Reconstructing Language History through Oral Traditions

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Introduction

Rationale

Informed debate about the influence and contribution of West African languages to the development of Afro-American Creole languages depends crucially on three factors. The first of these is what West African languages were present at the time these Creoles developed. The second is the uses to which these West African languages were put. The third factor is the nature of the influence which West African languages and European languages may have had on each other.

Documentary evidence covering these issues has come, up until now, almost entirely from written documentary sources. The writers of these documents are generally the dominant Europeans within plantation slave society. As a result, what these sources cover is highly selective. They have a European perspective and are unreliable in many of their details. I suggest that there is an alternative source which should be put on the same footing as written historical documents. This other source is the orally transmitted traditions of the dominated West African slaves and their descendants.

These oral sources, by definition, give us a radically different perspective from the documentary sources. The oral tradition, like documentary sources, is in fact highly selective, but selective in different ways. Knowledge derived from the oral tradition, therefore, can complement and expand knowledge gained by way of the written tradition. Using oral sources, therefore, we have the chance to try and fill in many gaps in knowledge left by documentary sources.

The reliability of sources and how they should be interpreted is as much an issue for the oral tradition as for written sources. In the case of the oral tradition, these take the form of questions about how accurate has been the transmission from one generation of oral historians to the next. Alterations to this tradition may result either from flawed memory or the tradition being modified in keeping with contemporary needs.

The Choice of the Saramaka

The oral traditions of Maroon communities in the Americas are a prime target for the kind of study being proposed here. They represent communities which split from plantation slave societies during the 17th century, very early in their histories. Their early separation from their original, European-controlled plantation societies, makes their oral traditions and languages special when compared with those of other Creole speaking communities. Those of Maroons tend to be relatively free of later European acculturating influence. By contrast, other Creole speaking communities, by virtue of being under direct colonial and European control, remained open to such influence right up to the present time. This opens the prospect that the language and oral traditions of Maroon communities, by comparison with Creole speaking communities from which they separated, provide better sources of information about language contact on 17th century slave plantations. Maroon communities are likely to have better preserved oral historical accounts containing historical information of linguistic relevance. They are, as well, more likely to have actual language forms of an earlier period preserved within such narratives.

How Suriname Creoles, Saramaccan in particular, emerged is critical in helping us to understand the historical relationship amongst the English-lexicon Atlantic Creoles. The light that Saramaka oral traditions might shed on the issue is, therefore, of enormous interest and significance. This paper aims to explore the vision of the past made available to us by Saramaka oral tradition. This work will, it is hoped, provide a model of how to explore Creole oral traditions from the perspective of language history. It will also demonstrate the kind of insights which potentially lie hidden within Saramaka and similar oral traditions.

The Data

The Saramaka Maroons of Suriname have a well-developed though disappearing oral historical tradition surrounding their origins. These stories of origin cover a period which includes the time spent in slavery on Suriname plantations in the 1680s. It covers the escape into the forest, migration into the interior and the eventual signing of a peace treaty with the Dutch in 1762. This period is referred to in the Saramaka oral tradition as *fési tén* or First Time, the era of the Old-Time people. The Saramaka oral traditions surrounding this period are recorded and commented on in some detail by Price (1983). This material, consisting of 202 story fragments, provided by 27 Saramaka traditional historians, constitutes the data which will be analysed in this paper. Price (1983) presents the bulk of this material in English translation from the Saramaccan original. However, the linguistically significant aspects of the data, notably the songs, proverbs and esoteric language, are presented in the original, with an English translation where one is available.

The First-Time oral tradition presented in Price (1983) consists of personal names, praise names, proverbs, speech fragments and song lyrics. These are often in esoteric language and either refer directly or elliptically to First-Time characters, events and relationships (Price 1983: 8). The praise names of First-Time people as well as proverbs referring to specific incidents are now played on the *apínti* drum at specified ritual and political occasions. This tradition also includes songs. Some of these supposedly date from First-Time period and are still sung and played at shrines such as Awónêngè, the First-Time ancestors, to bring pleasure to them. Others are sung during funerals to commemorate specific First-Time events. There are, as well, those songs sung at the shrines to maintain and glorify the cult of particular *óbias* and gods, regarded as being especially powerful in First-Time (p. 5, 8). The specific languages identified by Price (1983) as being named in the First-Time oral traditions of the Saramaka, are Papá, connected to the Gbe-Fon language cluster of West Africa, Komanti to the Akan-Twi dialect cluster, and Luángu to Kikongo and related language varieties. Often, archaic and esoteric language use in the First-Time spoken texts is reinforced by representation in media other than speech, notably drum and horn blowing patterns within Saramaka ceremonies.

Typical of possibly preserved archaic and esoteric language use are proverbs. Price (1983: 30, fn. 26) refers to the case of the proverb "Wása úsu wása," considered by the Saramaka as esoteric First-Time language. It does not show any trace of obvious Saramaccan language influence. It translates into normal Saramaccan as "*Téé i ta séki dèê páu i músu mêni i hédi*", i.e. 'When you shake a dry tree, you must mind your head' 1983:30, fn. 26). The brevity of the original as compared with the length and complexity of the Saramaccan 'translation', suggests that the latter is an equivalent proverb rather than a translation proper. The existence of such material opens the prospect that some of the exact language of the First-Time texts may date back to the formative period of Saramaccan Creole. This creates the possibility that we might, in addition to information about who spoke what language to whom and when, gain access to actual First-Time language forms and structures in the data.

This oral tradition is the means by which, historically, the Saramaka and their constituent clans have sought to define themselves in relation to other groups. This body of oral tradition, however, like documentary historical records, is open to the question about its historical accuracy. Does it faithfully represent actually occurring historical episodes and spoken exchanges from the First-Time period? This is an issue we will have to face in the course of the analysis.

The Saramaka Conception of First-Time

The Saramaka recognize the time of the signing of the peace treaty with the Dutch in 1762 as a watershed in their development as a people. Their traditions clearly identify that which is associated with the period up to this point as sacred, and clearly demarcated as belonging to 'First-Time'. Accompanying notions of First-Time stories are those of First-Time language. This very clear awareness in Saramaccan oral culture has both a positive and a negative effect on a literal historical interpretation of these stories. These stories are reified within ceremonies which seek to preserve memories of the pre-1762 heroic First-Time era. They, therefore, have the potential to conserve in more or less unchanged form both the content of the narratives and the esoteric language forms associated with the narrative. However, many of the details relevant to an understanding of the language situation on the plantation and in the early Maroon days, are likely to be conflated into simplified images representing the entire era.

Two examples of this can be pointed to. According to Price (1983: 101), the Saramaka transform conceptually the Creole forest-born leaders of the mid- and late eighteenth centuries into late seventeenth century African born runaways. Additionally, thousands of individual Saramakas would have fought against the Dutch between the 1680s

and the time peace came in 1762. However, only a few score names are invoked at Awónêngè to commemorate the ancestors who lived during the war years. The Saramaka oral history tradition, like all history, represents a radical selection from the mass of past events (Price 1983: 5).

