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LANGUAGE CONTACT AND ORTHOGRAPHIC PRACTICE IN EARLY ENGLAND

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Abstract

In this study, I argue that new media discourse has facilitated the enregisterment of orthographies for languages that were primarily oral in the 'pre-network society' age. Specifically, I will look at this phenomenon as it applies to Trinidad English Creole, a formally oral Creole language from Trinidad and Tobago. I will investigate the sociolinguistic implications of orthographic and scriptural choices, and how such practices both index and constitute social hierarchies, identities, and relationships (Jaffe et al 2012). Prior to 1990, Trinidad English Creole rarely appeared in written form apart from fictional speech in postcolonial dialectal literature or as indirect speech in newspaper articles. Coinciding with 'the rise of the network society' (Castells 2000), Trinidad English Creole is increasingly being employed by diasporic members for written personal communication in computer-mediated discourse. Through the utilization of theoretical frameworks that have been posited by social scientists in regards to our interactions in this new 'mediascape' (Appadurai 1996), I intend to show that (i)

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computer mediated communication is facilitating the enregisterment of Trinidad English Creole, a formally oral language, and (ii) these orthographic choices are employed metapragmatically as a means of enacting a subversive identity, and more particularly, a cosmopolitan postcolonial identity.

1. Introduction

Historically, what may be called 'identity through orthography' has received very little attention. Linguists have traditionally viewed the act of writing solely from a technical point of view: that is, as a matter of assigning "one letter only for each phoneme" (Pike 1938). It was not until the 1990s that a number of researchers began to develop the link between language ideology and orthographic choices.

While discussions of orthography have tended to focus on prescriptive issues that at the surface involve practical concerns over which kinds of scripts are most suitable for language standardization, at a deeper level orthography and orthographic choices can be viewed a means of situating oneself in the world through language (Shieffelin and Doucet 1992, 1994). Variationist sociolinguistics, which explores the relationship between sound and social meaning, has clearly shown that linguistic form has the potential to index specific social positions. This field, however, has privileged the spoken word as its focus of study. The analysis of orthography, the graphic medium of expression, has been largely neglected from a sociolinguistic point of view. Yet orthography can also be a critical site for the production of social identities: for instance, speakers can switch between orthographic choices in a manner that parallels conversational code switching. That is, vernacular writing, as a choice of spelling that departs from an existing standard, may constitute "social action" (Sebba 2007), and the choice to comply with or break existing norms may afford social meaning.

The link between language ideology and orthographic choice has coincided most notably with the rise of the internet and the new *network society* (Castells 2000). One of the most direct impacts this new network society has had on social structure has been inregard to traditional power relationships. With its ability to transcend and disrupt historical social hierarchies such as the sovereign state, schools and media, the internet offers diasporic communities in particular a space in which they can bypass the traditional power apparatus. This enables members of such communities, in the words

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of media theorist Madhavi Mallapragada, "to articulate their marginal voices and negotiate their dual identity as they enact, produce or construct new hybrid identities and cultures" (Mallapragada 2000, p. 179)

This negotiation of identity can be noted in the online practices of Trinidad English Creole speakers who, while utilizing and accessing Trinidadian diasporic online forums, enact socially salient markers of their Trinidadian identity through the use of orthographic representations of Trinidad English Creole. As Bucholtz and Hall (2005) have shown, identities may be linguistically indexed through labels, implicatures, stances, styles, or linguistic structures. New media contexts therefore provide an important field site in which it is possible to examine how Trinidadian English Creole users employ, enact and index a postcolonial Trinidadian identity through scriptural means, and how these identities are relationally created and intersubjectively constructed through several, and often overlapping, complementary relations, including similarity/difference, genuineness/artifice, and authority/delegitimacy (Bucholtz & Hall 2005).

In many of the Caribbean islands, one of the most noticeable post-independence sociolinguistic developments has been the rise in prestige of Creole languages, which have now become symbols of local cultural identity. Though there are several theories regarding Creole genesis, it is generally agreed that Creole languages are created through language contact and the subsequent incorporation of features from two or more unrelated languages. In many areas of the world, Creole languages normally possess a European superstrate (or lexifier language) while the grammatical structure is usually derived from a combination of non-European languages. Due to the legacy of European colonialism, the European superstrate language has historically been afforded a high social status, and as such, is regarded as the more appropriate variety for most public and formal types of communication. Creole usage therefore is generally reserved for, or relegated to, informal environments (Deuber 2013). The language ideologies that govern orthographic choices can thus be understood as a key concern of a sociocultural linguistic approach, as language ideologies are "representations, whether explicit or implicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world" (Woolard, 1998, p. 3). Working within a framework of language ideology, the employment of Trinidad English Creole in new digital environments leads us to consider

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the shifting indexicalities of the Trinidad English Creole language and its ideological positioning with respect to Standard Trinidad or Standard Caribbean English.

