Caribbean English and the Literacy Tutor

A Manual

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Published by:
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About the author

Alfred Jean-Baptiste was born in the Caribbean island of St. Lucia. He has written several handbooks, newspaper articles and facilitated numerous workshops on educational, pedagogical, social and political issues. Between 1979 and 1985, Alfred worked as General Secretary of the St. Lucia Teachers' Union. During this time he also served as President of the Caribbean Union of Teachers. While in this post, he visited all of the English-speaking Caribbean islands regularly to consult on issues which impact on the teaching profession and education. For a short time in 1982, Alfred was a Senator in the St. Lucia Parliament and Minister of Community Development and Social Services.

Alfred moved to Toronto in 1985 and is now the Program Coordinator of East End Literacy. He is very active in a number of communities and organizations. He continues to write and facilitate workshops on a range of issues including participatory research and anti-racism.

About this manual

This manual is designed for tutors working with adult learners of Caribbean Creole heritage. It gives tutors historical and socio-cultural information on the Caribbean. Many people make value judgements about a person on the basis of how they speak English. This manual provides tutors with a framework for looking at language in non-judgemental ways, and for viewing language as a reflection of culture and history. In this context, it is hoped that the content will dispel some of the negative myths about varieties of English.

The objectives of this manual are to:

- present information about the languages of the Caribbean, and about the history of Caribbean people;
- present information about Caribbean languages which will help to explain, and encourage tutors and learners to explore, the differences between Canadian and Caribbean varieties of English;
- provide information on specific language structures for the English-speaking Caribbean and some territories.

This manual is divided into five sections: the first section looks at the history of the Caribbean; the second section examines the story of English and how it is used in different parts of the world; the third section looks at the development of Caribbean Creole English and the presence of other varieties of English; the fourth section discusses Caribbean oral tradition and its role and influence on Caribbean identity; and, section five describes the first steps in creating a model for tutoring Caribbean Creole English speakers.

How to use this manual

Each section of this manual contains a set of questions intended to help tutors find the main ideas. These are not exercises but discussion points to deepen understanding and provide tutors with some background knowledge.

Tutors can get together in small groups to discuss the questions and paraphrase the main ideas for each section.

The audio component of the kit includes all of the poetry, songs, folktales and stories which appear in Section 4 (Caribbean Oral Tradition) of this manual. Tutors should use the audiocassette to develop familiarity with the sounds and pronunciation patterns of Caribbean people and the ways in which Creole English is used.

The audio component can also be used in small group or one-to-one tutoring and can be combined with the model discussed in Section 5 *(Literacy Tutors and Caribbean Learners).* The audiocassette can be used to trigger more folktales and proverbs, etc. After listening to relevant parts of the tape, tutors can:

- encourage the learner(s) to describe what they heard and what they think about it;
- ask them to talk about and describe personal experiences with the content;
- if working in a group, ask people to talk about the similarities in their experiences and the differences. If a problem is identified, find out if it is one that other people have;
- ask people to talk about why the problem exists, and what happens because of it. Ask how it relates to other concerns; and,
- ask people to discuss ways in which they can use the content on the tape to develop their reading and writing skills.

Tutors should ask open-ended questions. Every effort should be made to promote a positive self-image and sense of identity.

Introduction

This kit was first conceived in 1992 when the need for a resource supporting tutors of Caribbean learners became obvious at ALFA. Around this time, staff realized that many of the frustrations expressed by tutors working with learners of Caribbean heritage arose from a lack of awareness about the roots and nuances of Caribbean languages and cultures, and how this makes it necessary to do things differently.

We, at ALFA, believe that this awareness is especially important when teaching reading and writing. The majority of our learners are of Caribbean heritage while most of our tutors are of European heritage. Language reflects who we are, where we come from, and what we value. The language we speak reflects the different ways in which we understand and define the world around us. It also influences the way we read and write. A knowledge of the history, language varieties and oral traditions of the Caribbean is the first step towards addressing frustrations caused by unacknowledged differences.

This kit is intended to provide necessary background information to tutors working with learners of Caribbean heritage. It will provoke a lot of thought and discussion around the issue of language. Hopefully, it will challenge our understanding of the role of language in the lives of the learners with whom we work. At the very least, it will educate us all to value the concepts at the root of Caribbean oral tradition.

As a follow up to this kit, ALFA hopes to set up a participatory research project to further explore this subject. This project will include following the progress of learners and documenting techniques used by tutors to address particular challenges. Meanwhile, we hope that you enjoy this kit and that you learn as much as we did while working on it.

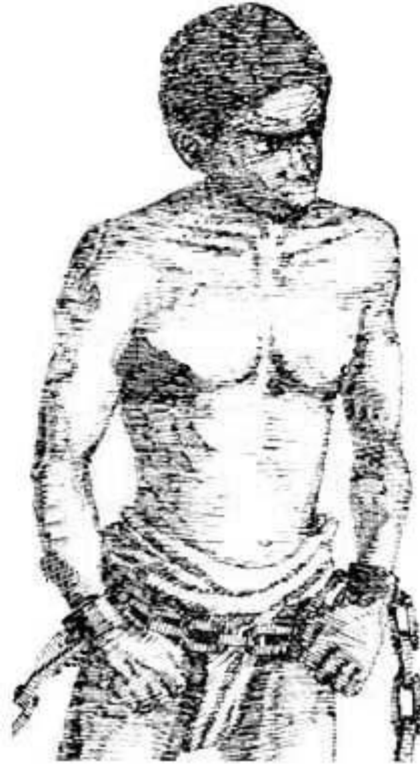
Maxine Mckenzie
ALFA staff
1989-1992

[Locating and Defining the Caribbean]

[The History of the Caribbean]
- The Europeans Arrive
- The Capture and Trade of African People
- The Triangle Trade
- Revolution and Freedom
- Indentured Workers

Connecting Language and Social History
- Language Origins and influences
- Social History

Understanding the Caribbean



The Caribbean

In order to understand where Caribbean English comes from we must first examine the geography, history and social development of the Caribbean. All of these have had a significant impact on whether English is spoken and what varieties of the language have developed.

LOCATING AND DEFINING THE CARIBBEAN

Geography means more than simple location. Even the names of countries go beyond historical factors and associations. In the Caribbean, geography is extremely intricate because of European colonialism. It created links and barriers between the islands without regard for their actual distances from each other, and left the region split into Spanish, British, French and Dutch entities.

The Caribbean islands curve southward from the bottom tip of Florida to the northwest corner of Venezuela in South America. There are at least 7,000 islands, islets, reefs and cays in the region. For example, 700 islands and 2,000 cays make up what we now call The Bahamas. For the purposes of this manual, however, we will concentrate on the countries themselves; that is, we will refer to St. Vincent and the Grenadines and not name the Grenadine islands (such as Bequia) individually.

In defining the Caribbean it is important to combine historical, cultural, linguistic and geographical features. The term most widely used today to define the region is **Caribbean Basin**, which includes:

- **the independent countries** of Antigua-Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad-Tobago, Suriname, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba

- **the UK dependencies** of Anguilla, Montserrat and British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Turks and Caicos, and Bermuda;

- **the US Virgin Islands** of St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John, and Puerto Rico;

- **the Dutch colonies** consisting of Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, St. Eustatius and Saba and part of the island of St. Maarten;

- **the French overseas departments** of Cayenne, Martinique and Guadeloupe; Guadeloupe, in turn has its own dependencies of Desirade, Les Saintes, Marie-Galante, St. Barthelemy and the rest of St. Maarten, known to the French as Saint-Martin.

While there are many factors which distinguish individual or groups of islands from each other, all have a similar geography. For example, with the exception of Guyana, the shores of all Caribbean countries and their territories are washed by the Caribbean Sea. The other similarity is their colonial past.

THE HISTORY OF THE CARIBBEAN

The history of the Caribbean region is similar to the sea that washes its shores. At first glance, the sea seems to be a range of colours from turquoise to royal blue, but a closer look shows the water actually has no colour at all.

Caribbean history is just as complex. At first glance its history may seem easy to tell, but further study reveals something far different – a mixture of legend, myth and distortion. From Columbus' so-called "discovery" to the development of a "tourist paradise", Caribbean history is characterised by cultural genocide, destruction, slavery and colonisation.

The Europeans arrive

Behind the early voyages of exploration was the desire by Spanish financiers to find new sources of wealth. These new sources would compensate for the loss in revenue from traditional Mediterranean routes to the East which were disrupted by the Turks, the Crusaders and the domination of that area by Venice and Genoa. When Christopher Columbus set sail across the Atlantic Ocean in 1492, he mistakenly landed on Guanahani and named it San Salvador (now The Bahamas). The Caribbean at that time was populated by **Arawak** or **Taino** people, the **Caribs**, and in parts of Cuba, the **Ciboney**. Columbus referred to them as Indians, and, thinking it was "The Indies", named the region "The West Indies". Seeing the aboriginal peoples adorned in gold jewellery, Columbus and the Spaniards who followed him, pushed further south into the region seeking precious metals and taking land already inhabited by the native peoples.

In fact, if anyone "discovered" the Caribbean, it was the aboriginal groups, not Columbus.

The two aboriginal peoples in the Caribbean (now generally referred to as Amerindians) to have first contact with the Spanish were the Arawaks, based in The Bahamas (in the northern and western Caribbean), and the Caribs in the eastern Caribbean.

The Spanish treatment of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean is well recovered by historians. Their enslavement was begun by Columbus himself when he carried a number of them back to Spain on his ships. In Hispanola (now Haiti/Dominican Republic), Columbus forced a system of tribute on aboriginal people where he had everyone over fourteen years of age bring a quantity of gold to him every three months. Those who did not bring this tribute were put to death.

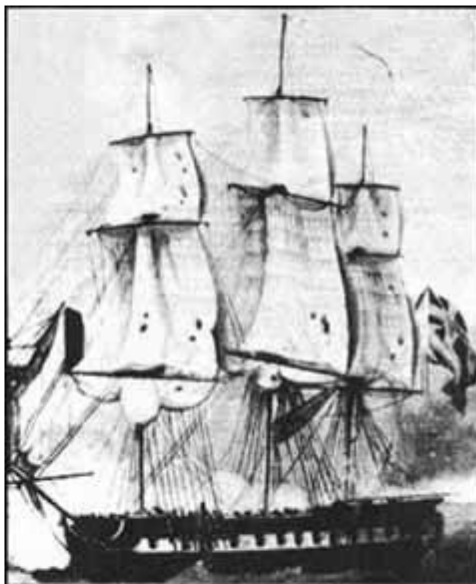
Fierce dogs were brought in from Spain to round up indigenous people throughout the region who escaped to the mountains.

Graphic Courtesy: The Caribbean People (Book 1)

Indigenous people were forced to work in mines. Others had to suply set amount of gold dust each month or face death.

Once found, they suffered great hardships. They were not used to hard labour, so some preferred to kill themselves rather than work for the Spaniards. Some took to the sea in their canoes. Many just died from hopelessness and grief. According to many historians, when Columbus landed in Hispanola the population was over one million. By 1497, one-third of the population was dead.

The Arawaks made a courageous effort to oust the Spanish from the Antilles (the northern and western part of the. Caribbean), but they were defeated by the Spaniard's advanced weaponry and fighting techniques. Those who survived fell victim to the Spaniard's system of forced labour, starvation, abuse and European diseases, particularly smallpox. It was more than a century after the Spanish invasion before any other European nation was able to establish a firm foothold in the Caribbean.



Graphic Courtesy: Caribbean: Survival, Struggle and Sovereignty

Ships like this were used to transport captured African to the Caribbean.

In 1494, the **Treaty of Tordesillas** was signed between Spain and Portugal. These two countries basically divided the world between them by drawing an imaginary line down the centre of the Atlantic Ocean. Every "new" land to the west of that line was for Spain and everything east of it was for Portugal. By the time the other European nations arrived in the Caribbean, the Spanish had already landed in Peru, Cuba, Panama and on the northern coast of South America. The other European nations paid no attention to the treaty and the "imaginary line" and refused to accept Spain's "ownership" of the Caribbean. After years of war with Spain, the British, French and Dutch moved into the region and began to colonise the Eastern Caribbean. The Caribs fought their colonisers for a long period of time but by the mid–17th century, the European's firepower forced the Caribs in Dominica and St. Vincent into the islands' hilly terrains.

