

Orthographic guidelines for writing São Vicentean Kriol¹

Version 2, September 2002.

JØRGEN CARLING, *International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO)*

Introduction

While Portuguese is Cape Verde's official language, the everyday language of the country's people is the local Creole language, usually known as Crioulo or Kriolu. In the São Vicentean dialect, however, the correct designation of the language is *Kriol*.

Several dictionaries and books on grammar and linguistics have been written about Kriol, and an alphabet known as *Alupec* has been officially approved for the purpose of writing Kriol. However, there is still a long way to go before Kriol becomes established as a written language. To the majority of Cape Verdeans, Kriol exists only in its spoken form. The different academic works usually reflect particular dialects and lack official recognition. Locally produced texts reflect a sort of linguistic anarchy.

Differences in dialects are a major barrier for standardizing Crioulo and granting it official status. Most initiatives for official recognition have come from the largest island, Santiago. This has caused considerable scepticism in other parts of the country, where people are anxious about losing their own dialects. On São Vicente, the second most populous island, many people vigorously oppose granting Kriol official status out of fear of being forced to write the *Badiu* dialect of Santiago.

The various dialects can be roughly divided into Barlavento and Sotavento groups, corresponding to the Northern and Southern half of the archipelago. The Sotavento includes Santiago with the capital Praia, while São Vicente is in the Barlavento group. Because São Vicente was settled quite recently, has experienced considerable population inflows from the neighbouring islands, and constitutes the centre of Barlavento islands today, the island's dialect can be seen as a common denominator of the Barlavento dialects. The only major contrast is probably between São Vicente and neighbouring Santo Antão. The other three islands, São Nicolau, Sal and Boavista have dialects that are relatively close to the São Vicentean dialect.

A primary purpose of granting Kriol official status is supporting local linguistic expression. The difference between dialects therefore constitutes a major challenge, even if there are underlying linguistic structures that unite the dialects into one language. While I have no firm conviction about what is the best way to meet this challenge, I believe in sensitivity to the importance of local dialects for people's linguistic identity.

The officially recognized *Alupec* alphabet can be used as a starting point for establishing a norm for writing São Vicentean Kriol the way it is spoken. As part of my research on São Vicente, I recorded interview that I subsequently transcribed. Through this work, I developed these guidelines for writing São Vicentean Kriol. There will still be considerable room for variation, and I do not claim to have developed an orthographic standard. These are merely principles to guide written representation of the spoken language of São Vicente.

¹ Suggested citation: Carling, J. (2002) *Orthographic guidelines for writing São Vicentean Kriol (Version 2)*, Available online at www.dragoeiro.com.

General principles

1. Words are written as they are pronounced, regardless of Portuguese conventions

Often when Kriol is written, traces of Portuguese orthography remain even where there is no linguistic or phonetic basis for this. For instance, many unstressed vowels in Portuguese words have disappeared completely in their Kriol counterparts and should therefore not be written. This is especially true with the São Vicentean dialect.

Examples:	Kriol	English	Portuguese
	<i>jdá</i>	<i>help</i>	<i>ajudar</i>
	<i>dzé</i>	<i>say</i>	<i>dizer</i>
	<i>ból</i>	<i>cake</i>	<i>bolo</i>
	<i>sonh</i>	<i>dream</i>	<i>sonho</i>
	<i>ón</i>	<i>year</i>	<i>ano</i>

2. Nasal consonants are written *m* and not *n* as in standard Alupec

This is the only major adjustment in relation to standard Alupec that I suggest. The primary reason for this is that in the São Vicentean dialect (unlike the Sotavento dialects), a very large number of words end in *-n* and are not nasal. This includes the counterparts of Portuguese words that end in *-ano*, which becomes *-an* in São Vicente and *-anu* in Sotavento. The ending *-m*, however, should be reserved for nasal endings.

Examples:	Kriol	English	Portuguese
	<i>Kaboverdián</i>	<i>Cape Verdean</i>	<i>Cabo-Verdeano</i>
	<i>son</i>	<i>sleep</i>	<i>sono</i>
	<i>sim</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>sim</i>
	<i>fim</i>	<i>end</i>	<i>fim</i>

3. The first person singular pronoun is consequently written *M*

An important implication of this adjustment is that first person singular pronoun is written *M* and not *N* as in standard Alupec.

4. Words ending in non-nasal *-m* are written *-m'*

A second implication is that there must be a way of identifying non-nasal *-m* endings. This is the case with words that in Portuguese end in *-me* or *-mo*, but lose the final vowels in Kriol. An apostrophe should be added to these words to indicate that the final *m* is not nasal.