1.1 Stress, Intonation and Vowels

Stress

One of the most notable differences between TEC and English is the tendency for Trinidad English Creole to have syllable timing, i.e. a pattern in which every syllable receives an equal amount of time and there are no reduced syllables with reduced vowels. TEC tends to have full vowels where English has reduced forms: eg. TEC [fɑdɑ] vs English [ˈfɑðɚ]

Intonation and Suprasegmental Features

The overall intonation patterns are clearly different from those of Standard English. The intonation patterns of TEC have been associated very broadly with African tone languages and intonation patterns seen in Bhojpuri. Most noticeable is that compared to Standard English, speakers exhibit a characteristic rising, 'question like' intonation at the end of an utterance as if the speaker is in doubt or asking a question (Allsopp 1972). Spectrogram readings from my three TEC speakers confirm marked changes in pitch in non-question utterances. The following examples illustrate the prosodic features of TEC: Note: Capitals indicate stress and apostrophes indicate a rising pitch.

- COCKroa'ch
- TRInida'd
- CARpen'ter

Vowels

With regard to vowels, TEC appears to have more lengthened monophthongs (or pure vowels) and an absence of diphthongs.
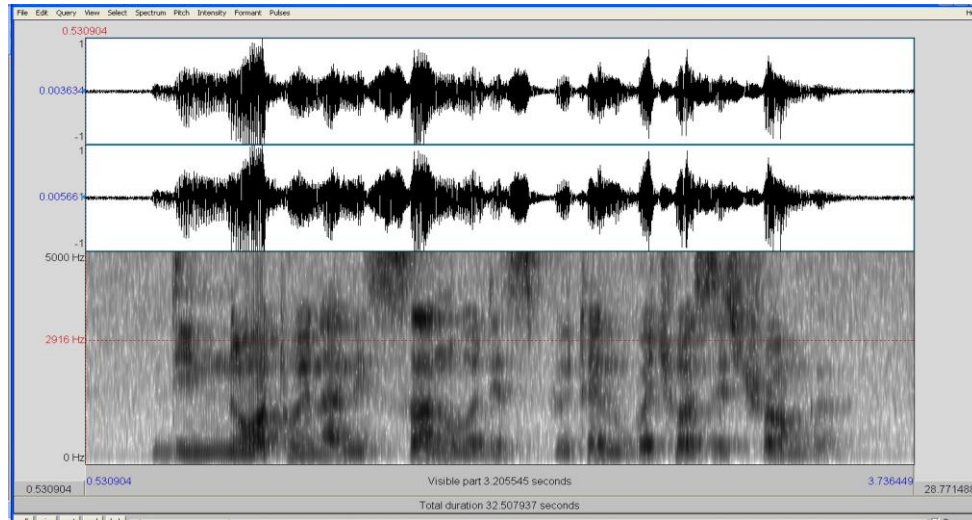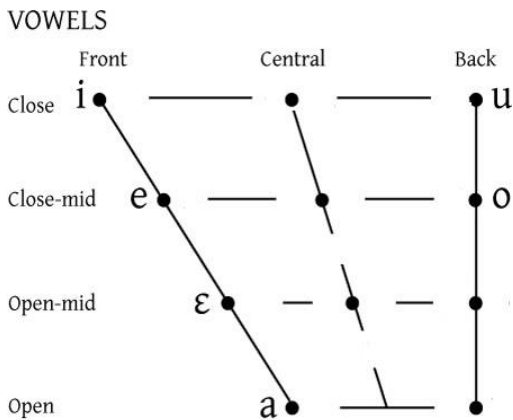
Chart 2. Spectrogram of the word 'baba', TEC Speaker

Chart 3: Vowel Space of Trinidad English Creole

Grammatical Features of Trinidad English Creole

Some of the general grammatical features of Trinidad English Creole discussed in this section was garnered from previous research conducted by David Jay Minderhout (1973), David Decamp (1971) and Mary Chin Pang (1981)

The copula or forms of 'to be' are usually absent and are generally deleted after pronouns, for example, /di bwai dɛm wrkrd/ "De boy dem wicked" (TEC) 'The boys are very wicked or mischievous' (STE)

(1) There is generally no past tense indicator, although the continuous tense is marked by the verbal suffix –ing, for example: /i wakn dɔŋ di strit/ "I walking dong de street" (TEC) vs. "I am walking down the street" (STE).