French and English settlements on the islands of the Caribbean were, in many ways, different from the early Spanish colonies of the Greater Antilles. Large-scale conquests, gold mining and cattle rearing were the ways by which the Spaniards laid the foundations of their empire. However, the French and English settlers and Dutch traders began on a smaller scale and chose smaller islands for colonisation. They gradually learned to produce a wide variety of tropical goods from which they chose tobacco and cotton as their main cash crops.

With the increase in the tobacco and cotton trade more labourers were required to prepare the land and reap crops. At first, the planters from the northeastern Caribbean islands and Barbados relied on a steady supply of white servants. These servants were not purchased outright, but indentured (placed under contract) to a "master" for a certain period of time. Once in the Caribbean they were fed, clothed, and sheltered at the expense of their "masters". At the end of this term of service the indentured servants were given a small plot of land or money to buy land.

Today, Arawaks can be found only in the interior of Guyana and parts of South America. There are groups of Caribs in parts of Central and South America and Dominica.

British people who broke the law or were captured as rebels were also sent to these islands as their punishment, particularly Barbados, to work as indentured workers in the fields.

The capture and trade of African people

While it is not possible to have a full discussion on the phenomenon of slavery in this manual, there are three points worth raising: first, the capture and trade of African people was a huge operation involving the movement of millions of people for nearly four centuries; second, the principal players in the trade of Africans were four European countries – Britain, Holland, France and Portugal; and, third, all of these countries established bases in West Africa to secure a monopoly on trade for their own possessions and for sale to the Spaniards.

Graphic Courtesy: *the Caribbean People* (Book 1)

A captured African man on auction
in one of the caribbean colonies

It was the Spanish who first began importing people captured in West Africa to replace the aboriginal inhabitants of the Caribbean in the sixteenth century. But it was the advent of sugar, and the need for a cheaper labour force on sugar cane plantations in countries like Barbados which made the slave trade big business.

The Dutch planters in Brazil were the first colonists in the Caribbean to grow sugar extensively. In 1644, they taught the English in Barbados how to grow and manufacture sugar successfully. This gave way to the establishment of a system of sugar production which required large fields and an extended labour force. This system of production was called the **plantation system**. By 1650, Barbados was leading the way in sugar production and the other English and French colonies quickly followed the example. The plantation system significantly changed the pattern of life in the Caribbean, dominating the people, the politics and the social fabric of society. Most importantly, the system was extremely profitable for the plantation owners and their partners abroad.

More than 20 million West Africans were captured and shipped across the Atlantic to work on plantations, but it is estimated that only half survived the journey. The Africans were often held in prisons for a long time before the ships came and then had a long journey, known as **the middle passage**, across the sea to the Caribbean. The Africans were chained together and crammed into holds on board ships and were subject to horrible living conditions, cruelty and torture. Preferring death to slavery, some of the Africans managed to break their chains and dive overboard; others succumbed to disease. Millions of others braved the deplorable journey to face a harsh life on the plantations.

The triangle trade

The transportation of Africans to North America and the Caribbean formed one side of what has become known as the **triangle trade**. Ships would load up with guns, ammunition and manufactured goods in Britain and France, then sail for four months to West Africa where the cargo was exchanged for Africans. Then came the middle passage across the Atlantic, and the sale of the African people in the Caribbean and in North American colonies. Finally, the ships loaded up with the sugar, tobacco and cotton produced in the colonies and sailed back to England and France where the raw produce was refined and re-exported to other countries.[1]

This trade system produced enormous profits for the colonial planters, the traders, and the merchants who financed the trade and processed the sugar. But as profits grew, the Caribbean became a region of war as the British, French and Dutch fought with each other for control. The British and French drove the Dutch out first, then the French and British would attack, seize and occupy each others' colonies. Consequently, many countries changed hands several times between French and British colonisers.

Revolution and freedom

As far back as the 17th century, African people resisted the traders and plantation owners. Some Africans, called Maroons, ran away and set up their own communities in the hills of different islands. Although others could not escape, their resistance did not subside over the entire period of slavery in the Caribbean. It climaxed with the uprising in the French colony of St. Domingue, (now Haiti) when half a million Africans led by **Toussaint L'Ouverture** rose up and established the free republic of Haiti in 1804.

The success of this uprising sent shock waves throughout the Caribbean and gave courage to other enslaved people. There were other revolts throughout the French, Dutch and British colonies. The spread of these uprisings was an indication slavery was coming to an end.

Graphic Courtesy: *Language and power*

The success of the waitian uprising
led by Toussaint L'Ouverture (shown above)
gave courage to other enslaved people.

Also important was the effect of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, which diverted attention away from the sugar industry, leaving the colonies in a period of economic and social crisis. Slavery became unprofitable. Abolitionists used this fact, as well as moral and humanitarian ' arguments to turn public opinion against slavery.

Graphic Courtesy: *Language and Power*

On August 1, 1834 all the enslaved people in the British colonies were declared free. Those in the French islands were freed in 1848.

Indentured workers

Many of the freed Africans left the plantations for work in towns; others set out on their own forming free villages and producing other crops (such as cocoa and nutmeg in Grenada). Even though some freed slaves stayed on the plantations working for wages, there were not enough labourers to keep up production in the sugar cane fields. So the plantation owners brought indentured labourers from India, Asia, Africa and Europe. Most of these workers signed contracts voluntarily, but were under the control of the plantation owners once they arrived in the Caribbean.

Caribbean changed dramatically in the 1800s Population
when migrant workers from India and Asia arrived.

Indentureship had the greatest impact in Trinidad and Guyana, where the sugar industry continued to flourish after it declined in other islands. But generally speaking, with the exception of Haiti, Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico and Barbados, the Caribbean underwent a demographic revolution in the 1800s because of this new immigrant labour. To the black and white colour structure were added people originating from India, China and Japan. More than half a million workers came from India and other parts of Asia to the Caribbean, settling mostly in Guyana and Trinidad, and significantly changing the populations in both these countries. Both societies became multiracial, their dominant populations nearly divided between people of African and Asian descent.

CONNECTING LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL HISTORY

The history and social structure of the Caribbean are the most important influences on what language is spoken and how it is spoken. Colonial history has resulted in the islands being divided today into English-speaking, Spanish-speaking, French-speaking and Dutch-speaking countries.

Caribbean history and social structure are the most important influences on what language is spoken and how it is spoken.

Language Origins and Influences

The Arawak and Carib peoples did not survive long after the Spanish arrived and neither did their languages. However, some of their words did survive. For example, the Spanish were not familiar with such things as tobacco, cassava, or guava, and had no Spanish word for them. So they used Arawak and Carib words, adopting them into Spanish. In the same way, the English absorbed many words (tobacco, cashew, hammock) from Amerindian sources.

From the 17th century to the 19th century, many European languages influenced the Caribbean: first Spanish, then English, French and Dutch, depending on which island was being colonised and by whom. Every time one coloniser would fight and seize control of a colony from another, it would try to erase any trace of the other's language and promptly install its own. As a result, countries show a variety of influences depending on their colonial history. Take Dominica, for example, which changed hands 12 times between Spain, France and Britain. It eventually became a British colony but even today the French influence on the country and language remains strong.

*All part of the Netherlands Antilles

African people who were captured and sold into slavery spoke a number of different languages belonging to the Niger-Congo family of languages from Western and Southern Africa. In the Caribbean, they were forced to learn the colonisers' European languages. Like the Amerindians, while their languages were lost, there are still words used in Caribbean English today that are similar to African words and expressions.

Indentured labourers from India and China also had some marginal impact. By the time they came to the Caribbean there were already stable language patterns, so their languages were absorbed. More importantly, these workers arrived into conditions quite different from those experienced by the African people–that is, they were free, not shackled in chains and sold. Consequently, the presence of indentured workers provided a zone between the White and Black peoples which led to the development of another class.

Word	Meaning	African Word	African Country
duppy	ghost	**dupe**	Guinea
nyam	eat	**unam**	Nigeria
obeah	magic	**o-bayifo**	Ivory Coast, Ghana
susu	whisper, gossip	**susu**	Benin, Ghana, Togo
unu(unoo)	you (plural)	**unu**	Nigeria
Jook	stab, jab, poke	**jukka**	Burkina Faso, Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal

However, these workers did contribute to the cultural development of particular countries. For example, in Trinidad where a high concentration of Asian people migrated, many words still used for foods today such as *roti, daal* and *baji* are Indian in origin. Or in Jamaica, *peaka peow*, a popular gambling game was introduced by the Chinese.

All of these factors have had an impact on what language is actually spoken in each country and how it is spoken. For example, St. Lucia and Dominica are considered English-speaking countries, but as mentioned earlier, the French influence remains constant in their language and has emerged as a French **creole** spoken by the majority of people.

Social history

The plantation system created a pyramid structure of the society which matched the linguistic structure. That is, those at the top of the social structure mastered the European languages, those at the bottom were the furthest away from it.

From what we have learned so far about the relationship between history, language and social/class development in the region, it is fair to say Caribbean languages are influenced by the complex nature of the region's history

This has resulted in the development of Caribbean Creole English (Creole English) with its own set of nuances, accents and vocabularies.

As this manual will show, speakers of Caribbean Creole English (like speakers of other varieties of English) learning to read and write in another environment are presented with one particular difficulty. Not only do they have to learn the mechanics of reading and writing, they have the added pressure of sounding out words based on pronunciation patterns which are different from their own. Section 5 (*Literacy Tutors and Caribbean Learners*) of this manual provides tutors with a framework for working with Caribbean people which uses their language experiences as a basis for tackling their learning needs.

Endnotes

1. Elizabeth.Coelho, Caribbean Students in Canadian Schools, Book One, (Carib-Can Publishers), Toronto, Canada, 1988.

Understanding the Caribbean

Discussion Points:

- Which territories make up the Caribbean?
- Who were the first people in the Caribbean?
- Who were the first Europeans in the Caribbean?
- Why did they come to the Caribbean?
- What do you think were the reasons for the disappearance of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean?
- Describe what happened in the triangle trade.
- What are some of the factors which contributed to the end of slavery?
- What happened to the languages of the Africans in the Caribbean?
- Given its historical implication, why do you think some Caribbean people would reject the use of the term "West Indian"?
- How important do you think history and social development are in defining a language?

The Story of English 2

[Language and Society]

[Sociological Factors]

[Standard English]

- [Spelling And Pronunciation]
- [Writing System]
- [Grammatical Forms]

[A Few Words About Canadian English]

[Understanding the Story of English]

The Story of English

LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY

Language is not simply a means of communicating information. It is also a very important way of establishing and maintaining relationships with other people. Whenever we speak we give our listeners clues about our origins and personality; our accent and speech generally show where we come from and may tell a little about our background. By communicating, we may even give an indication of our ideas and attitudes on various issues from which our listener(s) can formulate an opinion about us.

Therefore, the social aspects of language are very important in establishing social relationships and conveying information about the speaker. Both of these aspects of language behaviour reflect the close relationship between language and society. They are also closely tied to the social structure and value systems of society where different dialects and accents are evaluated. British English, for example, is seen by many as having much more status and prestige than any other English dialect. It is highly valued by many people and certain economic, social and political benefits are enjoyed by those who speak and write it.

In fact, the English accent is often described as being correct, beautiful, nice, pure and so on. Other varieties are often said to be wrong, ugly, corrupt or lazy. **Standard English**, moreover, is frequently considered to be *the* English language. This somehow assumes other varieties of English deviate from the norm; the deviation being due to laziness, ignorance or lack of intelligence. In this way, millions of people who have English as their mother tongue are persuaded they do not speak "English" at all.

Standard languages originated as local dialects, or combinations of several dialects. They became more widely used, not for any inherent qualities they possessed, but because of the socially- or politically-dominant position of the people who spoke them. Once a language has been adopted as a medium of expression in literature, government, education, and other specialised areas, it becomes the standard or "official" language.

Standard English is the variety of English used in publishing, by the media, and which is normally taught in schools. It is also the variety normally spoken by formally – educated people.

Whether English is spoken in North America, the Caribbean or Europe, there exist standard and non-standard variations. And, within Standard English, there are a small number of regional differences which tend to attract attention. Standard Scottish English is not the same as Standard British English, for example, or Standard Canadian English is somewhat different from Standard American English.

Graphic Courtesy: *Language and Power*

The history of the english language is also the history of the different groups of people who invaded and took power in England

Generally speaking, however, Standard English has a widely accepted, codified grammar and vocabulary. However, this does not apply to pronunciation. There is no universally acknowledged standard accent for English, and it is, at least in theory, possible to speak Standard English with any regional or social accent.