Interpreting the Data

We want to use data derived from the First-Time oral traditions of the Saramaka, as available to us through Price (1983), and collected during the 1960s and 1970s. I suggest that the data is reliable for the purposes for which I propose to use it here. In support of this, one can firstly point to the remarkable extent of the correspondence between the Saramaka oral traditions and documented historical accounts, where these cover the same issues and events. One example of this concerns the story of the slave double agent, Kwasímukámba during the 1750s. He lived amongst the Saramaka for a year, escaped back into slavery, and planned a massive Dutch expedition against the Saramaka in 1754 (Price 1983: 153-159). The fact that Price (1983) manages to establish this relatively high level of correspondence inspires some level of confidence in the oral tradition when it covers issues outside the scope of the documentary record.

One gets a similar sense of the reliability of the tradition in the area of language. Saramaka oral traditions identify them as having deserted from, in the main, plantations owned by Spanish-Portuguese Jews. This is supported by Price (1983) who, using written historical records, establishes the link between the main Saramaka clans such as the Matjáu, Nasí, Kadósu, Biítu, Kasitú and Kaapátu and plantations owned by Spanish-Portuguese Jews in the area called 'Jews Savannah'. The fact that the Saramaccan language has a disproportionate number of Iberian lexical items, as compared with the other Suriname Creoles, lends further credence to Saramaka First-Time oral traditions.

The First-Time tradition is particularly effective in preserving language forms which have fallen out of everyday use. Price (1983: 27-28) illustrates this with reference to the archaic form *seéka* 'hunting snare', which survives in a modern Saramaccan proverb but nowhere else. This form is recorded in the Schumann (1778) dictionary of Saramaccan as *sekra*, with the same meaning.

The Saramaccan conception of First-Time includes the notion that special African languages were in use at that time. The keepers of the Saramaccan oral tradition have a keen sense of the special nature of language use during First-Time. This is illustrated by the following quote in Price (1983:15) of an interchange with one of the keepers of the oral tradition. '*Aso pipí mi sa djóubi.* [They're all reaping the benefits.] First-Time language I, Dángasi, say so!' (Price 1983: 15). This proverb seems to consist of esoteric lexical items fitted into a Saramaccan syntactic structure accompanied by Saramaccan grammatical items such as *mi* and *sa*. What precisely constitutes 'First-Time' language? Was it one language or several? Who spoke it, African born runaways and/or forest born 18th century maroons? It is hoped that a critical approach to the data will allow us to arrive at answers to these questions..

The Early Language Situation Reconstructed

Plantation Life

Evidence of the use of African languages on the plantation can be seen in the story associated with the following song. This is the story of a man who drugged a creek while his wife was pregnant, breaking a taboo on when creeks could be drugged to catch the fish in them. As a result, his wife died. The song commemorates this event. The song has lines in a language labelled by the Saramaka as *Papá*, which is identified by linguists as Gbe-Fon. According to Price (1983: 50), the last two lines of the first version of the song are '… in the esoteric Papá language'. The place name, the Damáwan Creek, identifies this song as originating from Plantation Waterland, the plantation from which Lánu and Ayakô, the legendary founders of the Saramaka clan, the Matjáu, originated around 1680 (Price 1983: 50). Because the song and accompanying story are told by Matjáu and viewed as relating to their plantation ancestors, this language use suggests that *Papá* was a language of everyday use on the plantation in the period before the Saramaka ran away.

The ritual importance of this song is considerable. According to Price (1983: 50), this *papá* song is always sung on the morning of Pikilío funerals when people are greeting the daylight by playing *adjú* to chase out of the village the ghost of the deceased, and all sorts evil. Here, the term *papá* is used in the sense of a musical style. It so happens that the musical style of this name coincides with the language use so labelled in this example.

1)   Dakúmbe fón Damáwan

     [Dakúmbe drugged Damáwan Creek]

     Awéi bo tobôsi

     Adjawé bó tobôsi

     (Price 1983: 50).

     Adjawé boóko ên

     (Price 1983:50, fn, alternative line).

Information about the language situation in early plantation Suriname can be found even in the names that children were given, as these are recounted in the oral tradition. This is the case with the next extract.

2) "Friend, listen well. Vumá came out from Africa. He and his [pregnant] sister Tjazímbe. Akoomí was born here, on the [Lower] Suriname River. No one knows who her father was. He never left Africa. But when they came [to Suriname], and the child was born, Vumá said, "She has become mine" [*A kó u mi*], and that is how Akoomí got her name" (1983:112, Fragment 96).

The interesting point here is that the Suriname born baby of a mother who arrives pregnant from Africa is supposed to have been given a Creole/Saramaccan language name by her uncle just arrived from Africa. The suggestion here is either of very rapid Creolisation or at least recognition that the child had a Creole identity separate from the West African identity of the mother and uncle.

Our next fragment covers not just the linguistic competence of West African slaves but that of the European whites.

3) "Bíatiísi had a younger sister who worked at the master's house in Jews Savannah. When the Nasí slaves had made an escape plan, Bíatiísi told a male slave named Záiya to go tell her sister to come to her. But she told him when he went he should be careful not to say "kiníngosu". Instead he should talk *akoopína* ["play" or "disguised language"] because if he said "kiníngosu" the white man would pick it up and forbid her to go. Záiya went to the sister but what do you think that he said? "Kiníngosu!" He forgot to talk *akoopína*. The white man caught on and didn't let her come. Then Záiya returned to Bíatiísi to say the white man wouldn't let her sister come. She understood that he hadn't followed her instructions and told him that he would have to stay with her ever after, until death. … Years later, in the forest they were desperately searching for water and Záiya finally found the river. At the place now called Záiya Creek " (1983:102, Fragment 82).

Price (1983:101) suggests the escape by the Nasis discussed in the above fragment took place in the 1690s. The fragment covers exchanges between slaves. What is significant is that even though there is absolute need for secrecy, none of the slave protagonists seem to have access to any form of speech which could not be understood by the white man. The only option available was *akoopína*, i.e. a form of consciously disguised language. This suggests that, by that time, the language which the slaves used to communicate amongst themselves was a language which the whites could understand. It also suggests that they had no language which they could understand but which was not understandable to the whites. Price (1983:102) identifies the plantation in question as one owned by the Spanish-Portuguese Jewish Nassy family, located on the Cassipora Creek.

Flight

In the First-Time narrative, stories of flight from the plantation play a significant role. From a linguistic point of view, the give us a sense of what kinds of language behaviours and knowledge were being taken into the forest by the maroons. The item below is the first of these we shall consider.

4) Ayakô's flight from Pln. Waterland: '… He escaped. He ran off with his sister and her baby daughter … When he got to the edge of the forest, he called out his praise name. "I am the one! Okúndo bi okúndo. The largest of all animals. I may not have iron (tools) but I can still raise my family!" Then he entered the forest and continued till evening. All he carried was the [great *óbia*] Lámba gourd' (Price 1983:48, Fragment 2).

'Ayakô was made overseer of Plantation Waterland. He was in charge of all the slaves. It was at the time they were marching the slaves each day to dig the canal at Para. The work was too heavy. They couldn't take it any more. So they made a plan and escaped' (1983:48, Fragment 3).

