Sociolinguistic Indexicalities in Ethnic Diversity

Perceptions of Ethnicity and Language in Suriname

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Abstract

Ethnicity and language have often been considered jointly on the grounds of their intrinsic interrelation: hard ethnic boundaries are manifested by the use of heritage languages, while dynamics of assimilation reduce the need to linguistically project ethnic distinctness. This article seeks to test the interrelation between patterns of language use and ethnic boundaries in the context of Suriname by analyzing perceptions of ethnolinguistic boundaries elicited from a sample of young informants from Paramaribo. The findings suggest that Surinamese ethnic boundaries are salient, albeit eroding in urban areas. Erosion is visible at a linguistic level in what seems to be a general shift in urban areas toward Dutch and Sranan Tongo. However, this shift might be proceeding at different paces from one ethnic group to the next. As a result, ethnicity is reflected in variable levels of linguistic competence in Dutch and Sranan Tongo.

Keywords

Suriname – ethnicity – sociolinguistics – language contact – language variation

Introduction

Ethnicity and language have often been considered jointly on the ground of their intrinsic interrelation: hard ethnic boundaries are manifested by the use of heritage languages, while dynamics of assimilation reduce the need to linguistically project ethnic distinctness. The tension between ethnolinguistic separation and integration has mostly been studied in the context of immigration, and to a lesser extent in the context of national minorities. By contrast, it has been much less discussed in relation to historically multiethnic states

where the imperative of national cohesion often calls for the use of a lingua franca that is perceived as ethnically neutral. The national context that this article discusses is Suriname, a postcolonial, multiethnic society today still marked by a segregationist heritage, where the imagery of national unity rests to a large extent on the use of Dutch—the former colonizer’s language—as a formal lingua franca, which superimposes itself upon heritage languages, including Sranan Tongo, commonly portrayed as the country’s informal lingua franca. The general question that this article raises is to what extent historical ethno-linguistic boundaries are eroding in Suriname. To answer this question, this study analyzes perceptions of ethno-linguistic distinctions elicited from a sample of young Surinamese informants from Suriname’s capital city, Paramaribo, building on a previous qualitative survey held by Monique C. Menzo (2012).

The article is organized as follows. First, I provide a theoretical perspective on the interrelation between ethnicity and language in general, before providing sociolinguistic background information on Suriname. The next section presents the sample of informants recruited for the study, and the interview protocol used for eliciting sociolinguistic perceptions from them. The analysis of the data is subdivided into three sections. First, I deal with social categories—ethnic and other—perceived as salient by the informants. Next, I focus on the perceived linguistic attributes of Surinamese ethnicities expressed in terms of mainly language knowledge and language dominance. The next two sections describe perceived linguistic conventions and the extent to which these conventions seem constrained by ethnicity. Finally, I summarize the findings and place them in the perspective of other, comparable sociolinguistic environments.

Ethnic Boundaries and Language

Ethnicity, commonly defined as the “shared belief in common descent and culture,” has increasingly been regarded as a largely relational construct underlying social distinctions, partly inherited, partly negotiable (Banton 2015; Jenkins 1997; Wimmer 2008). Ethnicity finds expression through “diacritic features,” which can be phenotypical or behavioral (including linguistic), and combine into a “boundary,” a term that Fredrik Barth (1969) used to refer to distinctions that “make” ethnic groups. Sociolinguistics has long established the interrelation between language and ethnicity (Fought 2006). “Hard” ethnic boundaries, which are typically found in socioeconomic hierarchies in which rigid phenotypical and/or religious classifications play a role, tend to translate into categorical linguistic distinctions. Sociolinguistic manifestations of hard boundaries

include the maintenance of heritage languages, or the preservation (or even creation) of distinctive linguistic features. Conversely, “soft” ethnic boundaries are found in societal contexts where assimilation into a perceived dominant ethnic group, or integration, whereby individuals are afforded scope for deploying distinct ethnicities, are plausible options (Giles 1979; Giles, Bourhis & Taylor 1977; see further Berry 1997). Their sociolinguistic manifestations include multilingual repertoires, which translate into widespread code-switching (Auer 1999). Whether hard or soft ethnic boundaries prevail seems to depend on a variety of factors, which may comprise economic and political competition, religion, and race. Sociolinguistic literature suggests that linguistic interaction between ethnolinguistic groups is likely to be effected via the language of one of the several ethnolinguistic groups in contact if that group is perceived as dominant and inclined to assimilate others, a scenario typical of immigration contexts where immigrant ethnicities tend to dissolve into local “mainstreams.” By contrast, sociolinguistic literature suggests that *lingua francas* are a defining feature of multiethnic states, especially postcolonial ones where incipient nation-building is still at pains to offer viable alternatives to ethnicity for identity construction.

Nation-building in postcolonial contexts has often been consonant with strategies of promoting ethnically neutral senses of nationhood whose goal is to minimize risks of conflict. Retaining the former colonizer’s language as an official language was compatible with these strategies on account of the fact that the European elites that spoke it natively in the colonial context in many cases suddenly lost their social preponderance and visibility in the wake of national independences. When present, indigenous *lingua francas* whose native speakers form a demographic minority have also often been promoted as L-function official languages. H-function and L-function *lingua francas* in the postcolonial world generally cohabit with heritage languages as part of multilingual repertoires to degrees that vary with social class. Whether membership of a higher social class “erases” ethnicity has perhaps most notably been debated in urban studies that take as a point of departure the dichotomy formulated by Nathan Glazer between a “dual city” (where ethnic boundaries are superseded by class boundaries) and a “divided city” (where the opposite scenario exists) (Glazer 1994; see further Bekker & Leidé 2006). If ethnic boundaries are “softened” by class boundaries, one may expect *lingua francas* to retain an ethnically neutral character by being appropriated by an ethnically neutral middle class, which may ultimately nativize them. If ethnicity remains prominent, one may expect heritage languages to generally remain part of native repertoires and also to leave their imprint on *lingua francas* in the form of substratal interferences and strategically deployed features to which an

emblematic ethnic value is assigned. Illustrations of the former scenario tend to come from immigration contexts where ethnicity is invisible, and where a “melting pot” dynamic is consequently possible, as in particular in settlement societies,¹ while illustrations for the latter scenario are provided by, among others, studies of postcolonial Englishes in the “Outer Circle” (Kachru 1986; Meierkord 2012).

