In recent years, the interest in missionary linguistics has been expanding rapidly. Previous judgments on the missionaries’ inadequate knowledge of the languages they encountered as a by-product of Christianization have been revisited and reassessed (see Hovdhaugen 1996, Zwartjes 2000). Most of today’s research focuses on the descriptions of indigenous languages – a natural result, given that a large part of the missionaries’ work concentrated on these languages. Creole languages have rarely been taken into consideration in this context, despite the fact that we owe some of the first thorough descriptions of these languages to missionaries.31

In this paper I highlight the peculiar relationship between missionary and academic linguistics in the nineteenth century. Taking the case of Papiamentu, I show how academic linguists working with a historical-comparative approach relied on missionary studies in their work of Creole languages. The missionaries’ gathering of data will prove to be the crucial link between linguists in Europe and missionaries working overseas or local aficionados. In the second part of the paper, I show how the process of data production was connected to different concepts of writing by the two groups involved in the description and analysis of Creole languages. I argue that the notion of writing was closely linked to the language practices involved in linguistic description.

Throughout the paper, I distinguish between the academic and non-academic discourse on Creole languages. The former consists of research produced in the context of historical-comparative grammar, the dominant paradigm for linguistic research in nineteenth century European, particularly German, universities. The latter, which I call the layperson’s discourse, comprises the missionaries’ work on Papiamentu and contributions by local aficionados who took an interest in their island’s vernacular. My terms are not meant to belittle the quality of language description provided by the laypersons; rather, the distinction relates to the status and therefore reception of layperson’s versus academic discourse.

31 Stein (1984) and Mühlhäusler (1996) are the first to give a systematic account of missionaries’ contribution to the description of Creole languages by the Moravian Brothers in the Caribbean and in the Pacific regions. Reinecke’s bibliography (1975) lists some of the texts produced by missionaries without, however, going into detail about their linguistic practices. Eckkrammer (1996) gives credit to the role that missionaries played in the process of standardization of Papiamentu.
The cycle of production and consumption of linguistic data

In their account of the beginnings of Pidgin and Creole Studies, Meijer and Muysken (1977) recount an anecdote of Schuchardt’s, where he rejects the idea of research trips to improve his Creole studies. Meijer and Muysken clearly pick the quotation for its comical effect for contemporary linguists familiar with fieldwork as the established method of data collection:

Several years ago a friend of mine expressed his wonder about the fact that I had the courage to work on dialects which I myself had never heard spoken, in all seriousness he recommended to me overseas trips for the benefit of my Creole investigations. The matter is not serious enough however to warrant such frantic (“verzweifelten”) measures. (Schuchardt quoted from Meijer & Muysken 1977: 26 et sq.)

Similarly, Hancock (1987: 461) points out what he describes as the curious fact that Schuchardt, the father of the discipline “is said to have never heard a creole language actually spoken”. But is Schuchardt’s reaction really that surprising? And more importantly, how did he collect the data for his Creole studies, if not on overseas trips?

From the point of view of the aims and practice of historical-comparative grammar, it was probably the idea of fieldwork that appeared quaint rather than the reverse. After all, nineteenth century linguists tried to reconstruct the genealogy of the Indo-European languages by tracing their continuous transformation through systematic sound change. Hence they had to gather information on the different historical stages of the respective languages. Naturally, they could not travel back in time to interview informants on medieval Spanish or Vulgar Latin. Nineteenth century comparatists were trained as philologists; their data consisted of texts representing the different historical stages of a language. If texts formed the basis of nineteenth century linguistic practice, we need to know more about the kind of texts that were used for the study of non-written languages, and how philologists were able to gather the sources needed for their research.