The esoteric language formula, *Okúndo bi okúndo*, used in Fragment 2 by Ayakô to announce himself to the forest, is the verbal form of a drum slogan in modern use. It is played on the *apínti* (talking) drum to summon the important village officials known in the Saramaka language as the *gaán* (big) *basiá* to council meetings. This title is related etymologically to basya, a term in Sranan, the coastal Creole of Suriname, for "black overseer" or "slave driver" on plantations. Price (1983: 47-48) notes that Fragment 3, like several other oral accounts from the Saramaka Matjáu clan, states that Ayakô, during his period of enslavement, served as plantation overseer or driver. The praise name mentioned in 2, through the linguistic association between the Saramaccan language term, *gaán basiá* and the Sranan form, *basya*, links Ayakô to the job function he performed as a plantation slave.

The link could have been made in one of two ways. What was originally the praise name of Ayakô, the slave plantation *basya*, could have been assigned subsequently to the ceremonial role of the Saramaka *gaán basiá*. Alternatively, the association could have been from the spoken version of the drum slogan currently played for the *gaán basiá* to Ayakô, the former *basya* on the slave plantation. Only the former would give us conclusive evidence about language usage on the plantation. As it is, this alternative is the more plausible given the fact that Ayakô was, according to the First-Time narrative, born in West Africa. He would, as a consequence, have been a native speaker of a West African language. In the fragment, the esoteric language utterance was a ritual one, presumably addressed to the spirits of the forest. In more prosaic terms, he was using the shouting of his praise name as a means of psyching himself to enter the forest and face all the dangers that might be awaiting him. Given his African background and the praise name employed, it is clear that he is carrying into the forest the knowledge and use of at least one African language. Its use is, however, affective, serving as a means of releasing emotional energy, rather than as a medium of communication with someone else.

5)   'Mbaki óo, mbakí gwaniní é. Mbaki óo

          mbakí gwaniní. Ma a di yúu tén u dê a gwaniní. Hên

          gwaniní djómbo tjêle, tjêle, tjêle, tjêle, tjêle.

'Mbakí gwaniní, [term of address for the *óbia*]/ In the days we were with the eagle [or at the time we had the eagle's power]/ The eagle would jump *tjêle tjêle tjêle* [the sound of the eagle jumping.] (Price 1983:53, Fragment 11).

The song is sung, according to the First-Time tradition, by Ayakô. It has two addressees. The first and ostensible addressee is the war spirit or *óbia* of the Matjáu clan, Afíima. The ostensible message is one which praises the spirit by reference to the eagle, its key symbol. The other addressee, simultaneously indirect and more immediate, is Ayakô's wife, Asukúme.   It warns her to put his baby son, Dabí, in the bulrushes so as to prevent his crying betraying her to the whites who were searching the area. Here we have a song, ostensibly addressed to an *obía*, but indirectly addressed as a warning to his wife. We have here ritual communication with the spirit world which is intended to send a real message, albeit coded in metaphor, to an actual living person present.

The language of the song is, in the main, Saramaccan. The only esoteric item here is *mbaki* which occurs attached to *gwaniní* 'eagle' and seems to be functioning as a form of address. We, therefore, have evidence of Saramaccan playing a role not just in communicating between persons but with the spirit world.   Below is another example of language use during the period of flight from plantation slavery.

6)   'At the pool, one man said to another, "Gwínzu." The second one answered, "Gwínzu." The first said, "Gwínzu, the whites are getting close. When I *tjulú*, you should *tjalá*." The other answered, "No way, Gwínzu, I simply can't make it." The first said, "Gwínzu, just keep at it, and you'll succeed." Later the second said, "I can't go on." The first

said, "Just keep going, and little by little you'll win." And thus they passed the swamp… Captain Maáku of Kámpu used to tell us boys, "Gwínzu, keep at it and you'll succeed" (1983:78, Fragment 46).

This condensed story of how Kaási led his people across the Ma Pugúsu swamp, moments before the enemy arrived, remains the high point of Saramaka Lángu recollections of their history. The collective memory of this highly charged event is preserved in esoteric language at rituals at the Dangógo shrine of Awónêngè, the ancestors, as well as in everyday proverbial usage concerning the importance of perseverance' (Price 1983:79).

The link which Price (1983: 78-79) is able to make with an actual documented 1712 raid on a Maroon settlement in the area, establishes the literal historical authenticity of the events as recounted in the fragment. Does this authenticity extend to the esoteric language usage contained within the story? Embedded in the regular Saramaccan language from which the English translation is made, the esoteric forms, *gwinzu* 'man', along with two obviously related forms, *tjulú* and *tjalá*, both clearly verbs. This suggests that at the time, African lexical items were integrated into the emerging or emerged Creole language, along with still apparently functional suffixes. More importantly, by contrast with the esoteric forms dealt with so far, these items are being used as part of a normal literal language interchange between two people. We have here evidence of presumably West African lexical items being absorbed as loans into Saramaccan.

Meeting and Greeting

The First-Time oral tradition has numerous instances of runaways, either as individuals or groups, meeting in the forest during their journeys. These stories of journeys and meetings serve the modern function of staking territorial claims. Greeting routines play an important role in these stories and the uses to which they are put. In 7) below, there is a one sided sequence of esoteric language coming from Gúnkúúkúsu and directed at Ayakô's sister, Sééi. Strictly speaking, he was announcing his presence and giving her instructions to put away her chickens in order not to keep his presence secret. The authenticity and the sacredness of the esoteric language is asserted by the story teller. This he does by identifying that these words are now uttered at the time when libations are poured on special occasions.

7)

‘When Gúnkúúkúsu [the Wátambíi leader] fled to follow Ayakô, divination led him to where Ayakô was living. When he arrived at the edge of the camp, he didn't see Ayakô. But he saw the woman [Ayakô's sister] Sééi. He called out, "Ahúngwadja". She just stared at him. All she could see was a runaway. He said, "Awángamádesúsu". Because that man had come with a powerful *óbia* and had been living for days at the outskirts of the camp. Every day he would come to see if his friend Ayakô was there and he had lived by stealing Sééi's chickens. Now, he had finally come by daylight. He knew that if he simply appeared at a strange camp, they would kill him, thinking he was bringing the whites. That's why he called out to her, "Ahúngwadja". Three times he said it. She was silent. Then he said, "Awángamádesúsu. Mi doro ko kadja," which means, "I have arrived. Old woman, put your chickens in their baskets. It's me!" Today [on special occasions] people pour libations using these [secret] words. But it was Gúnkúúkúsu who first spoke them (Price 1983: 59, Fragment 18).

The greeting sequence in 7) clearly represents a precursor to the actual meeting between Gúnkúúkúsu and Sééi's brother, Ayakô. In 8) is presented the greeting sequence taking place between Ayakô, the Matjáu leader, and Gúnkúúkúsu, the Wátambíi leader.

8)

‘When they finally met, that first time, the [Wátambíi] man called out, "Awesáánu". The other replied, "Awesáánu". The first said, "Gbégbéde wédjamè". The other answered, "Awandíkbóu." Then they embraced, "djuuwè"' (Price 1983: 58, Fragment 17).

The greetings and the esoteric language in which they are expressed in 8), are central to establishing and reinforcing the relationship between two Saramaka clans, the Matjáu and the Wátambíi. This fact implies both authenticity and sacredness for persons operating within Saramaka culture. Price (1983: 7) seeks to establish this by pointing out that Matjáu clan members describe in tiny detail the manner in which Gúngúúkúsu, the ancestor of the Wátambíi clan

greeted their own ancestor, Ayakô when they reunited in the forest after fleeing the plantation. He indicates that Saramaka etiquette requires the visitor rather than the host to extend the first greeting. This, he argues is the reason for the importance of this historical fragment, and I would add, the esoteric language in the greetings within the fragment. Within the greetings and the sequence in which they take place lie evidence that Matjáu preceded the Wátambíi into the forest and, therefore, had priority when it came to land entitlements and other matters of status.