The interrelation between ethnicity and language in multiethnic and multilingual contexts has been systematically modelled by Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). CAT formulates sociolinguistic predictions regarding the probability of minority ethnolinguistic groups shifting to majority ethnolinguistic groups’ languages and the probability of a given language being chosen over another in interactions between ethnolinguistically contrasting interlocutors. These predictions are based on an evaluation of ethnolinguistic vitality. Expressed in terms of demographics, socioeconomic status, and institutional support, differentials in ethnolinguistic vitality are likely to determine how “soft” or “hard” an ethnic boundary will be, and, by extension, how it will be signaled linguistically (Ehala 2010; Gallois, Ogay & Giles 2005). Another influential model with implications for characterizing the interrelation between language and ethnicity comes in the form of Carol Myers-Scotton’s Markedness Model (1993). According to this model, ethnicity determines which language choice will be regarded as indexing solidarity or distance. In contrast to CAT and the Markedness Model, the ethnographic strand in sociolinguistics tends to emphatically distance itself from assumed one-to-one relationships between ethnicity and patterns of language use (Auer 1998). That theoretical premise has perhaps to do with the fact that it has generally focused on immigration contexts, where ethnicity is likely to dissolve (Kern & Selting 2011; Rampton 2014). The theoretical premise of this article is that ethnic boundaries are a priori reflected in linguistic distinctions, and that lacking or unsystematic correlations between the two may form evidence that ethnic boundaries are eroding. The article proposes to test that premise using perceptions of ethnicity and language in Suriname, an ethnolinguistically diverse postcolonial society with a heritage of ethnoracial segregation.

1 The English varieties of settlement societies in the “Inner Circle” could be an example (Trudgill 2006; see further Kachru 1986 for the concept of “Inner Circle” in English linguistics).

Ethnicity and Language in Suriname: General Background

In 2012, the population of Suriname, a South American country of little more than half a million inhabitants, consisted of mostly Hindustani (27.4 percent), followed by Maroons (21.7 percent), Creoles (15.7 percent), Javanese (13.7 percent), and individuals declaring a “mixed” ancestry (13.4 percent). The other categories (that is mostly Europeans, Chinese, Amerindians, and Brazilians) accounted for 8.2 percent (ABS 2012). Descending from slave populations imported during the British and Dutch colonial periods (1630–67 and 1667–1975, respectively), the Creoles and Maroons form a demographic majority in the northeastern extremity of the country, in Paramaribo, the capital city, and in the interior. By contrast, Hindustani and Javanese form the dominant ethnic groups along the coastline stretching from Paramaribo up to the western border.² Half of Suriname’s population is currently concentrated in Paramaribo, and two thirds in Greater Paramaribo (ABS 2005). Originally a European and Creole city, Paramaribo began to acquire substantial Hindustani and Javanese populations from the first half of the twentieth century, either through immigration or through the absorption into the agglomeration of Hindustani and Javanese settlements. The largest ethnic group in Paramaribo’s population in 2012 was Creole (25.5 percent), followed by Hindustani (22.9 percent), individuals claiming a “mixed” ancestry (18.3 percent), Maroon (15.9 percent), and Javanese (9.8 percent). It is noteworthy that the Maroon component of the city’s population has grown considerably (ABS 2012; De Bruijne & Schalkwijk 2005; Schalkwijk & De Bruijne 1999). The main religions in Suriname are Christianity (that is mostly Roman Catholicism and various protestant denominations, together accounting for 40.7 percent of Suriname’s population), followed by Hinduism (19.9 percent), and Islam (13.5 percent).³ The geographic spread of religions suggests a strong association between Hindustani and Hinduism, between Javanese and Islam, and between Afro-Surinamese (by which I am collectively referring to Creoles and Maroons) and Christianity (ABS 2012).

Surinamese society in late colonial times was characterized by an ethnically stratified socioeconomic hierarchy, described in detail by G.J. Kruijer (1973). According to him, Europeans featured at the top of the socioeconomic lad-

2 However, Creoles form a demographic majority in the sparsely populated Coronie district, thus forming an ethnic enclave on the otherwise predominantly Hindustani western coastline.

3 The religious affiliation of 21.1 percent of respondents was unaccounted for. Atheism accounted for 2.7 percent, and traditional/other religions for 3.8 percent.

der, followed by the Chinese, Creoles, Hindustani, Javanese, Maroons, and Amerindians (see also Van Lier 1949, 1971). Since World War II this hierarchy has been considerably disrupted by a number of factors. “Surinamization” policies implemented in the public sector gradually saw the European group lose its visibility in favor of the Creoles (Hoeft 2014:13–14). Meanwhile, increased urbanization rates, and the concomitant increased exposure to education, have led to the reduction of socioeconomic gaps between ethnic groups. Surveys of Paramaribo conducted by Aart Schalkwijk & Ad de Bruijne (1999) showed that the Hindustani, and to a lesser extent the Javanese, have caught up with the Creoles in terms of income and levels of educational attainment, while high-ranking professions are now distributed evenly among ethnic groups. While Paramaribo’s emergent multiethnic middle class shows signs of residential integration, there remain suggestions of salient ethnic boundaries at a residential level, which coincide with a still-visible socioeconomic hierarchy in which Europeans remain socioeconomically preponderant and the Maroons and Amerindians marginalized. Additional suggestions of salient ethnic boundaries come in the form of indicators that ethnic endogamy is strong, especially among the Asian and Maroon population groups (Schalkwijk & De Bruijne 1999).⁴ The possible salience of ethnic boundaries is reflected at a political level, in the sense that ethnic clientelism has been a constant consideration in patterns of party formation (Jaffe 2011; Ramsoedh 2001). Altogether, the indicators discussed above suggest that ethnic boundaries in Suriname are historically strong and spatially reflected at a national level, although they seem to be softening at a socioeconomic level, and at a residential level in the specific case of Paramaribo (see further Menzo 2012).

The historical patterns of social stratification in Surinamese society, and, more specifically, its internal ethnic fault lines, partly account for its linguistic complexity. Despite Dutch being the only official language and the only language supported by the education system, each population group has to various degrees preserved its heritage language: Sarnami (a local form of Hindi), Sranan Tongo, Javanese, Chinese dialects, Maroon, and Amerindian languages (Carlin 2001). Historically developed within the Creole community, Sranan Tongo is described in the literature as a society-wide medium of interethnic solidarity (Arends 2002). The most comprehensive attempts to depict Surinamese lan-

4 The rise of the “mixed” (*gemengd*) category described in census data is not necessarily a reflection of increasing ethnic integration between Suriname’s ethnic groups. A large proportion of those declaring a mixed ethnic background may consist of Creoles claiming a mixed African and European heritage (ABS 2005; 2012).

guage behaviors are the surveys conducted among Surinamese school pupils by Isabelle Léglise and Bettine Migge (2015) and Sjaak Kroon and Kutlay Yagmur (2010). Unlike these surveys, in which geographic location and type of school were treated as the main variables, other sociolinguistic surveys systematically included social and situational variables in their design. A.Y. Westmaas (1983) inferred from his urban data that ethnicity, age, gender, social class, and communication settings are linguistically relevant. Apart from Léglise and Migge (2015), none of the above-named surveys attempted to characterize the patterns of language mixing widely reported in Suriname, which often make the use of established language labels irrelevant to describing Suriname's sociolinguistic reality. The only attempt to link language use in Suriname with interethnic relations was made by Menzo (2012), who examined perceptions of the (according to her, eroding) ethnic boundary between Creoles and Hindustani and of its sociolinguistic manifestation. Like Menzo, this article proposes to relate language use to ethnic boundaries, taking account of more ethnic groups in the process. For its data, it relies on perceptions elicited from an ethnically representative sample of young informants who mostly hail from the Paramaribo region, where the country's main ethnic groups are all represented.

