

# **Integrating Local Languages and Cultures into the Education System of French Guiana**

## **A Discussion of Current Programs and Initiatives\***

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### **Abstract**

In this paper we present and critically assess three programs that are currently running in French Guiana. They aim to integrate local languages and cultures into the local education system that is otherwise identical to that of Metropolitan France. We discuss and compare their emergence, development and the premises, assumptions and approaches on which they are based. The paper argues that while all three initiatives make an important contribution towards questioning the educational monopoly of French and towards adapting the education system to the local context, their impact currently remains limited. This is in large part due to a lack of a concerted will on the part of the education system to undertake far-reaching change and program-inherent problems.

**Keywords:** French Guiana, local languages, bilingual education, language awareness, educational programs, evaluation.

### **1. Introduction**

The French overseas' department of French Guiana (*Guyane française*) boasts a remarkable ethnic and linguistic diversity. While this diversity has attracted researchers from the Humanities and Social Sciences (cf. Léglise & Migge 2007a), the impact of this research is surprisingly little reflected in the public sector where European French and French culture continue to dominate. This dominance is particularly strong in formal education where to date only a few programs have been initiated that specifically aim to validate local languages and cultures. The main initiative is the nationwide program *Langues et Cultures Régionales* (LCR) which was initiated in metropolitan France in the 1980s. Enforcing the Deixonne Law (1951), it was the first French initiative that made it possible to formally integrate the teaching in local dialects and languages into local school curricula. The

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program treats them like other foreign languages providing for a few hours of instruction each week. Over the years, a wide range of languages and cultures such as Kanak languages, Tahitian and the French Creoles of the four overseas departments came to be taught in local schools due to this initiative.<sup>1</sup> The French Guianese project *Intervenants en Langues Maternelles*, by contrast, is a grass-roots project that emerged in 1998 due to a unique collaborative effort between French linguists and members of the local branch of the ministry of education. After having been in existence for 10 years, it is still struggling to survive. Finally, in the last five years work has been underway to develop training modules and teaching materials that aim to raise awareness among teachers and students about French Guiana's multilingual context (Candelier 2007; Alby, Bitard et al. to appear).

In this paper we present and critically assess these three initiatives. The paper argues that while all three initiatives make an important contribution towards questioning the educational monopoly of French and towards adapting the education system to the local context, their impact currently remains limited. This is in large part due to a lack of a concerted will on the part of the education system to undertake far-reaching change and program-inherent problems.

The paper is organized as follows. Part Two briefly presents the sociolinguistic background of French Guiana. Part Three reviews the history of the integration of local languages into the education system of French Guiana. Part Four presents and evaluates the program *Langues et Cultures Régionales*. Part Five critically discusses the project *Intervenants en Langues Maternelles* and Part Six focuses on the latest initiative that deals with issues of language awareness. The final part summarizes the findings and discusses their implications for education in French Guiana.

## **2. Brief description of the French Guianese sociolinguistic context**

French Guiana borders onto Brazil in the east and in the south, and onto the Republic of Suriname in the west. Its territory consists of 86,000 km<sup>2</sup>, but most of the population resides along the coast. There is an important concentration in the east around the capital city of Cayenne and a smaller, newer concentration in the west around the border town of St. Laurent du Maroni. Smaller settlements are situated along the Maroni and Oyapock

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<sup>1</sup> The Deixonne Law initially only applied to Breton, Basque, Catalan and Occitan. It was subsequently extended to Corsican (1974), Tahitian (1981) and to four Melanesian languages in New Caledonia (1992). The *Circulaire Savary* (1981) extended the Deixonne Law to other local languages in metropolitan France and to French Creoles. The regional education authority (*Académie de la Guyane*) ratified this in 1986.

rivers that are mostly inhabited by Amerindian and Maroon groups (see MAP 1). The 1999 census estimated a total population of about 200 000 people. Especially in the last 20 years, French Guiana has attracted considerable numbers of immigrants from throughout the Guiana region (Brazil, Suriname, Guyana), Haiti, and from China. Estimates suggest that they represent almost 30% of the population (Léglise 2004). Demographically, French Guiana is very dynamic. Its population doubles roughly every 15 years and is relatively young, as half of the population is less than 25 years old and a third is less than 15 years old. Moreover, more than 50% of all the children born in French Guiana have a mother born outside of this *région*. The local and immigrant population is socially diverse and differs in their level of integration.

### MAP 1 About here

French Guiana is linguistically quite diverse. The official language, French, is in contact with 30 typologically different languages. They include six languages belonging to three Amerindian families of languages such as Cariban (e.g. Kali'na, Wayana), Tupi-Guarani (Emerillon or Teko, Wayampi), and Arawak (Lokono, Palikur), various European languages such as Brazilian Portuguese and to a lesser extent varieties of English, (Surinamese) Dutch and Spanish, English-lexified Creoles (Aluku, Ndyuka, Pamaka, Saamaka, Sranan Tongo, Guyanese Creole), French-lexified Creoles (the Creoles of French Guiana, Martinique and Guadeloupe, Haitian Creole), Hmong and languages of Southern China (Hakka, Cantonese).<sup>2</sup> While there is a certain degree of mutual intelligibility among the English-lexified Creoles and among the French-lexified Creoles respectively, the different Amerindian languages only share some lexical and structural features.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Saamaka* is the self-designation, in English people generally use *Saramaka* or *Saramaccan* and Dutch *Saramaccans*.

The speakers of Hmong, an Asian language, were settled in French Guiana in 1977. They mostly reside in two villages, Cacao in the east and Javouhey in the west. A third village appears to be emerging near Iracoubo (Ly 2007: 159-160).

<sup>3</sup> The varieties of Aluku, Ndyuka and Pamaka can be considered closely related varieties of the same language and are highly mutually intelligible. Saamaka descends from the same plantation varieties (Migge 2003) but has been subject to much greater influence from Portuguese (contact varieties) and is therefore only partially mutually intelligible with the former. Guyanese Creole emerged in a different sociohistorical context and is only minimally, if at all, intelligible with the Surinamese Creoles.

Anthropological and sociolinguistic research suggests that some languages have quite a significant speaker base.<sup>4</sup> Price (2002) estimates that Saamaka is spoken by around 10 000 persons, i.e. around 5% of the population, while our own studies suggest that the three related Maroon Creoles, Aluku, Ndyuka and Pamaka, are spoken natively by roughly 20% of the population. Speakers of Haitian Creole and French Guianese Creole make up about 10% and 30%, respectively, of the total population. Native speakers of French – mostly migrants from metropolitan France – and speakers of Brazilian Portuguese each constitute about 10% of the population. Speakers of the six Amerindian languages together constitute only a mere 2-5% of the entire population. Hmong and Chinese languages are spoken by about 1% each and the number of speakers of Antillean French Creoles may be as high as 5%.

France gives some recognition to regional languages but prescribes French as the obligatory medium of instruction in the education system. As in other parts of France, French is thus also the uncontested official language of French Guiana. Initially, only French Guianese Creole was officially recognized in French Guiana. However, in 1999 when the new status *langues de France* ‘languages of France’ emerged, a total of ten languages of French Guiana were given this status.<sup>5</sup> These languages are French Guianese Creole, the six Amerindian languages, Maroon Creoles and Hmong (Cerquiglini 1999; Launey 1999; Queixalós 2000).

