
5-31-2012

Expressing National Identity through Language: Papiamentu in Curaçao

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Recommended Citation

Horan, Kerilee (2012) "Expressing National Identity through Language: Papiamentu in Curaçao," *Undergraduate Journal of Global Citizenship*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 2 , Article 6.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/jogc/vol1/iss2/6>

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INTRODUCTION

Many nations with a colonial history have certain features in common, regardless of their colonizers or geographical location. One of these features is an imposition of the colonizers' language on the indigenous as a means of control as well as for economic, social, and political reasons. In the case of Ireland, the Irish national language, which was spoken by the majority of inhabitants of the island, was close to eradication in the 19th century. Britain sought to impose English on those living in Ireland to spread the Protestant religion, to quell uprisings, and "civilize" the Irish. Their goal was never fully realized, however, as a movement within the Irish population sought to preserve their language and culture, eventually calling for home rule. This movement came largely from the educated aristocracy of Ireland, through groups such as the Gaelic League and the media. By expressing the value of their culture and what would be lost if the British way of life were completely adopted, Ireland succeeded in preventing the absolute death of the Irish language and generated new interest in Irish history and culture.

During this time, European initiatives in other areas of the world were attempting to achieve largely the same goal as Britain was in Ireland and her other colonies. Countries such as Spain, Portugal, Britain and the Netherlands were heavily involved in the trans-Atlantic trade, with posts in West Africa and the Caribbean. The slave trade in particular gave rise to the establishments of European centers in West Africa and the colonization of the islands of the Caribbean. While each Caribbean island has a unique history of colonization, what remains true for the majority is that the culture of its colonizing power or powers was largely imposed on those already living on the island and those brought there forcibly, through which a new, amalgamated identity emerged. This process is clearly visible through the development of Papiamentu, the national creole language of Curaçao. The island of Curaçao is a prime example of the dichotomy between the national language commonly spoken by the people and the language imposed by European forces.

There are, of course, numerous fundamental differences between aspects of the Irish state and Curaçao. The population of Ireland was approximately eight million during the first half of the 19th century preceding the Great Famine, while the population of Curaçao at the turn of the century was close to 30,000 (Ziegelman, 2010; Soest, 1997). Unlike Curaçao, that Irish population was already thriving and speaking their national language prior to its colonization. In Curaçao, however, the Papiamentu language and culture that emerged from the people living on the island formed through trade and colonization. Many of those who are currently living on the island are descendants from individuals brought to

the islands by force as well as Dutch expatriates. These groups unknowingly worked together to form the current culture of Curaçao.

Although the demographic and cultural differences between these two regions do not seemingly lend themselves to a comparison, they both show a fundamental common feature of many colonized peoples: the lengths to which individuals will go to preserve their culture. Both Ireland and Curaçao faced structured political intervention attempting to regulate their national language and culture as a whole. The mindset of European colonizers during this period was to “civilize” the peoples of the territories in which they were involved, thus spreading a “superior” culture. Ireland is an example of how and why this preservation of the indigenous culture is achieved both historically and contemporarily. Curaçao, after having recently become an autonomous country within the Netherlands, is currently undergoing the process of determining the extent to which its social and political culture will reflect its Dutch colonizers, or the majority Papiamentu-speaking population. The comparison between the colonial history and development of national language in Ireland and Curaçao shows the way in which two colonies, both necessary for the economic prosperity of their colonizers, have developed their unique cultural identities through language, despite attempted force to eradicate it. In many ways, Ireland’s experience as a colony, Britain’s attempt to eradicate the Irish language, and the way in which Irish nationalists countered these attempts can be viewed as a glimpse into what Curaçao may be currently experiencing in the wake of autonomy. Ireland’s history and success in standardizing and promoting the use of Irish despite an educational system taught in English is an historical example of the dichotomy currently visible in Curaçao. The policies put in place in the post-independence could potentially be used in Curaçao to achieve the similar results.

Ireland’s history shows that in the years directly before independence and the half century following, language curriculum for children and social events for adults help a society preserve and encourage their national culture. Using both political and social tools, Ireland was able to increase awareness about the loss of culture it was undergoing as well as generate interest for its national language and common roots in Celtic Gaelic culture. With Curaçao’s autonomy comes the opportunity to better utilize the Papiamentu language as Ireland did with Irish. Following Ireland’s independence movement, the national Irish language, which was all but eradicated, experienced a complete revitalization. Along with English, Irish is widely understood throughout Ireland and abroad, though it is not the primary language for most who speak it. This type of resurgence of cultural identity and unification through a standardized national language is also possible in the formerly colonized Caribbean countries of Curaçao, provided a

reconstruction of language education, structured support from the nation's political system, and a commitment from those seeking to learn the language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Papiamentu creole spoken in Curaçao has its roots in many different languages, which emerged on the island at various points. Creole as a general category for language is difficult to define. Merle Hodge, for example, defined Creole as “a fusion of West African syntax and the modified vocabulary of one or another European language” (Lehmann, 2010). Others characterized a creole language in much wider terms: as a “pidgin that has evolved into the mother tongue of a community” regardless of the geographical location or languages involved (Cooper, 1997, p. 188). For the purpose of this paper, “Creole” refers to the term for languages spoken in the Caribbean that are largely based in one European language—mainly, French, English, Dutch or Spanish—but have words or characteristics of multiple European languages, West African languages, and indigenous Caribbean and South American languages such as Taino and Arawak. The term “creole” is the much more general term to refer to any language that is an amalgamation of multiple languages. It must also be noted that a “pidgin language,” which is often used synonymously with creole, refers to the initial stages of the formation of a creole language (Fouse, 2002, p. 9). Linguists theorize that given enough time, a pidgin language will ultimately either grow to a creole language or die out (Cooper, 1997).

