

The history and future of Patuá in Paria

Report on initial language revitalization efforts for French Creole in Venezuela

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1. Introduction

In Venezuela,¹ Patuá or Venezuelan French Creole (VFC) is spoken in the Paria Peninsula bordering Trinidad, once a French Creole-speaking territory, although never governed by the French. Venezuela and Trinidad share a maritime boundary in the Gulf of Paria, and are only seven miles or eleven kilometers apart at the nearest point. The area has been a point of exchange between the two areas since pre-Columbian times with speakers of Amerindian, European (Spanish, French, and English) and Caribbean Creole (French-lexified and English-lexified) languages going back and forth.

This paper will focus on the French Creole language of Paria, although French Creole is also spoken in El Callao in Estado Bolívar, home to migrants from Trinidad, St. Lucia, and Haiti. VFC is mainly spoken in Güiria in Estado Sucre (in which the Paria Peninsula is located). The French voyager, Dauxion-Lavaysse, writing in the early nineteenth century, notes that Güiria and Guinima were “deux villages établis par des Français et des Espagnols, qui ont émigré de la Trinidad pour se

1. In Iberian America, not surprisingly, French-lexicon Creole (FC) is spoken mainly in border areas, that is, national borders between French/French Creole-speaking areas and Spanish or Portuguese-speaking areas. The three French Creole varieties that are found in border situations (land or maritime) are as follows: a) Haitian French Creole in the Dominican Republic (bordering Haiti), b) Brazilian Karipúna and Amapá French Creole (bordering French Guiana, and in an area once claimed by France, cf. Ferreira and Alleyne 2007) and c) Venezuelan French Creole. San Miguel French Creole of Panama, almost extinct, is the only FC spoken in Latin America that is not a border language. It was taken there by St. Lucian migrants and is therefore also an offshoot of Lesser Antillean FC. In non-Latin South America, French Creole is also spoken by pockets of migrant communities in Guyana (with migrants from St. Lucia), and in Suriname, west of French Guiana.

soustraire aux vexations du gouvernement anglais” (1813.2:225–226). [Blaquire’s translation: Güiria and Guinima were... “two villages established by the French and Spaniards, who emigrated from Trinidad, to avoid the vexations of the British Governor” (Dauxion-Lavaysse 1820:115)].

VFC is mostly an offshoot of Trinidadian French Creole (TFC), a variety of Lesser Antillean French Creole, and is therefore not listed by Gordon (2005) as a separate national variety. VFC is also made up of other varieties originating from areas besides Trinidad, and is also spoken in areas such as El Callao in Estado Bolívar by descendants of migrants looking for work in the oil fields.

On the whole, regardless of origins (Lesser Antillean or Greater — Haitian), and although not necessarily a homogeneous whole, VFC is an endangered variety, with a low level of ethnolinguistic vitality. This is so since only very few bilingual elderly persons continue to speak VFC as a home language today, the language having given way to Spanish at the wider community level. This is similar to the case for its direct parent Trinidadian French Creole, which has given way to English and English Creole, although that FC variety appears to be far healthier in terms of its vitality and long-term potential to survive (cf. Holbrook and Ferreira 2002). One estimate suggests that there are fewer than one hundred speakers of VFC and that all speakers of VFC are bilingual in VFC and Spanish, and some also speak English as a first, second or third language (Juan Facendo, e-mail interview, March 22, 2007). If this is the case, then the language is seriously moribund, and there may be no real hope of revitalization, only hope of promoting the language as an ancestral, ethnic tongue to be taught in select schools.

VFC is generally associated with a subset of Afro-Venezuelan culture. Other cultural aspects include English (and French) surnames from the Lesser Antilles, calypso (especially in El Callao, the city in Venezuela best known for calypso, see Baptiste 2002:12), steelpan, the sport of cricket, as well as Trinidadian foods such as pelau, callaloo (“*kalalu*”), souse (“*sous*”), roti,² and curried dishes (see Díaz and Urbano J. 2005). Michelangeli (2003) has commented on this Trinidadian influence on Güiria cuisine (see also the Gastronomía link at ‘Güiria: Tierra de Gracia’ <http://www.guiria.com.ve/> accessed July 30, 2006.) Note that the presence of roti, an Indo-Trinidadian dish, confirms that contact continued between the two sides of the Gulf of Paria well into the mid-nineteenth century, since Indians first went to Trinidad in 1845 and not before, and their descendants would have gone to

2. Roti and curry are made at home by some families of Güiria, of Afro-Venezuelan descent. A recent (Arab-)Trinidadian migrant opened a roti shop, hiring an (Indo-)Trinidadian roti maker from the town of San Juan in Trinidad. The rotis were sold out of a food van and were very popular among the community of Güiria. The business closed down with the cook’s return to Trinidad.

Venezuela after that time. The continuing contact between Trinidad and Venezuela into the twentieth century does not necessarily signal the reinforcement of Patuá, since the majority of migrants probably spoke English or English Creole.

2. Historical background of French Creole in Venezuela

In the border situations of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and French Guiana and Brazil, where French Creole is spoken on both sides of each border, at least one side of the border had once been or still is administered by France. Unlike these situations, Trinidad was never claimed by the French as a colony, yet TFC was so widely spoken that migrants to Venezuela allowed TFC (later VFC) to flourish for some time. For over a century, French was Trinidad's language of commerce and of privileged society and French Creole was the lingua franca of the bulk of the population, regardless of class and ethnolinguistic background. This situation has its origins in the late eighteenth century.

