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History: The Creation of French Guianese Creole

The social history of early French Guiana shows the remarkable situation in which the creole arose. A mix of speakers of Native American, African and European languages created a new language in two generations. French Guianese Creole (FGC) did not exist in 1660 but by the early 1700s it was the native language of people born in the colony (Barrère 1743: 40). The basic outline of the colony's early chronology is as follows:

1654: Settlement by Portuguese and Dutch

1660: Portuguese begin importation of enslaved Africans

1664: French takeover; departure of Dutch and most Portuguese settlers

1667: Departure of remaining Portuguese settlers

Early 1700s: FGC is the native language of the locally born population

The historical section of this book will investigate the origins, motivations and society of the people who lived in the colony during those years, so that a possible pathway for the creation of the new language

can be developed. As necessary groundwork to the investigation, the section will begin with a brief description of French Guiana's historiography, location and current situation before examining the three principal groups of people involved in the creation of the creole: Native Americans, West and West Central Africans and French people. Saint-Christophe and Martinique, the two colonies where French creole society began, will also be discussed in order to build a picture of the origins and connections of FGC's creators and to show how each colony's social history differed significantly.

2.1 Background: Historiography, Geography and the Linguistic Situation Today

2.1.1 Reconstructing Creole History

Reconstructing the linguistic environment of colonial French Guiana during its earliest years is necessarily a speculative exercise but the extensive sources available reduce the uncertainty and allow a more accurate picture of the founding years than for any other French slave-based colony. Those sources rarely focus on slavery, however, because slaves in the Americas were a hidden people until the rise of the abolitionist movement. Their story lurks in occasional remarks and requires reading between the lines because a seventeenth-century slave's viewpoint and interactions must be surmised from observations made by owners. Their near absence from the historical record has left its mark on modern society.

Serge Mam-Lam-Fouck, the pre-eminent historian of French Guiana (see Mam-Lam-Fouck 1982, 1986, 1987, 1996, 2002), says "the inhabitants of French Guiana, notably the Creoles, are ignorant of their history. [...] The basic historical knowledge that would form a people linked by a common past is lacking" (1987: 1).¹ Similarly, the

¹"Les habitants de la Guyane française—notamment les Créoles—ignorent leur histoire. [...] n'existent pas, dans cette société, les connaissances historiques de base qui [...] donneraient la conscience de former un peuple lié par le même passé".

Martinican philosopher and author Edouard Glissant writes: “We have not yet unearthed or raised up our history, within us and among us. This gives us, for the moment, the uneasy pleasure of living in an eternal illusion” (1993: 17).² Some of the ignorance is voluntary, deriving from a natural unwillingness to dwell on a past built on slavery, but in the last two decades, historians and archaeologists have discovered much of French Guiana’s past (see Bacot and Zonzon 2011). However, very little has been written about the colony’s founding years, years that were disproportionately influential in its history and, as will be shown below, were the critical time for the creation of the creole language. Le Roux’s important archaeological work has literally unearthed French Guianese history in his excavations of a sugar plantation but is necessarily limited by corrosive soil that prevents a full understanding of how the plantation began (Le Roux 1995; Le Roux et al. 2009). Other studies voluntarily disregard the importance of the founding population; thus, Polderman (2004) sets 1676 as the start of her history while Cardoso (1999) begins his in 1715. There is a tendency in works on slavery in French Guiana (and often in other French Caribbean colonies) to consider the era in three parts: slavery, abolition and post-abolition. The foundation of a colony and the arrival of the first slaves are not given the attention they deserve, despite the way they shaped what was to come.

The recent historical studies of French Guiana build on earlier works of variable quality. Henry (1950) has been superseded by Mam-Lam-Fouck’s work. Saint-Quentin (1872) summarises the colony’s history and offers anecdotes derived from his lifetime there. Senez (1821) provides an excellent summary of early settlement attempts but makes almost no mention of slavery. Laboria (1843) uses his history as a backdrop to a proposed colonisation of French Guiana, as do a number of other works from the time (e.g. Bousquet 1882). Other nineteenth-century sources provide a contemporary picture but offer little accurate information about the early settlement (e.g. Denis 1823; Coüy

²“Notre histoire, il nous reste à la déterrer ou à l’élever, en nous et parmi nous. Ce qui nous donne, pour le moment, le plaisir trouble de fréquenter [une] illusoire éternité”.

1849). A late eighteenth-century historian, Jacques-François Artur, left 13 manuscript volumes containing a chronological history of the colony that has recently been published thanks to the efforts of Marie Polderman (Artur 2002). While Artur has relatively little to say about the slaves, his long experience in French Guiana, conversations with early settlers and transcriptions of documents now lost all make his work among the most important in the field.

Historical studies of French Guiana are supported by primary sources, most significantly those available in the Colonies section of the French National Archives. They include correspondence, memoranda and censuses addressed to the marine minister, who oversaw France's colonies. Among the sources are reports from colonial administrators, usually dry and bureaucratic but occasionally offering information about ship arrivals or plantation conditions. Memoranda presented optimistic projects for expanding the colony but often began with a summary of its history while censuses showed how the colonial population was distributed. Visitors to the colony might spend a few days or weeks there and provide a superficial view, although during the Enlightenment French Guiana attracted scientists keen to stay for years and explore the rainforest. One of them, Pierre Barrère, provided invaluable observations about the colony and was the first to mention the language known as the "Créol de Cayenne" (1743: 40). Missionary accounts also contribute to the picture of slavery in French Guiana (Wiesinger 2013), although as owners themselves the missionaries tended to say little about their property and preferred to focus on their principal task, which was to evangelise the Native American population (see Collomb 2006). Shipping records in French and Dutch archives, correspondence from individual settlers and plantation records all provide converging lines of evidence about the inhabitants' origins and the sociolinguistic environment in which they lived. Studies in language contact and second-language acquisition provide further support to the linguistic reconstruction proposed in the following pages. One final primary source deserves mention as it will be used extensively in this study. It is the manuscript of Jean Goupy des Marets, a Parisian who visited French Guiana in 1675 and later worked as a plantation manager there from 1688 to 1690. His descriptions of slave life, and most importantly

his biographies of 104 slaves, provide unparalleled details of Africans in the seventeenth-century New World and are the centrepiece of the reconstruction of early French Guiana that will follow the background material of the next sections.

2.1.2 French Guiana's Setting

French Guiana is divided into two regions: the narrow coastal area where most of the population lives and the immense equatorial rainforest. The forest is nonetheless considered the 'real' French Guiana by its residents despite its difficult accessibility; attempts to build inland roads have largely failed, and the interior of the country can effectively be reached only by river or air. In the early years of colonisation, heavy rainfall and muddy tracks hindered movement by land, making journeys by boat the most effective means of travel for many planters. As a result, some properties were more isolated from each other than their proximity on a map may suggest.

The forest restricted European colonisation attempts to the narrow 380-kilometre coastal strip from the Maroni River in the west bordering Suriname to the Oyapock River on the Brazilian frontier. Between two river mouths near the middle of the coastal strip is Cayenne Island, which became the most favoured site for European settlement attempts because it had rare low hills that made for good defensive sites. To the French, the colony of Cayenne that gradually spread over the island and extended onto the mainland was synonymous with French Guiana until the eighteenth century.

Despite its links to the Caribbean sphere of France's colonial activity, French Guiana could be very difficult to reach from Martinique or other islands of the Antilles. The prevailing winds and current along the French Guiana coast could be so strong that ships leaving the Antilles might make large detours. In 1667, for example, a missionary went from Saint-Christophe (St. Kitts) to French Guiana via the Cape Verde Islands (JA, FGu 6).³ In 1605, a ship from England

³Jesuit Archives, Vanves, France.

heading for the Oyapock inadvertently made landfall west of the river, spent weeks fighting wind and current in a vain attempt to beat along the coast, then gave up and went to St. Lucia (Williamson 1923: 37). The current carried large quantities of sediment from the mouth of the Amazon and deposited them along the Guianese coast. As a result, shifting sandbars could quickly change the form of river mouths. “This is why the rivers, which should constitute a perfect network of penetration inland, are hardly navigable, except by ships of average tonnage and a draught of 1.5 to 2 m” (Adam 1936: 11).⁴ Ships that crossed the Atlantic had much greater draughts and found few calm anchorages in French Guiana. All these factors—rainforest, wind, current and lack of harbours—contributed to the colony’s remoteness, made European settlement precarious and reduced contact between FGC and creoles of the Antilles, at least until the twentieth century.

2.1.3 French Guiana: Current Linguistic Situation

About 60,000 people speak FGC in French Guiana, with another 4,000 in neighbouring Brazil and Suriname. The number of speakers of FGC is not known exactly (cf. Renault-Lescure and Goury 2009) because the creole is widely spoken as a second or third language. In this aspect, it differs from the creole of the Lesser Antilles where a creole is only an L1. Interestingly, many L2 speakers of FGC have another French-based creole language as their first language: usually Haitian Creole, but also Lesser Antillean Creoles from Martinique, Guadeloupe and St. Lucia.

Many other languages with significant speaker communities are spoken in the territory today aside from French and FGC (see Goury 2001; Légliše and Migge 2007; Patzelt 2014). Half a dozen Native American languages from the Arawak, Carib and Tupi-Guarani families are all that remain of the many varieties spoken at the time of early European contact. In western French Guiana live descendants of maroons

⁴“C’est pourquoi les voies fluviales qui, dans leur ensemble devraient constituer un réseau parfait de pénétration, ne sont guère utilisables que par des navires de moyen tonnage de 1m50 à 2 mètres de tirant d’eau”.

(runaway slaves) from Suriname who speak creoles with elements of African languages, English, Dutch and Portuguese. Since the start of the twentieth century, many waves of immigrants have transformed the linguistic and demographic situation. The first was Martinicans fleeing the devastation of the Mount Pélée eruptions of 1902. Later, in the 1970s, several thousand speakers of Cantonese, Lao and Hmong arrived from Southeast Asia as part of international efforts to save them from the war in the region. Other refugees fleeing civil war in Suriname in the 1980s boosted the Maroon and Native American communities, and there are now more than 30,000 Surinamese living in French Guiana (Insee 2010). The 1980s saw another large wave of immigration, this time from Haiti, that swelled to over 20,000 in the following decades (Insee 2010). Further immigration occurred with the construction of the European Space Agency's base in Kourou, where a new city was built by labourers from many neighbouring territories. The thousands of scientists, technicians and civil servants now living in Kourou form a European minority speaking French, German and English that represents a foreign body for the French Guianese. An influx of Brazilians has also increased the population of French Guiana. More than 20,000 Brazilians are recorded in the censuses but many thousands more live there illegally. In all, the official population has tripled since the 1980s, and FGC is less prominent than two generations ago.

2.2 Origins of the French Guianese Population

2.2.1 Native Americans

The first inhabitants of the Guianas were Native Americans, whose presence there dates back some four thousand years (Giacottino 1984: 25). At the time of European exploration, the principal groups in the Cayenne region were Kali'na, then called Galibi or Caribs, who had migrated north from the Amazon basin and had gradually conquered the more sedentary Arawaks. Initial relations between Native Americans and Europeans were generally based on trade and proved relatively uneventful where they benefited both parties. Indigenous peoples tolerated

small European settlements unless there were overt signs of hostility on the part of the colonisers. As more Europeans settled the Guianas, relations worsened, particularly when pirates kidnapped Native Americans and sold them into slavery in the Antilles (Hurault 1989: 35). Old World diseases also had an impact: a smallpox epidemic in 1716 killed over 1200 Native Americans near Cayenne and perhaps many more beyond the colony (Artur 2002: 390).

The interaction between Europeans and Kali'na preceded the arrival of Africans but may have played a significant role in the formation of FGC. The Kali'na spoke at least two languages: Kali'na and a pidgin with predominantly Arawak morphology. The pidgin, used for communication with non-Kali'na, had been a lingua franca of the Caribbean for centuries (Taylor and Hoff 1980). When two seventeenth-century French observers independently sketched what they thought was the native language of the Kali'na, they in each case described a language with "remarkable similarity" to the Arawak pidgin (Taylor and Hoff 1980: 308). Many new lexical items were added to the pidgin after European contact. A Frenchman in Martinique in 1619 noted that the indigenous inhabitants used many Spanish and French words. He thought that the men and women spoke different languages and that "a child who wishes to learn their language must learn two at once" (Moreau 1990: 116). The men's language was probably the pidgin (Taylor and Hoff 1980: 301). The indigenous inhabitants of Guadeloupe "developed a sort of language containing elements of Spanish, French, and Flemish" (Du Puis 1652: 195).

In the Caribbean islands, many indigenous inhabitants were killed by war or European diseases before the establishment of large slave-based colonies, which limited contact between Africans and speakers of the Arawak pidgin. There are, however, strong arguments for assuming that the indigenous peoples played a role in the creation of creole languages in the islands. Bellido de Luna and Faraclas (2012a: 86) identify four waves of Caribbean creolisation, the first two of which involved Native Americans. The initial wave resulted from pre-Columbian contact between peoples, giving rise notably to the Arawak pidgin. It was followed by what González López (2007), elaborating on Chaudenson (1995)'s "homestead" and "plantation" phases of creolisation, refers to

as a “cohabitation” phase. This describes mixed societies on the margins of formal European colonisation composed of people such as runaway slaves, European deserters, pirates and isolated settlers who lived with and often depended on Native Americans. Small colonial ventures, such as those dotted along the Guiana coast until the mid-1600s, could also be considered part of the cohabitation phase, especially in the Cayenne area, where the Kali’na maintained regular contact with traders, settlers and slaves for centuries. Until the mid-1600s, Europeans settled only with Kali’na permission. As early as 1530, a Spanish settlement there lasted a matter of months; another survived five years from 1568 (Hurault 1989: 27–28). In 1604, the French explorer Jean Mocquet was shown an abandoned logging camp near the Cayenne River, proof of earlier occupation by Europeans, who could have been Spanish, Dutch, English or French given the nationalities of visitors to the area (Mocquet 1617: 110–111). The frequency of interactions increased throughout the seventeenth century as European interest in the region grew. In the 1640s, a large settlement of several hundred French people survived two years on the site of what is now the city of Cayenne. It ended when its tyrannical governor was ambushed by Kali’na. “One of them seized the front of his doublet and told him in French that he was worthless and that he was but an evil man” (Boyer 1654: 221).⁵ The words might have been French but the structure could have resembled that of a pidgin (such as “*toi vaurien, toi méchant homme*”).

Significant contact between Europeans, Africans and Native Americans after the cohabitation phase happened on a number of Caribbean islands, notably Hispaniola and Jamaica, but it occurred in liminal societies such as maroon communities, far from the plantations where the bulk of the slaves were based (Bellido de Luna and Faraclas 2012a). In French Guiana, the contact occurred directly with colonial society. Settlers married Kali’na women and employed Kali’na men to hunt and fish. Terms and structures used by Kali’na thus had a much greater presence at the heart of colonial society in French Guiana.

⁵“il y en eut un qui le prenant par le devant de son pourpoint, luy dit en François, qu’il ne valoit rien, & qu’il n’estoit qu’un mechant homme”.