Papiamentu, which is spoken in Curaçao as well as on the neighboring islands of Aruba and Bonaire, is an Iberian-based¹ creole, with Dutch influences. The origin of this language, as well as many other creole languages spoken in the Caribbean, stirs debate among linguists (Fouse, 2002). Experts are generally divided into two schools of thought: the polygenesis theory and monogenesis theory. The polygenesis theory holds that Papiamentu came from contact between the Spanish and Amer-Indians of the islands in 1499 and West African slaves. “Polygenesis maintains that each creole has its own roots depending on its location and the dominant (colonial) language that was present. Accordingly, proponents of this theory believe that Papiamentu was always Spanish-based and first formed during the original contact (1499) between the Spanish *conquistadores* and the Amer-Indians who inhabited Curaçao, Aruba, and Bonaire” (Fouse, 2002, p. 64). After this initial contact, separate creoles developed individually as groups of people were arrived on or were brought to the islands. In that way, each creole language currently spoken has a unique genesis

¹ Linguists debate whether Papiamentu was originally based in Spanish or Portuguese. Due to the similarities of the two languages, the term Iberian is often used to describe the European language(s) Papiamentu is based in (Fouse 22).

contingent upon where and when certain groups came to inhabit the island or islands on which it is spoken.

Those who subscribe to the monogenesis theory maintain Papiamentu and all other Creole languages in the Caribbean and South American mainland originated from one Afro-Portuguese pidgin in the West Coast of Africa and was brought to various islands in the slave trade, then developed different dialects (Fouse, 2002). This theory argues Creole languages of the Caribbean in general were born of the African slave trade and grew into distinct dialects once it was brought to the Americas. This theory shows that what eventually developed into Papiamentu was originally formed on the West Coast of Africa. The very first recognized Creole language was a Portuguese variant found on the Cape Verde islands in 1462, with other Portuguese Creoles forming on the African mainland shortly thereafter (Holm 255). Beginning in the mid-17th century, the Portuguese established trading posts along the coast of West Africa, which greatly increased the number of slaves transported to the Caribbean (Holm, 2010; Fouse, 2002). “Arrangements were made with tribal chiefs who would capture other Africans inland and bring them to the trading posts for payment...it was not unusual that captives would have to wait in these forts for months before a ship was available for transport” (Fouse, 2002, p. 63). Because of this period of waiting, captured Africans were forced develop a way to communicate with each other despite their differences in native languages. In 1513 the Catholic Church declared that slave owners were responsible for baptizing their slaves, thus religious instruction often included Portuguese language training as well (Fouse, 2002). Supporters of the monogenesis theory, therefore, believe the Afro-Portuguese creole formed in West Africa during the slave trade was the basis for all Creole languages in the Caribbean, including Papiamentu, and developed into separate dialects based on the language of the colonizing country of each individual island.

Likewise, Ireland has a complex history of groups contributing to the current culture found within the population. The current Irish language, formerly referred to as Gaelic, has words rooted in a wide range of Celtic and Germanic languages, as well as French, Latin, and Greek, among others. This backdrop, from which the current Irish language has emerged, shows the importance of the survival of the Irish language, as it serves as a commonality of those living on the island, many coming from different Continental European roots. This sense of identity will also play a large role in the Gaelic Revitalization in the pre- and post-independence Ireland. The role of the Catholic Church was also fundamental in the spread and survival of Irish, perpetuating Irish oral culture as early as the fifth century. Moscovici’s social identity theory indicates that both group and personal affiliations work together to create a sense of self, as compared to outside groups

(Howard, 2000). Within the peoples that eventually came to settle Ireland, the interaction between individuals and groups worked to create a dichotomy of who one is as compared to who one is not. Thus, according to this theory, one's sense of identity can be defined by what that individual or group is not—in the case of Curaçao, Dutch and in the case of Ireland, British. If applied to the specific circumstances in Curaçao, Moscovici's theory would suggest the culture of native Papiamentu speakers allows this group to define themselves by juxtaposing their culture and language with that which has been imposed upon them by the Dutch. This presents particular challenges for those who may be raised speaking both languages, or who identify with both cultures as will be seen through the education system (Crowley, 2000). Judith Howard used Moscovici's theory to show that social movements, in particular, gain strength due to an imposition of what a group believes is other than themselves (Howard, 2000). While various groups came together to form the culture of Ireland and of Curaçao, respectively, their characteristics were truly solidified in the face of an opposing cultural influence.

It is under these conditions of frustration and a rising sense of loss of culture that social movements in Ireland began to gain popularity, ultimately resulting in the Irish independence movement. Though originally the goals of social groups such as The Gaelic League were not political, their members seeking to revitalize the Irish culture eventually called for home rule. Because "people actively produce identity through their talk," British legislation to prevent the Irish language from being spoken gave strong motivation for the Irish speaking population to join these social and eventually political movements (Howard, 2000, p. 372). This theory on identity when juxtaposed to other cultures, particularly when in attempt to impose one over the other, shows one of the cultural reasons the call for home rule was eventually made. It is from this historical perspective that the current language policies have been formed in both Ireland and Curaçao. This comparison of colonization and linguistic development is particularly compelling when considering the role of Ireland's strategic location and resources for Britain, and Curaçao's location for the development of the Netherlands's empire in the Caribbean. Because both of these countries were so vital to the colonial objectives of their occupiers, they can both cite the forceful means of cultural subjugation as a common background and an environment from which their current cultures have emerged. This is important to note because the concept of one's identity is rooted in both individual and collective cognition; members of a group will hold varying conceptions of their own identity (Howard, 2000). For that reason, a common feature such as language can serve to unite individuals (such as Protestants and Catholics in Ireland, or natives of Curaçao

from various ethnic backgrounds) despite affiliating with varying qualities, groups, or characteristics.

LINGUISTIC COLONIZATION OF IRELAND

Ireland's linguistic history is as complicated and complex as the history of its inhabitants. Like the islands of the Caribbean, various groups have occupied the island, each contributing to the culture found on the island today. Beginning with Neolithic hunter-gatherers from the European mainland, groups of people were found in Ireland dating back to 7000 BC (Cronin, 1996). These nomadic peoples established temporary settlements following game, as well as building more permanent agrarian centers throughout the island (Diamond, Bellwood, 2003).