Examples:	Kriol	English	Portuguese
	<i>fom'</i>	<i>hunger</i>	<i>fome</i>
	<i>rum'</i>	<i>course</i>	<i>rumo</i>

5. Every sound is only represented by one letter (exceptions follow under point 6).

This is a fundamental principle in Alupec, and ensures that writing Kriol can be more straightforward than writing Portuguese. For instance the *k*-sound which is variously represented by *c* and *q* in Portuguese is always written *k* in Kriol.

Examples:	Kriol	English	Portuguese
	<i>kaza</i>	<i>house</i>	<i>casa</i>
	<i>ke</i>	<i>which</i>	<i>que</i>

6. The pronunciation of the letter *s* and the writing of the sound *sh* depend on the context.

The following rules apply:

- The letter *s* can represent either a *s*-sound or a *sh*-sound, never a *z*-sound
- The sound *s* is always represented by *s* or *ss* (the Portuguese *ç* is not used at all)
- A final *s*-sound is represented by *-ss* when stressed and *-s'* when unstressed*
- Double *s* is used between vowels to indicate stress (e.g. *pássaro*)
- The sound *z* is always represented by the letter *z*, never by *s*
- A final *sh*-sound is represented by *-x* when the corresponding Portuguese word ended with a vowel that has been lost in Kriol, otherwise it is represented by *-s*

*) In the latter case, the Portuguese counterpart ends in a vowel that is silent in Kriol.

The sounds *s* and *sh* are represented as follows.

Sound	Position			
	initial, before vowel	between vowels	before consonant	final
<i>s</i>	<i>s-</i>	<i>-s- or -ss-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-s or -s'</i>
<i>sh</i>	<i>x-</i>	<i>-x-</i>	<i>-s-</i>	<i>-s or -x</i>

Examples:	Kriol	Kriol Pronunciation	English	Portuguese
	<i>sol</i>	<i>sol</i>	<i>sun</i>	<i>sol</i>
	<i>Skud</i>	<i>shkud</i>	<i>Escudo</i>	<i>Escudo</i>
	<i>kaza</i>	<i>kaza</i>	<i>house</i>	<i>Casa</i>
	<i>oss</i>	<i>oss</i>	<i>bone</i>	<i>Osso</i>
	<i>lens'</i>	<i>lens</i>	<i>handkerchief</i>	<i>Lenço</i>
	<i>prasa</i>	<i>prasa</i>	<i>square</i>	<i>Praça</i>
	<i>práz</i>	<i>praz</i>	<i>duration</i>	<i>Prazo</i>
	<i>pex</i>	<i>pesh</i>	<i>fish</i>	<i>peixe</i>
	<i>lix</i>	<i>lish</i>	<i>rubbish</i>	<i>Lixo</i>
	<i>dos</i>	<i>dosh</i>	<i>two</i>	<i>dois</i>
	<i>kaixa</i>	<i>kaisha</i>	<i>box</i>	<i>Caixa</i>

7. In general, only the acute accent is used

For simplicity, only the acute accent (´) is used. It is used in five circumstances

- At the end of all verbs: *jdá, kmé, kurtí*
- To signal long vowels in single syllable words: *ón, lév* vs. *pex, nos*
- To signal long final vowels: *kebród, kabverdián*
- To differentiate two vowels from diphthongs: *aínda, aój*
- To indicate stress when it is not on the penultimate syllable: *lápis, pássaro*

Note that Portuguese *é* ('is') becomes *e* and Portuguese *e* ('and') becomes *y*: *El e nova y bnitinha* (She is young and pretty). This is in order to avoid unnecessary use of accents and stay close to the Kriol pronunciation.

The only exception to this rule is where accents reflect differences in pronunciation and are used to distinguish between words that are otherwise written in the same way (e.g. *avô* vs *avó*). Accents are never used to distinguish between words that have identical pronunciation.

(Note that the tilde (~) is not referred to as an accent. It is used to indicate nasal vowels.)

8. Verbs are linked to direct and indirect objects with a hyphen

The following endings apply:

- m me/to me*

- b) –b you/to you
 c) –l he, she, it/to him, her, it
 d) –s them/to them

There is no contraction for *bzot* (second person plural, informal) and *nos* (first person plural).

