SEM57. Linguistic perspectives on Caribbean Englishes and English-lexified Caribbean creoles

57A 11 September h. 16:00-18:30, PN 15
57B 12 September h. 16:30-19:00, PN 15

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Abstract
The varieties of English and the English-lexified creoles spoken across the Caribbean are the outcome of complex creative interplay between the English superstratum and various West African substrata, which have been in contact for over four hundred years within the social vacuum forcibly created by early colonizers. Although the "Afric" (Allsopp, 2004: xiv) component is obviously of paramount importance for their onset, "translanguaging" (García & Wei, 2014: 137) and "polyglossing" (Král, 2019: 836) practices are widespread across speech communities throughout the Anglophone Caribbean.

As a consequence, this part of the Anglosphere stands out as uniquely "fragmented" (Holm, 1986: 1) – historically, geographically, politically and hence linguistically – by the "colonial lag" but concomitantly united by "Pan-Caribbean tendencies" (Gramley, 2001: 82), as shown by the authoritative lexicographic works compiled by Richard Allsopp, that is the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (1996/2003), the *New Register of Caribbean English Usage* (2010) and *A Book of Afric Caribbean Proverbs* (2004).

Accordingly, this seminar aims to bring together scholars interested in exploring language variation and change in such a culturally diverse conglomerate from various linguistic perspectives, namely lexicological, phraseological, paremiological and metaphorical, by also considering attendant representations of identity and ethnicity. Potential topics focusing on Caribbean Englishes and/or English-lexified Caribbean Creoles may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Lexicology and lexicography
- Phraseology/phraseography and Paremiology/paremiography
- Oral traditions
- Translanguaging and multilingual practices
- Decreolization
- Metaphors and conceptual framing
- Digital and audiovisual communication

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SEM57. Papers

57A 11 September h. 16:00-18:30, PN 15

- *Americanizing Barbadian English ten years on: A field study 2015-2025* (Cristiano Furiassi, Università di Torino)
- *Englishes through Caribbean literacy stories* (Roberta Cimarosti, Università della Calabria)
- *"Me gets it, mon": Jamaican English in animation and in Italian dubbing* (Ilaria Parini, Università del Piemonte Orientale 'Amedeo Avogadro')

- *Afrogenesis in translanguaging and Anglophone derivations in proverbs and interjections:* wiemen fayah 'n dutty tingdem (Rosanna Masiola, Università per stranieri di Perugia)

57B 12 September h. 16:30-19:00, PN 15

- *Translanguaging and music: The presence of Jamaican speech forms in Italian reggae* (Renato Tomei, Università per stranieri di Perugia)
- *Reggae heteroglossia: The plurality of language artistically organized* (Elena Barreca, Università degli Studi "G. d'Annunzio" Chieti-Pescara)
- *Decolonising the language: Dread talk and reggae music against black 'downpression'* (Andrea Cifalinò, Università di Catania)

SEM57. Abstracts

Reggae heteroglossia: The plurality of language artistically organized

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In the last few decades, we have witnessed the publication of an increasing number of critical analyses of contemporary creolized fiction and poetry as well as research on the genesis of creole literature (Buzelin & Winer, 2009). However, the use of contact languages in verbal arts other than printed literature – such as in songs – remains a fairly new object of study (Farquharson, Hollington & Jones, 2024).

Stretching the boundaries of literary analysis to include lyrical "texts", this paper focuses on a corpus of Rastafari-reggae lyrics from 1970s Jamaica and looks at their creative use of language. With its diglossic context, Jamaica offers a fertile case-study for research in verbal arts and multilingualism, as speakers move within a continuum that has Standard English and Jamaican as its two extremes (Devonish, 1986).

This linguistic environment emerges clearly in Rastafari-reggae lyrics, where we find the Jamaican proverb and the newspaper title, the archaism of the King James Bible and the neologism of dread talk, the Rastafari jargon (Pollard, 2000). If the linguistic particularities of Rastafari-reggae have often been noted (Cooper & Devonish, 1995; Farquharson, 2016), no systematic analysis has yet attempted to understand how the interplay of different language varieties affects the lyrical style of the genre.

Based on a systematical analysis of a defined lyrical corpus, this paper examines reggae's use of language and elaborates on its aesthetic value. The discussion is shaped by Bakhtin's (1981) theory of heteroglossia: a concept recently relieved by sociolinguists, heteroglossia points to a stratification of the text into "socio-ideological languages," which represent "specific points of view on the world" (Hirschkop, 2023). Giving to songs the same in-depth attention usually given to written literature, this paper explores the linguistic creativity of Rastafari-reggae lyrics, where several "socio-ideological languages" are organized in the space of a few verses.

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Decolonising the language: Dread talk and reggae music against black 'downpression'

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Jamaica has a long history of foreign domination, as since the 16th century the Spanish and the British empires ruled over the island. Such colonial powers brought slaves from West Africa to serve as a labour force, causing a cultural and linguistic mixture that made the island a "crucible of languages" (Lalla & D'Costa, 1990, p. 6). As a result, Jamaican Creole (or Patwa) is nowadays characterised by an English-based superstratum, and a phonological, morphological and syntactic substratum that is largely influenced by West African languages (Durrleman, 2008).