Language vitality and language use patterns are equally diverse. In some communities such as among Maroons and Hmongs, the ancestral language is the main medium of interaction in the great majority of families and among community members. Other languages are primarily used for out-group communication. In contrast, in other, particularly urbanized communities, intra-community exchanges often take place in more than one

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<sup>4</sup> By law, French censuses are not allowed to elicit language and ethnicity data. Figures and percentage here come from a sociolinguistic survey in schools and calculations based on other estimates (see L glise 2007a).

<sup>5</sup> France did not sign the 1999 European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, but set up the category *langue de France* and conferred it onto 75 languages nationally based on the Rapport Cerquiglini (1999):

[http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/dglf/lang-reg/rapport\\_cerquiglini/langues-france.html](http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/dglf/lang-reg/rapport_cerquiglini/langues-france.html).

This status is very similar to the status of Regional Language in that it gives a language official recognition and provides for the possibility of its integration into the educational curriculum.

According to the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, a regional language is a language that has a long history and a clearly definable speaker community in a country in a clearly delimited part of the national territory. Its speakers are (in the majority) citizens of that country and the language is not an official language in another country Cerquiglini (2003).

language and children are learning several languages from very early on. In the French Guianese Creole community, for instance, French and French Guianese Creole are both commonly used in in-group encounters (Hidair 2007). The Amerindian language Lokono (Arawak) is highly threatened because its speakers have essentially shifted to Sranan Tongo (Léglise & Puren 2005). They use both Sranan Tongo and French for out-group and increasingly also French for in-group communication.

Especially younger people in French Guiana also regularly engage in patterns of code-switching and code-mixing to negotiate interactional and social identities (Alby & Migge 2007; Alby 2001; Migge 2007). These practices are often negatively evaluated in the community at large and by the education system (Léglise & Alby 2006). Some languages such as Saamaka and Kali'na are also subject to complex patterns of minorization. Being acutely aware of the stigma attached to their language, younger members are often reluctant to admit being speakers of that language or pose as speakers of another languages (Léglise & Alby 2006; Léglise & Migge 2006, 2007c).

According to Léglise (2007a), five main languages currently serve as *lingua franca* in interethnic contexts (market, school, hospital etc.): French Guianese Creole, French, Brazilian Portuguese, Sranan Tongo and Businenge Tongo.<sup>6</sup> French Guianese Creole used to be the main *lingua franca* of the department but is now mainly used in the eastern part of the department where it is currently being rivalled by Brazilian Portuguese. Businenge Tongo is widely used in the western part of French Guiana. In recent years French also increasingly functions as a means for interethnic communication due to the rapid growth of the school population (Léglise 2005).

Until recently, French held the monopoly in the media, but some of the local languages are starting to challenge this dominance. The regional radio station (RFO) now also broadcasts, at certain times, in French Guianese Creole and smaller radio stations in the West such as Reutemeger or Radio IDL also broadcast several hours a week in Sranan Tongo or in Businenge Tongo. Broadcasts in local languages are very popular and are contributing to the greater visibility of some languages and to a creation of an alternative public domain (Migge to appear). Other public services such as local administration, hospitals and GPs are adapting to the multicultural context to varying degrees by employing members from the local population (administration, hospitals) and by encouraging staff to learn the locally

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<sup>6</sup> Note that the locally used term Businenge Tongo is a cover term that refers to all the Maroon Creoles and variably also to Sranan Tongo as well as possibly to a newly emerging inter-variety koine (cf. Léglise & Migge 2006, 2007c).

dominant languages. However, L glise's (2007b) analysis of communication patterns in the hospital of St. Laurent du Maroni whose patients are in the majority non-francophone suggests that these institutions mostly engage in stop-gap measures. They do not effectively resolve existing communication problems. Linguistic diversity and especially lack of knowledge of French is essentially treated as a transitional problem.

The linguistic and cultural diversity of French Guiana is probably least visible in the local educational institutions. All education is carried out in French and students are in the majority faced either with teachers from metropolitan France who generally have little access and knowledge of any of the local cultures and languages or, along the coast, with teachers originating from Cayenne or from the French Antilles with a French Creole background. Most of these teachers are not willing or able to effectively integrate and adapt because they usually only spend a short time in the French Guiana and their social networks prevent them from accessing local cultures and languages (Thurmes 2007). In contrast to teachers, students' access to French and French culture is variable; in the west the majority of children do not have much contact with French outside of the school context (L glise 2004, 2005). The discrepancy between home and school language and culture is widely perceived to be the root cause of the serious educational problems facing the region – French Guiana has the lowest rate of educational achievement in all of France and a high school drop out rate – nearly half of all the children leave school without any school diploma.

### **3. The local languages and the education system**

Schools were first established in French Guiana after the abolition of slavery in 1848. The first schools were established in the eastern part, such as in Cayenne, Sinnamary, Kourou, R mire, Montsin ry and Roura. In the west, only the town of Mana had a school. Initially, the expansion of the school system was very slow. By 1852 only 1 200 students attended school (Puren 2007: 281) and schools were run by Christian religious orders. After secularisation of schools in 1888, there was a slow but constant increase in school attendance rates. At the turn of the century about 2 500 children attended school and more than 3 000 were registered between the two world wars (Puren 2007: 281-2). Amerindian and Maroon populations living in the interior of the country were not subject to school attendance until the 1960s.

When French Guiana changed its status from colony to *d partement de la Guyane* in 1946, the educational policies changed to an aggressive policy

of francisation.<sup>7</sup> Its main objective was to assimilate the populations of the so-called interior, namely Amerindians and Maroons, to French/European culture “afin d’assurer leur ‘développement intellectuel, social et politique’” (Vignon 1985: 61 cited in Puren 2007: 284). Two strategies were to facilitate this process: resettlement including geographical fixation of different groups in state-run communes and obligatory school attendance (Puren 2007: 284-5). Initially, many children from Amerindian and Maroon communities were forcefully removed from their communities and placed in church-run boarding schools with disastrous long-term effects, notably alienation from their home communities and cultures. Only a handful of children emerged as truly bicultural. Some currently act as leaders for their communities, actively defending their communities’ rights vis-à-vis the local, national and international administration and actively engage in the regional politics. The first schools in the interior of the country only opened during the 1970s. They continued to be squarely based on metropolitan models.

Despite criticism from anthropologists and linguists working in the region (Hurault 1972; Renault-Lescure & Grenand 1985), headway towards integrating local languages and cultures into the school context was slow because French policy eschews all languages other than standard French in the public domain (cf. Alby & Léglise 2007). Until 1951 (*loi Deixonne*), the French government had never acknowledged the linguistic or cultural rights of minorities within its borders.

The teaching of regional languages and cultures for a few hours a week officially became possible in 1982 due to a special educational law (*Circulaire Savary*). Initially, it was disregarded by educational institutions and it took some time before it was extended to French Creoles; it was never extended to the other languages of French Guiana.