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32 Brugmann’s inaugural lecture (1885) on the newly created chair for comparative linguistics throws some light on the delicate balance between the traditional discipline of philology and the relatively new academic field of linguistics. The drifting apart of the two disciplines was inherently implied in the research paradigm of the neo-grammarians, even if their research methods arose in the field of philology. However, Brugmann takes great pains to position his field as an overarching Indo-European philology. For a detailed discussion of the new concept of linguistics at the turn of the nineteenth century, which abandoned the common ground of philology see Bachmann (2004: 127-160).
In the colonies

The first question that arises is where and how Creole languages appeared in written documents at all. Early reports on the existence of Creoles were published in travel writing, mostly by foreign visitors to the colonies and without going into great detail (see Putte 1999: 29 for the ABC-islands). In the case of Papiamentu, it was only when Catholic missionaries started to use Creole to preach among the black population, that the vernacular began to attract attention. In the years that followed the missionaries produced a rapidly growing output of religious materials. This development began with the first Catechism written in Papiamentu in 1825 and ran well into the twentieth century. The publications consisted mostly of catechisms and other translations of material for religious instruction such as passages from the Bible or saints’ lives. Yet, we also find grammars and word lists, material typically designed as aids for fellow priests learning the local language. A third group consisted of textbooks written in Papiamentu, which were used by the missionaries in their charity schools, a schooling system that was expanded under the direction of the Dominican order after the abolition of slavery in 1863.

The missionaries’ work on the ABC-islands included religious instruction as well as basic school education. Literacy was considered a necessary step towards becoming better Christian. Hence, the Dominican order enlarged the existing Roman-Catholic schooling system for the islands’ poor, who were typically former slaves. These activities resulted in a considerable output of texts produced in Papiamentu, as the language became used in religious education as well as school instruction of a large part of the ABC-islands population. The substantial output of texts probably led to reflections about on the spelling of Papiamentu, because in the second half of the nineteenth century, we can observe a normative effort by Bishop Ewijk to produce a more coherent orthography. He modified the strictly Dutch spelling of the early texts and took etymological considerations into account. Through word lists and a grammar, he tried to establish a spelling system that combined elements from Dutch and Spanish orthography (Smeulders 1987: 50). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, we find an increasing interest in the vernacular by the local elite, who began to use Papiamentu for poetic expression and collected local folklore to add a distinctive

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33 The term ABC-islands is customarily used for the three Caribbean islands off Venezuela where Papiamentu is spoken. They comprise Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao.
34 See Smeulders (1987) for a detailed account of the missionaries’ work on the ABC-islands and their use of Papiamentu in school.
35 Reinecke’s bibliography on Creole languages (1975: 146-209) gives a detailed account on the production of religious material in Papiamentu. This section of his book is essentially identical to an unpublished manuscript of Martinus, who painstakingly listed not only linguistic descriptions of the language but all material produced in Papiamentu.
36 For a critical account of the process of standardization of Papiamentu see Martinus (1990).
Caribbean touch to their criollo identity vis-à-vis the numerous new arrivals from the Netherlands.37

We can conclude that, by the end of the nineteenth century, a considerable number of texts in Papiamentu were available. Moreover, we have seen that normative efforts of grammatisation, in Auroux's sense (1992), were undertaken by the Dutch missionaries to standardize the usage of the vernacular through the established linguistic tools of grammar and dictionaries or word lists. The linguistic practices of the missionaries had created a body of texts which was, in fact, to serve as a basis for linguistic analysis of Creole languages by European philologists. These texts entered the cycle of colonial exchange as raw material from the overseas colonies, that, like so many other goods would go to Europe for refinement and consumption.

**In Europe**

The first piece of writing on Papiamentu that appeared in an academic context is an article by the Italian philologist Emilio Teza entitled “Il dialetto curassese” (1863). The text was based on the first catechism in Papiamentu written by Bishop Niewindt. Teza had access to a copy from the collection of Cardinal Mezzofanti, who donated his library to the University of Bologna.38 In the same way, the first articles of any length on Creole languages such as Van Name (1869/70) and Coelho (1880-86) were essentially bibliographies and collections of available documents. Van Name, in his capacity as librarian at Yale College, listed all the material available to him, and gave a tentative analysis of some of it. Coelho’s articles on Portuguese Creoles and dialects display their author’s collector’s spirit even more clearly. He not only listed studies on Creole languages, but also reproduced entire pages of his sources to make them accessible to fellow linguists.