Within this context, Dread Talk emerged as a dialect reflecting the philosophical and political views of Rastafarianism, a religious movement that spread in Jamaica starting from the 1930s. This language is strictly related to the problematic social conditions of the Caribbean island and its former colonial past. As a matter of fact, it originated from the Rastafarians' social protest against the 'pigmentocracy' that characterised Jamaican society for centuries, in which blackness was associated with servitude and inferiority, whereas whiteness represented power, superiority and godliness (Pollard, 1982). Therefore, Dread Talk expresses the need felt by Rastafarians to modify the English superstratum of Patwa in order to reflect their socio-political perspectives through the decreolisation of the lexifier language (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Triffin, 1989). Moreover, the birth of reggae music between the 1960s and the 1970s marked the emergence of a politically sided genre that intertwined with Rastafarian ideals. Hence, many artists made extensive use of Patwa and Dread Talk in their lyrics to indicate further return to an authentic African identity and stress their beliefs of language decolonisation (King, Bays & Foster, 2002).

Drawing on these premises, this work aimed at digging into selected reggae songs to extrapolate examples of Dread Talk and investigate how this resistive language is employed as a form of political protest and language decreolisation. In order to do so, the analysis covers songs that span from the early stages of the reggae movement stretching to the most contemporary scene, comprising influential artists like Peter Tosh, Burning Spear, Bob Marley and the Wailers, Jimmy Cliff, Chronixx, Protoje, Kabaka Pyramid. The songs were analysed by identifying examples of Dread Talk and exploring which socio-political or identitarian meaning they carry by contextualising their use within the lyrics and linking it to Rastafarian ideology. The study revealed how reggae music reflects sufferings that lasted generations, while also representing a way of bringing together the Rastafarian community, allowing its members to self-represent.

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Englishes through Caribbean literacy stories

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Abstract

This paper presents Derek Walcott's musical plays *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* (1972) and its sequel *Moon-Child* (2012) as an example of the way Creole-based Caribbean literacy stories may be used to learn English in second- and foreign-language contexts based on a theoretical approach that interweaves three long-established research fields: 1) the latest postcolonial orientation to World Englishes (Saraceni, 2015); 2) the translingual, bi- or multilingual nature of the second- and foreign-language English user (Cook, 2010, Kramsch, 2008, Pavlenko, 2011); 3) the structure and use of Creole Englishes and the way they may apply to English acquisition (Lefebvre White & Jourdan, 2006).

By following the Creole folktale about little Ti-Jean who manages to articulate his creolised English while facing and defeating the devil, i.e., the material and psycho-emotional hindrances that fight hard to alienate him and his family from their own homeland, I propose to focus on the way the folktale may speak to today's translingual English users and learners. Specifically, the story makes us reflect on two linked aspects of the *translational English* that is connatural to

bilinguals: 1) the formation of a new Self as one inhabits and traverses both languages experiencing emotions, relying on certain values as well as on imaginative projections to overcome the inhibiting formalities of the standard languages and/or their socio-cultural associations; 2) the emergence of a hybridised English rooted in one's new identity and world.

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Americanizing Barbadian English ten years on: A field study 2015-2025

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Barbados, independent from the British Crown since November 30th, 1966, and a parliamentary republic since November 30th, 2021, is a speech community where Barbadian English, the local variety of English, coexists with Bajan, an English-lexified "mesolectal" (Gibson, 1996: 41) or "intermediate" (Winford, 2000: 215) creole. Due to the colonial past of the island, which makes it a prototypically diasporic context (Furiassi, 2023b: 48–49), the vocabulary of Barbadian English is inferred to chiefly derive from varieties of Modern English originating in the British Isles, namely British, Irish and Scottish (Furiassi, 2023a: 72; 2023b: 49–51; 2022: 91–92).

In fact, the aim of this piece of research is to highlight how the present-day vocabulary of Barbadian English seems to have moved towards American English, a phenomenon common to other varieties of English spoken in the Caribbean (Stuka, 2023: 92–93, 106). Data are drawn from field research, more specifically from two identical sets of questionnaires distributed ten years apart to Barbadian-only students attending the University of the West Indies at Cave Hill, Barbados: the first set was submitted between November and December 2015 to 200 students; the second set was circulated between March and April 2025 among 100 students. Both the first and the second batch of respondents correspond to about 5% of all Barbadian-born undergraduates respectively in the 2015-2016 and the 2024-2025 academic years.

Despite most of the respondents claiming that they attained and are still receiving formal education in British English, their use of vocabulary, apparent from the answers provided, seems to include an equal proportion of Briticisms and Americanisms (Algeo, 1989: 156), or at least an alternation between them. Hence, the findings recorded within the time frame considered are hoped to shed light on the discrepancy between the traditional notion of Barbadian English, conceived as resembling British English, and the actual use of vocabulary made by younger generations of Barbadians, which appears to be conspicuously closer to American English.