Just as there are differences between countries, provinces, and regions, no two individuals speak in exactly the same way. Everyone has a unique form of speech. Differences in forms of speech because of geographical or colonial separation or other reasons, usually mean that one group of people has common speech characteristics that another group does not share, even though the groups speak the same language.

So far we have used the terms *dialect* and *accent*. Neither represents a particularly clear-cut concept, but it is important to distinguish between the two. The term **dialect** refers to differences between types of the same language which mostly relate to vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. The term **accent** refers solely to differences of pronunciation. In the English language even Standard English is a dialect. In many important respects this dialect is different from other English dialects, and some people may find it surprising to see it referred to as a

dialect at all. However, in so far as it differs grammatically and lexically from other varieties of English, it can be considered a dialect. The term dialect can be used to apply to all varieties of a language, not just non-standard varieties.

Once a language has been adopted as a medium of expression in literature, government and education, it becomes the standard or "official" language.

The study of language has convinced most linguists that all languages and thus all dialects, are equally good. All varieties are structured, complex, rule-governed systems which fully meet the needs of their speakers. Therefore, value judgments concerning the correctness and purity of language varieties are *social* rather than linguistic.

SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS

Language, as we have seen, is not simply a means of communicating messages. It is also a symbol of identity and group membership. To suggest that a person's language, and that of the people with whom she identifies, is inferior in some way implies that she is inferior. In teaching environments this attitude, whether conscious or sub-conscious, often leads to a teaching approach geared towards the elimination of what is considered non-standard speech. For example, the person may be told it is "wrong" to say *I done it*, *I ain't got it*, or *He a good guy*. It is therefore implied that the teacher's speech is "correct" and "good"–the model to aim for. This, in turn, is likely to lead to alienation and/or rejection. It is also socially wrong because it may appear that certain social groups are less valuable than others.

Origins of Some "English" Words

Words	Language	How they came into English
teas	Chinese	from trade with China
bungalowcot	Hindi	from the time Britain colonised India
tomato **chocolate**	Nahuatl (A Mexican language)	these foods were introduced to Europe by the Spanish who had colonised Central and south America
hurricane	Carib	from the time Britain colonised the Caribbean

This is particularly undesirable when the language being stigmatised is that of another racial or ethnic group. In the tutor-learner environment, this is as a practice wrong because it does not and will not work. As most of us know, learning a new language is very challenging. But, learning a new dialect of one's own language is in many ways more difficult because both dialects are so similar, it is hard to keep them apart.

STANDARD ENGLISH

As we have already established, the fact that English is an international language does not mean it is spoken the same everywhere. There are several accepted standards, and even within each of these, there are contradictory and confusing rules. It is a complicated and challenging language. For instance:

Spelling and pronunciation: There are 26 letters in the English alphabet but more than 50 different and distinct sounds. There are two sounds written as [th]: **th**ere or for**th**, yet modern English does not distinguish between them in spelling. These and many other examples show there is considerable distance in English between the sounds of words and their spellings. This is due partly to borrowing from other languages and because spelling only began to be formalised during the 1700s in England. The way we pronounce English words has changed since then but the spelling has not. The result is that 80 percent of English words are not spelled the way they are pronounced.

In most language, if you know what sounds the letters make you can work out how to read a word or how to write it. In English, the same sound can be written in lots of different ways.

Writing system: People interested in simplifying the way English is written say spelling is not the only source of confusion. For instance, the use of the apostrophe to show possession: many people still do not know the difference between *it's* and *its*; or, the rules of capitalization which call for an upper case letter to mark proper nouns and the beginnings of sentences.

Grammatical forms: English has eight grammatical endings, three of which are [-s]. It marks plural nouns, possessives, and present tense verbs. English also has many verbs that follow no predictable pattern in their tense and person changes. Some form their past tense by adding [-d], [-ed], or [-t] (e.g., walk/ walk**ed**, bend/ben**t**). Others go through internal vowel changes (begin/**began**, sing/**sung**), or undergo both. Some do not change at all. Even skillful users of English sometimes have to pause before using the past tense of such verbs as swim, shrink, dive, shine or sneak.

Rules for placement of commas and quotation marks vary from one English-speaking country to another. Conventions for spelling and punctuation can also change within one country over time, as authors of various literatures take liberties with this and that rule and as the public accepts or disposes of the changes.

For all that, English lacks some words that are necessary. The English language needs separate singular and plural second person pronouns. Many dialects of English have solved this problem by using the word *you* for one person, *y'all* for more than one. Other dialects of English have accommodated this need in other ways with *you 'uns, youse, you guys.*

Over its 200 year of existence as a predominantly English-speaking nation, Canada has developed a distinct vocabulary.

English also needs a new gender neutral form for an unidentified person. Historically and grammatically *he* serves this function. Furthermore, why is it that a woman can man a station but a man cannot woman one?

A FEW WORDS ABOUT CANADIAN ENGLISH

It is difficult to decide which had the greatest historical impact on Canadian English: the Loyalists with their anti-American pro-British bias, or the British, who saw Canada as a good place to send their surplus population. When the Loyalists arrived they established schools and universities wherever they settled and may be credited with founding a good part of the educational systems of Ontario and the Maritime provinces ." Many doubt whether "American English" existed at that time for the Loyalists to bring it with them to Canada[2]. But it is a fact that long before the end of the 18th century, a distinctive American speech had begun to emerge.

Language experts disagree about the early influences on Canadian English but it is safe to say it would have been mostly 18th-century American, heavily flavoured with British English, with a bit of Scottish, Acadian French, and German. It should be noted that Newfoundland, which did not become a part of Canada until 1949, was the first English-speaking colony in North America. Following the landing of Sir Humphrey Gilbert in 1583, the island was colonised almost wholly by settlers from Ireland and the southwest counties of England. By 1763, when Labrador was added to the governorship of Newfoundland by the Treaty of Paris, the population comprised of some 8,000 people whose distinctive brand of English was relatively unaffected by prevailing North American speech patterns.

Canadian English Speakers seem to move arbitrarily between British and American usage.

Over its 200 years of existence as a predominantly English-speaking nation, Canada has developed a distinct vocabulary. C.J. Lovell classifies Canadian vocabulary[3] under at least 16 headings. Here are a few examples:

- **Direct adoptions from Native languages**, such as pemmican, shaganapi;
- Loan-words from Canadian French, frequently with Native antecedents, such as babiche, caribou, cariole;
- **Words originating in Canada** but adapted from existing words, such as chesterbed, mountie, Socred;
- **Everyday words formed into combinations**, such as apartment block, bush pilot, New Canadian;
- **Words replacing those often used in England**, such as elevator (lift), gasoline (petrol), movies (cinema), sidewalk (pavement).

Considerable variation in language usage exists in Canada not merely from speaker to speaker, but often in the same speaker. And it is clear that Canadians do not possess anything like a standard pronunciation. They seem to move arbitrarily between British and American usage. This divided usage was the focus of a study conducted by Walter S. Avis which revealed considerable diversity among Ontario speakers in their pronunciation of many everyday words.[4] He conclured:

.... [In Ontario] the implication seems to be that British forms are apt to have greater currency at the top of the social pyramid, American forms greater currency at the popular level. But the most significant conclusion to be drawn from this survey is that Ontario English (and surely Canadian English generally) is neither American nor British, but different in many respects from both in vocabulary, grammar and syntax, and pronunciation.

Endnotes

1. This aspect of Loyalist activities has yet to be adequately studied. See Report of the Historiographer of the Education Department of the Province of Ontario for the Year 1908, "What We Owe to the United Empire Loyalists in the Matter of Education", Toronto, 1909.

2. "Canadians Speak Canadian", Saturday Night, December 8, 1956, p. 16-18.

3. "Whys and Hows of Collecting for the Dictionary of Canadian English": 1, Scope and Source Material, October, 1955, pp. 3-8.

4. W.S. Avis, "Speech Differences Along the Ontario-United States Border", 111: Pronunciation, 1956, pp. 41-59. The information came from two multiple choice questionnaires circulated at Queen's University and the Royal Military College, Kingston, Ontario in 1949-1950 and 1954-1955.

Understanding the Story of English

Discussion Points:

- How do standard languages originate?
- Is there such a thing as pure English?
- How has the English language been affected by different groups of people in power?
- What are some of the factors which cause language variation?
- Why are some languages not thought to be as good as others?
- What is considered an "official" language ?
- When did the idea of a standard version of English first begin to take root?
- When one language variety is seen as the standard, what happens to the other varieties?
- Do Canadians use British or American spelling?
- In what ways is Canadian English different from American English?

Language Varieties in the Caribbean

3

Language Varieties in the Caribbean

- Creole English
- Foreign English Influences
- Erudite English
- Rasta English
- Standard English

Differences Between Territories

- Guyana
- Antigua
- Jamaica
- Trinidad
- Dominica and St. Lucia

Understanding Language Varieties in the Caribbean

Language Varieties in the Caribbean

LANGUAGE VARIETIES IN THE CARIBBEAN

In the Caribbean, there is a great deal of variation in the way English is spoken. As a result, many Caribbean people are unsure what to call their own language.

Patwa[1] is what we talk
among each other
like
when we don't want you to know
what we're saying!
I didn't know what it was called
until I come here.
A lady I work for ask
what was Jamaica's language,
what I was speaking.
I said English.

Sometimes they say
I speak different from the other
Jamaicans.
Why do I speak different?
It depends on the different area.
There's rural areas
and there's urban areas.
The culture is a bit different
so even though we are all Jamaicans,
people tend to speak different.[2]

The value system of colonial society has done much to diminish the West African influence in Caribbean language. From the middle of the 19th century, when schooling became more widespread in the Caribbean, British people insisted that creole languages had no place in schools in their colonies. This happened in Trinidad, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Grenada, St. Lucia, Antigua and many others.

People speaking a creole language were considered uneducated. This belief, along with no knowledge of the influence of their ancestral African languages, left many Caribbean people to think of Caribbean Creole languages negatively.

There are at least five variations of English in use in the Caribbean today. Each variety is connected by a chain of similarities. The term **dialect continuum** is used to explain this pattern. In the case of the Caribbean these variations include Creole English, Rasta English, Foreign English, Erudite English and Standard English. Most Caribbean people can operate in Creole English and, depending on the context, at least one other.

Creole Erudite Foreign Rasta Standard English English English English English

Each Caribbean country has its own distinctive accent and local dialect that can also be placed on the continuum between Creole and Standard English. In some cases the dialects at either end of the continuum are actually quite different.

Creole English

The term **Caribbean Creole English or Creole English** establishes a connection between the same or similar patterns occurring within the Caribbean territories. The following are certain common features:

The British insisted creole languages had no place in schools in their colonies.

- Some forms of Caribbean Creole English do not use vowel sounds in the way that classic phonics-based teaching approaches require. For example, in Standard English where the phonic method identifies a short [o] sound in words such as *pot*, Jamaicans use an [a] sound which produces the sound pat. Or, Barbadians may say *tremble* as ***trimble*** and *catch* as ***cetch***; the vowel sound in ch[ee]r is equivalent to the vowel sound in *ch**ai**r, beer/b**ar**e, hair/ h**ere**, fare/**fear*** and so on.
- Two consonants after a vowel are usually reduced to one consonant in Creole English; that is, the last consonant disappears. The following are examples:

last	**[las]**
blind, kind, find	**[-ain]**
bend, bond, band	**[b-n]**

Where the two consonants are followed by a vowel (test, testing) the reduction does not take place. However, the plurals of nouns ending with [-st], [-sp], and [-sk] are often pronounced as desses for desk and fesses for test.

- Creole English has a [y] sound after the consonants [k] and [g] before a centre vowel [a]. For example:

kyar car	**gyarden** garden
kyan can't	**gyas** gas
kyat cat	

The terms "broken English" and "bad English" Have no foundation or support in linguistics.

This exists in several dialects of English. In some cases, it helps to distinguish some dialects of British speech from American. For example, the words news and tune, may be pronounced by British English speakers as *nyuz* and *tyun*; while American speakers will say *nuz* and *tun*. This feature is noticeable in Caribbean Creole English because there is more of it.

- Creole English has a structure which conveys information in short sentences. The casual observer identifies these sentences as having no verb. For example: *She real nice* or *They out there*. It is interesting to note that this usually happens when Standard English contractions are used – *is* becomes ['s] or *are* becomes ['re].