As late as 1807, the missionary Christlieb Quandt reported: “The Arawak language can be of great benefit to a European travelling along the coast of Cayenne from Suriname to the Orinoco and Trinidad because people of that nation can be found throughout the region” (1807: 294). The Arawak pidgin may consequently have had a greater influence on FGC formation than on other French creoles, although its potential contribution is nevertheless likely to be small.

The best early source for Arawak as spoken in French Guiana is an unfinished grammar incorrectly attributed to the missionary Theodor Schulz by Lucien Adam and his colleagues, who edited a large number of Native American grammars and dictionaries in the 1880s. Adam knew that Schulz had left his mission early, leaving behind an unfinished grammar of a Native American language. When he found a copy of an unfinished grammar, Adam assumed it was Schulz’s and edited it under his name. Handwriting comparison and correspondence allow us to attribute the grammar and the accompanying dictionary to Theophilus Salomo Schuman. This is a crucial finding, as Schuman lived a century before Schulz. His earliest letters are from 1748, only 46 years after the creole was first attested in 1702. Schuman’s grammar is an invaluable document for the study of early FGC and shows that Arawak needs to be added to French, Portuguese and West African languages as another language in contact in early French Guiana.

A number of similar grammatical features have been identified between lexically English Caribbean creoles and the indigenous Arawak languages of the region (Bellido de Luna and Faraclas 2012b). The similarities are difficult to investigate in detail because most of the indigenous languages have died out, meaning that comparisons must be made indirectly by relying heavily on areal characteristics. Uncertainty about the morphology of the Arawak pidgin presents an additional problem. Despite these caveats, it should be noted that Northern Arawak languages mark a distinction between stative and non-stative verbs and emphasise modality and aspect over tense. They also have a six-part subject pronoun system with gender marking for third-person singular but not third-person plural and “non-copular constructions with existential, equational, locational and attributive meanings”, a characteristic found in the lexically English creoles of the Caribbean but not in most West

African languages, according to Bellido de Luna and Faracías (2012b: 148). In addition, the Northern Arawak languages use reduplication as a non-completive marker to indicate progressive aspect. Most pidgins and creoles tend to use reduplication as an intensifier (see Kouwenberg 2003) although Melanesian contact languages like Bislama (Crowley 1990) and Tok Pisin (Nose 2011) use it for a wide range of functions.

2.2.2 Western and West Central Africa

Africans and their descendants made up over three-quarters of the population of colonial French Guiana during the first century of slavery that saw FGC emerge. Knowledge of their origins, particularly of the founder population, provides essential information about the sociolinguistic environment of the colony. This section will focus on the three principal sources of slaves for early French Guiana, namely the Bight of Benin, Senegambia and Angola-Congo. Since the western Bight of Benin was the homeland of most of French Guiana's first slaves, particular attention will be devoted to that region. It should be noted that while Africans sent across the Atlantic were given a single ethnic label by their captors, they should not be considered monolingual. Multilingualism, "a fact of African life" (Fardon and Furniss 1994: i), was and is the norm. For example, about 98% of Beninese speak at least two languages, while over 50% speak four or more languages (Igué and N'Ouéni 1994: 58–59). It would be incorrect to assume that an African slave was bemused when placed in a multilingual environment. Instead, their experience meant they had well-developed communication strategies for encounters with people who spoke other languages.

The western Bight of Benin became a major site for the Atlantic slave trade in the seventeenth century. Linguistically, the region consisted of a group made up of Ewe, Fon, Gê, Gun, Mahi and other languages of the Kwa family referred to collectively as Gbe. Opinions vary as to how these languages differ; Hérault (1978) states that Yoruba is quite distinct, belonging to the Eastern Kwa languages, whereas the Gbe group, which he divides into Ewe and Fon, is part of the Western Kwa languages. Westermann and Bryan note that Fon, Gun and Mahi have a close

affinity (1952: 83). Akplogan mentions an “intercomprehension” between Gun and Fon (1992: 10). Kluge divides 49 Gbe varieties into seven dialect clusters (2000: 68). The intercomprehension of the languages of the Ewe and Fon subgroups is such that Capo (1983) argues that they are dialects of a single language: Gbe. A possible comparison could be made with the different Oil patois spoken in seventeenth-century France. In any case, it seems that a speaker of Ewe had little difficulty communicating with a speaker of Gun or Fon on the plantations of Cayenne.⁶

Portugal’s early dominance of the Atlantic slave trade established linguistic conventions (including *Lingua Franca*; see Arends 1997) along the African coast that survived even when Dutch merchants took over. In the western Bight of Benin, the Portuguese began to trade in the late 1500s with Alada rulers and by 1602 were purchasing large numbers of Africans there for Brazil and São Tomé (Law 1991: 119). Dutch influence rose in the 1630s, and by the 1660s Portugal was no longer involved but “Portuguese remained the language of trade in Alada, which the Dutch and other Europeans were obliged to use” (Law 1991: 123–124). France also established a post in Alada. A French trader who purchased nearly 1000 captives there in 1670 estimated that about 3000 Africans per year were being transported from Alada (Delbée 1671: 406). Some were sent there in the 1660s from the nearby settlement of Great Popo (Law 1991: 143), a claim borne out by the Great Popo origins of some of Cayenne’s slaves taken across the Atlantic at about that time.

In 1671, the French moved their Alada post to the neighbouring kingdom of Ouidah, or Juda, which soon became a focal point of the slave trade. Captain Damon called there in 1698 and again in 1701 to investigate commercial prospects (Law 1991: 134–135, 173). It was no doubt the same Damon who brought 190 Africans to Cayenne in late 1701 (AN, C14/4, 122).⁷ In the early 1700s, the volume of trading

⁶Grammatical descriptions of Ewe are provided by Ameka (1991), Dzablu-Kumah (2015), Essegbey et al. (2013), Lafage (1985), Pasch (1995) and Westermann (1961).

⁷This and subsequent similar abbreviations refer to material from the French National Archives Colonial Section, in this case from Series C14, volume 4, folio 122.

in Ouidah rose to an immense level, of some 20,000 captives per year (Snelgrave 1734: 2; see also Aboh 2015: 29).

Prisoners of war were the major source of captives sold in the western Bight of Benin (Law 1991: 185). The neighbouring inland kingdom of Dahomey supplied many slaves, and Ducasse reported in 1680 that these slaves, known as Fain or Fan, made up the majority of slaves sold in Alada and Ouidah (Law 1991: 186). Dahomey also acted as an intermediary, supplying slaves from further afield, notably Yoruba-speakers from the Oyo Empire, as demande rose in the eighteenth century. The frenetic slave-trading along the western Bight of Benin was not matched on the eastern side where Yoruba and Igbo peoples lived, although in the 1630s the Yoruba language was a *lingua franca* spoken as far west as Alada (Thornton 1992: 190), which suggests that many speakers of Gbe languages could also communicate with Yoruba-speakers.

Further east still was the Bight of Biafra in which lay the port of Calabar. Kalabari were transported to French Guiana in the first century of slavery, although they were few in number and generally not considered good workers. The language of Calabar was Efik, but many captives would have been competent in Igbo and Ijo, given the proximity and influence of those languages. Competence in languages spoken further west would be rarer, although a missionary remarked in the 1600s that some Alada people could understand catechism for Kalabari (Thornton 1992: 190). The African pilots around Calabar in the late seventeenth century spoke “a little either English, Portuguese or Dutch” (Hair 1992: 675), which reflects the ethnicity of the European slavers in the region over the previous fifty years. The French slaver Jean Barbot noted the importance of *Lingua Franca* there during his slaving voyage (Debien et al. 1978: 281; Hair 1992: lxxv).

To the west of the Bight of Benin was the Gold Coast, which supplied a large number of captives to the New World, but few to French Guiana. The Akan states of the early 1600s that gradually became the Ashanti Empire of the 1700s supplied Koromanti and Mina captives who spoke dialects of Akan (notably Fanti and Twi). Their cultural impact on certain creole societies has been well documented (see Bastide 1971), while McWhorter (1997) situates the pidgin ancestor of the English Atlantic creoles along this coast. Only one slaver,

Barbot in 1679, took people from this part of Africa to French Guiana during the colony's early years (Debien et al. 1978).

A small number of Senegambians also contributed to the slave population of early Cayenne. Africans purchased from Senegambian posts might be speakers of Wolof, Mande languages (such as Mandinka and Bambara) and Fula transported from far inland. They were more likely to be ethnically and linguistically diverse due to the long-established slave-trading routes there. Unlike in the Bight of Benin, captives might have heard some French before they were loaded on ships. A visitor in 1635 noted that there were so many French ships trading in Rufisque (now part of Dakar) that the local inhabitants had picked up a great deal of French slang (Saint-Lo 1637: 20). However, it was only in the last quarter of the eighteenth century that Cayenne received large numbers of Senegambian captives, by which time FGC had been in existence for three generations.

The third major region of the slave trade was south of the equator in Angola and the Congo, where people spoke languages of the Western Bantu family. In the middle years of the seventeenth century, roughly two-thirds of the African captives transported to the Americas were from western central Africa, and it was only the increased activity in the western Bight of Benin that saw this proportion decline by 1700 (Thornton 1992: 118). The Portuguese controlled most of the early Angola-Congo trade until the Dutch joined in after 1630. The latter shipped so many captives to French and English colonies that Central Africans played an important early role in the creation of many creole societies and languages (Heywood and Thornton 2007). French Guiana was an exception, however, and as will be discussed below, saw very few Central Africans in the first 70 years of its existence.

2.2.3 France and French Colonies

France's first wave of colonial expansion began with the policies of Cardinal Richelieu in the 1620s and ended in 1713 when the elderly Louis XIV signed the Treaty of Utrecht. Thousands of French people left their native land for the American colonies during that century of

royal aggrandisement. They brought a large range of vernaculars into the linguistic flux from which creoles emerged all over the Caribbean.

The centralisation of French power that occurred during Louis XIV's reign was prepared by Richelieu, who believed that France would never be truly unified until there was only one variety of French. In founding the French Academy, he intended to standardise the language and provide one dialect of French that would serve as a target for all those who aspired to succeed in French society. He and various grammarians tried to freeze the natural development of Standard French and render other language varieties spoken in France undesirable. The result was a large gap between Standard French and what the great majority of the population actually spoke.

Most of the early French emigrants to the colonies came from regions west of a line drawn through Bordeaux, Paris and Lille (Chaudenson 1995: 52). They were Picards, Normans, Bretons, Parisians, Poitevins and Saintongeais. The first French indentured servants in the Caribbean were recruited in Normandy and Brittany. When Guillaume Coppier sailed on an expedition to Saint-Christophe in the late 1620s, he was the only person from Lyon among 600 Bretons, Picards and especially Normans (Coppier 1645: preface [np]). Seventeenth-century Cayenne censuses list male settlers' names like Lecompte, Leclerc, Dubois, Fontaine and Bouteiller, all typical of Ile-de-France, Normandy and Picardy. The maiden names of the settlers' wives are not generally known, although in the late seventeenth-century poor women were shipped from Paris to Cayenne to be married to colonists.

The Vulgar Latin spoken by the soldiers and settlers of the Roman Empire had evolved over many centuries into hundreds of local vernaculars known as patois. Those patois spoken in northern and western France belonged to a cluster called the Oil languages, of which the most influential variety was the Standard French of the court. It was codified and prescribed by Richelieu's grammarians, but few New World settlers spoke it natively, not even Parisians, who spoke the popular French of the capital. Most seventeenth-century French emigrants to the colonies spoke Norman, Picard and other Oil languages.

Emigrants to the colonies in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were rarely from the bourgeoisie; they tended to be either

peasants or urban poor, in either case unaffected by the linguistic policies of France's élite. Their language has been described by Chaudenson as a "popular" or "advanced" French (1979: 80). While Goodman claimed that dialectal differences in French were primarily phonological (1964: 127), Chaudenson's view is that speakers of popular French introduced grammatical variants of standard French into the colonial sphere, although his descriptions of "advanced" French give the impression that the Oïl patois were derivatives of standard French when they had a parallel development from Latin (Manessy 1994: 167–170).

Alleyne draws attention to the sociolinguistic structure of French colonial society and claims that all inhabitants were aware of expressions that were identifiable with a particular rank (1996: 33). One example might be the standard French word for "house", *maison*, and its popular synonym *case*. A slave might know both words but would not use the standard word since this would be tantamount to identification with the slaveowner's "correct" language. A similar situation occurs when the main character of the Creole novel *Atipa* mocks a black inhabitant of Cayenne who tries to use French instead of his native creole (Parépou 1885: 80).

While preparing to leave France, settlers heard various Oïl patois and other languages in the port cities of France. Rouen, for example, which was a city of departure for many early voyages to French Guiana, had a multinational community connected with the shipping industry (Brunelle 1991, 2003). On the voyage out, the settlers would have heard the vernaculars of sailors from different backgrounds as well as the conventionalised jargon used on board to ensure communication among crew members. And in the colonies, heavily dependent on shipping, maritime vocabulary would have featured in the everyday life of the settlers, as is apparent from the presence in creoles and overseas varieties of French of maritime terms like *virer* ("steer") and *haler* ("haul") for the standard *tourner* ("turn") and *tirer* ("pull") respectively. Colonial varieties of French would have arisen, influenced by not only the shipping context but also the local environment and economic production, such as day-to-day life on sugar plantations. The movement of settlers and sailors from colony to colony, while somewhat limited where Cayenne was concerned, would have facilitated the conventionalisation of what might be termed Colonial French.

The Caribbean version of Colonial French, with its attendant mentalities such as how to talk to slaves, began in Saint-Christophe (modern-day St Kitts) in the early seventeenth century. It was the first French colony to use enslaved Africans, and its linguistic environment would have been diffused in part to other colonies. The closer the colony to Saint-Christophe, both geographically and historically, the more significant this transfer was likely to be. Distant colonies, such as Cayenne or Louisiana, were less influenced (Hazaël-Massieux 1990).

Saint-Christophe began in 1625 as a tobacco colony founded by the privateer d'Esnambuc (Margry 1863: 23; Du Tertre 1667–1671, I: 3). A 1626 document states that the colony consisted of “eighty men [...] and also about forty slaves” (Petitjean Roget 1978: 1496).⁸ Most of the eighty men were probably Normans, like d'Esnambuc's crew listed in a 1623 charter (Petitjean Roget 1978: 29). The slaves, described in 1627 as “naïgres et indiens” (Petitjean Roget 1978: 1494), had probably been taken during raids on the Spanish. D'Esnambuc evidently did not yet consider importing slaves from Africa to be viable since he instead recruited hundreds of indentured servants from France in 1627. The origin of most of them is known: two-thirds were Normans; 10% Parisians, 7% from French ports, and the rest, apart from a Portuguese worker, were from other French Provinces (Petitjean Roget 1978: 61).

In the early 1630s, Saint-Christophe planters became wealthy and imported thousands of African captives to work alongside the indentured servants on the island's small tobacco plantations. Anticipating a shortage of arable land, d'Esnambuc expanded development to nearby Martinique in 1635 (Petitjean Roget 1978: 5–6), while in the same year an expedition from France settled in Guadeloupe (Abenon 1992: 25–26). Although Saint-Christophe reached full capacity very quickly and faded in importance well before the English captured it in 1702, its settlers were found throughout the French Caribbean, especially in Martinique. At least one settler went to French Guiana, where he appeared in a 1691 document as Simon Hibar, aged 28, Creole of Saint-Christophe (AN, F3/213, 226).

