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CARIBBEAN ENGLISH AS A CHALLENGE TO LEXICOGRAPHY

Introduction

Almost as soon as the English throne finally broke with Catholicism, with the accession of Elizabeth I, one of her seamen, John Hawkins, sometime treasurer of her Royal Navy, began slave trading in defiance of Spain, and, in 1562, "got into his possession" at Sierra Leona (sic, from Hakluyt as cited in Payne 1907:7) "the number of 300 Negros at least" and sailed to the north coast of Hispaniola (Haiti) where he "made vent of the whole number of his Negros". Buying, transporting and selling slaves took easily 9 months (the 'triangular trade' took a year); but even if the migrated Africans would not have retained many English words from the ship's crew in this first venture - which Hawkins repeated on a much more wide-ranging Caribbean scale in one of Elizabeth's own ships (the Jesus of Lubeck) in 1564/65 - it is historically true that the English language had begun making substantial thrusts from Plymouth to the West Indies and South America long before it did so to North America. It was seamen's English that brought Protestantism's mailed fist into the rich belly of the New World, as the logical forerunner of the religious hands that guided the Mayflower to North America some half a century later in 1620. If this sounds exaggerated one need only recall that Sir Francis Drake's great plundering armada of 25 ships sailed in 1585 on what is historically known as 'Drake's West Indian Voyage', and a hazardous channel in the Virgin Islands is still known today as 'Drake's Passage'.

Indeed it is to the accounts of Hawkins's and Drake's voyages rather than to Columbus's controversial, long-concealed (and still longer untranslated) Journal that the English language owes the names of many commonplaces of today's Caribbean culture: flying-fish and bonito; coconut, pine-apple and plantain; egret and flamingo; canoe, cassava and cassava-bread; etc. (from John Sparke's account of Hawkins's second voyage, in Payne 1907:9-68). How many more may have, like these, actually come into the currency of maritime English long before they were recorded in printed accounts it is impossible to say; but as evidence that this must have been so one may refer for example to the successive colonizing efforts in Guiana by Englishment between 1604 and 1620 (cf. Merrill 1958); and to the fact that the formal settlement of St. Kitts (1624), Barbados (1627), and Antigua (1632) by Englishmen were all preceded by trial runs. The Caribbean, we might say, was being settled by Englishmen just when Modern English, as we understand the term, had been settled by the Bible, Shakespeare and Bacon. It is no accident that the last named wrote one of his famous Essays on the subject 'Plantations', in which he mentioned, inter alia, the planting of pine-apples and maize, and condemned the use of forced labour as an 'unblessed thing'.

What is Caribbean English?

The point of these introductory details is to indicate that Caribbean English has indeed the oldest ancestry of all Englishes exported from the linguistic homeland, but more, to stress that in time-depth it will have as large a residue of social, environmental and methodological vocabulary as any other offspring of homeland English today, the difference being unfortunately that the bulk of ours would have been unrecorded and lost. By way of example women had hairstyles and head-ties with many different names because they were signals to their menfolk; there are still dozens of designs of baskets, hundreds of medicinal bushes, many children's games and so on, the names for which have all but disappeared through time even when the items might still be found or remembered. Moreover, the historical depth of this inventory is repeated with significant variations in a large number of non-contiguous territories scattered around a million and a half square miles of sea linked to the mainland in the east in South American Guyana, and in the west in Central American Belize where the sun rises three hours later than in Guyana.

More precisely, the list of (linguistically) Anglophone or (politically) Commonwealth Caribbean territories duly embraced by the Caribbean Lexicography Project[1] is, from East to West: GUYANA, TRINIDAD/TOBAGO, GRENADA, the Grenadines, ST. VINCENT, BARBADOS, DOMINICA, ANTIGUA, ST. KITTS/NEVIS, Montserrat, Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, JAMAICA, BAHAMAS, BELIZE. That is to say some fifteen territorial entities or groupings of which no fewer than eleven are today independent nations[2] (indicated in block capitals), and therefore linguistically entitled to as many separate 'standards'. This may be seen as the first aspect of an overall challenge of the English language in the Caribbean to lexicography. For where else in the world can you find eleven politically independent non-contiguous neighbours speaking varieties of the same language, each fully entitled on linguistic principles to its own dictionary, yet (with possibly three exceptions) too small and too poor, and (with no exceptions) culturally too insecure to support an independent compilation in practice?