After 285 years of Spanish rule, Trinidad remained relatively underpopulated, to the dissatisfaction of the Spanish crown. Trinidad and Venezuela were part of the Viceroyalty of New Granada from 1717. This viceroyalty included Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guyana, and Panama. By 1777, Trinidad was one of the provinces of the Captaincy-General of Venezuela. As Baptiste (2002:2) put it, 'Prior to 1797–1802, Trinidad was a "Provincia de Venezuela" ... the territory was a veritable backwater of the larger Spanish Empire in the Americas' which presented a problem for the island's economic development. This was to change in the late eighteenth century.

In 1783, Roume de St. Laurent, a Frenchman based in Grenada, succeeded in obtaining a *Cédula de Población* (Real *Cédula para la Población y Comercio de la Isla de Trinidad de Barlovento*) from King Carlos III, designed to make the then Spanish colony more prosperous by attracting planters and settlers. The *Cédula* granted favorable conditions of settlement to any Roman Catholic foreign settler willing to swear allegiance to the Spanish king. Such conditions included grants of land and exemption from taxes. In the years following this *Cédula*, a period of social and political unrest in France and her colonies, hundreds of French Catholic planters and their slaves, mainly from the Lesser Antilles, went to Spanish Trinidad. As a result, both French and French Creole went to Trinidad. By the time the British arrived in 1797 and consolidated their takeover in 1802–03, 'Trinidad at that time seemed like a French colony which Spain had recently acquired' (Borde 1982:2, 301), although Spanish remained the language of government, of archival records, and of the law courts several years into the period of British rule.

Because the majority of Trinidadians migrating to Venezuela were of African descent, Venezuelan descendants of French Creole speakers today consider the

language a heritage language linked to their Afro-West Indian/Caribbean Venezuelan identity. (The French Creole-speaking population of Trinidad itself was considerably more varied, so that French Creole speakers and others in Trinidad do not necessarily associate the language with only one ethnic group identity.) Descendants and others trying to revive VFC today are doing so mainly for cultural, anthropological and ethnic purposes, rather than for intra-group communicative purposes (a function now served by Spanish), although some are also interested in renewing links with speakers of FC in the Antilles.

French and French Creole-speaking migrants arrived en masse in Venezuela in the late eighteenth century, but according to Pollak-Eltz and Istúriz, some French speakers went to Venezuela as early as the sixteenth century:

En los dos siglos antes de la llegada de los frailes [en 1750], algunos franceses de las islas del Caribe y holandeses de Suriname frecuentaban las costas de Paria, comerciaban con los indígenas y robaban esclavos indios para llevarlos a sus islas a trabajar en las plantaciones. Los franceses tenían un puesto fortificado en la isla Antica en el Golfo de Paria, donde poseían también cultivos, lo que hace suponer que algunos franceses se residenciaban permanentemente en este lugar. Según Carrocera (1968, III: 90), en 1739, algunos indios de Paria hablaban francés, usaban cuchillos, telas y machetes provenientes de Grenada e Martinica. Los indios solían canjear madera por armas y mercancía europea. Los franceses instigaron a los aborígenes a luchar contra las autoridades españolas (1968, III: 90). (1990:12)

In the two centuries before the arrival of the missionaries [in 1750], some Frenchmen from the islands of the Caribbean and Dutchmen from Suriname would regularly visit the Paria coast, trading with the Amerindians and stealing and enslaving Amerindians to work on their plantations in the islands. The French had a fort on the island of Antica in the Gulf of Paria, where they also had plantations, which leads one to suppose that some Frenchmen resided in this area permanently. According to Carrocera (1968, III: 90), in 1739, some Paria Amerindians spoke French, used knives, fabric and machetes which came from Grenada and Martinique. The Amerindians used to exchange wood for arms and European merchandise. It was the French who incited the natives to fight against the Spanish authorities (1968, III: 90). (1990:12)

Pollak-Eltz and Istúriz go on to note that the French returned in 1773 to already established commercial relations with the Amerindians of the area.

When the French went to Trinidad in 1783, they also went to Venezuela, taking with them French Creole-speaking enslaved Africans and others. With reference to the Paria coast of Venezuela, Dauxion-Lavaysse explains the apparently curious origins of the French presence following the Napoleonic wars:

Quelques familles françaises s’y réfugièrent pendant les premiers orages de notre révolution. Il s’y est établi depuis un nombre considerable de colons français de la Trinidad, de Tabago et de la Grenade, que les *Barbadiens* et les *trente-six mois Ecossais* de ces colonies ont forcé d’abandonner leurs propriétés, par un système froidement combiné d’avanies et de persecutions. Le gouvernement espagnol leur fit d’abord un bon accueil; mais les belles habitations à cacao, à café, à coton, et meme les sucreries qu’ils y ont formées, ont tenté la jalouse cupidité de quelques administrateurs locaux. Dès 1802, on cherchait des prétextes pour se débarrasser d’eux et les spoiler. Quelques-uns ont été expropriés et expulsés sous les pretextes les plus ridicules (1813.1:6–7).

