-based Creoles emerged in places where the Dutch traded, or where overseas colonies were established. In such places, mainly English-based and Iberian-based Creoles were used as the lingua franca. The Virgin Islands (St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix) were a Danish colony from about the start of the 18th century until 1917, when they were sold to the United States. These former Danish Antilles were colonized predominantly by Dutch expatriates, however, in particular Zealanders, and Caribbean-born Dutch, which is a likely reason why a Dutch Creole could have come into being there. It is not yet clear where and when Negerhollands emerged; it is possible that it existed already on St. Eustatius before the coming of the Danish in the West Indies (that is, before 1671). It is from this island that Dutch planters and their slaves were driven away to the Virgin Islands by the British in 1672.

Negerhollands was first mentioned in 1736 by German missionaries from the organization of the Moravian Brethren at Herrnhut. It was spoken between around 1700 and precisely 1987 in different varieties.

Negerhollands has existed in the form we saw above in Figure 1 until about 1850, after which it gradually changed under the influence of English.

2. Source material

2.1. Missionary activities in the Virgin Islands. As far as 18th century texts are concerned it is interesting to look at the activities carried out in the field of the mission. Most of our manuscripts have a religious background and are mostly written or translated by missionaries.

The mission of the Moravian Brethren on the Virgin Islands started in 1732. These Brethren originate from the pre-Lutheran protestant group of the *Husites* (followers of church reformer Jan Hus). Their place of origin is the village of Herrnhut which is situated in the far east of Germany, near the borders with Poland and Czechoslovakia². Their missionary work covered a wide range of countries, from Greenland to Surinam. Several aspects of their religious work have our interest, especially that:

- it was one of their main tasks to translate the Bible and all kinds of hymns and prayers into the local language;
- they considered teaching the local people to read and write as an important aspect of their work;
- they thought it important to keep a diary in which everything concerning their community was written down, but in which also notes about life and nature were made.

The first aspect has had the result that we now have a large amount of liturgical manuscripts. The last one gives us a lot of extra-linguistic information, like for instance the first explicit reference to Negerhollands, and indeed to the word 'creole' in reference to a language - in any text anywhere - made in a diary of a Moravian from 1736.

In 1742 three letters were published in Negerhollands. One of them, the first and longest one, was written by the spiritual leader of the Moravian Brethren, count Nicolaus von Zinzendorff. (We will probably never know if he translated the letter into Negerhollands himself!) The two other letters were written respectively by male and by female slaves who had become members of the community of the Moravians.

² This is why they are also called "Hermhuters", a name they do not like to use themselves, because literally taken, it excludes foreign Brethren.

From the period 1739-1770 about 150 slave letters have been preserved. A large part of this collection is written in Negerhollands, or in Dutch with lots of Creole elements. Peter Stein from Regensburg is preparing an edition of these unique manuscripts.

Most of the texts are written down by the German missionaries, but from 1756 on the Danish Lutheran mission also started to work in the Virgin Islands, which was a Danish colony after all.

2.2. Publications in Negerhollands. From 1765 until 1834 books were printed in Negerhollands. The collection encloses various kinds of religious texts, from psalmbooks to catechisms, but also linguistic works. The writers and publishers were all missionaries originating from Denmark or Germany.

Perhaps the most important work about Negerhollands was published in 1770. It is the grammar by J.M. Magens (who was born on St. Thomas and who was a native speaker of Negerhollands), which is the first real grammar of a Creole language. In the same year C.G.A. Oldendorp, a German, gave a short grammatical sketch of the language in his voluminous book 'History of the Moravian Brethren in the Virgin Islands' from 1777. In 1805 another grammar was written by the Moravian missionaries, but this one has never been published.

2.3. Sources on Negerhollands. Concerning the study of Negerhollands, we will just mention a few names. In the nineteenth century two works were published. One based on spoken material by Van Name in 1869, and one mainly based on written texts by Pontoppidan in 1881. In 1905 Hesseling's book about the language appeared. In this work material from the Herrnhut archive is used next to Danish printed material. In the twenties of this century De Josselin de Jong published two books in which the variety of Negerhollands is presented as it is spoken by the 'last' generation of native speakers (from the expedition of 1923).