At the level of educational administration throughout the region this cultural insecurity is a real challenge to serious lexicography; but at the level of scholarly discipline probably a more serious challenge is whether there can, in the circumstances, be a valid lexicography of material whose entity as a system of lexicon is questionable. Is there, indeed, such a thing as Caribbean English? If one accepts as correct, as I do, such an observation as that of George Santayana (1869:119) that "the structure of language...becomes a mirror of the structure of the world as presented to the intelligence", then it readily follows that the mirror of the Caribbean environment and human experience must present the intrinsic differences in the structure of the Caribbean world to the intelligence, which must then interpret those differences as a new family of idiom within the semantic and creative scope of any metropolitan language that pervades the region. Hence a Caribbean Spanish, Dutch, French and English, notwithstanding any protestations that may arise, whether from cultural insecurity on the one hand or from pedantic purism or

metropolitan chauvinism on the other. Whereas linguistic chauvinism is probably the least sin of the English nation, it nevertheless is to be doubted whether there would be many outside the ranks of linguists that would go as far as the late Patrick Gordon Walker who stated (in 1959:82) that

> Because English is a Commonwealth language it is much more than the language of England. It is inevitable and good that different brands of English have arisen and are arising in the Commonwealth...English as the language of the Commonwealth must be a common stream to which we all contribute, Britain [having] no more claim to speak 'correct' English than any other part of the Commonwealth.

Walker mentioned Canadian, Australian and Asian English as obvious examples but the case of the fragmented and still partially creolized Caribbean kinship may have made even his liberal mind hesitate. (Like other and more professional writers on the subject, he did not mention the Caribbean.) But it is precisely the Caribbean case which, as if sweeping aside any question of its substance and identity, has, over the last forty years produced perhaps the most distinctive examples of literary use of English language in those decades, in the works of Vic Reid (Jamaica), E.K. Brathwaite (Barbados), Selvon and Lovelace (Trinidad), for example - none of them as writers of Creole tidbits, let it be observed - it is the Caribbean more than any other brand of English which seems to me to challenge the record-keepers of the language, to require English culture to recognize the extent and power of its diaspora in language alone.

When, for example, Reid writes (1949:6 and 21)

(1a) Memories are a-shake me tonight

or (1b) So, then, turn buckra turns his cattle on to the land

and Selvon (1965:82)

(2) Back home in the West Indies it have a kind of dog they does call them pot-hounds ...Another kind name hat-rack

and the poet Brathwaite (1977:15)

(3) an to know that he hads was to walk down de noon
down dat long windin day
to we home

and so on, the question must arise whether the albeit sturdy morphosyntax of English can permit such liberty within the compass of internationally accepted formal English. The answer, which must be determined mainly by transmission of clear meaning in serious context perhaps reinforced by accountable public and academic accreditation - is 'yes' on all counts. That, of course, puts in question the whole notion of 'standard' English; but it will be noted that I used the term 'formal' English above because the notion of an international 'standard' English is at best nebulous and confusing, at worst hardly feasible. There simply is no more high table in a hall of English. Instead, the

English language is a multi-national corporation with a large number of members on the board, each with an accountable vote and none with a power of veto, the old father England at the head not being interested, and the biggest brother America at his right hand not being considered qualified, to veto.

It would therefore seem important and, especially in the context of this paper, proper, to agree on a decisive definition of English[3] which I propose as follows:

> English is the language developed out of Anglo-Saxon by the people of England whence it spread during three and a half centuries to become the common native or primary language of many nations and races distributed in every continent on earth. It is an analytic language with a morphology strongly characterized by adaptive features, the sense of any continuous utterance being governed by and dependent on a strong traditional word order (subect+verb+complement) as its international structural base, which is adaptable to a number of distinctive national features at all linguistic levels, chiefly in its lexicon.