[Blaquire’s adaptation: Some French families took refuge there during the first storms of the revolution: a considerable number of French colonists from Trinidad, Tobago and Grenada, have also settled in the same neighbourhood. At first the Spanish government gave them a good reception; but the beautiful plantations of cocoa, coffee, cotton, and even sugar manufactories which they soon formed, tempted the jealous avarice of some local officers of the government. From 1802, various pretences were invented for getting rid of, and plundering them. Some were driven out and sent away from the most contemptible motives (Dauxion-Lavaysse 1820:278–79).]

Upon the British takeover of Trinidad by 1798–1802, some French planters fled with their slaves to an isolated and under-populated Paria. Some of these French planters went to Trinidad and Venezuela via Haiti, others from Grenada. Pollak-Eltz and Istúriz, referring to Dauxion-Lavaysse and Depons, another nineteenth century writer, note that “los franceses y españoles, refugiados de Trinidad después de la ocupación por los ingleses, fueron los verdaderos fundadores de Güíria” (“the French and Spanish, fleeing Trinidad following the British occupation, were the true founders of Güíria”) (1990:15). Under the French planters, agriculture in Paria developed in a fertile but previously underpopulated area, much like in Trinidad following the Cédula. According to de Verteuil,

The Captain General of Caracas erected several batteries on the eastern coast of Venezuela upon the rivers which flow into the Gulf of Paria and under the protection of the guns, there were swarms of armed canoes and pirogues, manned by refugees and French Republicans who had been expelled from Trinidad and other colonies by the English... (1987:44).

Trinidad later became a source of and support for revolutionary ideas for Venezuelans, and Begorrat, a well-known French Trinidadian, helped the revolutionaries of Venezuela (de Verteuil 1987:84).

In Paria, the French established cocoa plantations and implanted their language(s) and culture³ until the Venezuelan War of Independence in 1811 (cf. Viso C. 2005). It would be true to say that when cocoa was king, Patuá also reigned. Pollak-Eltz and Istúriz note that cocoa plantations had been established in the mid-18th century (1990:13), not only by the French. One family contracted Trinidadian workers of African origin to work on the cocoa plantations. Many of these would have been speakers of French Creole. The war forced some of the French to desert Güiria in order to return to their Antillean possessions or territories of origin, including Port-of-Spain, and hundreds of (formerly enslaved) French Creole-speaking Afro-Venezuelans fled to the surrounding mountains.

After the 1811 War, Paria continued to remain isolated from the rest of Venezuela. The area became home to Corsican and other planters (some Corsican names are still found on both sides of the border, for example, Giovanetti, Sipriani (Cipriani), etc.). Afro-descendant workers from mostly the French but also British islands (including St. Lucia, Trinidad and Grenada, all French Creole-speaking at the time) also migrated to the area. Patuá became the common language of the plantations, although the socially and politically dominant language remained Spanish. Throughout the nineteenth century, an intense trading relationship grew up between Paria and the Patois/French Creole-speaking islands.

Toussaint's (2000) work on Afro-West Indians on the Spanish Main shows that there was a high degree of interaction between Venezuela and Trinidad, as well as other French Creole-speaking islands, in both the pre-emancipation and post-emancipation periods. In the pre-emancipation period, both runaway slaves and "free coloureds" went to Venezuela in search of a better life, and during the post-emancipation period, many others migrated in search of prosperity, especially during the Gold Rush in the 1850s and 1860s. This second period lasted roughly from 1838 to 1914, the beginning of World War I, but there has been continuous movement between Trinidad and Venezuela over the centuries (Toussaint 2000:173–216).

2.1 The decline of Patuá

Historians attribute the decline of Patuá to a number of political and economic developments in Paria. In the nineteenth century, Paria, in particular the towns of Güiria, Macuro and Carúpano, was a thriving area. This was so, not only because of the plantations in the area, but because of Güiria's (and later Macuro's) ports and customs.

3. Today, one of the more obvious signs of French settlement in the area is the French Caribbean style of architecture of several buildings in the town of Güiria.

In 1900, the then President Cipriano Castro moved to punish his political enemies among the *güireños* by moving the Güiria customs to Macuro, a move engineered by Castro to destroy their prosperity (Pollak-Eltz and Istúriz 1990:23).

Macuro, half an hour away from Trinidad by boat — or “down the Main” (mainland), as is said in Trinidad — was an important point of connection to Port-of-Spain by seaplanes and boats. Macuro also used to be an official port of entry and a thriving commercial port. This was so until 1935–36, when that role was re-assumed by Güiria (two hours by boat and one hour away by land transport, south-west of Macuro, on the Paria peninsula).

The Güiria customs were re-established in 1934 up to the 1940s (Pollak-Eltz and Istúriz 1990:24). When this happened, Güiria was able to trade cocoa and other goods directly with Trinidad again. By that time, Port-of-Spain and other Caribbean capitals had become the point of reference for many Parianos, with wealthy Venezuelans going to Catholic colleges (secondary schools) in Trinidad, conducting business in Trinidad, shopping, and even going to take drinking water back to the mainland. Carúpano, further west, was also important in Venezuelan-Antillean commerce.

Llorente (1995, cf. Llorente 1994) attributes the economic decline of Paria on the whole to the final closure of the Macuro customs in 1936, although the Güiria customs continued until later. The replacement of the cocoa industry by the oil industry (controlled by giant companies from Caracas and overseas) was another significant factor in Paria’s changing fortunes.