In French Guiana, the regional direction of Education (*inspection académique*) was mostly in favor of introducing French Guianese Creole into the school system. They quickly selected regional supervisors for the program and found volunteers among the Creole-speaking teachers. Today, it is integrated into the local education system in the form of the subject *langues et cultures régionales*. The other languages of French Guiana did not receive the same treatment although the linguistic and cultural difference between home and school culture and language is generally much more pronounced for children speaking these languages than for French

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<sup>7</sup> French Guiana is one of the 100 *départements* of France. All the *départements* outside of Europe are officially referred to as *département d’outre mer* (DOM) ‘overseas department’. Their administrative structure is exactly the same as that of Metropolitan French *départements*. For instance, they are also headed by a *préfet* (Police Commissioner).

Guianese Creole-speaking children. This lack of attention is due to the fact that persons of French Creole origin have been dominating educational institutions in French Guiana (Puren 2007: 292). Even today, only a handful of teachers speak any of the other languages (natively) and only relatively little is known about these languages, particularly Amerindian languages. Local Amerindian languages, Hmong, and the Maroon Creoles (Aluku, Ndyuka, Pamaka) only arrived in the school due to a unique collaborative effort between certain members of the local branch of the ministry of education and the linguists of the CNRS-IRD (*Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and Institut de Recherche pour le Développement*) research unit CELIA (*Centre d'Etude des Langues Indigènes d'Amérique*).

Inspired by the demands of the local Amerindian movement of cultural and linguistic self-determination, they initiated the unique educational project *Médiateurs Culturels et Bilingues*. Apart from agreeing to train native speakers of local languages to become teachers of their native language, the members of CELIA pledged to focus their research on obtaining linguistic knowledge about the region's least documented languages and about their sociolinguistic situation. The local educational authorities, for their part, made available several short-term (5 years) posts for educational assistants. The project is currently referred to by the name *Intervenants en Langues Maternelles*.

#### **4. Langues et Cultures Régionales**

The subject *langues et cultures régionales* (LCR) was introduced to the French Guianese curriculum in 1986. In French Guiana, the subject only deals with French Guianese Creole language and culture (Launey 2007: 491) and reaches a total of 300 classes (about 10 000 school children) (Puren 2005). The initiation, development and formal integration of this subject was facilitated by the creation of the teacher association *Rakaba* whose aim was to promote French Guianese Creole language and culture and through the support of the regional direction of Education (Goury et al. 2005). The program is administered by the local branch of the education ministry and is well integrated in the educational landscape of French Guiana. It is taught in five of the seven districts and about three hundred classes are benefiting from instruction in LCR every year. In 2008, there were about 100 teachers specifically trained for this subject in French Guiana.

In French Guiana, the subject LCR serves three related purposes:

- a. the promotion and official recognition of French Guianese Creole language and culture,
- b. the adaptation of teaching curricula to the local context and
- c. “the structuring of the child’s mind in his own language” (Puren 2007: 291).



It was argued that a few hours of structured teaching of the home culture and language creates a positive link between the home and school context which, in turn, significantly enhances children's motivation to participate in the educational process and their chances of succeeding (Puren 2007: 291; Goury et al. 2005).

LCR may be taught at both primary and secondary school level. At primary school level, teachers attending the (primary) teacher training institute (IUFM -*Institut Universitaire pour la Formation des Maîtres*) complete a set of courses in addition to those prescribed for all trainees in order to gain the right to teach LCR. At secondary level, teacher trainees have to complete an independent piece of work (*habilitation*) or follow specialized courses in the area of LCR and pass the qualifying, competitive national exam CAPES Créole. The CAPES for LCR, especially the CAPES Créole, was set up in 2002. It is a *CAPES bivalent*, meaning that candidates get certified for two subjects. The subject LCR or Créole can be combined with subjects like French, English, Spanish, history and geography. Each year a small number of positions are made available nationally for which people can apply. Between 2002 and 2005, eight positions were made available each year for all four overseas departments (French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, La Réunion), roughly a population of two million people.<sup>8</sup> There are currently 39 qualified teachers for LCR Créole, but none of these positions are in French Guiana – the majority of positions are held in La Réunion with a few in Martinique and Guadeloupe. Note also that although the University of Antilles and Guyane in Cayenne offers a BA or MA in *langues et cultures régionales* neither of the two degrees is obligatory for candidates of *CAPES Créoles* and future teachers of LCR. Teachers can prepare for the exam externally pursuing a range of books specially produced for the exam (cf. <http://www.montraykreyol.org/spip.php?rubrique80>). LCR is currently only taught at primary school level in French Guiana.

The development of LCR at primary level was realized due to the concerted effort of a working group led by Sonia Francius, a regional director of education. This working group in conjunction with volunteers among the teachers and pedagogical advisors was involved in the production and promotion of pedagogical materials for teachers and for the publication of a curriculum (*Académie de la Guyane* 1997). The first teaching materials were made available through academic bulletins and consisted of transcripts of a broad set of texts from the French Guianese Creole oral tradition such as nursery rhymes, poetry, folktales, and idiomatic

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<sup>8</sup> Persons from metropolitan France can also present for this exam and in 2007 such a candidate did, in fact, sit both the written and oral exam.

expressions including instructions for use in the classroom. These materials gave rise to several teaching manuals: Azéma et Rattier (1994), Francius & Thérèse (1998) and Armande-Lapierre & Robinson (2004). The manuals are designed to be used with children who are (native) speakers of the language because they assume knowledge of the language (Launey 2007: 491).

The manuals take a clearly cultural heritage preservationist approach and make little mention of modern life in French Guiana. For instance, the manual *Pipiri* (Francius & Thérèse 1998) was designed for children aged six and consists of six units that “follow the rhythm of the French Guianese school year” (p.1). The texts deal mainly with a range of traditional activities such as the washing of clothes and dishes in the river, local animals, traditional houses, furniture and clothes, walks through the forest while the school context, the multicultural nature of the department and modern life are only mentioned in passing. The texts are accompanied by various kinds of exercises. They include questions and exercises designed to check reading comprehension, cross-word type activities for developing vocabulary (e.g. terms relating to animals, local foods and social activities) and activities designed to study the semantic and syntactic relationships between lexical elements. None of the activities focus on developing the metalinguistic capacities of children. Although the book narrowly focuses on traditional French Guianese culture and only makes very little mention of other cultures including metropolitan French culture, several of the texts and exercises in the manual are presented in French only or in both French Guianese Creole and French giving the impression that French Guianese Creole culture even at its most traditional is inseparable from the French language.

In addition to the different manuals, teachers of LCR are supported in their work by a special pedagogical advisors for the subject LCR who advise them on both the use of existing material and on the development of new teaching materials. Moreover, as in the case of all teachers, teachers of LCR are periodically observed and evaluated by school inspectors who provide them with constructive criticism about their teaching.

In the current context, primary school children attending LCR receive between 1.5 to 3 hours of instruction in the subject. A good number of the children are speakers of French Guianese Creole, but they may not all be native speakers of the language. To accommodate the linguistic heterogeneity of (some) classrooms, LCR is often taught through French rather than French Guianese Creole.

The subject LCR clearly contributes towards adapting the teaching environment to the local context. However, to date it is not clear how successful it is in terms of realizing this goal. Despite having been in existence for more than 20 years, the program as a whole has, to date, never benefited from any formal evaluation.