The first significant outside group to impose its culture on the inhabitants of Ireland arrived between the second and third centuries BC, when the Celts first landed on Irish shores (Cronin, 1996). Falling under the general name "Celtic" those who arrived in Ireland were themselves a diverse group of people comprised of two main groups: the first most likely came across what is now known as the North Channel, between Scotland and Ireland, and the second coming from the European continent (Tymoczko). Many dialects of Celtic languages, from which modern Irish is a derivation, and Celtic culture known as La Tene, were imposed upon the early inhabitants of the island primarily through oral culture (Cronin, 1996; Tymoczko). Pre-Indo-Europeans also made their way to Ireland during this time, carrying their own languages and culture thus contributing to the diverse linguistic nature of Ireland during the pre-Iron Age (Tomocako). These centuries in Irish history continue to be regarded as among the nation's most peaceful; amicable trade and settlements were established, allowing La Tene to "continue relatively unbroken in parts of Ireland as late as the sixth century" (Tymoczko 28). Pan-European groups continued to migrate to the island, including groups from South-West Europe and Asia.

During this timeframe of peaceful co-existence came the arrival of Christianity. Perhaps one of the most influential presences on the island in terms of both language and culture, 432 AD is generally regarded as the beginning of the Christian presence in Ireland. Christianity arrived in the form of missionaries and monks, resulting in the spread of the faith through oral and eventually written tradition in the language of the people (Cronin, 1996; Tymocako). Christians arrived on the island "not as the church militant, ancillary to conquest, but rather as a cultural import, associated perhaps with Irish initiatives or informal missionary efforts, rather than formal missions from Rome" (Tymoczko 29). Christianity soon took hold in Ireland, emerging as the prevailing religion;

monasteries were built throughout the rural countryside and the Catholic faith spread rapidly, particularly in the seventh and eighth centuries (Tymoczko). The faith was not all that spread. Christians began to catalogue the local culture through the establishment of Monastic schools, which further contributed to the standardization and promotion of Celtic languages. “Celtic culture had been oral in its literary, legal, and learned expressions. Thus, when the Irish took up writing consequent upon their conversion to Christianity, they made the great transition to literacy as well” (Tymoczko 30). This marked the beginning of the shift to a written culture, for which Ireland would soon earn a reputation on the European continent.

In addition to their central role in the early stages of transitioning Ireland from an oral to a written culture, Christians were responsible for introducing Latin into the now varied languages of Ireland. Though their efforts, Latin “became a permanent feature of Irish intellectual and cultural life, maintaining a central position right to the twentieth century (Tymoczko 29). So successful were the Monastic schools in Ireland that students from across the European continent came to Ireland to learn the language; Irish Christians also spread across European mainland to establish schools, eventually bringing back the Germanic cultures of these lands to Ireland (Tymoczko). At this point in history, Celtic, Germanic, British, Pictish dialects as well as Latin and Greek could be found in Ireland (Tymoczko). Though so many ethnic groups and languages were now present, the written texts of Ireland were uncannily standard: “the linguistic uniformity of Old Irish texts [reflects] the use of a standard written language that characterizes textual production from approximately 700 to 900” (Tymoczko 34-35). This feature is accredited to the “existence of a uniform written language” which indicates a singular, unified, elite authority that set the standards of written Irish, as well as a standard school system (Tymoczko 35). Christian monks and monasteries are generally regarded to be the source of these standard written accounts of Irish oral stories, thus Christianity played a fundamental role in the establishment of a standardized dialect of Celtic used throughout the island (Tymoczko).

The year 795AD brought the first of what would become a torrid history of Viking invasions to the country, furthering the infiltration of outside cultures (Cronin, 1996; Tymoczko). Initially seeking to raid the Irish coasts, Norse and Danish Vikings eventually founded enclaves that would later develop into Dublin, Waterford, Cork and Limerick. As such, the Norse and Danish cultures began to assimilate with that of the Celts and Christians already on the island, again shifting the linguistic patterns of the Irish (Tymoczko). After the preliminary period of raids in the early 9th century, many Vikings converted to Christianity

and intermarried with those already found on the island. A second wave of raids came in the 10th century by Vikings seeking to pillage Ireland as well as engage in conflict with the Vikings now living in Ireland (Tymoczko). While the violent history of Vikings on the island is generally regarded as a major destructive force in the developed areas of Ireland, history shows Vikings that assimilated into Irish culture became a strong influence on the commercial trade industry of Ireland, opening her borders to interaction between the island and the European continent (Tymoczko). By the end of the Viking period, diverse Scandonavian dialects could be added to the list of languages found in Ireland—especially in the rapidly developing ports established by the Vikings, such as Dublin and Cork (Tymoczko).

With the 11th century came the decline of the Vikings, bringing on the age of Anglo-Norman invasions a century later (Tymoczko). The Battle of Contarf in 1014 is regarded as “the decisive engagement initiated by the Irish high king Brian Boruma that broke the Viking power in Ireland (Tymoczko 39). Anglo-Norman involvement in the Ireland further diversified the languages and dialects found within Irish shores. The official language of politics and the upper class in Anglo-Norman society was French, thus dialects of Continental French as well as Norman French, Welsh, Flemish and English were introduced (Tymoczko). Until this point, Old Irish would have been spoken (Tymoczko). The period of Anglo-Norman conquest, however, marked the beginning of the transition to Middle Irish, partly due to the assimilation of new languages, the decline of Latin because the destruction of monasteries and written accounts due to Viking raids, and the assimilation of Anglo-Norman influences (Tymoczko). The English language was officially adopted in 1366 with the Statutes of Kilkenny which states:

“every Englishman do use the English language, and be named by and English name, leaving off entirely the manner of naming used by the Irish...if any English or Irish living among the English, use the Irish language amongst themselves... [he] shall have restitution of his said lands, by writtised out of said places. In case that such person shall not have lands and tenements, his body shall be taken off by any of the officers of our Lord the King, and committed to the next gaol” (Crowley, 2000, p. 14).

