Janneke Diepeveen & Matthias Hüning
# The status of Dutch in post-colonial Suriname

**Abstract:** Dutch is an official language not only in the Netherlands and Belgium, but also in Suriname, a country in South-America. Before its independence, Suriname was a colony of the Netherlands, starting as early as 1667. After its independence in 1975, the multilingual Republic of Suriname maintained Dutch as its official language, the language of education and public life. In this paper, we shall address two seemingly conflicting developments which take place in this former Dutch colony: on the one hand, the growing use of the creole language Sranantongo as a *lingua franca* across Suriname and on the other hand, the persistence of Dutch. We shall argue that the linguistic developments in Suriname must be understood against the background of a young nation which is constructing its own post-colonial national identity.

**Keywords:** Suriname, Dutch, Sranantongo, diglossia, standardization, post-colonialism

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# 1 Introduction: Suriname and the Dutch language area[1]

Dutch is a West-Germanic language and the mother tongue of about 23 million people. It is an official language in six countries, two of which in Europe and four in South-America. In Europe, Dutch is an official language in the Netherlands and in Belgium, more specifically in the region of Flanders in the north of Belgium, but also in the capital of Brussels, where both Dutch and French are official languages. In the republic of Suriname in South-America, Dutch is the one and only official language.[2] It is the language for education, in public life and in official documents. Finally, Dutch is the official language for a group of islands in the Caribbean, the former Netherlands Antilles which include Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, St. Maarten and St. Eustatius (altogether ca. 256.000 inhabitants). The islands Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten are independent countries within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Curaçao and St. Maarten became autonomous in 2010 whereas Bonaire, Sint-Eustatius and Saba (the 'BES'-islands) became special communities within the country of the Netherlands. However, Dutch is not their only official language. Since 2007, Aruba and Curaçao have Dutch and Papiamento (Papiamentu) as their official languages. The latter is an Iberian creole and it is the dominant language for daily speech, the media and primary education. Sint Maarten has Dutch and English as its official languages and the latter is used for daily communication. For the BES-islands there is a special language policy: Dutch is the official language, but the use of English and Papiamentu is officially recognized in certain domains of education and in the communication with government offices.[3]

Whereas the Caribbean islands are officially part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Republic of Suriname has been fully independent since 1975. Autonomy was prepared in 1954, when both Suriname and the Nether-

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**1** We want to thank Philipp Krämer for his valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper.

**2** By the time we received the proofs of this paper there has been a surprising new development. On 15 February 2015 Suriname's news site Waterkant.net announced that Minister of Education Ashwin Adhin is planning to recognize at least 20 languages spoken in Suriname as official languages. We cannot foresee the consequences of this decision.

**3** For information on these regulations, we refer to the following website: http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/erkende-talen/documenten-en-publicaties/brochures/2012/04/16/taalregelingen-voor-de-bes-eilanden-in-de-nederlandse-wet-en-regelgeving.html

lands Antilles got a certain degree of self-determination. Before, they used to be Dutch colonies. The Dutch established several settlements and colonies in the 17th century: in the north of South-America, in South-East Asia and in the south of Africa. We shall briefly introduce Suriname, its history and its ethno-linguistic characteristics in section 2. In sections 3, 4 and 5 of this paper we concentrate on the linguistic situation of post-colonial Suriname. We have the special situation that Dutch is the official language, whereas Sranantongo, an English-based creole, is widespread as the *lingua franca*. This situation seems stable, but it is controversial. We provide evidence that Dutch has a strong position in post-colonial Suriname and we investigate why this may be the case on the basis of eight explaining factors. Our discussion is based on recent literature and on data which we collected mainly through personal communication and interviews with various people in and from Suriname.[4] This is an exploratory investigation which is part of the project *Dutch++. Examples and new models for learning and teaching pluricentric languages*. In the e-learning project *Dutch*++ Surinamese Dutch is presented as one of the national varieties of Dutch.[5] In the present paper we shall argue that the linguistic situation of Suriname, particularly the status of Dutch vis-à-vis Sranantongo, must be understood against the background of a young nation which is constructing its own post-colonial identity.

# 2  Multi-ethnic and multilingual Suriname

Let us briefly introduce Suriname before we move on to discuss its ethnic composition (2.1.), its linguistic landscape (2.2.) and multilingual practices (2.3.). The Republic of Suriname is situated in South-America, to the north of Brazil, in between Guyana and French Guiana. Although the country has four times the size of the Netherlands, it has a relatively small population of only half a million people. Most of them live in the capital of Paramaribo. Nearly

80% of Suriname's surface is covered by tropical forests. Suriname has plenty of natural resources including wood, gold and bauxite. Nevertheless a large portion of its population is living in poverty. Linguistically, Suriname has an isolated position in South-America with Dutch as its official language. Dutch is the only language for education, for the government, official documents and regulations, for science, etcetera. Suriname is the only former Dutch colony in which the Dutch language is still prominent (de Bies 1997: 9).

## 2.1 Multi-ethnic society

Suriname is a multi-ethnic society. This is due to its history of colonialism with long-lasting slavery and indentured contract laborers. Carlin & Arends (2002) and Borges (2014) give an overview of the complex origins of Suriname's ethnic and ethno-linguistic composition with references for further reading. We limit ourselves to a short summary.

From 1600 onwards the coast of the Guianas in the north of South-America was colonized by Europeans. They set up commercial centers and plantations. Initially the Caribbean region was particularly important for slave trade. In 1651 the English started sugar plantations with experienced planters and African slaves. They laid the foundation for large scale sugar cultivation. The Dutch acquired Suriname in 1667 through an arrangement with the English, who took over New Amsterdam. From 1667 onwards, Suriname was a Dutch colony and would remain so until its full autonomy in 1975.[6] In early colonial times this stretch of land was called Dutch-Guiana and it was originally inhabited by Amerindian civilizations. Today there are about 12.000 Amerindians left and they live in the forest, striving to keep their culture intact.