In this context the notion of national standard Englishes becomes feasible; and also, without serious risk of contradicting what was said above about an international standard English, but rather supported by the demographically small[4], historically, culturally and ecologically unified character of the Anglophone Caribbean, the notion of a Standard Caribbean English (SCE) becomes both feasible and practical. SCE may be defined as

> The literate English of educated nationals of Caribbean territories and their spoken English such as is considered natural in formal social contexts. There being many such territories, each with its own recognizable 'standard', SCE would be the total body of regional lexicon and usage bound to a common core of syntax and morphology shared with international English, but aurally distinguished as a discrete type by certain phonological features such as a marked levelling of British English diphthongs and a characteristic disconnection of pitch from stress as compared with British and American sound patterns.

Challenges to lexicography

It is with the whole body of linguistic behaviour so defined that the Caribbean Lexicography Project concerns itself. The huge size of the undertaking is a physical and financial challenge, but not a lexicographical one. Indeed Cassidy and LePage's DICTIONARY OF JAMAICAN ENGLISH (DJE) with its some 16,000 entries could go a long way to meet the physical problem by serving as a base for the comparative lexicography of the whole Caribbean. And why not? It was compiled on sound historical principles and has justly received wide scholarly acclaim. Yet in my own data-collecting in Jamaica in 1978 at three teacher training colleges I found the DJE too little known and not at all used by instructors or trainees. The reason is that educated Jamaicans are very nervous about the term 'Jamaican English' in itself, and quite upset at the prospect of identifying that label as proper to

the contents of DJE. That is in fact a problem that would repeat itself throughout the Anglophone Caribbean, and not a hundred distinguished scholars can overcome it.

The first great challenge therefore of Caribbean English to lexicography comes from the region's rooted cultural insecurity. The same problem is experienced in the predominantly white regions of the English diaspora; witness the vexed comment of the late Walter Avis in his introduction to the (Senior) DICTIONARY OF CANADIAN ENGLISH:

> ... it is a form of blindness to insist as many do, that "English is English" and that only fools "dignify the slang and dialect" of Canada by giving it serious attention.

But in those societies the regionalisms are pretty well always supported by some form of written record. In the predominantly non-white Caribbean, however, the problem is intensified firstly by a marked absence of written record, except for some mostly jocose experimentation, and secondly by the educator's anxiety over 'literacy' - what regionalisms are to be accepted as 'literate' and so permitted the respectability of a spelling? The best example of this is perhaps the work jook [ǰuk] "to poke, stick, pierce, wound". It occurs in absolutely every Caribbean territory and is widely used in evidence in law courts, yet no self-respecting Caribbean teacher would permit it to be written - because it is still associated with the language of the field-slave.

Indeed in the slow twilight of colonialism the long shadow of the field-slave covers the whole body of Caribbean folk culture with its considerable 'orature'[5] of unspelt labels for Caribbean ecology and life-ways; and because of that association the bulk of Caribbean 'educated' (i.e. schooled) people prefer to let all but a few essentials (e.g. food names) of that 'orature' remain at folk-entertainment level or die rather than be maintained by a systematic spelling. For example, many St Lucian school children know only the French Creole loan mawi sosé, and Dominicans the term susé glo, for the insect commonly known as the 'dragon-fly'. But in both these islands teachers assured me that there was never any question of writing down those terms. In each case the children would simply be instructed to write d-r-a-g-o-n - f-l-y if they ever wanted to write about such banalities in class! The lexicographer's influence therefore threatens to interfere with this smooth concordat between teacher and child who would both now have to learn to need and then learn to write a confusing new orthography.

