

Language making and ownership from the perspective of writing creoles

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Abstract

In this paper, I examine the ideologies and policies on writing creoles as examples of hitherto mostly unwritten languages and test cases for language making as defined by Krämer et al. (forthcoming 2022), also considering issues of language ownership. In so-called “Western ideologies” of what constitutes a language, writing plays an important role. Orthographies and the actors behind them are of interest as, for example, certain graphemes carry heavy sociopolitical connotations, which may emphasize the question of language ownership. I will briefly discuss the orthographies of four Western Caribbean English-lexifier creoles (Belize, Nicaragua, San Andrés-Providence, and Limón) and their evolution over the past three decades in order to address these issues. A useful point of comparison is constituted by the orthographies devised for Haitian Creole and Jamaican.

Keywords: creole languages, orthographies, language making, language ownership

1. Introduction¹

The goal of this paper is to examine the ideologies and policies on writing creoles as examples of hitherto mostly unwritten and minoritized languages, especially from the perspective of language making (cf., e.g., Makoni & Pennycook 2005) and language ownership. From a postcolonial perspective, it has to be born in mind that writing may affect the preservation of the vitality and creativity of a creole (cf. Freeland 2004: 131–132). This is true to the extent that choosing one specific variety and not allowing for, e.g., regional variation, especially in the initial phase of graphicization, may alienate speakers from writing (cf. Schieffelin & Doucet 1994: 192–193; Koskinen 2010; Sorba 2019: 303). Anti-literate ideologies in creole cultures have been previously documented, e.g., by French & Kernan (1981).

However, it is possible to argue that writing is crucial when taking into account the prevalent “Western” ideologies of what constitutes a language. What is more, whereas language is above all a (socio)political concept and it would often be preferable to speak

¹ I would like to thank Marie-Eve Bouchard, the guest editor of this special issue of the *Journal of Postcolonial Linguistics*, for her insightful comments and her infinite patience. I would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their detailed comments. Without them this contribution would have remained a torso. All remaining errors and shortcomings are my sole responsibility.

The Finnish Academy funded projects “Right to language and mother tongue education in Nicaragua and Guatemala. Linguistic research as a means of strengthening intercultural bilingual education in Nicaragua and Guatemala” (project number 111544; 2006-2009) and “The Description of Three Varieties of Western Caribbean Creole English” (project number 119750; Jan. 2008 – Dec. 2008), which are gratefully acknowledged, produced some of the data and scientific publications that fed into this paper.

of varieties, in specific contexts of language minoritization clear-cut boundaries, labels, names, and norms may present themselves as a necessity in the current cultural and historical context (Hüning & Krämer 2018). “Language” is such a label.

The paper is organized as follows: I will first revisit some key concepts. The orthographies devised for Haitian Creole since the 1940s are taken as a point of comparison for the discussion of four Western Caribbean English-lexifier creoles (Belize, Nicaragua, San Andrés-Providence,² and Limón). Increasingly, these language communities take Jamaican Creole as a point of reference, which reflects itself in orthography development in the communities in question. However, after presenting some considerations of the orality-literacy continuum, I will argue that an approach that considers Atlantic English-lexifier Pidgin/Creole (EP/C) as a pluriareal language could change Language Policy and Planning (LPP) in the region. EP/C is a hypothetical construct proposed by Bartens et al. (forthcoming) and based on the shared sociohistory and linguistic features of the English-lexifier creoles of the Atlantic region (cf., e.g., Alleyne 1980; Holm 1988-1989; Huber 1999; Holm & Patrick 2007; Michaelis et al. 2013; Mühleisen 2018). It also draws on first hand observation of mutual intelligibility by speakers themselves (e.g., Bartens et al. forthcoming), as well as increasing interchange of knowledge and materials in the development of the varieties until now considered separate languages because of geographical and political factors. EP/C (singular) and EP/Cs (plural) are used henceforward to underline the idea of this pluriareal language (in the making) with common historical roots.³

2. To write or not to write: Key concepts

Ideologies are here understood as the social representations of the fundamental beliefs shared by a group or movement. They constitute the basis of the group’s collective memory, norms and values (including language attitudes) and a frame of reference for interpreting the world. They translate into the practices of its members and their disposition to assimilate knowledge. Therefore, they can be considered a form of collective self-representation (cf. Dijk 2003).

Ideologies are fundamental in defining and shaping LPP efforts, both top-down and bottom-up. This can be explained by the fact that LPP encompasses not only language intervention, planning, and management, but also community practices – as well as beliefs and ideologies (Spolsky 2004: 5–10). In the case of strongly minoritized languages spoken in postcolonial contexts such as creoles, LPP faces special challenges. I am arguing that, in order to avoid elite closure (DeGraff 2019: x), writing is fundamental. Haiti and Haitian Creole constitute a good example of elite closure, which “is a type of social mobilization strategy by which those persons in power establish or maintain their powers and privileges via linguistic choices” (Myers-Scotton 1993: 149). This is achieved

² San Andrés-Providence Creole is a concept discussed, for example, in Bartens (2021c). However, most of the data presented refers to the San Andrés variety and there are some differences between the insular creoles. This explains the variable use of “San Andrés” and “San Andrés-Providence” when referring to the EP/C in question in this paper.

³ In the Caribbean, creoles are not considered pidgins but, for example, broken English (see below). EP/C was introduced by the authors of Bartens et al. (forthcoming) in order to include all speakers of Atlantic English-lexifier varieties.

through LPP limiting opportunities for civic participation by the elite, e.g., through access to literacy.

In linguistics, “postcolonial” is often associated with literary studies. However, a field of postcolonial linguistics with several subfields such as postcolonial sociolinguistics is starting to emerge (cf. Makoni 2011; Levisen & Sippola 2019). A relevant question, when adopting a postcolonial approach, is whether to conceive of postcoloniality as a time-defining concept reflecting change as proposed, for example, by Calabrese (2015: 1) and Anchimbe (2018: xiii), or from within a framework of power (cf. Warnke 2017). The first, descriptive-causal, and the second, critical-reflective, approach, share their ideological opposition to Eurocentrism (Levisen & Sippola 2019: 2). For the purposes of this paper, I am considering postcoloniality an essentially time-defining concept, i.e., referring to the period after decolonization (cf. Anchimbe *ibid.*). A critical interpretation of the importance of writing can be construed from this, as I shall argue below.

