

# Multidisciplinary and Multilingual Caribbean Studies: An Introduction

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Research on the Caribbean has quite a long tradition at German universities. It started in the 1980s and resulted in the foundation of SOCARE, the Caribbean Research Society in 1988, a German initiative which is still active today with the organization of conferences, workshops, round tables, publications, junior seminars, and lectures ([www.caribbeanresearch.org](http://www.caribbeanresearch.org)). One of its founders and long-time president was Ulrich Fleischmann (1938-2011), a linguist, ethnologist and literary scholar, specialized in the cultural history of Haiti. His career was defined by his special methodological approach, a combination of linguistic analysis with cultural and literary studies, including French, Spanish, Creole and African languages. By reproducing Fleischmann's essay about the *continuum* in "French" Caribbean literature, "The Formation and Evolution of a Literary Discourse. One, Two, or Three Literatures?" (1994), we aim to call attention to the relevance of his viewpoint because, today, linguistics tends to become a marginal field in cultural studies on the Caribbean, notwithstanding its multilingual societies. As Fleischmann argues, colonialism has left a situation of diglossia, and through giving insights in Haitian and French Caribbean literature he points to the continuum of intermediate forms for finding characteristics of daily cultural life. Fleischmann's daughter, Stephanie Fleischmann, a scholar of Spanish and Spanish American literatures, illustrates her description of the beginnings of Fleischmann's academic career with personal notes, outlining his "traveling" across the academic fields.

Fleischmann draws an astonishing blueprint for research by way of interconnecting different disciplines and with the concept of a multicultural and multilingual Caribbean. However, in view of the fact that linguistics and present-day postcolonial criticism mostly walk along different paths, Fleischmann still is an exception. In the context of many Caribbean research activities in the last decades, linguistics has even less visibility than other disciplines in humanities. Nevertheless, as documented in the *Bibliografía anotada*, compiled by Gabriele Knauer (2019), there are many

publications on linguistics in Germany in this respect, offering new empirical information and theoretical input to investigate the Caribbean as a cultural and linguistic contact zone *par excellence*. These studies include contributions to historical linguistics, Creole languages and socio-linguistics, applying traditional methods of Romance Languages, such as etymological research, but also rather new theories of socio-linguistics, such as the ecology of language, with the aim to analyze the particular complexity of linguistic and sociocultural processes of change in the Caribbean, which is reflected in the contributions in this volume.

However, not only due to this fact do we consider that such an approach would give rise to a more multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary way of thinking of Caribbean Studies, thus strengthening the linguistic perspective<sup>1</sup>, but also that work on the Caribbean deals extensively with research topics which have clear linguistic implications: slavery and its consequences in (former) plantation societies, sexual and racial discrimination, urban societies, Jewish religion<sup>2</sup>, agricultural diversity, diaspora, music, media, visual art, political and social constellations, and postcolonial analysis. Recently, we also observe the growing interest for Asian influences (see Knauer 2019). Therefore, the Caribbean as a contact zone *par excellence* became a privileged space of controversial academic discussion about mixture (*métissage*, *mezclaje*) and overlapping translated in the concept of *creolization*. On the one hand, this concept serves as a “bridge” between the various disciplines involved in the research, but on the other hand, linguistics and cultural studies differ in their definition and application in a more local versus universal way (Müller/Ueckmann 2013).

For these reasons and with the purpose of giving more visibility to recent linguistic contributions concerning the Caribbean, we organized a space for discussion by bringing together researchers from different universities

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- 1 The most recently volume of SOCARE on *Reshaping Glocal Dynamics of the Caribbean. Relaciones y Desconexiones — Relations et Déconnexions — Relations and Disconnections* edited by Anja Bandau, Anne Brüske and Natascha Ueckmann (2018) includes two linguistic contributions linked to Academic and Artistic Approaches to ‘the Caribbean’ (Ralph Ludwig) and Migration and Knowledge Circulation (Alla Klimenkowa) in a transdisciplinary way.
  - 2 Michael Studemund-Halévy published in *A Sefardic Pepper-Pot in the Caribbean* (2016) a special section on “A Multilingual Society”, in which the contributions deal with the Sefardic language in Curaçao (Asunción Lloret Florenciano/Susann Fischer; Eva Martha Eckkrammer).

in Germany, who preferably work with emphasis on languages, literatures and cultures from the Caribbean, at two research days held at the Institute of Romance Studies of the Humboldt University in Berlin in 2015 and 2016, and from which we collected the contributions for this volume.

