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Globalization, urbanization, and language in Caribbean development: the assimilation of St. Lucia

In: New West Indian Guide/ Nieuwe West-Indische Gids 77 (2003), no: 1/2, Leiden, 65-84

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GLOBALIZATION, URBANIZATION, AND LANGUAGE IN CARIBBEAN DEVELOPMENT:
THE ASSIMILATION OF ST. LUCIA

In the former and current British, French, and Dutch Caribbean, the folk-oriented masses have historically expressed themselves through the region’s various creole cultures and languages. The numerically small elite classes, in contrast, have historically looked to and identified with the cultures and languages of metropolitan Europe to pattern West Indian social life. The city has been the primary conduit for cultural exchange, serving as a meeting ground between local creole culture and cultural influences from Europe, North America, and the greater Caribbean. Before World War II, the United Kingdom, France, and the Netherlands were held up in much of the urban Caribbean as uncontested, idealized models of society, with the creole culture of the popular classes garnering scant respect at best, or open hostility at worst. Since the end of World War II, the United States has rapidly grown in influence in the region, competing with Europe for local political, economic, and cultural hegemony. What is more, beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, urban-based movements to revaluate creole culture and language emerged on the regional scene, adding further nuance and levels of complexity to the cultural orientation of Caribbean peoples, and addressing somewhat the historic imbalance between the prestigious cultural and linguistic forms of Europe and the denigrated forms of the black Caribbean.

This article examines the relationship between globalization, urbanization, and the city on the one hand, and the sociolinguistic development of the Caribbean on the other. St. Lucia, sitting in the Lesser Antilles, south of Martinique, north of St. Vincent, and west of Barbados, serves as a case study of the city, of cultural transmission and transformation, and the emergence of a regionalized islandwide English-speaking culture. Language, the means through which St. Lucians express and define individual, community, and national life, as well as their perceptions of and connections with the larger world, is the focal point of the article. Data from interviews with sixty

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randomly selected residents of Castries, St. Lucia’s capital and most important city, and forty randomly selected residents of Monchy, a small rural village in northeast St. Lucia, inform the study. A review of relevant historical sources and literature, data from unstructured interviews with current and former St. Lucian cultural nationalists and professionals working with language, and ethnographic research conducted by the author in St. Lucia during the summer months of 1997 also underpin this article.

**LANGUAGE IN THE CARIBBEAN**

Urbanization – rural-to-urban shifts in populations as well as the increasing influence of urban areas on their hinterlands – and globalization – the ongoing integration of all parts of the world into a single political economy – are concomitant processes that affect the sociocultural evolution of Caribbean societies. The region has undergone rapid urbanization since the end of World War II. In the immediate postwar period, the region witnessed a boom of economic growth and prosperity. The global economy, with the United States at its summit, was in full upward swing, transforming in its wake traditional forms of social life in the Caribbean, particularly in rural communities traditionally somewhat removed from the influence of urban society and the larger global political economy. Rural residents, attracted to the growing employment opportunities that accompanied global economic expansion, increased their contact with the cities of the region in the hope of improving the quality of their lives. As the populations shifted from rural communities to the premier cities and as advances in transportation and technologies of communication broke down the historic isolation of the rural Caribbean, the influence of urban-based sociocultural norms grew.

In the Caribbean, despite political independence, a white or light-skinned minority continues to control the economy (Robotham 2000). Members of these urban upper and middle classes regularly use European languages to distance themselves from the darker-skinned creole-speaking popular classes (Brereton 1989). The sense of inferiority that the region’s different creole speakers harbor about their languages constitutes a significant problem in efforts to elevate these languages to a more important role in Caribbean national life (Dalphinis 1985). Due to the unique history of social relations in the Caribbean, the Antillean creoles are among the most stigmatized of the world’s languages (Alleyne 1987, 1994). These languages, therefore, face the global free market of national and international languages on very unequal footing. In the contemporary Caribbean, the influence of the former colonial languages – English, French, and Dutch – is formidable, particularly in the urban realm, at the level of formal and non-intimate discourse, among
the higher classes, and in education, national administration, business, and international communication.