In Schuchardt’s series of articles on Creole languages, “Kreolische Studien” (1882-1890), we can observe the philologist at work in more detail.39 Like his contemporaries, he relied on sources provided by missionaries and colonial administrators. He had developed an elaborate overseas mail network and benefited from the enthusiasm of these people, cooperated in his research projects by sending texts from the colonies to Salzburg. Schuchardt acknowledged the role of his informants in the

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37 I am using the word criollo in its traditional meaning in Spanish as “born in or typical of the Americas”. See Smeulders (1987: 64-74) for a discussion of the awakening of Curaçao identity in the context of increasing Dutch immigration following the establishment of a Royal Dutch/Shell refinery on the island in 1915 and redoubled efforts by the Dutch administration to promote their language on the ABC-islands.

38 Teza relates that his article aimed to complement the grand projects of language cataloguing of his time such as collections of the Lord’s Prayer in Adelung’s Mithridates or Hervás y Panduros compilation from the Jesuit archives (Teza 1863: 343). These collections are considered to be the first systematic attempt at putting together the language knowledge accumulated by centuries of missionary work.

39 When quoting from this series of studies, I use the abbreviation KS.
articles (see Schuchardt 1883, KS III: 3-4 or 1884, KS IV: 882). Nevertheless, these correspondents were not informants in today’s sense of the word. They were collectors rather than producers of language material. They wrote down folk stories or songs in the local Creole, or they passed on texts produced by other people in the colonies such as missionaries.

When such material arrived in Europe from various parts of the world, it was not yet considered for analysis by the linguist. Rather, it was perceived as raw material from which the philologist would produce data. In order to use it, the philologist had to first transform this material into proper linguistic data. This process, which I call data production, can be reconstructed through a reading of Schuchardt’s Creole studies.

In a first step, the philologist had to assess the quality of the document, a process that Schuchardt describes meticulously in his work:

Die Sprachfärbung ist in beiden eine wesentlich verschiedene, was ich mir nur so zu erklären vermag, dass A die kreolische Mundart in ihrer natürlichen, charakteristischen Ausprägung darstellt, B jedoch in einer der Schriftsprache angenäherten Gestalt, wozu sich auch die grösstentheils religiöse Materie eignet. (Schuchardt 1883 KS II: 799)

[The style of language is considerably different in the two [documents], a fact that I can only explain as A representing the Creole dialect in its natural, characteristic form, whereas B represents a configuration that is closer to the written language, an impulse explained by the mostly religious content.]40

Schuchardt distinguishes between a ‘natural, characteristic form’ and one that is ‘assimilated to the written language’. As philologists at the time were trying to trace sound change in languages, they had to establish the spoken form of the language. Writing not only interfered in this aim by misrepresenting certain sounds, but often the Creole language used in written documents was one heavily influenced by the written code of the lexifier language. In the example above Schuchardt refers to the Portuguese influence, as the studied language is Indo-Portuguese. The assimilation to another written code did not mean that document B was useless for the analysis, but that the philologist had to take the deviation into account in order to derive valuable information from the source. The philological apparatus provided exactly that type of analysis by bridging the gap between the authentic, natural language and the written documents that were their only accessible source.

The next step in the philological processing of the documents was to prepare a critical edition with commentaries and translations of difficult passages. Schuchardt (1890, KS IX: 23) points out some of the problems arising from the material, for instance the difficulty of sentence and word separation, which can be quite arbitrary in a

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40 The translations throughout the paper are mine unless otherwise indicated.
language that has not yet acquired an established written code. However, apart from this structuring element Schuchardt insisted on leaving the text in its original form, so that other philologists would have the opportunity to assess the value and reliability of the document. It is precisely the commentary or translations of difficult passages that are supposed to close the gaps in understanding.

