Chapter Two

Kriol

From Minority to National Language

Ideas about what constituted a “creole” heritage in Belize were fluid from the mid-seventeenth century until the first decades of the twentieth century, when a sort of consensus was reached as to what the term would mean in Belize: “There were a variety of different groups that collectively were consolidated as ‘Belizean Creole’ between 1650 and 1930: slaves brought to British Honduras from Africa (either directly, or, much more commonly, through Jamaica); ‘Creole’ slaves (slaves born in the Caribbean); free black, free colored and European settlers, these latter three groups of freed people each encompassing an array of socio-economic statuses, from wealthy slave owners to poor renegades” (Johnson 2003: 602). Despite the array of origins, historical trajectories, and material circumstances, ethnic Creoles spoke a vernacular language that bound them together: Kriol. While the debates about the origins of creole languages in the Americas are extensive, scholars in general concur that creole languages originated through slavery-induced language contact, whether in the Caribbean or West Africa. Belizean Kriol is no different, and it was likely carried to Belize from Jamaica by slaves who were brought to work in Belizean logging camps. Much of the slave population in seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century Belize came through Jamaica, and Belizean and Jamaican Creole overlap significantly today.¹ Not surprisingly, Ken Decker (2005: 3) proposes that prior to 1787, Belizean Kriol was in fact even closer to Jamaican Creole than it is today. Belizean Kriol is thus an English-based creole, and scholars have identified West African substrate languages such as Akan, Efik, Ewe, Fula, Ga, Hausa, Igbo, Kikongo, and Wolof in its structure and lexicon.
While the accounts from local communities are often not considered in scholarly literature, we wish to note that for the Belizeans of all backgrounds we met throughout the course of this research, this is the origin story of Kriol.

The year 1838 marked the end of slavery in Belize and throughout the British Empire. Until then, Garifuna and Mayan communities had remained outside of the colonial economic web of relationships, since they resided in sites of intensified British presence—logging areas and ports in the northern part of the country. That came to an end in 1872, when colonists imposed the Crown Lands Ordinance, which established reservations for Mayan and Garifuna communities and prevented these groups from owning land. After this point, the Creole ethnic group in British Honduras held an intermediary position between Europeans and other minorities as the former masters expanded the logging industry into the interior and south of the country. These socioeconomic relationships remained relatively unchallenged throughout the longue durée of British Honduras’s colonial period (1872–1981), and Kriol began to be used as a lingua franca very early, especially in logging areas.

The place of Kriol in colonial British Honduras has largely determined its place after Belize’s independence: it benefits from a historically favorable position that has only been accentuated after 1981, though at the same time, it continues to be regarded as simply “broken English” born in the context of slavery and colonialism. Yet, as Robert Le Page (1992 [1998: 75]) observed nearly four decades ago, “The Creoles of Belize said similar derogatory things about their language within the context of education [but] nevertheless called it Creole and identified themselves, with pride and feelings of superiority, as Creoles.” In this chapter we discuss covert and overt language attitudes toward two varieties of Kriol spoken in Belize, the vitality of the language and its maintenance as the irrefutable national language of Belize, particularly in the wake of mass Creole emigration out of Belize.
Kriol is the native language of many Belizeans, regardless of their ethnic group. For example, Escure (1997) notes that Kriol “competes with Spanish as an indicator of youth solidarity and interethnic solidarity among Yucatec Maya and Mestizo youth in the Corozal district.” More recently, Balam (2013) demonstrates that code-switching between Kriol, Spanish, and English is very common in Orange Walk District because speakers associate it with their multilingual identities. Yet, Balam notes that younger secondary school speakers are beginning to employ more Kriol, at the expense of Northern Belizean Spanish and even code-switching. The trend “may be pointing to the genesis of a strong pan-Afro-Belizean linguistic identity among younger Belizeans which cuts across ethnic lines, and which consequently holds implications for issues of language dominance, language shift, and language policy and planning in Belize” (Balam 2013: 247).