Suriname was a plantation colony which produced for instance sugar, coffee and cotton. As the plantation colony was growing and Amerindian slaves could no longer meet labor demands, the colonists brought in thousands of slaves from the west-coast of Africa. In the early 18th century many slaves managed to escape from the plantations into the forest and established their own free societies there. As in many other (former) colonies, the community of escaped slaves was known as Maroons. In Suriname they are also referred to as 'bush Creoles'.

After the abolition of slavery in 1863 the Dutch were in need of new people to work at the plantations. This was the start of a period of contract labor-

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**6**  The English briefly reoccupied Suriname from 1799 to 1816.

ers from Asian countries. First of all Chinese workers immigrated from Hongkong. From 1873 onwards, there were Indian immigrants (Hindustani) from the colony of British-India, followed by Javanese immigrants from the colony of Dutch-India (Indonesia) in 1890. Many Asian immigrants stayed in Suriname. Today the Hindustani even make up the largest ethnic group in Suriname. The second largest group are the Creoles. This term refers to persons of African descent who may often show some admixture with other ethnic groups.

In addition to the groups discussed in this section Suriname still attracts new immigrants. Immigrants from Brazil are particularly involved in artisanal gold mining (Borges 2014: 29), whereas many Chinese immigrants choose the Paramaribo area to work as shopkeepers.

## 2.2  Multilingual society

Suriname is a multilingual society. First of all there is multilingualism on a national level: over twenty languages are spoken in Suriname. According to their origin, they can be classified into four main groups: Amerindian languages, European languages, creoles and Asian languages. For more information on each of these groups we refer to Carlin & Arends (2002).

a) The Amerindian languages are the original languages of Suriname, i.e., they are spoken by the indigenous people. They can be linguistically divided in Arawakan languages (e.g., Arawak), Carib languages (e.g., Carib, Trió) and Warao languages (e.g., Warao).

b) European languages are imported by the colonists, including the English and the Dutch. Today, Dutch is the most important European language: it is the official language; many people have adopted it as their main language and it is associated with upward social mobility.

c) However, English becomes more important, particularly since Suriname joined the *Caricom*, an originally English-speaking organization of Caribbean communities, in 1995. Not only does Suriname have a commercial relation with the Caribbean, but it is also culturally much more related to the Caribbean than to its geographically closer South-American neighbors. In addition, people in Suriname are regularly confronted with English in their everyday life. For instance, they are used to watching American TV-programs and films without subtitling (in the Netherlands and Flanders all English-spoken films and programs are subtitled).

d) Other European languages in Suriname include Portuguese, which played a significant role in the 17th century as many sugar estates were owned by

prosperous Portuguese Jews. The Sephardic Jews kept using Portuguese until far into the 18th century (Borges 2014: 17). Today, Brazilian Portuguese plays a considerable role in Suriname due to a recent immigration wave from Brazil (see e.g. Romero 2008).

e) Creoles originated in the contact of European colonial languages with those of (descendants of) African slaves who worked at the plantations. The slaves brought along their own West-African languages while the European settlers usually spoke various varieties of their home regions. At the plantations in Suriname, the slaves had limited access to the European languages but nevertheless needed to communicate with their masters, who were (initially) often English-speaking and with their foremen. In this context, various Surinamese creoles were created. Sranantongo or Sranan, formerly called Negro-English (*Negerengels*), Taki-taki, or Nengre, is an English-based creole with influences by West-African languages, Portuguese and Dutch. The Dutch influences were only added at a later stage. Sranantongo became the mother tongue of the slaves who passed it on to their children. In other words, Sranantongo is historically associated with the Creole population. Today it serves as the main language for interethnic communication in Suriname.

f) Other Surinamese creoles include Saramaccan (Saamaka), Aukaans (Ndyuka) and Paramaccan (Paamaka) and Kwinti. They originated from the languages used by the Maroons, the slaves who had left the plantations. These creoles are mostly used for communication within Maroon communities.

g) The Asian contract laborers imported various Asian languages into Suriname. In addition, Surinamese varieties of these Asian languages came into existence. The Hindustani brought several Indic languages, which over time were influenced by Sranantongo and by Dutch. This gave rise to Sarnami Hindustani, a Surinamese variety which is not like any present Indic language found in India (Borges 2014: 27). Javanese laborers brought along their Indonesian mother tongue, which was over time influenced by Sranantongo, Dutch and Sarnami Hindustani. This gave rise to a Surinamese variety of Javanese called Surinamese Javanese. The Chinese contract laborers brought different Chinese varieties to Suriname, particularly Hakka or Keija (a southern Chinese language). Today, following a new wave of Chinese immigrants, mainly Mandarin and Cantonese are used in Suriname (Borges 2014: 25). Chinese, Sarnami and Surinamese Javanese are predominantly used for communication within the respective ethnic group.

## 2.3 Individual multilingualism

Besides societal multilingualism, there is individual multilingualism in Suriname: individuals use two or three languages regularly. Each ethnic group in Suriname has its own language for communication within the own group. For further communicative situations people in Suriname use Dutch or Sranantongo. Thus, a child may use Sarnami Hindustani with his relatives at home, Dutch in the classroom and Sranantongo with his friends. Code-switching is common, both inter- and intrasententially: people may switch to another language within the same conversation (intersentential code-switching) but even within one sentence (intrasentential code-switching) (de Kleine 2002: 218). This phenomenon can also be observed on the internet. For a study on code-switching in Suriname with a special focus on Dutch and Sranantongo, see Radke (2013).

The preceding observations on individual multilingualism in Suriname are in line with current sociolinguistic research into social networks and communities of practice (see for instance Wardhaugh 2010 for references). While the older notion of speech community was too restrictive, these new concepts offer an adequate way to explain linguistic practice in Suriname. Thus, each language user participates in various social networks or communities of practice (e.g., home, the classroom, a club), each of which is associated with one or more languages. When participating in a certain community of practice, speakers foreground a certain social identity, which is marked by the use of a certain language. When moving on to the next occasion, they foreground a different identity and switch to another language.

The linguistic practices mentioned above give rise to various types of contact phenomena between the languages of Suriname. We refer to Borges (2014) for an extensive study. In the following sections we restrict our attention to Dutch and Sranantongo.