⁸“Il y a quatre vingt hommes [...] et aussy des esclaves au nombre de quarante ou environ”.

Martinique had nearly 1000 French inhabitants by 1640 (Bouton 1640: 40–41, 95), plus an unknown number of African slaves, who were “black barbarians from Cape Verde and other places. There are a good number of them, and this will increase, according to our French inhabitants, who find them very useful. Some of these Moors have already reproduced” (Bouton 1640: 133).⁹ Reference to Cape Verde slaves shows there were evidently Senegambian slaves in Martinique, although the trade in the 1630s from that part of Africa was modest. Perhaps Martinique had received only two or three shipments of slaves, one of which was from Senegambia. Bouton also described how the slaves communicated with the French: “Most of them already understand French, and say a few words of it without articles or other particles that we add” (1640: 100–101).¹⁰ The indigenous inhabitants spoke to foreigners in what was no doubt the Arawak pidgin expanded by European contact, “a mixed jargon of French, Spanish, English and Dutch” (Bouton 1640: 130).¹¹

A 1646 pamphlet claimed that Martinique had 1500 French inhabitants, about 1000 of whom paid taxes—the others were probably indentured servants. Saint-Christophe had about 6000 white inhabitants including 4000 taxpayers and Guadeloupe had 1000 inhabitants including 800 taxpayers (Anon. 1646: 24). The number of slaves was not mentioned. In 1654, hundreds of refugees arrived from an unexpected source and brought knowledge that transformed the French colonial Caribbean. They were Dutch administrators, Portuguese Jewish sugar planters and African slaves from the colony of Dutch Brazil that had just fallen to Portugal. Their refining skills sparked rapid growth in Guadeloupe and Martinique as large sugar plantations replaced small tobacco farms; on overcrowded Saint-Christophe the transition from tobacco to sugar was much more difficult. By 1660, Martinique’s French population numbered 2587 people and the island was soon to

⁹“... barbares negres du cap de vert, & autres lieux, dont il y a bon nombre, qui augmentera si on croit nos Francois, à quoy ils sont fort utiles. Quelques-uns de ces mores se sont desia regenez”.

¹⁰“Ils entendent desia pour la plupart aucunement le Francois, & en disent quelques mots sans articles, & autres particules que nous y adioutons”.

¹¹“... un baragouin meslé de Francois, Espagnol, Anglais & Flament”.

surpass Saint-Christophe as France's leading colony in the Americas (Anon. 1660). Its slave population was almost identical, being 2723 people of whom 24% were described as children.

The slaves are Moors, or Negroes, that the French and the Dutch buy in Africa from the kingdom of Angola and along the Guinea [coast]. They cost nothing once they have been bought, for they only need to be given Saturday to grow their food and look after themselves, although some [owners] prefer to do otherwise, finding it better to feed them. (AN, C8B/l, piece 3, f. 6. [1660])¹²

Du Tertre noted that “our planters rate Angola Negroes much higher than those of Cape Verde” (1654: 475).¹³ Like Bouton in 1640, Du Tertre did not mention Africans from the Bight of Benin, which suggests there were few Gbe-speakers in Martinique during the colony's first twenty years. The composition of French Guiana's early slave population would be very different and this study hypothesises that the different compositions of the two colonies' slave populations account for variation between the creoles of Martinique and French Guiana.

2.3 The Creation of French Guianese Creole

Mufwene (1996) argues convincingly that the founder population of a society has a disproportionate linguistic influence on later generations since the form of communication it establishes influences later arrivals. Unfortunately, the paucity of information about the first slaves of European colonies in the Caribbean makes it difficult to determine the linguistic composition of those founder populations that created creole languages. We will probably never know where the first slaves

¹²“Les esclaves sont Maurs ou Neigres que les Francois et Hollandois vont achepter en Affrique au Royaume d'Angole, et le long de la Guinée, lesquels ne coûtent plus rien depuis qu'on les a une fois acheptez, leur donnant seulement le sarnedi de quoy vivre et s'entretenir, quoyque plusieurs fassent autrement, trouvant mieux leur compte a les nourrir”.

¹³“Nos habitans estiment beaucoup plus les Nègres d'Angole que ceux du Capt-Vert”.

of Saint-Christophe or Martinique came from. However, as this section will show, French Guiana is an exception, since the linguistic origins of its founding slave population are known in some detail. Another point of difference is the frequency of slave arrivals. In larger colonies, slave ships arrived regularly from different parts of Africa, resulting in a linguistically mixed population with frequent new arrivals. In French Guiana ships were so rare that it is possible to estimate the effect of each arrival of new slaves on the existing language contact situation. These known origins and slave ship records, when added to knowledge about the other inhabitants of French Guiana, will enable the description of the linguistic situation that led to a creole language.

The importance of a close study of the history becomes clear when the overall slave ship records are considered for French Guiana. This study argues that Africans from the Bight of Benin were the dominant ethnic group among the slave population, but a simple glance at the monumental *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Eltis and Richardson 2010), based on 35,000 known slaving voyages, suggests a very different view. The *Atlas* summary for French Guiana shows that of the estimated 37,000 Africans sent to the colony from 1664 to 1829, nearly 10,000 were from Senegambia and another 10,000 from the Bight of Biafra (Eltis and Richardson 2010: 243). The Bight of Benin was a distant third source, contributing only 6300 people or just one slave in six. How then could such a small proportion of the population be considered the dominant group? The answer lies in the timing of arrivals and French Guiana's demographic history. Bight of Benin slaves dominated the founder population and maintained that dominance until after FGC had emerged, during which time the colony's slave population remained low. Senegambia did not become a prominent source until the 1780s, more than 120 years after the first Africans arrived, and most Bight of Biafra captives arrived even later.

Another distortion caused by reliance on overall slave numbers is the apparent importance of Liverpool slave ships, which transported one-fifth of French Guiana's African slaves. This unexpected figure results from a burst of activity during the Napoleonic wars when England's ally Portugal gained control of French Guiana and large-capacity English ships brought thousands of captives to develop the new possession. As

with the prominence of Senegambian and Bight of Biafra slaves, however, the Liverpool influence occurred many years after the creole language had emerged. As will be seen, the close study of the history will provide a more accurate picture of the linguistic situation than the one suggested by the overall figures.

2.3.1 The First Slaves and Language Contact on Cayenne Island

The permanent European settlement of French Guiana began on Cayenne Island in 1654 after decades of failed attempts and more than a century of trade with Native Americans. The most recent failure had lasted fifteen months and cost hundreds of lives. The French survivors had all left in 1653, taking with them the nine black slaves who remained of the fourteen captured from a Brazilian plantation a year earlier (Biet 1664: 277). Those slaves will be discounted from this discussion because of their small number, brief stay and departure from Cayenne. The 1654 colony consisted of a few dozen refugees from the former Dutch Brazil (Wiznitzer 1954), who arrived without slaves (Jennings 1999) and formed two small settlements on Cayenne Island, one Dutch, the other Portuguese Jewish. The Portuguese-speakers were experienced sugar planters and began to develop Cayenne by recruiting settlers from Europe and ordering slaves from Africa.

Archival research has uncovered an intelligence report showing that in December 1660, the Portuguese-speakers purchased a shipment of African slaves who became the founding slave population of French Guiana. The report, prepared in 1662 for French authorities planning to invade Cayenne, derived from an interview with Paul Languillet, the Norman captain of the slave ship (AN, C14/1, 188). Languillet said the Africans came from “Guinée” (the Gulf of Guinea, in other words, the Bight of Benin) and that he sold about 120 of them to the Jews in Cayenne (AN, C14/1, 188). A Dutch shipping record provides further details, stating that Languillet’s ship, the *Engel de Guarda* (Guardian Angel), sold 174 Africans. As the ship visited more than one Caribbean port, this number might be the total sold during the voyage rather

than just in Cayenne (Voyages 2016: 44221). The shipping record does not state where Languillet purchased the Africans but the ship's history points to Gbe-speaking areas. In 1653, the *Gele Engel* (Golden Angel), 400 tons, also known as the *Engel Gabriel*, out of Texel, effectively Amsterdam, transported 380 slaves from Alada (Voyages 2016: 11365). It was later captured by the Spanish and undertook a slaving voyage in 1657 under an interloper captain (Voyages 2016: 44185). Then back in Texel as the *Engel de Guarda*, 400 tons, owned by Diego de la Uasama and Juan Daça de la Jara, doubtless Sephardic Jews, it left on the voyage under Languillet that would take it to Cayenne. It was almost certainly the same ship as the *Engel Gabriel*; it had the same tonnage and of the 3000 known slaving voyages from 1620 to 1700 only these three voyages feature a ship with *Engel* in its name. The majority of slavers out of Texel in the 1650s and 1660s went to the Bight of Benin, where the most prominent trading posts were in Gbe-speaking areas. The Gold Coast could also be considered part of Languillet's "Guinée", but few Texel slavers went there in the seventeenth century and none before 1663. All the evidence points to the first slaves of Cayenne coming from Gbe-speaking places of the western Bight of Benin.

The Africans added to the complex linguistic environment on Cayenne Island. Their owners spoke Portuguese and Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) while the other group of settlers spoke Dutch (Wiznitzer 1953: 220). Both groups had been communicating with the Kali'na for six years. In 1660, there were broadly speaking four mutually unintelligible language communities on Cayenne Island: Arawak pidgin, Portuguese, Dutch and Gbe. Dialectal variation within those communities was inevitable; terms like "Dutch-speaking" can be only loosely applied. There were probably very few if any monolingual speakers in Cayenne. People there were used to hearing foreign languages and had probably had to communicate with speakers of other languages in the past. Cook (2016) employs the term "multi-competent" to describe people used to communicating in a second language. The native language of multi-competent people, she argues, is different from that of monolinguals because crosslinguistic transfer works both ways. Not only does L1 influence L2; L2 influences L1.

The Portuguese had lived in a colony administered by the Dutch, so both sides were used to hearing the other's language even if they might not be fully competent in it. The slaves would have been multilingual, speaking at least one or two Gbe languages, and had probably encountered foreign languages either in their homeland, through the proximity of their nation to the Yoruba-speaking Oyo kingdom, or during the process of enslavement: being sold, then marched to the Alada coast and finally placed on board the Dutch ship for the Atlantic crossing. There may have been rare cases of people who did not speak one of the four main languages of the community, such as a French-speaking Jew or a Yoruba slave. These people would have had to learn some rudiments of the language of the group they belonged to before arriving in Cayenne; a Yoruba slave would have learnt some Ewe, for example.

When a speaker from one of Cayenne Island's four language communities (Arawak pidgin, Portuguese, Dutch and Gbe) talked to someone from a different community, the motivation to communicate well was obvious; better communication would achieve a better outcome for the speaker. But the motivation for slaves to learn their owner's language was not so obvious (Baker 1995). They needed to understand orders but were not expected to say much in reply. Even domestic slaves could not indulge in idle chit-chat with their owners. Cooks and servants might have better access to Portuguese than field slaves but must not speak the language too perfectly lest they be punished for forgetting their servile status. The idea that slaves targeted the owner's language—a key point of Chaudenson's argument that creoles were in effect failed attempts to learn the dominant language—is challenged by Baker (1990, 1994). Smith (2006) largely agrees, noting that the slaves were not motivated to learn the language, a point echoed by Parkvall (2000) and Braun (2009). The psychological effects of slavery caused resentment and depression, which affected the normal motivation for communication.

The impact of identity and power relations on second-language acquisition is discussed at length in Norton (2013), who considers the situation of a Turkish immigrant named Saliha employed as a domestic servant in francophone Quebec. She is motivated to learn French but power relations with her employer, the benevolent Madame Rivest, restrict her opportunities to use the target language.

The reality that Saliha has to confront is that Madame Rivest has the power to influence when she can speak, how much she can speak and what she can speak about. Saliha acknowledges that it will be a long time before Madame Rivest will ‘let’ her practice speaking the target language. (Norton 2013: 41)

Saliha can hope to improve her situation—and her descendants’ situation—by mastering the dominant language even if the power relation is tilted so strongly against her. Slaves had no such motivation to acquire the owner’s language and even risked punishment for knowing it too well. They would remain slaves and so would their children.

Since the first slaves on Cayenne Island needed to understand their owners to survive, a pidgin using Portuguese lexical items probably developed. The owners, when talking with slaves, would have used a xenolectal form of Portuguese, possibly conventionalised on the plantations of Brazil many years earlier. A slave who had to communicate with a Dutch speaker would use the Portuguese pidgin because the Dutch speaker probably knew some Portuguese, even if it was no more than a pidgin, and there was too little interaction between the Dutch and the slaves in Cayenne to allow for the development of a Dutch pidgin. There was little call for interaction between speakers of Gbe and Dutch, except between household slaves of the Portuguese owners sent on errands. Contact between Gbe-speakers and Native Americans would also have been infrequent and limited to finding common ground between simplified Arawak and Portuguese pidgins.

When speakers from different language communities in Cayenne in 1660 needed to communicate, they had to agree tacitly on a strategy of communication. Every situation was unique, but the historical information and knowledge of the sociolinguistic setting lead to the following hypothetical contact situation based on the assumption that there were six principal linguistic interactions involving speakers of different languages in Cayenne in 1660 (see Table 2.1).

The two speakers might not use the same variety of language to communicate. For example, if a Gbe-speaker had to explain something to a Portuguese speaker, the former, who had probably only recently been exposed to European languages, would doubtless use a rudimentary

Table 2.1 Communication in Cayenne in 1660

Linguistic group of speaker		Hypothetical language of communication	
Speaker 1	Speaker 2	Speaker 1 used	Speaker 2 used
Gbe	Portuguese	Portuguese pidgin/Lingua Franca	Xenolectal Portuguese/Lingua Franca
Gbe	Dutch	Portuguese pidgin/Lingua Franca	Portuguese pidgin/L2 Portuguese/Lingua Franca
Gbe	Kali'na	Portuguese pidgin	Simplified Arawak pidgin
Portuguese	Dutch	Xenolectal Portuguese/Portuguese/L2 Dutch/Lingua Franca	Portuguese pidgin/L2 Portuguese/Dutch/Lingua Franca
Portuguese	Kali'na	Xenolectal Portuguese/Lingua Franca	Simplified Arawak pidgin
Dutch	Kali'na	Portuguese pidgin/Lingua Franca	Simplified Arawak pidgin

pidgin based on Portuguese, while the latter would probably use a simplified, or xenolectal, form of Portuguese. Since the Portuguese-speakers gave orders to their slaves, one would expect Portuguese to have been the dominant language in those interactions, as it was in the slave trade. Any slaves who had picked up elements of Portuguese or Lingua Franca would have served as interpreters for their fellows during the early months of their new life in French Guiana.

The two sets of colonists probably had bilingual speakers of Dutch and Portuguese to enable communication between groups. They might also have used Lingua Franca like the French priest Biet and an Irish colonist in Barbados in 1654, who communicated in “a certain broken language mixed from Italian, Portuguese and Provençal, or more accurately, a certain broken language well understood by all those who sail the Mediterranean” (Biet 1664: 275).¹⁴

¹⁴“... un certain langage corrompu entremeslé d’Italien, de Portugais, de Provençal, ou pour mieux dire d’un certain langage corrompu, que ceux qui voguent sur la mer Mediterranee entendent tous fort bien”.