The Statutes of Kilkenny, therefore, banned “the adoption of Irish customs of many sorts, as well as the use of the Irish language by the colonists” (Tymoczko 41). This became the first of many regulations placed on the language and culture allowed in Ireland under British rule.

THE AGE OF BRITAIN

With the conclusion of the Hundred Years War, England forsook the French language, which had dominated the aristocracy and political scene in England since 1066 (Tymoczko). The long and arduous political and militant history between Ireland and Britain was underway. English dominance over Ireland was sanctioned by Pope Adrian IV in 1169, “with the official purpose of bringing the Irish Church and State to order;” Henry II arrived two years later (Crowley, 2000, p. 12). Over the next four centuries, Anglo-Norman influences pervaded the island and numerous legislative efforts were made to force the inhabitants of Ireland to speak Standard English. In practice, however, these legislative movements were largely ineffective. At this time, the majority of Irish spoke Irish and accounts of Irish culture and oral stories were preserved through writing (Crowley, 2000). Because of the sheer number of Irish speaking natives, the Statute of Kilkenny was relatively futile in achieving its goals (Crowley, 2000). Therefore, over the next several centuries, legislation such as the *Act for the English Order, Habit and Language* in 1537 were passed, again attempting to eradicate Irish. It decreed all residing in Ireland shall “use and speake commonly the English Tongue and Language” thus attempting to reduce the number of Irish speakers (Cronin, 1996, p. 48).

The efforts of Anglo-Normans to Anglicize Ireland largely failed during the thirteenth century, leading to a period known as the Gaelic recovery (Crowley, 2000). Because of conflicts between Anglo-Norman lords, as well as disagreements over the decrees of the English Crown, the Irish regained political and cultural control until the 16th century (Crowley, 2000). English influences were isolated to the area around Dublin known as the English Pale and a small number of other urban centers (Crowley, 2000). The Gaelic recovery was so successful that “by 1500 Irish had displaced English in all but the major towns, the Pale itself, and the Baronies of Forth and Bargy in Wexford” (Crowley, 2000, p. 14). These three centuries of regained Irish culture came to a halt in the 16th century, as Henry VIII rose to power, officially declared king of Ireland in 1541 (Cronin, 1996). Henry VIII’s schism from the Roman Catholic Church further complicated English efforts to subjugate the Irish (Crowley, 2000). Plantations were established during this period; they were “the exemplary manifestation of the colonial solution to the political, religious and cultural problems presented in Ireland” (Crowley, 2000, p. 19). Under Henry VIII and subsequent monarchs of England, the influence of English culture expanded, now primarily through militant and political efforts (Crowley, 2000).

The last Irish chieftains fell to the British at the Battle of Kinsale in 1601 (Maguire, 1991). Over the course of the antecedent centuries, almost constant battles were fought between the British and Irish over territory, religion,

and politics (Cronin, 1996). English efforts to convert the Catholic population were fully underway in the 17th century. Varying approaches were taken: Elizabeth insisted upon the necessity for instruction to be provided in the Irish vernacular, preferring to spread the faith than eradicate the Irish culture (Crowley, 2000). Through her efforts the first printed Irish book was produced in 1567: a Protestant prayer book translated from English (Crowley, 2000). The Church of Ireland responded by publishing three books in Irish: *Gaelic Alphabet and Catechism* (1570), the *New Testament* (1602), and *Book of Common Prayers* (1608) (Crowley, 2000).

With England's victory at Kinsale in 1601 and the Flight of the Earls in 1607, the seventeenth century brought complete English control over the island for the first time, and thus the structured move towards Protestantism (Crowley, 2000). Still, the vast majority of the island spoke Irish and all towns, streets and names were Irish, thus despite earlier setbacks in the resilience of the Irish language, England made further efforts to reduce the prevalence of Irish through the Anglicization of places and names. Legislation was put in place to shift to English stating:

“His majesty taking notice of the barbarous and uncouth names, by which most of the towns and places in this kingdom of Ireland are called...much retards the reformation of that kingdom, for remedy thereof is pleased that it be enacted by the authority aforesaid that...proper names more suitable to the English tongue may be inserted with an *alias* for all towns, lands and places in that kingdom” (Crowley, 2000, p. 76).

The process became even further standardized under Penal laws, established in the late 17th century, which “sought to withhold civil rights from Catholics and Presbyterians” (Crowley, 2000, p. 83). One of the first laws passed banned the establishment of Catholic schools in Ireland and prohibited Irish Catholics from seeking education on the Continent, essentially forcing Catholics to attend Protestant schools or remain uneducated (Crowley, 2000). Catholics responded by creating hedge-schools, an underground educational organization that remained present until the 1800s (Crowley, 2000).

The year 1800 brought the passing of the Act of the Union, which abolished Ireland's Parliament, making it part of the United Kingdom (Cronin, 1996; Crowley, 2000). Because of the structured Anglicization of Irish names as well as the further cultural and political subjugation of the Irish during the first half of the 19th century, nationalism among the Irish began to grow. The nationalist movement took two distinct but related paths: those seeking political autonomy and those interested in the revitalization of Irish culture without necessarily calling for home rule (Crowley, 2000). Further complicating both

objectives was the abolition of hedge-schools and the establishment of the National Schools in 1831, regulated by Britain and taught entirely in English (Crowley, 2000). The National School System provided a free education to all children in Ireland, but was conducted completely in English, though the curriculum consisted only of oral and written English and arithmetic classes (Maguire, 1991).