Creole languages constitute a specific subgroup of minoritized languages. A possible definition of a creole language is the following:

A creole language is a language that has arisen from a language contact situation where speakers of a multitude of languages had to acquire a Means of Interethnic Communication (MIC; Baker 1990). It is a language that is capable of fulfilling all the linguistic functions of the relevant speech community. Frequently, but not always, these speakers were socially subjugated by a small elite. Creoles usually have one lexifier language, i.e., they derive the bulk of their lexicon from one language, whereas the other levels of the language structure are a result of complex processes that creolists are still trying to understand and describe in full. (Bartens 2013c: 65).

The concept of language minoritization, as opposed to the one of a minority language, reflects both language ideologies and LPP realities (Clerc & Rispaill 2009), i.e., it constitutes a more institutionalized ideological framework than stigmatization. While languages spoken by (numeric) minorities are not necessarily minoritized (Léglise & Alby 2006: 69), languages with a substantial number of speakers such as Spanish in the U.S. have been minoritized in specific historical, geographic, and functional contexts (García 2011: 675–678). Their speakers may not enjoy Linguistic Human Rights (LHR), despite the fact that LHR “are so basic for a dignified life that everybody has them because of being human; therefore, in principle no state (or individual) is allowed to violate them” (Skutnabb-Kangas 2008: 109). LHRs are frequently contemplated in terms of distinct dichotomies: negative (non-discriminatory) vs. positive (affirmative), instrumental vs. expressive, individual vs. collective, territorial, overt vs. covert (cf. Phillipson, Rannut & Skutnabb-Kangas 1995). These categories may overlap and are, in the ideal case, reflected in LPP.

Language minoritization is particularly advanced in the case of creole languages. This is especially true of the creoles coexisting with their lexifier language, as is the case, albeit to varying degrees, of the EP/Cs studied here. Those in a diglossic situation (cf. Ferguson 1959; Fishman 1967) with a lexically clearly distinct H language tend to face fewer challenges in language development (Bartens 2002). The fact that even Papiamentu, a

language with a relatively long literary tradition of almost 250 years, continues to be minoritized, reveals the state of institutionalized and everyday stigmatization and encroachment on speakers' LHR (cf. Dijkhoff & Pereira 2010; Maurer 2013: 166). In some multilingual societies, creoles engage in complex linguistic hierarchies, constituting an intermediate H language of double overlapping diglossia (Mkilifi 1972). This is, for example, the case of Nicaraguan EP/C in the Autonomous Region of the Southern Caribbean Coast RACCS (Span. *Región Autónoma de la Costa Caribe Sur*; McLean 2001: 124–125; Freeland 2003: 242), but does not change the overall relationship with the lexifier language.

The association of creoles with their lexifier, whether mythified (Freeland 2004: 111–113) or through actual diglossia, simultaneously upholds the historically widespread idea that we are dealing with “broken” (or even “rotten”, as well as other pejorative terms; Deuber 2005: 49) varieties of the same. Over the centuries, this idea has been assimilated by the speakers themselves, hampering their linguistic and cultural emancipation (Bartens 2013c: 137). By consequence, whereas we speak of autonomous creole language systems in terms of linguistic structure, this does not necessarily hold on the sociolinguistic and perceptual levels, leading to great linguistic insecurity in speakers. This manifests itself in “safe” language choices, e.g., opting for Spanish instead of English (or EP/C) in the San Andrés and Nicaraguan creole communities (cf. Preston 1989; Bartens 2019: 400). At the same time, because of both diglossia with the lexifier and lack of language standardization, there is additional fluidity as far as the structural system of these creoles is concerned (cf. the Creole Continuum Model, e.g., DeCamp 1971). These creole-speaking communities therefore face challenges distinct from other minoritized languages or creoles without lexical continuity with the H language which concern both LPP efforts and language making (see above).

The concept “language” itself is based on *abstand* pace Kloss (1967) on the one hand and sociopolitical factors as well as speakers' perceptions of the other (cf. Preston 1989; Bartens 2021a). The making of languages or “language making” can be associated primarily with communities of practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992: 464) in the formation of linguistic norms of use and interaction. In most creole-speaking communities, these are well established, rendering it more appropriate to use certain linguistic variants in one context than in others (Edwards 1968: 4).⁴ They may be (partly) codified through LPP measures as in the case of Haitian Creole and Jamaican EP/C. Language making therefore also consists of the public construction of language through the linguistic construction of public, i.e., community, through experts (cf. Gal & Woolard 1995: 129). Whereas academic experts are meant by the former, expertise in language making is first deployed by the individual: “[t]he cognitive linguistic entity which we call a named language, dialect or variety is a composite of associations and ideas shaped by individual attitudes” (Krämer et al. forthcoming 2022).

Following Makoni & Pennycook (2005), I would like to summarize that language making can be understood as the disinvention and subsequent reconstitution of “language”. This may be a conscious or unconscious process where language awareness

⁴ See Labov (2006) on overt vs. covert prestige.

plays a significant role in the creation of (imagined) varieties with clear-cut boundaries, labels, names, and neatly defined norms established by distinct agents through at times overlapping mechanisms (both top-down and bottom-up; see section 1.). As still largely unwritten languages with a high degree of minoritization and fluidity of borders on both the structural and sociolinguistic level, I argue that creoles illustrate the importance of focusing on writing in this process.