Llorente notes that all of these events, the severing of ties with the Caribbean islands, and the flight of inhabitants to other parts of Venezuela, propelled the decline of Patuá. Improved infrastructure connecting Paria to Carúpano, Cumaná and especially Caracas, and between Güiria and Macuro (relatively speaking, since marine transportation is still the main option between the two towns) also meant the end of the dependence on Port-of-Spain and Trinidad, as Caracas became the *de facto* capital for Parianos. With less and less contact with, and less traffic to and from Trinidad (where French Creole itself had begun to die because of changes in the social and educational systems), French Creole dominated the Paria region only up to about 1900, much like in Trinidad. By 1990, when Pollak-Eltz and Istúriz published their study, all of their French Creole-speaking informants were over 80 years old, and all remembered their youth, a time when all of Güiria could either speak or understand French Creole. Today, many of their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren lament the passing of their family and community language, and at least notionally support the revival of the French Creole language and culture.

3. The *I Encuentro*: A recent revival attempt

In Venezuela in the 21st century today, an anthropologist and member of the Casa de la Diversidad Cultural del Estado Sucre, Omaira Gutiérrez Marcano, is helping to organize an initiative to save Venezuelan French Creole from extinction, to pass on the language to future generations. To this end, the first meeting of Venezuelan and other French Creole speakers was held in Güiria, Paria, Estado Sucre from October 13 to 16, 2005. The gathering was entitled 'Primer Encuentro de Abuelos Creole y/o Patuá Parlantes de Venezuela y El Caribe en homenaje a Jorge Logan Delcine' ('First Meeting of Creole grandparents and/or Patois Speakers of Venezuela and the Caribbean in tribute to Jorge Logan Delcine') and subtitled 'Encuentro de memorias y saberes populares para la reafirmación de nuestra identidad Afro-Caribeña' ('Meeting of Memories and Folk Traditions for the Reaffirmation of our Afro-Caribbean identity'). Delcine was a speaker of VFC, of Afro-Venezuelan origin, well known in his community for his story-telling ability and for his interest in keeping Patuá linguistic and cultural traditions alive.

The *I Encuentro* brought together historians, anthropologists, linguists, culture practitioners, native speakers and their descendants, second language learners, and many more interested parties. Venezuelan-based scholars included anthropologist Angelina Pollak-Eltz of the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello (see Pollak-Eltz 1990), attached to the Centre for Afro-American Studies in Caracas, anthropologists Esteban Emilio Mosonyi and Josefina Solange Sampson, and historian Carlos Viso C., all of the Universidad Central de Venezuela (UCV).

The aim of the *I Encuentro* was the beginning of the revitalization of Patuá in Paria by gathering together (elderly) French Creole speakers from all over Venezuela and the Caribbean region to exchange ideas and to formulate concrete plans for language revival. As Wurm (2001) puts it, 'Many languages need management to survive' and this *Encuentro* represents the first effort in the revitalization strategy and campaign on the part of Venezuelans. The main arm of the revitalization plan appears to be a formal and informal literacy campaign, as well as an effort to teach Venezuelans of Afro-West Indian and Afro-Venezuelan descent and of French Creole heritage this ancestral language.

The *I Encuentro* was funded and sponsored by organizations of both the public and private sectors, and there was strong local newspaper support and coverage both before and after the event as well as a high level of publicity through posters, banners, pennants, apparel, and other paraphernalia.

Areas in Venezuela identified as having *abuelos Patuá-parlantes* (elderly Patois-speakers) included towns in Paria such as Güiria, Macuro, Mapire, Don Pedro, Uquire, Río Caribe, Irapa and Yaguaraparo, and other towns elsewhere in Venezuela such as El Callao, San Félix, El Tigre, Caripito, Maturín, Caracas, Valencia and

Cumaná. Güiria was considered to be the ideal location for what was hoped would be the first of several such encounters.

The original plan was to sponsor at least two representatives from each of the French Creole-speaking territories of the Southern and Eastern Caribbean (including storytellers), in order to promote a regional exchange. Groups and individuals from Dominica, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Martinique, St. Lucia and Trinidad were approached, but the only non-Venezuelan contingent came by boat from neighboring Trinidad. This group included three native French Creole speakers from the French Creole-speaking village of Paramin,⁴ a teacher of French Creole and his nine-member choir, *Bèl Chantèz*, and this researcher (cf. Holbrook and Ferreira 2002, and Ferreira and Alleyne 2007), representing The University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine and the Society for Caribbean Linguistics (SCL), which were named as two of the foreign supporting and participating organizations. The choir *Vini Chanté*, formerly known as *Bèl Chantèz*, sang *crèche* or *kwèch*, French Creole Christmas carols, and *parang* (> Sp. *parranda*) or *aguinaldos* (Spanish Christmas carols) and calypso, and was well-received in Güiria, featuring in the press, on radio and in concerts.

The program included census-taking of elderly Patuá-speaking Venezuelans, with the ultimate goal of forming an association of French Creole speakers in Venezuela. Several workshops were organized, focusing on aspects of culture using French Creole (traditional storytelling, games, songs, music, dance, food), plenaries, including one whose presenter wrote and read the abstract in Haitian (Mosonyi 2005), panel discussions, a concert (with calypsoes sung in English and French Creole, *parang* and traditional Patuá songs, all three musical genres known on both sides of the Paria peninsula), and a mini-Carnival. Primary school children and their teachers were all part of the event, and the idea was to allow the new generation to meet the older generations.