Research Paper

The present and habitual tense is marked by the word 'does'. For example: /shi daz go ta çʌç ɛbri de / "She does go to church every day" (TEC) vs. "She goes to church every day" (STE)

Future tense is marked by the word 'go'. For example: /a go go si di dakta/ "Ah go go see de doctor" (TEC) vs. "I will go to see the doctor" (STE)

(2) Plural markers are deleted.

(3) The following pronominal system is found in TEC:

Chart 4: Pronominal system of TEC

Standard Trinidad English	**Trinidad English Creole**
I	/a/
me	/mi/
you	/yu/
he	/i/
she	/ʃi/
her	/ʃi/
we	/wi/
us	/wi/
you (plural)	/allju/
they	/dɛm/ or /dɛ/
them	/dɛm/ or /dɛ/

There is no case in the pronouns, except that /a/ may be used in reference to ***/mi/.***

(4) There is no subject-verb agreement, e.g. 'the caterpillar where it wants to'.

(5) There is no passive form of the verb

(6) The negative particle corresponding to 'isn't' varies from /ɛnt ~ ɛn ~ɛ /

(7) Multiple negation - Whereas two negatives within the same core sentence are understood in Standard English to equal a positive, in Trinidadian Creole, multiple

negatives within the same clause simply indicate negative.

(8) Questions are not realized by the inversion of the corresponding statement but by a declarative sentence ending with a high tone.

(9) Use of the repetitive sentence is quite common. For example: ∕ ɪz dɛd i dɛd wi∕ for "Is dead he really dead, oui?" (TEC) vs. "he is really dead" (STE).

(10) The dummy subject constructions 'there is' or 'there are' are usually replaced by the existential 'it' in 'it have' as in ∕ ɪt hab tu man∕ "It have two man" (TEC) vs. "There are two men" (STE)

 (11) Reduplication is not a characteristic of lower social class. It spans the breadth of the entire continuum and is accepted by all social classes. Thus it is quite common to hear expressions like /hwoli-hwoli/ 'full of holes'.

(12) Another feature that is characteristic of Trinidad English Creole is that of associated plurals. The use of these associated plurals is generally limited to the lower classes of creole speakers. Some examples are: /jan dɛm / 'John and his companions'

(13) Some nouns are also used for verb functions. Whereas in Standard English the verbal counterpart of the noun 'thief' is 'to steal', in Trinidadian Creole, the verbal equivalent of the noun 'thief' is 'to thief'. Similarly, whereas in Standard English there exists the noun 'tote' meaning 'carry-all', there is no such noun in Trinidadian Creole. Instead, there is the verb 'to tote' which means 'to carry'.

(14) Certain verbs are semantic converses from Standard English, for example, 'learn' and 'teach', are sometimes expressed by a single word. Trinidad English Creole speakers usually say "I learned the alphabet this week" but they also say "learn she sums" as in: 'teach her how 'to do sums' (math).

 (15) One of the most complex of the grammatical and phonological variables of TEC is hypercorrection. Hypercorrection arises when a distinction in the standard language is neutralized in a particular dialect. For example, in TEC, verbs are not marked for number and person. However, TEC speakers hear speakers of Standard Trinidad English using verb forms that are marked for number and person. They are not aware that there are certain rules that apply to form these paradigms in certain contexts. They only know that persons of higher social standing, who are better educated than they are, use these verb forms in their language. Thus, in a social situation in which a vernacular closer to

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Standard English is required, they produce unacceptable and un-grammatical sentences such as:

(a) *I has to go to town today. (b) *We uses to go to the market. (c) *YOU wants a cup of coffee? (d) *They is a lazy people.

Hypercorrection is a complex grammatical issue because many of the erroneous forms are systemic i.e. speakers of TEC employ one of these hypercorrected forms as a means of indexing a TEC speaker of a lower social status.

2. Attitudes towards Creole English in Trinidad and Tobago

The interaction between the colonizer and the colonized provides the historical and sociological context in which language contact took place in Trinidad. As a former British colony, Trinidad inherited a linguistic situation in which British English functioned as the prestige standard while Trinidad English Creole was associated with the black and brown laboring underclasses. Colonial officials often expressed negative views of the Creole language, often disparaging it—and its speakers—in the strongest possible terms. The recognition of Trinidad English Creole as a legitimate language has thus been slow, due in part to its sociological and ethnolinguistic association with poverty, slavery and indentured servitude.