Writing is a fundamental condition for languagehood according to the “Western” language ideologies (cf. Woolard 1992: 241) prevalent at present. According to the same ideologies, a language would not start to exist until it is written (cf. Lüpke, 2018: 141). This does by no means mean that linguistic repertoires, which are only used in oral form, are not languages, but the focus here is on the ideological value attributed to written language. While it is thence possible to speak of the “tyranny of writing” (Weth & Juffermans (eds.) 2018), not writing does not constitute an option in today’s world, despite the fact that it potentially entails major challenges in the unification towards a standard as a last step in the process as suggested by Freeland (2004: 124, 131–132). Many speakers write without a standard, whether one has already been established or not. This occurs often, but not necessarily, as a first phase in the process. The access to (any kind of) writing can be argued to constitute part of human rights in general and LHR in particular. This is because access to information through literacy and social stratification are intertwined in a bidirectional relationship (Coulmas 2013: 63). Grass-roots literacy (Blommaert 2008) and, as far as the EP/Cs studied here are concerned, lead-language writing (Lüpke 2018) constitute relevant options to complement or replace top-down LPP. Lead-language writing builds on previous knowledge of other alphabets, e.g., Wolof for creating grassroots writing practices for smaller Senegalese languages (Baïnouk Gubëher, Joola Kujireray and Joola Banjal; Lüpke 2018: 141). It is also possible to start with different types of writing (see section 5). Allowing for regional variation in the initial stages of writing as proposed by Koskinen (2010) for Nicaraguan EP/C and making certain compromises between etymological and phonemic writing systems (Hellinger 1986: 67–68), as outlined in 3. and 4.1., contribute to a situation where potentially less speakers are alienated from the endeavor.

As we shall see below, lead-language writing is to some extent being practiced among the EP/Cs studied here, which variably take Jamaican EP/C as a point of reference in orthography development (cf. 4.5.). This is possible if we consider EP/C to be a pluriareal language, at least as far the Western Caribbean region is concerned. Kloss (e.g., 1978: 66) introduced the term “pluricentric” for standard languages with several varieties with equal distribution; for example, official and administrative languages in distinct independent countries. Subsequently, further criteria were added to official status in at least two interacting centers: linguistic distance, acceptance, and codification (Clyne 1992: 1; Muhr 2012: 20). The concept of “pluriareality”, on the other hand, focuses on linguistic differences in language forms independent of national and political borders (Niehaus 2015; Elspaß, Dürscheid & Ziegler et al. 2017). Despite political borders, pluriareality clearly fits the situation of the EP/Cs under survey here better than pluricentricity, also given that an actual continuum can be detected among the EP/Cs of distinct areas studied here, e.g., San Andrés, Old Providence (both islands belonging to

Colombia), and the Miskito Coast of Nicaragua. Among the three, the first is the most basilectal, the second the most acrolectal of the three (Bartens 2009). Acknowledging the pluriareal character of Western Caribbean EP/Cs could greatly enhance orthography development in the region.

Finally, the question of language ownership needs to be addressed as language making through the passage to writing becomes more and more common. As the legitimate claim that speakers have over the development of their language (Wee 2002: 283), language ownership is tied to definitions of legitimate, native, and mother tongue speakers – and ultimately the question of membership in a speech community (O'Rourke 2011: 327). Native and legitimate speakers are categories that evolve over time and as a result of language ideologies (cf. Hackert 2012). The legitimacy of “new speakers” tends to be particularly contested (Costa 2015). Whereas drawing in less competent or so-called peripheral speakers (Labov 1972) is fundamental when new communities of practice are created or existing ones are reshaped (cf. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992: 464), the importance of language ownership is illustrated through the example of orthography creation in Haitian Creole in the next section. The issue is further highlighted by the increased awareness and global change in attitudes towards minority and minoritized languages within the very communities (Bartens 2019: 397). However, just as the legitimacy of being a speaker is contested, the idea of language ownership is being redefined along the way (e.g., by language activists), notwithstanding the fact that speakers obviously already own their languages.

3. Orthography development illustrated by the example of Haitian Creole

Despite critiques of writing (going as far back as Socrates according to Weth & Juffermans 2018: 4), the desire for empowerment through literacy (e.g., Freire 1963) and the prospect of democratization (Goody & Watt 1963; Goody 1968; Coulmas 2013: 104) were definitely at the center of efforts to establish an orthography for Haitian Creole.

What was first described in terms of “the great divide” between orality and literacy (Goody & Watt 1963; Goody 1968), has been very much present in the Haitian Creole context as a result of elite closure (see 2.). Subsequently, this divide has been conceptualized as a continuum (e.g., Ong 1982; Thaler 2003; Montes-Alcalá 2016) or a range of continua along various interrelated dimensions, including biliteracy (Hornberger 2004). The continuum scenario also fits the present spectrum of different literacy practice such as CMC (computer-mediated communication) to be discussed below.

According to Schieffelin & Doucet (1994: 182), written Haitian Creole or Kreyòl was first used for both official and literary purposes in the late 18th century, while “[h]istorical evidence suggests that under French colonial rule (1695-1803), kreyòl was widely spoken among both masters and slaves as well as among the *affranchis* (freed slaves).” Writing initially followed the etymological principles of French orthography. The first systematic orthography was proposed by Frédéric Doret in 1924, but the development of a writing system did not gain momentum until the work done in the 1940s (id.:183–184). The main points of departure, replicated in other Creole-speaking territories, were adopting one of the following:

- 1) Lexifier-language or so-called etymologizing writing conventions, in this case, following French orthography. The main advocates are teachers and parents who see these conventions as a bridge to literacy in French and wish to emphasize the historical connection with the lexifier language.
- 2) A phonemic writing system. Linguists, the Haitian Government, and the churches (which have firsthand knowledge of the field) consider Haitian Creole an autonomous language which should be represented as one through a writing system as easy as possible to acquire for speakers not alphabetized in French or another language.
- 3) A compromise solution between the two previous models. The proponents believe that Haiti will be bilingual in creole and French in the future. “[...] the orthography should be phonemic but whenever possible should use the same conventions as the French orthography to represent sounds similar in French and kreyòl” (Schieffelin & Doucet 1994: 184–187).