 The esoteric language usage in 7) and 8) suggests that such greetings were a domain within which West African languages were preserved in the late 17th century. Also, the fact that they would require that both parties speak the same language, it might imply that these greetings were taking place between speakers of the same West African language. We have already seen cases where protagonists of First-Time stories do not have a common language other than the early Saramaccan. In these greeting sequences, however, a common language in addition to Saramaccan is implied.

Addressing the Physical Environment

 In 9) and 10) respectively, we have songs which are reported to have been sung by Kwémayón, Ayakô's *óbiama* and by Ayakô himself. They are sung when claiming sections of the Upper Suriname River for Ayakô's clan, the Matjáu. The song lyrics seem to be a mix of esoteric language and Saramaccan. In 9), the river takes away Kwémayón's sacred clay pot at Déwawe, a tiny island on the Upper Suriname River. In 10, the river does the same to Ayakô's armband. In both cases, this mix of esoteric language and Saramaccan are being used to address the spirits of the river.

 9)

'Kwémayón called out [singing]:

    Déwaweo, Déwawe

Gánsa mi yánvaló

Mi yánvaló nawé o, mi yánvaló nawé

Déwawe mi yánvaló nawé

Mi yánvaló nawé o, mi yánvaló nawé

Gánsa mi yánvaló nawé

Déwawe mi yánvaló nawé' (1983:66, Fragment 28).

   'That is how Kwémayón spoke to the River begging permission of it, to live there' (1983:66, Fragment 29).

10)

'When Ayakô's armband "went" [into the river], he sang out:

   Wínzu fu Amaíduwe

   Wínzu Amaíduwe

   Hándi kóko djaío

   A goé uou wínzu

Wenwe yánvaló

Háni kóko djaí éo

Wínwi yánvaló

A goéooéééé

Which signifies [loosely], 'the dearest thing I own you have taken. Finally, I've bested the River. I'll live on this river. I claim it. Because I've paid for it' (1983:67, Fragment 30).

In 11), we get a case of a claim that one of the place names which appear in the narrative of wandering that accompanies the events which produce 9) and 10). Here, we notice that the place name, *Awáósu*, is described as Papá. In fact, only the first part is not normal Saramaccan. The latter, *ósu* 'house', is a regular Saramaccan lexical item. This unclearness in the distinction between a West African language such as Papá and Saramaccan is an issue which will arise throughout this analysis. For now, it is sufficient to note that the language mix and unclearness of the story teller in 11) seems to match the mixed language used to address the river spirits in 9) and 10) above.

11)

'So he came to [the site of] Dángogó, the rapids called "Awáósu" [in Papá language] …' (1983:68, Fragment 32) [Otjútju].

Addressing Family Members

The fragments in 12) and 13) deal with family relations. Here we see two distinct forms of language in use. In the first, Alábi, an 18th century leader who grew up in the forest, is reported to have requested in 1779 the return of a sister captured by the Dutch several decades earlier and enslaved. The song in 12) was supposedly sung by Alabi's mother as she pined for her stolen daughter (Price 1983: 9). This song, whose lyrics are directed at the child, are in Saramaccan rather than any form of esoteric language. It does raise the prospect that in the forest, in the early decades of the 18th century, the literal mother tongue, the language used by mothers to speak to children, was Saramaccan.

12)

'Tutúba, Tutúba u mi o mmá

Míi o, u míti goonliba?

'Tutúba, my Tutúba, [little] momma

Child, oh, Will we ever meet again on this earth?' (Price 1983: 9).

The next involves an exchange between Abámpapá, one of the early escapees and founders of the Kwamá clan, and Alúbutu, variously described as his grandson or sister's son. The younger man had been brought up in the forest by the older one. The exchange below involves the younger man, in a third attempt at preventing the older man from going off to kill Ayakô out of revenge, finds the appropriate verbal formula to convince Abámpapá.

13) 'Alúbutu said, "Don't go and fight Ayakô." He said, "*A fí a na kwonú / Kwanákwa / Kwanákwa adjú / Kwanákwa.*" [Alternative: *a fí a na kwonú kwanákwa adjú / kwá kwá kwanákwa kwanákwa adjú kwanákwa.* The man spun around and said, "Child, is that the way it really is? Then I give in" (1983:97, Fragment 73).

Price (1983: 96) explains that a verbal formula such as this is a *nòngô*. This is a semantically compressed proverb with a meaning not derivable, at least in the twentieth century, from the individual words themselves. This particular *nòngô* can be expressed in modern everyday Saramaccan as *a disá ná a táki sábi sô* "not doing something can avoid 'I told you so'". By not committing a rash act insures that you will not later say, "If only I had known" (Price 1983:96). The *nòngô* in 13) is crucial for explaining the rulership succession amongst the Saramaka. Ayakô, grateful to Alúbutu for saving his life, is supposed to have handed his ruler's stool to the latter. The story is supposed to establish that Alúbutu's accession to the position of ruler was not by right of descent but at the pleasure of Ayakô. This had the effect of establishing that rulership could not subsequently be passed on within Alúbutu's lineage, the Kwamá, but had to revert to Ayakô's line, the Matjáu.

Linguistically, 13) suggests that, *nòngô*, oral formulae embodying traditional wisdom, were expressed in esoteric language, even when involving exchanges between close relatives. This is in keeping with the pattern observed so far for esoteric language use. It is most frequently used in contexts which are metaphorical, require interpretation and/or involve indirect communication. Saramaccan, by contrast, seems to have a much wider range of communicative functions.

Claiming Power over Language

Papá, like other named ritual languages in Saramaccan, is simultaneously a spoken language, a sung language and one which is represented in drumming patterns. According to Price (1983: 167), Papá performances mark the climax of Saramaka funeral ceremonies. He further suggests that the traditional rivalry between two of the main Saramaka clans, the Matjáu and the Abaísa, are played out in relation to their perceived proficiency in Papá performances. The following two fragments, the song and an explanation, commemorate an event in which two Saramaka leaders, one Abaísa, the other Matjáu, challenge each other to a Papá performance contest 'to the death'. Price (1983: 148) dates the incident to the 1750s.

14)

'Dokubónsu wíni Doísa

Gamánti dè gbèdé gamantí bái moyôn

Ma dí Doísa kó wíni Dokubónsu

Hên gamantí dè gbèdé, awó kabái wiyê" (1983:148, Fragment 167).

"The Abaísas and the Matjáus met at a *papá* performance. They were enemies; it was to be a grudge match. They agreed the rules for the contest: the first one to doze off would be killed. Well, the Matjáu, he was the first to doze off. That was Doísa. So Dokubónsu, the Abaísa, had bested him. He "killed" him; he knocked him with a club. But Doísa wasn't dead! They gave him water and he regained consciousness [*a weki baka*]. So they returned to the contest and continued playing. And then Dokubónsu was the one to doze off. Well, Doísa knocked him *bôbô bolo* dead! He killed him." (Price 1983:149, Fragment 168).