- A notable feature of Caribbean Creole English is the number of equal stress patterns. In English, words of more than one syllable have one syllable which is said with stronger emphasis. For example:

standard **pow**er cr**eat** re**cord**

However, in Caribbean Creole English, there are words where all the syllables are stressed, like **water, Canada,** and **Jamaica.**

- In spoken or written English, go and come are sometimes followed directly by another verb. For example: Go get it; Go fetch; and Come see it. In Creole English, verb constructions can be much more elaborate and not restricted to clauses with the verbs go and come. Some examples:

Creole English has a structure which conveys information in short sentences

Carry it come	**Run** fast **go tek** it up gi me
Run come see it	Di man **tek** whip **beat** di children dem

- Finally, in Standard English simple past tense is usually marked by a sound represented in spelling by the addition of [-d] or [-ed], or by a strong verb: break/broke. In Caribbean Creole English, the distribution of an event through time (whether it is repeated, continuous or completed) tends to be of greater importance than tense. Once a specific time context has been established, there is no need to mark for tense. Only when there is a time shift will it be necessary for the tense to be re-established. Examples:

Creole	Standard English
Yesterday I run for the bus.	Yesterday I ran for the bus.
The car stop at the lights.	The car stopped at the lights.
The food finish	The food is finished.

Foreign English Influences

Foreign English refers to the presence, in the Caribbean, of the variety of English spoken in Britain, America and Canada. However, it is not only produced by foreigners. Many Caribbean people will imitate a British accent on the north coast of the island. The result is that many Jamaicans have developed an acute facility in moving from one type of English to another.

> In Creole English, the distribution of an event though time tend to be of greater importance than tense.

when speaking with an English person or an American accent when speaking with an American. The extent to which this is done varies from individual to individual. It is likely to be inconsistent and exaggerated since it is based on the individual's perception and is usually limited to a few salient items, generally pronunciation and words.

However, this is not unique to the Caribbean person. For example, a British or American person imitating Caribbean speech will do three things: 1) insert *man* or *mon* before and after almost every clause; 2) change every [th] to [t] or [d] as in *ting/thing* or *dat/that*; and, 3) use a "sing-song" or Jamaican accent. The result sounds quite unusual to the Caribbean person.

Although radio and television serve unconsciously as sources of training in Foreign English, it is tourism more than any other factor which contributes to its existence. Therefore, how much of it actually exists is directly related to the level of tourism in each country. Guyana, for example, has had little or no increase in foreign tourists over the past 25 years and very few Guyanese returned home during most of this period. Consequently, there has been little change in the linguistic development. Trinidad's tourism industry has gradually increased over the years, but its economy has not been dependent on tourism as a main contributor. Again, there has been little change in the language in relation to Foreign English.

Jamaica's situation is quite different. There is a considerable movement of Jamaicans in and out of the United States and Canada; there are traditional and strong links with Britain and the English language; there is a very strong love and promotion of things Jamaican and for their particular dialect, Jamaican Creole; and, there has always been a significant amount of tourism on the north coast of the island. The result is that many Jamaicans have developed an acute facility in moving from one type of English to another.

A British or American person imitating Caribbean speach
will often use a "sing-song" or Jamaican accent.
The result sounds quite unusual to the Caribbean person.

The other islands in the Caribbean are increasingly dependent on tourism, but are not yet as dominated by the industry as Barbados. In St. Lucia and Dominica (where English is the *official* language), the fact that Frenchbased Creole is the native language of most of the people means that exposure to Foreign English is more restricted. The spectrum of English in these two islands is narrower and there is greater concern to speak English well than to imitate foreigners.

At this time it is difficult to say which direction and to what extent the development of language is being pushed in the Caribbean. There is some indication however that the traditional attitude of regarding one form of language as a threat to another is being replaced with a greater tolerance for and appreciation of the different forms of language.

Erudite English

Erudite English contains features clearly suggesting the speaker is quite skillful with words, phrases and idioms, especially older and foreign ones. Erudite English embraces performance, biblical and proverbial English.

The sole intention of the speaker is to impress by sound, length or unusual combinations of words. The listener most often does not seek any great meaning or philosophical content, but reacts as one normally does to poetry and music. Meetings, religious services, songs or social functions were most often the contexts for the use of extreme forms of performance English. At these events, the speeches would contain long sentences with many Latin and Greek words and biblical phrases.

Tourism and immigration have contributed to Jamaicans having
developed an acute facility to move from one
type of English to another.

The Bible was introduced in the Caribbean at the very beginning of European colonisation and its influence remains strong. It was the instrument of the church and the church was at the root of general education. At all levels, church-controlled education involved rote learning, especially of the Bible. As a result, a demonstration of in-depth knowledge of the Bible was a clear indication of higher learning

Rasta English

The Rastafarian belief system is a combination of African cultural themes, old testament Christianity and elements of Marcus Garvey's preaching. As an ideology, it offers a reversal of the social order and a positive self image for all Black people. It also offers a way of speaking which easily integrates into the local dialects of the Caribbean.

The language of Rastafari is Jamaican Creole modified to reflect the philosophy of the Rasta. There are at least three processes of word formation within the Rastafarian lexicon. The syntax of Jamaican Creole is left intact except for the substitution of the form **I** or **I and I** for the Jamaican pronoun, **me**. The reason for this change is not entirely to do with syntax. The sound [ai] is important in the speech of the Rastafari. It is a sound with a positive force. In the pure Jamaican Creole, the first person singular in all its cases is expressed by the pronoun, me: **Me** have **me** book

The sole intention of the speakers using Erudite English is to impress by sound, length or unusual combinations of words.

The plural of the first person is always, we: *Them see **we** with **we** book.* Rastas believe this creole pronoun me shows subservience, and self-degradation. In one word-making process, the initial syllable in any number of words is replaced by the sound [ai] or the letter I, as in ***I**-laloo* for *calaloo* creating a large vocabulary of I words.

The sound [ai] is related also to the word eye; which they define as the centre of sight allowing the Rasta to be "far seeing" when compared to the non-Rasta whose sight is limited.

Just as sight is positive so blindness is negative. So, for example, ***ci**garette* becomes ***blain**jaret.* This type of replacement forms the basis of another process in which words are remade so they convey a better meaning. A word like *oppress*, when defined as the action of keeping a person down, is unacceptable in Rasta culture and language because [op-] is phonetically the same as *up* and inconsistent with the meaning of that word. So, in Rasta idiom it becomes ***down**press/oppress and **down**pression/oppression.*

There are also words which retain their Standard English forms but change their meanings. Examples: forward (*to leave or depart*); and *babylon (any person seen as part of the establishment).*

The spread of Rasta philosophy and the spread of the language owes much to reggae music and the popularity of its lyrics sung by Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Jimmy Cliff and Burning Spear to name a few. Rastafari singers also view their role as a social and religious responsibility. It is not by chance that Bob Marley's music carried messages calling for *downpressed* people to:

> *Emancipate yourself from mental slavery*
> *none but ourselves can free our minds.....*

> Rastafarian ideology offers a reversal of the social order and a positive self image for all Black people.

Playing with the sounds and structures of words has also been regarded by Rastas as an attempt to make the words more logical or more consistent with progressive thinking. However, Rasta language is not only a matter of changing words; Rasta speech contains very strong pronunciation, sentence and conversational features designed to create an unmistakable style of speaking.

From its very beginnings Rasta English has fuelled the argument about whether the English language itself is a deliberate tool of colonialism and "downpression", or whether it is the path to progress and an integral part of the Caribbean. The fact that English is the official language in most Caribbean territories means that *babylon* has accepted it as the path to progress. At the same time it is generally realised that most people from the English-speaking Caribbean are discriminated against because they have not "mastered" the language of the coloniser. Rastafarianism is seen by some as a means of escaping these two realities and establishing independence and self-confidence.

Standard English

Standard English in this context refers to English which is characteristically Caribbean without being Creole English. There are marked differences between the Standard English spoken in the Caribbean and the type spoken in Canada, Britain, or the United States.

Caribbean Standard English differs because it gets most of its character from its pitch, stress and general tone and not from consonants and vowels. Take the word *calypso* for example: other varieties of English give the word the pattern *ca*-***lyp***-*so*, with primary stress and high pitch on the second syllable.

> Playing with the sounds and structure of words has also been regarded by Rastas as an attempt to make the words more logical or more consistent with progressive thinking.

A typical Caribbean pattern for the word is **ca-lyp**-so, with primary stress on the first two syllables and high pitch on the last syllable.

Many factors in Caribbean history and culture have also provided Caribbean Standard English with characteristic acceptable words, meanings and phrases. These are of several sorts: there are irreplaceable words like *calypso, bush tea*, and *ackee*; there are old words like *stupidness* and *cuffuffle*; new words like *shirtjac, irie* and *ital*; and, there are words with unique Caribbean meanings like *tea (any hot drink), lime (to visit)* and *cool out (to relax).*

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TERRITORIES

To most Caribbean people and some non-Caribbean people as well, the linguistic differences between Jamaicans and Trinidadians are noticeable and easily explained; the differences between Kittitians and Anguillans are not, but the perception of difference by the people of these two islands is no less real.

Within the Caribbean, only Barbados and Jamaica are famous linguistically. Jamaican Creole is seen as being different in all areas of grammar, which makes Jamaica stand out. While it is the characteristic pronunciation marking Barbadian speech which draws attention. Trinidadian and Guyanese speech are recognisable because of the numbers and importance of these people in the Caribbean. However, their speech is not identified with the same enthusiasm as Jamaican and Barbadian speech.

> Rasta speech contains very strong pronunciation, sentence and conversational features which create an unmistakable style of speaking.

Each territory has its own peculiarities of pronunciation, vocabulary, and style. A few examples follow:

Guyana

Guyanese produce the first vowel in words such as dirty, thirty, and Thursday further back in the mouth to sound like the vowel in door. Like Jamaica, Antigua and St. Kitts, Guyana has the [a] sound in words like job/***jab***, dog/ ***dag***, got/***gat*****.**

Guyanese, like Jamaicans, use *mek* to link clauses establishing cause and result:

She cuss him up proper <u>mek</u> he lef she.
Dem take way the thing <u>mek</u> me no got none no more.

Guyana and Trinidad also have more names for Indian dress, food, festivals and other cultural items than most other Caribbean territories. Words such as *daalpuri, masala* and *sari* are well known in Trinidadian and Guyanese vocabularies.

There are a number of English words used in Guyana, the meanings of which are totally unfamiliar to people outside of the country. Note how the words *uplift* and *transport* are used in the following examples:

> Within the Caribbean, only Jamaica and Barbados are famous linguistically....

Mary gone a post office fu uplift one parcel.
Mary has gone to the post office to collect a parcel.

I bin at me lawyer to uplift the transport.
I went to my lawyer to get the title-deed.

Antigua

The general structure of speech in Antigua is similar to Jamaica. However, Antigua has its own specific characteristics. Antiguans produce the consonants [tr] as [ch]. Therefore the words *three* and *truck* sound like *chee* and *chuck*. The sound of [dr] also changes in the same way to [j]. The words drink and *drunk* sound like *jink* and *junk*.

In order to indicate past tense, Antiguans use the word min:

You min eat	You ate
You min a eat	You were eating

Like Jamaicans, Antiguans say *laugh after* meaning *laugh at* and *look pon* when saying *look at*; or, they say *anybody for me meaning any of my relatives*.

Like St. Lucia and Barbados, Antiguans use *by to* mean *at the home of*. For example, I *went by you yesterday*.

> ...but each Caribbean territory has its own peculiarities
> of pronunciation, vocabulary, and style.

Antiguan speech also has a number of peculiarities which are unknown outside the country. Note the usages of *walk with* (meaning to bring) and *empty* (meaning only or nothing but):

When you coming walk with two limes.
When you're coming bring two limes.

He doesn't have any mangoes, he has empty figs.
He doesn't have any mangoes, he only has bananas.