The optimization of the phoneme-grapheme correspondence is usually recommended in order to enhance literacy acquisition (Aro 2004). There are certain other possible consequences, most notably when IPA (or similar transcription systems) are used: For example, it is possible to reflect the performative character of speech through heterography (cf. Blommaert 2008). Among the writing systems based on IPA are the Africa Alphabet (Westermann 1927) and the African Reference Alphabet (Mann & Dalby 1987: 207, 210). Albeit also designed for practical purposes, they mostly serve the relationship between writing and linguistic analysis, as written language constitutes both the medium and the object of study of linguistics (cf. Coulmas 2013: Ch.1). Linguistics is heavily dependent on writing despite critiques of the practice by, e.g., de Saussure and Bloomfield (in addition to Socrates), who considered writing a distortion, even for linguistic analysis, as well as an impediment for language evolution (Coulmas 2013: 2; 2018: 27; cf. also Lüpke 2018: 142). A specific consequence of the use of phonemic orthographies for the EP/Cs under survey here, for example Nicaraguan and San Andrés-Providence EP/C, is that they are mistakenly judged to look too Spanish. As these EP/Cs have been in a diglossic relationship with Spanish, diffused by the educational system during the 20th century, creole speakers tend to associate the phoneme-grapheme correspondence negatively with the colonizer’s language.

In the quest for a writing system that could be approved by as many speakers as possible, it has to be noted that certain graphemes carry heavy sociopolitical connotations, emphasizing the question of language ownership. Among these graphemes are {k}, {w}, and {y}, at times found to be “too American” (Schieffelin & Doucet 1994: 185). Particularly the grapheme {k}, not used in Romance languages, is associated with communism in Romance-lexifier creoles such as Haitian or Réunionnais (cf. Schieffelin & Doucet 1994: 191). On the other hand, {w} and {y} are preferred, e.g., in the San Andrés community especially in word-final position for “looking better”: {kow} [‘kəu] ‘cow’, {sity} [‘siti] ‘city’ (Bartens 2021c).

The 20th century saw the development of three main orthographies for Haitian Creole: (1) the McConnell-Laubach Orthography of 1943, preceded by a 1940 version by

McConnell; (2) the 1946 Faublas-Pressoir orthography later known as the ONAAC (Office National d'Alphabétisation et d'Action Communautaire); and (3) the writing system developed by the IPN (Institut Pédagogique National), adopted as the official orthography in 1980.

The first of the three was phonemic, including the previously mentioned “American” graphemes {k}, {w}, and {y}. It also employed the unfamiliar (to persons alphabetized in French) graphemes {â}, {ê}, and {ô} for the corresponding nasal vowels but omitted the front rounded vowels /y/, /ø/, /œ/, and /~œ/ occurring in acrolectal varieties of Haitian. Changing {u} > {ou} for /u/ and {sh} > {ch} for /ʃ/ (as in French) in the 1943 version was too little, too late. Haitians still recalled the American occupation of 1915-1934 and associated the literacy campaign sponsored by President Elie Lescot with Protestantism and his “anti-superstition campaign” (Schieffelin & Doucet 1994: 184; Sebba 2012: 7). The Faublas-Pressoir orthography was a direct response to the former and aimed at restoring a traditional, etymologizing orthography. For example, nasal vowels were represented as {Vn}. This produced the problem of distinguishing between nasal vowels and an oral vowel-nasal sequence, first transcribed as {V-n}, then {V'n} (Déjean 1980: 183, 194). Finally, a phonemic system with some compromises (e.g., {oun} for both /un/ and /ün/) was developed by the IPN with the collaboration of French linguists from the Université René Descartes. Scholars like Férère (1977) have underlined that an ethnophonemic orthography would be the answer (1977: 51) to the educational and communicative needs of a mostly monolingual population while multilingual Haitians may struggle with the lack of representation of, e.g., the front rounded vowels (Bonnefil 1997: 65–66).

Summing up, the development of the Haitian orthography demonstrates that compromises need to be made and that the participation of local actors is of utmost importance lest the end result be identified as imposed by outsiders.

4. EP/C orthographies

4.1. Belize

English is the de facto official language of Belize, which in July 2020 had a total population of 420,000.⁵ According to the 2010 census, Mestizos constitute the largest ethnic group at 50%, followed by Creoles (21%), Mayas (10%), and Garifuna (4.6%).⁶ As English is also the medium of instruction in Belizean schools, most people are likely to have access to the language. However, it is not a first but second language or dialect (Escure 1997: 37).⁷ Escure (2013: 92) gives a figure of only 70,000 speakers of Belizean EP/C or Kriol in Belize itself and 80,000 more in the diaspora.⁸ She notes (2013: 93), however, that it is “a thriving lingua franca, constantly gaining speakers thanks to its

⁵ Statistical Institute of Belize, <http://sib.org.bz/> (13 February, 2021).

⁶ Main Results of 2010 Population and Housing Census, <https://perma.cc/6WVQ-48VH> (13 February, 2021).

⁷ Eberhard et al. (2021) quote the 2014 United Nations Statistics Division for their figure of 184,000 L1 speakers of English in Belize.

⁸ Eberhard et al. (2021) attribute EGIDS (Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale) status 3, “Wider communication”, to Belize EP/C. The EGIDS builds on Fishman’s GIDS (Lewis & Simons 2010).

popularity and identity value even in the non-Creole population”, including the Mestizos who are mostly Spanish speakers (Eberhard et al. 2021 mention a total of 201,000 users of Spanish; see also Schneider 2017: 65 for the increasing use of Kriol among Mestizos). Given that English is the sole medium of instruction, LPP efforts for Kriol have sought to uphold the ties with Standard English writing.

One of the first published texts in Belize EP/C was the poem “Tode and Billy” in 1935 (Decker 1994: 352). Others were to follow, especially when the discussion on writing Kriol was initiated in the 1970s in anticipation of independence from Great Britain in 1981.

The point of departure was, as with creole languages in general (see 3.), the tension between a phonemic orthography reflecting the autonomy of the language system and “an orthography that ha[s] some appearance of similarity with English” (Decker 2005: 34), thus facilitating the transition to English considered relevant for scholarly achievement in the educational system.

Following Winer (1990) on Trinidad and Tobago EP/C, the following options were considered:

1) The Phonemic Model

Belizean speakers, although not schooled in Spanish as, for example, most present-day San Andresan speakers, presumably commented it looked too much like Spanish, a language from which they are under increasing pressure (cf. Escure 1997: 35).⁹

2) The Historical-Etymological Model

Words with no historical precedence in English are given a phonemic representation. Here Belizean speakers would conclude it did not look like Kriol.

3) The Modified English Model

It retains the spelling of all words shared by English and Kriol and established Kriol words and adds phonemic spellings for Kriol words without an established spelling.