Methodology and Sample

In order to explore the interrelations between ethnic boundaries and language behaviors in Suriname, this study relies on perceptual data that were collected by means of semidirected interviews conducted with a sample of young Paramaribo residents during the period 2015–17. Numbering 57 in total, the informants were recruited from Anton de Kom University's campus in Paramaribo using the "friend of a friend" approach (Milroy 1987). The informants were 19 to 23 years of age, included slightly more women than men, and, based on their self-declared ethnicity, comprised the following ethnic groups: Creole, Maroon, Hindustani, Javanese, Euro-Surinamese, Chinese, and "mixed." Table 1 gives a summary overview of the informants categorized in terms of self-declared ethnicity and gender. The Maroon informants all specified their background as Aucan, except for one, who indicated a Kwinti background.⁵ Individuals who despite a self-declared ethnically "mixed" ancestry primarily self-identified with a specific ethnic group were treated as members of that same ethnic group. Most informants were born and bred within the Greater

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5 Aucans are also known as Ndyuka or Okanisi.

TABLE 1 *Informants by ethnicity and gender*⁶

	Creole	Maroon	Hindustani	Javanese	Euro-Surinamese	Chinese	"Mixed"
	CR	MA	HI	JA	EU	CH	MI
Male	7	5	5	5	—	—	4
Female	6	7	6	6	1	1	4

Paramaribo region. Two informants had spent most of their lives in Nieuw Nickerie, and three in Saramacca. These informants had moved to Paramaribo for their tertiary education.

The interview protocol was designed so as to allow the discussion of ethnicity and language in the context of Paramaribo and Suriname. The informants were led to discuss their views on social distinctions in Surinamese society, whether ethnic, linguistic, or other, and how they relate to them. The questions on ethnicity provided in the protocol broadly fall into the following themes:

- The informant's ethnic background
(*"What is your ethnicity?"*; *"What is your parents' ethnicity?"*)
- The informant's history of exposure to other ethnic groups
(for example, *"Who did you play with on the street?"*; *"What were the dominant ethnicities at your primary school?"* et cetera).
- The ethnic composition of the informant's social network
(for example, *"What are the dominant ethnicities in your circle of close friends?"*).
- Perception and experience of intergroup discrimination
(for example, *"Have you ever been a victim of ethnic/racial discrimination?"*; *"In what context and by whom?"* et cetera).
- Experiences and perceptions of ethnic and other social distinctions in Surinamese society
(for example, *"How do you define being Hindustani?"*; *"Have you ever been discriminated against, and, if so, by whom and in what context?"*; *"What typical professions do you associate Maroons with?"*; *"Who are the wealthy in Paramaribo and where do they socialize?"* et cetera).

A range of questions were phrased so as to give space for the informants to name and characterize the nonethnic social categories that they see as rel-

⁶ No Amerindian informants could be found.

evant. These questions tested the informants' perceptions of social distinctions salient in the literature, such as the urban-rural divide, social class, and religion (for example, *"In what ways do you feel that your rural relatives (if any) behave differently?"*; *"In what ways do you feel that people from rural areas behave differently?"*; *"Who are the wealthy in town and how do they typically behave?"*; *"How do you as a Christian Javanese relate to Muslim Javanese?"* et cetera).

The linguistic questions provided in the protocol were phrased so as to elicit the following information:

- The informants' linguistic profiles and biographies (for example, *"What languages do you know?"*; *"At what point and where were you first exposed to Sranan Tongo?"*).
- The informants' macrosociolinguistic perceptions of Surinamese society, with an emphasis on the perceived linguistic attributes of Surinamese ethnic groups (for example, *"What languages do the Javanese usually speak?"*; *"To what extent is language maintained within your ethnic group?"*; *"To what extent is it better maintained in rural areas than in urban areas?"*).
- The informant's linguistic behaviors—expressed in terms of patterns of language choice—across intra- and interethnic contexts, as well as across a range of interactional contexts that are named in sociolinguistic literature on Suriname as linguistically differentiated (that is formal/informal, intra-/intergenerational, intra-/intergender'; see further Westmaas 1983). The questions pertaining to that theme rely in their formulation on generic language labels. (for example, *"What is the dominant language used in your home?"*; *"What language do you use to speak with your parents/siblings?"*; *"What language would you use with a woman you are going on a first date with?"*; *"What language would you speak to a Hindustani-/Creole-looking stranger on the street?"* et cetera).
- The informants' linguistic behaviors, expressed in terms of intraconversational code-switching practices. Efforts were made to focus the informants' responses on characterizing the totality of linguistic resources that they draw on across interactional contexts and on the pragmatic functions they assign to these resources. (for example, *"How much Dutch do you use in your Sranan Tongo?"*; *"How much Sranan Tongo do you use in your Dutch?"*; *"When do you mix them?"* et cetera).

- The informants' perceptions of ethnic differentiation, and other modes of social differentiation, in linguistic behaviors in Surinamese society in general.

(for example, *"Do you think Hindustani have their own way of speaking Dutch/Sranan Tongo?"*; *"Do urban and rural Maroons sound different?"* et cetera).

The interviews were carried out by the researcher, whom the interviewees considered "white" and "Dutch." The medium used for interviewing was Dutch, while freedom was given to the informants to use terms from other languages. Due to their predominantly urban backgrounds, it was expected that the informants' answers might provide a biased picture of the urban-rural divide. The analysis of data proceeds as follows. First, I deal with the informants' perceptions of their own and others' ethnicities while placing these perceptions in the perspective of other social categories that the informants describe as salient. Next, I focus on the perceived macrosociolinguistic attributes of ethnicities and of other social categories, expressed mostly in terms of language knowledge, dominance, maintenance, and shift. The section that follows describes the interrelations that the informants perceive between social categories, contexts, and languages. Thereafter I describe the interrelations that the informants perceive between social categories, contexts, and codes—by which I refer to the varieties of languages or multilingual combinations identified by the informants. In the discussion section, finally, I attempt to draw conclusions on ethnolinguistic dynamics in Suriname, while fitting them into a broader sociohistorical perspective involving comparable postcolonial environments, in particular Guyana and Trinidad. Informants are referred to by means of the capitalized abbreviations introduced in Table 1 (for example, "CR") prefixed with "M-" or "F-" to denote their gender, and suffixed with a number to facilitate making individual distinctions (for example, "M-CR-1").