This situation was not peculiar to Creole studies, but was typical of the research paradigm of historical-comparative grammar. Before Schuchardt’s interest focused on Creole languages, he had written a major study on Vulgar Latin, *Der Vokalismus des Vulgärlatein* (see Swiggers 1999: 5-10). Much of Vulgar Latin was reconstructed through so-called ‘corrupt’ texts written by scribes who did not know classical Latin well and therefore left traces of their spoken Latin in their writing. This view of normal research practice in Creole studies is confirmed by a comparison Schuchardt draws between his earlier research on the beginnings of the Romance languages and his new field of interest. Talking about the hybrid Portuguese-Portuguese Creole forms he says that they remind him of “those monuments of the early middle ages […] which disclose the influence of the Latin vernaculars”.41

In the research for his doctoral dissertation Schuchardt had dealt with the testimonia of Vulgar Latin found in tombstone inscriptions, and was therefore well acquainted with difficult and fragmentary sources. Moreover, many of the medieval documents on which other philologists were working at the time presented similar textual difficulties as they represented the first written traces of the emerging European vernaculars. One must, however, bear in mind that most classical philologists were suspicious of the application of their traditional methods to material which was, in their view, unworthy. Philology of the modern languages had to fight for academic recognition from the established discipline of classical philology, and the apparently extravagant project of considering language varieties without any literary tradition must surely have dismayed parts of the philological establishment (see Christmann 1985).

Schuchardt, a trained Latinist, was an expert in the critical editing of texts. He did not consider the Creole material with which he was confronted as in any way exceptional. Creole languages fitted into a well-established paradigm of research. They represented extensions of their European lexifier languages, thus creating an analogy to the emergence of the Romance languages from Latin.

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41 Schuchardt (1890, KS IX: 800): „an jene Denkmäler des beginnenden Mittelalters […], in denen sich der Einfluss der lateinischen Volksmundarten verräth“.
Conceptions of writing

I focus in this last section on the conceptual context of the early descriptions of Creole languages. Creole data for linguistic analysis was derived, as I have shown, from written documents edited according to the methods of classical philology. The concept of writing was thus crucial to linguistic practices of text production and consumption involved in the process. However, the perceptions of writing oscillated between the two poles of lay and academic discourse. Historical-comparative grammar abandoned the classical notion of *littera*, which informed the writing practice of the laypersons.

The classical notion of *littera* comprised both the graphic and phonic qualities of letters as the minimal units of the alphabet. Vogt-Spira (1991) shows that the concept of *littera* did not involve a clear-cut distinction between the written and the oral dimension. Instead, *littera* was a theoretical notion being understood as an atomic unit separating the continuous flow of language. *Littera* was a general term comprising three qualities: *nomen* – *figura* – *potestas* (name – graphic image – phonic quality). This threefold letter produces a specific alphabet by bringing together the written graph with a specific sound identified by a particular name.42

With historical-comparative grammar's new focus on sound changes, the phonetic quality of language became ever more important to linguists. In their quest to trace the correct sounds of historical stages of a given language, they replaced the trinity of *nomen, figura and potestas* with a representational view of writing that enabled them to think the difference between written and spoken language, and hence to determine the correct phonic value of a given letter in a document. In the next sections, I compare layperson's discourse with philologist's discourse, in order to show how linguistic practice and conceptual changes were intertwined.

The layperson’s conception of writing

What writing in Creole meant to the missionaries and *aficionados* is shown by an article of the Curaçao businessmen Jesurun, who published two studies of the island’s vernacular Papiamentu in the local folklore journal, *Jaarlijksch Verslag van het Geschied-, Taal-, Land- en Volkenkundig Genootschap*, which was edited by an overseas branch of the Dutch Folklore Society. In his second article Jesurun discusses writing in particular. He begins with the following observation:

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42 This definition of the letter continued to be used in academic discourse well into the nineteenth century, as can be observed in the writing of one of the founding figures of historical-comparative grammar, Jakob Grimm, who used the term in the first and second edition of his *Deutsche Grammatik*, whereas in the third edition of the text he revised the whole chapter originally entitled ‘Von den Buchstaben’ (On the letters) changing its title to ‘Lautlehre’ (Phonetics) and making the corresponding corrections to the text (Vogt-Spira 1991: 324).
Zoolang geen alphabet voor het Papiëmentsch wordt vastgesteld, zullen zich, bij het schrijven van die volkstaal [...] die verwarringen in de spelling blijven voordoen. (Jesurun 1898: 75)

[As long as there is no established alphabet for Papiamentu, the confusions in spelling when writing the vernacular will persist.]