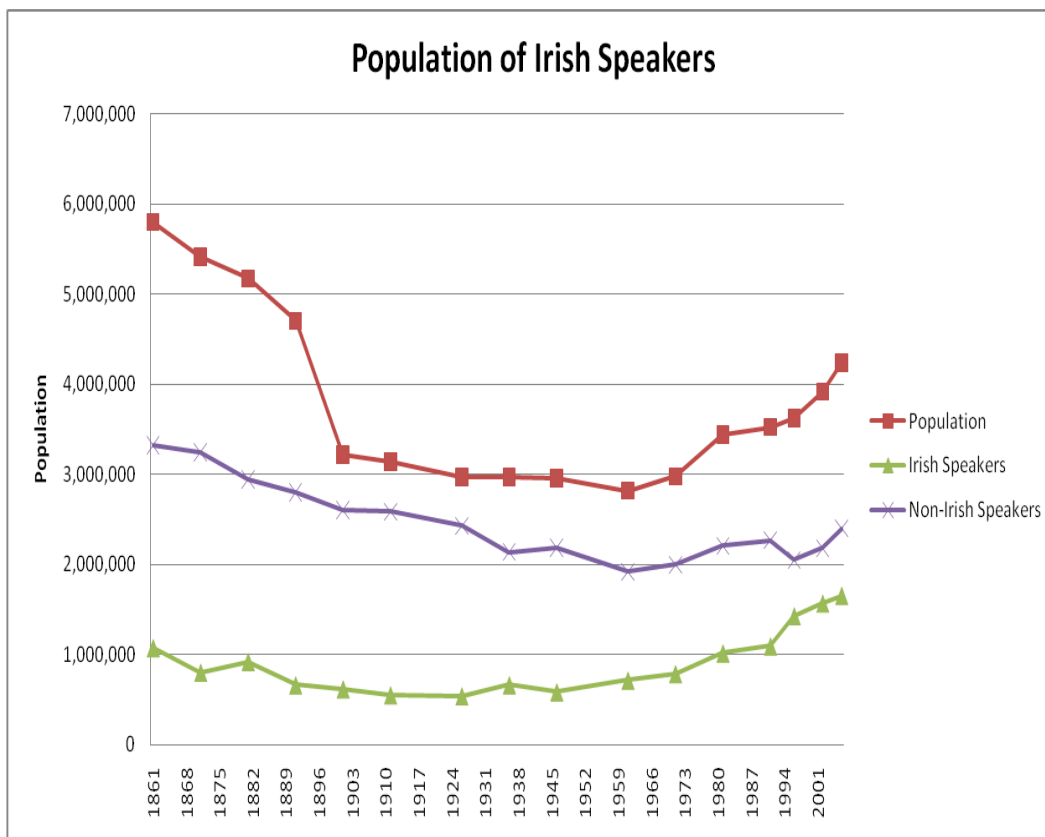
Many Irish had mixed feelings about the use of English both in and out of the classroom. During this time it was policy for students to speak English only and children were physically beaten for the use of Irish inside or outside the classroom (Pearson, 2011). Though many Irish were aware that their culture was being stricken from them through the infiltration of British ideas, not all were opposed to the use of English. Parents of school children recognized there were greater economic opportunities for their children if they spoke English, especially during and directly after what would become the most detrimental blow to the Irish language: the Great Famine (Crowley, 2000).

In the years leading up to the Great Famine (1841-1845) Ireland was used as an agricultural machine, producing both food for British citizens as well as agricultural commodities for trade. Ireland was an important British post for naval ships seeking trade with Europe, and the Americas (Cullen, 1972). Because of the economic interest Britain had in Ireland, it was beneficial for Ireland's citizens to speak English as employment opportunities and trade were moving towards English and away from Irish (Maguire, 1991). The poor, working class of Ireland was still the population that predominantly spoke Irish, and they were also the demographic that suffered the most from the Great Famine. Because of the successive failure of three out of four potato crops, the Irish population declined by 20 percent between 1841 and 1845, due to starvation and immigration (Crowley, 2000). It became crucial for those still living in Ireland to have an understanding of English; "as the saying went, the Irish may love their language, but they love their children more" (Crowley, 2000, p. 135). To most, the ability to speak English and therefore migrate to any Anglophone country, or work with the increasingly British population of Ireland became more important than preserving the Irish language.

Throughout these centuries of political and militant conquest, the Western areas of Ireland remained the most Gaelic in terms of both language and culture, with British influences moving steadily from East to West. Small areas of towns and districts that spoke only Irish were known as The Gaeltacht, which also tended to be the poorest regions of Ireland and concentrated in the West (O Raigain, 1997). The Gaeltacht steadily decreased, and the Irish-speaking

population waned through the first half of the nineteenth century as more and more of the country was Anglicized and the National Schools effectively taught English to the next generation of Irish (Crowley, 2000).

Because of the tendency for those who did speak Irish to live in rural areas of the country, and due to the fact that education was conducted solely in English, the general opinion towards Irish speakers began to shift in the mid-nineteenth century. Those who spoke only Irish with no knowledge of English were thought of as second class citizens, even by their own countrymen (Crowley, 2000). This developed a conflicting sense of identity by those who did understand English, and resentment from those who only spoke Irish. By this point, proficient Irish speakers had declined dramatically. The Irish language, formerly found in both urban and rural areas across the countryside was relegated to a few small pockets of Irish speakers. According to the 1851 Census, 23 percent of the population spoke Irish, a number that would continue to decline until Irish independence (Hindley, 1990).



The above table, compiled by the Central Statistics Office of Ireland uses census data to show the progression of Irish speakers over a 150 year span². The 1891 Census of Population provides a statistical measure of the state of the Irish language at the point at which the language revival movement was about to become a significant force. The Census conducted in April of that year indicated that the percentage of Irish-speakers in the area which now comprises the Republic of Ireland had fallen to 19.2%--or a total of 664,387 persons in total (O Raigain, 1997).