Perceptions of Ethnicity and Other Modes of Social Distinction

Ethnic boundaries are clearly felt by the informants at both macro- and micro-social levels. Some professions remain stereotypically associated with specific ethnic groups, as previously reported by De Bruijne & Schalkwijk (2005): most informants tend to associate Hindustani with agriculture, retail trade, and catering; Creoles with the public sector; and Maroons and Javanese with agriculture and the construction sector. There is also a perception that schools are ethnically segregated, especially primary schools, which can display Hindustani majorities if confessional. Some areas of Paramaribo are perceived

as ethnic islands: Hindustani are recurrently associated with Kwatta Road, Javanese with Leonsberg and Blauwgrond, and Maroons with Latour and Pont Buiten. There is a consensus across informants that Hindustani are the ethnic group most likely to self-insulate socially. Indeed, seven out of the eleven Hindustani informants describe their circles of friends as mostly Hindustani. Additionally, ten describe feeling pressure from their families not to marry those of a non-Hindustani background, especially Creoles and Maroons. The Javanese informants, as well as the Euro-Surinamese and Chinese informants, report similar pressure from families to maintain social distance vis-à-vis Creoles and Maroons within their respective ethnic groups. The Maroon informants agree that the Creoles maintain a degree of social distance toward Maroons in general: They perceive Creoles as being condescending toward them, mostly due to their historically more urban character. That is the reason, in the words of F-CR-1, why “a Creole would take offence if you called him a Maroon.” Experiences of ethnic discrimination come to the fore in two main forms: discriminatory comments on social media (reported by 15 informants), and patterns of group formation on campus, whereby Hindustani student groups are repeatedly described as ethnically exclusive and as maintaining their distance versus other ethnic groups (reported by 39 informants).

Despite perceived patterns of separation, the informants' comments suggest that there is scope for mobility across ethnic boundaries. At a macrosocial level, the historical association of Creoles with employment in the public service is perceived by most as eroding (“These days you find more and more Hindustani in the public services,” M-HI-2). There is also little perception of rigid ethnic segregation at the educational level beyond the primary school phase, or at the residential level in Paramaribo, as most informants report their streets as being ethnically mixed. Except for the Hindustani, most informants in each ethnic category describe their social networks as ethnically mixed. There also seems to be scope for ethnic repositioning, subject to the presence or absence of certain phenotypical features, in particular skin color, hair texture, and eye shape. F-MA-1 remarks that urban Maroons “sometimes pretend they are Town Creoles,” a strategy of blurring ethnic boundaries, facilitated by the African phenotypical features that they share with the Creoles which is probably in response to the enduring rural stigma attached to them. Generally, it seems that full self-categorization as Creole can be justified simply by at least partial Creole parentage and the presence of African phenotypical features. For example, M-CR-1 and M-CR-2 do not include in their self-categorization their partial Javanese backgrounds due to what they say are their dominant African features. A clear-cut boundary is also lacking between light-skinned Creoles

and Euro-Surinamese (to whom all informants refer using the Sranan Tongo terms *boeroe* or *bakra* “white”) to the extent that the two categories are sometimes even treated as synonymous. An illustration is provided by F-EU, who in her self-categorization as “white” distances herself from her mother’s Javanese ethnicity due to what she claims are its “negative connotations.”

Ethnic disidentification can translate into the situational adoption of another ethnicity, but it can also translate into the situational rejection of established ethnicities in favor of “Surinameseness,” which, according to M-M1-1, provides an escape route from what he calls “the pressure to join one specific group.” There are indirect indications, however, that “Creoleness” forms a defining, if not a dominant, dimension of Surinameseness due to the intrinsically inclusive values that it conveys. This perception is perhaps best epitomized in the observation by F-M1-1 that “we Douglas are rejected by the Hindustani but accepted by the Creoles.” Openness to other ethnicities on the part of the Creole population has, according to F-CR-3, to do with a strategy of “whitening,” as “the Creoles are maybe not happy with their skin color, so they want to have Bonkoro and Dougla children.”⁷ By indexing values of hybridity, Creoleness can be appropriated into an oppositional identity strategically set against ethnic traditionalism. Although she self-categorizes as Hindustani, F-H1-4 claims to prefer associating with Creoles rather than with Hindustani, whose ethnocentric behaviors she finds oppressive. Additionally, projecting Creoleness more than other ethnic identities offers an avenue for social self-promotion. This is evident in the case of the Maroon informants, who tend to generically apply to themselves the Dutch label *Creool* rather than the officially used labels *Boslandscreool* (i.e. “Bushland Creole”) or *Marron*, which—in the opinion of F-MA-3—is meant to neutralize the rural imagery historically attached to Maroon identity. Similarly, M-M1-1—who is of mixed Creole-Javanese parentage—feels strongly inclined toward “the Creole side” of his identity, as in his opinion “you get nowhere in life if you act like a traditional Javanese” as a “traditional Javanese typically has no ambition.”

In addition to Surinameseness, phenotypical hierarchies seem to cut across specific ethnic boundaries. The Creole informants report a phenotypical hierarchy among Creoles that ranges from *blaka* (“black”) to *redi* (“red,” meaning “fair”), with *bonkoro* forming a transitional category between the two. A comparable hierarchy is found among the Hindustani, who—according to the Hindustani informants—may be categorized as either *kariya* (the Sarnami term for

7 *Bonkoro* is a Sranan Tongo term meaning “light brown.” *Dougla* is a Hindi term referring to individuals of mixed African and East Indian parentage.

“black”) or *safta* (“white,” “fair”). In both cases, belonging to the fairest category is seen as a justification for claiming membership of the upper classes. At first sight, religion also seems to cut across ethnic boundaries: Islam is shared by sections of the Hindustani and Javanese populations, and Christianity by sections of the Javanese population and most Afro-descendants (ABS 2012). Additionally, the informants named Winti (or Winta in Aukan) as a set of religious beliefs and practices shared by Afro-descendant groups. However, the informants perceive religious practices as displaying a strongly ethnic character. The Javanese informants stress the “Javanist” component of Javanese Islam, and emphasize that Christian Javanese typically identify with a protestant denomination that specifically caters to the Javanese.⁸ The Creole and Maroon informants agree that Winti/Winta rituals strongly differ across their respective communities. Finally, a social distinction regularly referred to for qualifying ethnicity is the urban-rural divide, especially when describing the Hindustani, Javanese, and Maroon populations, whose rural members are more “traditional” in the view of the informants. However, certain ethnicities remain perceptually polarized across the urban-rural divide. The non-Maroon informants associate Maroons with rural areas, and Maroons regard Creoles as essentially urban. I examine in the next sections how the social distinctions reported by the informants play out at a linguistic level.