The multidisciplinary and multilingual dimension of the Caribbean is well-represented in the collections of the Ibero-Amerika Institut PK (IAI, [www.iai.spk-berlin.de](http://www.iai.spk-berlin.de)), a library for Spanish-, Portuguese-, Latin-American and Caribbean research, in which scholars can update their information on their respective studies subjects. Ulrike Mühlischlegel and Christoph Müller, scientific researchers at the IAI, attended our research days and, for this purpose, gave a short overview concerning strategies of collecting data and material in the Caribbean region itself. In their essay “Libraries, Databases and Bookselling in the Caribbean” they address the following points, 1) the development of libraries, 2) the digitalization of data bases, and 3) booksellers, with the aim to provide some basic information and give links to useful sources for further research.

With the intention of framing the contributions in line with Fleischmann’s “traveling”, we divide this volume in three sections. In the first one, “Linguistic Studies”, the essays concentrate on different Creole and Indigenous languages in a diachronic perspective and in a variety of Caribbean areas, as well as on French and Spanish regarding special issues of their present sociolinguistic situation. In the second section, “Transdisciplinary Studies”, the essays address the social category of the Cuban *cuenta-propista*, an economic actor in the private sector, connecting linguistic and sociological issues, and the correspondence between a linguist and a writer about the cultural context of the Creole language of Curaçao, Papiamentu. In the third section, “Literary and Cultural Studies”, the essays engage with texts that belong to literature, music, film, oral literature and ethnological field work, and in which the spoken word can shift from one language to another.

Jessica Stefanie Barzen (University Erlangen-Nürnberg) starts the section “Linguistic Studies”, investigating “Samaná Creole as Indicator of Older Stages of Haitian Creole: The Preservation of *h aspire*”. Samaná Creole is a variety of the French-based Haitian Creole that is spoken on the Samaná Peninsula in the north-east of the Dominican Republic. This variety was brought to Samaná more than 200 years ago in the aftermath of the 1791 Haitian Revolution, which led to a mass exodus of French colonists and their African-Haitian slaves. When a variety splits off from its original

environment due to migration, it can develop certain linguistic divergences over time and may preserve more conservative features in comparison to its home variety, like, for instance, the voiceless glottal fricative [h]. By analyzing the realization of the corresponding onsets in Samaná Creole and comparing them both to graphic realizations in earlier documents of colonial Haitian Creole and spoken realization in current American French-based Creoles, the author hopes to make a contribution to the ongoing discussion by determining more precisely the phonetic impact of Francien and Norman in the earlier stages of Haitian Creole.

Miguel Gutiérrez Maté (University of Augsburg) offers an innovative approach in his essay “De Palenque a Cabinda: un paso necesario para los estudios lingüísticos afroiberorrománicos y criollos” providing important material for future research. He compares *palenquero* (the language of Palenque in Colombia) with L2 (=second language) varieties of Kikongo substrate and the Ibero-Roman super-substrate on the one hand, and the postcolonial Portuguese in the northern Angolan provinces of Zaire, Uíge and Cabinda on the other. This last one, Cabinda, is specifically important because the Kikongo varieties intervened in the configuration of *palenquero*: the *yombe* from the interior zone (localized in the tropical forest of Mayombe) and the *vili* of the nord-western zone (the *vili* being the group responsible of capturing the inhabitants of the tropical forest to sell them as slaves to the Portuguese, who successively sold them to other Europeans, above all to the Spanish).

In “Island Carib, Gender Indexicality and Language Contact”, Silke Jansen (University of Erlangen-Nürnberg) demonstrates the existence of indigenous influences. She inquires the “mixed” character of Island Carib, the indigenous languages of the Lesser Antilles, an issue that has concerned researchers for a long time. While the morphosyntactic patterns of this language are clearly Arawak, a considerable part of the lexicon was borrowed from Carib, with a gender split according to etymological origin. In her contribution, Jansen examines the colonial sources in order to get a deeper insight into the functioning of gender specific language use among the Island Carib. Relying on the notion of “gender indexicality”, she analyzes the lexical gender split in the context of comparable phenomena in other South American indigenous languages. Finally, she discusses possible reasons of heavy borrowing of Carib lexical elements by Island Carib men from a sociolinguistic perspective.