## 5. Intervenants en Langues Maternelles<sup>9</sup>

This project was initiated in 1998. It was initially called *Médiateurs Culturels et Bilingues* (MCB, Cultural and bilingual mediators) and was renamed *Intervenants en Langues Maternelles* (ILM, assistants in mother tongue education) in 2007. Despite a number of administrative problems and changes, it has by now been running for about 10 years. In this period, it has expanded from initially 21 MCBs working in 16 schools to 30 MCBs working in 25 schools (in 2006) mostly situated in the western part of the *département* (Crouzier 2007a: 455). In 2009, recruitment continues.

### 5.1. The aims and overall conception of the project

The project is modelled on existing grass-roots programs in other South American countries such as Columbia, Brazil, Paraguay (Landaburu 2000; Renault-Lescure 2000). Briefly, the idea is to train a small number of persons from marginalized communities in basic (descriptive) linguistics, anthropology and applied linguistics in order to enable them to develop socially appropriate teaching materials for the teaching of their own language and culture as well as to carry out some of the teaching through that language in local schools. Another key feature is the active involvement of researchers and educational practitioners. They train the teaching staff and lend their expertise for developing coherent teaching curricula, teaching materials and classroom activities. All activities including the construction of orthographies are carried out as part of a constructive dialogue between the communities and researchers. According to Launey (2007: 493), this kind of project is particularly well suited for smaller and relatively isolated communities.

In French Guiana, the aim of the project MCB-ILM is to integrate into the school context some local languages and cultures that had until then been excluded from it to address educational problems (Goury et al. 2005). Three broad objectives were set out for the program:

- a. to accompany children with little or no knowledge of French in their first language during their initial years at school in order to facilitate their integration into the school context (Goury et al 2005).
- b. to develop children's meta-linguistic competences in their home language in order to facilitate their cognitive development and their acquisition of French.

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<sup>9</sup> Since one of the authors participates in the program and this program has from its beginning been accompanied scientifically, the following discussion is more detailed than for the other projects.

- c. to create a positive link between the home language and culture and the school context in order to validate students' social identities (Launey 2007: 492).

Secondary objectives include more effective mediation between the school staff and parents (Migge & Renault-Lescure 2009) and promotion of the maintenance and development of regional languages (Alby 2009).

### *5.2. The trainees, their recruitment and their contractual situation*

The project MCB-ILM was initiated as part of the nation-wide program *Emploi jeunes* launched in 1997 whose aim was to create and develop new occupations that are socially useful (Goury et al. 2000). Teachers for the project (henceforth assistants in mother tongue education (AMTE)) were initially hired as educational assistants and had to fit both the national criteria for recruitment of educational assistants and the criteria devised by the linguists of CELIA in conjunction with the regional direction of Education. The former required that a person be fully bilingual in both their home language and in French (Goury et al 2005) and have an interest in educational work with children. Fulfilment of these prerequisites was determined based on an oral interview. The national criteria for the recruitment of educational assistants demanded that a candidate have a French high school diploma (*baccalauréat*) and be less than 26 years old. Given the educational context of French Guiana (see Section 3), particularly the national criteria made it initially impossible to establish a list of even 15 eligible candidates. The linguists therefore successfully lobbied for the waiving of one or the other of the national prerequisites for some promising candidates based on their previous experiences (Goury et al. 2005).

The initial recruits were not always the most ideal candidates, but all of them were delighted about the opportunity to work on their native language and culture (on the AMTEs' profile, see Puren 2005; Crouzier 2007a & b). Among the first recruits, there were native speakers of Amerindian languages (Kali'na (3), Wayana (2)) and Maroon languages (Aluku (7) and Ndyuka (3)). Soon afterwards, they were joined by two speakers of Hmong.

Although Lokono, Palikur and Saamaka are also susceptible to being regional languages of French Guiana according to the European Charter, AMTEs for these languages were initially not included in the project for different reasons. In the case of Palikur, the search for eligible schools had not been completed by the time the project started (Goury et al. 2005). With respect to Saamaka, integration has been slow due to the absence of a linguist working on the language. Lokono has so far not been integrated because its speakers, mainly residents of the villages of Balaté and Sainte Rose de Lima, are in the final stages of language shift; a language revival project appears to be more appropriate in this case. In early 2008, the project involved AMTEs from the following communities: Aluku (7), Ndyuka (8), Hmong (2), Kali'na (3), Wayana (2), Palikur (1), Emerillon (1), Wayampi

(1). While some have already been in the project for quite a while and have received extensive training, others have so far benefited from very little or no formal training.

In 1998, all AMTEs were hired on a five-year contract and were promised the development of a professionally-oriented structured training program that would lead to a recognized certification. To date, neither of these have emerged. Over the years, different kinds of temporary contracts were given to old and new recruits. Since 2007, along with changes in the administrative structure of the program – it is now administered by the *rectorat*, a local Education Office directed by the equivalent of a regional superintendent of Education –<sup>10</sup> the status and title of the AMTE was changed to a school assistant (*assistant d'éducation*). Currently, AMTEs work 26 hours a week and receive a monthly salary of € 1219 (Crouzier 2007a: 455).

Some of the AMTEs have since left the program for various reasons. Some of the initial AMTEs recently decided to enrol as part time university students at the *Université des Antilles et de la Guyane* in Cayenne to obtain a *licence* (BA) in order to eventually obtain their teaching certification. This decision was much supported by the *rectorat* and the linguists because it was hoped that this would contribute towards increasing the number of teachers from politically and socially marginalized communities whose children nevertheless make up a important proportion of the student population. Some of them recently obtained their BA, but none have yet completed the teacher-training course. However, at this point it appears that on successful completion of the teacher-training course they will most likely have to leave the program and teach French. Despite a higher salary, many of the AMTEs have expressed discontent about this prospect.

### 5.3. The training

The aim of the training sessions is to provide the AMTEs with some linguistic and pedagogical training to enable them to effectively develop their teaching activities and teaching materials. Over the last 10 years, training sessions have taken place roughly twice a year depending on the availability of trainers and financial means. The trainers now include several linguists from CELIA and one or two educators, usually one from the

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<sup>10</sup> Until 2007 IRD carried out all the administrative work for the project such as prolonging of contracts, organisation of training sessions including travel and lodging of trainees and trainers in addition to devising and carrying out training sessions. In 2007 an agreement was signed between IRD, IUFM and the *rectorat* and a working group (*groupe académique de pilotage des Intervenants en Langues Maternelles*) took over the responsibility for the project and its development.

CASNAV (*Centre Académique pour la Scolarisation des Nouveaux Arrivants et des Enfants du Voyage*, ex-CEFISEM),<sup>11</sup> the other an experienced primary school teacher, as well as invited speakers who lead the discussions on specific pedagogical or cultural topics. Training sessions typically last one week and focus on one or two topics. They are carried out partly in small groups and partly in sessions that bring together all the trainees and trainers. The small groups typically consist of one linguist and speakers of one language (e.g. Hmong) or of closely related languages (e.g. the Maroon Creoles). Training sessions are not rigidly structured but they usually involve several elements such as work on specific linguistic and pedagogical topics that pose problems in the classroom, presentation of new themes, development of teaching materials on the theme by members of different language groups, their presentation to all the trainees and trainers etc.