IRISH HOME RULE AND THE GAELIC REVIVAL

While the Irish aristocracy had long realized the detrimental effect British policies and National School System were having on Irish culture, the latter half of the 19th century brought the first real opportunity to begin to reverse these policies. Because of the strong infiltration of British culture, and the attempt to prevent the Irish from expressing their own, social movements began to gain momentum. The exasperation among nationalists feeling they were beginning to lose their cultural identity sparked the establishment of groups seeking to reverse the hold British ideas had taken. “One influential theory of social movements hypothesizes a collective identity that motivates group action...this identity requires a perception of membership in a bounded group, consciousness about that group’s ideologies, and direct opposition to a dominant order” (Howard, 2000, p. 384). This type of membership is exactly what took hold of nationalists largely beginning in the wake of the Great Famine. Young Ireland (1839), The Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language (1876), the Gaelic Union (1880), and The Gaelic League (1893) were among these groups (Crowley, 2000).

The Gaelic League, perhaps the most pervasive group of the Gaelic Revival, was formed by Eoin MacNeill and Douglas Hyde which “sought to maintain and develop native culture—however one defined native—without explicitly calling for Home Rule or Irish independence” (McMahon, 2008, p. 2). The League prided itself on its apolitical nature, unaffiliated with either Catholicism or Protestantism, welcoming any members interested in Irish cultural nationalism. The focus of the organization was to “appeal to people of all political and religious persuasions through a sense of Ireland’s unique cultural heritage, distinct from that of England or Britain, and in so doing, to release the creative energies of the Irish people” (McMahon, 2008, p. 2). It consisted of 593 local branches by 1904 that sought to establish Irish language classes as well as promoting Irish culture through festivals, lectures, debates, music and dancing as well as social events (Crowley, 2000; McMahon, 2008). This gave the Irish an

² The above graph depicts a sharp population drop between 1889 and 1903. Due to discrepancies in statistical information, the actual decline was likely not as sharp as shown.

organized way to come together to celebrate their culture as well as learn, socialize, and debate political thought. Initially focusing on language education, particularly within the adult population of its members, the goals of the League shifted between 1893 and 1922 as membership and the political climate evolved (McMahon, 2008).

While the objective of the League was not to create a monolingual Irish speaking state, its policies lent itself to be characterized that way. In reality, its goals were far more complicated than simply encouraging people to learn Irish. As a subject of the British Crown, curricula of all education levels had to be approved, teachers had to be procured or produced, and the actual content of language courses had to be standardized. Prior to the Anglicization of Ireland, Irish was widely spoken and, as in any language, there were regional dialects and inflections. Therefore another task of the Gaelic League and later the independent Irish government was to decide whether or not to standardize the language and if so, which dialect to choose as the primary form of the language. With the 1908 Irish Universities Act, the National University of Ireland was established, consisting of campuses in Galway, Cork and Dublin (Bhroimeil, 2003). Founders and influential members of the Gaelic League, Douglas Hyde and Eoin MacNeill were elected to the Senate of the Universities, and as such were responsible for determining their curricula. It was decided that Irish would be taught in primary schools outside of school hours, offered in secondary school, and mandatory in the National University (Crowley, 2000). These new policies “would have an immediate effect on the education system in Ireland as Irish would have to be taught in all second-level schools whose pupils wanted to progress to the National University” (Bhroimeil, 2003, p. 89-90).

Beyond the independent organizations such as the Gaelic League, the media also played a role in the public’s attitude towards the Irish language. Publications such as *The Nation* (produced by Young Ireland), *Gaelic Journal* (produced by the Gaelic Union), *The Dawning of the Day* and *The Sword of Light* (both published by the Gaelic League), and *The Weekly Freeman*, often wrote of Irish nationalism, poking fun at Britain and her policies, as well as encouraging both scholarly and non-scholarly submissions focusing on Irish nationalism. *The Nation*, in particular, became a popular nationalist publication with frequent submissions by members of Young Ireland and the Gaelic League (Crowley, 2000). Both Irish and American writers drew comparisons between the American Civil War and the plight of the Irish under British rule (Howes, 2011). With the abolition of slavery in the United States came further questions as to why the Irish had to accept tyrannical policies imposed by the British. Articles and political cartoons like the one pictured here appeared in publications such as *The Nation*,

stirring up support for the Irish nationalist movement and encouraging the middle class to demand the right to speak the language of their ancestors (Howes, 2011; Blake, 2011).

Not surprisingly, with Irish independence in 1922 came an even greater



resurgence of cultural pride on the island. For the first time, the curriculum of the Irish public schools was left entirely in the hands of the Irish. What resulted was an almost complete reverse in language education policy, ironically instating some policies the British had previously used to ensure the shift to English. Irish became the means through which education was taught and a mandatory subject in higher education, which was still conducted in English. The change in policy rendered Ireland short of both students capable of understanding the new instruction conducted in Irish, and teachers proficient enough in Irish to teach classes.

“While in 1925 a knowledge of Irish became a requirement for those entering the general grades in the public service, very little pressure was exerted on those already in the service to become proficient in Irish. Although the proportions of public servants with a good knowledge of Irish gradually increased, Irish did not become the normal language of use among state employees. Nor were the elected representatives much better.

Although Irish was generally used on ceremonial occasions, the language of the Da'íl was predominantly English” (O Raigain, 1997, p. 19).

The response was to focus attention instead on the next generation of students, molding them into proficient speakers who could then become teachers. Grants were given to schools that conducted classes solely in Irish and scholarships were given to students who went on to study related fields. University-level education focused on the language and four preparatory colleges were established to prepare teachers for the rigor of teaching in the Irish language. As a result of the new policies, the 1951 Census saw the highest number of Irish speakers in decades.

PRE-COLONIAL PRESENCE IN THE CARIBBEAN AND EARLY EUROPEAN INVOLVEMENT

Like Ireland, the current population of Curaçao is comprised of many different groups from varying countries coming together to form a unique cultural identity. The current population found on the on Curaçao comes from a complicated history of indigenous peoples, colonization by multiple European powers and the transportation of people via the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Curaçao became an influential trading point as a Dutch colony in the 1600s, as Wilamsted was a natural harbor and safe haven for the West India Trade Company (Fouse, 2002). What resulted, and is still evident on the island, is a population consisting of many ethnicities and a distinct culture formed from the influences of many countries.