Based on a discourse analytical approach, Andre Klump (University of Trier, America Romana Center), in “Lang kreyòl kòm dezyèm lang ofisyel”, explores the linguistic question in the organization of the CARICOM. This Community of Caribbean Countries choose French as its second working language (after English). In his speech on 1 July 2011, the President of Haiti, Michael Martelly, problematized the statute of French in this respect, which generated a national linguistic debate on the use of the two official languages in Haiti, French and Haitian Creole. Klump presents the arguments of the two camps, the pro-French and the pro-Creole, by way of realizing a discourse analysis. In addition, he demonstrates the linguistic and institutional consequences at the level of the CARICOM.

Ingrid Neumann-Holzschuh and Evelyn Wiesinger (University of Regensburg) also focus on Creole languages, in this case on those spoken in Louisiana and French Guiana. In their essay “Deux créoles à la périphérie: les créoles louisianais et guyanais à la lumière de leur lexique d’origine non-française”, they investigate the vocabulary of two French Creole languages, which from the geographical and historical point of view are considered “peripheral”. The main objective of this contribution is to demonstrate the particularities of the vocabulary of non-French origin in the Creole languages of Louisiana and French Guiana in their individual linguistic history. The author’s comparative approach reveals important convergences and divergences between the French Creoles in the Americas, insofar as the Creole languages in the periphery demonstrate lexical specificities which distinguish them quantitatively and qualitatively from the Creoles of the central zone of the Caribbean.

Gabriele Knauer and Alejandro Sánchez Castellanos (Humboldt University of Berlin / University of Havana) discuss changes on political and social posters from 1959 until today. In “Paisajes lingüísticos en cambio: el género del Cartel Político y Social en el espacio público cubano desde 1959 hasta la actualidad” they analyze the linguistic dynamics on these poster texts in the public spaces of Cuba as reflection of different scenarios of the revolutionary process. Knauer and Sánchez resume the focus on this linguistic landscape — mostly applied in multilingual urban contexts and with a synchronic perspective — from another methodological point of view applying the concept of linguistic landscape in a monolingual context and in a process of change. Their main objective is to reveal the interrelation between the linguistic-discursive and the socio-economic changes in the configuration of public communication in Cuba, and especially in the

field of political propaganda in the period from 1959 until today, as a case of localization instead of globalization: based on the example of the Cuban sugar cane harvest (*zafra*).

The essays in the next section “Interdisciplinary Studies” concentrate on the Spanish language and its social and cultural surroundings.

Jenny Morin Nenoff (University of Köln) and Gabriele Knauer inquire the social category of the *cuentalpropista*, the one who works for his/her own benefit in Cuba, in the essay “Del ‘hacer *timbiriches*’ al ser *cuentalpropista* en Cuba: negociación discursiva de un concepto y sus implicaciones socio-laborales, lingüísticas y ideológicas”. The authors show that the debate on this phenomenon does not only have a social but a linguistic dimension as well. Point of departure is a sociological study of Cuban employment biographies, in which Jenny Morin Nenoff (2017) discusses the problems of the definition of the category of *cuentalpropista* under the conditions of the contemporary period of revision of the social and economic model in Cuba. It seems necessary and important to relate the linguistic perspective to questions of social sciences that add to the semantic precision of the concept.

Ineke Phaf-Rheinberger (University of Giessen) establishes cross connections between Creole languages and literature. She argues that it might be the case that the Netherlands Antilles, and Curaçao in particular, are the only Creole speaking countries in the Caribbean with a Spanish language tradition reflected in literary texts. Thanks to the prominent presence of the Jewish community with Sephardic roots, a majority of the colonial elite spoke Spanish maintaining intense commercial contacts and relationships with family members and friends in Latin America until the 1930s. In addition, these Spanish-speaking citizens considered Papiamentu, the island’s Creole language, as their mother tongue. In her essay “Acerca de la lengua escrita en papiamentu — Rodolfo Lenz y John de Pool”, Phaf-Rheinberger publishes the correspondence of these two personalities who were of major importance for documenting this period.

In the third and last section of this volume, “Cultural and Literary Studies”, the essays cover different textual genres, historical texts, media, and ethnological field work.