After the initial sessions, two issues emerged: verification of acquired knowledge and the training of new AMTEs. Although trainees do not have to pass formal exams, the trainers sometimes assign quizzes on vital pedagogical and linguistic issues and discuss the results with the trainees. They also spend some time on reviewing vital material from previous sessions. The integration of newly recruited AMTEs proved somewhat more challenging because it meant that trainers had to simultaneously explain previously treated issues and work on new topics. Recently, trainers have decided to address this matter by creating a teaching manual and by training resource persons among the AMTEs who will help or even take over the training of new recruits. To date, this is still on-going.

So far, the training sessions have treated a range of topics:

- a. *social and linguistic topics*: the history of the communities, ethno-botany, local classification of animals, kinship terminology, production of local food staples, colour terms, body parts, local oral literature genres (tales, poetry, sayings), linguistic politeness (honorifics, greetings, address forms), numerical and mathematical concepts,
- b. *basic linguistic concepts*: language, dialect, variety, language acquisition, language development, language transmission, types of language contact, semantic notions (e.g. expression of tense, mood, aspect, space),
- c. *introduction to the levels and concomitant terminology of linguistic description (units and processes)*: such as morphology, syntax,

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<sup>11</sup> Traditionally, the CASNAV, ex-CEFISEM, supports educators working with migrant children who lack competence in French during their integration into the school context. In French Guiana, it supports all teachers interested in French as a Foreign Language or French as a medium of instruction.

- pragmatics, phonology and its relationship to writing and writing systems, elaboration of orthographies, and
- d. *didactics*: such as learning of reading and writing, objective-based work, elaboration and structuring of teaching activities based on cultural and linguistic knowledge, elaboration of thematic and learning progressions, elaboration of lesson scripts (cf. Lanier-Auburtin 2009: 181-182, Renault-Lescure & Queixalós in press: 15).

#### *5.4. The development of teaching materials and a curriculum*

One of the goals of every training session was to develop teaching materials and to encourage AMTEs to develop materials on their own or in collaboration with teachers at their school. A great variety of teach materials exist, but they are not widely available. Since 2008 a concerted effort has been underway to make more widely available a selection of the teaching materials as part of a teaching manual. The aim is to develop a precise curriculum with clearly defined learning and teaching goals and outcomes in accordance with learning trajectories and the linguistic and cultural specificity of each community. It is hoped that this will contribute towards stream-lining teaching activities, facilitating the training of new recruits, and official recognition of the AMTEs' work. Existing teaching materials include:

- a. sung and rhythmical games used for learning terms and concepts,
  - b. question-answer games that teach children to deduce and describe elements and formulate questions about them,
  - c. activities around traditional objects to develop children's vocabulary, their descriptive capacities, cultural concepts and processes,
  - d. pictorial and textual descriptions depicting the production of local projects such as calabashes, dugout canoes, wood carvings, manioc-based food staples used to practice temporal sequences, ordering of events, development of narratives based on a sequence of pictures, development of the concept to receipt,
  - e. traditional tales used for creating illustrated story books, to stage plays, to familiarize children with their cultural background, to develop listening and story telling skills, and temporal ordering skills,
  - f. riddles employed for promoting analytical skills, the notion of analogy and the idea of metaphors,
  - g. picture books (of animals and plants) used for developing vocabulary (nominal concepts and related verbal expressions),
  - h. nursery rhyme used for memorizing language structures, common sequences (days of the week, months, numbers) and for practicing pronunciation and phonological differentiation, and
  - i. local artwork used for studying geometric concepts and shapes.
  - j. Some activities around mathematical concepts.
- (Lanier-Auburtin 2009)

Work in progress shows that while the overall curriculum may be broadly similar across the different languages, the types of exercises and sometimes the order of elements to be introduced have to differ partially to accommodate language-based differences (Lanier-Auburtin 2009).

In addition to these activities, descriptive work on the languages of French Guiana (cf. Goury & Migge 2003; Launey 2003), its sociolinguistic situation (cf. articles in Léglise and Migge 2007a; Renault-Lescure & Goury 2009) and specific language practices (cf. Migge 2004; Migge 2005a & b; Migge 2007; Léglise 2007b) is on-going. These and other scientific articles function as important reference materials for constructing teaching activities and materials.

### *5.5. Schools, students, teaching and institutional support*

The project was conceived for schools where all the children are non-francophone upon entering school and are members of the same or closely related linguistic communities. Initially, 14 schools located in western French Guiana were selected. They are situated in the following locations involving the following languages: Awala-Yalimapo (Kali'na), Mana (Ndyuka), Javouhey (Hmong), Maïman and Apatou (Aluku), Grand Santi (Ndyuka), Papaïchton, Loca and Maripasoula (Aluku), Cayodé, Taluhen, Elahé and Antecume Pata (Wayana), St. Laurent du Maroni - La Charbonnière (Eastern Maroon). Later on, a school in Saint-Georges de l'Oyapock (Palikur), one in the neighbourhood of Sable Blanc (Eastern Maroon) in St. Laurent du Maroni, one in Camopi (Emerillon and Wayampi) and one in Bellevue-Yanou (Kali'na) were added (cf. MAP 1).

In 1998 the newly recruited AMTEs were each assigned to a school and charged with three main tasks:

- a. teaching children about and through their mother tongue (L1) during the first three years of their schooling in order to 'structure' and support the pupils in their L1 and further their integration into the school context.
- b. representing the children's L1 and culture in the school and informing the mostly external teaching personnel about the children's L1 and culture and helping them to develop culturally sensitive teaching materials and classroom activities.
- c. functioning as a mediator, a go-between, between the school and the parents.

(Crouzier 2007a: 456; Renault-Lescure & Queixalós in press).

Accomplishing these tasks required collaboration between the AMTEs and the teachers and particularly the directors of the schools as well as having a certain amount of competence in teaching and mediation work. Since the AMTEs, however, essentially were not fully trained in either and, more importantly, were at the very bottom of the school's staff hierarchy and had to operate in an environment that was at times openly hostile to local



languages and cultures, their job was made nearly impossible. Most AMTEs were faced with a range of problems that seriously undermined their work:

- a. They were not assigned a separate classroom where they can store and display their own teaching materials; they either had to continually change rooms or work in unsuitable locations such as outside, in storage rooms, the library etc. (cf. Puren 2005: 23).
- b. Their teaching activities were not fully integrated into the timetable but were carried out whenever it was convenient for the teachers.
- c. The teachers often did not want to make groups of students available to the AMTE since they felt that this would be “time lost for French”.
- d. They were mainly assigned “problem students” that teachers found difficult to deal with or were asked to help out in the special education classes (Puren 2005: 20, 26).
- e. The school directors did not want to make materials (papers, pens, photos) available to them for developing their teaching materials (Puren 2005: 23-24).
- f. Directors and teachers obliged some AMTEs to do a range of unrelated tasks such as supervise students during breaks, managing the library, giving sports lessons, photocopying for teachers, helping teachers with the teaching of French or doing translation work for them (Puren 2005: 21-23).