Perceived Ethnic Factors in Patterns of Language Knowledge and Dominance

There is an obvious connection between ethnicity and patterns of self-reported language knowledge in the sample in that the active knowledge of specific languages—namely Sarnami, Javanese, Chinese dialects, and Maroon languages—is ethnically bounded. The informants also stress a symbolic connection between these languages and senses of ethnic belonging. For example, it is inconceivable in the view of all informants to be Creole and not speak Sranan Tongo: “The Creoles own Sranan Tongo,” according to F-CR-5. Also, for a Hindustani to not at least understand Sarnami is likely to raise questions as to his/her membership of the Hindustani community, as explained by M-HI-3 and M-HI-4, who describe their competence in Sarnami as low or nonexistent. Self-reported modes of acquiring heritage languages vary consid-

8 Six of the Javanese informants were Muslim, while four were Christian, identifying with the Javanese branch of the Evangelische Broedergemeente or Moravians.

erably from one ethnic group to the next in the sample. The Aucan informants and the seven Hindustani informants with active knowledge of Sarnami claim to have acquired their respective heritage languages from their parents. By contrast, two out of the three Javanese informants with active knowledge of Javanese acquired their language skills from their grandparents. Finally, the Creole informants all claimed to have picked up Sranan Tongo mostly outside of their homes, more specifically in the neighborhood environment or at school. These patterns of transmission reflect society-wide dynamics of language maintenance and shifts perceived by the informants. The Javanese informants describe what they see as a near-complete shift from Javanese among younger Javanese generations. The Creole informants describe Sranan Tongo as largely absent in intergenerational communication in Creole households. The heritage languages best maintained in the home sphere are, in the view of the informants, Maroon languages and Sarnami, although cases of urban Hindustani and Maroon children not understanding their heritage languages are reported.

When a given heritage language is not dominant in the home sphere, Dutch is. Most informants (as well as most informants within each ethnic group in the sample) reported that Dutch is their dominant home language, the exceptions being four of the eleven Hindustani informants, five of the twelve Maroon informants (which can be related to the abovementioned disposition toward language maintenance among these informants' respective ethnic groups), as well as one of the eleven Javanese informants. Even when not described as dominant, Dutch is described as present, except in the case of two Maroon informants. Overall, having Dutch as a home language seems to be an attribute of Creole and Euro-Surinamese identity, which reflects Suriname's history of urbanization. However, the fact, illustrated by the data, that Dutch nowadays also functions as such among other ethnic groups and among those members of the population with mixed ethnic backgrounds (especially in urban areas and among the middle classes in the view of most) seems to give it the trappings of an ethnically neutral language. The informants ascribe the dominance of Dutch in their home spheres to a strategy consciously pursued by their parents to enhance their children's performance at school, where Dutch is always the dominant medium of instruction. The informants also perceive a correlation between speaking mostly another language than Dutch at home and underperforming at school (for example, "You can tell school kids who only speak Javanese at home because they struggle with Dutch," F-JA-4). Except for two of the eleven Hindustani and two of the twelve Maroon informants, the informants intend to replicate this strategy in their future households. The main reason named by the Maroon informants for the absence or underrepresenta-

tion of Dutch in their homes is that their parents grew up in remote rural areas and did not have access to Dutch-medium education as a result.

Aside from Dutch, Sranan Tongo is the other language whose patterns of self-reported knowledge may at first sight not reveal ethnic fault lines: All informants claimed to have at least partial knowledge of it. There is a wide consensus that Sranan Tongo is the most widespread language in Suriname (for example, "It is everyone's language," M-HI-2). By contrast, knowledge of the other heritage languages seems confined to the ethnic in-groups that they are historically associated with, although mention is made of Hindustani and Javanese individuals fluent in one another's heritage languages, often as a result of being part of a mixed union. Also, all Creole informants claim a passive knowledge of Aucan (attributed to the fact that it closely resembles Sranan Tongo), which—according to the Maroon informants—is also widely known among the non-Aucan Maroons.⁹ Not speaking Sranan Tongo is linked to an attitude rather than to an ethnicity ("There are some that just don't like to speak it," M-MI-4). Sranan Tongo is in all cases acquired in the early years, and, as already discussed above in relation to the Creole informants, mostly acquired outside the home sphere, especially on the street. Only three (Creole) informants stated that they had acquired this language partly from their parents, and even then, this was always indirectly. Three of the eleven Hindustani informants stated that they began to learn it only from the moment they started attending secondary school. Most Creole informants reported that they began to use Sranan Tongo at home with their parents once they were halfway through school, as "it becomes acceptable as one gets older" (M-CR-1). Overall, there is a perception that Sranan Tongo is less repressed past the stage of primary school, where the acquisition of Dutch is at stake. Still, only one informant (F-CR-3) is of the view that Sranan Tongo should be made an official language, which shows that Dutch holds more overt prestige.

Ethnicity may not necessarily predict whether someone knows Dutch or Sranan Tongo. Yet, ethnicity is seen as having an impact on degrees of competence in these languages. The informants mostly named the Creoles as most likely, and the Maroons and Hindustani as least likely, to speak "good" Dutch, while speaking "good" Sranan Tongo was associated with Creoles and to a lesser extent with Maroons. Other factors that the informants mentioned as impacting on levels of competence in Dutch are the urban-rural divide, social class, and age: competence in Dutch is perceived as highest in urban areas, among

9 Four of the twelve Maroon informants did, however, claim knowledge of Saramaccan (or Samaaka), in one case due to the mother being Saramaccan.

middle and upper classes, and among the younger generations, and as lowest in rural areas, among lower classes, and among elderly individuals. Competence in Sranan Tongo is perceived as highest in rural areas, among lower classes, and among men, and as lowest among middle and upper classes, and among women. Eight informants indicated having only limited competence in this language (through comments such as: “When I try Sranan it just doesn’t sound right,” F-JA-5). Out of these informants, seven are female; in terms of ethnicity, four are Hindustani, two are Javanese, one identifies as being of “mixed” ethnicity, and one is Creole. Three of the eleven Hindustani informants ascribe their limited competence in Sranan Tongo to their parents’ bias against the language (“My father doesn’t want me to speak it as he thinks it sounds too rough,” F-HI-5), and to having attended Hindu primary schools where Sarnami and Dutch functioned as the media of socialization. The other informants cite social pressure to project an educated image as a factor limiting their scope for improving their Sranan Tongo. F-JA-6 claims her competence in Sranan Tongo remains limited because “if you are of a certain standing, you have to keep it Dutch.” Generally, F-MI-1 links low competence in Sranan Tongo to academic attainment (“The more people have studied, the less they can speak Sranan Tongo”).