Price (1983: 149) argues that the choice of Papá performances to express Matjáu-Abaísa rivalries is not by chance. Even though the two groups are considered to be the best *papá* players, the Abaísa are the acknowledged by all,

including the Matjáu, to be the masters at this play. History might provide a possible explanation. According to Price (1983:149), Matjáu oral traditions suggests that the Matjáu who escaped earlier consisted of people of a broad range of ethno-linguistic backgrounds. These early maroons originated from a broad area of West Africa which extended from the Akan through the Yoruba speaking areas on the West African coast to the Bantu speaking region of Loango. This mix included a significant number of speakers of the Gbe-Fon language cluster, known in Suriname as Papá or Aladá. During the 18th century, by contrast, the Abaísa were labelled by outsiders as belonging predominantly to the Papá ethno-linguistic group (Price 1983: 149). This difference in ethno-linguistic composition between the two groups could serve to explain the generally accepted superiority of the Abaísa in Papá plays.

The actual language of the Papá fragment above is worthy of some attention. The first and third lines are in Saramaccan as evidenced by the verb *wini* 'defeat' and the serial verb *kó wini* 'come win'. Here we have a text affirming the ownership of Papá ritual in which the actual language is at least half in Saramaccan. This suggests that the labelling of a song or other text as Papá is not based solely or mainly on its linguistic form but on the drumming sequences with which it occurs and the actual role it plays in the funeral rites. This observation is reinforced by the next fragment we will examine in the following section.

Celebrating the Power of War

The First-Time oral tradition has war as a dominant theme. The tradition celebrates the fighting which the Dutch colonialists who were seeking to re-enslave the Saramaka. The example, 15), consists of lyrics from a Papá song celebrating a battle.

15)

"Folú e, Agbáila e, Adáumêni o

Folú tutú Agbáila

Adáumêni, i o yei

Folú [man's name], Agbáila [gun's name],

Adáumêni [woman's name]

[When] Folú fires Agbáila

Adáumêni, you will hear it " (1983:125, Fragment 131).

Price (1983:125), in commenting on the problem of identifying the characters mentioned in the song, suggests that this '… stems from the cryptic medium of preservation (Papá)…' The actual text of the song suggests quite the opposite. In spite of the song being described as Papá, its language, in the form of the verb *tutú* 'blow, fire' and the phrase *i o yei* 'you will hear', is entirely Saramaccan. The only feature which makes it Papá is the role it plays in funeral rituals (Price 1983:125-6). Interestingly enough, the event which it commemorates is one which occurs quite late in the First Time period, dated by Price (1983:126) as occurring around 1745. We may be seeing here evidence of the full insertion of Saramaccan into expressive functions which are labelled *Papá* and which previously would have been the preserve of Papá language text.

Apart from language names linked to West African ethno-linguistic groups, we get reference to esoteric *apúku* (forest spirit) language. It is this language which, according to Price (1983:154) is supposedly being used in the song within the following fragment.

16)

     'Then one day Wámba appeared in Yáyá's head and sang out:

     Lu-kéin o, ba-ná-ngo-ma hé-si é

     Lu-kéin o, ba-ná-ngo-ma hé-si é

    Kwa-sí-mu-kám-ba tjái ki-bám-ba. Ba-ná-ngo-ma hé-si ó.

     This song is in the esoteric *apúku* (forest spirit) language. "Lukéin" is the special term of address for Ayakô by his sister's daughter's god; "banángoma" is the *apúku* word for "[black] person" (*nêngè* in standard Saramaccan); "kikámba" is the *apúku* word for "white person" or "outsider" (*bakáa* in standard Saramaccan). The song, then, roughly translates "Ayakô, hurry, man! [repeat]/ Kwasímukámba is bringing the whites./ Hurry, man"' (Price 1983:154, Fragment 174).

The nouns in the fragment are, it can be accepted, in esoteric *apúku* language. However, the verb *hési* 'hurry' as well as the overall sentence structure is in normal Saramaccan.

Thus, what is being called here *apúku* language is almost certainly not an alternative language to Saramaccan. It is rather a specialized argot, a body of special lexical items that replace their normal Saramaccan equivalents in speech involving rituals related to forest spirits. *Apúku* language does not have the same historical status as a language as do languages associated historically with West African groups which came to Suriname. The latter were complete languages which had their roles and functions gradually eroded. Eventually, only some vestiges of these languages seems to have been sometimes appeared, used in a manner which is little or no different from esoteric *apúku* argot. This is a pattern already seen in some of the fragments so far discussed. The incident associated with the fragment is dated as 1754 (Price 1983: 156). The text could arguably be assigned a similar dating.

Claiming the Bringing of Peace

The signing of the peace treaty with the Dutch was a watershed in Saramaccan history. Not surprisingly, therefore, the issue of who amongst the Saramakas was responsible for the initiatives which led to peace, has been the subject of historical debate and dispute amongst the Saramakas themselves. Their traditional discourse around this question has generated bodies of language which are presented by the tellers as actual First-Time language.

17)

     'She said, "Tei u tei huena, vunvun sa fúu tjéni pôtò" [The first phrase, not in normal Saramaccan, means "little by little" or "over a long period of time"; the second means "hummingbird will fill up the sugar cane cauldron".] Then the old man, it wasn't long before … he died. And when he had died, peace finally came' (1983:160, Fragment 178).

The prediction, attributed to old woman, Yáya, is supposed have heralded the beginning of the negotiation process which led to the signing of the peace treaty with the whites. The discussions Price (1983: 160) had with members of the Matjáu clan suggest that the god, Wámba, came into Yáya's head and made the prophecy using her as a medium. This prediction attributed to Yáya, Ayakô's sister's daughter, marked the end of an era. The generation of African born leaders like Ayakô who had led the Saramaka in their flight into the first and their fight against the whites, was dying out. With their deaths, the younger generation of forest born leaders were much more willing to arrive at a peace treaty with the whites (Price 1983: 160). Significantly, the prediction, dated as taking place in the late 1750s, seems to have been made in Saramaccan, even if the first line may consist of archaic language.

Price (1983:167) states that the next fragment is attributed to Wíi, the Saramaka leader who some credit with bringing peace to the Saramaka maroons. Wíi is supposed to have sung Fragment 185 to commemorate his deed on his return to Saramaka in 1762. Today the song is sung by the Lángu descendants of Wíi as part of ceremonies for *apúkus* or forest spirits with whom Lángu people are believed to have a special connection. The song is considered to have great ritual power. Even though Price (1983:167) claims that this song is in the esoteric Luángu language, there is very little evidence of this. In fact, the song is almost entirely in Saramaccan. The item, *tólola* 'magical leaf', is identified by Price (1983:167) as an archaic 18th century Saramaccan word. This leaves only *Sángono*, the first part of Wíi's praise name, as a candidate for the label of 'esoteric Luángu language'.

18)

        Sángonomitólola

        Sángonomitólola

        Lángu nêngè tjá fíí kó

        Baawíi nêngè tjá fíí kó

        Sángonomitólola

        Sángono, Me-of-the-magic-leaf [Wíi's praise name]

        Sángono, Me-of-the-magical-leaf

        The Lángu clan has brought the Peace

        Baawíi's [an *apúku*'s] people have brought the Peace

        Sángono, Me-of-the-magic-leaf (1983:167, Fragment 185).