Most of the AMTEs were able to improve their working conditions over time either as the result of changes among the teacher population or, especially in serious cases, as the result of intervention from members of the *rectorat* and the trainers. However, even today the AMTEs have to continually raise awareness about their role, assert their position, and the success of their mission is highly dependent on the attitudes of the teachers to local languages and cultures and the AMTEs’ ability to assert themselves in relation to the teachers and the school director.

From the beginning, there has been great variation in the educational level at which the AMTEs teach, the amount of time they spend with children from each class, the frequency and length of teaching periods, the number of classes in which the mediator teaches, and the types of activities that they carry out with the children. Most AMTEs work only or primarily with the children from the first three years (junior and senior infants and first class) (Puren 2005: 25), but some also work with older children, depending on the ‘needs’ and approach of the school. According to the *rectorat*, each class should be taught in their L1 for two hours each day (Crouzier 2007a: 455), but there is considerable variation. In some schools, children spend 4 to 6 full class periods of about an hour each week with the AMTE while in others, children’s total time with the AMTE amounts to around an hour divided into four 15-minute sequences.

The activities clearly vary depending on the size and the level of the groups. When working with junior infants (*petite section*), activities centre around exploring basic language and culture concepts such as identification,

recognition and naming of colours, structure of the day, numbers, locational concepts, practicing of main greeting and self presentation sequences, learning of local nursery rhymes, songs and short folktales. The children are also introduced to the school environment, listening comprehension and basic narration skills. At senior infant level (*moyenne section*) basic competences are elaborated. For instance, they learn the structure of the week, are introduced to more locational concepts, listen to longer stories and discuss the activities in more detail focusing on verbal concepts (e.g. movement verbs) and sequencing of actions. New activities involve traditional games, exploring of the natural environment including their village and villagers' life, interpretation of images, identification and naming of geometric shapes, and identification of body parts. In the *grande section* children stage short plays, work on the temporal structure of the language (past, future), produce short oral texts and songs, learn to discriminate between sounds, and are introduced to letters and the reading of words. At higher levels (CP) the children are also introduced to orthographic conventions, practice writing, reading, the production of written texts and their oral presentation, the syllable structure of words and learn about language varieties, production of cultural objects (dugout canoes, calabashes, traditional clothes), and about important social issues (waste, kinship, politeness). Until 2005 its extension to higher levels (CP) was much hampered because the teaching of writing in languages other than French and the use of non-French written materials for teaching was formally prohibited.

Another issue that has not been formally tackled by trainers and the steering group is the much greater heterogeneity of the student population than initially envisaged by the program's founders. There are two sorts of cases. In the first case, most (all?) children are already bilingual or multilingual and code-switch between languages like most of their caretakers (cf. Alby & Migge 2007; Migge 2007). Ideally, AMTEs would have to be aware of such practices including their social meanings and differences in competence levels and to design their teaching activities so as to mediate between them. Currently, only a handful of AMTEs can do that effectively and such sociolinguistic issues are also not consistently dealt with in training sessions.

The second case are heterogeneous classes involving children who speak several closely related mother tongues (e.g. Aluku, Ndyuka, Pamaka), somewhat more distantly related languages (e.g. Ndyuka and Saamaka), or unrelated languages. The former case generally does not pose a problem at all since the linguistic differences between these varieties are minimal (cf. Goury & Migge 2003). Most of the AMTEs are now, due to training, also able to properly take into account and address the identity-related issues linked to these varieties. In the second case, a higher level of mediation is required because despite important linguistic and cultural similarities and the fact that a good number of Saamaka children would also know the other

Maroon languages, there are important differences. Either AMTEs integrate discussion of these differences into their activities or they split them up into separate groups with different AMTEs. The former option is preferable because it avoids emphasising ethnic boundaries and contributes towards much needed intercultural understanding as well as is practically and financially more feasible. However, only few AMTEs are able to effectively handle this kind of intercultural work. Others simply ignore this level of heterogeneity. More pedagogical reflection and training for AMTEs is required on this topic.

The third case poses roughly the same issues but on a different scale. Currently, the problem is resolved by having the non-native speakers simply attend the same sessions. This does not pose a problem for activities designed to work on basic competences as most children's competence would be sufficient for that. However, for example, story telling activities, writing and more culturally-laden activities may pose problems. So far, AMTEs have not signalled any problems, but it affects the main objective of the project (mother tongue teaching) and may require more far ranging changes to the project in the case of linguistically very diverse classes.

#### *5.6. Supervision and evaluation of the project*

To date there does not exist any formal arrangement concerning supervision for AMTEs and evaluation of their teaching activities. However, AMTEs are invited to raise any issues during training sessions. Since 2005, both linguistic and pedagogical trainers have also observed AMTEs' teaching sessions often together with local school inspectors. Such visits have revealed that AMTEs are generally enthusiastic about their work and that students enjoy these classes. However, they have also revealed persistent institutional issues and issues related to teaching methods and content that need to be addressed more globally during training sessions. AMTEs generally welcome these visits and benefit from the feedback.

Between 2005 and 2006 the program was evaluated by three different persons. The first evaluation was carried out by Josiane Hamers, an emeritus professor of psycholinguistics and bilingualism from the University of Québec. She visited some schools in western French Guiana, on the Maroni River, in Saint Laurent du Maroni, Javouhey and Awala-Yalimapo. Her overall assessment was very positive. She noted that the children appear to be very active and motivated when working through their L1. She concluded that the program would be even more effective if students received more of their education through their L1 and if the pedagogical training of the AMTEs was intensified (Renault-Lescure & Queixalós in press: 14).

The second evaluation was carried out by Laurent Puren an assistant professor in education at the University of La Réunion. He visited a number

of schools along the Maroni and Lawa River and on the Oyapock River and reached the following conclusions:

- a. AMTEs have become the main interlocutors for the local language and culture in the schools fostering teachers' greater understanding of the issues affecting non-francophone children.
- b. AMTEs' work has improved relations between parents and schools.
- c. AMTEs' presence has improved the school environment for the children and created a positive link between the school and home environment.
- d. AMTEs' work needs to be further streamlined and validated through the creation of an official certification (Puren 2005).

The third evaluation focused on the effectiveness of the project and was carried out by Françoise Crouzier who was assistant professor at the teacher-training institute (IUFM) in Cayenne at the time. She focused on 43 students of Ndyuka (16) and Hmong (10) background, 26 of whom were participating in the project and 17 who did not. She examined their educational results, interviewed their teachers and AMTEs, observed classes and administered a non-verbal test for measuring the educational and cognitive development of children. This test, called NBBT (Ravard & Ravard 1990), was adapted to the French Guianese context and administered to children at senior infant level, testing their preschool knowledge.<sup>12</sup> The investigation revealed the following positive effects of the AMTEs' presence (Crouzier 2007a: 458-459):

- a. It leads to students' greater valorisation of their mother tongue and home culture.
- b. It improves social cohesion because it contributes to children's better understanding of their home culture and teaching environment.
- c. It improves children's behaviour and their educational results.

