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The Palikur people occupy several territories in Brazil (state of Amapá) and French Guyana (Guyane), an ambiguous situation which has a strong impact on their present life in terms of identity, education, language and citizenship. Ever since beginning of the 16th century when Vincente Yañez Pinzon first mentions a Costa de Paricuria (1500), the Palikur identity has been constantly altered and redefined. Incessant movements between the two countries inhabited by the community, along with a certain exposure to religious and linguistic cultural diversity, have contributed to preserving some of the Palikur traditional values and to creating new ones.

Based on our fifteen years of fieldwork in Guyane, spent conducting lexicographical work on a Palikur-French dictionary and sociolinguistic surveys, we shall discuss how the Palikur linguistic situation in Guyane is influenced by the permanent contact (due to borders that are quite difficult to define) between this French département d’outre-mer and Brazil, and how these factors contribute to shaping the identity of this moving population in contemporary Guyane. This deep analysis of the linguistic situation of the Palikur people and of the political, religious and social realities associated to it will also show the roles played by the various languages used by the speakers (several varieties of Palikur, French Guianese Creole, Karipuna Creole, French and sometimes Brazilian Portuguese) and how they contribute to creating complex national/regional/community identities and to defining otherness.

The findings of this work are based on the study of:

• The languages used and the context of use for each (family, casual social interaction with people speaking other languages or with Palikur speakers from other villages, administration, school);
• How language use evolved during the past thirty years;
• Lexical dynamics in various settlements in Guyane and the factors that have an influence on them;
• The speakers’ relation to their native language, especially in Guyane;
• The speakers’ relation to writing in general and to the writing system used in Brazil;
• Political stakes of language use, recognition, conservation and documentation.