Just as the culture of the island has formed through both internal and external influences, the languages spoken on the island has likewise shifted and congealed over the past four centuries. Some of the earliest inhabitants of the Curaçao would have spoken Goajiro, a Northwest Maipuran language, which is now extinct (Granberry and Vescelius, 2004, p. 56). Primarily a Dutch colony throughout its history, the principal official language of Curaçao used in both schools and official government offices is Dutch. The main language used outside these areas, however, is Papiamentu—a creole language comprised of Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, and West African languages. This dichotomy has presented particular challenges within the construct of both the educational and social structure of the islands. Various dialects exist, and the implications of speaking Papiamentu over European languages have led to difficulty succeeded in school for children and finding employment for adults.

The history of this language becomes more complex as various groups imposed their culture on Curaçao. A Spanish colony until 1634, Curaçao was seized by the Netherlands and shortly thereafter Aruba and Bonaire were as well (Fouse, 2002). A Spanish influence remained, however, due to the islands’

proximity to the South American mainland. Because of Spain's economic influence on trade in the Caribbean as well as the Spanish Catholic missionaries seeking to convert both indigenous peoples of the islands and slaves transported from Africa, the Spanish language seeped into the Afro-Portuguese language present in Curaçao (Fouse, 2002). Further, the "Dutch had little or no interest in sharing their language with the black slaves who arrived on the islands speaking a variety of African languages, nor did they have any interest in educating anyone but the children of the Dutch populations" (Fouse, 2002, p. 68). The Catholic Church, on the other hand, was interested in converting slaves and the indigenous, therefore produced the first printed document in Papiamentu, a catechism titled "*Declarashon cortiky di catecismo pa uso di Catolica di Curaçao*" (Fouse, 2002, p. 69).

Despite its early history as a Portuguese, then Spanish-based creole, Papiamentu continued to evolve in the 19th century to take on many characteristics of Dutch. Following nine years of British rule between 1807 and 1816, Curaçao returned to Dutch control (Fouse, 2002). In 1819 Dutch was declared the official language of the island, though Papiamentu was spoken by the majority of those living there (Fouse 70). What followed was the establishment of schools that taught only in Dutch, to a population that largely spoke only Papiamentu (Fouse, 2002). Because students continued to speak Papiamentu at home and outside the classroom, "Papiamentu remained the language of the masses" (Fouse, 2002, p. 70). After the Dutch abolition of slavery in 1863, education became much more widely spread in Curaçao, but the language barrier remained a problem as Dutch was still the main language of schools (Fouse, 2002). As the 19th Century progressed, Papiamentu texts were produced, however there was and continues to be a divide between language inside and outside the classroom (Fouse, 2002).

Because there are so many dialects of Creole as a whole, but also within Papiamentu itself, the question of standardizing the language is a vital one. If Papiamentu is to be standardized, which dialect should be used, and should that standardization be extended throughout the three Papiamentu-speaking islands? Whose responsibility is it to standardize the language? Who will become even further marginalized if that were to take place? Because there are not only different dialects of creole spoken between Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, but also European languages, code-switching has become an increasingly used practice. In 1991 Valerie Youssef "coined the term 'varilingualism' to describe that competence whereby individuals learn to mix codes according to appropriacy levels, learnt through their individual language exposure and the term has also been useful in describing adult language competence and use" (Gardner-Chloros,

2010, p. 59). The term “varilingual” refers to the relative ease with which many individuals can switch between dialects of Papiamentu or other languages given the company in which they find themselves. Generally cases in which code switching would take place is between members of different genders, generations, or out of formality (Gardner-Chloros, 2010). If this is the case, how would standardizing the language affect those who typically use varying dialects?

PAPIAMENTU AS A NATIONAL LANGUAGE

In 2007 Papiamentu was declared an official language of Curacao. This marked a landmark victory in legitimizing the language and including it in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools. Opponents to this decision asked the question of the relevance of knowledge of a somewhat obscure language. From the earliest stages of public education by the Dutch, the cost-worth question played a major role in the time and money spent, or rather, not spent, standardizing and teaching Papiamentu, as well as other Creole languages and dialects. By teaching Creole rather than a European language, students spend less time becoming proficient in a language that is used both in their home country and abroad in trade, politics, and academia (Bakker-Mitchell, 2002). Because books were printed in the Dutch in the Netherlands then shipped to Curaçao, the cost of producing course material was lower than if it had been printed in a limited number in Papiamentu. Finally, the question of the actual monetary cost of formally teaching Papiamentu is raised. Because it is expensive to print textbooks, especially on a small-scale, many argue against using funds to print books for an “obscure” language (Jones, 1997, p. 80). As a result, students received books written in Dutch which were ill-suited for the majority of students, who were native Papiamentu speakers.

Ireland answered this question by creating an environment in which Irish was necessary and relevant. The policies put in place in Ireland can be observed by policy makers in Curaçao, who are now solely responsible for setting their curricula. After Irish independence, the decision to make the Irish language a cornerstone of primary education came from the implementation of required Irish classes in order to graduate from the National University. At first this shift was difficult for students and teachers alike, as both groups were not proficient enough in the subject to perpetuate the new teaching requirements. This was remedied by focusing attention on the next generation of students and teachers, which is a model Curaçao may be able to follow so as to standardize and teach Papiamentu in schools. Greater access to education, training for teachers in this language, as well as television and radio stations that utilize Papiamentu are becoming more widely accessible to the general population. Together, these practices have helped Papiamentu become a more widely known, relevant, and standard language. One

of the main criticisms of using Papiamentu in the education system rather than Dutch is that all students seeking a university degree will necessarily have to speak a second (European) language, as there are no universities taught completely in Papiamentu. The University of the Netherland Antilles and the University of Aruba do offer limited classes in Papiamentu, however the majority of courses are taught in English or Dutch. Ireland chose to require a level of proficiency in Irish in order to graduate from the National University of Ireland system. What resulted was an increase in interested students, teachers, and a much more widely developed body of literature written in the national language.