To such a challenge from the body of Francophone Creole loans (operative in St. Lucia, Dominica, Grenada and Trinidad) must be added the much wider challenge of an acceptable orthography for Anglophone Creole loans in educated Caribbean English. The phonemic orthography proposed by Cassidy (1961) and used effectively in DJE is generally adaptable for other Caribbean Anglophone Creoles and has indeed been so used by linguists; but homogeneity, already difficult in an overall Anglophone system, is impractical with Indic and Amerindian loans (most of which have traditional

spellings anyway), and not feasible with Francophone loans. The challenge is therefore to find acceptable orthographic compromises, since four different spelling systems would be pedagogically unacceptable.

Semantic pitch-differentiation in SCE, an obfuscated legacy of the African prosodic element in its background, offers another challenge to English lexicography. For example, it seems necessary to indicate pitch and stress in order to identify the significantly different denotations of the expression one time in Caribbean English. Thus

one time	/3"1/	There and then [very strong contrastive stress]
one time	/3"3'/	At this very instant
one time	/1'2/	Without too much delay
one time	/2'1/	(1) At one and the same time (2) Once upon a time (in story telling)
one time	/1 1/	At some time in the past [reduced even stress]

(the last two of these being articulated with more obviously open juncture than the first three). A number of disyllabic words and phrases in Caribbean English, and a few trisyllables too, are subject to such pitch-differentiated distinctions of meaning, with stress being a noticeably separate suprasegmental item.

A second great challenge and one also caused by the absence of a written record in SCE is the matter of etymology, but as the Caribbean Lexicography Project is predominantly a cross-referenced inventory - and the first one to be undertaken - of Anglophone Caribbean culture, and not a survey based on historical principles, etymology appears at first to be of secondary importance, and one is strongly tempted to ignore the excitement of this labour. On the other hand, given the effects of the cultural insecurity of the region, it turns out that etymology has a greater significance in our case than in that of the more settled British and American Englishes. In those cases etymology merely supplies the refined details of a linguistic and social history that their culturally secure people know to be there somewhere. In the Caribbean case the entrenched belief, on the contrary, is that what SCE obviously owes to British or American sources is refined and that all else is crude and systemless, as evidenced by such remarks as "That is not grammar", "You can't even spell such things, it's just what people say", etc. In the event the etymology of Caribbean lexical items becomes too important to be neglected. For it uncovers the linguistic processes and strategies of structure at work and, by showing them to be part of the normal stock of all human linguistic devices, will go a long way to remove the notion of systemless crudeness. On the more positive side, etymological inquiry reveals that some of the pedagogue's favourite taboos like tinnen 'a tin cup', stupidness 'nonsense' (as distinct from stupidity) etc. have just that English pedigree which the insecure so much crave; that many others encapsulate lost pieces of valuable social history (such as the uniquely Trinidadian washicongs, and uniquely Grenadian punkasal, both being words for 'sneakers' or 'plimsolls', the first being of likely Chinese origin and the second Carib).

As more reliable information is now also available about African languages, from which a great many items have been brought through calquing (cf. Allsopp 1976/77), and again about Indic language areas from which large immigrant populations came, a better understanding of and respect for the great interpenetration of cultures in the Caribbean is made possible via etymology. The meaning of this for Caribbean self-respect, social history and education is incalculable.

The most down-to-earth usefulness of etymology in Caribbean lexicography, however, is in helping to recommend the fittest spelling in certain unsettled cases. Possible dictionary entries E_1 to E_5 to exemplify this.

E_1: (Trinidad) - bazoudi [< Fr. abasourdir]
rather than bazodee etc.

E_2: (Jamaica) - dokunu [< Two ɔ-dɔkono]
rather than duckonoo etc.

E_3: (Caribbean) - guinep [< Arawakan kenepa]
rather than genip etc.