        'Wíi's praise name for himself includes an eighteenth-century word no longer in Saramaccan: "*tolollà …*" ….' (Price 1983:167).

The second fragment to be discussed here, 186 is in what Price (1983: 167) calls, with greater justification than his previous reference to esoteric Luángu, the esoteric Papá language by Matjáus as the standard response to the Lángu claim. Like the previous fragment, this one is also considered to have great ritual power (p. 167).

19)

        Adjoto kaako kaako silo

        Kwême djidjiló

        Avúvu míndo djádja

        Stole it, you just stole it

        Like the thief in the night

From the land of the dead (Price 1983:168, Fragment 186).

There is variation in the form of Saramaka texts in esoteric language. As is the case with other fragments in esoteric languages, different people produce this Papá fragment differently, with "Nóno. Yu! [No way. You!] Adjoto aako kaako/ We maasi djilo [also: Akwé maasi silo]/ Awemé djadja" also being heard as alternatives to Fragment 186 (1983:168).

Material in esoteric languages also presents problems for interpreting their meanings. Several interpretations are put forward for texts which no longer have any direct communicative meaning for those who use them. This can be seen by the comment, 'This is a very loose translation. The second and third lines apparently allude to the way Death steals its victims unawares. I have also been told that this Papá fragment means, "You're a liar. It wasn't you who brought the Peace. You stole it. By theft you brought the Peace" (Price 1983:168).

The next fragment is associated with one Saramaka leader, Afadjé, went to the city to sign a separate peace treaty with the whites. He then headed south back to the interior. As he was journeying home, he died of a stomach ailment. Before he died, he is supposed to have sung a song in Papá which has been preserved as part of the First Time oral tradition (Price 1983: 172). It was sung to appease the avenging spirit or *kúnu* addressed in the song as *Mása fu alúnya*. This event and presumably the song texts associated with them can be dated to 1763.

20)

'As Afadjé lay dying, he sang:

Mása fu alúnya [the name used for the *kúnu* repeated several times]

Ahunudé. Mi húúnhun.

Mi kó dafié. Mása fu alúnya. Ahunudé.

Mi depó, depó. Mása fu alúnya.

Ké, mi mása. Mi deláo.

Mása fu alúnya.

To beg the great *kúnu* [avenging spirit]. He said, "Great thanks. May the great *kúnu* leave me alone to arrive [in Saramaka]. But if it kills me, it mustn't kill any of my kinsmen again." Then it killed him. But it has never killed others, because Afadjé begged it so strongly.' (1983:173, Fragment 199).

Another version of this song is presented in the following fragment.

21)

'Afadjé sang; he prayed:

Vodu mekuta.

Mekuta Afadjé.

Huuhun, hunhun.

Mi ko dafié.

Ahunudé.

Vodu mekuta.

Mekuta Afadjé.' (1983:173, Fragment 200).

There is another possibly garbled text associated with this event has been collected.

22)

"Akwati logoso sawée madonu kaiwo fu naadji" (Price 1983: 174-5, notes on Fragments 197-201).

As Price (1983, 174-5) points out, a leader dying far away from home so soon after his official recognition by the whites, was bound to have been considered to have been an extremely evil omen. According to Saramakas, Afadjé's captains staff remained unused for decades and his position unfilled. The Papá songs he is believed to have sung as he died in great pain are considered amongst the most ritually dangerous in the repertoire of the Matjáu clan. The words, uttered in Papá, are believed to have been preserved in their original form through the years and have been used by Matjáus to protect themselves when they are away from home on journeys.' (Price 1983: 173, Fragment 201).

Linguistically, all the fragments ascribed to Afadjé in large measure consist of esoteric language whether Papá, as is asserted by the tellers of the story, or some other. These are, it should be noted, later texts, all dating to the late 1750s and early 1760s. It is significant that these later texts show such consistent use of esoteric or archaic language. They appear to contradict the tendency for the later texts generally to have greater use of the Saramaccan language. This may be the result of the especially dangerous nature which has been attributed to the Afadjé texts, commemorating as they do an even event associated with great evil. Also a factor is that they are addressed directly to the *kúnu* which presumably has to be communicated with in esoteric language. Most significant, however, is likely to be the fact that the song(s) had ongoing value as protection against evil spirits. The pressure, therefore, for the preservation of original esoteric language could have been enormous.

Marking the End of War

Price (1983, pp. 172-175) indicates that the Saramaka oral tradition retains no memory of the complicated negotiations which led to the signing of the Peace Treaty. This tradition merely recalls the bringing of the peace by Wíi and the day the Saramakas celebrated in Sentéa the coming of peace. What follows are fragments celebrating the peace at Sentéa. They all come from a single source, Tebini. He was the "Matjáu elder" who, by the late 1970s, was recognised to be the last living person able to describe the great day in detail. He described it using many of the songs supposedly sung at the event more than two hundred years before. These songs were preserved, in the 1970s, in then ongoing rituals for the earliest ancestors held at the Dángogó shrine of Awónêngèè. (Price 1983, p. 176). The following is the first of these songs.

23) 'When they had come to very end of the meeting [with the whites], well, we finally answered "Yes". As soon as we answered "Yes", everyone solemnly clapped their hands together *bólobólo* and then ceased [a sign of thanksgiving or prayer]. And we sang out:

Kibénde o – tjímbati kóa.

Anabéénsú o tidé tjímbati kóa.

Kibénde kibénde o - tjímbati kóa.

Anabéénsú e tjímbati kóa.' (1983:175, Fragment 202).

[Note by Price] 'Tebini explained the song's general meaning: "The heart is cool. There's no more fighting. Good things have come. People's blood mustn't fall on the earth any more." A speculative, more literal translation of these esoteric words would interpret "Kibénde" and 'Anabéénsú' as the names of the gods being addressed, and 'tidé tjímbati kóa' as 'today Tjímba's heart is cool'; separate traditions record that Tjímba was an *apúku* (forest spirit) on whom the Matjáus depended heavily in their battles with the whites.' (Price 1983: 175).

Accepting the Price (1983, p. 175) speculative translation, even though some of the language may be archaic or difficult to decipher, the song is entirely in Saramaccan. The only items that would not be immediately attributable to Saramaccan are Kibénde and Anabéénsú, the names of the gods to whom the song is ostensibly addressed, albeit in the third person. The linguistic form of the next fragment follows the same pattern. It shows archaic features but is obviously Saramaccan. The song directly addresses the *apúku*, Gbánambémbu, and indirectly the ancestors. There is a second song which is presented below.

24) 'Abíti abíti mulêlè dá mi avó

Mbéi mi súsu - Gbánambémbu

Un sê mi sa féni mulêlè?' (1983:176, Fragment 202).

[Note by Price] '"Mulêlè" is said by Tebíni to be an esoteric word for stars. 'Abíti abíti' means 'a few'. This haunting immensely sweet song would then be saying, 'A few stars for my ancestors [untranslatable by me] name of an *apúku*/ But how will I ever reach the stars?' [Or, 'But where will I ever find the stars?'] (Price 1983: 176).

In the following song, the direct addressees are the ancestors. Again we see the exclusive use of Saramaccan.

25)

'Mbéi-u sáa môo un pèê dá wi e.