To communicate with the Kali'na, slaves, planters and Dutch alike would have relied largely on the European loanwords in the Arawak pidgin. Lexical items in *Lingua Franca* and the Arawak pidgin doubtless overlapped after more than a century of European trade in the Caribbean. Local terms for flora and fauna would have become part of everyone's vernacular in Cayenne. Communication with the Kali'na would have been limited to few contexts, most notably hunting, fishing and trade. The Dutch, Portuguese and Kali'na had already worked out strategies of communication before the Africans arrived.

Despite the complex linguistic situation in French Guiana in 1660 after the first shipment of slaves arrived, Portuguese was clearly the most important language in the colony due to its status as the slaveowners' language and its widespread use in communication between different groups. Gbe-speakers were numerically dominant in the settlement but their social inferiority as slaves restricted Ewe, Fon and related varieties to the African community of French Guiana.

2.3.2 More Gbe Slaves Arrive

A second slave ship came to Cayenne in 1661, 1662 or 1663. Its Dutch captain Hyan Clae sold captives from areas in and around Grand Popo and Alada (Goupy 1690: 87–88), where Ewe and closely related languages were spoken. Five of the captives were still alive in 1690, when Jean Goupy des Marets recorded their biographies. In addition was Aoüa, son of one of those slaves and listed as a 27-year-old born in Cayenne. The number of captives Clae sold is not known, but it exceeded 100, since the total slave population in 1665 was 260. According to Goupy (1690: 87), the slaves were sold to the Dutch governor 'Spran' (1690–1687) but Quirijn Spranger did not arrive until June 1663 and promptly commandeered the estate and slaves of outgoing governor Jan Claes Langedijck (Hulsman et al. 2015: 35), whose name Goupy may have assigned to the slave ship captain Hyan Clae. Langedijck's slaves must have been a recent purchase since the Dutch settlement he led was very poor, with only a few dozen settlers in 1660. He was replaced as governor because of his inability to recruit people

for the Dutch colony and his hostility to the Portuguese who were developing Cayenne Island.

Spranger put the slaves to work on a sugar plantation managed by a man named Bessy, who was a Dutchman according to Goupy (1690: 87). Spranger had spent more than a decade in Dutch Brazil and had been appointed a governor of Cayenne because of his favourable stance towards the Portuguese Jews who were trying to rebuild the slave-based sugar economy they had lost when Recife fell. With the possible exception of the slaves of Spranger's plantation, all the Africans in the colony had to follow orders and communicate with their owners in Portuguese or a variety derived from that language. But it was the role of African languages that set the colony apart from most other colonial slave colonies.

Since the slaves were all from a region where Gbe languages were spoken, they did not need to abandon their native languages to communicate with other slaves. This is a major point of difference with most other Caribbean creole languages. The slaves' children did not need to invent a new language to communicate with each other. Consider the example of Aoüa, born in about 1663. His mother Oüaipay was from Saitto in Alada (Goupy 1690: 89) so she probably spoke several Gbe languages. His father, recorded only as Jean, was probably a Gbe-speaker as well. It has been argued that African languages had little purpose on the plantations of the New World. Colonies typically imported Africans from many different regions, leading to a linguistic diversity that forced slaves to rely on their owner's language for communication within the slave community (Chaudenson 2001: 81). In many societies in which a creole language arose, the first slaves worked alongside their owners on small farms like the tobacco plantations of Saint-Christophe, Guadeloupe and Martinique. They had good access to their owners' language, were scattered about the colony in small numbers and had little use for their native languages, especially as slavers arrived frequently with Africans from different language groups. This typical situation is known as the homestead phase (Chaudenson 2001: 97–101). It accurately describes the experience of many founding slave populations, especially in the Caribbean. But it does not describe what happened in French Guiana.

In a typical colonial society in which a creole language arose, settlement began with the homestead phase and evolved, usually after a generation or two, into the plantation phase, signalled by a numerically dominant slave population and large sugar estates that functioned more like factories than farms. The sugar boom of the 1650s that followed the dispersal of experienced planters from Dutch Brazil sparked a rapid transition from homestead to plantation phase in many colonies, especially in the French Caribbean. As they had in the homestead phase, slaves in the plantation phase found little use for their native languages, but for a very different cause. On sugar plantations, they were grouped in large labour gangs in which the diversity of linguistic backgrounds rendered African languages largely useless for communication. In Saint-Christophe, for example, Pelleprat noted the presence of thirteen different African languages (1655: 53). Owners used a divide-and-rule policy of deliberately mixing ethnicities to dilute identities and reduce the chances of rebellion. As the missionary, Father Mongin noted in Saint-Christophe in 1682: “For very good reasons, they are forbidden to speak their native language. They might even have difficulty being understood if they did so, there being sometimes ten or a dozen languages spoken in the Blacks’ houses” (Chatillon 1984: 133–134).¹⁵ Even if some languages survived because of the sheer number of Africans shipped from Gbe and Bantu-speaking regions (Aboh 2016), those languages had little use as a means of interethnic communication. A form of the owners’ language would have to become the lingua franca of the slave community.

In French Guiana, the situation was again different because the Africans from the second ship (Hyan Clae’s) had come from the same region as those of the first (Paul Languillet’s). They could communicate easily in a Gbe language. This assumption is based on the Bight of Benin slave trade being in its early days, before many Africans were brought from far inland beyond Gbe-speaking areas. In addition, African multilingualism made it likely that speakers of different Gbe

¹⁵ “[...] pour de très bonnes raisons leur étant défendu de parler leur langue naturelle. Ils auraient même de la peine à entendre autrement y ayant quelquefois dans une case de nègres de dix ou douze langues”.

languages could find a language and lexical items in common. The slaves doubtless added terms from Portuguese to describe plantation life and from Arawak pidgin when talking about local flora and fauna, but the language they used to communicate with each other was essentially Gbe. The only other possible language they had in common was the form of Portuguese employed for communication with their owners, but it seems illogical that they would use it since it would have been an advanced pidgin at best while they could draw on a Gbe language that they spoke natively.

Unlike in typical colonies, African languages in French Guiana served a useful purpose among slaves. African languages and cultures were tacitly accepted, as Goupy showed in 1690 when he recorded the names of the slaves on the plantation he managed. Most had three names: their slave name, the name used by the ruling class and their African name. Aoüa, for example, was recorded as “Jacques known as Jacob and called Aoüa by the blacks” (Goupy 1690: 85).¹⁶ Aoüa may have been born a Creole, but he had an African name and lived in a displaced Gbe community that used a form of Portuguese to communicate with owners and a local variety of Gbe to talk with other slaves.

The languages of the slaves and owners would have converged in their use of terms specific to plantation life and to French Guiana. Many plants and animals would have received the Kali’na name, for example. Lexemes related to sugar-refining equipment would have come from Portuguese. All languages present on Cayenne Island would have developed a common core of lexical items peculiar to the settlement. The infrequent arrival of new slaves and settlers would have encouraged the varieties used to stabilise more readily than in colonies where there was a constant influx of African captives. French Guiana’s proximity to West Africa made it nonetheless an emergency stop for slavers who had experienced difficulties during the Atlantic crossing. Occasionally, the slaver would sell a few weak captives for food and water, before taking the

¹⁶“Jacques dit Jacob et par les noirs appelé [sic] Aoüa”.

rest to lucrative Caribbean markets. On 9 April 1664, the Dutch slaver *Ridder S. Joris* arrived in Cayenne with 320 Africans who were presumably speakers of Bantu languages, since they had been loaded in Luanda. Twenty of them, doubtless the weakest, were sold in Cayenne before the ship sailed to Guadeloupe and Cuba with the remainder (Voyages 2016: 11389).

The Bantu-speakers now had to achieve communication with the other slaves and to understand the owners' orders. They were heavily outnumbered by slaves from a relatively homogeneous linguistic background with several years' experience of communication in Cayenne. As new slaves, the Bantu-speakers cannot have exerted much direct linguistic influence; instead, they had to adapt to the existing linguistic conventions that had evolved over the previous four years. They needed to learn what the owners were saying and how to communicate with other slaves. The Portuguese pidgin was the most useful form of communication to learn, since it could be understood by both groups. Over time, the Bantu-speakers would also have acquired elements of Gbe languages after years of contact with other slaves. They would not have the opportunity to talk to other Bantu-speakers for decades.

One way in which FGC differed from many other Caribbean creoles is that Bantu languages were almost absent from Cayenne during the early decades of contact. Bantu-speakers were typically very well represented in other young colonies due to the strength of the slave trade in Western Central Africa during the first half of the seventeenth century (Heywood and Thornton 2007), but French Guiana's first big shipment of Bantu-speakers did not occur until mid-1687, when a Dutch slaver sold about 300 captives from Angola (AN, F3/213, 181). The usual treatment for new arrivals was as follows, according to Mongin in Saint-Christophe in 1682:

When the ships have landed these wretches, which happens several times a year, and once they have been placed in the settlers' houses, the local missionary finds out which part of Africa they are from. If, for example, he finds one of them is from Ardres or Juda, kingdoms of Guinea, he will ask a Black from this country who is already a Christian to teach the new arrival the basics of Christianity, and he will reward him for doing

so. This old hand will do his best, to the point where the new arrival learns French, which he will do in very little time, because the Blacks are completely dependent on their masters and overseers, who will only ever speak French to them. (Chatillon 1984: 133–134)¹⁷

When it came time to catechise the 300 Angolans, however, the missionaries in Cayenne encountered a problem that proved the early slave population of French Guiana had almost no Bantu-speakers. Only a few survivors from the *Ridder S. Joris* remained and their ability to communicate with the Angloans was severely compromised.

We have among the Negroes of Cayenne six or seven Angola Negroes. Who can begin their instruction using Negroes of the same language as we usually do with the new arrivals? Those six or seven Angolans are old; they have forgotten or nearly forgotten the language of their country. (De la Mousse 1687, quoted in Wiesinger 2013: 8)¹⁸

Although the Angolans' case could be considered first language attrition, it is better to consider it as first language change, since the process of acquiring a new language affects the brain's existing languages in other ways besides loss (Cook 2016; Seton and Schmid 2016). After decades spent in a multilingual environment that did not feature Bantu languages, the *Ridder S. Joris* survivors' first languages would have undergone phonological and morphosyntactical changes as well as attrition. The lack of Bantu influence during Cayenne's first decades

¹⁷“Quand les vaisseaux ont mis à terre ces pauvres gens, ce qui arrive plusieurs fois l'année, et qu'ils ont été distribués dans les cases des habitants, le Père missionnaire du quartier où sont ces nègres nouveaux-venus, s'informe de quel pays d'Afrique ils sont; et si par exemple il trouve que celui qu'il voudra instruire est d'Ardres au de Juda, royaumes de Guinée, il dira à quelque nègre de son pays, qui est déjà chrétien, qu'il apprenne au nouveau-venu les principes du christianisme, et lui promettra récompense pour cela. Cet ancien negre s'acquitte le mieux qu'il peut, jusqu'à tant que ce nègre nouveau-venu ait appris le français, ce qu'il fait en très peu de temps, dépendant pour toutes choses de leurs maîtres et de leurs commandeurs, qui leur parlent toujours le français”.

¹⁸“Nous avons parmi les nègres de Cayenne six ou sept nègres d'Angole; qui pourrait commencer leur instruction, comme nous la faisons faire ordinairement des nouveaux venus, par des nègres de la même langue? Mais ces six ou sept Angolais sont vieux, ils ont oublié ou peu s'en faut la langue de leur pays”. We are indebted to Evelyn Wiesinger for this quote.

may also account for differences between FGC and other creoles. Agglutination of determinant and noun to form words like *dlo* ('water', from the French 'de l'eau') is a very common feature of lexically French creoles that Baker (1984) links to the presence of Bantu-speakers. Ladhams (2012) arrives at the same conclusion for agglutination in lexically Portuguese creoles. A comparative study of agglutination in lexically French creoles finds that the feature is appreciably less common in FGC than in other lexically French creoles (Grant 1995: 156). Knowledge of French Guiana's early slave origins may explain this linguistic difference. Examples of agglutination in FGC appear below in Sect. 3.1.3 and a discussion of Bantu-like features that are present in Martinican Creole but absent in FGC appears in Sect. 3.5.2.

2.3.3 French Replaces Portuguese

In May 1664, one month after the *Ridder S. Joris* arrived, a large French expedition seized Cayenne. The Dutch and Portuguese settlers were allowed to remain but most sold their slaves and plantations and went to Suriname, taking with them the origins of the Portuguese element in many Suriname creoles (see Jennings 1999; Arends 1999). The expedition had sailed from La Rochelle, which suggests that the colonists were from the Aunis, Poitou and Saintonge Provinces of western central France. However, early census records of the colony show a predominance of Norman, Picard and Ile-de-France names. In any case, all of the provinces mentioned lay in the Oil patois continuum that covered most of northern France.

The French settlers, like other linguistic groups in Cayenne, had a range of competence and practice in implementing strategies to communicate with speakers of other languages. Some of the settlers would have experienced language contact in the Atlantic world from earlier voyages to the Caribbean, just as an earlier venture to Cayenne had relied heavily on veterans of previous expeditions to act as interpreters between Kali'na chiefs and French leaders (Biet 1664). Their linguistic experience would be especially necessary for slaveowners and indentured servants who would work with the Africans on the plantations and need to rapidly establish communication with them.

The Africans similarly needed to establish communication with the French. Aoüa and his mother Oüaipay were among the 32 slaves purchased by La Barre, the new governor of Cayenne, from Spranger (AN, C14/1, 82). Their survival depended on Oüaipay's ability to understand orders; lack of comprehension might be misconstrued as recalcitrance or rebellion and lead to punishment. In French Guiana, as elsewhere in the Atlantic world, slaves were beaten, whipped and mutilated for minor faults. One of the slaves who worked with Oüaipay would have an ear sliced off (Goupy 1690: 85); two others would be beaten to death (Goupy 1690: 91–92). Oüaipay needed to understand her new French-speaking rulers who, since few would have had any knowledge of Portuguese, would have initiated communication in a basic French pidgin. The lexical and structural similarities of French and Portuguese would have helped the slaves as they developed communication with the French; in other words, the initial French pidgin would have developed more rapidly than if the slaves had no knowledge of Portuguese. The French would have adopted many local Kali'na terms that the slaves also used and might also have adopted Portuguese-based terms for plantation techniques. Since many of the French were indentured servants, there may have been greater contact between the colonisers' language and Gbe languages. This was short-lived, however, due to the rapid decline in the French population.

In June 1665, Cayenne had 610 French people and 180 slaves in French ownership. A further 80 slaves worked for the remaining 60 Portuguese (La Barre 1666: 40–41). During the next fifteen months, mismanagement—combined with food shortages exacerbated by a lack of supply ships from France—led to the deaths of a third of the new settlers and an unknown number of slaves (AN, F3/22, 25). Three years would pass before the arrival of another slaver. From a linguistic viewpoint, the lack of outside influence allowed for communication between the slaves and the French to become more stable, albeit in horrific circumstances. The next slaver was the Dutch *Aletta*, presumably making an emergency visit, since its captain Jan van Arel sold only 27 of some 300 captives in mid-1667 before selling the rest in Curaçao (Voyages 2016: 11394; Goupy 1690: 84). The new slaves were from Alada so would have had no difficulty communicating with the surviving Gbe-speakers of French Guiana.