Perceived Ethnic Factors in Patterns of Language Choice

The informants were generally able to see one-to-one relationships between languages, especially Sarnami, Javanese, and Maroon languages, and social contexts in which ethnicity plays a role. One of these contexts is the home sphere, especially in the case of mono-ethnic households. As it often displays an ethnic character, religious worship forms another context where the use of these languages is reported, especially Sarnami and Javanese.¹⁰ Finally, intra-ethnic socialization with age peers outside of the family unit is recurrently mentioned as being conducive to the use of these languages. To some extent, the use of Dutch displays a correlation with Creole ethnicity in that all Creole informants report it as their dominant linguistic choice at home. Ethnic factors at work in language behaviors are also revealed in comments that the informants make on ethnic groups other than their own. Sixteen informants explicitly relate the

10 The Hindu informants describe Sarnami as occasionally practiced alongside Dutch at the Hindu temples or mosques they attend, stressing that Sanskrit and Classical Arabic are earmarked for ritual functions. The Javanese informants report frequently hearing Javanese at Javanese churches and mosques.

frequent use of Sranan Tongo to being Creole. Some informants also identify interethnic contexts in which heritage languages other than Sranan Tongo are used for various purposes to which the invocation of ethnicity seems relevant. One of these purposes is the situational exclusion of ethnic others. For example, F-MA-5 observes that “it is a typical Hindustani thing to speak Sarnami when they don’t want others to join their groups.” Another purpose seems to be the identification of an unknown interlocutor’s ethnic background preceding an exchange. This strategy is mostly reported by the Aucan informants in relation to their interactions with Creoles (“The dark ones may as well be Maroons, so you can try Aucan first,” M-MA-2).

Certain patterns of situational language choices serve the function of ensuring ethnic neutrality in the view of the informants. According to F-CR-1, if only Creoles are taking part in a conversation, then Sranan Tongo is the norm, whereas “if the group is mixed, then it is mostly Dutch,” suggesting that choosing Dutch as a medium of interaction is consonant with the aim of shaping an ethnically neutral communication setting. Modes of ensuring ethnic neutrality in interethnic communication settings can also involve both interacting parties maintaining their respective heritage language in the exchange. Such strategies are reported by the Maroon informants in relation to interactions between Maroons of distinct linguistic backgrounds and between Maroons and Creoles. Four of the twelve Maroon informants reported regularly using Aucan with Creoles. Their motivations for doing so are the close resemblance between Aucan and Sranan Tongo (“Aucan is Sranan Tongo with an accent,” M-MA-5) and a belief that Creoles are more fluent in Sranan Tongo than others. However, the maintenance of Aucan in interethnic communication does not seem to be universally approved. An indication in this regard is given by F-MA-1, who remarks that “Creoles sometimes get annoyed when you start talking to them in Aucan.” The Maroon informants have mixed perceptions of linguistic norms of interaction between Maroons of distinct linguistic backgrounds. Four of the ten Maroon informants report that Aucans and Saramaccans generally maintain their respective heritage languages when mutually interacting, yet only when the Aucan-speaker is familiar with Saramaccan. By contrast, the other eight Maroon informants think that Sranan Tongo remains the ethnically neutral medium between the various Maroon subgroups, as regular exposure to other Maroon languages is not widespread outside of specific settlements.

The patterns of language choices reported by the informants sometimes seem to be motivated by the aim of invoking ethnic solidarity or of marking ethnic boundaries. They also occasionally derive from a combination of cognitive considerations linked to competence levels and linguistic conventions of deference. These become apparent when a generational perspective is taken on the

informants' descriptions of their language choices in their home spheres. Even though it is known across generations, the use of Sranan Tongo is described as largely restricted to intragenerational interactions, as it carries connotations of "roughness." All 32 informants who declare that they ever use Sranan Tongo in their home spheres specify it as a medium for interacting with their siblings. Dutch seems to be the dominant choice for intergenerational interactions in the home spheres, unless the addressee's competence in Dutch is low. In that case, two options present themselves. One is to use the heritage language, as in the case of F-HI-3, who speaks Dutch with her father, but Sarnami with her mother, "because her Sarnami is better." Using mostly heritage languages when talking with parents is the norm for 17 of the informants (nine Maroons, six Hindustani, and two Javanese), while using Dutch is the norm for the rest. Using Sranan Tongo for intergenerational communication is also motivated by competence. Four informants (two Javanese and two Hindustani) declared that they use it with their grandparents, whose knowledge of Dutch is limited, and with whom Sarnami and Javanese cannot be used as media by the informants as their own competence in these languages is low. Exploratory language use outside the family unit provides another illustration of linguistic conventions of deference. For most informants, except the Maroons, the practice of addressing (older) strangers in their presumed heritage language or in Sranan Tongo might convey an assumption that the interlocutor is uneducated.

The sum of the above observations suggests that—apart from ethnic boundaries—specific languages index specific values, which—subject to cognitive factors—can be simultaneously read as marking more or less deference and distance. The informants clearly associate Dutch with deference, a value that they feel cannot be conveyed through heritage languages. For example, all Javanese informants with competence in Javanese admitted not mastering the "polite" register of Javanese, or "High Javanese." In the words of M-HI-4, Sarnami is no more than a "hotchpotch," a "coarse language" that is not as refined as Hindi, itself a "pure" language, in which only two informants claim to have competence. In opposition to Dutch, Sranan Tongo—a "street language," in the words of M-CR-2—is assigned a [-deferential] and [-distant] value. Outside of the home, Sranan Tongo is—irrespective of ethnicity—the language used with age peers, or, in the words of M-CR-3, the language that "you speak with your friends." These contrasting indexicalities are reflected in linguistic norms of deference between men and women. Most informants agree that it is more appropriate to address women in Dutch. It is, in the words of M-MA-1, "an indication that things are neat and tidy," while speaking Sranan Tongo to a woman would send potentially unwelcome "macho" signals. The "manliness" attached to Sranan Tongo explains why Dutch is regarded as more apt to index

femininity, and why women correspondingly tend to speak more Dutch than men in the view of the informants, especially when they are “not emancipated” (M-JA-1). In the view of the informants, this particularly applies to Hindustani women, who are noted for being “ashamed to speak Sranan” (F-HI-1). The link between Dutch and deference, distance, and femininity seems to be less strong among Maroons, as Maroon informants describe the use of Maroon languages as “normal” or “not inappropriate” between men and women.