4) Rule-Based Phonemic Model

It maintains the most common English spelling conventions, e.g., resulting in more than one spelling for long vowels, but is simplified and more consistent *vis-à-vis* English orthography (Decker 2005: 34).

Kriol orthography workshops were held in 1994 and 2002, involving both the SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics) and local stakeholders, most importantly the Belize Kriol Project. In the first workshop, it was essentially the Rule-Based Phonemic Model which was adopted. In the second one, modifications were made towards a phonemic spelling. Most importantly, there is only one spelling for each vowel sound. However, the

⁹ The “*Pania* trickle” mentioned by Escure (ibid.) can be observed in all the Central American EP/C communities. *Pania* or *Paña* ‘Spanish-speaker, Hispanic’ < *España*.

graphemes for vowels and “vowel combinations” are still taken from English (see Belize Creole Orthography Project 1994 for more details).¹⁰

The following aspects of the orthography were considered important: (1) the ease of learning (both for those literate in English and those being alphabetized) while maintaining the idea of transition to English; and (2) the ease of mechanical reproduction (Decker 2005: 34–35). The question of mechanical reproduction can be illustrated by the case of Cape Verdean Creole. The first post-independence orthography proposal contained graphemes with a circumflex on {s, z, c, j, n, l} as a sign of palatalization is difficult to reproduce without special characters (Bartens 1995: 31).

In terms of language ideology and ownership, the challenge was to find a balance between distinct aspects: (1) maintaining some of the English legacy but also sufficient distance to claim ownership of the language, and (2) avoiding Spanishness/unfamiliarity for those literate in English. Distinct materials were produced above all by the National Kriol Council (cf., e.g., Belize Creole Orthography Project 1994; Crosbie et al. 2007). However, so far Kriol is only written by language activists (Schneider 2017: 65). This includes digital settings where the threshold to writing is lower (see 5.).

4.2. Nicaragua

After the Sandinist Revolution of 1978 and the passing of the Law on Education in the Languages of the Atlantic Coast in 1980, the Intercultural Bilingual Education Program was launched in the autonomous regions RACCN (*Región Autónoma de la Costa Caribe Norte*) and RACCS in 1984/1985 and was consolidated through the Atlantic Coast Autonomy Law of 1987. At no point was the decision to use the L1 of indigenous groups Miskitu and Panamahka (a variety of Mayagna) in the corresponding bilingual programs questioned. Creole speakers, however, expressed their allegiance to their Anglo rather than Black or Costeño (‘coastal’) identity by choosing the program and thence writing to be carried out in English and Spanish (cf. Freeland 2004: 111, 117). Despite clearly observable problems as far as learning results were concerned, there were considerable difficulties in relegating English to the position of an L2. A new curriculum based on the Regional Autonomous Education System (SEAR) was implemented in 2007 as a pilot in eight primary schools in the RACCS recognizes five L1s: Miskitu, Panamahka, Tuahka, Ulwa, and Nicaraguan Creole or Kriol for ethnically Creole, Rama, and Garifuna children. Both Spanish and English are taught as L2; note, however, that special problems are posed by the fact that at least in the Creole Program, teachers have limited competence in English (Koskinen 2010: 152).

The discussion around writing Nicaraguan EP/C has to be understood against this background. Unlike Belize, the presence of English is a mythified rather than a real one when it comes to everyday interactions (cf. Freeland 2004: 111; see 2.) On the other hand, there is a legal framework in place which gives good opportunities for the emancipation of minority language groups in both the RACCN and the RACCS (Koskinen 2010: 148).

¹⁰ The name and spelling of the Belize/Biliiz Creole/Kriol (Orthography) Project/Projek vary according to the source.

Despite these facts, the writing/orthography discussion has been very similar to the one in Belize. Due to both historical and cultural ties and the fact that the Belize Kriol Project had been initiated earlier, input and collaboration was sought from it, resulting in workshops organized in 2001-2004. Unlike for Belize Kriol, transition to English was not seen as the goal of literacy in Nicaraguan Kriol. By consequence, a phonemic orthography was created. However, it was felt to look too Spanish by some. The negative connotation of Spanish is due to the ongoing advancement of Nicaragua's agricultural frontier into the autonomous regions (Bartens forthcoming).

However, tackling with variation within communities located on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua (also part of the San Andrés-Nicaragua-Providence continuum; section 2), totaling 35,000–50,000 L1 speakers and used as an L2 by others, constitutes a challenge. In addition, it is commonly felt that the urban and at least mesolectal variety (in terms of the varieties spoken within Nicaragua) of Bluefields should constitute the basis for standardization (Bartens 2013b: 116). This has led to the proposal of allowing for regional variation in the initial phase of writing (see 1. and Koskinen 2010: 154) and is reflected in materials produced especially by the Institute of Linguistic Research and Cultural Revitalization (IPILC) of the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast (URACCAN). The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland funded joint project *Fortalecimiento de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe* (FOREIBCA, 2001-2005) produced some important materials, e.g., FOREIBCA (2005a; 2005b). Language research, development and teacher training activities at the IPILC continue (Tasker-Mueller 2015: 60–61, 65).¹¹

4.3. San Andrés and Providence

According to Eberhard et al. (2021), San Andrés-Providence EP/C has 12,000 speakers.¹² Forced Hispanization and Catholicization, initiated by the arrival of the Capuchin monks and nuns in 1927, defined the sociolinguistic situation of the community for most of the 20th century. The Capuchin order prohibited the use of English in schools, burnt English language Bibles in the girls' school of San Luis in 1928, and denied scholarships for further study to non-Catholic students (Petersen 2002: 109, 111). All public schools became Spanish language and Catholic. Few parents had the means to pay for English tuition in the remaining private schools (Clemente 1991: 228).

The new Colombian Constitution ratified in 1991 constitutes a new framework for liberal legislation. Law 47 of 1993 which mentions “English spoken in the manner of the islands” as a co-official language with Spanish, and the 2010 Law 1381 on Native Languages which safeguards the programs which deal with the preservation and diffusion of native languages at national, regional, and local level, as well as their use, including the use of anthro- and toponyms allow for a certain degree of both territorial and linguistic self-determination, nevertheless not made use of to its full potential. For example, efforts to introduce San Andrés-Providence EP/C into the educational domain

¹¹ Note that Eberhard et al. (2021) consider Nicaraguan EP/C to be on EGIDS level 4 “Educational”.

