Language practices, naming practices & language ideologies among Maroon languages in the Surinamese and French Guianese context

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Much of the research on Maroons has focused on understanding the origin and nature of their culture(s) and languages. Relatively little is known about their contemporary development and how they are affected by social, political and economic changes (urbanization, increased mobility). This paper assesses their impact on two sets of Maroon languages, the Eastern Maroon (Aluku, Pamaka, Ndyuka) and two western Maroon (Matawai, Kwinti) languages.

Recent sociolinguistic research shows that urban and rural Maroons have expanded their linguistic repertoires (Migge & Léglise in press). While Maroon languages remain important in-group languages, especially younger Maroons are drawing on Dutch and Sranantongo, but also on other Maroon languages and English. Urban, educated Maroons are often bilingual while rural and less educated Maroons tend to code-mix using Dutch and/or Sranantongo and their Maroon language for a variety of reasons. On an ideological level, urban Maroons orient to a pan-maroon identity that is made visible through pan-maroon language terms and ethnically neutral lexical forms. An important difference emerges between eastern and western Maroons in term of language ideologies. Eastern Maroons display very positive opinions about their languages and competence and widely use them. Western Maroons tend to underestimate their language competence and the importance of their languages. This is pronounced among speakers of Kwinti. Informal recordings show a fair amount of influence from other languages. In urban areas speakers do not encourage their children to speak them, orienting them to Dutch. Consequently, many younger speakers only have a reduced competence. The findings suggest that some Maroon languages are expanding because their speakers are gaining in confidence and status, others appear to be contracting due to averse social circumstances. The paper will explore the nature of these circumstances.

Keywords: language practices, social change, Language ideology.