In our own research on the place of Kriol in coastal areas, we have observed the extensive reach of Kriol—it is the language used in stores owned by Chinese Belizeans throughout the coast; it is the language adopted by the Guatemalan, Honduran, and Salvadoran immigrants who work on the streets of Belize City, the Cayes and Placencia Beach; it is the first language of our youngest Mayan participants in Toledo District; and it is frequently the first or second language of Garifuna peoples in Seine Bight, Dangriga, Hopkins, and Punta Gorda. It is, nonetheless, commonly derided by many of its speakers—regardless of their ethnic background—as merely “broken English.” This might be due to speakers’ intuitions that much of the vocabulary—approximately 88 percent, according to John Holm (1977)—is shared with Standard English. At the same time, however, the phonology and syntax of Kriol mark it off as distinctly not Standard English, which leads to the impression of it as a deficient variety of the majority, lexifying English.

Our informal conversations with numerous Belizeans in Belize City, Caye Caulker, Belmopan, Placencia, and Punta Gorda revealed the rich complexity of attitudes toward Kriol. There is pride in the language and in independent Belize, yet this was consistently
undermined by warnings that Kriol was not good English. We first encountered this seeming incongruence of attitudes in Belize City, the Creole cultural capital of Belize, and we wondered if it would be the same elsewhere in the country. To answer this question, we designed a verbal guise study to tease apart these attitudes in Belize City, as well as in Punta Gorda, which is the largest town in the country’s south. In Belize City, we surveyed in downtown Belize City (Albert Street, King Street, Regent Street, etc.), the Vernon Street fish market, Michael Finnegan Market, Fort George, Queen Street, Freetown, all along Barrack Road, and on the campus of the University of Belize in Belize City. In Punta Gorda, we surveyed people around the central park, on Main Street, the Front Street market, the Punta Gorda hospital, the airstrip, Maya Island Air and Tropic Air ticket counters, the University of Belize campus in Punta Gorda, as well as in various homes and businesses in the city. We surveyed Belizeans of many ethnicities, including ethnic Creoles, East Indians, Garifunas, Mestizos, Kekchi and Mopan Mayas, and Central American immigrants. Essentially, we surveyed members of almost every major group except Mennonites. As a result, we spoke with Belizeans from a wide variety of professional and ethnic backgrounds—from lawyers to insurance salespeople to security guards and police officers, to street vendors, store clerks, fisherman, taxi drivers, and university students. Indeed, our pool was as diverse and complex as the population of Belize itself.

Our aim here was to go beyond the “standard” view in the literature of the relations between creoles and their lexifying languages and instead try to understand the factors that have contributed to Kriol’s prestige, and how its appeal might vary across ethnic groups, and between men and women. We surveyed a total of 141 participants with equal numbers of men and women, and our participant pool closely resembled the ethnic group distribution in each locale: in Belize City (71 total participants), 91.45 percent of our participants identified as native speakers of Kriol, 7.04 percent were native speakers of Spanish, and 1.40 percent were native speakers of Garifuna; in Punta Gorda (70 participants), 57.74 percent were native speakers of Spanish, 17.14 percent were native speakers of Kriol, 4.28 percent were native speakers of Spanish, 17.14 percent were native speakers of Mopan, 15.71 percent were speakers.
of Kekchi, and 4.28 percent were native speakers of Garifuna. Our pool also ranged across socioeconomic classes, including college students, professionals and semiprofessionals working in doctors’ offices and medical clinics, lawyers’ offices, government offices, as well as taxi drivers, restaurant and hotel staff, fishermen, street vendors, security guards, and retail clerks.

To run the verbal guise test, we recorded two ethnic Creole men telling Anansi stories and two other ethnic Creole men telling stories about their youth—one chose to tell a story about his grandfather and the other told a story about fishing. Our goal in this diversity of recordings was twofold. First, we wanted the speech to which test participants were exposed to be more natural than, say, a recording of someone reading prepared written passages aloud, as is commonly done in verbal guise tests. Second, with the inclusion of the Anansi stories, we wanted to gather attitudes across two different genres of speech—one of which was personal and conversational and one of which was the Belizean folk tale.