Another formal evaluation of students' competences is currently underway  
ECOLPOM ([http://cnep.univ-nc.nc/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=48&Itemid=36](http://cnep.univ-nc.nc/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=48&Itemid=36))

### *5.7. Conclusion and outlook*

The program was conceived and born under difficult circumstances and has so far had a bumpy history. However, it has raised awareness among those

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<sup>12</sup> This test is administered in small groups and lasts about one hour. It consists of nine parts: graphic representation, spacial organization, rythme, visual discrimination, auditory analysis, writing, geometric figures, reproduction and drawing of pictures representing persons. The first five parts test preschool competences while the latter four relate to students' learning capacity and the structuring of their personality. The test was administered in their L1 for children who participate in the program and in French to students who did not (Crouzier 2007a: 460).

people who have willingly or unwillingly come into contact with it about the importance of taking into account and valorising students' languages, cultures and identities in the school context. It contributes towards bridging the divide between their home and school life and motivates children to engage in the educational process and to view themselves as equal citizens. It has also transformed the lives of the AMTEs who feel that they have acquired important insights into their language and culture (Puren 2005: 15-16, 19).

However, in order to fully deliver on its objectives, the program will have to be improved. First of all, the training and supervision of AMTEs must be streamlined and intensified,<sup>13</sup> the development of teaching materials must be increased and existing and new teaching materials must be more rigorously structured in relation to learning objectives, trajectories and outcomes. The program leaders must also reflect more carefully on the linguistic and social realities of the target communities and on ways of responding to them within the framework of the program. Moreover, the current focus on transitional bilingualism is problematic. To be effective, the program should be extended to all levels of primary and secondary school education and reach more than the current 20% of the schools in the department. The latest news from the *rectorat* indicate that the number of AMTEs is expected to rise to 50 by the end of 2010 and that the project could be extended to migrant languages (such as Brazilian Portuguese or Haitian). But a new national policy may make it impossible to renew existing contracts which would have disastrous consequences for the program.

## **6. Raising awareness about language and language diversity**

In linguistically relatively homogeneous communities in which all the inhabitants of the area/village share at least one common language, a broad bilingual approach such as the one promoted by LCR and MCB-ILM can be an effective first step towards addressing language and culture-related inequalities. However, such communities are becoming increasingly rare in French Guiana as elsewhere. Children are generally exposed to and draw on several languages in their everyday lives and there are differences in language use patterns, language practices and language competence among children and between children and adults. In addition, everyday language

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<sup>13</sup> The appointment of pedagogical advisors for native speakers of Amerindian languages is a first step in the right direction. An advisor for Maroon languages will mostly likely be appointed during 2009.

use patterns differ in various ways from communal and national language norms. This heterogeneity is subject to negative evaluation by community members and educators and leads to language-based discrimination and disharmony among social groups.

A method that has proven very useful for systematically addressing issues of language and cultural diversity including resulting inequalities is the *Language Awareness* approach. It was developed in the United Kingdom in the 1980s (Hawkins 1984; Moore 1995) and was tested and further developed in the course of two projects funded by the EU, the program *Evlang* (1997-2000) and *Janua Linguarum* (2000-2004). The approach has four objectives:

- a. To interest and open up students to the notion of diversity and to dispel the myth that homogeneity is the norm and more desirable.
- b. To develop students' aptitudes for observing and analyzing languages to reinforce and improve their existing linguistic competence.
- c. To positively encourage pupils to learn languages, including the languages of their fellow pupils or the official language, and
- d. To develop pupils' knowledge about their immediate linguistic environment and more distant regions.

In French Guiana, one activity focuses on raising awareness among teachers and another one on developing language awareness materials among students.

### *6.1. Raising awareness among teachers*

One of the most important challenges facing teacher training in French Guiana is the relatively great socio-cultural and linguistic discrepancy between teachers and students. Most of the current and future teachers come either from Cayenne having a French Creole background or from metropolitan France and the French Antilles while great numbers of the students originate from Haiti, Suriname, Brazil and Guyana. Most of the non-local teachers only spend a very short period of time in the *département* and are monolingual or bilingual in French and a French Creole. By contrast, most of the students especially in the west are in the majority multilingual, non-francophone and also speak languages from neighboring countries.

Until about 10 years ago, the teacher training institution (IUFM) did very little to address teachers' relative unfamiliarity with the local context. However, in 1997 they finally agreed to include several daylong workshops that focused on the linguistic situation of the department in their yearly teaching schedule. They were optional and held at the very end of the school year. They were run by linguists of CELIA and focused on the Amerindian languages and Maroon Creoles of French Guiana and on anthropological and didactic issues relevant for teaching in a multilingual context (Alby 2009).

In 2001, after much lobbying by members of CELIA, the IUFM formally integrated into its curriculum an obligatory module of 20 hours on the languages of French Guiana. Its aim was to expose students to the linguistic diversity of their future students and to propose ways of integrating students' knowledge into teaching activities. Finally, in 2007 an additional module entitled *Teaching in a multilingual and multicultural context* was introduced. It focuses on teaching strategies in a multilingual and cultural environment that equally take into account the language of instruction and the languages spoken by the children. This module is obligatory and has a teaching volume of at least 34 hours. It emerged from on-going discussions among the staff at the IUFM, research within the framework of the local ERTE (*Equipe de Recherche en Technologie de l'Education*) and sociolinguistic and language-related educational research in the region in general.<sup>14</sup> The content of the course is structured around four broad issues a) the social and linguistic nature, processes and outcomes of multilingualism and inter-culturalism, b) the nature of linguistic competence in a multilingual context, c) the teaching of grammar, d) the integration of students' linguistic and cultural background in teaching and learning activities. It is co-taught by researchers and teacher trainers (Alby 2009).

As part of this module, teachers are asked to work on a number of issues and language attitudes are a central concern. Teachers are asked to critically examine the nature and origin of their attitudes towards the languages in French Guiana and to reflect on their attitudes towards processes and outcomes of contact, most notably code-mixing and code-switching and language use patterns in French that diverge from standard or metropolitan usage. Essentially, teachers are made to understand through guided analysis of language use corpora that mixing or code-switching are not a sign of linguistic degradation or occur randomly but are highly structured and perform important social and interactional functions (Alby 2009).

Another important issue concerns teachers' use of children's L1s. Although most teachers express relatively positive overt attitudes about their students' languages, most of them also feel that their use should be restricted to furthering children's acquisition of French or to mediating problems of comprehension. Class work therefore focuses on discussing strategies for realizing this goal. For instance, teachers are presented with spontaneous recordings of classroom interactions and are asked to critically

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<sup>14</sup> The ERTE is a research program financed by the ministry of education which focuses on a) producing knowledge on the educational context of the department, b) diffusing this knowledge to teachers, and c) support the ministry of education and teachers in the development and adaptation of teaching policies, methods and activities.

examine language use patterns and responses to them in teacher-student interactions. These analytical exercises are designed to raise awareness about interactional patterns and to make available tools to future teachers for analyzing and dealing with such interactional patterns.