Soon after van Arel's visit, an English fleet attacked Cayenne in September 1667. About 100 settlers fled to the Antilles, probably with-out slaves. Another 80 or so of the French were taken prisoner and shipped to the Antilles (Clodoré 1671: II, 306–329). The others hid in the forest with the slaves while the raiders sacked the colony. Only two slaves were taken, while a slave woman died of heart problems during the flight into the woods (JA, FGU 6). Soon after the raiders left, English pirates attacked and carried off 39 slaves (Artur 2002: 225), one of whom was Aoüa's father. After peace between the European nations, the French settlers and "several" slaves returned to Cayenne to rebuild the colony (Artur 2002: 225). On their arrival in December 1667, the group found about 150 settlers along with the slaves living in the wreckage of the colony.

The English attack had a major linguistic effect on French Guiana because the raiders carried off the Portuguese planters to Suriname, thereby ending the direct Portuguese influence on the slave population of French Guiana. The influence had lasted only seven years but left its mark on FGC, which features a number of important Portuguese lexemes, perhaps signs of a relexified pidgin, that are not attested in other lexically French creoles: *wonm* "man", *fika* "to be located at", *briga* "to fight", and the completive marker *kaba* "already" (Goodman 1987; Stolz 1987). The influence cannot be explained by the minimal early contact between French Guiana and Brazil or by the short occupation of Cayenne by Brazilian officials during the Napoleonic wars. The early period of contact with Portuguese-speakers is the most likely explanation for the presence of these terms in FGC. As George Huttar claims:

If more than one superstrate is involved in the formation of a Creole, and one of them precedes the other in the history of the Creole, then more basic lexemes are more likely to derive their form from the earlier superstrate than are less basic lexemes. (2003: 123)

Again we see good evidence of the founder effect in the retention of those few basic but important lexemes derived from Portuguese. Early contact periods, however brief, do leave traces.

2.3.4 A Gbe-Speaking Slave Population

The English raid did not change the linguistic composition of the slave population, which remained almost entirely Gbe-speaking as before. If the “several” slaves taken to Cayenne by returning settlers were from Antillean plantations, they might have brought a form of Lesser Antillean Creole with them. Or they might have been good French-speakers and served as domestic slaves. Whatever their function and language ability, they were not numerous enough to influence the rest of Cayenne’s slaves. The creole language that emerged in Cayenne appears to have formed independently of varieties spoken by slaves of the French in the Lesser Antilles. It is very difficult to present a convincing argument on historical grounds that FGC is an offshoot of the Lesser Antillean creoles.

In early 1668, Cayenne had about 180 slaves and 350 French-speakers. Most of the slaves had worked for Portuguese owners, but now all were owned by the French. Some 90% of the slaves spoke a Gbe language natively, and about 80% of them had been in the colony for at least 7 years. All had been brought over in Dutch ships and none knew French prior to arrival. They could communicate with other slaves in Gbe languages, even probably the 15 or so surviving Bantu-speakers, while they learnt to communicate with their new owners. Within each language group, there were of course dialectal differences, although these were becoming less important. The isolation would have caused the French settlers’ various Oïl varieties to merge into a local variety of Colonial French. Similar dialect levelling would have been happening in the slave community among the various varieties of Gbe. The Gbe variety would also have used a growing number of French words to describe everyday life and objects in the colony.

The high ratio of owners to slaves after the English raid suggests that the slaves had good access to French while they rebuilt the colony. In effect, there were now just two linguistic communities, French and Gbe, working in close contact. Gbe-speakers were not troubled by the linguistic chaos found in the slave communities of other colonies and could also acquire a good understanding of French. This linguistically simple

bilingual situation would have facilitated transfers from Gbe into the French variety the slaves used when communicating with owners.

The next slave ship voyage did little to change the dominant French-Gbe communication vector. In 1669, Jan van Arel returned and sold 225 Alada and Fon captives in Cayenne (Voyages 2016: 44123; Goupy 1690: 84). His sale doubled the slave population but once again, the new slaves did not need to abandon their native language. This circumstance differs from Thomason and Kaufman's account for the language contact situation in which "abrupt" creoles, in particular, "European slave-trade creoles" arose:

[I]n the uprooted and mixed speech communities of the slaves, a person might have few or no people to talk to in his or her native language. Such a person would need a primary language for communicating with his or her fellows, not merely a secondary language to use for limited purposes of intergroup communication [...] [T]he process of linguistic deculturation from the native languages must have been rapid in many cases, virtually immediate, in fact, for those slaves who were completely isolated and therefore could not continue to use their native language. (1988: 149–150)

For early Cayenne, the process of linguistic deculturation was never rapid, except for the few Bantu-speakers of the *Ridder S Joris*. The Dutch slaver *S. Franciscus* had passed in about April 1669 with captives loaded at the Kongo port of Mpinda (Voyages 2016: 11584), but it cannot have sold anyone in Cayenne. Only the *Ridder S. Joris* brought Bantu-speakers in the first 26 years of Cayenne's slave population.

The slave population after Van Arel's second voyage was almost homogeneous in terms of linguistic origins, but distinctions would have emerged based on experience. The new arrivals were unfamiliar with the ways of the colony. In contrast, many of the older slaves had been in Cayenne for nearly a decade. They taught the new slaves about the colony, including, no doubt, local words and the owners' commands.

Another Dutch slaver, the *Eendracht*, came to Cayenne in 1670 (Voyages 2016: 44279). It brought speakers of Gbe languages, as proven

by the presence of a Ouidah slave called Aphô who had arrived in Cayenne on an unknown Dutch ship after the “English war” and been sold to “de Lizy”, who was briefly governor at the time (Goupy 1690: 86). A year or so after the visit of the *Eendracht*, the slave population was 5–600 (BNF, *Mélanges Colbert* 160 (juin-juillet 1672), 640), almost all speakers of Ewe or related languages.

No further slavers called until 1673. It is worth pausing a moment to consider Cayenne’s population just before the 1673 ship arrived. The colony had roughly 300 French-speakers, some of whom were sugar planters with dozens of slaves while others had small homesteads, perhaps with a slave or two. The indentured labour system was nearly at an end; only ten such workers would be recorded in 1677. A local variety of French would have been emerging, distinguishable most noticeably from other colonial varieties by lexical items describing things unique to Cayenne. In the slave population of 1673 were some 550 Africans, of whom about 530, even the locally born children, were native speakers of a Gbe language. The senior slaves had been in the colony for 13 years. Even the least experienced had been there for three years. No slave needed a European language or variety thereof to talk to another slave. Their slaves’ speech community was not mixed, and there had not been a significant process of linguistic deculturation. The slaves all understood some French, although competence would have varied according to the degree of contact with the owners’ language. When they needed to communicate with the owners, they would have used at least a pidgin form of French that developed for those slaves with good access to the owners’ language into a second-language variety of Cayenne French. There are similarities with the early history of Réunionnais, which had a relatively stable bilingual phase before the development of the creole (Chaudenson 1974). In French Guiana, the phase was brief but long enough to allow transfers to take place between the local variety of French and the local variety of Gbe (see Siegel 2007: 177 and Chap. 3 of this study). Further research might uncover links to modern cases involving two languages in an unequal social relationship, such as a linguistically homogeneous community of immigrants and their host country’s language.

2.3.5 A Linguistically Mixed Slave Community

The language environment in Cayenne changed substantially in 1673 when the Gbe homogeneity in the slave population ended. During the next four years, more than a thousand Africans were brought into the colony, about half of whom could not understand a Gbe language. By 1677, Cayenne had 1454 slaves (AN, C14/1, 220), a total that would not be exceeded for another 30 years. Some two-thirds of those slaves—400 veterans from the 1660s and 600 recent arrivals—could communicate in a Gbe language. The remaining third came from a variety of linguistic backgrounds. Those included Cape Verde Creole, Ijo, Bambara and Wolof, but not Bantu languages, save for the few slaves of the *Ridder S. Joris*. Detailed knowledge of these new arrivals is essential for the understanding of the environment in which FGC arose.

The first known large arrival of Africans who did not understand a Gbe language occurred in 1673. The *Chasseur* and the *Saint-François* were contracted in 1672 to carry 60,000 *livres* (pounds) worth of slaves from Senegal to the French colonies (AN, F3/213, 122). The *Chasseur* went to Guadeloupe (Voyages 2016: 21562; Mims 1912: 172); the *Saint-François* to Cayenne. At this time in Cayenne, the *pièce d'Inde*, the price of a fit adult male slave, was about 300 *livres* (Artur 2002: 270). A rough estimate suggests that the Senegal contract brought 150 male and female captives of all ages to Cayenne. According to Jean Goupy, who described his slaves' ethnic origins with precision, the Africans were from the Cape Verde Islands, not Senegambia (Goupy 1690: 85–88). The lexically Portuguese Cape Verdean Creole would have helped them communicate with slaves who had worked for the Portuguese in Cayenne. If they spoke languages from the Senegambian region like Wolof and Serer, they found them of little use in Cayenne.

A ship carrying Kalabari captives arrived at about the same time as the Cape Verde slaves. Five Kalabari were listed on a plantation in 1690 (Goupy 1690: 87–90). They were aged from 35 to 46, suggesting they were bought in the early or mid-1670s, certainly before the buyer's death in January 1678. Some of the Gbe slaves in Cayenne might have been able to speak a language understood by the Kalabari, but most of the new slaves would have found that they could not understand anyone in the colony.

Gbe-speakers and new arrivals would have worked together and lived together, so they must have developed a means of communication. The solidarity between slaves of different ethnic groups against the French is well documented. Slaves protected one another from punishments and worked harder so that an expectant mother or an ailing slave might work less, regardless of ethnic differences. However, a slave hierarchy did exist. Imagine a sugar planter who owned about 30 Gbe slaves and who bought 10 Kalabari. Some of the Gbe slaves would have been assigned the task of looking after the new arrivals. Some would have occupied a senior role, like an Alada cook who was allocated a Kalabari boy as his assistant. Situations like this would have been repeated all over Cayenne, and in each case, the new slaves would have been placed at the bottom of the pecking order. The Gbe slaves would have wanted to maintain the few small privileges they had earned through years of service. Prominent positions in the slave hierarchy would have been jealously guarded because they increased slaves' chances of survival.

Wherever the Cape Verde and Kalabari slaves were sent to work, whether in the household or in the fields, they had to learn from Gbe slaves. Many of the lexical items used by the Gbe slaves, even in their native language, would have been French or Native American (with a few Portuguese remnants), for in their years in Cayenne they would have adopted those terms for many of the unfamiliar objects they saw. The new slaves could speak neither French nor a Gbe language but needed to communicate with native speakers of each group. The terms common to the vernacular of both slaves and owners would have been salient features to the new slaves. Beyond the common terms, communication would have been based on French, despite the slave population now outnumbering the French by more than two to one, and the decreased access to French of the slaves on the plantations. The new slaves had to learn some French anyway, since they received orders in that language, and were required to communicate with the French in a variety of that language, even if, like the previous shipment of slaves, there was little immediate incentive for them to deepen their knowledge of the owner's language. This does not mean that they were modelling French or that they desired to learn the language fluently. The advantage of being able to communicate in a variety based on French was that

the new slaves could communicate in that variety with both owners and other slaves. There was no need for them to develop two different forms of communication, one for the slave community and the other for the owners, since the one form could be understood by both groups.

One possible consequence of this new use of a variety of French within the slave community is analogous to Crowley's description of language contact in the Pacific in the mid-1800s, at the point when speakers of different Melanesian languages developed a form derived from English to communicate.

A European attempting to make himself understood to a Melanesian could use his native-speaker competence to rephrase a sentence until he hit on a construction that his interlocutor could understand. Similarly, the European could use his native-speaker competence to decode a range of structurally varied utterances from a Melanesian. However, as soon as Melanesians began using this means of communication with other Melanesians, this strategy could no longer work, as neither speaker would have had access to the competence of the English speaker. [...] Under these sorts of circumstances, too much structural instability was no longer tolerable as communication could simply not have taken place. (1990: 378–379)

The result, according to Crowley, is the necessary emergence of a stabilised pidgin, which replaces the unstable jargon developed more or less spontaneously by individual transactions. In Cayenne, a similar sort of process must have taken place between Gbe slaves and the new arrivals because structural instability would otherwise have prevented communication. Crowley also shows how areal characteristics could have played a part in the conventionalisation of a stabilised pidgin. Both groups of slaves would have shared similar ways of perceiving and categorising things that may have been unusual or infrequently used in French. If the West African view of events was primarily aspectual, for example, and the French view primarily temporal, the aspectual view may have emerged in the pidgin used in the slave community. When this aspectual view was also used in communication with the owners, the French would have understood it and found it acceptable, since French can also

express events aspectually. Thus, the pidgin, which would have seemed derived from French, could have incorporated African patterns.

The mechanism for the survival of certain features at the expense of others has been widely debated (see, e.g. Mufwene 1996; Siegel 2008). Thomason and Kaufman suggest a scenario for people “thrown into a new multilingual community and given a new vocabulary which they must learn” (1988: 153). They say the slaves made guesses about the “target language”, to which they had little access. A right guess meant comprehension. The more contact there was between slaves the more chance there would be for the right guesses to become accepted, and remembered for the next time of contact. In other words, conventionalisation depends on the frequency of contact, not time.

It is unlikely that the Kalabari and Cape Verdeans who were sold in Cayenne chose to “target” French, a language to which they had little access. The plantations were growing and the proportion of slaves to owners was rising sharply. Why should the new slaves choose as their goal the acquisition of a language they had little access to? They had just arrived in the colony, there were many more experienced slaves and any sort of promotion through a good command of French must have seemed almost impossible. The first goal of the new slaves was survival, not a possible promotion to an easier job in five or ten years’ time. Survival meant learning to communicate in as short a time as possible. The obvious thing to do was to learn the form of French that the Gbe slaves had been developing. It was more accessible than the native varieties of French the owners were using. The arrival of the Cape Verdean and Kalabari slaves marked a turning point in the linguistic history of Cayenne, the moment when a Gbe language was insufficient for communication with the slave community. Whether new arrivals after 1673 could speak a Gbe language or not, they would need to learn the vernacular based largely on French to communicate with all slaves.

The next arrival of Africans was not for several years. No other slave ships are known to have called in Cayenne in the first half of the 1670s. The future plantation manager Jean Goupy des Marets was in the colony from March 1675 to February 1676 and recorded all shipping there; no slave ships visited during that time. Goupy also noted

that on the Rémire sugar plantation he would manage a decade later, there were six whites and 55 slaves: 26 men, 17 women and 12 children (Goupy 1690: 3). On 3 May 1676, a Dutch fleet captured Cayenne. During the assault, the slaves profited from the distraction of their owners by pillaging the plantations. The revolt revealed their attitudes to the French, but differed from their behaviour during the English attack of 1667. The reason for this contrast is that the slave population of Cayenne had changed considerably in only nine years. In 1667, slaves were outnumbered by their owners. When the Dutch invaded, slaves heavily outnumbered the French, by perhaps five to one; furthermore, many of the Africans had only very recently been enslaved and placed on sugar plantations where the French were few in number. The Dutch allowed the conquered settlers—and their slaves—to remain in Cayenne, presumably to safeguard the colony's economy, but the occupation was brief as a French fleet recaptured the colony in December 1676. Cayenne belonged once again to France. Save for a brief Portuguese occupation in the Napoleonic era, Cayenne has been French ever since.