Anja Bandau (University of Hannover) problematizes in “Qu’est-ce que peuvent amener les textes coloniaux pour les études littéraires postcoloniales?” the role of colonial texts in contemporary studies on the Haitian revolution. She argues that, albeit the topic of postcolonial literary studies

is not new — by mentioning several authors —, it is useful to formulate new questions to avoid repeating the same stereotypical views. For her, an important question, when talking about the Haitian revolution, is to look for the representation of the revolutionaries: how are they depicted in colonial texts? For a long time, the Haitian revolution was silenced in the French sources and, in reference to this fact, contemporary postcolonial research has contributed with new information. Bandau describes three topoi, which react to the revolutionary violence: the “bon nègre”, the emergence of a Creole space, and the naissance of a “national” literature written inside and outside of Haiti.

Jana Gohrisch (University of Hannover) discusses writing on enslavement in Anglophone texts after abolition and analyzes three rarely mentioned texts from the nineteenth century: a children’s tale, a tale addressed to a young readership, and a novel, all written from the “white” perspective for a middle-class readership. Gohrisch situates these works in the context of general opinions in the post-slavery period, demonstrating that these texts continue to write the “real” African Caribbeans out of the dominant post-emancipation narrative by way of domesticating people of African descent, for whom the only road to social acceptance was acculturation.

Andrea Gremels (University of Frankfurt/Main) discusses the magazine *Tropiques* (1941-1945), published by Aimée and Suzanne Césaire in Martinique. She points to the transcultural crossovers of surrealism in the different articles and essays. According to her argument, the influence of surrealism on *Tropiques* has already been discussed but, for Gremels, the relevant issue is the inspiration this magazine and its editors gave to surrealism. In his dialogues with Césaire, Breton discovered the creative potential and vitality of the Caribbean environment and takes this as exemplary for his revue *VVV*, founded in New York in 1942. The concern of the Césaire’s, meanwhile, was to change the way of thinking within and on the Caribbean itself and to transform the folkloric perspective into a horizon of marvelous appearances, into a “barbarous surrealism”, which inspires the first novel on the Haitian revolution written in Spanish, *El reino de este mundo* (1949), by the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier.

Paola Ravasio (University of Bielefeld) offers an extensive discussion of the poetry of Eulalia Bernard. Bernard was born in the coastal region of Costa Rica and applies the term “negritud” to relate Costa Rica to the Caribbean and Afroamerica. Ravasio argues that it is not sufficient to read Bernard’s poetical texts, but that one must imagine these texts as performed

by Bernard with carefully chosen music. She used to travel through the region to construct a dialogue with her audience by way of hearing the often-multilingual lyrics and listening to musical compositions.

Juan José Vélez-Peña (University of Bremen) analyzes two documentaries on Afro-Caribbean music, on the *rumba* in Cuba in the 1970s and on the so-called popular *boricua* music in Puerto Rico in the 1990s. He argues that those documentaries add to the image of mono-culturalism, a political aim in national interest, whereas in reality discrimination of the Afro-Caribbean part of the population is a current feature of everyday life. In Cuba, this concerns young people in the cities, who are considered to belong to a criminal environment. And for Puerto Rico, well-known public personalities in and outside the island, declare that this music testifies a unity of the people, albeit not existent in the island's hierarchy.

Finally, Sinah Theres Kloss (University of Köln) refers to the Asian components in the Caribbean. In "Wearing the Shikha", she describes the religion of a Hindu community in Guyana and their contacts with Guyanese Hindu communities in the USA. During her fieldwork, Kloß assisted Sunday services in the Madras tradition in a temple in Berbice, eastern Guyana, and lived in the village observing the dress code of the visitors. In her opinion, the Madras tradition is emerging in opposition to the dominant Sanatan tradition, emphasizing religious leadership in terms of guru-hood to contest Guyanese socio-religious hierarchy.

It seems that in particular the variants of Creole languages, also among the Hindu communities in Guyana, Trinidad, and Suriname, demonstrate that the real communication pattern is to be found in those linguistic alternatives, and that they influence cultural life as well. Even if we denied that comparables Creole variants exist in the Spanish-speaking areas, we can find Creole roots in popular expressions and religious affinities (see Paola Ravasio in this volume).

In this sense, the Caribbean continues confirming its reputation of being a laboratory of modern life, in which linguistic interaction in everyday life is an outstanding issue making research projects on its details a rewarding experience. We thank all the contributors for their collaboration and, in addition, Alexandra Ortiz Wallner (Substitute Professor of Hispanic Literatures), for her invaluable support during the Caribbean Research Days held at the Humboldt University.



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