Colonial legacy and the contemporary influence of urban society have resulted in a continued subordination and, in some cases, a gradual loss in the demographic strength of creole languages in the Caribbean. For example, although Haiti is the Caribbean territory in which creole is the most indispensable language for internal communication, Haitian Creole nonetheless suffers subordinate status vis-à-vis the official French, spoken primarily by a relatively small urban elite in Port-au-Prince (Chaudenson 1992; Dejean 1993). In Jamaica, the second largest nation of the creole Caribbean, the national English-based Creole language similarly suffers from low prestige vis-à-vis standard Jamaican English, especially in urban zones (Patrick 1999). Elsewhere in the Anglophone Caribbean, English-based creole also enjoys little status compared to standard English (Fenigson 2000), with the possible exception of Belize, where Belizean Creole is widely spoken in urban centers and is considered by many as a national language (LePage & Tabouret-Keller 1985). In the French West Indies, French is the sole official language of the territories and the dominant vernacular of urban social life, although there are some cultural and nationalist movements to elevate the local creoles. Finally, in Suriname, Dutch is replacing Sranan, the historic lingua franca of that country, as the primary language of public and private discourse in the capital city, Paramaribo (St-Hilaire 2001), although in Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao, the Iberian-based Papiamentu profits from a social status unparalleled in the Caribbean (Howe 1993).

In spite of the lingering colonial legacy, which undermines the status of the Antillean creoles, creole cultural nationalism, which became a relatively strong force in the region during the 1970s and 1980s, altered somewhat the social playing field for these languages. Since the 1970s, much of the support for the promotion of the Caribbean creoles has been at the grassroots level (Charles 1990). The 1970s marked a profound change in public attitudes toward the languages (Devonish 1986). More people have come to value the creoles as symbols of national identity and have gained greater awareness of their communicative effectiveness (Alleyne 1994). Despite pan-Caribbean cultural nationalism, however, public recognition of the creole languages continues to be the exception (Winford 1994). Everywhere in the Caribbean, creole remains subordinate to the language of the former

1. See also Carrington, 1987. Creole Discourse and Social Development. A report prepared for the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean for submission to the International Development Research Centre.
2. Bebel-Gisler 1976; Numa 1986; Guilbault 1993; Prudent 1993; Schnepel 1993.
3. Dalphinis 1985; Devonish 1986; Brereton 1989; Oostindie 1996; St-Hilaire 1999.
European colonizer. The dual European and African heritage of the West Indies and the continued predominance of European languages and cultures inherited from the colonial period mitigate the impact of the pro-creole movements (Knight & Palmer 1989).

ST. LUCIA: THE HISTORIC URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE

From its early history and onward, St. Lucia has been a meeting ground of different cultures. For example, between 1605, the date on which the English first attempted to colonize the island, and 1814, when the Treaty of Paris formally ceded the island to Great Britain, St. Lucia changed flags fourteen times. Castries, more than anywhere else on the island, has been the place where the different waves of invaders, colonists, slaves, migrants and their cultures came together. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the French and their slaves together established the dominant sociocultural patterns of rural St. Lucia, where people have historically spoken only Kwéyòl, a French-oriented creole similar to those spoken in neighboring Martinique, Dominica, Guadeloupe, and Haiti (Graham 1985). An amalgamation of French and West-African linguistic elements and the mode of expression of traditional St. Lucian folk culture, Kwéyòl derives most of its lexicon from French and much of its syntax and phonology from various languages of the Niger-Congolese family (Dalphinis 1985). During the second half of the nineteenth century, the British established the dominant sociocultural norms of urban Castries, where English has been the exclusive language of polite, public discourse and high society.

After the abolition of slavery in 1834, colonial officials vigorously strove to introduce English as the sole language of the island. The association of Kwéyòl and the Afro-French, creole culture with ignorance, backwardness, and poverty intensified. In an effort to bring progress and a particular concept of civilization to St. Lucia, colonial officials became actively hostile toward Kwéyòl and its associated culture (Alleyne 1961). Reflecting colonial attitudes of the period, Henry Breen (1844:185), one-time mayor of Castries, wrote disparagingly, “[t]he Negro language is a jargon formed

4. The term “Kwéyòl” is a neologism, coined in the early 1980s to label the language, formerly and still widely known as “Patois.” Cultural nationalists believed that the term would confer higher status on the vernacular and thus be an aid in developing it as a national and official language of the island.