Further, the argument of relevance is applied to the limitations it creates for those who do not speak a major “business” language. Sophia Lehmann showed it is possible for language to “imprison people in the past,” using Yiddish as an example. She described it as a “language which practically no one understands, whose culture has been annihilated, and the use of which therefore only leads to frustration” (Lehmann, 1998,). While Yiddish does not function in exactly the same way as Papiamentu, Lehmann’s comparison of Yiddish and Afro-Caribbean languages is compelling. She argued that the respective Diasporas of Jews in post-World War II Europe and Afro-Caribbean individuals in post-slavery Caribbean are undergoing a similar search for an identity through language. “Disparate diasporic communities are now faced with the shared struggle of articulating a cultural identity in which history and home reside in language, rather than nation, and in which language itself must be recreated so as to bespeak the specificity of cultural experience” (Lehmann, 1998). Due to the history of traumatic experiences both groups have undergone, Lehmann showed the need for a language that is their own, rather than completely imposed by an outside source, as Dutch was in Curaçao.

Arguably, the simple answer as to whether or not Papiamentu should be standardized, taught, and encouraged is that it would be a cultural loss if it were not. As the primary language of 250,000 people living in Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, Papiamentu has evolved into its own language, with unique words, grammatical rules and inflections (Fouse, 2002; Romero, 2010). Beyond consisting of the characteristics of a distinct language, Papiamentu has emerged to represent the culture of those who speak it, uniting those who come from different backgrounds that now live in Curaçao. Particularly in a culture with a history of traumatic experiences such as slavery, having a national language to describe experiences fundamentally changes the way in which individuals are capable of understanding their past, coping with complex issues, accurately representing their experiences, and moving forward both as individuals and as a group. “In

diaspora, language works both to define and to create this sense of commonality between people who share history and experience” (Lehmann, 1998).

Papiamentu’s importance as a standard world language can also be seen through the literature produced by those living in Curaçao. The arts have played an integral role in Papiamentu’s success as a national language. Authors such as Elis Juliana have contributed to the body of work published in Papiamentu: “Juliana’s grasp of the islands’ folklore is not only the identity of Curaçaoans, but also the identity of the Antilles. Juliana’s identity as established in his collected folklore and writings are the islands’ identity, their soul” (Garrett, Mos, 2007, p. 29). Collecting oral tales from elder members of the community, Juliana has kept the oral tradition of Papiamentu alive, and catalogued it in writing for future generations (Leendert, Garrett, Mos, 2007, p. 22). An expansive body of literature is necessary should Papiamentu be integrated into the school system in a more substantial way.

It is evident that Papiamentu as a language is extremely complex, and grows even more in its complexity when considering its history as a language of an oppressed group of people. While there are certainly economic reasons for encouraging the learning of a more widely-spoken global business language, there are many practical reasons for promoting a standard teaching of Papiamentu. Its historical role in both politics and society are still seen, and continue to grow as it gains ground as a global language. Lehmann argues “the use of a ‘tribal language’ within English, far from reducing one’s audience, actually broadens it, because only through speaking from the specificity of one’s experience can one create a sound heartfelt and loud enough to be heard” (Lehmann, 1998). When considering the case of Papiamentu, it must be recognized that while knowledge of Dutch may be integral to obtaining a position in higher education or employment, knowledge of Papiamentu is integral to an understanding of one’s identity as a native Curaçao.

THE FUTURE OF NATIONAL LANGUAGE

What Ireland experienced in the years preceding and directly following independence was a complete reorganization of language policies and education resulting in an effective revitalization of their native language. While it is no longer a primary language for the majority of those who speak it, its place as a secondary language has played an instrumental role in the cultural identity of Ireland. Through the work groups such as Gaelic League and other social organizations, the establishment of primary, secondary and tertiary schools, and support drawn up by *The Nation* and other publications, Irish was made available to the masses and interest in the Gaelic Revival was generated. The emphasis on

Irish language was a top-down approach as the Irish government became involved following independence, but in the late 19th century it grew from the educated upper class in urban centers.

This process of the resurgence of cultural identity is not atypical of colonized countries. “You always start with a cultural nationalism movement that begins pre-independence. The first thing that people start to get an identity from and start to rally behind that eventually becomes political independence is the idea of having a national culture” (Pearson, 2011). This is a common feature of formerly colonized countries regardless of demographics or geographical location. Curaçao has already made significant progress in the standardization and promotion of Papiamentu. By becoming an official national language in 2007, Papiamentu is in a much stronger position to be recognized as a legitimate language both in the Caribbean and world-wide. Including a structured integration of Papiamentu in the school system would be the next step, including fuller integration of Papiamentu language and literature classes at the university level. Students who grow up speaking Papiamentu and are then forced to speak Dutch in primary education not only have the task of learning the content of their class subjects, but the language in which they are taught without the support of native Dutch speaking parents.

To offer the curriculum in Papiamentu would create an environment in which native Papiamentu speaking students can thrive. The fact that Dutch may be more economically advantageous to those living in the Curaçao is true; however knowledge of more than one language can only be beneficial. With the standardization of the Papiamentu language and its full incorporation into primary education, Curaçao could potentially experience a revitalization of their national language, while simultaneously creating an environment in which its use would be valuable in the job market. A commitment by those who speak varying dialects to learn the standardized version of the language would be necessary to foster community and maintain an atmosphere in which the use of Papiamentu is practical. Through both official government and independent organizations the Irish national language was promoted and the culture of the indigenous Irish was celebrated. Curaçao stands poised to enjoy their language as a national entity and their vibrant culture as they move through the lifecycle of the Papiamentu language.

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