Perceived Ethnic Factors in Use of Linguistic Varieties and Codes

While ethnicity cannot easily predict who can and who cannot speak Dutch and Sranan Tongo, it can to a higher degree predict how one’s Dutch or Sranan Tongo is likely to sound. According to the informants, each ethnic group speaks Dutch with an “accent,” especially when they speak their heritage languages fluently and their competence in Dutch is correspondingly low. The Hindustani are stereotypically perceived as speaking Dutch with a “singing tone”: “It is like they add a question mark to the end of every sentence” (M-HI-4). A widely held view of the Javanese accent in Dutch is that it is overaccented (“They draw it out a lot,” M-MI-2). Similarly, there is a perception of a “Maroon accent,” characterized, among other things, by the confusion between the phonemes [g] and [k] (M-HI-2 gives the example of the word *gat* “hole” that Maroons would pronounce as *kat* “cat”). Varying degrees of competence in Dutch are usually measured by the mastery of Dutch gender distinctions as manifested through the correct use of the definite articles *de* and *het*. Hindustani stand out as tending to use the definite articles incorrectly. “They make crazy mistakes,” according to F-JA-4, also in terms of confusing present and past tenses. Apart from ethnicity, the rural-urban divide, social class, and age are named as salient social factors that have an impact on the ways of speaking Dutch: second language learners’ errors are more likely to be encountered among individuals with a rural background, individuals with lower levels of education, and older individuals. Contact with the Netherlands is also named as a factor: there is a widespread negative stereotype of Surinamese returning from the Netherlands to Suriname with a contrived Netherlandish accent. “Overdoing” the European Dutch accent may have ethnic overtones: it tends, according to M-HI-2, to be more frequent among Hindustani and Javanese, whereas Creoles “only just learn new words” but “don’t catch the accent.”

Ethnicity is less central to perceptions of variation in Sranan Tongo. Primary impressions are that Sranan Tongo sounds the same across all ethnic groups (“There is only one Sranan Tongo,” F-CR-2). However, ethnicity (alongside with

levels of education, social class, and gender) does manifest itself indirectly as a prominent factor in variation through levels of competence. Most informants agreed with the notion of a contrast between the Sranan Tongo spoken by Creoles (who are considered to be its best speakers) and the Sranan Tongo spoken by others, especially Hindustani (whose competence in it is deemed lower). An important aspect by which the informants measure variation in Sranan Tongo is knowledge of “deep words” (for example, “The Creoles speak Sranan Tongo deeper,” M-HI-2) and expressions, such as *odo’s* (proverbial statements), which in the view of the informants tend to be hallmarks of the Sranan Tongo spoken by Creoles. Although there are observations of Maroon ways of speaking Sranan Tongo marked by a lexical input from Maroon languages (“The Saramaccans sometimes use Saramaccan words in their Sranan Tongo,” F-MA-2), the dominant opinion among the informants is that the Maroons speak a conventional form of Sranan Tongo. There still is a case for the argument that an urban Maroon variety of Sranan Tongo might be emerging in an Aucan guise, in the sense that urban Aucan varieties might be in the process of merging with Sranan Tongo. That possibility is most clearly indicated by the observation made by F-MA-2 that “many [urban Aucan speakers] think they speak Aucan while it is actually Sranan Tongo that they speak.” In turn, the large representation of Aucan speakers in urban areas could be leaving a lexical imprint on urban Sranan Tongo in general, as the Creole informants were aware that they use Aucan borrowings in their Sranan Tongo.¹¹

All informants describe intraconversational code-switching as a widespread practice. Its patterns vary from one ethnic group to the next, but tend to uniformly display a combination of Sranan Tongo and Dutch across all ethnic groups. Code-switching involving Sranan Tongo and Dutch alone is more likely to be found among Creoles, while other ethnic groups’ code-switching patterns are likely to also involve their respective heritage languages. Whether these heritage languages are present in code-switching patterns largely depends on whether the exchange takes place in intra-ethnic or interethnic settings. Still, there are indications that Sarnami, Javanese, and Maroon languages occasionally feature in code-switching patterns deployed in interethnic settings. Some Hindustani, Javanese, and Maroon informants describe how they might occasionally insert emblematic words from their respective heritage languages into Dutch and/or Sranan Tongo utterances while interacting with members of

11 Among the Aucan borrowings named by the informants are the adjective *tyobo* “dirty,” used in a derogatory moral sense (Sranan Tongo *doti* or *fisti*), and *fika* “to leave alone” (Sranan Tongo *libi*).

other ethnic groups. An example is F-HI-5, who claims to “sometimes” use Sarnami words in her Dutch while interacting with members of other ethnic groups (“it is an ice-breaker”). Such self-reported behaviors suggest that code-switching involving more than Dutch and Sranan Tongo amounts to projecting ethnicities. Patterns of Dutch–Sranan Tongo code-switching are more likely to co-vary with location, age, and social class than with ethnicity. More specifically, there is a consensus among the informants that code-switching practices feature more Sranan Tongo and less Dutch in rural areas, as well as among lower classes and older individuals. Irrespective of the urban-rural divide, age, and social class, some informants feel that there is a limit to how much Dutch can be combined with Sranan Tongo (for example, “Too much Dutch in Sranan Tongo is confusing: one should stick to one or the other,” F-MI-3).

Possibly more prominently than ethnicity or any other social factor, topic and conversational frame are perceived as having an impact on code-switching patterns. In the view of the informants the only language that is usable across topics is Dutch. Except for Aucan, the informants consider their respective heritage languages to be of more limited conversational use. Sarnami and Javanese can never be used for discussing school-related topics, for which Dutch is in all cases seen as the more appropriate language choice. Among those who provide more detail on their use of Sarnami, F-H-2 claims to use it in connection with community-related topics (“discussions about people”). Sranan Tongo is felt as more appropriate for “macho-themed” conversations, which is the reason that F-HI-2 says she uses it “to discuss football” with her brother. Sranan Tongo is also described as appropriate for indexing specific conversational frames. F-JA-5 says in this regard: “If you want to tell a story, then you do it in Sranan Tongo, because it is more fun.” Additionally, it is used for emphasis (M-MI-2), for “cracking jokes” or for “hurling insults” (F-CR-1). Perhaps due to their low levels of competence in it, the Javanese informants seem to use Javanese more for emblematic purposes within otherwise Dutch- or Sranan Tongo-dominant exchanges with ethnic peers. For example, F-JA-4 says she mostly uses Javanese for questions such as “How are you?” or “Have you finished eating?” While the examples of code-switching discussed so far seem to involve stylistically salient transitions between languages, there is also a widespread opinion among informants that code-switching “happens automatically” (F-MI-3), and is “unconscious” (M-CR-2). This type of code-switching, referred to as language-mixing (Auer 1999), is likely to occur between typologically close languages. This explains the perception introduced above that Aucan and Sranan Tongo could be in the process of merging in urban areas.