# 3 Dutch and Sranantongo in Suriname

We will now focus on the two languages that play a central role in post-colonial Suriname: the European language Dutch (3.1.) and the Surinamese creole Sranantongo (3.2.). We provide some information on their history in Suriname and we briefly introduce their present-day status. For more extensive information on the history and status of Dutch in Suriname, with refer-

ences for further reading, see for instance Gobardhan-Rambocus (1997), de Kleine (2002) and de Kleine (2013).

Suriname's so-called 'linguistic schizophrenia' (3.3.) will be investigated more closely in the remainder of the paper.

## 3.1 Dutch

Dutch has been the only official language in Suriname since its territory was colonized by the Dutch in 1667. During early colonial times, Dutch held the prestige position in Suriname, although the Dutch colonial government never propagated it (Gobardhan-Rambocus 1997: 246). In the beginning of Dutch rule, use of the language was limited to a small group consisting particularly of planters who did not allow the 'lower classes', particularly black slaves, to use it, let alone learn it. Although the Dutch planters wanted their language to be exclusive, they could not stop it from spreading. A generation of children was born as a result of relationships of Dutch planters with black female slaves which would constitute the core of Suriname's Dutch-speaking population (Gobardhan-Rambocus 1997: 227). They would give rise to a new class of self-declared free people who tried to distinguish themselves from the slaves. The Dutch language was one means to do this.

From 1876 onwards school attendance was made compulsory in Suriname for all children from 7 to 12 years old. This was the starting point of a language policy by the Dutch colonial government (Gobardhan-Rambocus 1997: 246). It was determined by law that the language to be used in education was Dutch. The Dutch authorities strongly discouraged the use of Sranantongo, which they considered as the language of the slaves. It was forbidden to speak Sranantongo at school and if children did, they were told to go and wash their mouths. For some time there were exceptions for children of Asian immigrants, but by 1910 they too were educated only in Dutch (Eersel 1997: 216). This was a clear sign of the Dutch colonial government that they wished to turn Suriname into a Dutch-speaking colony, although they did not intend to replace Sranantongo entirely (Gobardhan-Rambocus 1997: 229, 2008: 193). Schools for 'free' black children and children born from mixed couples were installed in 1760; children of slaves were not educated until 1844 (Gobardhan-Rambocus 1997: 228).

Until the first half of the 20th century the Surinamese society underwent a strong assimilation to Dutch (christian) culture or 'dutchification' (Gobardhan-Rambocus 1997: 232–233). Important factors enabling this degree of assimilation were education, missionary work, mass media and the fact that the

Surinamese society was organized according to the Dutch model. Another factor were activities by the *Sticusa* (foundation for cultural cooperation), an influential organization strengthening cultural ties between the Netherlands, Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles. Assimilation to Dutch culture and society was not equally strong for all ethnic and social groups in Suriname. It was particularly the elite which was 'dutchified' and this was mostly the case for the Creole population.

It is important to note that during the process of assimilation there have been no direct attempts to wipe out the other languages spoken in Suriname (compare Gobardhan-Rambocus 1997: 246). Commissions and institutions concerned with spreading Dutch did not aim at replacing all other languages by it.

After the Second World War there was a growing self-confidence of Suriname (Gobardhan-Rambocus 1997: 231). This resulted in a semi-autonomous status within the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1954 which included that Suriname was still financed by the Netherlands but that it could largely make its own decisions. During this period the Dutch language maintained its prestige position. This was partly due to the Surinamese elite of Dutch-speaking Creoles in the Paramaribo area. This prominent group, consisting of public servants, teachers and so on, chose Dutch as the language for progress in society (Gobardhan-Rambocus 1997: 232). The Creole community was quite self-confident and demanded full independence from the Netherlands. Finally, in 1975, the fully autonomous Republic of Suriname was installed with President Johan Ferrier.

Due to the burden of colonial history, the relation between Suriname and the Netherlands has always been of a complicated nature and it remains tense today. In a way this also holds for their cooperation with respect to the Dutch language. In 2003/2004, the position of Dutch in Suriname was officially confirmed as Suriname became an associate member of the Dutch Language Union. This is an intergovernmental organization in which the Netherlands and Flanders (the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium) collaborate with respect to the Dutch language in a very wide sense, including literature, spelling and education.[7] Critics of the accession of Suriname to the Dutch Language Union have uttered that Suriname has a Europe-oriented language policy rather than focusing on itself (Brandon et al. 2007 and Kroon & Kurvers 2009). Other critics point out that from a Surinamese perspective, the position of the members of the Dutch Language Union is not equal: Suriname is an associate

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**7**  In the period of 2007-2011, the Dutch Caribbean joined the Dutch Language Union.

member only. It does not have its own financial budget, hence it cannot start its own projects or initiatives but it is merely asked to cooperate in activities and research projects started by the Netherlands and Flanders. Due to this inequality, the Dutch Language Union is perceived by certain critics in Suriname as a neocolonial organization. They are convinced that it is a strategy of the Dutch to keep controlling Suriname. Their view may be strengthened indirectly by the current government of Suriname, which does not actively support the Dutch Language Union (Helen Chang, p.c.).[8]

Today, Dutch is the prestige language used for all official and formal situations: written documents, government offices, court proceedings, and also in the domains of work, media and education. Dutch is the language of instruction and it is taught in schools. Dutch is also the biggest language in Suriname in terms of the number of speakers. 200.000 consider it their first language and another 200.000 their second. It should be stressed that there are immense differences concerning the use of Dutch in the capital city of Paramaribo and in the remote districts in the interior parts of Suriname. In the latter areas, Dutch mostly is a foreign language (L2 or L3) and children usually first encounter Dutch at school (see 3.2.). By contrast, in the Paramaribo area, Dutch is more and more frequent as a mother tongue. School boys and school girls use Dutch more than adults (see Asin et al. 2004). People are more and more willing to pass the Dutch language on to their children. Many parents who themselves first encountered Dutch at school, now make sure their own children are already confronted with Dutch at home. In the Paramaribo area Dutch is commonly used in informal circumstances. This is shown in research, e.g., Fierens (2006), who interviewed young Surinamese in the capital and found that they consider it normal to use Dutch in informal situations like the cafeteria.