Mbéi-u sáa môo un pèê dá wi e.

Mbéi-u sáa môo un pèê dá wi o.

Ké, mbéi-u sáa môo un pèê dá wi.

Wè téé --- di tén kísi un sa kó a wi o.

Mbéi-u sáa môo un pèê dá wi. (1983:177, Fragment 202).

[Note by Price] 'This song addressed to the ancestors, literally means, "Let's not be sad any longer, come 'play' [dance/sing/drum] for [with] us/ Brother, [first line repeats]/ Well, when the time is right, you can come to us [first line repeats]. (Price 1983: 177).

All these fragments look backwards to the ancestors who did not live to see the end of war. The peace of 1762 marks the end of the heroic phase in Saramaka oral history, the end of the story of the formation of the group. At this stage, the gods, the *apúku* and the ancestors are deemed to be addressable in Saramaccan.

Celebrating the Peace

What follows are the songs which commemorate the celebrations at Sentéa. The ostensible reason was the arrival of a white postholder, Ensign J. C Dörig. He had come as an emissary of the government and, as part of the conditions of the treaty, was to live among the Saramaka. It was his arrival that signalled for the Saramaka the final coming of the peace and produced the celebrations which are recorded in Saramaka oral history (Price 1983 p. 177). The first of these is labelled as a song in the Komanti language, even though the second and most of the third line are in Saramaccan. This song text does not have an obvious addressee, serving rather as expressive of personal joy, signalled by what *u* 'we' and *mi* 'I' are eating.

26)

> 'Hóndóó! Bái hóndóó! Hóndóó! Bái hóndóó!
>
> Tidé u nyán kóa e.
>
> Nyán mi nyán soo-sóo bándawa. É, bái hóndóó! (Fragment 202).
>
>
> [Note by Price] '… the song is in Komanti language: "Joy! Shout out 'Joy'!/ Today we et [celebrate] *kóa* [coolness? peace?]/ I am eating meat *bándawa*! Shout out 'Joy'" (Price 1983: 178).

The next item involves a story fragment which includes two songs. The first is sung in what is largely Saramaccan, even though it includes the untranslated item *dénde*. The second song is one attributed to the women who sing as they respond to an invitation to dance the *allele*. This song seems, except for *tuléle*, which apparently contains a reduced form of the word *allele*, to be in esoteric language.

27)

> 'Fií kó, -- kó dénde fií -- ó, -- kó dénde
>
> Peace has come, *kó dénde*, Freedom. *Kó dénde*, Peace'.
>
> 'Peace had come … Then they said, "Well, women, it's time to show off [strut your stuff, *poólu*], to dance *allele*." And they sang out:
>
> Kalíkatí tuléle, kalíkatí tuléle, kalíkatí tuléle,
>
> Kalíkatí tuléle, kalíkatí tuléle, kalíkatí tuléle'. (1983:180, Fragment 202).

The last song is an *adunké* supposedly composed on the spot by a woman who had been asked why she had not attended the *allele*. The song she sang is preserved as part of the rituals honouring the ancestors by the singing of songs they loved when they were alive. The song text represents a spoken exchange between Saramaka women at the time of the peace (Price 1983, p. 177). Significantly, it is entirely in Saramaccan.

28)

'Diítawéndjèmánu, Andí mbéi i án kó na allele? Hóókóó –

Bêlekísigbada Kwasí án kê mi kó! --- Hóókóó.'

Diítawéndjèmánu [the woman's play name], Why didn't you come to the *aléle*? *Hóókóó*

[expression of joy], [Expletive] Kwasi didn't want me to come. *Hóókóó* [expression of joy]. [Expletive] Kwasí didn't want me to come. *Hóókóó.*' (1983:181, Fragment 202).

Summary of Text Usage

In the table below, the term 'Claimed' refers to the language label which is assigned, usually by the story teller, to the particular body of language. This is distinguished from the label 'Actual' which is assigned to what the language variety actually is. The only specifically identifiable language variety is Saramaccan, 'archaic' or otherwise. The term 'Unidentified' covers any language variety other than Saramaccan in the text. The columns for 'Addressee' and 'Message' are self explanatory, with the one for 'Mod. Function' covering the modern functions to which the particular bodies of language are put as part of present day Saramaccan culture.

No.	Date	Language		Addressee	Message	Mod. Function
		Claimed	Actual			
1	1690	Papá	Unidentified, Saramaccan	General	Anecdote	Funerals
2	1690	-	Saramaccan	General	Ancestor Name	Explanation of Name
3	1690	Saramaccan	Saramaccan?	Slave/ Bíatiísi 's sister	Escape message	Explanation of Creek Name
4	1690	Esoteric	Unidentified	Forest spirits	Praise name	*Gaán basiá* drum slogan
5	1700	Esoteric	Unidentified/ Saramaccan	*Óbia*, Wife	Secret Instruction	Remembering Afíima *óbia*
6	1710	Esoteric	Unidentified	Maroon	Instruction	Anc. Rituals, proverb
7	1712	Esoteric	Unidentified	Sééi	Greetings	Rituals, Land Rights
8	1712	Esoteric	Unidentified	Ayakô, Gúnkúúkúsu	Greetings	Rituals, Land Rights
9	1720	-	Unidentified, Saramaccan	River	Begging Permission	Land Rights
10	1720	-	Unidentified, Saramaccan	River	Boast	Land Rights
11	1720	Papá	Unidentified, Saramacan	General	Place Name	Land Rights
12	1740	-	Saramaccan	Maroon Child	Genealogy	Clan Origins
13	1740	Esoteric	Unidentified, Saramaccan	Abámpapá	*Nòngô,* Proverb	Chieftancy Claims
14	1750c.	Papá	Unidentified, Saramaccan	General	Song?	Ritual Rights over Papá
15	1745	Papá	Saramaccan	Maroon Woman	Song	Funerals

16	1755	*apúku* language	Unidentified, Saramaccan	Ayakô	Message	Historical recall
17	1755	-	Archaic Saramaccan	General	*Nòngô* used in Prophecy	Marking onset of Peace
18	1762	Luángu	Saramaccan	General	Boasting song	Sung for *apúkus*
19	1762	Papá	Unidentified	Wíi (Maroon leader)	Counter-claim song	Matjáu clan Peace claims
20	1763	Papá	Unidentified, Saramaccan	Avenging spirit /*Kúnu*	Prayer	Protection for travellers
21	1763	Papá	Unidentified, Saramaccan	Avenging spirit /*Kúnu*	Prayer	Protection for travellers
22	1763	Papá	Unidentified	Avenging spirit /*Kúnu*	Prayer	Remembering Adjáwe
23	1762	-	Archaic Saramaccan	Anabéénsú, Tjímba	Celebration of Peace	Commemoration of Peace
24	1762	-	Archaic Saramaccan	Gbánambémbu	Remembering the Ancestors	Commemoration of Peace
25	1762	-	Archaic Saramaccan	Ancestors	Invitation to Play	Commemoration of Peace
26	1762	Komanti	Unidentified, Saramaccan	General	Celebration of Peace	Commemoration of Peace
27	1762	Esoteric	Unidentified, Saramaccan,	Maroons	Celebration of Peace	Commemoration of Peace
28	1762	-	Saramaccan	Maroon Woman	Mockery	Commemoration of Peace

Non-textual Information

We have so far focussed on information provided specifically by language use within the First-Time texts themselves. There is, in addition, some non-text information which has linguistic relevance. This will be examined here.