5. In analyzing the closely related Haitian Creole, Lefebvre (1989, 1998) also partially attributes the language’s syntax and phonology to West African sources. Carrington (1992), however, attributes Kwéyòl’s grammar to linguistic innovation in addition to carry-overs from West African languages.
from the French, and composed of words, or rather sounds, adapted to the organs of speech in the black population.” The British used education as the primary means of imposing English language and culture, bringing in English-speaking Protestant teachers from Barbados, Jamaica, St. Vincent, Antigua, and the other British islands. However, according to Breen (1844: 262), these teachers had
great difficulties to contend with, especially the paralyzing prevalence of the Negro language amongst the vast majority of their pupils. In proportion to the extent of this difficulty has been the success of their exertions, the most sensible result of which is the all but universal adoption of the English language by the children of the present day.

The English-speaking Protestant teachers helped carry out Great Britain’s project of civilization, denigrating the Kwéyòl language and the Afro-French, Creole culture in the eyes of St. Lucian children. English-speaking military officers and colonial administrators accompanied the teachers to St. Lucia, where the great majority took up residency in Castries, the island’s main port and link to the larger Caribbean and the world. Language became an instant marker of social status. English speakers assumed positions of high status in island society. Kwéyòl speakers remained confined to the lowest social echelons. Mastery of spoken English became a prerequisite for upward mobility in colonial society. Due to St. Lucia’s mountainous geography and poor system of internal transportation and communication, however, the influence of the British civilizing project remained largely confined to greater Castries through the end of the nineteenth century. During the second half of the nineteenth century, a sociolinguistic and sociocultural schism emerged between English-speaking, modern, and outward-looking Castries and the island’s Kwéyòl-speaking, folk-oriented, and inward-looking rural communities.

THE CITY AND SOCIOCULTURAL CHANGE

In 1921, 11.5 percent of the total St. Lucian population lived in Castries (Momsen 1996). At emancipation, the freed slaves preferred to stay in established rural villages or in scattered squatter settlements. As public education in, and Anglophone migration to, the rural districts remained limited, the settlement patterns of ex-slaves encouraged the continued vigorous use of Kwéyòl. However, after 1921 the economy became more diversified and urban based, exposing greater numbers of St. Lucians to English and to the anti-Kwéyòl attitudes of Castries. Nonetheless, bananas rose in importance as a commodity after World War I, encouraging many Kwéyòl speakers to remain in the rural districts where the use and status of
Kwéyòl remained strong. Moreover, while the Barbadian-based Anglican Church provided a model for the urban Anglophone culture of Castries, the Roman Catholic Church continued to favor the maintenance of Kwéyòl in rural St. Lucia, switching to this language from French at the beginning of the twentieth century (Vaughan 1979; Anthony & Louisy 1983).

On the whole, the first half of the twentieth century is marked by a steady shift toward English. In 1911, for example, 61.7 percent of the St. Lucian population knew no English. In 1921, this figure fell modestly to 60.1 percent. In 1946, however, only 43.4 percent of the total population knew no English (West Indian Census 1950). The proportion of St. Lucians not knowing English was lowest in Castries and highest in the rural districts. In 1946, for example, only 9 percent of Castries professed no knowledge of English. Moreover, among young people aged ten to fourteen, 32.3 percent islandwide knew no English in 1946, significantly less than the national average. These data indicate an Anglicization of the St. Lucian population throughout the island, signaling a breakdown of the historic sociolinguistic cleavage between Castries and rural St. Lucia. However, before and in 1946, there is no evidence that St. Lucians were abandoning Kwéyòl with the acquisition of English. To the contrary, the proportion of Kwéyòl speakers remained relatively steady from the 1911 to the 1921 and 1946 censuses.

The period following World War II, ushering in rapid growth in the global economy, brought greater urbanization to and increased the importance of the city in St. Lucia. By 1960, 19.4 percent of the island population lived in Castries (Alleyne 1961). The establishment of manufacturing industries in, and an increase in the volume of trade through, Castries served to attract migrants from the countryside and from the English-speaking Caribbean. However, despite the increase in manufacturing, bananas became St. Lucia’s primary export commodity. With the advent of large-scale banana production came the need for an islandwide road infrastructure to facilitate the quick transport of bananas to the port of Castries upon harvest for export to the United Kingdom. An improved islandwide system of roads brought predominantly English-speaking Castries and the predominantly Kwéyòl-speaking rural districts in close and sustained contact for the first time in St. Lucia’s history. The expansion of the island’s network of roads was accompanied by an increase in the influence of radio and television as well as of formal education. Taken together, these post-1945 factors have had the effect of strengthening the position of English and undermining the status of Kwéyòl. Monolingual Kwéyòl speakers became increasingly rare and stigmatized, while the dominant and prestigious English language of Castries

6. Robert LePage & Andrée Tabouret-Keller, 1977. Sociolinguistic Survey of Multilingual Communities, Stage II: St. Lucia, West Indies. Report to the Direction générale des recherches scientifiques et techniques, Paris.
usurped greater amounts of public and private social space from Kwéyòl throughout the island.