## 3.2 Sranantongo

Sranantongo is an English-based creole which is, historically at least, the first language for the Creole population in Suriname. The history of this language probably starts in 1651, when the English established sugar plantations on the territory of Suriname. After the Dutch had occupied the colony in 1668, the English linguistic base was maintained (Essed 1983: 47). From then on,

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**8** Helen Chang is a Surinamese staff member of the Dutch Language Union. She represents the Dutch Language Union in Suriname.

Dutch vocabulary was integrated as well. From 1844 onwards, children of slaves were educated in Sranantongo, which by that time was already an important *lingua franca* (Eersel 1997: 213). As explained in 3.1., Dutch became the official language of education in 1876. Nevertheless, Sranantongo remained an important *lingua franca* and today, it has even become **the** *lingua franca* of Suriname which is used for interethnic daily communication. People with different backgrounds, who speak different languages at home, typically use it for their daily communication and new immigrants use it, for instance new Chinese immigrants working as shopkeepers. To them, Sranantongo is easier to learn and use than Dutch (see Paul Middellijn in Romero 2008).

Sranantongo is particularly strong as a *lingua franca* in the interior parts of Suriname. People there do understand Dutch but they use other languages at home, for instance Maroon languages. As mentioned in 3.1, only a quarter of families in the interior parts of Suriname uses Dutch at home (Van Maele 2013). Children from different ethnic backgrounds tend to communicate in Sranantongo, which they often learn on the street. Most of them first encounter Dutch at primary school, where it is the language of instruction. For these children Dutch is a foreign language which may be difficult to learn, considering that is linguistically remote both from their L1 and from the English-based creole Sranantongo they use as a *lingua franca*. In this respect, Suriname differs from other creole-speaking countries in which the language of instruction has served as the base language of the creole (e.g., French and a French-based creole) and may thus be perceived as more familiar.

Sranantongo is not officially allowed as a language for education and it is not even taught as a school subject. The same educational methods are used and the same goals are to be attained all over Suriname. There are no different methods in the city and in the interior parts of Suriname. In the end, all pupils have to pass the same tests, whether Dutch is their native language or not and no matter how much or how little support they get at home. This is a well-known problem. In the interior parts of Suriname half of the children have to repeat the first year at primary school, many children skip school regularly or they do not go there at all. Most pupils have to go to secondary school in the Paramaribo area. When pupils with different backgrounds meet here, the ones coming from the interior parts of Suriname are clearly disadvantaged. For all of these reasons it has been suggested that the native languages or at least Sranantongo should be officially established as 'auxiliary language' at school (Van Maele 2013). Teachers in primary school already use Sranantongo from time to time, but there is no official language policy to back them up.

Sranantongo is mainly an oral language: it is uncommon for people to write it down. As a spoken language, Sranantongo has particular social functions in Surinamese society. People switch to Sranantongo when they express emotion, when they want to tell a story, gossip, discuss something or tell jokes. Thus, at the workplace, colleagues may go through the work schedule of the day in Dutch language and switch to Sranantongo when they want to add something personal or emotional. Fierens (2006) found in her survey that 45% of young Surinamese (of the age of 15-16) find a joke in Dutch less funny than a joke in Sranantongo. In the documentary *Ver weg of dichtbij* (Far away or nearby) produced by the Dutch Language Union a boy explains that he and his schoolmates talk about 'boring things' in Dutch, and that they use Sranantongo when things get exciting (Visser 2005). Sranantongo is perceived as short, snappy and to the point. No wonder it is popular in rap music and with young people. For the same reason, Sranantongo is used in public campaigns, in both oral and written form (slogans), for instance against smoking or against domestic violence.

People's associations with Sranantongo are ambiguous. There is a social stigma attached to it; it is often considered to be vulgar. For example, Surinamese men will not speak Sranantongo when they try to seduce women (Farid Khodabaks, p.c.). At the same time, Surinamese tend to feel a strong sense of national identification with Sranantongo. In addition, Sranantongo is used in political campaigns: president Bouterse introduced Sranantongo phrases in his political speeches in the 1980s to reach the people. This contributed to an association of the use of Sranantongo with nationalist politics (Romero 2008).

## 3.3  Linguistic schizophrenia?

On the basis of 3.1 and 3.2 we may conclude that we are dealing with two seemingly conflicting developments taking place in the former Dutch colony. Carew (1982) refers to this situation as Suriname's "linguistic schizophrenia". Sranantongo is strongly present in everyday life and in the minds of people, it is the second largest language in Suriname in terms of the number of speakers and it is steadily growing as a *lingua franca* across Suriname. Nevertheless, there is no official recognition of Sranantongo. On the other hand, Dutch is maintained as the official language, the language of education and public life in Suriname. In addition, there is a growing willingness, particularly in the Paramaribo area, to speak Dutch and of parents to pass it on to their children.

# 4 Explaining Suriname's linguistic situation

How can we explain the strong position of Dutch (in terms of social prestige, actual language use and official recognition) in post-colonial, multilingual Suriname – in comparison with Sranantongo as the country's *lingua franca*? In this section we identify eight possible explanatory factors. We start by objective factors and end with two central attitudinal factors. We compare the position of Dutch with the situation of Sranantongo.

## 4.1 Dutch grants access to further education and better jobs

Dutch holds the prestige position in Surinamese society. It is the language one has to learn in order to function well in society (Gobardhan-Rambocus 1997: 246). In Suriname, a good command of Dutch is perceived as a ticket to professional success. People realize that this starts with higher education and this, like primary and secondary education in Suriname, takes place entirely in Dutch. Dutch is the main language at Anton de Kom university of Suriname, in other institutions and of academics in general. Higher education in Suriname has improved greatly in recent years and new study programs are being developed in the Paramaribo area. More and more people are willing to learn, they aim for a better job and choose university education as a way to achieve that. The movement in favor of Dutch in Suriname (for instance, people's willingness to learn Dutch and pass it on to their children) can be directly related to the progress in education (Helen Chang, p.c.).