In early 1677, Cayenne's forces captured a slave brigantine. Its 50 African captives became slaves on the colony's plantations. Three of them, an Alada, a Fon and a Juda, all Gbe-speakers, feature in the 1690 plantation list (Goupy 1690: 85). Another slaver, the *Embuscade*, sold at least 11 captives (2 Koromanti, 3 Juda, 3 Fon and 2 Alada). It was after the Dutch occupation and La Touche was the buyer, so it must have been in 1677, before his death in January 1678. The Africans from both ships, save perhaps for the Koromanti, could easily communicate with the Gbe-speakers in Cayenne, but would have learnt the variety derived from French to communicate with other slaves.

A census from 1677 shows the colony had 1454 blacks and 319 whites across four districts (see Table 2.2). The ratio of blacks to whites varied by district, but the ratio of blacks to sugar plantations was consistent, suggesting that the black population was concentrated on plantations. Studies of later, more detailed censuses show that in 1685, nearly three-quarters of the colony's slaves were concentrated on just 15 plantations (Jennings 2009: 378).

Table 2.2 The Cayenne 1677 census

Category	Cayenne	Rémire	Mathoury	Mainland	Total
White men	49	62	7	65	183
White women	37	19	3	13	72
White children	34	12	5	13	64
Total white people	120	93	15	91	319
Black slaves: men	83	212	113	192	600
Black slaves: women	74	257	85	107	523
Black slaves: children	51	158	75	47	331
Total black slaves	208	627	273	346	1454
Mulattos, Native Americans	23	22	4	14	63
Total	351	742	292	451	1836
Sugar plantations	3	8	4	5	20
Blacks: whites	1.7	6.7	18.2	3.8	4.6
Blacks: sugar plantations	69	78	68	69	73

Source AN, Colonies, C14/1, 220

The slaves on the plantations heavily outnumbered the French, meaning that they had relatively little access to their owners' language. As the colony's governor wrote in 1686:

It would be important to order the owners of the sugar plantations to have as many Frenchmen as there are ten Negroes on their properties, so that this may prevent any possible revolt from the said Negroes (AN, C14/2, 172).¹⁹

In the slave society of Cayenne in 1677, there were perhaps some 20 or 30 Gbe-speaking slaves who had been a part of the founding slave community 17 years earlier. Even though Goupy did consider some of these slaves as worthless in his plantation list, he learnt from them and gave them the most space in his descriptions. The old slaves, though considered invalids, probably played a very important part in looking after the children of the plantation while the parents worked. They would have told the children stories of Africa and would have explained

¹⁹"Il seroit important d'ordonner aux Mes des sucreries d'avoir sur leurs habitations autant de Francois comme de dix negres, afin d'empescher la revolte qui pourroit arriver desd. negres". Ferrolles to Minister, January 1686, C14/2, 172.

the various techniques of sugar-refining or other skills to the young, using a dialect-levelled Gbe that had many words of Portuguese and French in it. The newly arrived Gbe slaves would have listened to the elders to learn how to survive in Cayenne but would still have needed to learn the language variety used for communication within the slave society that had been in existence for four years. Otherwise, a new slave could not communicate with slaves from non-Gbe regions. The 1677 census also recorded the presence of Native American slaves. These would not have been locals but sold by Portuguese traders from the Amazon region. Goupy recorded several such slaves on the Rémire plantation in 1690. Their presence was another reason for a French variety to be used in the slave community. These slaves were often hunters and fishermen, but they had to communicate with both the French and the Africans.

The 1677 census counted 331 black children, which was 22.7% of the slave population. Goupy had counted 12 children out of the 55 slaves on the Rémire plantation two years earlier, a similarly small proportion. The children would have been almost all Creoles. In Suriname at about the same time, a third of the enslaved children were African-born (Arends 1995: 267). Cayenne had a much lower proportion. Goupy's 1690 list of 92 slaves includes just 17 children under 14, all born in Cayenne. Only two of the 61 African-born adults arrived in Cayenne under the age of 12.

Children born to slaves in Cayenne in the 1670s would have acquired a Gbe language influenced by French, Portuguese and Arawak pidgin as their mother tongue. They would also have heard the variety of French used by slaves and have acquired that variety as well. While plantation life was a new experience for their African-born elders, it was the children's only experience. The French words the first generation of slaves had borrowed were part of the children's native language.

Once the children were weaned and left largely to the care of elderly slaves, possibilities for the acquisition of further languages were created. The elderly slaves were generally Gbe-speaking veterans, so one would expect them to have talked in a Gbe language to the children. Small children would play with other small children, and a contact variety would have emerged, based most probably on the frequency with

which certain structures were heard and the compatibility of these features with the mother tongues of the children. Gbe languages and the language variety used within the slave community would have been the most frequently heard forms. Lefebvre (1998) contends that Haitian Creole is relexified Fongbe, despite the fact that a sizeable proportion of Saint-Domingue's first slaves did not speak a Gbe language. While this study makes no claims about FGC being relexified Gbe, it does indicate that simply on demographic grounds the language would be a far better candidate than Haitian Creole for testing such a relexification hypothesis.

2.3.6 Conventionalisation

The Dutch occupation of 1676 severely harmed Cayenne's reputation. Slave ship visits declined sharply during the following two decades. Cayenne's black population, unable to maintain numbers in the harsh conditions of slavery, also declined. From a linguistic viewpoint, the infrequent new arrivals allowed forms of communication in the colony to conventionalise. Note, as Mufwene (2010: 361) says, that "the emergence of communal norms does not preclude variation". Conventionalisation was rather a process of convergence of idiolects that in Cayenne was encouraged by the lack of new arrivals in the community.

During the decade after the *Embascade* and the captured brigantine of 1677, only three slavers visited Cayenne. The *Soleil d'Afrique* sold 134 captives, mostly Koromanti, in 1679. They made up less than a tenth of the slave population and were spread about the colony. It would have been rare to have seen more than a dozen Koromanti on one plantation, and it was probably more likely that they were isolated in very small groups—two or three Koromanti on a plantation of 30 slaves, for example. Some of the Koromanti may have spoken a Gbe language but most would have been in the same situation as the Kalabari and other non-Gbe speakers. A further three years passed with no arrival of African captives, then in 1682 the *Perle* brought 241 Gbe-speakers loaded in Ouidah (Voyages 2016: 21873). The

Sainte-Trinité arrived in about the same year with an unknown number of Senegambians. Then five years passed without any slaver visiting. In comparison, Martinique received 950 Africans in 1683 alone (AN, C8A/3, 316), meaning that there was a regular stream of new arrivals and more linguistic chaos there than in Cayenne. Theories of creole genesis tend to assume regular imports of slaves during the period when the creole emerges. The five-year hiatus in Cayenne is yet more evidence that every contact language, when examined closely enough, has a unique demographic history that any general theory of creole origins must take into account.

The slaver who ended the hiatus was a Dutchman named Vanpentegen, who in 1687 sold 300 Angolans, the only known Bantu-speakers in the slave community's first 70 years, save for the *Ridder S. Joris* people. A dozen of Vanpentegen's captives ended up on the Rémire plantation where Goupy (1690) recorded their names several years later and noted that some had been baptised by the Portuguese in Africa. Their experience cannot be the origin of the Portuguese element in FGC, however, since other colonies had a much higher Bantu slave population but have negligible Portuguese influence in the resulting creoles.

The arrival of the Angolans increased the black slave population to about 1450. After the long isolation, during which time no external language had perturbed the linguistic environment of Cayenne, there was now about one slave in five who could not communicate verbally with other slaves, or with the owners. The experienced slaves who helped the Angolans adjust to their new life would have taught them local terms derived from French, Arawak, Portuguese or other languages. Leaders of field gangs and other senior slaves supervising work, most of whom were probably Gbe-speakers, would have given orders using words derived mainly from the owner's language. The five years preceding the arrival of the Angolans would have allowed the language variety used for communication within the slave population to become more stable and conventionalised across the colony. Even after the Angolans arrived, another long pause helped the slave population adjust linguistically to the Bantu-speakers. Aside from the sale of 200 Guinea captives, probably Gbe-speakers, in 1688 (Voyages 2016: 33767; Goupy 1690: 27), no other slaver visited Cayenne until 1695.

The issue of conventionalisation has been discussed with reference to other creole societies. Chaudenson argues that plantations were more or less closed societies that slaves were not allowed to leave without express permission of the owner (1992: 79–80), while Mufwene says that in the case of early Jamaica, geographic isolation prevented significant conventionalisation (2010: 383). In contrast, Kouwenberg (2009: 344–346) states that not only were the early sugar plantations of Jamaica relatively close, but also that other factors enabled conventionalisation, including slave gatherings, runaways and sales of slaves from one planter to another. Evidence from the early history of French Guiana leans towards Kouwenberg's view that slaves from different plantations met frequently, thereby conventionalising communication rapidly. Some interactions, such as trade between slaves, were illicit while others were condoned by owners. In a 1681 decree, the governor noted that the banned commerce between slaves still continued. He ordered planters to prevent their slaves from going to other plantations and to turn away visiting slaves (Anon. 1826: 6). Complaints from missionaries and repeated decrees showed that on Sundays, slaves drank at illegal taverns before mass and then gathered for dances afterwards. Since almost three-quarters of French Guiana's slaves were concentrated on 15 plantations during the late 1600s, it seems obvious that these were the centres of any language development. When the slaves met on Sundays or other occasions, the Africans who worked on small holdings would have had to conform to the languages spoken by the slaves of the large plantations. Similarly, the prevalence of short-term absenteeism, during which slaves might visit relatives on another plantation or taste freedom by living on the fringes of an estate until hunger drove them back, also contributed to conventionalising the language variety used across the colony. Thus, the illegal assemblies of slaves so frowned upon by the French were an opportunity for the Africans to maintain their native language and at the same time to conventionalise the variety of French used by the slave community.

Many interactions between slaves of different plantations were condoned by their owners. Sunday masses, preached to slaves “in bad French brought down to their level” (Artur 2002: 320), encouraged

conventionalisation.²⁰ When planters went to town or visited other estates, domestic slaves travelled with them as servants or messengers. If they went by boat or over muddy paths, they took more slaves as paddlers or bearers. Sugar needed to be taken to port and goods from France to the plantations. In all these situations, slaves legally met slaves from outside their plantation, enabling greater conventionalisation of the form of communication used by the slave community across the colony. The greatest, and most tragic, possibility for interaction between slaves of different plantations occurred at the Royal Works, when the governor commandeered slaves to develop and maintain the colony's infrastructure. In 1689, a five-year project to build fortifications began. Owners had to supply in total 500 slaves per day, which nearly ruined the colony (AN, C14/2, 70). Half the colony's slaves worked together on one site. Soldiers drove them hard in brutal conditions. In the first 15 months of the fortification works, 150 slaves, or one slave in eight, died at the fortifications (AN, C14/2, 76). The fact the slaves were grouped together during most of those six years at the Royal Works enhanced the possibility of conventionalisation. The brutality of the Royal Works that cost so many lives certainly meant that language development was not a priority, but communication occurred none the less.

Cayenne censuses from the 1690s show a sudden increase in the proportion of slave children, driven not by slaves having more children, but rather by the deaths of so many adults at the Royal Works. Since almost all children were locally born, the proportion of locally born to African-born slaves increased rapidly as well. This tipping point may have led to the variety used for communication within the slave community becoming the children's first language. Another tipping point that occurred at about the same time was the increase in the proportion of children who were not born to two Gbe-speaking parents. Until about 1674, all children in the slave population were members of what was in effect a displaced Gbe population. From the mid-1670s, more and more children were born to parents of different African languages. Eugenice

²⁰“en mauvais français à leur portée”.

practices meant that the owners would assign newly arrived women slaves to their hardest working men. The children born from such relationships in the 1670s and 1680s were likely to have a non-Gbe mother and a Gbe father who would have used the variety of French employed by the adults in the community. Since slave children were concentrated mainly on the large plantations and would have been grouped together during the day, they would have had a passive knowledge of more than one language. In the earliest years, they would have spoken a Gbe language together, but eventually, perhaps after the deaths of the older Gbe slaves who looked after them, the French variety would have come to dominate. The level of interaction between planters' children and slave children in Cayenne is not known. Evidence from other colonies suggests that the children of owners and slaves played together on smaller plantations, while on larger estates interactions were formalised and some of the slave children were made servants of the French children.

By 1695, after 35 years of existence, the importation of over 2000 Africans and the birth of hundreds of children, the slave population was just 1047 (AN, C14/3, 215). Speakers of Gbe languages were still socially and numerically dominant, although for the previous 22 years the slave community had included large numbers of non-Gbe speakers. A variety derived from French had probably been the language used for communication within the slave community for a generation. A closer view of that community is provided in the following section.

2.3.7 Daily Life on a Plantation in French Guiana in 1690

Jean Goupy des Marets, manager of the Rémire sugar plantation for three years in the late seventeenth century, left a detailed list of the slaves of the estate as of 1 May 1690 that provides details about the slaves' background and reveals the social environment at a key time in the history of FGC. The list was transcribed and analysed by Debien (1964) and has been commented on by several authors, including Thornton (1992), Jennings (1995), Singler (1993), Karam (1975, 1986) and Le Roux (1995). Goupy listed 92 slaves in all, grouped by family. He noted their African and French names, their ages, ethnic

origins and other details, such as the slaver who sold them (Table 2.3). He added the names of a dozen others who had died since 4 May 1688 (Table 2.4) and recorded two stillbirths (Table 2.5). He was very precise in his list; he had travelled to Africa and judging from the detail about slaves who came from regions where Gbe languages were spoken, he knew the Bight of Benin well. While information about the colony's other plantations at the time exists, it is largely limited to census numbers. Goupy's slave list has been referred to many times already in this study, for it provides a wealth of information on the origins of Cayenne's first slaves. In this section, other details in the list will be examined to build up a picture of life on a French Guianese sugar plantation in the late seventeenth century.

The Rémire estate was one of the largest in the colony. Part of it was originally the site of the Portuguese settlement and the rest belonged to a Du Plessis, who had arrived with La Barre and was a member of the French West India Company. By 1675, the land had become a single estate owned by Hippolyte Noël and run by a succession of managers: de Boulay, Charles Boudet de la Touche, Gaudais, Dupuy and then Goupy (Goupy 1690: 71). The plantation was over 20 years old, and many of its slaves had worked for several masters. This may have resulted in a higher proportion of creole slaves than was the norm for French Guiana, particularly for those born in the colony before the arrival of hundreds of slaves in the early 1670s. Several other plantations had been in existence since the 1660s, and given the eventful first decade of slavery in the colony, many slaves present since that time would have changed owners at some point. The oldest plantations were also presumably among the biggest. On the other hand, the newer plantations started during the mid-1670s with the arrival of hundreds of African captives would certainly have had a different ethnic make-up; one would expect fewer elderly slaves and a lower proportion of Gbe-speakers than on the older Rémire plantation.