3.1 Focus on language

Three of the workshops were specifically language-oriented: one focused on teaching basic French Creole (see Hernández 2005), and the other on choosing an orthography for Venezuelan French Creole (see discussion below). The third workshop consisted of a brainstorming session on developing strategies on how to

4. The Paramin residents, all native speakers of TFC, included John Kenneth Romain, Errol 'Clyde' Felix, and Lawrence 'Gomez' Constantine. The teacher was Nnamdi Hodge who teaches French at a secondary school and who learned St. Lucian French Creole at The UWI, St. Augustine. He now runs classes of TFC, mostly for non-native speakers.

actually revitalize the language, with a special emphasis on the social and economic benefits and values to young people.

In Güiria, efforts have already been made to teach some French Creole at the Universidad de Oriente, led by Rosa Bosch Teriús, cultural conservationist and self-taught second language (L2) learner of French Creole (see Sampson et al. 1991). Rosa Bosch is Venezuelan of Catalan origin (there have been Catalans in the region since 1790, cf. Dauxion-Lavaysse 1813:116), and is the president of the Sociedad Conservacionista de Güiria, one of the sponsors of the event. She is well-known and highly respected in Güiria for her promotion of ‘Afro-West Indian’ culture, including Patuá (see Sampson et al. 1991 and Bosch 1998). The language teaching workshop was led by Rosa Bosch and was used to teach basic greetings as well as a few sentences.

3.1.2 *Choosing an appropriate (and potentially official) orthography*

Rosa Bosch, the main teacher of Patuá in Güiria, noted the lack of a consistent orthography since ‘*como se oye, ya se escribía*’ (‘they used to write it like how they heard it’), Patuá being an oral language ‘with no history of writing’. Some of the orthographic choices are represented in the following phrases and sentences taught in a beginners’ language workshop at the *I Encuentro*. Note that the orthography is variously influenced by Spanish or L2 French:

Greetings

- (1) *Bon suá dam* /bõ swa dam/ ‘good evening, Madam’
- (2) *Cum u yé* /kum u ye/ ‘how are you?’ (according to the teacher, *cumauyé* /kuma u ye/ is the way that this phrase would be rendered ‘*cuando hablamos rápido*’, i.e. in fast speech, cf. Betancurt 2008:59–60)
- (3) *Cum u ka santi* /kum u ka sãti/ ‘how are you?’
- (4) *Mue bien meci* /mwe bjẽ mesi/ ‘I am fine, thank you’
- (5) *Cum u ka quillé u* /kum u ka kwije u/ ‘what is your name?’

Learning Patuá

- (6) *La pumié clas* /la pumje klas/ ‘the first class’
- (7) *Nu vini apuen palé patuá* /nu vini apwãn pale patua/ ‘we came to learn Patuá.’

Note that Patuá or Patua appear to be the preferred spelling choices among Venezuelans at the *I Encuentro*, and Patuá is the choice of the author in this paper.

Modern standardized Caribbean French Creole (comprising St. Lucian and other varieties) would consider the use of two graphemes for the sound /k/ as overrepresentation, as per <c> in *cum* and *clas* and <q> in *quillé*, which would be rendered *kum*, *klas*, and *kwiyé*, respectively, in modern written French Creole. Following Spanish, *quillé* could have been written *cuillé*, but seems to be based on French.

Another possible example of overrepresentation is the use of two graphemes for the sound /s/ as per <s> in *suá* and by <c> in *meci*, which modern orthographies would render *swa* and *mèsi*, respectively. As a result, the grapheme <c> was overused for both /k/ as *cum* and for /s/ as *meci*. These minor apparent discrepancies were generally overlooked by workshop participants, since they mostly follow standardized norms of Spanish (where <c> is consistently used before front unrounded vowels, and <s> is used elsewhere). Therefore, these neither interfered with the objectives of the workshop nor hindered participants' understanding of the classes.

Given these problems, the orthography workshop was devised so that participants could examine existing French Creole orthographies and select or adapt one, according to Venezuelan needs. The goal of the orthography workshop was to select or modify an existing orthography.

Participants comprised two Venezuelan anthropologists, a native Haitian French Creole speaker, a second language French Creole speaker,⁵ and two Trinidadians, including a teacher of French Creole and this researcher. This workshop sought to answer questions such as:

1. For whom? For patuáparlantes? (Patois speakers) For L2 hispanohablantes? (Spanish-speakers)
2. For what? For writing and reading monolingual books? For bilingual books (for transitional bilingualism?)?

5. That participant, 44-year old Juan Facendo of Maturín (capital of Estado Monagas), originally of San Tomé, Estado Anzoátegui where there is a small community of Haitians, has been active in learning and promoting VFC. Much of his learning was through contact with French Creole-speaking friends and his own reading of books and collecting Venezuelan songs in French Creole. His maternal grandmother spoke some Patuá, and his wife's paternal family speaks the language. He and his wife are trying to keep the language alive among a circle of friends and at home with their children. He has been preparing a trilingual dictionary (Venezuelan Patuá, Spanish and English), based on a 1991 thesis done by Feliciano and Sampson, and is involved in other efforts to keep Patuá alive. Sampson, Venezuelan-born of mainly (Afro-)Trinidadian parentage and educated in Trinidad, is also the main editor of *Patuá in Gütria*, a documentary on DVD (also 1991).

