



Title	Kindred spirits? An investigation into convergence between Sarnami and Sranan in Suriname
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Kindred Spirits?

An Investigation into Convergence between Sarnami and Sranan in Suriname

(SESSION 7 / PANEL 7B)

Suriname is known among creolists for an unusually high number of Creole languages, amongst them Sranan and the numerous Maroon Creoles, notably Saramaka and Ndyuka. However, Suriname is characterised by an even more complex contact scenario which involves multiple convergence processes. This process appears to be driven by the emergence of Sranan as a multi-ethnic vernacular diasystem (cf. eg. Charry et al. 1983) and is fed into by various overlapping and mutually reinforcing contact processes. Sarnami, the community language of the Indian-descended population of Suriname is a cornerstone in this contact scenario (cf. Marhé 1985). While it has retained its status as a primarily intragroup language, Sarnami has undergone a profound transformation since its implantation in Suriname, partly through autonomous changes and internal convergence of diverse Indic language systems (cf. Darmsteegt 2002) and, we hypothesise, partly through external convergence towards Sranan.

One objective of this paper is investigate the hitherto hypothesised uni- or bidirectional convergence of Sarnami and Sranan in two particular areas of the grammar, namely in the expression of tense-mood-aspect and argument realisation. The paper will draw on fresh data collected in the framework of the “Traces of Contact” project at the University of Nijmegen. Research is currently in progress and concrete findings will hopefully emerge within the next months. It will be particularly interesting to investigate the effects of sustained language contact on Indic argument realisation strategies such as dative experiencers for instance, and the split ergative system.

Certain characteristics of the Sarnami-speaking community of Suriname make some degree of rapprochement with Sranan highly likely - amongst them are high levels of competence in Sranan, some language shift from Sarnami to Sranan and Dutch, as well as the overt and covert prestige of Sranan as a language of youth and popular culture, and interethnic communication.

A second objective of this paper is to test the possibility that certain structural areas are more susceptible to change through contact than others. We hypothesise, for example, that there might be a higher degree of convergence in the expression of (certain) TMA (categories) than in the expression of grammatical relations.

Studies like the present one allow us to place creole linguistics within a broader scenario which takes both genetic factors and language contact into account as factors of change in language systems.