Jamaica

As mentioned before, Jamaica's speech is quite complex. It has a number of peculiarities, some pervasive and strong, others not. The strong and pervasive ones are in pronunciation. The omission and addition of [h] at the beginning of a word or syllable have occurred in the history of many languages (for example, the French pronounce *hotel* as *otel*, keeping the [h] silent). In the Caribbean, this feature is only characteristic of Jamaicans. It is prominent because it is pronounced at the beginning of words which begin with vowels, and not pronounced where the [h] actually does occur. The following words are some examples:

> Antiguan speach has a number of peculiarities, some of wich are unknown outside the country.

airport is pronounced **hairport**
eggs/**heggs**

ounce/**hounce**

have is pronounced eve
help/**elp**
had/**ad**

Another strong feature of Jamaican speech is the insertion of [w] and [ay] in the words like ***bw****ay/boy*, ***bw****ayl/boil*, and *sp****way****l/spoil*. This feature is prominent despite the small number of words where it actually occurs because of the frequency of the words themselves in normal everyday speech.

Some words which characterise Jamaican speech are *pikni or pikney (child/ren), maasta (master)*, and *facety (bold face or barefaced)*.

Another layer to the general Caribbean Creole English in Jamaica is Jamaican Creole. The linguistic differences between Jamaican Creole and Standard English are so great that Jamaican Creole is considered a language on its own.

Trinidad

Two strong features of Trinidadian speech are the exclamation *eh eh*! and the use of go before the verb to indicate the future: I go *eat now*. Trinidadians also use dem with the words man and boy(s), as in *Leh me know what the* ***man and dem*** *go do; I went down by the* ***boys and dem.***

> The ommission and addition of [h] at the beginning of a word or syllable is characteristic of Jamaican speech

In its vocabulary Trinidadian speech is outstanding in naming cultural words relating to Carnival, supernatural beliefs and folklore, and also in words for fruits, plants and animals. These areas of Trinidadian vocabulary overwhelmingly show words of French Creole and French origin such as, *jourvert (jour overt), ligarou* and *pomme citerre*

In the more general vocabulary of Trinidadians is the word *mamaguy* meaning to tease by flattery. There is also the word *picong* which means the exchange of teasing and even insulting repartee, generally in a lighthearted manner. Another typical Trinidadian word is *maco* which refers to a special kind of undue inquisitiveness.

Dominica and St. Lucia

In Dominica and St. Lucia, English varies from being the second language of some people to the native language of others. The pronunciation, syntax and vocabulary are greatly influenced by French Creole. The best known features, also common in Grenada and Trinidad, are:

It have a man in town who....
There is a man in town who...

It making hot.
It is hot.

And, using **Wi** (oui - French / yes - English) as a tag:

Trinidadian speech is outstanding in naming cultural words relating to Carnival, supernatural beliefs and folklore.

It making hot, wi!
It is hot, yes!

In St. Lucia, **wi** occurs normally as **i** (meaning, you know) as in:

We do it, i! We did it, you know!
It turning, i! It's turning, you know!
She dat give it to me, i! It is she who gave it to me, you know!

In St. Lucia in particular, the [th] sound at the beginning of words sounds like [f]. For example: ***fri****/three,* ***fot****/thought,* ***fing****/thing.*

Finally, the fact that English is a formally learned language for many in these two islands is quite apparent, particularly when Standard English and specifically the auxiliary verbs *be, do,* and *have* are being used. Spoken formal English is characterised by constructions such as *I'm, he's, don't*, and *hasn't*, but in Dominica and St. Lucia the full forms, I *am*, etc., are more frequently used. All English speakers have to learn to spell words which they pronounce the same. Tutors

are familiar with the fact that most English speakers, for example, pronounce *beat* and *beet, meat* and *meet* the same. In the case of Caribbean English speakers, it may not be clear whether the problem is grammatical or phonological (sound). For example, if a learner says *I pass by the house yesterday*, this could indicate one of three things:

- the learner has no concept of past tense;
- the learner has a concept of past tense, but does not use the [-ed] suffix to mark past tense; or,
- the learner understands the use of [-ed] as a marker of past tense, but does not actually pronounce it in speech because of the cluster of two consonants in the word pass. (*See the section on Creole English*.)

In St. Lucia and Dominica, the pronunciation, syntax and vocabulary are greatly influences by French Creole.

The answer to this problem will be of considerable importance to the tutoring strategy and to understanding a learner's reading and writing difficulties. An apparent reading mistake may simply be a pronunciation difference; the learner may have a different set of homonyms from the tutor in that she pronounces *passed* and *pass* the same. For him/her, *pass* and *passed* are different words with distinct meanings which, like *meat* and *meet*, are not actually distinguished in pronunciation. On the other hand, it might mean the learner has no recognition of [-ed] as a past tense marker, and therefore [-ed] is simply a group of meaningless silent letters. It is obviously essential for the tutor to try to distinguish clearly between the two cases through reading and spelling exercises.

It is also important for the tutor to have some knowledge of the learner's language variety, with an appreciation of the sounding of certain words, in order to estimate what are and are not reading mistakes.

Endnotes

1. The term **patwa** (patois) refers to the social function of a language. It applies primarily to the spoken language and is limited to informal situations.

2. **Some People Is Asking,** St. Christopher House Adult Literacy Program Publications, 1989, Toronto, Ontario, pp. 22-23.

Understanding Language Varieties in the Caribbean

Discussion Points:

- What terms have you heard used to describe the languages spoken by people in the Caribbean?
- Which terms do you find positive and which ones do you think are negative?
- Why do you think the colonisers spent time opposing and attacking Creole languages?
- Why do you think some Caribbean people are ashamed of their Creole languages?
- What are the varieties of English found in the Caribbean?
- Why do you think some varieties of a language are accepted in certain types of writing, but not in others?

Caribbean Oral Tradition 4

[Caribbean Oral Tradition]

[Proverbs in the Caribbean]

[Folktales and Music]

[Dub Poetry]

[Selections in Caribbean Oral Tradition]

[Understanding Caribbean Oral Tradition]

Photo Courtesy: (top) Bob Marley, "Songs Of Freedom", Island records (bottom) Merle Collins, *Language and Power*

Caribbean Oral Tradition

CARIBBEAN ORAL TRADITION

"Ranny, where yu is?"
"Leaning up aghence a banana tree."
"Which banana tree?"
"The banana tree dat is leaning aghence me. "
Louise Bennett (Miss Lou) & Ranny Williams

Cultural traditions exist for many reasons. They keep us rooted, but they also point to the future. They set us in motion and they also give us balance. They show us the darkest parts of our history, and the brightest points of our hope.

Traditions take many forms: the knowledge, skills, and practices that grow and evolve among people; the way of celebrating life, love, and the beauty that surrounds us; the myths and stories that interpret our world; and the values and beliefs that give us strength, hope, faith, and dignity.

The Africans who were brought to the Caribbean arrived in chains and stripped of all possessions. Still, there was one thing which could not be taken away from them – the memory of their former way of life. The plantation system did not allow them to live as they had been accustomed but they could recall their African folktales, songs and dances. They knew how to use tropical herbs as medicine and practiced what they could remember of the religion of their ancestors.

PROVERBS IN THE CARIBBEAN

It is said that proverbs are more popular in Africa than anywhere else in the world and that there is a great love for speaking in symbolic terms. One of the ways people have traced the connections between Africa and the Caribbean is by proverbs – those sayings handed down by parents to children over the years.

The disease which affects the eyes usually affects the nose as well.
[Yoruba: Nigeria, and Nyang: Cameroon versions]
What hurt eyes does make nose run.
[Trinidad version]

Tales are the food of the ear.
[Igbo: Nigerian version]
Talk is the ear's food.
[Jamaican version]

Other Caribbean proverbs:

Lé chat pa la, wat ka-bay bàl. [St. Lucia]
When the cat's away, the rats have a ball.

Sa ki fét a fé nwé ke-pawét a klèté. [St. Lucia, Dominica]
What is done in the dark will appear in the light.

When compared with the full range of proverbs in other societies, Caribbean proverbs have a strong negative element either in form, meaning, Implication or context. In any random selection of Caribbean proverbs, it is normal for over 75 percent of them to contain at least one negative word (e.g., no, never, nothing). Of the remainder more than half will have a word which incorporates a negative meaning (e.g., lose, break, burst, or kill) and of the others most are warnings or advice against something. In effect, although wisdom in proverbs is unquestionably sound and reflective of experience, it is seldom presented in a positive form.[1]

Caribbean proverbs clearly reflect the personal relationships and social experiences historically dominated by negative factors: *If you don't hear, you will feel*. The negative aspect of proverbs still features prominently in Caribbean language today, which shows the level of negativity in social behaviour and outlook is still significant. Most of the things which came naturally to Caribbean people were stigmatised as bad. Thus, for example, while in most other societies poetry has developed from an oral tradition of song, lyric and rhetoric, in the Caribbean every attempt was made to, separate poetry from its most natural base.

Graphic Courtesy: *Language and Power*

Louise Bennet (Miss Lou)

FOLKTALES AND MUSIC

And then there are folktales. In English, the term "folktale" is used to refer to household tales or fairy tales such as Cinderella or Snow White. It is also more broadly used to include written and oral stories which have been passed on through the years. In the Caribbean, folktales are not always about princesses and fairies, but also animals. Sometimes men and women appear, but the best known Caribbean tales feature an animal as the main character or trickster hero. Some tales are meant to instruct; others to entertain.

In Jamaica, Antigua, St. Vincent, Guyana and Nevis the main character in most cases is called **Anancy**. In Grenada, the name given to the character is Zayen, from the French word *araignee*, and when the tales are told in English this is translated as Spider. In St. Kitts, Dominica, Trinidad, St. Lucia, Montserrat and Barbados the trickster-hero in most cases is called Rabbit. And in most of the other territories a character called Monkey appears as the trickster-hero. It is also common for Anancy, Rabbit and Monkey to appear in the same tale, trying to outsmart each other.

Anancy originally came from the Akan people of the Asante state in Ghana. Anancy stories were brought to the Caribbean by the people taken from West Africa and were handed down from parents to children. In the Caribbean, Anancy came to represent the Africans in their struggle with the plantation owners.

As well as bringing these stories to the Caribbean, Black people have carried Anancy tales to America, Canada and Britain. Many of the stories are remarkably similar, showing how strongly African heritage has survived. Caribbean folktales are characterised by optional openings and closings. Again there is a difference between the French Creole-influenced territories and the others.

Anancy stories were brought to the caribbean
by the people taken from west Africa.

In the former, the storyteller may start off by saying "*Cric*" to which the audience replies "*Crac*", or by saying the more French Creole "*Tim Tim*" with the response "*Bois seche*". In the other territories, there is no such introduction and the storyteller starts the tale with the traditional English-type opening, Once upon a time, One time, or There once was, etc.

The tradition of storytelling and performance has generally been closely related to the tradition of song. The conteur (teller) had to be able to act two or three roles, employ several tones of voice, achieve rapid and elastic changes of pace, as well as sing at particular moments of the performance. In some Carriacou performances, songs help give the folktale formal shapes where the conteur sings a song at the beginning of the story which contains the theme or some matter relevant to the development of the story. The same song is repeated in the middle and at the end of the story. For example, in *When Moon Shine*, a poem by Paul Keens-Douglas, the audience is told:

Tim, Tim? ... papa welcome!
Ah send an' call de doctor
An' de doctor reach before me?
Don't tell me, ah know -- coconut!
Is Nanci story time on the step,
Is full moon an' everyting bright.
All little children teafin' ah 'stay up.'
Playin' rounders an' catchers,
Nobody mind, not when de moon full,
Is like everybody find excuse
To leave de house. [2]

The tradition of storytelling and performance
has generally been closed related to the tradition of song

In the islands of St. Lucia and Dominica, the stories usually start with the following dialogue between the conteur and the audience:

Conteur: *Tim Tim*
Audience: *Bois seche*

After this introduction, the conteur usually proceeds like this:

"Teni... "(there was once ...) or *"unfois"* (one time).

The conteur then goes on to tell the story. To conclude, more dialogue follows between the conteur and the audience, which goes:

Conteur: *E di queek*
Audience: *Quack*

Although the traditional folktale is gradually disappearing, it is being kept alive in music – particularly calypso and reggae – because of its sensitivity to social change and its capacity for expressing some of the deepest urgencies of the time. Folktales demonstrate some of the survival measures developed under colonial domination. Today, traditional folktales inform and shape most of the performances, dramatised conversations and storytelling in the region.

Photo courtesy: *is Town Say so*

Popular Caribbean storyteller,

Paul keens-Douglas.

DUB POETRY

Dub poetry has emerged as one of the most important militant voices of Black people. It continues the African oral tradition with a combination of the spoken word and the sound of drums to help drive the rhythms of the poems. It largely ignores the official languages of the region, preferring instead to use a combination of Creole and Rasta forms to give voice to their concerns.