Participants first focused on the fact that the phonological inventories of Spanish and Patuá differ significantly. In its consonant inventory, unlike Spanish, Patuá has both /b/ vs. /v/ and /s/ vs. /z/, as well as /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /dʒ/, /h/, and /ŋ/ (which does not occur as a distinct phoneme in Spanish, only as an allophone or as a dialectal variant). The vowel inventory of Patuá includes both /e/ vs. /ɛ/ and /o/ vs. /ɔ/, as well as nasalized vowel phonemes, also unlike Spanish. Discussion focused on which existing orthographies could serve as adequate models or guides, and since a Haitian native speaker participated in the workshop, that variety was given consideration, as well as the more closely related St. Lucian (with the most easily imported materials), and Karipúna (because of this researcher's own interests — see Ferreira and Alleyne 2007).

The Haitian system initially under consideration was not the modern IPN (the orthography of the Institut Pédagogique National, which was established after the Haitian participant had migrated to Venezuela and which was therefore unknown to him), but an older version of the 1940s (the McConnell-Laubach Method of the Eglise Méthodiste d'Haïti) using a circumflex <^> for nasal vowels, such as <ê> for /ê/ and <â> for /ã/. (In that system, all other vowels use the acute accent for the close-mid front unrounded vowel /e/, i.e. <é> and grave accent for the open-mid front unrounded vowel /ɛ/, i.e. <è>, as per French.) The Pressoir-Faublas (or Faublas-Pressoir) orthography which followed the McConnell-Laubach orthography was abandoned in 1979 in favor of the orthography of the IPN, which includes elements from both of its predecessors. The Haitian participant also introduced a bilingual Spanish-Haitian dictionary from the Dominican Republic as a potential aide in language teaching in Venezuela.

Table 1 shows a comparison of some orthographic symbols across the three varieties. All other letters used are the same across the three varieties, and mostly correspond to the values of similar IPA symbols.

Table 1. Comparison of corresponding orthographic symbols for some phonemes in three varieties of French Creole

	/e/	/ɛ/	/ê/	/u/	/ɔ/	/dʒ/	/tʃ/
St. Lucian (SLFC)	<é>	<è>	<en>	<ou>	<ò>	<dj>	<tch> (or <tj>)
Haitian (HFC) – IPN	<e>	<è>	<en>	<ou>	<ò>	<dj>	<tch>
Karipúna (KFC)	<e>	<é>	<ê>	<u>	<ó>	<dj>	<tx>

Advantages and disadvantages of the various options were discussed. Since most of the potential students would be native Spanish speakers, it was felt that there would be problems with some of the options existing in the other three varieties. For the vowel phonemes, at least two options were presented, such as the following:

1. <e> for /e/ (easy for Spanish speakers and used in Haitian) or <é> (French-influenced, used in St. Lucia and elsewhere);
2. <u> for /u/ (easy for Spanish speakers and used in Haitian) or <ou> (French-influenced, used in St. Lucia and elsewhere);
3. for the nasalized vowels, there was a choice of a digraph (the vowel followed by an <n>), e.g. for /ã/ <an> (St. Lucian) or <ã> (Brazilian) or <â> (pre-IPN Haitian).

For the first two phonemes, the Spanish orthography won out over Caribbean French Creole, while the Brazilian and old Haitian options for nasalized vowels gave way to the modern Caribbean French Creole option using digraphs of vowel plus nasal.

For the consonant phonemes, /ʃ/ and /tʃ/ presented some problems. For /ʃ/, not a Spanish phoneme, some participants felt that since English was an important international language, it would be good to use <sh>. However, this digraph is not in international usage among French Creole speakers, so most participants agreed that <ch> was a better option. This, however, could present problems for literate native Spanish speakers who would already use this digraph for /tʃ/. The workshop decided to follow international conventions for French Creole, <ch>, and simply propose teaching Spanish speakers the value of the digraph, as would be done for French. For /tʃ/, a Spanish phoneme, some participants argued for <ch> since it was already used in Spanish and would be easy to learn for literate native Spanish speakers. The Karipúna <tx>, based on Portuguese, was immediately ruled out. Since most available materials were St. Lucian, it was felt that <tch> or <tj> would be better choices, even if considered to be foreign by Spanish speakers, since all language learners would have to learn both new sounds and new symbols in acquiring any foreign language. See table below for summary.

Table 2. Considering orthographic options for two consonants

French Creole Phoneme	Orthographic Options	PRO	CON
/ʃ/	a. <sh>	helpful in transition to English as a second/foreign language taught in schools	not in international French Creole usage
	b. <ch>	in international French Creole usage	looks too much like Spanish <ch> for /tʃ/
/tʃ/	a. <ch>	helpful in transition from Spanish	not in international French Creole usage
	b. <tch> or <tj>	in international French Creole usage	not Spanish

Eventually, international French Creole usage governed most choices. The final orthography was chosen because of more practical concerns, namely, cost factors in producing brand new bilingual or monolingual materials and the availability of St. Lucian materials which were already in use among some members of the community. The following graphemes were chosen, with only two differences from St. Lucian vowel letters, namely <e> for /e/ instead of <é> and <u> for /u/ instead of <ou> (as per Haitian). All consonants followed modern (Eastern) Caribbean standards. The following table shows the orthographic symbols (letters) chosen by the orthography workshop participants and compiled by Facendo et al. (2005). (Falling and rising diphthongs such as /aɪ/ and /je/ were not treated as separate phonemes needing special digraphs or letters.)

