

Language use and language attitudes in Aruba

In this paper, we present the results of a survey that was conducted on Aruba. The majority of the Aruban population speak Papiamentu, but Dutch has been the only officially recognized language for centuries. Global languages such as British/American English and Spanish play an important role as well, due to migration, tourism and the media (television, the internet).

The language situation is complex and so are the attitudes toward the individual languages. Papiamentu is regarded as an important identity marker, but also perceived as threatened by English and Spanish (Carroll 2009, 2015). Attitudes toward Dutch are ambivalent or negative due to the influence of the colonial history of unequal power relations. Additionally, critical attitudes toward Dutch are fuelled by the use of Dutch as the only language of instruction in the Aruban education system, which is argued to cause high failure rates (Dijkhoff & Pereira 2010).

Our survey was conducted among more than 800 informants, belonging to different generations and representing groups with different (parental) birthplaces. The preliminary results indicate that attitudes toward Papiamentu are overall very positive and the language is used in different domains by speakers of different age groups, belonging to local as well as migrant families. The use of other languages (Dutch, English and Spanish) is much more restricted, but younger informants tend to speak English more often than older informants, particularly outside their homes. Furthermore, younger informants tend to find Papiamentu more important (as compared to older generations) for activities related to achievements, such as passing exams, getting a job and earning money. These results can make a significant contribution to the development of a sustainable education system, aiming at balanced multilingualism in order for Aruban students to achieve their full potential.