## *6.2. Educational activities for raising language awareness among students*

There is also on-going research on creating new teaching materials and adapting existing resources to the local context. This research is carried out within a GRAC (*Groupe de Recherche Action*) on language awareness that was initiated by the members of the special pedagogical support unit CASNAV and involves collaboration with local researchers in the area of language awareness and in sociolinguistics. The main work is carried out by interested primary school teachers and local researchers and members of CASNAV have an advisory role. The teachers meet every Wednesday to prepare teaching materials and on Saturdays they record their experimentation in class. In addition, once every year the members of the GRAC get together for a few days to review their activities. Participation in the project is voluntary and is generally not compensated.

For the moment, the experimentation focuses on three linguistically quite heterogeneous classes in Cayenne. While some children identify only one language such as French, a regional or an immigrant language as their sole home language, others report regularly using more than one language at home. Usually such children name a regional or immigrant language in conjunction with French.

Educational activities have so far focused on the following things:

- a. the formal creation of a multilingual space within the classroom.
- b. practicing of nursery rhymes from different languages that are not necessarily part of the local context and eliciting children's reactions to them.
- c. exploring of the interaction between a verb and person reference in order to discuss linguistic universals and cross-linguistic variation.
- d. recording and comparing of a set of sentences from students speaking different home languages.

Although only a small number of exercises have been properly experimented with, the results of this experimentation are very encouraging. Teachers found that all students are very interested and motivated to participate in the activities. Especially children that usually do not partake in other class activities presumably because of their lack of knowledge of French are highly motivated to engage in them and do not hesitate to lend their language expertise. The activities contribute towards validating these children's otherwise marginalized backgrounds.

The research has so far identified the following broad areas of activities for the second year (senior infants) and the third year (first class):



- a. creation of a multilingual space to raise awareness about the existence of different languages,
- b. studying of the sounds of the languages of the world to develop listening and attention-keeping competences, and
- c. studying of the functioning of languages through observation and comparison of linguistic material from different languages to develop metalinguistic competences.

Once experimentation has progressed, it is envisaged to publish a DVD on teaching in the multilingual context (of French Guiana) and to develop a manual on language awareness activities for the French Guianese context.

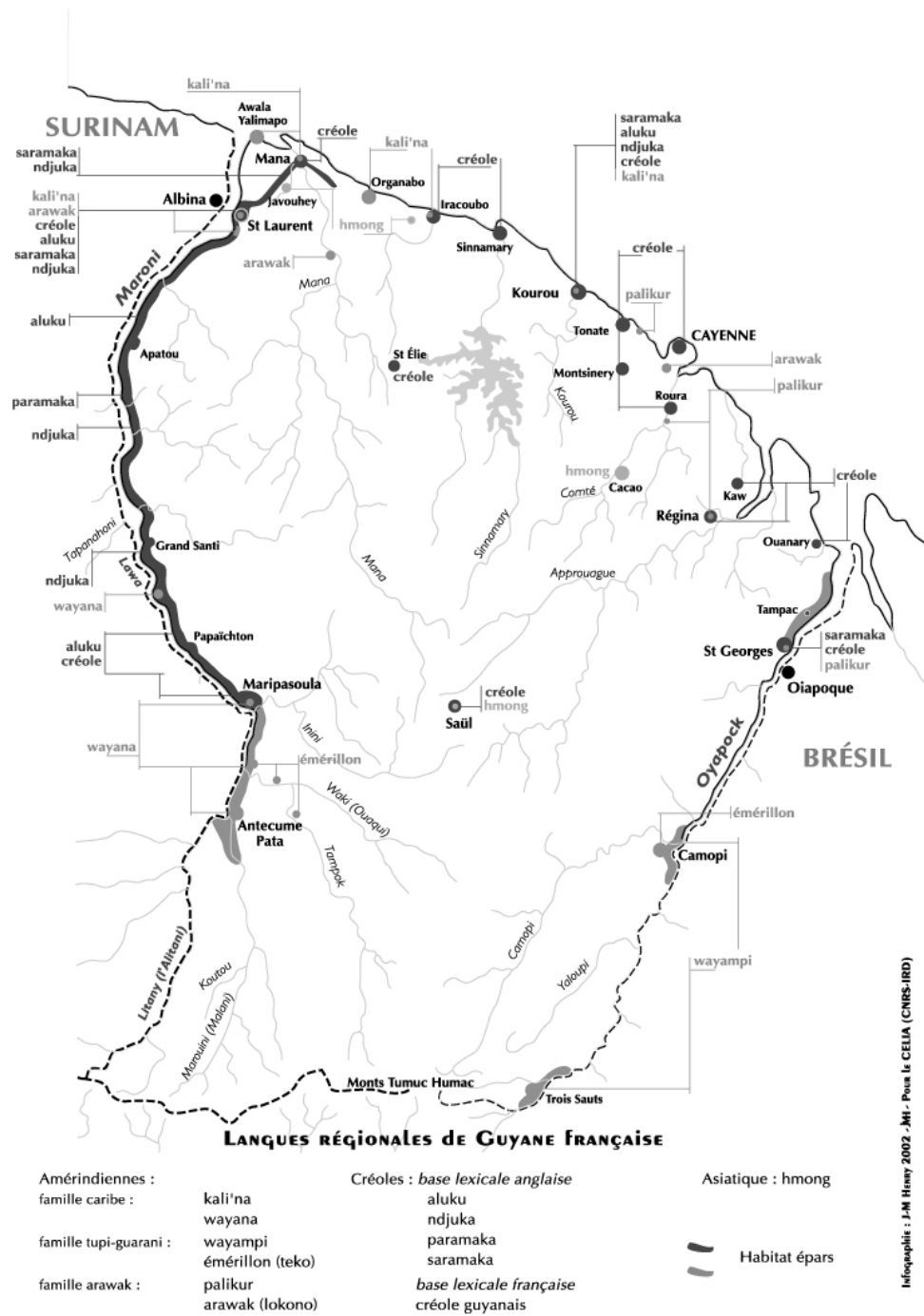
## **7. Conclusion and outlook**

French Guiana is culturally and linguistically a very heterogeneous region which has in recent years also been subject to significant social changes. However, until quite recently the education system has been quite reluctant to embrace strategies for adequately managing this heterogeneity although it is often invoked as the root cause of the region's significant educational problems. The main measures to date include the integration of a subject on French Guianese Creole language and culture into the curriculum, the teaching of several local / minority languages such as the Maroon Creoles, Hmong and local Amerindian languages, and the conception of a module on teaching in a multilingual context in the teacher training curriculum. While all of these measures pursue different goals, they all contribute towards adapting the teaching environment to the linguistic and cultural landscape of French Guiana. However, in their current state, all these measures require further elaboration.

While LCR and MCB-ILM are clearly useful, their underlying conceptions and approaches need to be adapted to the local social, linguistic and cultural realities of the department. Specifically,

- a. teaching materials and approaches should reflect the multilingual character of the society and the modern context,
- b. teaching should not be restricted to only a few of the local languages, all students whether or not they are native or non-native speakers should have access to such classes,
- c. the transitional bilingualism character of these approaches must to be tackled.

In the long run it might be useful to consolidate LCR and MCB-ILM by creating a subject that focuses on familiarizing students with all the languages and cultures of French Guiana, teaching vital metalinguistic competences and addressing language and culture-based issues in the region.



MAP 1: Location of the Regional Languages of French Guiana.