Thornton asserts that "there were probably few estates in the New World that had greater [ethnic] diversity" than the Rémire plantation (1992: 197), but we will demonstrate the opposite. Although Rémire had slaves from many parts of Africa, the importance of Gbe-speakers was such that they formed a social and linguistic hegemony on the

Table 2.3 The slaves of the Rémire plantation in May 1690

No.	Name in slave community	Slave name(s)	Sex	Age	Origin	Notes: sellers/owners
1	Agouya	Jean de la Place	m	44	Fon	Vernal 1 to La Place
2	Ouagounou	Annique	f	31	Juda	<i>I'Embuscade</i> to La Touche
3	Baby	Mars	m	11	Plantation	
4	<u>Hyohyo</u>	<u>Renée</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>4</u>	Plantation	
5	Bazau	Paul	m	29	Juda	<i>I'Embuscade</i> to La Touche
6	Louisia	Louisa	f	20	Congo	Vanpantegen to Boudet
7	<u>Manon</u>	<u>Louise-Marie</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>1</u>	Plantation	
8	Aboré /Boijoly	François	m	39	Grand Popo	<i>I'Embuscade</i> to La Touche before 1676
9	Merbellé	Philippe	f	26	Fon	la <i>Perle</i> to Gaudais in 1682
10	<u>Marie Popot</u>	<u>Marie</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>3</u>	Plantation	
11	Fanchonladé	Jean le juif	m	54	Fon	Vernal 1 to Gras to Lézy to La Touche
12	Suzanne	Suzanne	f	27	Congo	Vanpantegen to Dupuy to Boudet
13	<u>Margueritte</u>	<u>Margueritte</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>2</u>	Plantation	
14	Abapacòco	Ignace dit Clément	m	28	Fon	<i>I'Embuscade</i> to La Touche
15	CoÛye	Marcelle	f	26	Fon	la <i>Perle</i> to Gaudais
16		<u>Nicolas</u>	<u>m</u>	<u>1</u>	Plantation	
17	Apaeà	Estienne dit Arada	m	39	Kalabari	Vernal 1 to Noël
18		Marie-Anne	f	26	Native American	Many owners
19	<u>Cocoguiau</u>	<u>Anthoine dit Thony</u>	<u>m</u>	<u>3</u>	Plantation	
20	Couacou	Pierre dit Bellerose	m	24	Koromanti	<i>Soleil d'Afrique</i> to des Cloches to Gaudais

(continued)

Table 2.3 (continued)

No.	Name in slave community	Slave name(s)	Sex	Age	Origin	Notes: sellers/ owners
<u>21</u>	<u>Abatte</u>	<u>Catherine</u>	f	<u>18</u>	Plantation	Daughter of Osman (78)
22	Anon	Jean dit Gros-Jean	m	44	Fon	Vernal 1 with 1
23	Maria	Marie	f	18	Congo	Vanportegen to Boudet
<u>24</u>	<u>Baptiste</u>	<u>André dit Baptiste</u>	m	<u>1</u>	Plantation	
25	Guianon	Henry dit Doré	m	27	Juda	<i>l'Embuscade</i> to La Touche
<u>26</u>	<u>Marie Doré</u>	<u>Marie dite Marie Doré</u>	f	<u>18</u>	Plantation	daughter of Agouya (1)
27	Sambou	Jean dit Martin	m	34	Alada	Lézy to La Touche
<u>28</u>	<u>Houyopajellé</u>	<u>Margueritte dite Agnès</u>	f	<u>36</u>	Fon	Lézy to La Touche with 27
29	Aoüa	Jacques dit Jacob	m	27	Cayenne	Son of 80
<u>30</u>	<u>Jeanneton</u>	<u>Madeleine dite Jeanneton</u>	f	<u>22</u>	Senegal	<i>Ste-Trinité</i> to Fontaine to Gaudais
31	Decoüa	Ignace laviolette	m	39	Alada	<i>l'Embuscade</i> to La Touche
<u>32</u>	<u>Guenoupla</u>	<u>Isabelle dite Dianne</u>	f	<u>33</u>	Fon	la <i>Perle</i> to Gaudais
33	Ouanbom	Anthoine ditThony	m	42	Kalabari	La Touche
34	Aunon	Loüise dite Friquette	f	42	Kalabari	La Touche, with 33 (husband in Africa)
35	Christophe	Christophe	m	9	Plantation	
36	Suzanne	Suzanne	f	15	Plantation	
<u>37</u>	<u>Margueritte</u>	<u>Margueritte</u>	f	<u>14</u>	Plantation	
38	Manuel	Manuel	m	46	Cape Verde	Boulais with Capn Thomas before 1675
<u>39</u>	<u>Obba</u>	<u>Suzanne</u>	f	<u>36</u>	Koromanti	<i>l'Embuscade</i> to La Touche

(continued)

Table 2.3 (continued)

No.	Name in slave community	Slave name(s)	Sex	Age	Origin	Notes: sellers/owners
40	Ouyfiny	Izaak dit Mathurin	m	46	Alada	Vernal 2 to Noël, Lezy, LaPlace, LaTouche
41	Hanssy	<u>Catherine,</u> <u>Cathon,</u> <u>Cleve</u>	f	60	Alada	Vernal 2 with husband 40
42	Gô, Agô	Nicolas	m	26	Fon	<i>l'Embuscade</i> to La Touche
43	<u>Louise</u>	<u>Louise</u>	f	18	Plantation	daughter of Apaeà (17)
44	Douy	Etienne	m	27	Bambara	Ste-Trinité to Gaudais
45	Aoüa	<u>Magdaleine,</u> <u>Victoire,</u> <u>Piequenine</u>	f	28?	Peul	<i>Ste-Trinité</i> to Gaudais, Boudet, Dupuy
46	Aphô	Mathieu	m	39	Juda	Dutchman after 1667
47	Assierou	Margueritte dite Maryon	f	39	Koromanti	<i>l'Embuscade</i> to La Touche
48	Thony	Anthoine dit Thony	m	4	Plantation	
49	Simbé	Catherine dite Cathou	f	6	Plantation	
50	<u>Auba</u>	<u>Louise</u> <u>Annique</u>	f	2	Plantation	
51	Gué	Jacques dit Boniface	m	28	Bambara	<i>Ste-Trinité</i> (Capn Tourtel) to Gaudais
52	<u>Isabelle</u>	<u>Isabelle</u>	f	18	Congo	Vanpantegen to Boudet
53	Capitaine	Abraham dit Capitaine	m	41	Cape Verde	Boulais with 38
54	<u>Athiam</u>	<u>Suzanne dite</u> <u>Athiam</u>	f	35	Kalabari	La Touche with (33)
55	Aguinon	François, Gros François, Michel	m	70	Fon	Hyan Clae to Spranger

(continued)

Table 2.3 (continued)

No.	Name in slave community	Slave name(s)	Sex	Age	Origin	Notes: sellers/ owners
<u>56</u>	<u>Sanon</u>	<u>Marie, Grande Marie, Catherine</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>42</u>	Alada	Vernal 2 to La Touche
57	Noou	Jean-Baptiste dit Baptiste	m	36	Juda	la <i>Perle</i> to Gaudais
<u>58</u>	<u>Houlacy</u>	<u>Jacqueline</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>36</u>	Grand Popo	la <i>Perle</i> , with her husband (57)
59	Doon	Alexandre dit Apacy	m	37	Ayo	la <i>Perle</i> (Captain Bienvenu) to Gaudais
60	Anne	Christine	f	42	Congo	Vanpantegen to Boudet
<u>61</u>	<u>Paul</u>	<u>Paul Estienne</u>	<u>m</u>	<u>2</u>	Plantation	
62	Comaman	François la Fontaine	m	32	Bambara	<i>Ste-Trinité</i> to Gaudais
<u>63</u>	<u>Guyanoué</u>	<u>Margueritte</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>52</u>	Juda	Lézy to La Touche with 27
64	Bonneau	Louis dit Boucanne	m	72	Fon	Hyan; has always been with 55
65	Tassy	Suzanne dite Tassy	f	56	Grand Popo	Hyan; has always been with 64
<u>66</u>	<u>Compere Maloin</u>	<u>Nicolas dit Compere Maloin</u>	<u>m</u>	<u>24</u>	Cayenne	
67	Dioque	Jacques, Dioque, la Gambille	m	47	Cape Verde	Boulais with 38
68	Boüa or Baoua	Pierre dit Pierot Athio	m	16	Plantation	Stepson of 67
69	Jeanne	Jeanne Madame	f	15	Plantation	Stepdaughter of 67
<u>70</u>	<u>Angueoré</u>	<u>Marie-Anne</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>9</u>	Plantation	Stepdaughter of 67
<u>71</u>	<u>Bassy</u>	<u>Marie dite Bassy</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>73</u>	Grand Popo	Hyan; has always been with 55 & 64

(continued)

Table 2.3 (continued)

No.	Name in slave community	Slave name(s)	Sex	Age	Origin	Notes: sellers/owners
72	Izabelle Dibia	Izabelle Dibia	f	28	Senegal	<i>Ste-Trinité</i> to Gaudais
73	<u>Paul</u>	<u>Paul</u>	<u>m</u>	<u>3</u>	Plantation	
74	Marie Oudin	Marie dite Marie Oudin	f	44	Kalabari	La Touche, with 33
75	Quinto	Mathieu	m	15	Plantation	
76	Asser	Jacque dit Asser	m	11	Plantation	
77	<u>Houé</u>	<u>Suzanne dite Amanemouy</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>9</u>	Plantation	
78	Osman	Françoise dite Osman	f	46	Kalabari	La Touche, with 33
79	<u>Gaspar</u>	<u>Charles dit Gaspar</u>	<u>m</u>	<u>15</u>	Plantation	
80	<u>Oüaipay</u>	<u>Marie dit Marie Maroquin</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>62</u>	Alada	Hyan; has always been with 55
81	Giam	Jacque dit Louis	m	28	Bambara	<i>Ste-Trinité</i> to Gaudais
82	Oulé	Jean Olivier dit Abaquier	m	24	Fon	la <i>Perle</i> to Gaudais
83	Amare	Jean dit Amare	m	24	Sénégal	<i>Ste-Trinité</i> to Gaudais
84	Bohô	Jacques dit Grégoire	m	28	Petit Popo	la <i>Perle</i> to Gaudais
85	Ainguy	Michel dit Charles	m	28	Bambara	<i>Ste-Trinité</i> to Gaudais
86	Pitre	Pierre dit Pitre	m	27	Congo	Vanpentegen to Dupuy to Boudet
87	Petit Manüel	Emmanuel	m	24	Congo	Vanpentegen to Boudet
88	Questy	Pierre dit Pierot la Renommée	m	20	Alada	<i>l'Embucade</i> to La Touche
89	Dangoüé	Jean dit Tambour	m	30	Fon	<i>l'Embucade</i> to La Touche
90	Fanchon	Jean dit Lorange	m	20	Grand Popo	<i>Soleil d'Afrique</i> to Guermon to Gaudais

(continued)

Table 2.3 (continued)

No.	Name in slave community	Slave name(s)	Sex	Age	Origin	Notes: sellers/ owners
91	Cascare	Gabriel dit Cascare	m	16	Native American	Many owners; valet
92	Jeanneton	Margueritte dit Jeanneton	f	22	Native American	Many owners; cook

The first 80 slaves are grouped in families (indicated by a line). Then come ten unmarried men (Nos. 81–90), and two Native Americans. *Source* Goupy (1690: 83–90)

Table 2.4 Slave deaths on the Rémire plantation 1688–1690

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Origin	Died	Notes
93	Domingue	m	42	? [Congo?]	16/6/88	Fell into fire 30/5/1688
94	Jacque	m	4	Plantation	26/1/1689	Fever and yaws. Son of 14 & 15
95	Francisque	m	32	Congo	10/4/1689	Stomach pains
96	Pitre	m	26	Indien	4/9/1689	Fever, stomach pains. Hunter
97	Madame	f	?	?	10/9/1689	Stomach pains. Wife of 67
98	Grandjacque	m	61	?	?/9?/89	Royal Works. Sugar refiner
99	Bouqué	f	38	?	5/12/1689	Ate earth. Wife of 93
100	Dibia	m	42	?	12/12/1689	Royal Works. Husband of 72
101	Tonnique	f	52	?	4/3/1690	Stomach pains, fits
102	Gratia	m	24	Congo	7/3/1690	Stomach pains, fits
103	Alexandre	m	?	Congo	25/3/1690	Royal Works
104	Jouan	m	24	Congo	20/7/1690	Royal Works

Table 2.5 Stillbirths recorded on the Rémire plantation 1688–1690

Name of mother	Cause
Marie (No. 26)	Royal works
Ouagounou (No. 2)	Yaws

estate and, by extrapolation, throughout the colony. The hegemony contrasted with the diversity observed in other colonies (see Sect. 2.3.2).

The slave population of Rémire was far from what one could consider a normal population, despite the assertions presented by Thornton (1992). Although 50 of the 92 slaves (54%) are male, which does not appear a highly disproportionate number, 39 of them are aged 16 years or over and 31 of the 42 females are in the same age group. In other words, the estate has only 22 children (11 boys and 11 girls) aged 15 or under, just 24% of Rémire's population. This percentage is apparently indicative of a "normal" rate of reproduction (Thornton 1992: 176–177), despite Thornton's definition of a "normal" rate being when a population's proportion of under-13-year-olds is 31.5%. For Rémire, that proportion is 18.5%. Thornton adds that French Antillean slave birth rates of the late seventeenth century (and by extension, those of Rémire) were higher than African ones of the time; in other words, slavery was beneficial to birth rates (1992: 177). It is quite clear that if African birth rates were similar to that of the Rémire slaves, Africa's human population would have died out long before the age of the slave trade. Thornton also implies that plantations needed to introduce about 5 or 6 slaves per hundred every year to make up for deaths only for the first 15 or 20 years (1992: 177), until children born on the plantation had grown up. In other words, plantation populations were self-sufficient a generation after they began. However, the low proportion of children on the Rémire sugar estate, which had been in existence for well over 20 years in 1690, demonstrates that the plantation population was far from self-sufficient.

A study of the Rémire slaves by the family shows the population's low fertility. Only five families had more than one child and none had more than three children. Of the others, ten families had one child, and 16 had none at all (two of the boys were 16 or more, and could be considered adults). One only needs look at a few examples to see that infertility and child mortality on the plantation were high. Ouagounou (No. 2 in Table 2.3) was 31 and had been in the colony since she was about 16. She had been married to Agouya since her late teens. In 1690, the couple had an 11-year-old son and a four-year-old daughter and had just experienced a stillbirth. The age gap between the two children suggests

others had been born and had not survived long. Merbellé (No. 9) was 26 and had been in the colony since she was 18 but had only one child alive in 1690. Coüye (No. 15) was also 26 with just one child. Several female slaves were 18 and childless. Hard work, poor nutrition and poor living conditions led to a late onset of puberty, high rates of infertility and extremely high infant mortality. Such conditions reduced the chances of children shaping the linguistic environment of the colony and suggested that adult second-language acquisition played a prominent role in the creation of FGC.