E_4: (Guyana) - Phagwa [< Hindi phagun + wa]
rather than Phagwah

E_5: (Trinidad) - washicong [< dial. Chinese hua xie kɔŋ kɔŋ]
rather than watchekong

The challenge in this area of course comes not just from the paucity of available source information as compared with the size of the inventory, but most often from the difficulty of recognizing (a) what linguistic source an item may have derived from and (b) what may have been its original form, intermediate varieties having been very rarely recorded. In process of time, a number of phonemic erosions, morphemic distortions, folk etymology, Anglicization, or false refinement due to ignorance have all been in operation. The difficulty may be illustrated by seeing two cases in which there has actually been some success. Thus calypso is far removed from its probable Efik original ka isu 'go on' (a common audience-participation phrase), though the parallel folk form kaiso and the known varieties cariso (Virgin Islands) and calisseau (earlier Trinidad) are evidence of the connection. Similarly, the Jamaican fruit known as naseberry correlates phonologically via Spanish nispero with (Virgin Islands) mesple. It remains to be established whether there is a further linguistic connection with the original Uto-Aztecan tzapotl from which came (Eastern Caribbean) sapodilla, but they are names of the same fruit.

Another important area of challenge lies in word-class identification. Charles Fries's (1952) reference to a remark of John Stuart Mills in 1867 is very pertinent here: Mills said that "the distinctions between various parts of speech...are distinctions in thought, not merely in words". Indeed the folk roots of Caribbean English, with their genetic experience of African idiom or way of putting things, have fed some distinctions in thought into the function of some English words in the Caribbean

that can make it difficult to determine the morphosyntactic identity of these units in any conventional terms, old or modern.

For example, consider these Caribbean English sentences:

(4) Man, like you're really happy today.

(5) That's something for like Friday, like in the gym.

(6) Like if it's raining, I wouldn't make her iron.

(7) In those days even we so could not go into the Marine Hotel, and as for them so, they couldn't stay in the kitchen.

(8) All in the presence of the Lord he still got eyes for the women.

(9) All the try you would try the child don't want to learn.

In sentences (4), (5) and (6), like has modal functions (signalling kinds of suggestion), whereas it has no such function in British or American English[6]. In sentence (7), so is a deictic tag serving to give emphasis to the preceding pronoun/pronominal intensifier. In (8) and (9) all is an adverbial intensifier which, in (9), also helps to supply focus in an idiomatic structure taken from Creole (by 'front-focussing'). Such cases do not fit into the normal morphosyntax of English and the lexicographer is challenged from time to time with the need for a 'nonconformist' functional analysis to identify word classes.

Status labelling of Caribbean English items is the next challenge to the lexicographer. The social resistance to such folk-level items as jook, tinnen, stupidness has already been pointed out; and whereas etymology can assist in their being given acceptance, the raising of their status is a different dimension of the problem. That must depend on their enlightened use in writing over a period of time. Meanwhile they remain as of low status, and are embraced in the whole body of folk idiom - from morphs to proverbs - under the label 'slangs' (sic pl.), a designation seriously so used by students in many Caribbean territories. Linguistically, of course, even 'slang' (sg.) is inapplicable as an overall label, but in the circumstances it would clearly be unhelpful to use it at all in the lexicographical classification of items in Caribbean English; and the term 'colloquial' is even more confusing in the Caribbean context. 'Standardness', a difficult concept as has been pointed out above but still possible in relation to Caribbean English structure, is more difficult to decide in respect of items of territorial usage, but is impossible without a settled spelling, and is unworkable if it comes to choosing one as standard among several different territorial designations of the same denotatum. For example, it is just possible to set up some territorial hierarchies for the regional designations of "white rubber-soled canvas shoes", as follows:

Jamaica	Barbados	Trinidad	Guyana
crepe-soles	+crepes (plimsolls)	+sneakers	+yachting-shoes
sneakers	+sneakers	crepesoles	+yachtings
bugas	+pumps	washicongs	white slippers
puss-boots	(half cuts)		soft-shoes

- in which the + sign denotes highest frequency, and brackets denote low frequency. Neither is relative frequency, of course, a guide to status, nor is the lowest member of each regional group necessarily regarded as 'slang'. Yet there is no doubt that in each community educated speakers would discriminate in favour of one or two forms, not necessarily the commonest, as being suitable to the most formal contexts. A hierarchy of 'formalness' would seem a more practical answer to the challenge of status labelling, in these related oral societies, than a hierarchy of standardness.

