

A diachronic and comparative analysis of Papiamentu's Swadesh list

This paper is concerned with the origins of Papiamentu and offers a diachronic and comparative analysis of Papiamentu's 100-word Swadesh list (cf. Hancock 1975) to support the claim made by Quint (2000b) that Spanish relexification of an early Upper Guinea Creole variety resulted in what we now know as Papiamentu.

With this purpose, I have roughly divided the Swadesh list up into content words and function words. About function words Muysken & Smith (1990:883) note that "they are normally less susceptible to replacement due to processes of historical change than content words". Consequently, if Papiamentu results from (partial) relexification of an early Upper Guinea Creole variety, we should find evidence for this in the functional categories. Indeed, according to this prediction, the content words on the Swadesh list are principally of Spanish origin, while the functional elements (e.g. 'that', 'this', 'when', 'where', 'who', 'why', 'you (pl.)') demonstrate remarkable correspondences in form and use with Upper Guinea Creole.

Furthermore, for the benefit of this paper, several recently published early Papiamentu texts (e.g. Conradi 1844, Van Dissel 1865) have been closely studied. These texts allow describing various salient soundchanges that have led to some of the modern Papiamentu forms found on the Swadesh list, this way providing valuable insight into the relexification process responsible for the pronounced Spanish character of modern Papiamentu's content words. I will make a selection of diachronically interesting items that star on the list and, where possible, contrast the modern Papiamentu form with the early form as found in the early texts in order to demonstrate that, if we look closely, we find strong indications of the historical ties between Papiamentu and Upper Guinea Creole not only in the functional categories.

In addition, some Spanish derived Swadesh items in Papiamentu will be compared with their equivalents in Chabacano to argue against a significant role of Old Spanish in Papiamentu's formation.

In its totality, then, the paper aims to present a rich collection of 'Swadesh-list-related' observations that are of interest to the origins of Papiamentu in general and its relationships with Upper Guinea Creole in particular.