Table 3. Consonant and vowel phonemes of Venezuelan French Creole and corresponding orthographic symbols with Spanish and English translations of lexical examples

Consonants	
/p/ – <p> patua (<i>Patuá</i>) ‘Patois’	/ʃ/ – <ch> cho (<i>caliente</i>) ‘hot’
/b/ – bo (<i>beso</i>) ‘kiss’	/tʃ/ – <tch> tchè (<i>corazón</i>) ‘heart’
/t/ – <t> ti (<i>pequeño</i>) ‘small’	/ʒ/ – <j> jaden (<i>jardín</i>) ‘garden’
/d/ – <d> du (<i>dulce</i>) ‘sweet’	/dʒ/ – <dj> djep or djèp (<i>avispa</i>) ‘wasp’
/k/ – <k> kai (<i>casa</i>) ‘house’	/m/ – <m> mue (<i>yo o mi</i>) ‘I or me’
/g/ – <g> gato (<i>torta</i>) ‘cake’	/n/ – <n> non (<i>no</i>) ‘no’
/f/ – <f> fami (<i>familia</i>) ‘family’	/ŋ/ – <ng> zonng (<i>uña</i>) ‘fingernail’
/v/ – <v> vann (<i>vender</i>) ‘to sell’	/j/ – <y> yo (<i>ellos</i>) ‘they’
/s/ – <s> sèl (<i>sal</i>) ‘salt’	/w/ – <w> wè (<i>ver</i>) ‘to see’
/z/ – <z> zòt (<i>ustedes</i>) ‘you, pl.’	/h/ – <h> had (<i>ropa</i>) ‘clothes’
Vowels	
Oral	Nasal
/i/ – <i> i (<i>él</i>) ‘he’	(nasalization is signaled by an ‘n’ following a vowel letter)
/e/ – <e> epi (<i>con</i>) ‘with’	/ɛ̃/ – <en> pen (<i>pan</i>) ‘bread’
/ɛ/ – <è> èvèk (<i>con</i>) ‘with’	/ã/ – <an> jan (<i>gente</i>) ‘people’
/a/ – <a> apwe (<i>después</i>) ‘after’	/õ/ – <on> yon or ‘nyon’ (<i>uno</i>) ‘one’
/u/ – <u> u (<i>tu</i>) ‘you’	
/o/ – <o> oblije (<i>obligar</i>) ‘to force’	
/ɔ/ – <ò> zòt (<i>ustedes</i>) ‘you, pl.’	

Source: Facendo et al. (2005)

If and when local materials are developed, the findings and decisions of this workshop could be formally implemented. In the meantime, French Creole-speaking residents in Güiria and Macuro have already decided to continue using St. Lucian materials. For example, in November 2005, a few interested participants from Macuro made contact with the government of St. Lucia, and planned to teach a three-month course to teachers so that the teachers in turn could teach their pupils (Luis Enrique

Hernández Loreto, personal communication, October 29, 2005). Plans were in place for Rosa Bosch to start classes at the Universidad del Oriente in Güiria in 2007.

4. Conclusion

As for most dying languages, nonlinguistic factors such as social, historical, and psychological factors are responsible for language attrition (cf. Dixon 1997, Fishman 2001, and Nettle and Romaine 2000). Psychological factors include language attitudes ranging from fairly negative to nostalgic to positive. A commonly held view is that *'el patuá no es un idioma'* ('Patuá is not a language'). This quote is taken from Sampson et al. (1991). Facendo also reports that many Venezuelans think that Patuá 'is a mélange of languages, akin to Papiamentu. They think that this mix of languages makes it hard to learn and to understand' (e-mail interview March 22, 2007). This may be the result of a negative attitude, but many of the people who feel this way enjoy speaking Patuá in certain contexts. In response to a general question on feelings about Patuá, Juan Facendo, who feels positive towards Patuá, explained that others feel differently: *'I ni anpil moun ki kwe si u pale Patua, u pa kai rive pale pagnol byen'* ('There are a lot of people who believe that if you speak Patua, you will not speak Spanish well').

A mostly multiple choice formal questionnaire was sent by e-mail to two speakers of VFC (one a native speaker and one a second language learner). There was one free response question: 'please write (in Spanish or in Patois) your comments and feelings about Patois below'. The full context of this quoted statement is as follows (verbatim response to a question in a written questionnaire sent by e-mail, March 22, 2007):

Mue ka kwe Patua se ion lang ki pokò konte listua li. Mue kwe i se ion move bagay nu pa ka konsidere lang sala ion lang nu sa ba se timamay la nou. I ni anpil moun ki kwe si u pale Patua, u pa kai rive pale pagnol byen. Recherche la apuesa ka di si u pale de lang depi u se pitit, u ka fe pase konneksion an la tet u. Le u ka pale ion lòt lang u tini ion lòt mannie pu gade larealite.