The result, determined by recognizable sociolinguistic criteria (cf. Allsopp 1982), might be as follows:

'Formal'	- required or acceptable in the most serious spoken and written contexts
'Informal'	- everyday usage, not humorous or rude
'Antiformal'	- signalling familiarity or a willed rejection of formalness
'Subformal'	- common error, in conflict with educated usage
'Taboo'	- offensive

In each of the territorial hierarchies set out above the first two levels may each qualify as Formal or Informal, the third float between Informal and Antiformal, and the last would be generally Antiformal.

The display of designations should also help to illustrate how unrealistic it would be to select any one of the four top members, say - and there are more for other territories - as the SCE term. On the contrary, their complete equality of linguistic status, together with the fact that they are semantically identical (more than synonyms are), needs to be recognized, and perhaps the term 'allonyms' would suitably mark the distinction.

Conclusion

Lastly, as a first regional pedagogical work in a region that has been served only by British and American dictionaries, and in the hands of the culturally insecure West Indian who fears his own regional language differences, a DICTIONARY OF CARIBBEAN ENGLISH USAGE must argue its own case in regard to

(a) the authenticity and acceptability of the data on which it is based;

(b) the multinational and cultural spread of an item in the Caribbean context;

(c) the requirement of an enlightened judgement, in both regional and world terms, of the rightful semantic place

and function of Caribbean inputs to English.

The challenge thereby presented seems to require the lexicographer to consider how best to present his material. The long and widely established method of presentation in dictionaries broadly assumes the acceptance of headwords and glosses which may or may not be illustrated by citations. This is an inductive process, the gloss being a 'generalization' followed by illustrative 'instances'. But in fact the 'instances' are the premises from which gloss and function are deduced - a deductive process.

This fact recommends a particular order of presentation as an answer to the challenge of the Caribbean circumstances. Presenting the citations rather than the gloss first will not only present the valid evidence to support (a), (b) and (c) above, but will offer the gloss as a logical conclusion from cited premises, thus immediately preventing doubts about morphological extensions (e.g. jooks, jooked, jooking), and especially minimizing editorial value judgements (while focusing the user's attention early) on the status and usage of an item (cf. Allsopp 1978).

It should be clear in the context of all that has been said that Caribbean lexicography can hardly afford to be purely descriptive or purely historical if it is going to be respected and used by Caribbean peoples at large. Not only an authentic common reference is needed, but a rationalized guide that can be respected by teachers and general public alike. Its authenticity must be the first duty of scholarship, but of no less importance are the melding of rationalization and guidance by a careful compromise between descriptive and prescriptive principles.

Notes

1 The Caribbean Lexicography Project, based at Cave Hill campus of the University of the West Indies, began effectively in 1972 and has been endorsed by the Ministries of Education of the region. It has received grants and personnel from the Governments of Guyana, Barbados, Trinidad & Tobago, and the UWI, and a number of smaller grants from Ford, Barclays, IDRC and ACLS. The paper is based on the work so funded.

2 Of these, Jamaica (population 2,000,000) and Trinidad & Tobago (pop. 1,000,000), both independent since 1962, are the largest communities, while St. Kitts/Nevis (pop. 45,000) is the smallest and most recently independent (September 1983).

3 Scholars often bypass a definition of English. Consider, e.g., Strevens's (1964:21) open-ended definition: "So let us be bold and agree to accept as 'English' any piece of human behaviour that is clearly meaningful language, whether spoken or written, and which is not any language other than English."

4 The total population of the British-affiliated Anglophone Caribbean and rimland territories would barely exceed 5,000,000 today, with the highest concentrations being in Jamaica and

Trinidad (see Note 2 above).

5 This valuable term I owe to an unidentified participant at the First World Congress of Communication and Development in Africa and the Diaspora, held in 1981 at Nairobi, Kenya.

6 American Black English, however, appears to retain a vestigial trace of this uage in such contexts as "I'm not buying that one. See like it costs too much", in which like seems to be minimally suggestive and almost dispensable.

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