¹² Note that this is a 1981 figure by the Summer Institute of Linguistics. Eberhard et al. (2021) consider San Andrés EP/C to be at EGIDS stage 6a “Vigorous”. Bartens (2013a: 101) suggests the figure 20,000 might be too optimistic. No reliable survey of speaker numbers has been conducted in the recent past.

have suffered from discontinuity. Now the overall change in attitudes is having a positive impact on writing practices in this community as well (Bartens 2019: 395–397).

Orthography workshops for Andrés-Providence EP/C were first organized under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics in 1998-2001. Here, too, Belize orthography development was initially taken as a model, but in 2001 a radical shift was made towards the use of IPA characters for the representation of vowels (Decker & Keener 2001: 10). Besides the already mentioned reaction that a phonemic script looks too Spanish and too little English, San Andresan teachers interviewed by the author in the early 2000s also stated explicitly that they found the writing system very difficult to master. The initial goal of the 1999-2004 trilingual education project in question was to start with EP/C and transition first to English and then Spanish, but was abandoned as unrealistic. This may have had to do with the orthographic choices made (cf. Morren 2010: 304; Bartens 2013a: 104).

More than a decade of lack of consensus and especially non-implementation ensued. The 2014-2015 “Saintandruan English ahn Spanish Langwij Manijment Kuors”, which targeted both high school students and teachers and was run at the school of the First Baptist Church of San Andrés (cf. Bartens 2019: 397), and especially the completion of the translation of the *New Testament* (Wycliffe Bible Translators 2015) may have constituted a turning point. Word-final {w, y} are still considered emblematic but for example {h} has been introduced to signal short vowels in final position, also found in the Belize and Nicaraguan EP/C writing systems (see 5. below for a comparison).

Relatively few materials have been produced, most importantly two 2001 storybooks by the Christian University Corporation and a full translation of the *New Testament* published in 2015 (Wycliffe Bible Translators 2015). Nevertheless, over the last decade, increased pride in Ailanda(z) or Saintandruan culture and language (Bartens & Lucena Torres 2010: 205 for [auto]glossonyms) has led to manifestations of language making through writing in public spaces (see 5. below).

4.4. Limón

Limonese EP/C is an offshoot (or second-generation creole pace Chaudenson 1992) of Jamaican EP/C with 55,100 speakers according to Winkler (2013) and considered moribund by Eberhard et al. (2021; EGIDS 8a). This may not be the case as language activism has led, for example, to the proposal of a phonemic orthography by Zuñiga & Thompson (2018). Two consultative workshops were organized before the publication of this work. The Jamaican orthography serves as an acknowledged model. Considering, however, that the population potentially using the orthography is literate in Spanish, the choice of graphemes is explained and justified from the point of view of that language (Zuñiga & Thompson 2018: 51–59). In addition, the grapheme {ñ} is included in the proposed Limón EP/C alphabet as, due to Spanish influence, /ɲ/ for previous /ny/ has been integrated into the phonological system of the language (Zuñiga & Thompson 2018: 56). More widespread writing in Limón EP/C is still in its very early stages.

4.5. A comparison of Western Caribbean EP/C writing systems

The partially mutual origins and high similarity of the EP/Cs under survey constitute enormous potential for the development of the languages. A common tendency arising from diglossia or coexistence with Spanish is that phonemic orthographies are felt to encroach upon the English legacy and even language ownership. This may seem contradictory, but has to be seen as a reaction against forced Hispanization in the pertinent cases (Nicaragua, San Andrés-Providence, and Limón EP/C).¹³

With the exception of Belize Creole where literacy in EP/C is hoped to constitute a transition to literacy in Standard English for children not yet alphabetized (thence the English-derived orthographic solutions), the presence of English is mythified in the sense that it is taken as a point of reference with a variable impact depending on various factors including professional/academic and social networks. As observed in 4.3. above, the San Andrés trilingual pilot project first aimed at transitioning from EP/C to English and then Spanish; finally, this was not found to be feasible.

Table 1. *Orthographic solutions in the EP/Cs studied in comparison with Jamaican*

	<i>Belize EP/C</i>	<i>Nicaraguan EP/C</i>	<i>San Andrés-Providence EP/C</i>	<i>Limón EP/C</i>	<i>Jamaican EP/C</i>
<i>{-h} for short vowels in final position</i>	+ (weh REL)	+ (weh REL)	+ (weh REL)	- (we REL)	- (we REL) (also weh)
<i>{-hn} for nasalization in final position</i>	+ (waahn ‘want’)	- (waan ‘want’)	+ (waahn ‘want’)	- (waan ‘want’)	+ (waahn ‘want’)
<i>{y} in (initial) rising diphthong</i>	+ (ya ‘here’)	+ (ya ‘here’)	+ (ya ‘here’)	+ (yer ‘here’)	+ (ya ‘here’)
<i>{i} in (final) falling diphthong</i>	+ (krai ‘cry’)	+ (krai ‘cry’)	+ (krai ‘cry’)	- (krai ‘cry’)	+ (krai ‘cry’)
<i>{u} in (initial) rising diphthong</i>	- (cf. oal [o:l] ‘old’) ¹⁴	+ (uol ‘old’)	+ (uol ‘old’)	- (wol ‘old’)	+ (uol ‘old’)
<i>{w} in (final) falling diphthong</i>	+ (kow ‘cow’)	+ (kow ‘cow’) (but: nou ‘now’)	+ (kow ‘cow’)	+ (kow ‘cow’)	- (kou ‘cow’; nou ‘now’)

¹³ Despite a distinct sociolinguistic situation, Spanish-looking writing systems are rejected by Belizean speakers, too (see 4.1.).

¹⁴ Decker (2014: 142) states that some speakers conserve the diphthong [uo] as a more archaic form.