We then asked these participants to rate the speakers on a series of traits as they listened to the stories, and to tell us where they thought the men they heard in the recording resided. Kriol was well regarded by participants in both locations, though all of the participants found the Belize City variety of Kriol more appealing than the Punta Gorda variety. This was true of traits such as attractive, educated, eloquent, friendly, hard-working, sense of humor, intelligent, polite, and trustworthy, and was particularly the case for those traits that would be appealing on a personal, familiar level. The high ratings given to Belize City Kriol might be due to the fact that it comes into contact with fewer languages than Punta Gorda Kriol, leading our participants to recognize it as unmistakably Belizean “old school.”

The Belize City area and the nearby villages in the Belize River valley are home to a much higher percentage of ethnic Creoles than anywhere else in the country; and, the Creoles claim Kriol as a native language as opposed to a second language or lingua franca as is often the case elsewhere in Belize. Many of our test participants in Punta Gorda and elsewhere in the country made comments to the effect that if we “wanted to hear real Kriol, we needed to go to Belize
City and to the villages.” The villages in the Belize River valley can by no means be considered urban environments; thus it is interesting that there is strong agreement that these rural villages are where the best Kriol is spoken. This suggests that the lines of language prestige in coastal Belize do not necessarily run along rural-urban lines, where urban varieties are considered more prestigious and rural varieties less prestigious, as is frequently thought to be the case cross-culturally. Belize City and the river valley are also predominantly monolingual, or bilingual with Kriol and English. This differs from other parts of the country, such as the south, west, and northern borders with Guatemala and Mexico, in which several languages—that is, Kriol, English, Garifuna, Spanish, and Mayan languages—are spoken side by side. The variety of Kriol spoken in the Belize City area is considered a traditional vernacular variety, as the city has a high concentration of ethnic Creoles who seldom come into contact with speakers of languages other than Kriol and English. The quantitative results clearly bear this out: Belize City Kriol is rated as more traditional than Punta Gorda Kriol, while Punta Gorda Kriol is rated as more modern than Belize City Kriol.

The conclusions we can draw from these facts fit well with the findings of many attitude surveys of creole languages reported elsewhere in the literature, in which the vernacular rates high in solidarity and personal appeal but low in power. For example, John Rickford (1985: 156), partially quoting Karl Reisman (1970: 40) on this relation, writes that “Creole [in Antigua] violates English standards of ‘order, decorum, quietness, and authority,’ but in which people in fact ‘take great joy.’” This highly evocative description of Antiguan Creole, its formally subjugated relationship to English, and its appeal to the personal and familiar, is precisely what we found with respect to Belize City Kriol. Similar results are reported in Silvaana Udz’s (2013) study of attitudes toward Kriol in primary education. In her survey of 300 schoolteachers, 87.4 percent stated that they enjoy using Kriol. Nonetheless, 47.3 percent of her participants believed that using Kriol keeps one from learning Standard English.
The Ecology of Kriol

Kriol does not exist independently of its speakers, and, as we are reminded by the seminal work of Einar Haugen (1972: 323), an analysis of Kriol is not complete without “the study of interactions between [the] given language and its environment.” Drawing from principles of language ecology and especially Mufwene’s (2001, 2003) analysis of creole languages in their environments, we now attend to the sociohistorical settings in which Kriol is spoken, focusing on the socioeconomic factors that largely determine its use by Belizean men and women across generations. Very little has been said about the role of gender in sociolinguistic attitudes in Belize—or, the rest of the creole continuum in the Caribbean, for that matter (see Winford 1991). Escure 1991 and Salmon 2015 are exceptions, as they investigate the role of gender in linguistic variable choice and gender dialect prestige in Belize, respectively.

Great changes have taken place in these coastal sites. Placencia, where much of the fieldwork on Kriol and Garifuna reported by Escure (1981, 1991, 1997) was conducted, for example, is no longer the isolated fishing village she describes. In the last two decades the population has grown dramatically as a result of tourism, and there are many foreign-owned business and hotels, including one by the famous movie director Francis Ford Coppola. Thus, Ocean Home: The Luxury Coastal Lifestyle Magazine had the following to say about Placencia in May 2012: “The Placencia Peninsula, along Belize’s central coastline, is the latest hotspot for Central American beachfront real estate and is home to Coppola’s thatched-roof beachfront retreat, Turtle Inn. To those who’ve previously stumbled upon Belize’s downtrodden coastal capital, Belize City, fear not; Placencia bears no resemblance to the country’s economic epicenter and will quickly replace any previous feelings of ‘paradise lost’” (Rubio 2012). Similarly, the Coppola Family Resorts web page for Turtle Inn promises its guests an idyllic refuge. Under the “secluded canopy of the rainforests” and “mere steps from the seashore,” Coppola’s guests are invited to enjoy “luxurious accommodations” and “unparalleled service” during their luxury stay.