Dub poetry or reggae poetry sprang to life in the last decade, pushed by such artists as Linton 'kwesi' Johnson, Mutabaruka, Oku Onuora and Jean Breeze – all from the Caribbean.

The foundation of dub poetry is word, sound and power and its themes are similar to those sung by Bob Marley: white domination, western oppression, life in the ghetto, police brutality, racism, equality, justice and current economic issues. For example, in her dub poem *Aid*, Jean Breeze writes:

> Four hundred years from the plantation whip
> To the IMF grip
> Aid travels with a bomb
> watch out
> Aid travels with a bomb
> They rob and exploit you of your own
> then send it back as a foreign loan
> Interest is on it, regulations too
> They will also
> decide your policy
> for you.

For some of the older Caribbean intellectuals, dub poetry is an abomination. They claim it does not correspond with the norms of poetry handed down in the English literary tradition and is too raw. However, this literary form has gained acceptance all over the Caribbean partly because it is impossible to draw a line between dub poetry and other traditional forms.

Artists such as Paul Keens-Douglas, Louise Bennett (Miss Lou), Oliver Samuel, Edward Braithwaite, Valerie Bloom, Marc Matthews, Dick Lochan, Lillian Allen among others, and scores of calypsonians and reggae artists, have in several ways maintained, extended, built upon and transmitted the strengths of a living oral tradition. Many poets and writers have used Creole English as the language of their work. There is a large number of short stories and anecdotes, and a growing number of anthologies and small collections. Many of these stories are dramatic in nature, and some, like Samuel Sevlon's, have been performed on stage. The continuation of this work will hopefully have an impact on changing attitudes towards Creole English, and ensure it will be recognised soon as a valid form of communication. The following pages include a varied selection of poetry, a folktale, stories and dub poetry.

Endnotes

1. Peter A. Roberts, **West Indians and Their Language**, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 157.

2. Paul Keens-Douglas, **When Moon Shine**, P.K.D., Port of Spain, Trinidad, 1975, p. 9.

SELECTIONS IN CARIBBEAN ORAL TRADITION

In Defence Of We Lingo

"But look at mih crosses nah! Imagine dis damn Kanadian Immigration man telling me, ah born Trini, dat ah speaking ah foreign language.

> Ha lord! Like he doh understand simple English o' what!
> I doh know whah de ass does happen tuh dese people nah man!
> Look Mister, doh geh meh hot nah, ah warning yu!

Yuh mean tuh tell me dat ah big sensible man like you in such ah high position eh have enough common sense tuh know dat dey does speak English in Trinidad!

Ah kyah believe cat! Yuh mean tuh tell meh yuh so stupid yuh eh evenself know cat! Yuh know whey Trinidad is? Look, look at you, yuh kyah even answer – yuh eh even know whey Trinidad is, buh telling me ah speaking ah foreign language!

Who stupid? Steups! Look gimme mih damn suitcase lemme go back whey ah come from eh, before police lock meh up.

Ah never see ting so, ah big Kanadian Official so eh know one ass! Aye! How come de Kanadian Government hah you wuking fuh dem?"
"Hmm! Well Yes ! "

"Steups!....Hel-lo! Hel-lo! Excuse meh! Excuse meh! Who is in charge here? Lemme talk tuh dem ah minute please! Dis is rale nonsense!

You in charge?"

"Yes! "

"My name is Missis Joseph and I jes came in from Trinidad with Bee Wee on Flight 709 dat jes landed after ah whole day flying. Den ah had tuh wait so long fuh mih bags and as ah was coming thru immigration one ah yuh officers started tuh shout at me and rough me up becaw he say ah was speaking ah foreign language, and fuh dat, he send meh here tuh wait, and yuh know how long I here! Here is meh passport and I is from Trinidad and is British whey we does speak English."

"Yes Madame, I know and I understand and I must apologize for the officer's ignorance. He must not know of Carnival and Steelband..."

"Not only dat, it look like he doh understand English becaw all ah dis wouldna call for in de fuss place...Anyway...thanks."

Dick Lochan

From: Doh Make Joke

Patwa Is What We Talk

Patwa is what we talk
among each other
like
when we don't want you to know
what we're saying!

I didn't know what it was called
until I come here.

A lady I work for ask
what was Jamaica's language,
what I was speaking.

I said English.

Sometimes they say
I speak different from the other
Jamaicans.
Why do I speak different?
It depends on the different area.
There's rural areas
and there's urban areas.

the culture is a bit different
so even though we are all jamaicans,
people tend to speak different.

From*: Some People Is Asking*
St. Ghristopher House Adult Literacy Program Publications

Sweet St. Vincent

"Wa, way yo say dey.
If me go leave St. Vincent
and go live somewhere else?
Yo mad, you expect me fe
leave me nice sunshine, and
go live in ah ice box.
Na because de money way ah work fa
can't buy ah good pair a shoe.
Ah ain't leaving because
a go miss me crab and calalloo.
You see – like up dey yo na ha freedom.
Is one thing me can't miss
is me strong rum.
And when yo see carnival come
I can't miss de getting down.
Me love fo St. Vincent
could never done. "

David Phillips
From: Not A Bed Of Rose

Anancy and Commonsense

Once upon a time, Anancy, feeling very greedy for power and wealth, decided to collect all the commonsense there was in the world. He thought that everyone would then have to come to him with their problems and he would charge dear for his advice. So, he set out to collect all the commonsense in the world.

He collected and he collected, and all that he found, he put in a large calabash. When he could find no more commonsense, he sealed the calabash with a roll of dry leaves. Then, he decided to hide all the commonsense, at the top of a very high tree, so that no one else could get at it.

Anancy tied a rope to the neck of the calabash, tied the two ends of the rope together and put the loop over his head, so that the calabash rested on his stomach.

He started to climb the tree, but found that the calabash was getting in his way. He tried again and again, but all in vain. Suddenly, he heard someone laughing behind him, and looked around to see a little boy.

Graphic Courtesy: language and Power

"Stupid fellow," cried the little boy, "if you want to climb the tree, why don't you put the calabash behind you?"

Anancy was so annoyed to hear this little bit of commonsense coming from a little boy, when he, Anancy, thought that he had collected it all, that he flung the calabash at the foot of the tree and broke it.

And so, commonsense was scattered in little pieces, all over the world, and nearly everyone got a bit of it.

Anancy is the cause.

From: *Caribbean folktales and legends*
edited by Andrew Salkey
Reprinted from: *Language and Power*

Miss Amoury's Bathwater

Miss Amoury's little house had such a putrid smell that Nurse Hannah expected to see rotting food, even a dead rat, drying up in the corner; but nothing could be seen and so she got up to investigate more fully. The house looked very clean and there was no food left out. Then suddenly she came upon the source of the smell under the foot of Miss Amoury's bed: a bath-pan of fermenting green water.

Nurse Hannah woke up Miss Amoury and asked her what was fermenting in the bath-pan. At first Miss Amoury would not answer. It was only after much prompting that she told the nurse a most wondrous tale.

First she begged Nurse Hannah to please pull the bath-pan from under her bed. Miss Amoury's voice gained strength as she continued, "I start to feel weak and have stomach pains, so I send a message to a man name Piggot who does bathe people to change de way tings going." She paused, coughed weakly and looked sheepishly at Nurse Hannah. "Well Nurse, the obeah man come and me tell him how me feeling and he go way and come back and bring all different kind'a bush. He put on water to boil, and meantime, he pick out certain bush and he put them in me cup. The rest'a bush, he put them in de bath-pan. When de water boil up he pour some on de bush in me cup and he pour de rest on de bush in me bath-pan. Meantime, he put in cold water till it cool down." Miss Amoury laid back on her pillows and fanned herself with a delicate straw fan.

De bush water was nice smelling. And den he tell me to go in de bath-pan and let de water lap up on me while I drinking de bush tea from me cup. Den he tell me dat he will have to bathe me." Miss Amoury took a deep breath and looked at Nurse Hannah. Nurse Hannah kept a straight face. She wished that she could laugh. Miss Amoury continued, " Well, Nurse, you know me no show me skin easy. You even did have trouble wid me dat way. But next tiny me know, me jump in de bath-pan in me naked skin. It was most peculiar, Nurse. Most peculiar."

Nurse Hannah smiled openly now. She shook her head, "You must be crazy. How you could make dis man bathe you, Miss Amoury?" Then she asked half-seriously, "You don't fraid he ask you for wife?"

"Nurse, I am a old woman. What man would do such a ting? You don't understand. Dis man help me. He bathe me so gentle wid dis cloth, I feel like a new-born baby. Pure and clean. Den he tell me to throw 'way de water at de crossroads. And I was to throw two pennies wid it."

Nurse Hannah looked at her curiously, "Well, why you still have it under you bed?"

Miss Amoury was decidedly upset now. She looked slyly at Nurse Hannah. "Ah don't have nobody to ask to do such a tiny for me," she said.

"Don't look at me!" Nurse Hannah said sharply.

"But Nurse," Miss Amoury's voice was pleading, "Nurse, dat's why I so sick. I suppose to throw 'way de water, otherwise I not going get better." She was very agitated and the excitement made her cough. When she caught her breath she continued excitedly, "One tiny though, Nurse, when I throw out de water, if anybody take up de pennies dat in it, dey will get whatever ailing me."

At last Nurse Hannah felt that she could laugh openly. She threw back her head and laughed and laughed. "What? Who tell you dat Miss Amoury, de obeah man?" As Miss Amoury nodded Nurse Hannah kept laughing. She finally paused long enough to say, "I will throw 'way de water for you."

When she got back to the clinic Nurse Hannah made a note in her file on Miss Amoury. She wrote, "Recovering nicely." She made no mention of the obeah man and the bush bath, neither did she write anything about going back to remove the bath-pan. She left the clinic after she had put away her files and went walking down the street. Finally she saw the person she needed, a young man talking with his friends outside a grocery store. The young man and the nurse set off for Miss Amoury's house.

Nurse Hannah instructed the young man and together they lifted the fermenting bath-pan and walked it to the crossroads. They tipped the bath-pan on its side and before Nurse Hannah could do anything about it, the water ran under their feet. Just then a woman standing nearby said, "Nurse, take great care. Might as well you and the young man go arrange you own bush bath right now cause all you walk in Miss Amoury bathwater. You going have her pain, Nurse."

Nurse Hannah turned to reply to the woman and when she turned back around, she was just in time to see the young man rising from a stooping position. Nurse Hannah's voice was sharp. "What you have dere?"

His reply made her feel quite faint. "De two pennies dat drop out of de water," he said, opening his hand to show her the coins.

Nurse Hannah sighed and said to him sharply, "Throw dem back." Then more kindly she told him, "If you get sick, send somebody to find me at de clinic." Then she gave him a dollar for helping her.

By the time Nurse Hannah reached home she could hardly walk. Her stomach ached. She got into bed but not before sending her brother with a message asking Miss Amoury to find Piggot, the obeah man. Before Nurse Hannah fainted away from the pain she wondered how she would explain this to the young man who had so kindly helped her throw out Miss Amoury's bathwater. She knew that he too would soon need Piggot's services.

Althea Prince
Excerpt from: "Miss Amoury's Bathwater" in *Ladies of the Night and Other Stories*

Rub A Dub Style Inna Regent Park

Monday morning broke
the news of a robbery
Pam mind went
couldn't hold the load
dem took her to the station.
in a paddy wagon
screaming
her Johnny got a gun
from an ax-policeman
Oh Lawd, Oh Lawd, Oh Lawd, eh ye.

A wey dis ya society a do to wi sons?

Rub a dub style
Inna Regent Park
Mon a dub it inna dance
Inna Regent Park
Oh Lawd, Oh Lawd, Oh Lawd, eh ye.

"Forget yu troubles an dance"*
Forget yu bills dem
an' irie up yuself

Forget yu dreams gatherin
dust on the shelves

DJ rapper hear im chant
pumps a musical tract
For im platform
Cut it wild, sey de system vile
dubbing it inna dance
Frustration pile
inna different style
Inna Regent Park
Oh Lawd, Oh Lawd, Oh Lawd, eh ya
Could have been a gun
but's a mike in his hand
Could have been a gun
spilling out the lines
but   is a mike
         is a mike
Oh Lawd, Oh Lawd, Oh Lawd, eh ya.