Jamaican is increasingly taken as a point of reference. For example, until the mid-20th century, families on San Andrés, Providence, and Santa Catalina would send their children to Jamaica for higher education (Bartens 2019: 402). The historical ties between Jamaican EP/C and the four varieties studied here have resulted in great structural affinities (Bartens 2021 b). Structural similarity could be exploited even more in future EP/C development in the region. Already now, some of the orthographic solutions are shared while others are not. In Table 1, a very small, eclectically selected number of shared orthographic solutions are presented in bold print.

As pointed out above in section 3, San Andrés-Providence EP/C prefers {y} in word final position, e.g. *sity* ‘city’, but this does not affect the final falling diphthong, typically /ai/.¹⁵ The representation of /w/ in the word final falling diphthong /ou/ is inconsistent in Nicaraguan EP/C where we find, on the one hand, *kow* ‘cow’, but on the other *nou* ‘now’. Note that the typical context for the rising and falling diphthongs scrutinized here is word initial or final. Other contexts present more varied solutions; cf., e.g., San Andrés-Providence, Nicaraguan, and Jamaican EP/C *hous* ‘house’, *stie* ‘stay’ vs. Limón EP/C *howz*, *stye*.

The following are examples from Limón EP/C for the orthographic solutions mentioned in Table 1, given with translations into San Andrés EP/C:¹⁶

- (1) L *We dem de?* (41)
SA *Weh dehn deh?*
‘Where are they?’
- (2) L *Unu waan go de.* (34)
SA *Unu waahn go deh.*
‘You want to go there.’
- (3) L *Yer so mi baan.* (108)
SA *Yahso weh mi baan.*
‘This is where I was born.’
- (4) L *Mek wi rayt wi langwich.* (17)
SA *Mek wi rait wi langwij.*
‘Let’s write our language.’
- (5) L *Breda Taiga iz may fada wol rayidin aas.* (92)
SA *Beda Taiga da mi pupa uol raidn haas.*
‘Brother Tiger is my father’s old raiding horse.’
- (6) L *Sii ow dem a shyek.* (94)
SA *Luk how dehn deh shiek.*
‘Look how they are shaking.’

¹⁵ Some acrolectal speakers also have /ei/, i.e. they pronounce [‘teik], not [tɛ:k], ‘to take’.

¹⁶ The languages are abbreviated as “L” for Limón and “SA” for San Andrés EP/C. All the Limón EP/C examples were taken from Zuñiga & Thompson (2017), a recent manual dedicated to the introduction of the alphabet. The numbers in brackets refer to the page the example was taken from. The translations to San Andrés EP/C are my own.

While the Belizean orthography process had a major influence on language development of Nicaraguan and San Andrés-Providence EP/C (see 4.2. and 4.3.) and Jamaican is taken as a regional point of reference, there are still differences. Assuming that those could be set aside, sharing EP/C materials would be easier. Considering the relatively advanced stage of LPP for certain varieties, e.g., Belize and Jamaican EP/C, this would also constitute a major challenge. Note, however, that despite the work carried out above all by the Jamaican Language Unit of the University of the West Indies (a wealth of resources have been developed since 2002),¹⁷ a petition to make Jamaican an official language alongside English launched in late 2019 did not meet its goal of the 15,000 signatures required to force the Government to issue a statement on the issue.¹⁸

Differences in orthography development can also be seen in the representation of place names. Crosbie et al. (2007: 28) state that “All proper nouns have been given a [Belize] Kriol spelling in this dictionary. However, the spelling of proper nouns will be left to the writer’s discretion.” The other EP/C communities have opted for the maintenance of the English tradition as proper nouns, days of the week, and months are spelled in English orthography. The same tendency is reflected in the capitalization of the 1SG personal pronoun *Ah* in meso-/acrolectal San Andrés-Providence EP/C.

Another comparison with Haiti seems pertinent here: Haitian toponyms have phonemic spellings. On the other hand, for example on San Andrés, the reappropriation of Hispanized toponyms has meant the reintroduction of original English forms, e.g., *North End* for *El Centro*, *The Hill* for *La Loma*, *Rocky Key* for *Cayo Rocosó*, *Fresh Water Bay* for *Aguadulce*, etc. (Parsons 1985: 110). While the Hispanization of anthroponyms seems irreversible, some San Andrés families use anglicized versions of their names in informal contexts, e.g., *Martheen* for *Martínez* (originally *Martin*; Bartens 2019: 405–406).

5. The great divide revisited

Considering the continuum from orality to literacy, new technology such as text messaging as well as chats, Twitter, FB, and other CMC and social media platforms and applications enables minority languages to enter, so to speak, “through the back door” into the domain of literacy, crucial for eventual H (high) language status (e.g., Ferguson 1959). This results in the decolonization of the traditional power relationships between H (high) and L (low) varieties (ibid.) and the democratization of former elite practices (Mair 2019: 372).

On the mentioned orality – literacy continuum (e.g., Ong 1982; Thaler 2003; Montes-Alcalá 2016), text messaging as well as CMC and social media applications can be located somewhere halfway between the two extremes (cf. Hinrichs 2006: 19).¹⁹ Overall, attitudes towards stable and monolithic standards may change with the interactive functions of digital media. Standard or conventionalized (ortho)graphy may appear less relevant generally, also in non-creole settings (cf. Sebba 2007: 66).

¹⁷ <https://www.mona.uwi.edu/dllp/jlu/about/index.htm> (February 17, 2021).

¹⁸ <https://nationwideradiojm.com/petition-to-make-patois-official-fails/> (February 17, 2021).

¹⁹ The term “conceptual orality” has also been used (cf. Koch & Oesterreicher 2011: 3).

Given the different characteristics of distinct applications, there may also be differences in the use of creole. While this would clearly require quantitative comparisons including the communicative habits of different groups of language users, it cannot be excluded that more private WhatsApp might actually feature less creole than, e.g., FB (personal communication Maureen Hooker O’Neill, 11.10.2020).²⁰

There are also FB groups promoting the use of EP/Cs (cf. Bartens 2021c). The San Andrés group “My grandma use to say” aims at collecting local proverbs and sayings, but other content is included at times as well. Orthographic conventions are used variably, cf.

(7) *Yo so faas and layad, when yu ded dem jafi dig 2 grave, 1 fi yo bady and 1 fi yo tong.* (29.9.2020)

Yu so faas ahn layad, wen yu ded dehn hafy dig tuu griev, wan fi yu bady ahn wan fi yu tong.