Slave marriages showed that the successive owners and managers of the property believed firmly in eugenics. Debien states that slaves were married with little regard for ethnic background (1964: 22), as though slave families were deliberately mixed, but this is not entirely the case. It is easy to see how this impression is given, for Debien appears to consider the situation of the slaves in 1690, rather than when the marriages occurred. It is not difficult to conclude that there was deliberate mixing, for otherwise the Congo women of Vanpentegen's ship would have been allowed to marry Congo men from the same ship who were bought for the Rémire estate at the same time. It is more likely that women, being fewer in number than men, were married soon after they were bought. There may have been an incentive for the unmarried men of the estate to work harder in order to be given a wife, or it may be that the slaveowners felt that the children of a poor worker would themselves be poor workers. Thus, we see that Bazau (No. 5), a trusted Ouidah slave and a good worker who arrived on the *Embuscade* in 1677, was married to Louisa, a Congo slave who arrived in 1687. The oldest unmarried man, Dangoüé (No. 89), also came on the *Embuscade*, but he was of no use except as a cowherd, in Goupy's eyes. Three other families where the wife was a Congo slave had husbands who were trusted or good workers: Fanchonladé (No. 11), an excellent and skilled worker at the age of 54; Anon (No. 22), whom Goupy now considered of little use but had by contrast worked well in the past; and Gué (No. 51), who was a good woodsman, yet described as lazy and a thief. Whether the slaves in question were actually allowed to choose which of the Congo women they wanted is not certain. What is certain is that the slaveowners' eugenic practices made it more likely that a child would have a

parent who spoke a Gbe language. Had slaves been allowed to form couples as they wished, they would likely have married someone of a similar cultural and linguistic background and so been able to use the same African language to communicate. Instead, they needed another language and would have selected the one variety common to the whole slave community that was used when communicating with their owner. When the 54-year-old Fanchonladé (No. 11), a Fon with two decades' experience in Cayenne, spoke to his newly arrived Congo wife Suzanne (No. 12), he would not have used a Gbe language. In learning how to survive on the plantation, Suzanne had to understand orders given by the planter or the overseers, who would have used French or a variety derived from it. A child like Margueritte (No. 13), who had a Fon father and a Congo mother, may have acquired a Bantu language from her mother but found it of little use and would have communicated in another language.

Of Rémire's 92 slaves, 61 were African-born, 3 were Native Americans from Brazil and 28 were Creole. Over half of the 61 Africans spoke a Gbe language (see Table 2.6). Their majority is enhanced by their status as both earliest arrivals and dominance of the slave hierarchy. Slaves of other origins had to adapt to certain linguistic conventions established by the Gbe-speakers. Goupy saw 55 slaves on the Rémire estate in 1675. He did not record their origins, but most were native speakers of a Gbe language. The others had been in the colony for only two years. Even in 1690, most of the non-Gbe slaves were

Table 2.6 Origins of the African-born slaves of Rémire

Language group	Number	Ethnic origin
Kwa: Gbe	32	13 Fon, 7 Alada, 6 Juda, 5 Grand Popo, 1 Petit Popo
Kwa: Ijo	6	Kalabari
Kwa: Akan	3	Koromanti
West Atlantic	4	3 Senegambians, 1 Peul
Bantu	7	Congo
Mande	5	Bambara
Benue-Congo	1	Ayo
Cape Verde Creole/West Atlantic?	3	Cape Verde
Total	61	

relatively recent arrivals from Vanpentegen's ship in 1687 or the *Sainte-Trinité* in 1682; before then, probably more than three-quarters of the plantation's slaves were Gbe-speakers.

The 32 Gbe-speaking slaves formed a linguistic unit on the plantation. The other 29 Africans were for the most part more recent arrivals and spoke many different languages. They could not use their native languages except to communicate within their small groups. The linguistic fragmentation of the non-Gbe speakers gave added importance to Gbe and reduced the influence of other African languages.

The 28 Creoles of the Rémire plantation make up nearly a third of the slaves (see Table 2.7). All but two of the Creoles were born on the estate itself. Fifteen years earlier, during his first visit to Cayenne, Goupy counted 12 children on the Rémire plantation, six of whom were still alive in 1690. A study of the parents of the children in 1690 shows surprising diversity, given the numerical dominance of the Gbe-speaking slaves in the African population. Of the 16 children whose father's and mother's origins are known, few have two parents who speak the same language. Aside from the eugenic practices, this result is mainly due to most of the 16 children being born in the mid- or late 1680s, after the arrival of Congo and Koromanti slaves. As explained by Aboh (2016), these children would not live in an environment of language fragments. They would be multilingual, speaking the community language as well as at least one of their parents' languages. For the older children, the origins of both parents are usually not known, but it is safe to assume that most had Gbe-speaking parents. Only two children aged over 11 have not lost their father, mother or both—yet another statistic showing the human cost of slavery.

The plantation's slaves had a French or Portuguese name but Goupy noted that they used their African names with each other. Many of the locally-born slaves, especially the older ones, had an African name. The first generation of locally born children was more or less African; hardly surprising since almost all the colony's slaves were Gbe-speakers. The youngest children, who generally had parents of different origins, were less likely to have an African name and would grow up in a different linguistic environment from that of the first creole generation.

French Guiana was unusual among the seventeenth-century French colonies in that it had Native American slaves. Their numbers and

Table 2.7 The Creoles of the Rémire plantation in 1690

No.	African name	French name	Sex	Age	Parents ^a
29	Aoûa	Jacob	m	27	x, A
66	Compion Maloin	Nicolas	m	24	F, GP
43	Louise	Louise	f	18	K, x
21	Abatte	Catherine	f	18	x, K
26	Marie	Marie Doré	f	18	F, x
68	Boûa or Baoua	Pierre	m	16	x, x
36	Suzanne	Suzanne	f	15	K, K
75	Quinto	Mathieu	m	15	x, x
69	Jeanne	Jeanne Madame	f	15	x, x
79	Gaspard	Charles	m	15	x, K
37	Margueritte	Margueritte	f	14	K, K
76	Asser	Jacque	m	11	x, K
3	Baby	Mars	m	11	F, J
77	Houé	Suzanne dite Amanemouy	f	9	x, K
35	Christophe	Christophe	m	9	K, K
70	Angueoré	Marie-Anne	f	9	x, x
49	Simbé	Catherine dite Cathou	f	6	J, Ko
4	Hyohyo	Renée	f	4	F, J
48	Thony	Anthoine dite Thony	m	4	J, Ko
19	Cocoguiau	Anthoine	m	3	K, Am
10	Marie Popot	Marie	f	3	GP, F
73	Paul	Paul	m	3	x, S
50	Auba	Louise Annique	f	2	J, Ko
13	Margueritte	Margueritte	f	2	F, C
61	Paul Estienne	Paul	m	2	Ay, C
24	Baptiste	André dit Baptiste	m	1	F, C
16	Nicolas	Nicolas	m	1	F, F
7	Manon	Louise-Marie	f	1	J, C

^aFather's, then mother's origin: *A* Alada, *Am* Native American, *Ay* Ayo, *C* Congo, *F* Fon, *GP* Grand Popo, *J* Juda, *K* Kalabari, *Ko* Koromanti, *S* Senegambian, *x* Unknown

occupations confirm that such slaves were primarily domestics and hunters with tasks that separated them somewhat from the African slaves. Only one of the three Native Americans on the plantation was considered part of the black community while the other two, at the end of Goupy's list, were a valet and a cook, respectively. A fourth Native American slave, who had died the previous year, had been the plantation's hunter. In addition, the Native American slaves were not from the local Kali'na, but had been brought from Brazil by different traders, and sold several times before being put to work on the Rémire estate. They

are unlikely to have had any effect on forms of communication used by the slave population, meaning that any influence of Native American languages on FGC must have come from another source

The deaths on Goupy's list, as well as showing the harshness of slavery, give information about the linguistic situation of those who survived. The plantation manager recorded deaths dispassionately except in two cases. One was Grandjacque, a 61-year-old sugar refiner whose age and his status suggested he had been in French Guiana since the 1660s and was a Gbe-speaker with an influential position in the slave hierarchy. He was killed in a fall at the Royal Works. The other was Dibia, who must have been one of Rémire's best and most trusted slaves. Goupy's long account of what happened to Dibia is in itself a sign of respect for the dead man; it also describes certain aspects of slavery at the time that are useful to a study of the origins of the creole language. Dibia was 42 and his importance to the plantation manager suggests he had been a slave there for a long time. His African origin is not known, but since *dibia* is an Igbo word meaning healer or priest, he may have arrived with the Kalabari slaves in 1673. Dibia died from a heavy blow inflicted by a soldier named Lespérance at the Royal Works on 28 November, but Goupy and the plantation surgeon did not find out until 4 December. They were thus unaware of the state of one of their best slaves for almost a week, so the slaves were evidently not closely bound to their plantation during the years of the Royal Works. Goupy complained to the authorities about Lespérance but was told that his assistant Boudet had neglected to name an overseer and consequently the soldier had been appointed.

Moreover all the Blacks of my plantation who were employed at that time at the Royal Works told me that they had heard Boudet tell Lespérance to thoroughly punish the Blacks of our plantation if they were found wanting. (Goupy 1690: 92)²¹

²¹“De plus tous les noirs de mad. habitation, que nous avons eu dans ce temps là employer dans les travaux du Roy m'ont dit qu'ils avaient ouy dire par Boudet aud. Lespérance de bien châtier les noirs de notre habitation s'ils manquoient en quelque chose.”

The slaves of Rémire could report a conversation between two French-speakers to a third French-speaker. Even if the conversation had been directed at them and in simplified French, they evidently had a good understanding of the language.

One final linguistic point remains from the list of 12 slave deaths in two years. Five of the people who died were from the newly arrived group of the dozen Bantu-speakers sold by Vanpentegen. Not only did early French Guiana have long intervals between slave ships but when new captives arrived many did not live long. An analogous situation occurred several years later when half of the *Poly's* Senegambian captives died soon after arrival (AN, C14/3, 137). The first year of slavery was the most dangerous for Africans in Cayenne. The effects of captivity, transportation, a new climate and new diseases combined fatally with the planters' urgency to put new slaves to work. These effects were exacerbated by the fact that many slaves were sick when they arrived, sold by slavers making an emergency stop in Cayenne. The linguistic impact of new slaves was therefore less than their number suggests.

The slave list of the Rémire estate in 1690 reinforces the argument that Gbe languages had a strong influence in early French Guiana. It shows that the plantation was dominated by Gbe-speakers, both numerically and by virtue of experience, and suggests that the Gbe dominance extended socially and demographically beyond the 13-year commencement period of the slave population.

2.3.8 The Emergence of French Guianese Creole

Pierre Barrère, a scientist who lived in French Guiana from 1722 to 1724 (Froidevaux 1896: 5), noted that the planters' children there spoke Creole instead of French.

Their jargon draws heavily on Negro, especially in its pronunciation. The Negresses, in whom one is obliged to entrust the upbringing of the children, have introduced an infinity of words from their country. One can

however say that the *Créol* language of Cayenne is less ridiculous than that of the Islands. (Barrère 1743: 40)²²

Barrère's observations show that by the early 1720s, FGC was recognised as a language related to but distinct from Martinican and other dialects of Lesser Antillean Creole. As the nurses who used the language were adults, it must have been the language of the slave community since at least the first years of the 1700s. The significant phonological changes Barrère noted have persisted to the present day but the "infinity of words" derived from African languages has not, offering the intriguing possibility that he observed a relexification process still in transition.

Barrère's observations also tally with the demographic history of the slave population. The paucity of slave ships in the 1680s and 1690s meant that Creole slaves were fast becoming the majority of the population and occupying senior roles on the plantations. As their number grew, the conventionalised variety derived from French would have been used more often. Creoles would have used the languages of their parents and elders less frequently, simply because the proportion of African-born slaves was falling.

It was very probably the children of the first Creoles, born in the late 1680s and early 1690s, who began to use the conventionalised variety as a first rather than a second language. They understood some of the African languages used occasionally by their parents and other slaves, but the conventionalised variety, by now the most widely used language in the slave community, would have displaced African languages as the native language of the third generation. The displacement would have occurred earlier had the first Creole slaves been born in a linguistically mixed community rather than a Gbe-speaking one.

From the early decades of the eighteenth century, any newly arrived Africans sold into slavery in French Guiana would have found that the creole language was the most useful language of the colony. They might find compatriots among the veteran slaves with whom they had one or

²²"Leur jargon tient beaucoup du Nègre, sur tout par la maniere de prononcer. Les Nègresses, à qui on est obligé de confier l'éducation des enfans, ont introduit une infinité de mots de leur pays. On peut cependant dire que le langage *Créol* de Cayenne est moins ridicule que celui des Isles".

more languages in common; this would help them during their first weeks and months in French Guiana while they acquired the creole, the only language that enabled communication with all other slaves and with the slave-owning population. During the 1700s, about one slave in five would have been African-born, although this proportion would have increased after sudden increases in shipping of the late 1720s and late 1770s. Later arrivals did come from other parts of Africa, as shown in the *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, but by this time FGC had emerged and the new arrivals likely had little influence on the language. The constant shortage of slave ships throughout French Guiana's first century as a plantation society and the high mortality rate of new arrivals suggest that the proportion of African-born slaves was much lower than has been argued for other colonies (see Singler 1990, 1992). Consequently, linguistic innovations in the creole were less likely and the role of the Gbe-speaking founder population in the creation of FGC becomes even more important.

2.4 Conclusion

The close study of French Guiana's early linguistic history suggests the following pathway for the genesis of the creole. Firstly, there were two principal differences with other French slave colonies: the dominant presence of Gbe-speakers and the near absence of Bantu-speakers. Some theories of creole language origin rely on the plurality of slave languages to underpin their hypotheses, but in French Guiana during the first 13 years, almost all slaves could communicate in a Gbe language. Since the Gbe family has some significant dialectal variation, it is likely that a simplified version emerged in the colony. The slaves were multilingual but the slave community needed only one language. After several years of Portuguese influence that left a strong linguistic trace showing the importance of the founder effect, the colony became constituted of two linguistic groups, one speaking the local variety of French and the other speaking the local variety of Gbe. Social structures made owners unwilling to learn Gbe so communication between the two groups was based on French, allowing the possibility that Gbe structures found their way

into the slaves' communication with owners. In addition, where slaves could choose between two French structures, they would have opted for the one used most frequently or the one they thought resembled a Gbe structure, even if they misinterpreted the resemblance.

The analysis of slave society on a French Guianese sugar plantation concludes that the Gbe dominance remained disproportionately strong even after the arrival of speakers of other languages. When non-Gbe-speaking Africans arrived in significant numbers in the colony the community language shifted from Gbe to the variety used between slaves and owners. Long intervals between new arrivals allowed the variety to become conventionalised throughout the colony. Several decades later, this variety had native speakers in both the slave and the settler communities and was known as the creole language of Cayenne, different from other lexically French creoles. The pathway proposed here, with its focus on users and interactions rather than grammars, shows that FGC needs to be tested for the presence of Gbe structures. This will be the focus of the following chapter.

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