We can see here that, from Jesurun’s perspective, an alphabet was not a universal representation of spoken language but a language-specific code for putting a given language into script. If a specific script had not yet been developed, this would inevitably result in unsystematic, confused spelling. The idea of alphabet that Jesurun seems to have in mind is the classical notion of *littera*, where a set of letters are assigned specific pairs of graphic and phonetic qualities. This view is confirmed by his description of the confusions in Papiamentu spelling. Jesurun illustrates his point by taking the letter *j* as an example. He distinguishes between the Dutch, the Spanish and the English letter *j*, naming three different letters, i.e. pairs of graphic and phonetic qualities in three respective alphabets. He then goes on to explain the difficulties that occur in writing Papiamentu with respect to the letter *j*. In words borrowed from Spanish, according to Jesurun (1898: 75), the letter *j* is pronounced as in Spanish, and therefore has “the sound almost equivalent to Dutch *h* (‘den klank bijna van de hollandsche *h*’ (ibid: 76). Therefore many of the Dutch missionaries writing Papiamentu used the Dutch letter *h* when spelling, for example, the word Papiamentu *husticia*, which derives from Spanish *justicia*. In Papiamentu words derived from Dutch, however, the letter *j* represents the glide vowel [j], as in the Dutch alphabet. This mixed script, which takes letters from different alphabets to write another language, hence creates confusion, as the reader can never be quite sure whether one is dealing with a Spanish or Dutch letter. Jesurun’s proposed solution is to write Papiamentu words according to their etymology, which would lead to a systematic use of the letters taken from different alphabets, even if the resulting spelling would require a high level of linguistic knowledge.

Given these explanations, we might ask why Jesurun needed the English letter *j* for his Papiamentu alphabet. The answer is that he used it to represent a specific sound of Papiamentu:

In verscheidene *zuiver* Papiëmentsche woorden heft de *j* den klank van die letter in het Engelsch. Deze klank wordt door hollandsche papiëmentsch-schrijvers voorgesteld door *dj*; zoo schrijft men djaka (rat), al geven die beide aan elkander gevoegde letters slechts bij benadering den Engelschen klank van de *j* terug. (Jesurun 1898: 76)

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43 This Dutch spelling becomes more plausible if we consider the weakening of the Castilian /s/ in American Spanish, which also applies to Papiamentu.
[In some pure Papiamentu words the $j$ has the sound of the English letter $j$. Dutch writers of Papiamentu represent this sound by $dj$ writing $djaka$ (rat), even though the two joint letters represent the English sound of $j$ only approximately.]

The English letter $j$ served to illustrate the correct pronunciation of a specific sound of Papiamentu, namely [$d\,ž$] and to give that sound a correct representation in writing through the well-established English letter $j$ that has the same phonic quality. The Dutch spelling $dj$ should rather be pronounced $[dj]$ thus misrepresenting the Papiamentu sound. We can therefore conclude that by no means did Jesurun and the other aficionados or missionaries mix up the letter and its sound, as is often assumed by contemporary researchers assessing the value of missionary linguistics. Jesurun’s description is perfectly accurate under the classical conception of the letter. Using the $j$ from the Dutch, Spanish and English alphabets he is able to describe the problems arising in Papiamentu spelling, as well as potential misrepresentations. His ultimate concern is to define a coherent spelling tailored to the specificities of Papiamentu.

**The philologist’s conception of writing**

The philologist’s discourse on the issue of writing is characterized by constant complaints about its misleading character, which makes the linguist’s task all the more difficult. Schuchardt (1883, KS II: 810) refers to the spelling of his Creole documents as a “capricious masquerade”, and Lenz (1928: 77) claims his Papiamentu informations yielded to its “seduction” (“seducido por la ortografía”). The most famous example along these lines is certainly Saussure’s verdict in the *Cours de linguistique générale* (1995 [1916]: 45-54) that writing is essentially supplementary with respect to spoken language. He attacks writing for having encroached on the primacy of the spoken language, an unnatural and unlawful process in his opinion, which he denounces as the “tyrannie de la lettre” (ibid: 55).