As coastal sites like Belize City, San Pedro, Caye Caulker, and Pla-
cencia have grown as tourist destinations, the villages surrounding them have been transformed as home bases for an underclass that serves a wealthy foreign leisure tourist class. The impact on Belize’s gross domestic product (GDP) has been tremendous: according to the World Travel and Tourism Council’s (2017: 1) economic impact report on Belize, the total contribution of travel and tourism was 38.1 percent of GDP in 2016, and is expected to rise by 5.0 percent to 47.8 percent of GDP in 2027. The report goes on to say that the total contribution of travel and tourism to employment, including jobs indirectly supported by the industry, was 34.3 percent of Belize’s total employment in 2016, and this is expected to rise to 43.2 percent of total jobs in Belize in 2027.

Over a decade and a half ago, Donna Bonner (2001: 82) wrote that “Creole speakers commonly defer to the superiority of speakers of foreign varieties of English, like those associated with the United States and England, and accord them greater prestige.” In terms of overt language attitudes, foreign varieties of English are held in higher esteem, especially in formal venues. Yet our field observations over the course of four years suggest that these varieties of English might not enjoy the same prestige. More research is needed in order to further examine the linguistic hierarchy in exchanges between Belizeans and speakers of U.S., British, and Canadian English, particularly in tourist zones like Placencia and the Cayes where the largest number of cruise ships dock. Notwithstanding the presence of a linguistic hierarchy involving varieties of English, it is important to remember that financial stakeholders in Belize’s tourist industry are generally citizens of North America and the United Kingdom, which already locates them in social positions of power relative to the Belizeans they employ.

Our participants often stated that Kriol should be spoken on the streets and with family but that English should be spoken in more formal settings. Yet in our ethnographic observations on university campuses in Belize and in businesses and government offices in Belize, we overheard a great deal of Kriol spoken—it wasn’t spoken frequently to us, but it was certainly spoken to other speakers of Kriol. So Belizeans do speak Kriol at school and in the workplace; they just do so with other speakers of Kriol. Interestingly, in our dis-
cussions with Canadian and U.S. tourists in Placencia, we learned that these groups preferred to vacation in Belize precisely for that reason: they didn’t have to spend time and money learning another language (e.g., Spanish) to enjoy their vacation. And, in their eyes, both alcohol and conversation could flow freely “with the locals.” These Anglophone tourists want to hear their “Belizean hosts” speaking a basilect variety of Kriol with other Belizeans, but they want their service to be provided in Standard English or an acrolectal variety of Kriol when they wish to engage in an “authentically Caribbean” experience.

The economic shift caused by the rapid growth of the tourist industry has had powerful effects on language attitudes and language use across ethnic communities in Belize. Similar to the situation documented by Walt Wolfram (2008) in his study of Okracoke Island, the economies in Belize City and Punta Gorda have transitioned steadily over the last few decades from maritime and agricultural economies that employed almost solely men to those that embrace a significant amount of international tourism, which provides advantageous economic opportunities for women in the process. As noted above, employment related to tourism in Belize accounted for over 34 percent of Belize’s total employment in 2016 and is steadily growing. We do not have quantitative data on numbers of women working in the tourism sector in Belize, but based on our own experience throughout the country, women are significantly present in the hotel, restaurant, eco-, and adventure tourism business. The situations of Belizeans and the Ocracoke Islanders are thus quite similar, both in the evolution of their economies and the shifting sociolinguistic attitudes of communities within them. Notably, men in both contexts indicate a strong preference for what are perceived as “traditional” varieties of the minority language, while women show a stronger affinity for varieties that showcase a greater degree of language contact at the lexical and phonological levels. Taking these as points of departure, we now consider other socioeconomic factors contributing to the status of Kriol and its vitality. Two such factors are the rise of postindependence nationalism in Belize, and the large and recent waves of emigration and immigration.
Belize was one of the latest British colonies to become an independent nation. As Assad Shoman (2011) explains, “By 1961 Britain had agreed that Belize could become independent whenever it chose to; the only delay thereafter was the Guatemalan government’s threat to pursue its territorial claim to Belize by force if necessary” (199). Border issues over the demarcation of British Honduras erupted between the British and Spanish crowns in the eighteenth century, and boundaries continued to be disputed even after Central America declared formal independence from Spain in 1821. Lauded as two of the most progressive Guatemalan presidents for their reforms in Guatemala, Juan José Arévalo and Jacobo Arbenz both pursued arbitration and contemplated military invasion in order to wrest away the territory they believed belonged to Guatemala. Border disputes were clearly a concern for British Honduras/Belize as it planned to claim its independence with an intact territory, and this created a tense relationship between the colony and its colonial officials, who pointed to the costs of protecting British Honduras/Belize. One official declared in 1962:

