

Robbert van Sluijs

Variation and change in Virgin Islands Dutch Creole

Tense, Modality and Aspect

Virgin Islands Dutch Creole is the now extinct language that developed as a result of European exploitation of enslaved Africans in the highly multilingual Danish West Indies (US Virgin Islands) in the Caribbean. Despite being the creole language with the most extensive eighteenth century documentation, there are still not many in-depth linguistic studies, when compared to other creoles.

One reason for this is that the available Dutch Creole data cannot always be easily compared among each other. The language as spoken by those of African descent has only been directly documented in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the eighteenth century, Dutch Creole was primarily documented by missionaries, who had learnt and adapted the language for their own purposes.

This dissertation takes advantage of the digital availability of the Dutch Creole data to address the issue of variation in all data sources: eighteenth century missionary data as well as twentieth century data of speakers of African descent. This dissertation explores system-internal and cross-system variation of tense, modality, and aspect markers, benefiting from their highly language-specific profile for investigating and comparing closely related language varieties where the linguistic background of the language user plays an important role, as is the case for Dutch Creole.

Features investigated include past time reference marking, imperfective, prospective, perfect, and completive aspect, and modality, taking all language varieties present in the multilingual Danish West Indies context into account: seventeenth century and contemporary Dutch, English, German, Danish, and West African languages as Akan, Ewegbe, and Ga.

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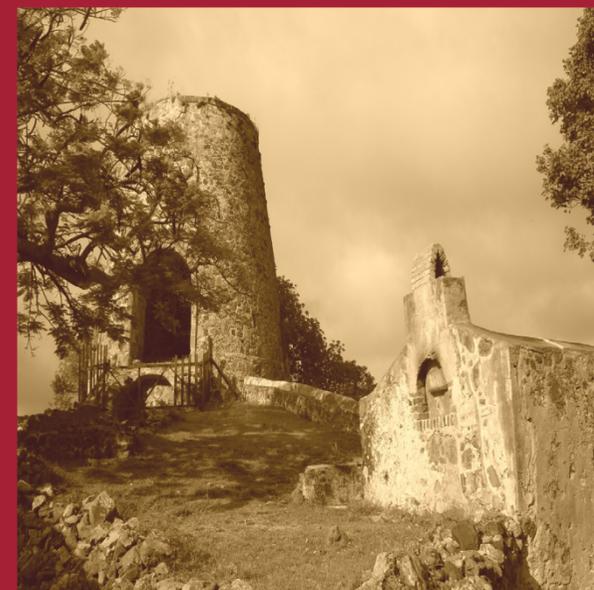
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