Riddin line vessel im ache
from im heart outside
culture carry im past
an' steady im mind
man take a draw and feeling time

Words cut harsh and try to find
explanations

for the sufferings of the times
Oh Lawd, Oh Lawd, Oh Lawd, eh ye.
"Forget yu troubles an dance"*
Forget yu bills dem an irie up yuself
Forget yu dreams gatherin
dust, dust, dust

Is a long time we sweating here
Is a long time we sweating here
to join society's rites
Is a long time we beating down yu
door Is a long time since wi make the trip
'cross the Atlantic
On the slave ship
Is a long time wi knocking
An' everytime yu slam the door
sey no job
discrimination, injustice
a feel the whip lick
An' it's the same boat
the same boat
the same boat

Oh Lawd, Oh Lawd, Oh Lawd, eh ye.

DJ chant out, cutting it wild
Say man hafti dub it inna different style

When doors close down on society's rites
Windows will prey open
In the middle of the night
dashed hopes run
wild in the middle of the night
dashed hopes run wild
in the middle of the night
Oh Lawd, Oh Lawd, Oh Lawd, eh ya.

* Bob Marley

Lillian Allen
From: Women *Do This Everyday*

One Trini Recollection

Wowww Yuh know
There's so many things I'd forgotten
Not in name, but in sensual feelin'
The things I thought I knew, I'd imagined
The things I once took for granted
Like how darkness descend quick, quick, quick
Long before yuh even sight the moon
An' how deadly hot sun does beat
An' that there's a right time to bid good afternoon
I'd forgotten
I'd forgotten dogs barkin' in full chorus
Jus behind a sweet chickadee's song
An' how cock crowin' out loud at any hours
Make yuh heart feel to sing along
I'd forgotten
The uniformity of school children, flutterin'
Hummingbirds flyin' free
I'd forgotten
The vibrance of a pink an' yellow flower
On a majestic tree call poui
I'd forgotten the many uses of cassava
An' how cush-cush does eat sweet
An' even sweeter still with fried plantain

An' banji fuh meat
I'd forgotten
The scent of a fresh picked mango
An' how high that mango does grow on tree
I'd forgotten
I'd forgotten how salt water and wave
Could really mash up a body
Oh God... I'd forgotten
Fuh the flavours of pomerac, pomcitay and paw-paw
They can never find a substitute
An dem big black cobo, when they land
They really run like turkey, in truth!
I'd forgotten
The nuts-man don' carry unsalted, but fresh
An' that waitin' fuh that pelouri, in the Savannah
Is a real patience test!
I'd forgotten
The symphony of sounds rain plays on
A galvanized roof
An' that a jelly coconut water

Far surpasses any juice
I'd forgotten
Strange, eh? Heh-eh!
I never thought I'd forget the heat of
Sweet calypso rhythm
An' the blood-warmin' feelin' of seein'
Red poinsettia flowerin', bloomin', rich poinsettia
In the middle of April!
I'd – heh, heh-eh – forgotten
The things I thought I knew, I'd imagined
An' they were things that I once took fuh granted An' forgotten.

Sister Lois Jacobs
The Jahfrikan Princess

Understanding Caribbean Oral Tradition

Discussion Points:

- What kind of oral traditions did Africans bring with them to the Caribbean?
- What are some of the peculiarities of Caribbean proverbs?
- What are the differences between Caribbean and Canadian folktales?
- Why do you think cultural traditions exist?
- How can Caribbean short stories, proverbs, poetry and folktales be used in literacy tutoring?

Literacy Tutors 5

and Caribbean Learners

[Literacy Tutors and Caribbean Learners](#)

- Some Points Worth Considering
- Creating A Model
- How It Can Be Done
- Working With Advanced Learners

Understanding Literacy Tutors and Caribbean Learners

Photo: Judy Kondrat and Alex Jones

Literacy Tutors and Caribbean Learners

LITERACY TUTORS AND CARIBBEAN LEARNERS

In many ways, the situation facing Caribbean people in adult learning situations in Ontario mirrors the powerlessness they experience in our society. The absence of training opportunities for tutors, the lack of information about the varieties of English spoken, and the stereotyping and prejudice so evident in this society, can serve to reinforce the status quo on the issues of language, race, class and power.

How can literacy programs and tutors help to redress rather than reinforce this situation? Before proceeding it should be stated that the suggestions made in this manual are intended to address the current situation, i.e., where very few tutors of Caribbean origin are involved in literacy tutoring. It should in no way replace an outreach strategy and a concerted effort by literacy programs to recruit and train staff and tutors who are more representative of the communities they serve.

Some points worth considering

If Caribbean adults in Canadian literacy programs are going to learn to read, they have to learn, for the moment at least, to read Standard English. However, tutors must be sensitive to the fact that a Caribbean person who joins a literacy program speaks Creole English flavoured with a local dialect and accent. This person's native language or pronunciation can never be completely removed.

> Tutors who are not sensitive to the differences in pronunciation patterns between Canadian and Caribbean English may perceive Creole English speakers as having a problem with pronunciation. To remedy this perceived problem tutors tend to engage learners in the repetition of sounds, words and sentences. To Caribbean learners this seems pointless because they do not understand what they are supposed to be learning since they already know the sounds they are being asked to repeat. Learning then becomes a constant mental struggle between trying to sound like the tutor and trying to learn the principles of writing and spelling. This creates an atmosphere for language learning by imitation and repetition which is extremely boring and requires extraordinary motivation.

Tutors working with Caribbean people need to be informed and aware of the kinds of language issues discussed in this manual. The following points are worth considering:

- Native language does not disappear and no attempt should be made to change this.
- Language is social and functional.
- Caribbean English and Canadian English are just two varieties of English.
- Most learners are often not convinced they already know a lot of what they are being taught.

Tutors working with Caribbean people need to be informed and aware of the kinds of language issues discussed in this manual

- When learners write sentences such as Him tell the woman everything, they are not merely making mistakes; they are reflecting, in their writing, some of the language patterns associated with Caribbean Creole English (See Section 3, *Language Varieties in the Caribbean*).
- The focus of tutoring should be to help learners write English structures which are different from their own, not superior to them.
- Where the tutoring relationship is well-established, the tutor and learner should talk about the differences and similarities between Caribbean and Canadian English.
- If the way a learner reads (and sounds out words) does not affect their understanding of what is being read and its meaning, there is no need to interrupt or correct their pronunciation.

Photo: Judy Kondrat and Alex Jones

Creating a model

For tutors working with Caribbean people, the **language experience approach** is a useful model to deal with language issues. It is one way in which language, storytelling, proverbs and other aspects of oral tradition can be used to learn how to read and write.

No matter what the subject, good stories remain compelling to the teller and listener alike. Much of Caribbean culture resides in oral traditions and there is ongoing research exploring the roles stories play in communication at all levels. Introducing stories into the learning environment provides opportunities for a wide range of learning and tutoring experiences. It also provides a chance to examine the relationship between language and writing in a way not explored by traditional grammar and phonics-based approaches.

The language experience approach for developing literacy is based on the concept that reading texts for beginners need to be firmly rooted in the reader's experiences and language use. The best way to provide such texts is to have learners involved in creating them either individually with the tutor or as a group. This approach guarantees comprehension and beginning readers understand that print represents meaning, not just sounds and symbols. Language experience allows learners and tutors to place the primary emphasis on communication and self-expression rather than phonics. The skill of decoding words is not considered a goal in itself, but only a means of communication. Too often in literacy tutoring, mastering initial consonants becomes more important than the story a learner might write. Phonics is not neglected; it is an integral part of the approach. The first words of a story are broken down and studied in terms of their phonetic parts. The difference is that the words are not the often boring, impersonal CAT, BAT, MAT, RAT of a phonics workbook. They are words that have organic meaning for the learner.

Introducing stories into the learning enviroment provides opportunities for a wide range of learning and tutoring experiences.

How it can be done

The mechanics of this approach differ from tutor to tutor. But it always involves a speaker (the learner) and a recorder (usually the tutor, but it can also be another learner or a tape recorder). The following are some basic steps which will help both the tutor and the learner to use this approach:

- If the learner has never worked in this way before, it is essential to **explain exactly how it works** and what is going to happen. If the learner does not understand the purpose of this way of working, it could be very threatening to have his/her words taken down.

Photo: Judy Kondrat and Alex Jones

With this in mind, the tutor must act with sensitivity when writing down what the learner says and should also read aloud what she has written so that the learner knows – and has control of – what is being recorded. As with any piece of writing, the first attempt to get something down might be seen as a draft and, being learner controlled, will include the right to change what is written.

❍ **Create the story** from the personal experience of the learner. Use triggers such as stories about the learner's history and culture, songs, poetry, folktales, proverbs, etc.. For an absolute beginning learner, proverbs may be appropriate since they usually involve only a few words. The learner dictates and the tutor prints it word for word with a marker on a large sheet of paper, controlling only the spelling. This is necessary for three reasons:

- Most tutors are unsure how to reproduce Creole orthography. There would therefore be inconsistencies in the way words are spelt.
- Learners are interested in learning how to spell in a variety of English which will hopefully make it easier for them to get by. In the Canadian context, this increases the learner's ability to deal officially and increases the possibility of finding work. It can be a tool for self-education since it provides an entry into a world of ideas which is presently not expressed in written Creole. It would be hard for other learners who do not share the language variety to read
- It would be hard for other learners who do not share the language variety to read.

❍ **Read and re-read the story aloud**. The tutor should read the story back to the learner, pointing to each word, while the learner repeats. Of course, the tutor will give help and encouragement on difficult words

Next, point randomly to words in the passage to ensure the learner is building sight vocabulary and not just memorising the spoken word. Even the complete beginner can learn to read the whole text because she the whole text because she knows what has been written and can therefore predict what she is going to read. However, predicting or guessing is an important part of reading and should not be discouraged in the early stages of learning to read.

Photo: Judy Kondrat and Alex Jones

❍ **Copy the story.** At the next session, using either a typed or flip chart version of the story, the learner and tutor can repeat some of the first lesson's activities: read and repeat; and, point randomly to individual words. The following are also recommended:

- **Match individual words** on flash cards to words in the story. These flash cards will give the learner practice in reorganising his or her own words out of context. They should be kept in an individualized card-file library of sight words, and learners should be encouraged to take them home for further review.

- **Use the words in other contexts.** Practice the new sight vocabulary by doing the following reading and writing exercises:
    - Make new sentences by rearranging the flash cards. When you use a word to start a sentence, write it with a capital letter on the back of its card. You will need to talk about capital letters and full stops, but keep it simple. Read and copy the new sentences.
    - Arrange the cards or write the story leaving a blank space. The learner can find the missing word among the flash cards, or she may choose a new word which would also make sense. In this case, write this new word on a card.

Photo: Judy Kondrat and Alex Jones

- **Spelling.** A learner who is confidently reading and copying should be given techniques for learning to spell the words she has chosen to write. Like many learners writing English, some Caribbean learners have difficulty with spelling, and the usual errors can be expected: "there" for "their", "shoping" for "shopping", etc. These can be dealt with using memorisation or homophones, recognition of word families, rhyming words, application of spelling rules, etc.

  However, many Caribbean Creole English speakers also make errors related to the pronunciation patterns of Creole English. These can be approached in a very systematic way. The following procedure alerts learners that there are some useful spelling patterns to be learned and these patterns are not necessarily related to the way a word is pronounced.

  The tutor collects samples of a specific item of Creole-influenced spelling from the learner's writing or this manual (e.g., *conflick*) and writes on a flip chart the sentences containing them under the heading **Caribbean spelling**. Beside this, another column labelled, **Other spelling.** Pointing to the word *conflick*, the tutor can say, "That is how a lot of people say this word in the Caribbean. In Canadian English, we say *conflict*." No matter how you say it, it is better if we all spell it the same way.

The learner can then be asked to generate a list of other words they know which end with a similar sound.

> No matter how you say it, it is better
> if we all spell it the same way

- **Diagnose writing problems and make a work plan.** An increased understanding of Creole English enables a tutor to be more aware of the hidden factors when Creole-speaking learners attempt to reproduce Canadian English structures in their writing. In most cases, the tutor can use familiar literacy tutoring techniques to give the learner the opportunity to discover why the structures are difficult and to write them in different contexts. For example, texts may be dictated back to the learner in order to identify areas on which she needs to focus. In particular, errors in spelling should be noted. But, remember to look for problems in the more general areas of punctuation such as the use of periods, commas, question marks and capital letters.