British Honduras is an embarrassment to Her Majesty’s Government, both [sic] politically, militarily and financially. Politically, it is anachronistic to maintain a colony on the American continent in the 1960s: its existence complicates Her Majesty’s Governments’ relations with all the Latin American States. . . . Militarily, the maintenance of the garrison in British Honduras is a commitment which we ought to shed as soon as possible. Financially, British Honduras costs Her Majesty’s government half a million pounds per annum simply to balance the budget. Added to these general disadvantages is our long-standing dispute with Guatemala, which is costing us about 1 million pounds per annum in lost trade already, and if the Guatemalan government decides to break relations with us, could lead to the loss of substantial assets as well. (qtd. in Shoman 2011: 213–14)

Through the 1960s and 1970s, threats of invasion and attempts at negotiation continued. Even as war and genocide erupted in Cen-
entral America around British Honduras/Belize, plans for its independence moved forward. Belize gained international support, set a date for its independence, and, most important, Britain made preparations to remain in Belize “for an appropriate period” to defend it against any possible Guatemalan invasion. The British remained in the country from 1981 to 1993. So long as British forces continued to defend an independent Belize and the United States was in full accord with the agreement, Guatemala could not invade the youngest nation in Central America without causing severe diplomatic tensions. However, far from being a thing of the past, border disputes with Guatemala continue to this day.

Many of the Belizeans we spoke with in our research—those roughly in their forties today—would have been children and young adults when Belize gained its independence in 1981. Raised in one of the most dramatic socioeconomic shifts ever experienced in Belize, their eyes would have been wide open as their country became what Shoman (2011: 331) calls “a dependent (independent) Belize in the world economy.” They experienced the transition from colonial economy to postmodern economy, and chose to remain in Belize to see it through. By remaining in the young country, they became part of the process of Belizean nation-making and ethnolinguistic identity-making.

Shoman observes that although colonialism had ended, the colonial mentality and dominant culture weighed heavily on Belize as it worked to define itself. Even with the relocation of the national government from Belize City to Belmopan, the English colonial presence continued to have important cultural symbolism. Past and present came together as the new nation was imagined as Creole: “People that spoke English, were Anglicized in other cultural ways, and practiced a unique ‘Belizean way of life,’ which could be interpreted best by members of the Creole elite. True, other members of the nation were tolerated and even celebrated as folkloric manifestations that made Belize interesting and quaint, but the bedrock of the nation was a British inheritance, ‘those institutions, laws and high principles characteristic of the Anglo-Saxons’ that the 1951 Creole constitutional commissions had spoken of” (Shoman 2011: 360). Creating a sense of place and rightful belonging was predicated on
the way Belizeans would frame their national identity in the present (in museums, the Central Bank, the courts) and imagine the past (in national myths, colonial history, the Westminster system), as well as on a collective national imaginary with respect to ethnicity and identity politics (Sutherland 1998: 60). Debates about Creole culture—and at the root of this, the Kriol language—are an integral part of the process. As McClaurin (1996: 2) observes, “Rather than Creole culture being taken as another example of cultural diffusion, innovation and transculturation in the Americas, the lingering evidence of British tastes in food, manners, daily routines (like tea time), and education” remains in Creole culture.