The economic, political, cultural, and demographic importance of Castries has continued to grow in relation to the rest of the island since the 1960s. According to the St. Lucian Census of 1991, 39 percent of the island population resides in Castries district. In addition to a disproportionate share of the island population, Castries is home to the parliament and ministries of the national government, most of the island’s banking and industry, the chief port for international trade, an international airport, foreign consulates and embassies, much of St. Lucia’s foreign-born population, the print, radio and television media, and institutions of higher learning. Moreover, Castries is St. Lucia’s political, economic, and cultural link to CARICOM, and serves as the administrative center for the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, a political and economic union joining the English-speaking islands of the Lesser Antilles. What is more, Castries is the chief place of contact for hundreds of thousands of English-speaking tourists from North America and Europe who visit the island annually via cruise ship and airplane. The influence of the outside English-speaking world makes itself felt most heavily in and through Castries.

**Kwéyòl Cultural Nationalism**

In St. Lucia, Kwéyòl cultural nationalism is predominantly an urban movement, based in Castries. With roots in the Black Power and Caribbean Black Consciousness movements of the 1970s, the St. Lucian cultural nationalist movement initially drew on the support of a group of relatively well-educated young people from middle-class, English-speaking Castries families (St-Hilaire 2000). These young people, who were primarily secondary students during the early 1970s, worked under the guidance of a young Catholic priest and later formed the Folk Research Centre (FRC), the main organization in St. Lucia dedicated to the preservation and promotion of Kwéyòl. The objectives of the FRC during its first years of existence were to conduct research on St. Lucian folk culture; to initiate and direct programs for sociocultural change, particularly in relation to national development; and to sensitize St. Lucians to the importance of their cultural heritage (Rohlehr 1993). The FRC arose in part in reaction to most St. Lucians’ narrow view of Creole culture, typically limited to a handful of annual folk festivals and dances. The main deliberate and most successful outcome of the work of the FRC has been the annual *Jounen Kwéyòl*, or International Creole Day, now the island’s largest national holiday. Initially a one-day, one-site event in 1984 attracting relatively few participants and onlookers, *Jounen Kwéyòl* has evolved into a month-long, islandwide series of activities and festivities.
in which thousands of St. Lucians participate. During Jounen Kwéyòl St. Lucians of all social strata are encouraged to speak Kwéyòl, the radio stations broadcast extensively in the language, and the schools expose children to Kwéyòl-centered learning activities.

Another outgrowth of the expanding influence of cultural nationalism during and after the 1970s, but not directly tied to the efforts of the FRC, has been the increased use of Kwéyòl in radio broadcasting not only during Jounen Kwéyòl, but throughout the year. Historically, radio has been the exclusive domain of English. Kwéyòl first appeared on the radio in 1971 with the broadcast of a commercial by Chase Manhattan Bank encouraging rural St. Lucians to deposit their money into the bank. In 1974, a French-owned radio station began airing an hour-long broadcast each evening that consisted of news and entertainment in Kwéyòl. It turned out to be a success, spurring on the development of other Kwéyòl-language radio shows. The establishment of Kwéyòl radio programming prompted politicians to make announcements in the language (Frank 1993). In addition, the business community, historically averse to risk, began to invest heavily in Kwéyòl-language advertising, further enhancing the status of the language (Samuel 1992). The use of Kwéyòl on the radio has had a powerful legitimizing effect on the language.

GLOBAL INFLUENCE IN ST. LUCIA: INTEGRATION INTO THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD

The post-1970 gains in the status of Kwéyòl notwithstanding, the language continues to yield to the globally and locally dominant English in public and private domains of use. Kwéyòl, a language not even spoken by all of the 150,000 people living on resource-poor, geographically small St. Lucia; burdened by a historic association with ignorance and poverty, and lacking the institutional support that English enjoys, fares poorly in internationally open, highly stratified St. Lucian society. One cultural nationalist active in the pro-Kwéyòl movement since the early 1980s identified the perception of St. Lucia as a member of a larger and predominantly English-speaking world as working against organized efforts to elevate Kwéyòl, particularly among the more affluent of the island: “It’s perhaps a group of yuppy ... upcoming professionals who have this distinct notion that we have to be part of a global society and that everything which prevents us from getting in should be dropped ... which to some extent to them includes the language.” However, many St. Lucians also express concern over the loss of what is distinctly St. Lucian to outside influences, as articulated by another cultural nationalist