Dutch is required in most job vacancies. Good jobs are often situated in some kind of government office. Whether you want to work in a government office, in the media or in a private company, you are expected to have an excellent command of Dutch (see for instance Van Maele 2013). People in the districts, too, are convinced that a good command of Dutch is necessary to get by in the Surinamese society. They themselves feel they would be completely isolated without Dutch; it is their bridge to the city, to Paramaribo (Van Maele 2011). For this reason they will not give up on Dutch and they do not think highly of organizing primary school education only in the native languages.

## 4.2  Dutch constitutes a bridge to the Netherlands

For the people in Suriname, Dutch constitutes a bridge to the Netherlands in several ways. There is an important personal motivation for people in Suriname to have a thorough command of the Dutch language. Due to frequent migration, just about each individual living in Suriname has at least one relative in the Netherlands (Essed-Fruin & Gobardhan-Rambocus 1992: 12). After Suriname's independence in 1975 its society faced great changes. In 1980, Desi Bouterse initiated a military dictatorship in which human rights were damaged and in which drug crime and murder were no exception. The sad climax was the event now known as the 'December Murders' in 1982. Many Surinamese migrated to the Netherlands to escape Bouterse's military regime, to leave a society which they felt was hopeless, or to follow university education in the Netherlands. The final outcome of this wave of migration is that about 345.000 people of Surinamese descent are living in the Netherlands (2010, Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics; see Borges 2014: 28).[9] A thorough command of Dutch enables people in Suriname to be in touch with their relatives and the social world of these relatives. For financial reasons, the Netherlands is often the only destination where Surinamese can afford to spend their holiday (Essed-Fruin & Gobardhan-Rambocus 1992: 18).

Having contacts with the Netherlands is not only necessary for private reasons but also for professional reasons. A good command of Dutch allows Surinamese to take university studies in the Netherlands. People in Suriname may aim for better job opportunities in the Netherlands. An excellent command of Dutch is essential to pursue these goals.

## 4.3  Dutch is internationally and politically important

On the one hand, one may argue that Suriname is rather isolated as a Dutch-speaking country within South-America. However, for Suriname, maintaining Dutch is actually a way to be *less* isolated. Dutch does not only provide a bridge to relatives in the Netherlands, but in a more global perspective, it

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**9** Within the scope of this paper we cannot go into detail but it may be interesting to add that there have been some recent political changes in Suriname. There was a return to democracy by the end of the eighties. In 1991, Ronald Venetiaan was president, he was elected again in 2000 and 2005. In 2010, the former military dictator Desi Bouterse was chosen for president, which was quite controversial from the point of view of the Netherlands. By many people in Suriname, however, Bouterse is seen as a politician who is close to the people.

gives the Surinamese access to the world arena. After all, Dutch is spoken outside Suriname, first of all nearby, in the Dutch Caribbean, and secondly – and most importantly – overseas, in the Netherlands and Belgium. Compared to other European countries, the Low Countries are small but they are experienced in the world arena and they have plenty of connections in world trade.

There are indications (cf. Carew 1982) that Surinamese consider Dutch an internationally and politically important language. To them, Dutch is a window to the world that for instance Sranantongo can never be, since it is only spoken in Suriname and does not seem at all relevant outside the territory of Suriname. However, the choice of Dutch may still be considered remarkable compared to other European languages which are internationally and politically far more significant, such as English, Spanish and Portuguese. These languages are not only relevant for Suriname's relations with its neighbors but they are particularly important in the areas of business and trade.

Indeed, it has repeatedly been proposed that English should be an, or even the only, official language of Suriname. Various politicians in Suriname, but also Surinamese linguists (e.g., Hein Eersel) and writers (e.g., Paul Middellijn) defended the opinion that Dutch as an official language should be replaced by English (see e.g. de Bies 1997, Brandon et al. 2007: 1, Romero 2008). The motivations to introduce English as the official language of Suriname are partly of a commercial nature, particularly to facilitate Suriname's participation in the international organization *Caricom* (Caribbean Community and Common Market) but also more generally, to strengthen Suriname's links to the Caribbean and North America.

## 4.4  Literary tradition in Dutch

Dutch is not only politically and economically important but also culturally. Through Dutch, Suriname has access to a wide literary tradition, including literary work by Dutch and Flemish authors. With authors like Clark Accord, Albert Helman, Cynthia McLeod, Ismene Krishnadath, and several others, Suriname itself can boast a literary tradition in Dutch language, which is also respected in the Low Countries.

The literary and cultural role of Sranantongo is somewhat different. Audience and readership are mostly limited to Suriname. It should be added that Sranantongo is mainly an oral language, the effect of which is strongly felt by people in Suriname. An excellent example is Suriname's national anthem. In 1960 there was an official recognition of a Sranantongo strophe in the national anthem, which used to be entirely in Dutch. The famous author Cynthia

McLeod notes that the Sranantongo part is the only strophe that people in Suriname actually sing. This illustrates a certain feeling of 'national' identification attached to Sranantongo.

## 4.5 Dutch is standardized and taught in institutions

Since 1876, people in Suriname people have been and continue to be fully literated in Dutch language. For children to learn to express themselves in Dutch is the central goal of language teaching in primary school (*Nationaal leerplan voor het basisonderwijs in Suriname*, by MINOV 2004; see Asin et al. 2004). However, it should be noted that primary education takes place entirely in Dutch: not only do pupils with different mother tongues have to learn the Dutch language, they also have to learn other school subjects like mathematics and history in this foreign language (Van Maele 2013). This is difficult and teachers sometimes have to use Sranantongo as a final resort when they notice that pupils are unable to understand the subject matter.

Although Suriname today is looking at much greater tolerance towards Sranantongo than in previous generations, Sranantongo is still not taught at school. Since it is no school subject, people do not learn to write it and are not familiar with its official orthography. There are two recent official orthographies in use: Sranantongo has had an official orthography since 1960 which was revised in 1986 (Sebba 2000: 927). In the domain of edited publications, there are attempts to follow the 1986 norms, but outside this domain (e.g., names, slogans, advertisements), there is a range of orthographic practices (Sebba 2000: 927-928). Written Sranantongo is only around in small chunks outside any 'official' domain, where two norms may even be used alongside each other. Thus, for many speakers of Sranantongo, writing the language down is an *ad hoc* process (Sebba 2000: 929).