In his analysis of this part of the *Cours*, Derrida claims famously in *De la gramma- matologie* (1967) that Saussure’s remarks reflected a long-lasting Western philosophical tradition of suppressing the autonomous value of writing. According to this conception, writing functions as a mirror to represent the ideas and thoughts of a subject.44 Mignolo (1995: 317-321) points out that Derrida jumps to conclusions by focusing on the classical Greek tradition and French classicism. He neglects the long intervening period of Latin-Christian thought, in which writing and the model of Latin grammar played a prominent role in epistemological practices. The notion of the letter

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44 See Oesterreicher (1998) for a summary of Derrida’s Saussure critique. He analyses Saussure’s work from the perspective of contemporary linguistic research on Written and Oral code.
and its associated linguistic practices that characterized the layperson's approach to writing in the nineteenth century, as discussed above, were heavily informed by this Latin-Christian tradition.

It is therefore more convincing to situate the negative attitude of late nineteenth-century linguists towards writing in a more specific historical context of linguistic practices. As we will see, this negative attitude towards writing was related to a new conception of the letter that contrasted with the classical tradition just outlined.

In discussing the philological process of data production from the raw material of Creole documents, I showed that style played a role in Schuchardt's assessment of the authenticity of his documents. The conceptual implications of this fact for the philological analysis are highlighted in the following quotation from Schuchardt, which raises the problematic status of writing in academic linguistic discourse:

"Insbesondere pflegt die Orthographie, sogar innerhalb einer und derselben Schrift, eine ausserordentlich inconsequente zu sein. Das Bestreben, die portugiesische Schreibung beizubehalten, herrscht z.B. in der Übersetzung des neuen Testaments von 1826 bis zu einem ungebührlichen Grade vor. Wo man von der Überlieferung abgeht, thut man wiederum oft nur halbe Schritte, und so begegnen uns viele Formen, welche weder echt portugiesisch noch echt kreolisch sind. Aehnlich verhält es sich in unseren Texten. Der Versuch, aus der launischen Verkleidung den gesprochenen Laut herauszuschälen, lässt kein sicheres Ergebnis erwarten. (Schuchardt 1883, KS II: 810)"

["Above all, the orthography is usually extremely inconsistent even within one and the same text. The effort to stick to the Portuguese spelling, for example reigns to an excessive extent in the translation of the New Testament of 1826. Where they deviate from the tradition, they often do so only half-heartedly, and thus we come across many forms that are neither genuinely Portuguese nor genuinely Creole. We have a similar case in our documents. One cannot expect valid results from the attempt to peel off the capricious masquerade covering the spoken sound."

Firstly, Schuchardt notes that the spelling in the documents is very inconsistent not only from one text to another, but even within a single document. This is, of course, due to the fact that no systematic spelling for the respective language had yet been established. A problem similar to the one observed by Jesurun in the case of Papiamentu is encountered, namely that the spelling conventions of another language are used to write the Creole. Whereas Jesurun was concerned with prescribing the best spelling for a language he knew well, Schuchardt's position is different. He is trying to reconstruct the genuine form of the Creole through a document that reflects the diglossic situation that existed between the written Portuguese code and the Creole language that had developed from it. The difficulty inherent in this analysis is expressed vividly through the peculiar image of the linguist trying to ‘peel off the capricious masquerade’ of writing that makes direct access to the authentic spoken language impossible. In this case, writing represents
the older historical crust of the related language, whereas the progressive Creole that has developed from it only is glimpsed through the coating layers of the written representation.