7. Carrington, 1987. Creole Discourse and Social Development.
who joined the movement in the early 1970s and has maintained involvement through grassroots community development work:

Right now we are faced with a ... an entrance into our society, into our culture of North America in forms that we are not even prepared in any way to resist or to stand up against. So when we talk about the technological capabilities of companies who are coming in with North American images, North American lifestyles ... one that is bombarded at us. It's all we see on our TVs. It's all we hear. It's a struggle to combat. You have artificial demand that development has created ... and ... society has not naturally grown to satisfy the hunger for things that are on the television. Young people are not interested in a lot of the national culture. They want to learn ... basketball, they want to learn rap, they want to dress in a tropical country with layers and layers of clothes. Because that's what they see on TV ... They want to speak English.

The current dominance of the United States throughout the Caribbean conditions much of the sociocultural development of St. Lucia. U.S. influence is particularly strong in the mass media. Television programming and, to a lesser extent, American music have inundated St. Lucian airwaves. The influence of television is relatively recent. As late as 1973, Lieberman (1974) reports that television reception did not exist on most of the island. By the 1990s, however, through modern technologies in telecommunications, homes around the island could pick up locally broadcasted programming in addition to paid satellite television. In spite of the spreading of television, local content on St. Lucian televised airwaves is limited primarily to newscasts. The bulk of television programming, transmitted both domestically and via satellite, is composed of U.S. series and movies. In 1998, thanks to the British-owned telecommunications company, Cable and Wireless, sixteen additional channels were made available to St. Lucians. Two originated in St. Lucia, one in Barbados, one in Martinique, and the remaining twelve emanated from the United States. Even on the two St. Lucian channels, foreign English-language content constituted 90 percent of all programming. Faria (1993) posited that cultural forms indigenous to the island are in danger of extinction in the face of U.S. foreign cultural penetration via television. Dalphinis (1993) adds that U.S. television is eroding both traditional St. Lucian culture and the status of Kwéyòl among young people.

Foreign cultural penetration of St. Lucia is reinforced by population transfers and links between St. Lucia and the English-speaking world. St. Lucians rely heavily on emigration in the hope of earning a living. Nearly 2 percent of the national population leaves the island each year in search of work (Hornbeck 1989). Historically, most St. Lucians have opted for the United Kingdom. The number of St. Lucians and children born to St. Lucians in the United Kingdom is probably equivalent to more than 25 percent of the current national population of St. Lucia. Most St. Lucians
have family members living in the United Kingdom. In addition, more than 15,000 St. Lucians have migrated to and set up permanent residence in the United States (Kasinitz & Vickerman 1999). Thousands more live in English-speaking Canada. Conversely, there is a small, but economically influential community of British, American, and Canadian expatriates on the island in addition to hundreds of non-St. Lucian English-speaking Antilleans. The influence of the foreign-born on the island is augmented by a multitude of English-speaking tourists who visit St. Lucia each year, supporting the many St. Lucians who make their living in the important tourism sector of the island economy.

St. Lucians are well aware of English as an asset in an increasingly English-speaking world and in an increasingly English-speaking St. Lucia. Nearly one-half of all informants who felt that it was important for children to learn English expressed the international importance of the language as the primary reason. St. Lucians value English because it offers them a door of access to a larger and more economically prosperous world, both on and off the island. A forty-nine-year-old construction worker living on the outskirts of Castries and who speaks Kwéyòl as his first and best language emphasized the importance for children of learning English in order to make it in the world: “[It’s] very important because in the English system ... it’s a universal system. When you speak English, you’ll be recognized into the world. And English is becoming very important to be speaking in any nation because once you speak English, therefore you broaden yourself into the world ... English is presently dominating the world.” An elderly retired woman in Castries added, “St. Lucia should be an English place, huh? It wouldn’t do any harm. Suppose that you have to travel, it’s English that will get you there.”

Another informant, a nineteen-year-old recent secondary school graduate with a perfect command of English, highlighted the growing attraction of English among young people (her younger siblings were watching a U.S. television program while their sister and I spoke):

The children nowadays learn ... are more interested in English. And when it comes to um ... like, if they ... For example, when you go to job interviews, they will not ask you questions in Patois. And they are not looking for any kind of English. They are looking for standard English. So, I think they should raise their level of English and ... They should leave the Patois out of it.