A similar lack of standardization holds for Sarnami Hindustani and Suriname Javanese, although committees for their standardization do exist (particularly for establishing a uniform spelling). As long as there is a lack of standardization, there is little chance for these languages to become school subjects in Suriname (and vice versa: if a language becomes a school subject, this may contribute to its standardization).

Children in Suriname are educated in Dutch at primary and secondary school using Dutch schoolbooks and literature, they learn Dutch spelling, they consult Dutch dictionaries and grammar books and skim newspapers in Dutch language. 'Dutch' is synonymous to 'Netherlandic' in some respects, e.g., Suriname uses many schoolbooks published in the Netherlands which are not

adapted to Surinamese society. With respect to standard Dutch, Suriname is in an ambiguous position. On the one hand, education builds upon official Dutch spelling and grammar regulations laid out in the Low Countries. As long as this is the case, teachers in Suriname will mostly refer to the Netherlandic Dutch standard. On the other hand, education has to come to terms with Suriname's own variety of Dutch, which is influenced by the other languages spoken in Suriname (see 4.8).

## 4.6  Maintaining Dutch seems the most economical

There is a very practical reason for Suriname to hold on to Dutch as the main language in society: Suriname cannot afford the costs to introduce other official language(s). To introduce a different official language would mean that the country needs new books for schools, new signs in the streets, a translation of official documents, etc. The costs would be too high for Suriname to bear. Keeping Dutch as the official language has the advantage that there are no extra costs (in addition to the already existing costs for educational material).[10] It should be noted, however, that Suriname faces high (invisible) costs because of the fact that many children are educated in Dutch instead of their L1: there is a considerable educational inequality and social deprivation.

From the point of view of the population, there is no real concern for language regulations. Many Surinamese are living in poverty. Estimations on how many Surinamese are living below the national poverty line differ but the highest figure is as high as 70%.[11] The first concern of these people is obviously a very basic one: 'surviving'. A large number of Surinamese are too busy struggling to survive to actually worry about language policy.

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**10**  Suriname gets some financial support for Dutch-language educational material, for instance from the Belgian non-profit organisation *VVOB* (*Flemish Association for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance*) (Helen Chang, p.c.).
**11**  Figure for 2002; see "Suriname moet armoedecijfer zelf vaststellen", *NoSpang.com* (02/20/2014)
http://www.nospang.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=38638:suriname-moet-armoedecijfer-zelf-vaststellen&catid=73:binnenland&Itemid=65 (checked 05/27/2014).

## 4.7 Dutch has a unifying effect since it is not tied to a particular ethnic group

Besides objective and practical factors there are highly important attitudinal factors we need to refer to when we attempt to understand why Dutch as the 'colonial language' can persist in post-colonial Suriname.

Dutch is perceived as everybody's language and as such it is not tied to a particular ethnic group (de Bies 1997: 14, Essed-Fruin & Gobardhan-Rambocus 1992: 18, and see 4.8.). This makes it attractive in the multi-ethnic society. It could be argued that Sranantongo too is a unifying language since it is used by different groups for interethnic communication. Sranantongo is also the *lingua franca* learnt by new immigrants. However, contrary to Dutch, Sranantongo is not entirely free of any associations with a particular ethnic group. Sranantongo may be associated by certain groups with the Creole population in and near Paramaribo; this association may particularly be felt by the Hindustani community (Essed-Fruin & Gobardhan-Rambocus 1992: 18) and by the Maroons (Romero 2008). Part of the Creole population itself considers Sranantongo as the language of their ethnic group, since it is their native language and an exponent of Creole culture (Gobardhan-Rambocus 2001: 510). We should repeat in this context that there are also some associations between Sranantongo and nationalist politics. Notwithstanding such associations, various ethnic groups across Suriname freely use Sranantongo as their *lingua franca*.

Another language which could have a unifying effect is English. As indicated in 4.3, English has been proposed by some as a possible official language for Suriname. The main arguments in favor of English pertain to Suriname's *external* relations, particularly with its Caribbean neighbors. However, when it comes to the integration of ethnic groups *within* Suriname, English does not seem like a natural choice. Even though Suriname used to be occupied by the English, the English language has not been maintained as a community language by any significant group of Surinamese (Borges 2014: 15). Thus, we should not overestimate the unifying effect of English in comparison with Sranantongo and Dutch.

## 4.8 Dutch is no longer the 'colonial language' but Suriname has its own national variety of Dutch

During colonial times, Dutch in Suriname was expected to be as linguistically close to Dutch in the Netherlands as possible. Influences from Sranantongo

were not accepted and any mistakes caused by Sranantongo were corrected. People in Suriname were more or less forced to speak Netherlandic Dutch, i.e., Dutch the way it was spoken in the Netherlands. Since (Netherlandic) Dutch was obligatory, it was perceived as language of the oppressor and a language people in Suriname could and would hardly identify with. Older generations may still have this perception. However, there appear to have been changes in the younger generations. Fierens (2006) shows on the basis of a written survey that 64% of young Surinamese do not consider Dutch as the colonial language. Only a minority of 16% does.

It has been suggested that Suriname's independence plays a role in the changed perception of Dutch. Carew (1982: 1) notes that a sharper national awareness accompanied Suriname's independence (1954/1975) and that this inspired a new look at Dutch. In other words, together with Suriname's independence from the Netherlands, the Dutch language obtained a different position in society. However, changing perceptions can probably be situated earlier. In his dissertation from 1950 Johan Ferrier (later Suriname's first president) stated the principles of how education in Suriname should be organized (Gobardhan-Rambocus 1997: 235). At that time, he was very clear in demanding that there should be only one single official language for education and that this ought to be the most prestigious one. In his view, this was standard Dutch as spoken in the Netherlands. However, during the 1960s Suriname experienced a growing tolerance towards Surinamese variants in standard Dutch. Dutch in Suriname was influenced by other languages used there, particularly Sranantongo. Some scholars claimed that codification of Surinamese-Dutch would have a positive effect in education since it would make Surinamese pupils more confident of their language skills (Gobardhan-Rambocus 1997: 238–239).