The following excerpt is a letter that was written to the editor of a Trinidad & Tobago newspaper, *The Express*. When viewed through the lens of Mikhail Bhaktain's theoretical framework (1974) that asserts that words are loaded with inherited cultural and historical implications, references to the language as "a butchering of Oxford English" provides a window into the historical sociological narrative that has taken place regarding Trinidad English Creole and Trinidadian culture as a whole:

> We do not have a common philosophy, culture or religion which could arouse common literacy and artistic sentiments in drama, dance, song or story-telling. That is, official English is adequate for a people of multi-ethnic background. Trinidadians are followers. Language essentially deals with ideas which convey emotions. What we will surely do will be to introduce the four-letter word even to describe the music of Chopin, Mozart, or Bach. Slang is not dialect or vernacular.

Research Paper

> The truth is, we want to boast of originality and creativity, but to create a Trinidad
> dialect is to butcher Oxford English – the English in which all West Indian
> scholars excel. Do you want to make a *dougla[1]* of that great language?
>
> We are too lazy to pronounce and enunciate correctly. We want short cuts to
> everything. For example, 'th' in 'the' is never heard. It takes too much effort.
>
> (Letter to the Editor, Express newspaper, 19 Oct 1986)

A key element in postcolonial studies is the examination of the process by which the colonized native is rendered a marginalized subject with little access to his 'own' identity. Postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha's seminal work titled 'Mimicry and Men' (1994) explores and analyzes the distortion that takes place in the postcolonial national. Bhabha posits the idea that the colonized national's only true identity is an identity of mimicry: that is, that all of his actions are imitations of the colonizing culture. Local culture, norms and language therefore are eschewed and are relegated to positions of inferiority. Many arguments against the use and legitimation of Trinidad English Creole as a language are therefore steeped in sentiments that see the culture of the colonized as debased and inferior to that of the colonizers. The following statement regarding Trinidad English Creole is especially revealing: "*What we will surely do will be to introduce the four-letter word even to describe the music of Chopin, Mozart, or Bach.*" Here, the speaker creates a social dichotomy, with Trinidadians and their language on one side and European musicians such as Chopin and Bach on the other. Using Bhaba's framework of distortion as a guide, we see that the speaker has explicitly reduced his own culture by positioning it as diametrically opposed to European classical culture; the language is posited as coarse and crude, merely a multitude of 'four letter words' (a reference to the expletive utterance '*fuck*'). Trinidad English Creole, and by extension its speakers, are coarse and socially unsophisticated, culturally inferior to the refinement of the European world.

2.1 Socawarriors

Socawarriors is an online forum that displays posts of newspaper articles, sports, news and other social trends from Trinidad. Sporting a home banner that encourages users to "Talk yuh Talk," as shown in Figure 1 below, the website makes overt use of TEC to cue its members to orient themselves to Trinidadian culture:
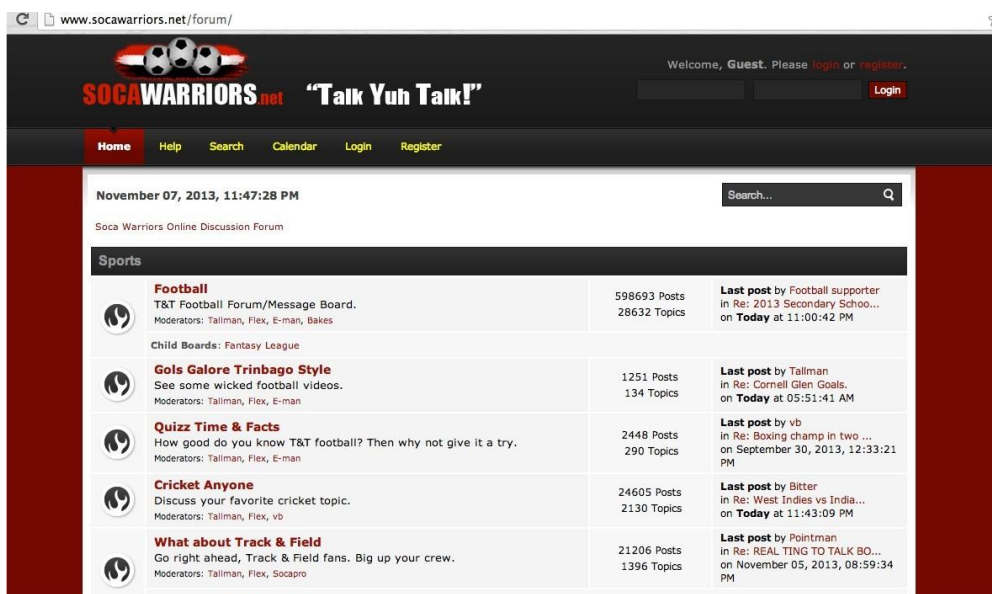
Figure 1: "Talk Yuh Talk!"