I believe that it is a language that has not yet had the opportunity to tell its story. I believe that it is a bad thing not to consider this language one that we could pass on to our children. Modern research tells us that if you speak two languages from the time you are young, you are able to organize them mentally. When you can speak another language, you have another way of looking at reality.

One of the possible reasons for this idea that Patuá affects learning of standard Spanish could be the two shared grammatical features feature in Patuá and in regional Spanish, as noted by Lipski (2003a:19–20):

...in the Güiria Peninsula of Venezuela, Spanish is in contact with Trinidad creole French, and local Güiria Spanish exhibits double negation⁶ of the sort *yo no estoy yendo no*, a pattern found in creole French but not elsewhere in Venezuela. Also unique to this local Venezuelan dialect are noninverted questions such as *¿Qué tú quieres?*, otherwise absent in Venezuela, but typical of creole French. (Cf. Lipski 2003b.)

In spite of the widespread negative attitudes, a few continue to speak the language, and to seek ways of promoting it.

After the *I Encuentro* in Güiria, a long formal interview was conducted and videotaped with two informants. As part of a contribution to the *Atlas Linguistique des Petites Antilles et de la Guyane*, coordinated by LeDù (forthcoming), an interview based on a specific 446 word list was conducted with Mr. and Mrs. Saturnino “Liyo” and Rosa Briceño. Mrs. Rosa Briceño is a native French Creole speaker from Venezuela, while her husband, also born in Venezuela (1928), was educated in Grenada and learned both Grenadian and Venezuelan French Creole, as well as English and English Creole. Short informal interviews were conducted with other elderly informants, many of whom were nostalgic about the fate of the language, but who had not actively taught their own children the language.

Much more work needs to be done on the history, development, and current state of VFC (Patuá), and this will be part of the focus of this researcher’s ongoing project entitled ‘Comparative Study of French Creoles in the Southern Caribbean and Northern South America.’

The organizing committee is planning future *Encuentros* for different locations in Venezuela and in the rest of the Caribbean region, as well as an Asociación de Patuá Parlantes of Venezuela. How far these ideas and events go towards actual language planning and development remains to be seen, but it is certainly worth noting that the least known, least studied, and perhaps the most endangered variety of French Creole in the Americas may well be the one to spearhead a renewal of language awareness and regional linguistic links.

Postscript

The II Encuentro de Abuelos Patuá Parlantes de Venezuela de el Caribe (en Homenaje a Saturnino (“Liyo”) Briceño) took place from 25 to 27 September 2008, once again in Güiria, and again organized by Omaira Gutiérrez. It was part of a wider celebration “El Caribe, Eje de la Diversidad Cultural” from 24 September to

6. This type of double negation is not the type of ‘ne ... pas’ as in French, but this author has not yet found examples of the sort that Lipski refers to.

1 October, taking place under the auspices of the Centro de la Diversidad Cultural (El Foro de los 100 Días 3), including the towns of Güiria (Municipio Valdéz), Río Caribe (Municipio Arismendi), Carúpano and Cumaná (Municipio Sucre y Bermúdez) of Estado Sucre.

There were several differences in this second Encuentro compared to the first. Firstly, the occasion was marked by the absence of Rosa Bosch who was ill in Caracas, and by the passing of Juan José Salinas, one of the most committed and vibrant members of the community, just one week before (in fact five elderly French Creole speakers had passed away between 2005 and 2008). In general, there were fewer participants from the academic world, except for Emilio Esteban Mosonyi of the Universidad Central de Venezuela who continues to lend strong support to the growing movement, and for participants from the Centro de Estudios Caribeños in Cumaná, Universidad de los Andes and the Aldea Universitaria de Güiria of Universidad del Oriente where all the main sessions were held. The delegation from Trinidad was also much smaller than in 2005, as the choir Vini Chanté was unable to go.

Secondly, this Encuentro was dedicated to a living person, Sr. Briceño, who has spearheaded the Asociación de Patuá Parlantes, and who is the director, lead singer and composer of the band Patuá Sonen. He has been actively researching and preparing a dictionary and teaching materials, while giving classes and motivating others to learn, use and teach the language. The *II Encuentro* schedule listed two Talleres Prácticos de Patuá (Practical Patuá Workshops) led by Sr. Briceño, Luisa Elena López H. and Juan Facendo, as well as Una Conversa en Patuá (A Conversation in Patuá), compared to one such event in the *I Encuentro*.

There was a marked use of the language in writing, in posters as well as in the workshops. Examples of the posters are ‘¡Bienvini Camagá! ¡Bienvenidos a Güiria, Tierra de Gracia!’ (‘Welcome Friends (*kamawad*)! Welcome to Güiria, Land of Grace!’) and ‘Tymamai La’ (‘The Children’). In one of the workshops, led by Saturnino Briceño and Luisa E. López, the lessons were presented using Power-Point, with alphabet lessons, grammar lessons, exercises and illustrations.

There was also a greater participation by the children — more attended the workshops and there were two children’s choirs singing traditional songs in French Creole.

Although marked by absences, deaths and smaller turnouts in general, the *II Encuentro* was organized and attended by highly dedicated and motivated social, cultural and linguistic activists from both Estado Sucre and Estado Bolívar, whose commitment was tested but remained unshaken over the three years in between the two *Encuentros*.

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