In the last two decades, Graves, Sabino and Gilbert Sprauve have published about their research on the spoken language of the last native speakers. From the beginning of the nineteen eighties, Peter Stein has published a number of articles on the material he discovered in the Unitäts Archiv in Herrnhut.

3. Negerhollands in Creolinguistics

The study of Creole languages is an intriguing section in the field of General Linguistics, both from a synchronic and a diachronic perspective.

Creole languages form an ideal testing ground for certain theories about cognitive and linguistic universals, as they systematically possess properties generally absent in non-Creole languages. Traditionally, discussions on Creole languages have centered around the origins of these commonly shared properties: can they be ascribed to the fact that universal principles should show themselves most clearly in Creoles, because these languages generally have the most unmarked parameter settings, and the like, for the lack of historical 'noise'; or is the latter theory too romantic and should, and can, the origin of the resemblances between Creoles be found in their possibly shared, mostly West African, substrate languages?

In studying the emergence and development of Creole languages, attention for the reconstruction of the original sociolinguistic contact situations is of immediate importance. In this connection, more and more archives lately have been consulted, and various disciplines have been involved, such as colonization history and economic history, historical demography, archaeology etc. Of course the most important linguistic sources are texts and metalinguistic comments. Since the Creole languages hardly ever had a written tradition, of which they generally weren't considered worthy enough anyway, such sources are scarce.

Our project however, concerns a Creole language in which fortunately many direct historical sources have been preserved. Negerhollands is a Creole language that can boast of a considerable number of unusually early (historical as well as synchronical: early in relation to its first phase of emergence) sources. In fact, this number represents the greatest quantity of early sources that has been handed down of any Creole language. In addition to this, the fact that these sources can be grouped after origin into two independent classes, Danish and German, that confirm each other for the most part, contributes significantly to a dependable picture of early Negerhollands. Furthermore, this Creole language does not also derive its lexicon from those European languages that have been the superstrate languages of so many Creoles all over the world, like English, Portuguese, Spanish and French, but it is one of those extraordinarily rare cases where Dutch was the lexifier language.

4. Negerhollands, a Creole language

An important reason to regard Creole languages as a separate group is typological. Wherever they emerged around the globe, and how different their lexicons may be, Creole languages have a number of characteristics in common. Negerhollands is no exception, and we want to illustrate this with the following examples:

(1) vorwaarom Joe a ka doe ons die? (1780)
 why 2sg PAST PERF do 1pl that
 S V IO DO
 ‘why did you do that to us?’

(2) mi boek mi na voor Em. (1780)
1sg bow 1sg to before 3sg
'I bow myself before him'

(3) sender gie sender sender skaap sender.
3plSub give 3plObj 3plPoss sheep PL
'they give them their sheep (plural)'

(4) sellie ha loop slaep mit tien yer. (1770)
 3pl TNS walk sleep with ten hour
 'they went to bed at ten o'clock'

In a paratactic reading of this example, walking and sleeping are to be regarded as separate actions whose sequence and consecutiveness is

iconically represented by juxtaposition of the verbs. In the more probable serial reading, however, walking has an inchoative meaning, and the construction indicates what in non-serializing languages would be expressed through hypotaxis by means of complementizers and the like. In example (5), different subjects are in play:

- (5) Em a roep een van die knechten kom biem. (1780)
 3sg TNS call one of DET servants cometo3sg
 'he called one of his servants to him(self)'

Another very common trait in Creole languages is the occurrence of in predicate cleft constructions to mark focus. In this construction, a verb is fronted, but it is still present at the original site as well. Like verb serialization, this construction type is quite rare in early Negerhollands.

In example (6), the use of a conjunction meaning 'for' can be observed marking infinitive and purposive sentences:

- (6) vordaarom mi a ka kom voor doop met water.
 therefore 1sg TNS ASP come CONJ baptize with water
 'therefore I have come to baptize with water' (1780)

In many Creole languages an element meaning 'for' is used as an infinitival marker (see Bakker 1987).