Working with advanced learners

All of the above can be adapted for use with learners at different reading levels or in group work. However, if the learner is a good reader and can write reasonably well this provides an opportunity for a more in-depth discussion of Creole English and its relationship to Canadian English.

Photo: Judy Kondrat and Alex Jones

He or she can be given a chance to read books, stories, or poetry written by Caribbean authors which contain examples of Caribbean Creole English. In some cases, it may even be possible for such learners to try creative writing using Creole English. This is useful because just as the grammatical patterns in Creole English are relevant to learners' general writing, so are the pronunciation patterns; both have some impact on how learners spell.

Also, learners are more motivated to read when they become aware of what literature exists and may, in turn, attempt their own writing using Creole English. In addition to the possible psychological boost associated with this step, there is the increased ability of the learner to self-edit for Creole English interference when writing for a non-Caribbean audience. This step is also important because it may not be practical or even morally right for a non-Caribbean tutor to attempt to resolve conflicts which are an integral part of learners' speech.

As mentioned before, writing and editing for Creole interference as part of the writing process is an important issue because learners often perceive themselves as English-speaking already; they do not attend to the linguistic differences in the same way an ESL learner typically does. The reality is that while basic messages may be successfully communicated, learners may not always know how they are being perceived by Canadian English speakers. This is a particularly sensitive area because moving too far away from Creole may have undesirable social consequences: loss of identity or rejection of one's peers.

The grammatical and pronunciation patterns in Creole English are relevant to the learner's general writing and some bearing on spealing and meaning when the learner writes.

Therefore, it is important for tutors introducing this form of editing to assist learners to focus on one item at a time. Tutors should also formulate a rule for Canadian English usage. The learners need to become proficient and possibly life-long self-editors. For many learners, this will take several years.

In order to become independent editors of their own writing, learners need to learn how to edit for Creole interference: to find the differences, consider the alternative ways of expressing the same thoughts, and finally to apply them. Editing for Creole interference can be integrated into the writing process, usually at the third or final draft.

The following steps should be helpful:

- Provide a writing sample showing several of the differences between Caribbean and Canadian varieties of English. Before learners can do this with their own writing, they need a great deal of practice in applying this process to writing samples other than their own. It is less threatening and easier to be objective when analysing the writing of others.
- The learner should first read the sample silently. Then aloud.
- Discuss the sample: the content, the style (humorous, descriptive, etc.), the intent of the writer, the audience it was intended for, and the overall success of the writer in communicating what she intended. This is important because it helps to emphasize a holistic approach, and that contextual meaning and communication are primary goals in reading and writing.
- Look for differences.
- The tutor should work through the sample line by line with the learner. The learner should offer alternative suggestions.
- The learner should identify what kind of differences there are: subject/ verb agreement, verb/tense, etc.

- Discuss each difference asking: Why is it different? Why the writer might have written it in this way? or, How would it be written or said in Creole? This step is very important because it raises the learner's awareness of language the differences in Canadian and Caribbean English grammar in particular, and the distinction between speaking Creole and writing other varieties of English.

- Formulate a rule.

- Make the change and proceed through the rest of the sample in the same manner.

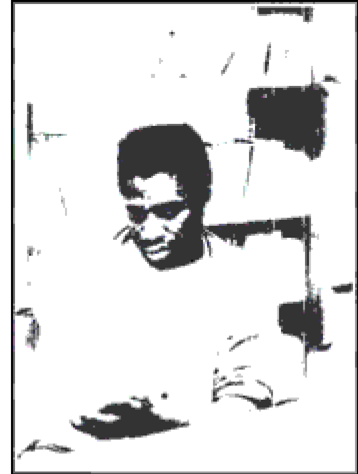


Photo: Judy Kondrat and Alex Jones

- The learner should read the passage aloud, incorporating all the changes.

- Try a few more samples.

- The learner can apply the process to their own writing, either individually or in group editing sessions. The ultimate goal is that learners will be able to edit their own work and that of their peers.

- Finally, tutors need to be zealous in record-keeping in order to monitor the learner's progress and problems. All texts and flash cards should be kept. It is important to know what has been done and what needs to be done now and in the future. Tutors must record any specific or general difficulties they have noticed and discuss them with the learner.

Understanding Literacy Tutors and Caribbean Learners

Discussion Points

- What are some of the issues facing Caribbean Creole speakers in literacy programs?
- What is the language experience approach?
- How is it different from phonics-based approaches?
- What are some things tutors can do to promote the language and heritage of Caribbean Creole speakers?
- What are some things literacy programs can do to safeguard the language and heritage of Caribbean Creole speakers?
- What impact can negative stereotyping of a person's language have on their sense of identity?
- When should a tutor change the way a learner speaks?
- What additional support or information do you need to facilitate working with a learner from the Caribbean?

Glossary

Ah...A, I, of
An'...And
All yu, allyu, all ah yu... All of you
Ax...ask
Bajan...Barbadian, from Barbados
BeeWee...B.W.I.A., national airline of Trinidad and Tobago
Dan...than
De...the
Dem...them
Den...then
Dese...these
Dey...they
Dis...this
Doh...don't
Dose...those
Douen...folk-spirit of child who died without being baptised (Trinidad)
Duttyin'...dirtying
Eh, ehn...am not, is/are not
Fa...for
Fadder...father
Fuss...first
Geh...get
Gehway...get away
Hah...have
Jah....expression referring to a higher being used by Rastafarians
Jes...just
Jook out me eye....to take advantage of
Jouvert...Carnival Monday morning/Jour Ouvert
Jumbie...ghost, spirit
Kiaso...calypso
Kinda...kind of
Kyah, kyant...can't, cannot
La Diablesse...woman folk-spirit with cloven hoof
Laff...laugh
Leff...left
Leh...let
Lemme...let me
Ligaroo, Loupgarou...folk-spirit. Man who takes off skin and flies at night in a ball of fire, sucking blood from victims. The woman is called Socouyant

Likkle...little
Lime...hang out
Lingo...language
Maco...peeping Tom, to mind other people's business
Mudder...mother
Nah...no
Nutten...nothing
Ole...old
Oui.. .yes
Outta...out of
Radder...rather
Rale...real
Roti...baked shell with curried meat or vegetable filling
Sah...sir
Tief...thief
Ting...thing
Tinkin'...thinking
Trus'...trust
Trini. ..Trinidadian
Tuh...to
Woulda...would have
We...our
Whah...what
Whey...where
Wid...with
Wine...gyrate waist
Wuk...work
Wus...worse

Resources

General

Honeychurch, Lennox. The Caribbean People, Book One, (Nelson, Caribbean),U.K., 1979.

A series of three books for secondary schools which focus on the Caribbean people and their development and progress towards the creation of the Caribbean we know today.

Sunshine, Catherine A. The Caribbean: Survival Struggle and Sovereignty, (EPICA), Washington, D.C., 1985.

A comprehensive look at the Caribbean region: its history, political, economic and social development from slavery to the mid-1980s.

Language

Language and Power, (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Ltd.), U.K., 1990. *An extensive examination of the English language and Caribbean Creole languages.*

Ahmad, Khurshid and Grenville Corbett, Margaret Rogers and Roland Sussex. Computers. Language Learning and Teaching, (Cambridge University Press), U.K., 1985.

This book is a practical introduction to the field of computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Written in plain language, this book provides a guide for tutors and teachers who may wish to know what computers can do in language teaching.

Coelho, Elizabeth. Caribbean Students in Canadian Schools, Book One, (Carib-Can Publishers), Toronto, Canada, 1988.
This book outlines the historical and social background of Caribbean students in the Caribbean and in Canada and the educational experience of the students and their parents. The book considers the implications of this information for the development of a school program to meet the needs of the students and their parents.

Coelho, Elizabeth. Caribbean Students in Canadian Schools, Book Two, (Pippin Publishers Ltd.), Markham, Ontario, 1991. *(See description for Book One).*

Coelho, Elizabeth. "Caribbean Languages: A Story of Survival", 1990. *A language study kit.*

Goodman, Ken. What's Whole in Whole Language, (Scholastic Canada Ltd.) Richmond Hill, Ontario, 1986.
This book describes the essence of the whole language movement -- its basis, features and futures.

Kennedy, Katherine and Stephanie Roeder. Using Language Experience with Adults: A Guide for Teachers, (New Readers Press), Syracuse, New York, 1975.

This booklet covers: why language experience; ways to help students create their own curriculum; language experience and specific reading skills; and ways to elicit imaginative writings.

Lederer, Richard. Crazy English: The Ultimate Joy Ride Through Our Language, (Pocket Books), New York, N.Y., 1989.
An examination of the inconsistency and illogical structure of English.

Moore, Robert B. Racism in the English Language, (Council on Interracial Books for Children), New York, N.Y., 1985.
An essay on the bigotry, colour symbolism, ethnocentrism, politics, etc. of the English language. Five lesson plans/activities are included.

Orkin, Mark M. Speaking Canadian English, (General Publishing), Don Mills, Ontario, 1971;
English is described as it is spoken in Canada today -- the vocabulary, pronunciation, syntax, grammar, spelling and slang.

Roberts, Peter A. West Indians and their Language, (Cambridge University Press), Great Britain, 1988.
This book deals with the varieties of the English language which have developed and are in use throughout the Caribbean region.

Schwab, Irene and Jud Stone. Language. Writing and Publishing: Work with Afro-Caribbean Students, (Drakeford Press Barnet Herts), Great Britain, 1985.
Published by the Hackney Reading Centre in London, England, this booklet covers: the language experience approach, standard and non-standard English and the role of writing and publishing in the learning process of AfroCaribbean students.

Sutcliffe, David and Ansel Wong. The Language of the Black Experience, (Basil Blackwell Ltd.), U.K., 1986.
This book discusses the cultural, social and linguistic aspects of AfroCaribbean language and its contribution to international culture.

Storytelling

Allen, Lillian. Women Do This EveryDay, (Women's Press), Toronto, Canada, 1993.
Writings by this well-known dub poet.

Brown, Stewart and Mervyn Morris, Gordon Rohlehr. Voice Print, (Longman Group), U.K., 1989.
An anthology of oral and related poetry from Caribbean poets and writers.

Dunn, Sonja with Lou Pamenter. Chants for Whole Language: Crackers and Crumbs, (Pembroke Publishers Ltd.), Ontario, Canada, 1990.
Chants for children.

Espinet, Ramabai. Creation Fire: A CAFRA Anthology of Caribbean Women's Poetry (Sister Vision Press), Toronto, Canada, 1990.
An extensive collection of poetry from women poets throughout the Caribbean.

Ford-Smith, Honor. Lionheart Gal (Sister Vision Press), Toronto, Canada, 1987.
The experiences of Jamaican women are brought to life in this collection of stories by the Sistren Popular Theatre Collective.

Kellman, Anthony. Crossing Water, (Greenfield Review Press), U.K., 1992.
A collection of poetry from the English-speaking Caribbean.

Keens-Douglas, Paul. Is Town Say So, (College Press), Trinidad, 1981.
Dialect poetry and short stories by the author.

Lochan, Dick. Doh Make Joke: Caribbean Dialect, (We Lingo Publications), Scarborough, Ontario, Canada, 1987.
A collection of stories and poetry by the author.

Mandiela, Ahdri Zhina. Speshal Rikwes, (Sister Vision Press), Toronto, Ontario, 1985.
A collection of dub poetry by this Toronto-based dub poet.

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"In Defense of We Lingo" by Dick Lochan. From his book: *Doh Make Joke:* Caribbean Dialect, We Lingo Publications, Scarborough, Ontario, Canada, 1987.

"Patwa is What We Talk" from: *Some People Is Asking*: published by St. Christopher House Adult Literacy Program Publications, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 1989.

"Sweet St. Vincent" by David Phillips. From *Not A Bed Of Rose*, published by the Toronto ALFA Centre, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 1989.

"Miss Amoury's Bathwater", excerpt from the story by Althea Prince. From her book: *Ladies of the Night and Other Stories*, published by Sister Vision Press, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 1993.

"Rub A Dub Style Inna Regent Park" by Lillian Allen. From her book: *Women Do This Everyday*, published by Women's Press, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 1993.

"One Trini Recollection" by Sister Lois Jacobs.

"Anancy and Commonsense", reprinted from: *Language and Power*, published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Ltd., 1990.

"When Moon Shine", excerpt from the story by Paul Keens-Douglas. From his book: *Is Town Say So*, published by College Press, Trinidad, 1981.