During the following decades, tolerance towards Surinamese variants has continued to grow and Suriname stopped focusing only on European (i.e., Netherlandic) Dutch. The changing view is reflected in the gradual recognition and standardization of Surinamese Dutch as a separate national variety of Dutch (e.g. de Bies 1994, 2009). Influences from Sranantongo are no longer banned from Dutch, but they are accepted as part of the Surinamese variety. This is reflected in Renata de Bies' dictionary of Surinamese Dutch (prepared in 2008; commercial edition in 2009) which incorporates many words of Sranantongo origin. However, since lexicographers have to base description particularly on informal spoken language, they have the difficult task to determine in which cases a word is a Surinamese Dutch variant and in which cases it is actually an instance of interference from Sranantongo. In a more general sense, code-switching is one of the main difficulties in attempts to standardize

Surinamese Dutch. Surinamese Dutch may be viewed as a continuum of (spoken) varieties situated on a scale ranging between 100% Sranantongo and 100% Dutch. Which words or phrases ought to be counted as 'standard Surinamese Dutch' and which ones ought to be left out? This is particularly hard to determine, especially while the use of Sranantongo elements in speech appears to be linked to social factors.

Standardization of Surinamese Dutch requires further linguistic investigation, which is difficult to carry out since Suriname lacks financial means for long-term research activities. This lack of research funding is particularly unfortunate considering that there are well-educated linguists in Suriname who are motivated to contribute to their variety's standardization. Their number is likely to increase thanks to the fact that the Anton de Kom University in Paramaribo recently started a master program of Dutch coordinated by Renata de Bies. This program and the publication of de Bies' dictionary are important achievements for Surinamese people to find support and to feel more confident in using their own variety. Particularly teachers are expected to profit from this since they are often dealing with linguistic uncertainty. A Surinamese Dutch dictionary is one step for them to gain a stronger awareness of lexical variants, their (social) meaning and use (Gobardhan-Rambocus 2008: 193). A Surinamese Dutch grammar could be another important step. As long as there exists no full academic description of Surinamese Dutch grammar, teachers have to decide individually and intuitively whether a certain grammatical item used by their pupils can be accepted as a Surinamese Dutch variant or should be rejected as an interferential element – which relates to the question: how much interference should be tolerated anyway?

Dutch in Suriname obviously originates as the 'colonial language', the language of the oppressor. For many people in Suriname today, Dutch has become their own language: Dutch is no longer perceived as the language of the oppressor since Suriname is confident about its own national realization of Dutch (compare Gobardhan-Rambocus 2001: 511). There may still be differences between generations, however. The older generation was brought up with the idea that Dutch in Suriname contains mistakes that have to be corrected, particularly influences from Sranantongo. The younger generation is brought up differently. They firmly agree that they do not speak like the Dutchmen. In fact, any Surinamese speaking like a Dutchman is most likely to be laughed at (Essed-Fruin & Gobardhan-Rambocus 1992: 16). Instead, Suriname holds on to its own pronunciation and vocabulary. Thus, the Surinamese realization of Dutch seems to be used as a social marker for speakers in Suriname to distinguish themselves from speakers from the

Netherlands. This does not mean that all language users are aware of, or ready to accept, linguistic variation in Dutch.[12] The concept of 'Surinamese Dutch' as a linguistic variety in its own right has not (yet) established itself in the minds of people, whereas in Belgium, the concept of 'Belgian Dutch' as opposed to Dutch in the Netherlands is already more widely known and used.

Apart from a growing recognition of the Surinamese variety from within (in Suriname), there is also recognition from outside. The most significant example probably is the Dutch Language Union. When it was established, the Union was very eager to keep the Dutch language 'united'. However, its point of view has developed over the course of the years. Today the Dutch Language Union leaves room for a pluricentric view with differing norms. It represents the idea of Dutch as a pluricentric language with different standard realizations of Dutch in different nations. The Union accepts three different national standard realizations of Dutch: Belgian, Netherlandic and Surinamese Dutch; the status of Carribean Dutch remains implicit.[13] In a pluricentric view Surinamese variants are not seen as deviations from the (Netherlandic) standard but they are explicitly accepted as characteristics of equal national varieties of one and the same language.

# 5 Conclusion

Carew (1982) described Suriname's situation as 'linguistic schizophrenia'. However, the factors we discussed in section 4 suggest that the linguistic situation of Suriname may be organized in terms of a relatively stable diglossia (extended diglossia in the sense of Fishman 1967). There is an organization on a socio-cultural level with two functionally distinct languages – that is, if we ignore Suriname's other twenty languages, which are mainly used for communication within the ethnic group. In Suriname, Dutch and Sranantongo are seen as being not in conflict with one another. Each fulfils relatively clearly defined roles in society: Dutch is used in one set of circumstances and Sranantongo in an entirely different set. The two languages are kept quite apart in their functions, which is a key defining characteristic of diglossia

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**12** It is an aim of the project *Dutch++* to help establish this kind of linguistic awareness among speakers, learners and teachers of Dutch all over the globe.

**13** The Dutch standard language is described by the Dutch Language Union on its website as 'Eén standaardtaal met drie poten' (one standard language with three legs). See: http://taalunieversum.org/inhoud/feiten-en-cijfers#standaardtaal (checked 05/27/2014).

(Wardhaugh 2010: 85). In this view, Dutch can be described as the 'high variety', the powerful variety which holds the prestige position in Surinamese society. It is the language one has to learn in order to function well in society (Gobardhan-Rambocus 1997: 246). Whereas Dutch is standardized and taught in institutions, Sranantongo is not even a school subject. Sranantongo can be described as the 'low variety': It has a social stigma attached to it and it is considered less beautiful and less expressive than Dutch, which is used to seek prestige. However, Sranantongo has covert prestige (in the sense of Labov 1966): by using it, speakers choose to differ from the standard. People prefer to use Sranantongo when they express emotion, when they want to tell a story or a joke. Whereas Dutch is the language for official and formal functions, for written documents, written media and fine literature, Sranantongo is first and foremost an oral language which is used in informal and spoken situations.