Discussion

The data discussed in this study reveal that ethnic boundaries seem to be salient in the Surinamese context. Salient ethnic boundaries could be discerned in perceptions of segregation in Surinamese society, in practices of ethnic stereotyping, as well as in the informants' patterns of socialization. The data recurrently indicate rigid boundaries around specific groups, namely, the Hindustani (which reflects the data discussed by Menzo 2012), the Euro-Surinamese, and the Chinese. This study's data also suggest that values associated with Surinameseness tend to carry ethnic connotations of Creoleness, suggesting that Creoles perceive themselves, and are perceived as, Suriname's socially dominant ethnic group. The hypothesis that ethnic boundaries are linguistically manifested holds true to some extent. Ethnicities are associated with specific heritage languages, which to various degrees are known by the informants, and which to various degrees are present and used by the informants, in ethnically bounded social contexts that involve intra-ethnic interaction, in the home sphere in particular. There could also be some ethnic indexicality to the Dutch language in the Surinamese context as it is the only home language that the informants attributed to the Creoles and Euro-Surinamese in general, a stereotype that was reflected in the Creole and Euro-Surinamese informants' linguistic characterizations of their own home spheres as being Dutch-dominant. Ethnic fault lines are also reflected in differential levels of competence in Dutch and Sranan Tongo, with the lowest levels of competence in the two languages attributed to the Hindustani, and the highest to the Creoles. Finally, code-switching patterns also reveal ethnic fault lines to some extent as some informants report on code-switching patterns involving more than Sranan Tongo and Dutch that seem to perform the function of invoking an ethnic identity.

Despite the above observations, there are suggestions that ethnic boundaries might be eroding, as Menzo (2012) also established in relation to boundaries between Hindustani and Creoles. Indications in this regard are the informants' biographies of exposure to other ethnic groups and their propensity to have ethnically mixed circles of friends. Additionally, Surinameseness is always primarily described as an ethnically neutral identity with which all informants identify. Ethnic boundaries might be eroding more between specific ethnic groups than between others: there seems to be a tendency among urban Maroons to identify with Creoles, a strategy that is facilitated by the fact that the two groups tend to share phenotypical features. The possibility that ethnicity might be eroding in contemporary Suriname is further suggested by the fact that the informants foreground social factors other than ethnicity in

their interpretations of Suriname's sociolinguistic landscape and of their own linguistic behaviors. To begin with, there is a general perception of a language shift taking place in urban areas toward Dutch in the home sphere, which reflects the sociolinguistic data collected by De Bruijne & Schalkwijk (2005). The ongoing process of language shift goes some way toward explaining patterns of language choice: more than ethnicity, a low level of competence in Dutch among older generations is the reason that heritage languages are maintained in intergenerational interactions (as observed by Légise & Migge 2015). Also, the scope for speaking Sranan Tongo is generally constrained by linguistic conventions of deference. Finally, patterns of code-switching outside intra-ethnic settings involve only Dutch and Sranan Tongo by default, and are mostly described as a function of topic and frame management strategies, or as unconscious language mixing.

How far the erosion of Surinamese ethnic boundaries can go could be tentatively predicted by examining the linguistic dynamics in Guyana and Trinidad, which also harbor ethnically diverse populations featuring roughly equal proportions of Afro- and Indo-descendants (CSO 2012; BSG 2016). In both countries, nineteenth-century British assimilationist policies resulted in comprehensive shifts toward nonradical English creoles (i.e. Trinidadian Creole English or "TCE," and Guyanese Creole English or "GCE") under the normative umbrella of Standard English (Rickford 1987; Winford 1997). Following the theoretical premises of this study, these shifts could be read as the linguistic outcome of eroding ethnic boundaries. However, despite some demographic indicators pointing in this direction,¹² ethnic fault lines remain, most notably at the political level (Bissessar & La Guerre 2013). Enduring ethnic fault lines are linguistically indexed by concentrations of [+basilectal] features, the highest among which are found among Indo-descendants, who are historically less urbanized and thus less exposed to standard varieties of English (Rickford 1987; Winford 1972). A parallel can be drawn between higher concentrations of [+basilectal] features in the Trinidadian and Guyanese contexts and lower levels of competence in Dutch in Suriname. In all three national contexts, levels of competence in the superstrate seem to have been equalizing in urban areas, where ethnic segregation is lowest.¹³ As a result, ethnolinguistic indexicality

12 Perhaps more so in Trinidad than in Guyana, where a dynamic of "Douglarization" has been accompanying urbanization (cf. Clarke 1993; Premdas 1995; Segal 1993).

13 I am referring here to Trinidadian and Guyanese census data on the evolving proportions of each ethnic group in the Port of Spain and Georgetown areas, which are the most urbanized areas in Trinidad and Guyana, respectively (CSO 2012; BSG 2016). For comparable Surinamese data, I refer to De Bruijne & Schalkwijk 2005.

may be in the process of disappearing in urban areas, leaving suprasegmental features as the only reminders of ethnic affiliation.¹⁴ In the specific context of Suriname, possible other indicators of ethnicity are levels of competence in Sranan Tongo and the lexical features thereof, which are likely to reveal the presence or absence of an Afro-descendant background.

Conclusion

This study attempted to firmly situate the topic of language variation in Suriname within the perspective of ethnicity, operating under the assumption that language variation consistently indexes social distinctions, including ethnic ones. Based on perceptions elicited from a sample of urban residents, the findings confirm—and also provide a position from which to generalize—Menzo's conclusion that Surinamese ethnic boundaries are enduring, while undergoing erosion in urban areas. The process of erosion is visible at a linguistic level with what seems to be a general shift in urban areas toward a diglossic system featuring Dutch as H-language and Sranan Tongo as L-language. However, this shift might be proceeding at different paces from one ethnic group to the next. Erosion could be proceeding fastest among those ethnic groups most inclined to identify with Surinameseness (and its Creole component), most notably the Maroons, and slower among the others, most prominently the Hindustani. As a salient feature of Surinamese society, ethnicity still seems to be reflected in the ways of speaking Dutch and Sranan Tongo, which, in the view of the informants, is determined by ethnically variable levels of linguistic competence. Whether these differential levels of competence are producing fossilizing features that over time could acquire an emblematic value remains to be established on the basis of directly observed linguistic usage.

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14 By "suprasegmental feature" I refer to the specifically Hindustani intonational curves and the Javanese patterns of emphasis highlighted by the informants. The suprasegmental features that the informants ascribe to the Dutch varieties spoken by Indo-Surinamese have also been observed in the English and TCE varieties spoken by Indo-Trinidadians (Leung & Deuber 2014).

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