Examples:	Kriol	English
	<i>M skrevé-b um karta diazá</i>	<i>I wrote you a letter a long time ago</i>
	<i>Inda bo ka dá-m el</i>	<i>You still haven't given it to me</i>
	<i>Bo podé trazé-l manhã</i>	<i>You can bring it to me tomorrow</i>
	<i>El dá-l el</i>	<i>He/she gave it to him/her</i>
	<i>Es kebrá-s tud</i>	<i>They broke all of them</i>
	<i>El levá nos pra la</i>	<i>He took us with him over there</i>
	<i>M ta dá bzot el</i>	<i>I will give it to you (plural)</i>

9. Some pronouns, prepositions and conjunctions can be contracted with an apostrophe.

As a general rule, the preposition should be abbreviated and the pronoun should be kept intact. The exception is that *pa el* becomes *pa'l* and not *p'el* because this contraction is pronounced with an *a*.

Examples:	Kriol	English
	<i>de ot</i> <i>d'ot</i>	of another
	<i>de el</i> <i>d'el</i>	of it/her/him
	<i>pa el</i> <i>pa'l</i>	for it/her/him
	<i>ke el</i> <i>k'el</i>	that it/her/him
	<i>se el</i> <i>s'el</i>	if it/her/him

10. When the corresponding Portuguese words end in *-ão*, the Kriol ending is usually *-ãu* or *-õ*.

Most Portuguese *-ão* endings become *-ãu*, for instance, *-çãu* endings become *-sãu*. However, a small number of words have lost the diphthong but remained nasal, such as *irmõ*, meaning brother (*irmão* in Portuguese). Still, this is slightly different from the nasal *-om* endings such as *nom*, meaning name (*nom* in Portuguese).

11. Soft *g*-sounds are always represented by *j* and hard *g*-sounds are represented by *g*.

As a consequence of this, *g* is never followed by a silent *u* to signal a hard *g*, as in Portuguese.

Examples:	Kriol	English	Portuguese
	<i>aój</i>	<i>today</i>	<i>hoje</i>
	<i>jovem</i>	<i>young</i>	<i>jovem</i>
	<i>stranjer</i>	<i>foreign</i>	<i>estrangeiro</i>
	<i>jent</i>	<i>people</i>	<i>jente</i>
	<i>ke</i>	<i>which</i>	<i>que</i>

Ortographic elements

These are examples of how Kriol orthographic elements are related to the Portuguese counterparts. This is based on the principles listed above.

Portuguese ortho- graphy	Kriol ortho- graphy	Example	English translation
–ado	–ód	<i>kansód</i>	tired
–ado	–ad	<i>stád</i>	state
–ão	–ãu	<i>kondisãu</i>	condition
–ão	–õ	<i>irmõ</i>	brother
–ce	–ss	<i>doss</i>	sweet
ce–	se–	<i>sebola</i>	onion
–ce–	–se–	<i>bosé,</i>	you (polite)
–ço	–ss	<i>peskoss</i> (stressed –s)	neck
–ço	–s’	<i>lens’</i> (unstressed –s)	handkerchief
des–	dz–	<i>dzempregod</i>	unemployed
ge	je	<i>jent</i>	people
gue	ge–	<i>gerra</i>	war
–je	–j	<i>aój</i>	today
–jo	–j	<i>anj</i>	angel
–lho	–dj	<i>midj</i>	corn
–m	–m	<i>fim</i> (nasal)	end
–me	–m’	<i>fom’</i> (not nasal)	hunger
–mo	–m’	<i>rum’</i> (not nasal)	course
–nho	–nh	<i>sonh</i>	sleep
–no	–n	<i>ón</i>	year
que	ke	<i>kebród</i>	broken
–rr–	–rr–	<i>parriba</i>	above, up
–rro	–rr	<i>korr</i>	car
–s	–s	<i>dos</i>	two
–so	–z	<i>margóz</i>	bitter
–ss–	–s–	<i>pasód</i> (s not stressed)	past
–ss–	–ss–	<i>pássaro</i> (s stressed)	bird
–sse	–ss	<i>toss</i>	cough
–sso	–ss	<i>pass</i>	step
–xe	–x	<i>pex</i>	fish
–xo	–x	<i>box</i>	low, below
–z	–s	<i>ves</i>	time, turn

Sample text

Bom, um ves emigrasãu era mas fásil. Do ke agora. Um ves, M uví dzé, jent tava emigrá ku... so bilhet de identidad. Y grinha-sim ja ka ta kontsé. Grinha-sim bo tem ke tem vist, bo tem ke tem mut papel, bo tem ke tem mut... mut problema.