‘You are so devious and a liar that when you die they will have to dig two graves, one for your body and one for your tongue.’

(8) *Brin de money fi me dat da love.* (11.10.2020)

Bring di mony fi mii, dat dah lov.

‘Bring me the money, that is love.’

In the examples, the second line corresponds to orthographic recommendations by the Islander Spelling Committee.²¹ In example (1), *yo* is a variant of *yu* (2SG) not advocated by all language activists (personal communication †Dulph Mitchell, October 2015). The form occurs, nevertheless, in the translation of the *New Testament* (Wycliffe Bible Translators 2015). *Jafi* for *hafy* ‘have to’ is a spelling influenced by Spanish.

The diglossic situation in which Creole has not been a written language is also leaking in linguistic landscapes, which include manifestations of discourses of authenticity (Blommaert & Varis 2013). In the discussion on the minoritization of languages, it is important to note that besides linguistic resources factors such as size and typeface as well as spatial emplacement and possible stratification when gauging the effects in terms of affirming authenticity and ownership of language play a role. Indeed, minoritized language varieties thus gain opportunities for revitalization, innovation, and development (cf. Wang 2018).

In 378 photos taken on San Andrés Island in October 2015, we find the following distribution of languages, presented in Table 2:

Table 2. *San Andrés linguistic landscapes*

²⁰ Hooker O’Neill’s observations are on language use on San Andrés but mirror reports on similar choices made by Limón Creole speakers.

²¹ The Committee was created during the orthography workshops mentioned in 4.3. with the main aim of translating the Bible.

<i>Number of photos</i>	<i>Language</i>
291	Spanish
246	English and/or San Andrés-Providence EP/C
79	English only
123	Spanish only

The majority of the pictures are multilingual. At times, other languages, which are relevant for commercial interactions, are included. Essentially, these are French, Italian, and Portuguese. It is possible to draw the following conclusions:

- 1) Spanish is the dominant language of this community;
- 2) English and/or San Andrés-Providence EP/C is subjugated to Spanish (name of the business or event only, second language in bilingual signs or texts);
- 3) Other languages are used to obtain specific, above all commercial effects.

This does not apply in all contexts where San Andrés EP/C is used. Figure 1 features exclusive use of the creole in question, forbidding eating inside the library of the First Baptist Church School, the school that has most vigorously been promoting EP/C literacy.



Figure 1. *Sign in the library of the First Baptist School, San Andrés, 2015.* © Angela Bartens

Moving back to more traditional channels of language development and standardization, the presumably high cost of producing reference works and teaching materials can be overcome through new technologies as well, for example producing materials on site and using the Big Books method (Morren 2010). Building a literary canon, also considered fundamental for languagehood *vis-à-vis* the existence as a dialect can be achieved through translation of, e.g., French classics into Haitian Creole or Portuguese theater into Kabuverdianu (see Lopes 2017 for the second case) in addition to authors from the language community writing in their creole.²²

However, it has been noted that speakers of languages which have not been standardized frequently first demand it but then may be unlikely to use the materials

²² For an example of an early novel written in Guyanese French Creole, see Alfred Parépou's *Atipa*, 1885. Schieffelin & Doucet (1994: 182–183) list a number of early works written in Haitian Creole.

(primers, storybooks, etc.) produced. The demand for literacy in these languages is above all a matter of identity construction and social legitimacy (cf. Jaffe 2000: 511; Lüpke 2018: 138). Use of materials may be hampered, for instance, by specific orthographic choices made. It is also of utmost importance language ownership issues, coupled with community involvement, are considered all through the process.

6. Conclusions

In all the cases studied here, the process of creating and implementing an orthography has been relatively lengthy. In some of them, e.g., Nicaraguan or San Andrés-Providence EP/C, it is still under way; in others, e.g., Belize EP/C, it has spanned various decades before the completion of the process in the production of materials such as Crosbie et al. (2007). It also needs to be stated that the implementation of orthographies varies in the communities studied as language activists are at the forefront of the process.

Community involvement has therefore turned out to be crucial. Participatory Action Research as defined by Benedicto & Mayangna Yulbarangyang Balna (2007) constitutes an important paradigm for the inclusion of both native speakers and linguists not originally belonging to the community, considering that ideologies and their manifestations have to be negotiated in a way that is meaningful for LPP from a postcolonial view, in this instance also understood in the critical-reflective sense in addition to the descriptive-causal one (section 2).

Writing anchors a community in its social, historical, religious, and political context.²³ In the case of the EP/Cs under survey, this implies coexistence with the lexifier language in one way or another. By consequence, there is (or has been) a tension between language ideologies affirming historical continuity through etymologizing orthographies and the existence of an autonomous language system manifest in phonemic orthographies (see 3.). The need for maintaining historical continuity is most significant in the case of Belize EP/C where literacy in Kriol would aim at transitioning to literacy in English if used in the educational system.

The Haitian orthography, taken as a point of comparison, most clearly distances itself from etymologizing solutions, thus declaring ownership of language (and culture) as graphically distinct from French, even in place names (see 4.5.). The EP/Cs in question draw upon each other but also Jamaican for orthographic solutions, claiming ownership of language through this medium. However, English is included to a certain extent in this process of creating *ausbau* through *abstand* (Kloss 1967) from both English and Spanish.

Assuming Atlantic or at least Western Caribbean EP/C gained acceptance as a pluriareal language, this might solve some of the LPP issues at hand. An example of this would be the possibility to share educational materials (see 4.5.). A similar idea can be read into Decker (2014: 191–197) who briefly compares Belize, Nicaraguan, San Andrés, and St. Vincent EP/C, but only highlights the similarities of the phonological system and some orthographic choices.

²³ Lüpke (2018: 129) suggests that “languages express social, historical, religious and political identities at best partly instantiated in prescriptive writing [...]”. For the examples cited in this paper, emphasis should be on “partly”.

In any case, the overall change in attitudes over the last years is leading to the overcoming of the stigma and minoritization of creole languages in the construction of postcolonial societies in which speakers' LHRs will eventually be respected.

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