Accelerated change in Belize has been the rule of the day since 1981, but as Mara Voorhees and Joshua Brown put it in the 2008 Lonely Planet: Belize tourist guidebook, “Kriol is di stikki stikki paat that holds Belize together.” This is perhaps evermore true in the context of the emigration flows that have forever altered the demographics of the small country. Writing in 2007, Jerome Straughan estimated that there were then between 110,000 and 120,000 Belizeans living in the United States, and that 30 percent of the Belizean American population was born in the United States. This migratory flow out of Belize was about 75 percent Creole and Garifuna, both with African roots, leading to a decrease in the number of ethnic Creoles in Belize. At the same time, Belize experienced a significant wave of immigration driven by the conflict and genocide in neighboring Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador in the 1980s. The population of Belize was 145,000 in 1980, and by 1985 it was estimated that up to 30,000 new Central American immigrants had arrived. According to the 1990 Belize census, Creoles comprised 30 percent of the population, compared with 40 percent in 1980, and Mestizos became 44 percent of the population, compared with 33 percent in 1980. The 2000 Belize census counted ethnic Creoles at 25 percent of the population and Mestizo at 48 percent. The number of Mestizos in Belize, however, is a complex matter since the figure collapses groups of people with a long-standing presence in Belize (that is, those fleeing the Caste War of Yucatán in the late nineteenth century) with more recent Spanish-speaking Central American immigrants and their children, who were born on Beli-
zean soil and speak Kriol with as much ease as any other Belizean of their generation.

Both emigration and immigration have caused a demographic shift of dramatic proportions, and, we observe, have thrown linguistic and cultural differences into sharp relief. Creole-speaking Belizeans of all ethnicities and Spanish-speaking immigrants of different Central American nationalities compete for resources and employment, even as multimillion-dollar resorts are built in their small villages with U.S. and Canadian capital. In the midst of this, identifying with a Creole culture and speaking Kriol, both products of a colonial past that antecedes flight from Belize and flight to Belize, become indicators of belongingness that mark speakers as true Belizeans. In our study, we found an overall appreciation for two different varieties of Belizean Kriol across generations. Both regional language varieties (that is, Kriol as spoken in Belize City and as spoken in Punta Gorda) were ranked quite favorably among all groups; however, the Belize City variety was ranked significantly higher in status and solidarity traits, as shown in table 1, where the group aged 18–34 rated Belize City Kriol significantly higher than Punta Gorda Kriol, as did the group aged 35–60. When we compared the 18–34 group from Belize City with the 18–34 group from Punta Gorda, we found no significant differences in how the varieties were rated. This suggests that the young people of coastal Belize, who were born and came of age after independence in 1981,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age cohort</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Solidarity</th>
<th>BC Kriol</th>
<th>PG Kriol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>All 18–34</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3.43</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>F = 21.16, p = &lt;.0001</td>
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<tr>
<td>All 35–60</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>3.10</td>
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<td>F = 16, p = &lt;.0001</td>
<td>F = 31.1, p = &lt;.0001</td>
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are very alike in their attitudes toward both varieties of Kriol, seeing both varieties as instances of the national language.

The same was not true for the older age group when we compared results from Belize City and Punta Gorda. Our older participants—those who were teenagers when Belize became an independent nation and who saw Belize City through its many transformations—show a significantly stronger preference for Belize City Kriol, regardless of their place of residence. This suggests that Belize City Kriol has long been considered the standard or “best” variety, and our many interviews around the country confirmed this perception.

It is only with the younger, post-independence speakers that the elevation of the Kriol language in general has occurred. Clearly, Belize City Kriol has grown to symbolize a fresh national identity, at once emblematic of a colonial past without being subject to it, and thus more “authentically Belizean” and prestigious than any of the other languages spoken in the country. At the same time, especially with the younger generations, other varieties of Kriol are not displeasing to the Belizean ear, and they symbolize a national Belizean identity as well, if to a slightly lesser extent.