However, the inconsistency of spelling can also be of advantage to the linguist, as the following quotation from Lenz shows:

> Para el filólogo esta incertidumbre de la escritura a veces llega a ser ventajosa. Si un testo vacila entre omber i homber (cast. hombre), esto no prueba nada; pero si en otro libro se imprime jomber como jende o hende (cast. jente) esto indica que la persona ha pronunciado homber con verdadera h aspirada, como en inglés, alemán u holandés. (Lenz 1928: 9)

Inconsistent spelling that diverges from the standardized spelling of the lexifier language may indicate the actual pronunciation of the writer. In this case, the spelling with h alone as in homber would not constitute conclusive proof for aspiration, as it might just follow the etymological spelling convention of standard Spanish, where no aspiration occurs in educated speech. The spelling of Papiamentu jomber (man) alongside jende or hende (people) indicates, however, that aspiration does in fact occur, as in this case the underlying Spanish word is pronounced with a word-initial [x], a sound that has undergone a process of weakening in Papiamentu as the alternating spelling of j and h indicate.

In both examples, the focus of the analysis is on the relationship between the Creole language and its supposed base language: from Portuguese to Indo-Portuguese and from Spanish to Papiamentu. The Creole languages were therefore not seen as a descriptive aim themselves; it was their relation to the base language that provided a privileged look at relatively recent language change. By the end of the nineteenth century, linguists had established an ever finer-grained picture of sound change to represent the historical development of the Indo-European languages. Phonetic analysis grew increasingly more sophisticated. This focus on the details of sound change eventually motivated a shift from the textual basis of philology towards a concentration on the characteristics of spoken language. This is exactly where writing becomes problematic: the entire analysis rests on the assumption of the representational character of writing with respect to spoken language. Yet, at the same time, the shortcomings in this representational function became ever clearer as knowledge of the physical properties of phonetics advanced. Writing, in this view is supplementary because it is a mere simulacrum of spoken language, at the same time essential, because it is needed to trace the phonetic form of different historical stages of a language.
Conclusions

The two opposed conceptions of writing I have outlined are closely connected to the aims of their respective linguistic practitioners. Whereas the laypersons were faced with the task of first putting Papiamentu to script, the philological analysts aimed at the reverse process of extracting the phonetic value from written material in order to explain the transformations that had taken place from the base language to its related Creole. The aim of the laypersons was ultimately directed at the written code; the linguists’ concern was foremost with the spoken language. For the laypersons, the letter was the ultimate analytical unit in their task to develop a coherent spelling for Papiamentu. In that sense, even the often criticized Dutch spelling of the first missionary documents followed a certain logic, as the texts were mostly directed at other Dutch-speaking missionaries, who needed to learn Papiamentu for their pastoral duties. They certainly knew how to interpret the Dutch spelling system, but it is unlikely that many of them were familiar with Spanish orthography. Therefore using the Dutch system was a practical choice to speed up language acquisition. Even the use of Dutch spelling for school books can be understood from this perspective, since the ultimate goal was to acquire reading and writing skills in the colonial Dutch language. Later attempts to develop a Papiamentu orthography that reflects its specificity as well as its relations to Spanish and Dutch indicate the first moves towards a standardization of the vernacular.

For the linguists, the perspective on writing was completely different. Historical-comparative grammar had set out to explain the historical transformations brought about by sound changes that could lead to alterations of grammatical subsystems. The point of departure was therefore the phonetic representation of language. Language was thought to change in the process of continuous oral proliferation, but writing concealed the existing varieties in spoken language that already showed the traces of transformation. Hence linguists had to go beyond the letter in order to detect intermediate stages of language change.

The layperson’s conception followed a productive approach to writing in which language analysis and standardization or systematization of the language went hand in hand. Developing a systematic spelling system for a language was part and parcel of the efforts to standardize it through processes of grammatical selection and reduction of variance. But it was exactly the supplanted variance that built the missing links in the chains of sound changes established by philologists. Nineteenth century linguistics were therefore not interested in the productive aspect of alphabetic writing in which phonetic variation can be reduced to phonemic differences, and which hence contains the possibility of graphic abstraction of infinitely complex sound distinctions. They understood writing as a repository for their real object of academic interest, namely the spoken language, which was perceived as the natural, with inherent principles of production and transformation.
that linguistics set out to analyse. In this sense, Saussure’s outcry against the tyranny of the letter can be understood as a revolt against a linguistic tradition that had long taken the written language as its natural point of departure.

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