However, not all young St. Lucians unreservedly embrace English. A nineteen-year-old Castries fisherman with a primary school education expressed some alienation and discomfort with the trend toward the increased societal dominance of English:
Being that standard English coming in style and dem books start coming out and different things ... People that are working for the government system, computer and computerized thing, it's strictly English you need to work with. They trying to kill all the Kwéyòl for you to learn more English. If you want a job, they expect you to speak standard English. That's why English is important. But I tell you both are important. Both should be practiced. If you come speaking Patois, you will not get the job. That's the way the system flow. But if you come speaking the polite standard English asking for a job very nice, you understand? ... you will get it.

THE URBAN INFLUENCE: NATIONAL CONVERGENCE TO CASTRIES-BASED NORMS

Castries is not only St. Lucia’s gateway to the larger world, the city is also the traditional and contemporary center of English-speaking St. Lucian culture. A theme that arose from ethnographic research on the island and from interviews with residents of Castries and rural St. Lucia is that of linguistic and cultural integration between the capital city and the hinterland. English is becoming more widely spoken throughout the nation. Everywhere on the island, even in those areas that have been historically monolingually Kwéyòl-speaking, a very conscious effort is made to raise children in English. Many St. Lucian adults consider it bordering on child abuse to raise a child in Kwéyòl. The author observed no instance in which parents made any sustained attempt to raise their children in both languages. Children, whether in Castries or in small, rural, and traditionally Kwéyòl-speaking villages, are expected to speak English, at least until they reach adolescence. The strategy appears to be working. Among themselves, children everywhere on the island tend to converse exclusively in English, even when there are no adults to monitor their behavior. In spite of nearly three decades of pro-Kwéyòl cultural nationalism, English is still perceived as the sole language of success, both at home on the island and in making one’s way abroad.

The current near-universal use of English and limited knowledge of Kwéyòl among St. Lucia’s young people is the result of more than a century and a half of educational policy and social norms emanating from English-speaking, anti-Kwéyòl Castries. The influence of traditional anti-Kwéyòl attitudes in Castries has played no small role in denigrating the status of the language among rural St. Lucians. Historically, rural St. Lucians, who until the recent past spoke only modest amounts of English, if any at all, have

8. Standard English is not universally or even widely spoken. St. Lucian vernacular English, somewhat removed from standard English and influenced by Kwéyòl, is widely spoken by St. Lucians of all ages both in and outside Castries (see Garrett 2000).
been subject to ridicule when making incursions into Castries. An informant in her forties, from the small fishing village of Gros Islet north of Castries, associated negative childhood experiences of being caught speaking Kwéyôl in her rural community to the negative experiences of her mother’s generation when visiting Castries:

I remember going to school in the country and we were being monitored along the road. If we spoke Kwéyôl along the road, then we’d be reported. And the following day, we would be beaten at school if we were caught speaking Kwéyôl ... because that is what we knew. That is how we communicated with our friends. I mean in class you would try to speak English because you did not want to get beat. But on the road, I mean it was a free-for-all. People were monitored even before that. As my mother said, it was worse because they, as country people, would go into town to sell their goods ... and people always called them as country bouk ... you know, treated you as uneducated, illiterate people with nothing to offer ... and this kind of attitude.

An informant in his early thirties from the southern coastal village of Soufrière and currently working as an English teacher in a Castries-area secondary school related a story of the adverse effects of internalized anti-Kwéyôl attitudes within his own family:

In my case ... at home everybody in the house spoke Kwéyôl. I alone spoke English. My mother could hardly speak English. So, she used to speak to me in Kwéyôl, but I could not answer her in Kwéyôl. I had to answer her in English. It was like, “You should know better.” Like they sending you to school to learn this thing and to do it right and so on ... “So don’t, don’t speak this filthy language,” and that kind of stuff. I would be chastised for even using the language.