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Afrogenesis in translanguaging and Anglophone derivations in proverbs and interjections: *wiemen fayah 'n dutty tingdem*

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In the context of the "Creole Debate" and the recognition of Jamaican as an Anglophone-based speech form or English-lexified Creole, this presentation examines the Afrogenesis of Jamaican and Caribbean languages. Research on proverbs in lexicography (Allsopp, 2006a, 2006b; Cassidy & Le Page, 2002) uncovers a rich, shared African multilingual heritage that underpins these languages. The structural grammar of African languages significantly influences the translanguaging evident in Jamaican, reflecting a unique rhythm and stress pattern reminiscent of the languages from the Western Coast of Africa (Devonish, 2002). This perspective is crucial for dispelling the negative stigma associated with pidginization and dismantling deeply rooted prejudices against so-called "broken languages" (Allsopp, 2003; Cassidy, 2007).

Proverbs, interjections, ideophones, and mimetics are not just linguistic elements; they are powerful emotional tools and vital markers of identity (Rickford & Rickford, 1999). Moreover, linguistic phenomena such as metathesis, syllepsis, and the reduction to holophrastic forms and ideophones challenge traditional semantic interpretations, allowing for a richer understanding of language. Proverbs vividly illustrate how Afrogenesis continues to thrive through translanguaging and the interjectional continuum hypothesis. The limited examples discussed highlight themes of matriarchal solidarity and the intricate dynamics surrounding procreation. Moreover, interjections, holophrastic phrases, mimetic lexemes, and even vulgar exclamations not only reflect Anglophone influences in Jamaican and Caribbean speech forms but also expose critical issues of sexism and gender stigma related to fertility. This calls for a deeper examination of the social implications woven into the fabric of contact languages, and the colonial importation of cursing and its diffusion (Farquharson, Forrester & Hollington, 2020).

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"Me gets it, mon": Jamaican English in animation and in Italian dubbing

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The use of accents and language variation in films is a long-established practice that manipulates language as a tool in the construction of characters, so as to convey specific characteristics. This is even more evident in animated films, where language is used as a quick way to build character and reaffirm stereotypes. Linguistic variation can occur on the phonological, as well as the lexical and syntactic levels. Several studies seem to agree that using linguistic stereotypes in animated films (which are aimed at a public mainly composed of children or young adults) is a potentially dangerous practice which may ultimately teach youngsters to discriminate against people speaking a variety with certain specific

features. According to Minutella (2021), Lippi-Green (1997), Dobrow and Gidney (1998), and Ellis (2012), it is not a case that the villains quite often speak with a foreign accent.

Shark Tale is an animated comedy produced in 2004 by DreamWorks Animation, where the characters speak different variations of American English, which are used to attribute different features to them. The villains, in this case, are a group of white sharks who present a series of elements that allows the audience to easily identify them as Italian American Mafiosi. The film caused a lot of debate in the United States, where many associations of Italian Americans were concerned about the above mentioned potential discriminating message conveyed to children, due to the negative features associated with their ethnic group (Parini, 2019). However, the Italian American variety is not the only one spoken in the film. In fact, two minor characters, called Ernie and Bernie, speak a language variety which can be easily recognized as Jamaican English. Being an animated film, their characterization is also reinforced by their visual representation, as they are two jellyfish whose tentacles look like Rastafarian locks. This presentation will focus on the characteristics of these two characters and the strategies used in the Italian dubbed version of the film.

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Translanguaging and music: The presence of Jamaican speech forms in Italian reggae

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Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of language, music, and identity by examining the translanguaging practices observed within the Italian reggae and Rastafari community. Focusing on the dynamic presence and adaptation of Jamaican speech forms, including the Rastafarian lexicon, the study highlights how these linguistic features are appropriated, recontextualized, and re-signified in the Italian sociocultural landscape (Sebba, 2012). Drawing on ethnographic observations, discourse analysis, and interviews with artists and community members, the paper reveals a marked variety of features adopted from Jamaican linguistic and cultural practices, and distinctive speech rhythms typical of Jamaican deejaying and chanting (Cooper, 2004; Alim, 2009; Hollington, Farquharson & Jones Jr, 2022).

These linguistic elements are not isolated but deeply embedded within a broader spectrum of youth cultural practices. The Italian reggae scene exhibits a strong influence from Jamaican cultural aesthetics, ranging from music production and performance styles to pragmatic features, dress codes, hairstyles, and expressions of spiritual identity aligned with Rastafari principles (Hebdige, 1987; King, 2001). These practices collectively contribute to the creation of new translinguistic and transcultural spaces, where meanings are continuously negotiated, and new identities are performed.

The paper argues that these translanguaging processes go far beyond code-switching or cultural imitation; instead, they reflect a complex and creative engagement with global flows of language, culture, and ideology (Pennycook, 2007; García & Wei, 2014). Through the lens of reggae music and Rastafari discourse, Italian youth not only express affinity with Jamaican traditions but also localize and reshape them to fit their own sociopolitical and cultural realities. The result is a dynamic linguistic and cultural repertoire that challenges conventional linguistic boundaries, offering new insights into the role of music and Jamaican speech forms as vehicles for transnational identities.

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