Linguistic Belonging

The two popular sayings—“Belize is for Belizeans” and “Dis da fi wi langwij”—bring to bear the connections between nation, national identity, and linguistic belonging. As Robert Le Page and Andrée Tabouret-Keller (1985) note in their seminal work on creole languages in Cayo District in 1978, the term Belizean designated a citizen of the soon-to-be independent nation of Belize, and had a very strong connotation with the use of Kriol. Ethnic identification, strongly linked to community and geographical location, had given way to a sense of belonging to an independent country. British Honduran no longer, national identity began to override local conceptualizations of identity: “Those who had formerly had an identity as ‘Spanish,’ or ‘Carib,’ or ‘Maya,’ or ‘Kekchi,’ or ‘Waika’ (a somewhat denigratory term in common use for the Miskito) or Lebanese or ‘Creole,’ and as British colonial subjects would now, if they
chose to stay in the country, have to find an identity within the new state” (117). For many young Belizeans, the transition meant that their identities would then be predicated on the basis of something other than the language spoken in their communities (221). As Le Page and Tabouret-Keller noted then, in most cases where Belizean identity was mentioned, Kriol was spoken of as “the Belizean language” (220). This in Cayo District, which they conceptualized as “a rather empty buffer zone between the coastal Creoles of the Belize district and the Spanish, Maya and Mestizos of Guatemala who had spilled over as political refugees to establish the small town of Benque Viejo” (217). We have discovered that this is now also true of Mayan and Garifuna communities in the coastal districts of Belize.

The sociopolitical changes from 1981 to the present have allowed all Belizeans, and members of these communities in particular, to declare a linguistic identity that is more closely associated with citizenship and belongingness in the new nation than with their village affiliation. The implications of this change are important to bear in mind as we move forward in our analysis of the factors that contribute to the use and endangerment of minority languages in Belize. Similarly, it is important to note that Kriol works as an identity marker that allows speakers to identify themselves as citizens of Belize, and to distinguish “true” Belizeans from non-Belizeans. The socioeconomic changes that Belize has undergone in the last thirty-five years have left their mark on the cultural and environmental landscape—the rise of the tourist sector, the designation of Belizean land for the purpose of natural reserves, the sale of land to foreign companies and investors, as well as emigration and immigration have created a country that is very much in flux. Throughout this complex demographic shift, the Kriol language appears to have a long future as the most salient marker of Belizean identity.

In addition to the historically advantageous position of Kriol, there has been a strong language revitalization movement headed by the Belize Kriol Project and National Kriol Council of Belize, which aims to promote the language. The group has targeted educational institutions as the focus of change, especially primary schools in response to the country’s official educational policy (see Ministry of Education 2008; and Udz 2013). They have also been
at the forefront of establishing a writing system for Kriol that has been met with a mixed reception—with some enthusiastic support but also strong opposition—as opponents claim that developing a writing system seeks to legitimize a flawed and broken language.\textsuperscript{12}

Outside of the educational realm, the Belize Kriol Project and the National Kriol Council of Belize have spearheaded notable projects, such as an English/Kriol dictionary published in 2007 and a Kriol translation of \textit{The New Testament}, which appeared in print in 2013 and can now be read in its entirety online.\textsuperscript{13} These projects complement a postindependence literary movement launched with the publication of Zee Edgell’s \textit{Beka Lamb} (1982) and Glen Godfrey’s \textit{The Sinner’s Bossanova} (1987). These were the precursors of a movement that sought to establish a national Belizean literary tradition, founded on the language and themes of its people, and have been followed by a succession of writers and poets for whom Kriol is a central feature of their work (Ruiz Puga 2001).\textsuperscript{14} As of this writing, the often hotly debated Kriol appears in books, magazines, advertisements, and newspapers. It is also found on the radio and in cyberspace, and it has been the subject of linguistic analyses, which include, most notably, linguistic grammars such as Young 1973, Greene 1999, and Decker 2005. Despite the misconceptions and overt negative attitudes about Kriol, the language plays an important role in mass media and advertising, particularly in relation to the tourist industry. Taking these factors into account, Kriol occupies an undeniably visible place in Belizean society that no other language in the country is positioned to hold. It possesses an irrefutable vitality, even as its native speakers discredit its linguistic value. As we will show in the remaining chapters, despite this seemingly contradictory set of positions, Kriol appears to be having strong effects on other minority languages in the country.