Although in 1946, 43.3 percent of all St. Lucians claimed not to be able to speak English, currently the overwhelming majority of St. Lucians have some competence in the language. Negative attitudes toward Kwéyôl originating from Castries society facilitated the spread of English, as did the rapid expansion of access to and the enrollment of the vast majority of age-appropriate children in public primary schools since World War II. Published estimates put the proportion of English speakers on the island at 80 percent (Alexander 1981; Isaac 1986; Hornbeck 1989; Samuel 1992). However, 1997 field research suggests that this percentage may be higher today (see Table 1). Castries residents self-report high levels of competence in the language. In addition, all randomly selected Castries informants indicated that English was the primary, if not exclusive, language of the home. Moreover, the only time the author observed the public use of Kwéyôl anywhere in Castries was at the port customs office. In this instance, a customs agent was giving procedural instructions in Kwéyôl to a mixed group of St. Lucians and
Table 1. English-Speaking Ability

| Level          | Monchy (%) | Castries (%) |
|----------------|------------|--------------|
| Very well      | 39%        | 48%          |
| Well           | 38%        | 30%          |
| So-so          | 17%        |              |
| Not well       | 10%        |              |
| Not at all     | 5%         |              |

Martinicans who were waiting to embark a French-owned inter-island ferry destined for Martinique.⁹

In Monchy levels of self-reported competence in English are also high, although in general Monchy residents lag somewhat behind Castries residents in their English-language ability. However, even in rural Monchy only 5 percent of informants claimed no ability in the language. In all Monchy households save one, parents strove to raise their children exclusively in English. The only exception was of a monolingual Kwéyòl-speaking grandmother who lived alone with her nine-year-old grandchild. Moreover, in both Castries and Monchy mastery of English is inversely related to age and education. Older residents, particularly the rural and poorly educated, tend to struggle most in making themselves understood in English. Informants in Monchy who spoke no English or did not speak it well were over sixty years of age and did not complete primary school. Informants in Castries who did not speak English well were also over sixty years of age, had little or no formal education, and moved to the city from the countryside as adults. All informants under thirty years of age, whether in Castries or Monchy, identified English as their preferred and best-spoken language.

**The Place of Kwéyòl in Contemporary National Life**

In spite of approximately thirty years of pro-Kwéyòl cultural nationalism, including the increased use of Kwéyòl on the radio and the rise of Jounen

⁹ In each of the two islands' French-based creoles, St. Lucians and Martinicans can communicate without great difficulty.
Kwéyòl as St. Lucia’s largest national holiday, the language is receding as a medium of communication in the family, the community, and the nation. Many young informants, particularly those still in school, professed to speak no Kwéyòl or not to speak it well. There is a perception shared by many St. Lucians that knowledge of Kwéyòl interferes with a child’s ability to speak and write English and, hence, to do well academically. English remains the sole language of upward and outward mobility. However, most St. Lucians, both in Castries and the rural districts, attach symbolic importance to Kwéyòl as a language of national identity. For example, a twenty-year-old teacher in Castries emphasized the need for St. Lucia to retain Kwéyòl as a marker of distinctiveness in the world of nations:

I think Kwéyòl is important because St. Lucia is a very open country and it is easily influenced by a lot of other cultures ... like America and Britain. And you find that slowly we are ... we are losing our distinctive aspect of our culture. So, I think if we can keep something that is distinctive to ourselves, it would help to really signal St. Lucia out from other countries.

Another informant, a middle-aged Castries laborer, evoked Biblical imagery in stressing the importance of Kwéyòl:

Your first language ... it’s a gift given by the All-mighty. This is what you’ve been created of. And if you have to neglect that language or pack it completely and adopt [another] language, you become an adopted child ... but not a legitimate child. So, you see Patois is very important just like English or any other language for that matter in the development of our society.

Nevertheless, the symbolic importance does not translate into acceptance of Kwéyòl as a language of instruction in the schools or as a language to use in the home with young children. One eighty-four-year-old Castries housewife summed up a line of thought common among St. Lucians that works against the promotion and elevation of Kwéyòl, particularly among the young:

To me Kwéyòl don’t take you anywhere. It doesn’t matter to me. I would say it is better that we are speaking English. When the children go to school, the two main subjects are English and math. So they must do English. They must know English. People should use less Kwéyòl in St. Lucia because when you go to school, you must do English ... and you must pass in English and in math.

This woman’s views are particularly salient given the competitive nature of admittance to all secondary schools on the island. Only one half of all age-appropriate children gain admittance to secondary school. An island-wide written test in English is used to determine the postprimary educational
future of all St. Lucian youth. Given the competition for limited space in St. Lucia’s secondary schools and the requisite written proficiency in standard English, it is not surprising that Kwéyòl is still viewed as a handicap, despite the language’s gain in value as a symbol of national identity.