As with other forum sites, users identify themselves with 'nicknames' and organize topics and discussions according to themes. In keeping with the anonymity associated with the internet, many of these form users appear to be strangers who do not have an 'offline relationship'.

TallMan is the moderator and owner of the socawarriors.net forum. A member of the Trinidadian diaspora, he has resided in the United States for over thirty years. Like many of the Caribbean immigrants who came to the United States during the 1970s, his mother immigrated to the United States under the guest worker program, where she worked as a domestic housekeeper in New York until her retirement in the late 1990s. A practicing Rastafarian, *TallMan,* though only in his mid 40s, is retired and lives a relatively understated life of opulence in the United States. During his mid twenties, after graduating from Pace University with a degree in Computer Information Technology, he moved to San Francisco where he founded a computer technology firm. By thirty-two, *TallMan* was worth over $100 million dollars, and in 2001, he was featured in Forbes magazine's '100 richest people in technology' edition.

TallMan's affluence provides him with a significant amount of social capital within the Trinidadian diaspora community. While such extreme cases of success are

Research Paper

rare, it is indicative of the marked social shifts within Caribbean society regarding success and social mobility. Once tied to ethnicity or the ability to successfully assimilate British cultural values, social mobility has been partially eroded by the ascendance of individuals once excluded from domains of power to positions that enable them to take advantage of a new dialectic in regards to culture, pride and identity.

When I asked *TallMan* why he decided to utilize Trinidad Creole English on the forum, he responded: "*But, eh eh*, *iz ah Trini – how else I suppose to talk*?" I then asked his thoughts regarding the use of Standard Trinidad (or Standard Caribbean English) on the site:

DiamondTrim continues to address forum members with SE orthography and explicitly confronts Bake n Buljol by name when doing so, calling him out for his poor command of English: *A note to Bake n Buljol....your command of the englishlanguage is both juvenile and laughable at best. You are not fit to touch the felt of my grammatical jacket. I suggest you continue in your futile attempts at insult with someone more suitable to your bovine talents. Bake n Buljol* then responds to the insult by switching his orthography and register to what can only be described as a highly stylized Superstandard English, reminding *DiamondTrim* that there is little point in arguing online: *I find your affected pomposity amusing. One thing I have never felt the need to do is to bandy about my qualifications and/or accomplishments in somesilly cyber measurement of intellectual dicks.*

The interaction above clearly illustrates that the use— or disuse—of specific graphic varieties can index particular social stances along a Trinidadian continuum. Through the employment of Standard English orthography, users index a stance that may be indicative of intelligence, but at the same time of superiority and privilege. It is apparent that all of the speakers are keenly aware of the meanings produced through this semiotic stance-taking, allowing certain stances of their own to emerge through unique combinations of orthographic choice. I suggest here that these stances are examples of Trinidadian communicative practices that have been 'reterritorialized' into virtual space, with participants drawing on multiple orthographic resources in order to position

themselves. Most critically, the use of particular orthographic styles works to situate forum members along a continuum of Trinidadian identity. For instance, the ability to use both language varieties skillfully, as MEP does in this exchange, positions users as both university educated *and* proudly Trinidadian, in stark contrast to previous understandings of these two positions as incompatible, if not mutually exclusive.

CONCLUSION

I have argued in this thesis that the internet is facilitating an orthographically mediated enregisterment of Trinidad English Creole. Users of the *socawarriors* website are social actors who draw on multiple communicative resources in order to position themselves within the specific context of Trinidadian societal norms. The analysis of these interactions reveals two things: First, Trinidad English Creole speakers orient towards Trinidadian language norms and cultural identities through their specific orthographic choices. Second, the use of Standard Caribbean English or Trinidad English Creole on a diasporic forum is a deliberate choice, with social implications being enacted through one's decision to use a particular variety in a given situation.

These online forums, as part of the new network society, are facilitating a 'democratic grassroots' enregisterment of Trinidad English Creole. While past attempts to enregister Trinidad English Creole failed because officials did not account for the diglossic separation of Trinidad speech domains, the internet, with its ability to transcend and bypass traditional power structures, has now shifted the issue of orthography and Trinidad English Creole into the hands of the people. Language ideology and national identity are clearly linked, and Trinidad English Creole speakers' decision to utilize the language of the private sphere in the public sphere constitutes a form of "social action"

that is at once personal and political. On forums such as *socawarriors*, this action can be seen as both an affirmation and subversive enactment of a new postcolonial identity.

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