This view of the language situation in Suriname as being organized along diglossic lines is, however, challenged by the actual language use of the speakers. While Dutch and Sranantongo are ascribed different functions in Surinamese society by their speakers, these speakers do not always keep them apart in daily practice. As mentioned above (in 4.8.), the multilingual speakers make use of their linguistic repertoires in different ways. We need a continuum view of the spoken varieties in order to describe the language(s) used in actual discourse. The social expectations with regard to the functions and the use of Dutch and Sranantongo do not (or at least not necessarily) correspond to communicative reality.

We conclude that the current linguistic situation in Suriname must be understood against the background of a nation which is constructing its own national identity. Suriname is a young nation which, on the one hand, is still dealing with its colonial past and struggling to define itself and its relation to the former 'mother country', the Netherlands. On the other hand, Suriname has to position itself vis-à-vis the Caribbean islands and the neighboring South-American nations. Suriname's current linguistic situation reflects the identity it is constructing. How stable is the socially accepted diglossia, i.e., which macro-level changes may occur in the following generations? Will Dutch keep its strong position? Will Dutch and Sranantongo continue to exist side by side? Will English eventually play a role as well?

Macro-level changes in Suriname's linguistic situation may be instigated from above and from below. Changes from above pertain to measures taken by the Surinamese government towards a language policy. The final memorable measure taken was the participation of Suriname in the Dutch Language Union, which was considered as an indication that Suriname actively

strengthened the position of Dutch as its official language. However, the debate on which should be the official language(s) in Suriname continued. In an article in The New York Times (Romero 2008), the Surinamese writer Paul Middellijn made the following statement: "We shook off the chains of Dutch colonialism in the 1970s, but our consciousness remains colonized by the Dutch language". Therefore, he proposed that English should be made Suriname's official language instead of Dutch. Other voices urge Suriname to reconsider its policy with respect to the language of education (e.g. the Flemish journalist Pieter Van Maele 2011/2013). So far, there is no indication that the government is taking any efforts to introduce Sranantongo as a school subject or as (additional) language of instruction. As we already pointed out, Sranantongo will remain an oral language as long as it is not taught in institutions and not standardized. There are, however, recent attempts to codify Sranantongo: van der Hilst (2013) recently published a grammar of Sranantongo. Codification is a significant step towards standardization (compare de Bies 2009: 18).

Changes in Suriname's linguistic situation from below pertain to language attitude and language use of the Surinamese population. As long as Dutch is perceived by Surinamese people as the prestige language, they will continue passing it on to their children and it will probably persist in its current functional domains. Brandon (2006) conducted a written survey with 315 Surinamese respondents (both in Suriname and in the Netherlands) on attitudes towards Dutch. The survey shows that Surinamese people agree that Dutch is part of the Surinamese identity (particularly in view of the historical connections with the Netherlands). The respondents agree that Dutch should remain the main language of education in Suriname. All in all they have a positive attitude towards Suriname's accession to the Language Union, although the Surinamese in the Netherlands are slightly more critical. Despite the overall positive attitude towards Dutch, the Surinamese, particularly those in Suriname, believe that a good command of English is important for the socio-economical development of their country (membership of the *Caricom*). Brandon's survey shows that Surinamese are in favor of two official languages for Suriname and they prefer the combination Dutch/English over Dutch/Sranantongo. Interestingly, there is a larger preference for the latter combination among Surinamese in the Netherlands. This is in line with Borges' (2014: 29) observation that Sranantongo is established "as an important and highly visible heritage language in the Netherlands". Apparently, the use of Sranantongo is an essential marker for Surinamese in the Netherlands to achieve group identity.

At the same time, in Suriname, the use of English is on the rise in certain contexts. Not only is English the language of the internet, the younger genera-

tion also likes to introduce English phrases in daily conversation (which may be facilitated by the fact that Sranantongo is an English-lexicon creole). If this generation starts passing on English to their children, this may strongly affect the linguistic situation of Suriname.

Since we are concerned with the status of Dutch as a pluricentric language (see introduction), we are also interested in which way macro-level changes in Suriname's linguistic situation might affect the Dutch language structurally. As pointed out above there has already been a rise in tolerance towards Sranantongo elements in Dutch. The time that Dutch needed to be as close to Netherlandic Dutch as possible is definitely over. It is not uncommon to introduce Sranantongo vocabulary and expressions in both spoken and written Dutch. Also, several transfer phenomena can be observed (see Borges 2014 for various contact phenomena and Radke 2013 for examples from chat language). Increasing influences from Sranantongo may lead to modifications of Surinamese Dutch. This might have additional consequences for Dutch as a pluricentric language: it could lead to further divergence from European Dutch or even a separation between Surinamese and European Dutch. Two decades ago, Geerts (1992: 73) reflected upon the status of Dutch as a pluricentric language by raising the question whether "[...] the independence of Surinam could lead to an increasing differentiation between European and Surinamese Dutch so that at a given moment the Surinamese might want to declare the Dutch in Surinam emancipated, just as happened in South Africa". At the moment we do not see any direct indications that Surinamese Dutch is developing into a language of its own. In fact, it would be disadvantageous for Suriname should Surinamese Dutch diverge too much from European Dutch, since Suriname still benefits from smooth communication with the Low Countries.

Suriname finds itself in an ongoing process of constructing its own national, post-colonial, identity. Within this process, both Sranantongo and Surinamese Dutch are awarded central roles: each contributes in its own way to the Surinamese identity. Whereas the use of Sranantongo is a solidarity marker for achieving a Surinamese group identity, the use of Surinamese Dutch may be a marker for post-colonial Suriname to differentiate itself from the Netherlands. Whether they can establish themselves jointly as Suriname's national languages will be up to the next generations.

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