This being said, Kwéyòl does enjoy some status as a language of informal communication and camaraderie among some adults and above all as a language of joking and profanity. A thirty-four-year-old middle-class Castries teacher with some college education and who was raising his daughter exclusively in English said the only time he uses Kwéyòl is with older people who speak little else or, “if there’s a joke ... a joke sounds better in Kwéyòl.” A fourteen-year-old student from a working-class Castries neighborhood also said the only time he uses Kwéyòl is when making jokes. A twenty-four-year-old man from one of the rural districts who works as a night service person in a hotel catering to many U.S. tourists good-naturedly added that the only time he uses the language is, “when I crack a joke ... or when I crack a joke about an American ...” Moreover, one young woman in Monchy who had recently graduated from secondary school stated that the only time she uses Kwéyòl at home is when she is angry with her sister. Kwéyòl, she said, is a powerful tool for reproaching or insulting someone.

Although Kwéyòl enjoys status as a language of informal discourse within limited domains – i.e., for joking and expressing strong emotions – and has increased value as a symbol of St. Lucian nationhood, the language has not made significant gains in daily use. In Castries, Kwéyòl has not been a language of polite, public discourse for more than a century. If people spoke it, they generally did so behind closed doors. This remains true today. Furthermore, it is not unlikely that fewer residents of Castries today speak the language at home than previous generations. In rural St. Lucia, the language has historically been the primary medium of communication in both the family and the village. This is no longer the case. Among Monchy informants, 83 percent reported that the use of Kwéyòl has declined in St. Lucia over the past thirty years. A thirty-six-year-old seamstress in Monchy with children of her own explained the nationwide trend away from the language, using her own family’s history as an example:

I think less Patois is spoken now than when I was a child. Because I could remember when I was a little girl going to school, all the children would be speaking Patois on the road to school. But now you hardly have any child that speaks Patois ... The parents are not speaking Patois like that ... time by time, you see, Patois is decreasing ... from the old generation that’s dying out and the young generation that’s coming in. The old generation speak Patois to their children. The children speak English to their children, you understand? So, therefore ... my great grandmother died already. And she speaking Patois alone. So, she died already. My grandmother can speak it (English) a little. And then my mother speak it
CONCLUSION

In St. Lucia, a result of increased globalization – i.e., increased integration with the English-speaking world – has been an elevation of the status of English in relation to Kwéyòl among St. Lucians, young and old, urban and rural. St. Lucians – especially young St. Lucians – faced with limited opportunities on their island of birth frequently look abroad for their future. The growing influence of the United States via television has further fueled desires in the hearts and minds of the young for a better life elsewhere. As all St. Lucians know, their ticket off the island is through mastery of the English language. St. Lucia’s window to the outside, English-speaking world is Castries. Like most Caribbean territories and, indeed, developing countries throughout the world, St. Lucia has witnessed profound sociocultural change at the national level primarily through its capital and largest city. Castries-based norms, including anti-Kwéyòl bias, have spread throughout the island. As a result, rural St. Lucia is in many ways today like urban St. Lucia. English is the uncontested language of prestige and the preferred medium for daily communication across the island, in individual rural communities, and in most families. This reality leaves Kwéyòl an orphaned child, without the nurturing necessary for its sustenance.

Nevertheless, cultural nationalism made some significant gains over the past three decades. An ostensibly Kwéyòl-oriented festival has become the island’s largest national holiday and is now even marketed abroad for its potential for further developing regional tourism. Moreover, St. Lucians can now hear Kwéyòl on the radio nearly every morning and every evening of the week. However, these gains have been insufficient to reverse or halt the trend toward the Anglicization of the historically Kwéyòl-speaking rural districts. In addition, the government has failed to take a more active role to prevent the demise of the language by introducing it as a language of national administration and education – a demand of many cultural nationalists. Consequently, although many St. Lucians emphasize the value of Kwéyòl as a key component in St. Lucian identity, the vast majority will do nothing that they perceive will reduce their children’s opportunities for economic advancement, both at home and abroad. This includes teaching their children Kwéyòl or advocating its use in school. St. Lucian parents still consider Kwéyòl unworthy of perpetuity in their offspring. By continuing the tradition of denigrating Kwéyòl in the minds of young children, islanders push the language further to the margins of St. Lucian society. The results of
this tradition remain to be seen. However, it is likely sooner, rather than later that these results will be definitively known.

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