The First-Time traditions of the Matjáu, a clan of the Saramaka, show a strong awareness that indigenous people and Africans were together slaves on the early plantations of Suriname. He indicates that he had often been told that "the Indians escaped first and then, since they knew the forest, they came back and liberated the Africans" (Price 1983:48). This fact introduces the prospect of influence on Saramaccan from Arawak, both on the plantation and during the early days of the escape.

'Then the spirit of his wife came into his head, and he arose suddenly and ran into the forest ... When Lánu went out into the forest, he ran this way and that, calling out to his wife, trying to find her. This woman was from Dahomey; they called her Osíma from Dahomey. Well, he kept calling out and calling out until he got deep into the forest. Finally, the forest spirit (*apúku*) named Wámba called out to him.   And Wámba came into Lánu's head and brought him directly to where some Indians lived. These Indians welcomed him, took care of him and gave him food. And he lived with them there' (1983:46, Fragment 1).

'Ayakô ran away to seek his older brother, Lánu. He found him and saw that he had been well taken care of by the Indians, that he had done well there. He too found things to eat there' (F4, p. 49).

In the first of the above abstracts, we get some specific information about the origins of Lanu's wife, and as a consequence the language situation on the slave plantation from which he escaped. With her country of origin being identified with Dahomey, her language background would have been most likely have been Gbe-Fon. Both of the extracts, in addition, introduce the prospect of indigenous linguistic influence in the period immediately after escape

from the plantations. This combines with a general awareness within the Saramaka oral tradition, as noted by Price (1983, p. 48) of previous contact between enslaved Africans and indigenous people on the sugar plantations.

Conclusions

Language Labels

In Price (1983), we see the tellers of the stories showing considerable language awareness. They attach language labels to many of the special bodies of language presented in their original form in Price (1983). The language labels they use that may be identified with known languages are Papá, Luángu and Komantí. The labels are identified in the literature respectively with the West African languages or language clusters, Gbe-Fon, Kikongo and Twi-Akan. The first of the three language labels, Papá, receives by far the most references in the Price (1983) collection. There are eight references to Papá by comparison with one reference each to Luángu and Komantí. The difficulty with the Papá label, in particular, is that it is simultaneously applied to songs of a particular style and to drum patterns which associated with such singing. Language labels, therefore, become inseparable from the various non-linguistic media within which the particular language form is used. On occasion, it is these non-linguistic forms become dominant in the definition. As a result, the label attached to these secondary forms often becomes transferred to the language forms in the songs, even when these language forms themselves are obviously Saramaccan.

Price (1983, p. 154) identifies in one case the special language used in a story as *apúku* or spirit language. The main body of the text is in Saramaccan with the accompanying translation providing meanings for the special *apúku* vocabulary items. This suggests simply special vocabulary items used when addressing the forest spirits.

Other bodies of language, Price (1983) labels as 'archaic'. These consist of Saramaccan texts including forms that are not in current use.   A related term, used more frequently than 'archaic' is 'esoteric'.   Price (1983) uses this label for language obviously not current Saramaccan, not identifiable as archaic, and not assigned any language label by the teller.

In all this, there is a language label which seems to be missing. Given the known influence of indigenous people, in particular the Arawaks on Saramaka history and language, the absence of any ritual language assigned to this group is significant. A working hypothesis, however, has to be that some of the special bodies of language, notably those addressed to features of the environment such as rivers and to the forest spirits, may show some Arawak influence.

Saramaccan as a language is never named. As the current language of the Saramaka and the language in which the stories were told, its use is taken for granted in the stories and its presence is inferred rather than stated.

Reconstructed Language Functions

 We now focus on conclusions we can arrive at based on actual language use in the First-Time stories. Examining the languages actually used, we have only six cases of 'Unidentified' alone and ten of Saramaccan alone. This is by comparison with twelve cases of 'Unidentified' & Saramaccan. In nearly every case of this category, the main language is Saramaccan with 'Unidentified' accounting for lexical items present within a Saramaccan language frame. The overall picture for First-Time, therefore, is one in which there is some residual use of 'Unidentified' language, but in which Saramaccan reigns supreme, either alone or with a smattering of lexical items from 'Unidentified' language varieties.

 Example 3 is quite significant in the reconstruction of the historical role of Saramaccan. Zaiya is unable to communicate a secret to Bíatiísi 's sister in the presence of a white man without using a special system for disguising language. This suggests that by 1690, on a Nassy owned plantation and perhaps by extension on other Spanish-Portuguese Jewish owned plantations in Suriname, African slaves had no common language which could not be understood by whites. An extreme interpretation of this would be that a Saramaccan like language variety had emerged as a language common to all groups on the Suriname plantations of Jews' Savannah, African and European alike. The historical reconstruction proposed by Smith (1987) suggests that Saramaccan was originally an English-lexicon Creole which acquired Spanish-Portuguese vocabulary features in the late 17th century on the plantations of Jews' Savannah. Such a reconstruction would be consistent with the idea that a new, plantation based Creole, emerged as a lingua franca between all groups, African and European, on the Jewish plantations of Suriname. The seemingly overwhelming power of plantation Creole on incoming Africans can be seen in example 2. This consists of a Saramaccan type name given to a child who was supposedly conceived in Africa but born in Suriname around

1690. The mother would not have spent much time in Suriname yet is stated, according to the story, to have given the child a Creole language name.

This Creole language dominance is seen when the First-Time ancestors are addressed as a group. These ancestors are the ones that fled from the Suriname plantations but did not live to see the coming of the peace. These were either African born or conceived to be so by Saramaka tradition. In example 25, the song addressed to these ancestors, the language used is Saramaccan, albeit an archaic variety of that language. Saramaccan rather than any of the West African languages, including Papá, is presented by Saramaka traditions as the dominant language throughout the First-Time period. The language of the song addressed to the lost child, Tutúba in example 12, leaves us in no doubt that by 1740, Saramaccan was quite literally the mother tongue of children growing up in Saramaka maroon communities.

Conclusions

 The following represent a reconstruction of the language situation amongst the Saramaka in Suriname between 1680 and 1763, the period covered by First-Time narrative (Price 1983). This reconstruction is based on information and language forms presented in the First-Time texts themselves.

     i)   Indigenous/Arawak language influence existed both on the plantations and in the forest.

     ii)   Whites knew the emerging (Saramaccan) Creole as early as 1690s

     iii)   There was no shared language on the plantation which slaves could use to the exclusion of whites

     iv)   African born slaves almost immediately adopted a Creole linguistic identity for the Suriname born children, as well as themselves adapting to this identity

     v)   African languages continued to be used (a) as loanwords integrated into Saramaccan, (b) in greetings, (c) in rituals, notably communicating with the gods and spirits considered to inhabit the physical environment, (d) songs, (e) proverbs

     vi)   By 1762, if not earlier, Saramaccan dominated all day to day interaction and had even become appropriate for addressing spirits and deities.

References:

 Price, Richard. 1983. *First Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People*. Baltimore, MD and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

 Smith, N. 1987. *The Genesis of the Creole Languages of Suriname*. PhD Dissertation, University of Amsterdam.