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*The Creole Diaries: Carriols in Eighteenth-Century Moravian Mission Stations on St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John*

During the second half of the eighteenth century, Moravian missionaries in the Danish West Indies conversed regularly with enslaved people in a Dutch-lexifier creole that some of its early speakers called Carriols. Because missionaries described these interactions in station diaries for their supervisors in Germany, most of their writings appear in German. On rare occasions, Carriols – known today as U.S. Virgin Islands Dutch Creole – peeks through.

Based on evidence from station diaries, by the mid-eighteenth century, Carriols had developed what linguists refer to as an acrolect and a basilect, forms that are the most and least similar to the Dutch superstrate language. While a full picture of the basilect is beyond the archival record, it offers an interpretation of religious interactions that overlaps and diverges from common frameworks found in early modern religious historiography, including dissimulation, syncretism, translation, and resistance. The presentation argues that the existence of Carriols varieties in the eighteenth century implies such interactions encompassed subtle power negotiations over "how to speak" between missionaries with more limited linguistic capabilities but authority over church sacraments, and African-descended peoples with greater linguistic range. Surviving creole sentences and phrases offer a glimpse of these subtle verbal negotiations. Based on creole linguistics and Caribbean historiography, such negotiations involved native speakers' linguistic flexibility, their accommodations to missionary limitations, the social prestige attached to the Dutch-like register, and enslaved people's desire to keep part of the continuum incoherent to outsiders and allow them to retain it for their needs — from the subversive to the benign.

This work is a collaboration with linguist Kristoffer Friis Bøegh of Utrecht University and the Meertens Institute.