These characteristics are not restricted to 18th century Negerhollands. As suggested earlier, Negerhollands went through some change during the time of its existence, but it retained the Creole properties sketched above. Examples (7) from a 1926 source and (8) from 1977 still show the same Creole characteristics, such as the invariability of the pronouns in different functions, S - V - O word order, Tense and Aspect particles and a serial verb construction:

- (7) Am a sē ši mēster, dð kiniŋ lō kō ki am.
 3sg TNS say his master, DET king ASP come see 3sg
 S V O S V O
 'he told his master that the king was coming to see him'
- (8) di kining a fraa, apee fa am gut wa am
 DET king TNS ask where COP POSS thing REL 3sg
 kaa bring.
 ASP bring
 'The king asked where is that thing that he has brought'

In fact, when looking at these 20th century sources of Negerhollands, they give a much more Creole-like impression than the 18th century sources do. The same is the case when comparing Sranan in 18th century documents to its present form. Theories about Creole languages are often based on the presumption that Creoles emerge rapidly, that is, Creoles emerge in their most prototypical form in a single generation or in the first few generations. This implies that the earliest stages should reflect the most unmarked parameter settings, contain mainly analytic expressions and so on, and that subsequently, the Creole language gradually develops according to the same historical processes that non-Creole languages are subject to. Negerhollands (and also Sranan) appears to be counterexample to this. In early Negerhollands, verb serialization is very rare, but the 20th century Negerhollands sources abound with these constructions.

Two possible (and mutually not exclusive) conclusions can be drawn from this. Or Negerhollands became more and more prototypically Creole-like over the centuries, or, if Negerhollands did emerge in its most prototypical Creole form during its first stages, our sources are not altogether representative. In the latter case, the early sources might be biased towards the European superstrate languages. In the text in figure 1, for example, inflectional morphology, a rare thing in Creole languages, is also encountered. Complex sentence embedding, as furthermore encountered here, is not a prototypical trait of Creoles either. As these traits point to Germanic interference to a certain extent, a likely origin for them would be the translators, who were not native speakers of Negerhollands. But before we dismiss the variety the manuscripts contain as artificial, it should be noted that the German Bible translators were very critical about the usage of the 'right' language variety. This can be read in various letters that were written around 1770 in the Danish Antilles by German missionaries (amongst whom C.G.A. Oldendorp) that are kept in Herrnhut. For example, the language used in the Psalmbook of 1765 is called 'far too Dutch-like'. Another point against the texts not being representative is the fact mentioned in section three that the German and Danish sources confirm each other. Taking these facts into account, the idea of gradual development does not seem unlikely.

5. *Negerhollands reflexives*

One example of recently undertaken research has been the investigation of reflexive pronouns in eighteenth century Negerhollands. This research was the first quantitative one on the 18th century manuscript material. In Van der Voort and Muysken (to appear) we looked for variance among these pronouns. Until recently, it has been defended that, following its tendency

as a Creole to non-ambiguity, Negerhollands made a more consistent distinction between reflexive and non-reflexive use of pronouns (through the use of an exclusively reflexive pronoun *sie* and/or a reflexive disambiguating marker *selv*) than its possible non-Creole superstrate models like Dutch, German and Danish. Part of the confirmation of such consistency appeared to be due rather to the one-sidedness of the restricted source material that was available before the edition project started, than to the tendency to strict transparency in Negerhollands. We now have access to several different versions of texts derived from the New Testament, the Old Testament and others by the Moravian Brethren. It appears that, - within and among these texts - there is considerable variation. Some of our earlier observations are retraceable in our new material as tendencies however, as for example the use of the combination of a pronoun with the reflexive marker self in adverbial PPs. One of the conclusions supported by the variance in the reflexives when compared to yet other sources of Negerhollands, is that Negerhollands as a whole in time became more and more exclusively Creole-like. Some of our findings and conclusions support a recently proposed classification of anaphors by Reinhart and Reuland (1991).

6. Conclusion

Perhaps the most interesting part of Creole languages is their genesis. Unfortunately this first stage of the Atlantic Creoles took place in the 17th century, so there is no opportunity to use recordings or informants, and the use of written material is limited to a small amount of texts. Negerhollands, the Creole nature of which we have sketched in section four, is, thanks to the activities of eighteenth century missionaries, an exception to this. The corpus consists of a bulk of texts in which the oldest stage is approached closer than is possible for other Creole languages. The manuscripts are not always word by word translations. The independent texts (Danish and German) show that language is used in a quite natural way. Also, these early sources might be especially helpful in the demystification of the early stages of creolization. We think that the material, in the near future accessible by computer, is very interesting for Creolists as well as for linguists with interest in other subjects, like historical linguistics, sociolinguistics and Dutch dialectology.

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