

ORTHOGRAPHY

1. One of the processes involved in standardisation is the development of a writing system for the language in question.

The lack of a widely accepted writing system for Jamaican Creole is probably one of the reasons for the lack of writings, creative or otherwise, in the language. What little has been done has usually taken the form of poetry, songs or short stories.

Newspaper columns have for decades been one area in which creole, written in various ways, has found a home. You may recall Stella seh, Auntie Roachie sey, Uman Tong and now Montel.

2. POSSIBLE WRITING SYSTEMS

To write the language in a consistent manner we may resort to:

- a) phonetic symbols
- b) an alphabet

2.1 PHONETIC SYMBOLS

There is a system for representing sounds by phonetic symbols which has been internationally accepted among linguists for several decades - the International Phonetic Alphabet.

Along with various characters which represent sounds there are other symbols which indicate features such as length and stress. The great advantage of phonetic writing is that it allows one to represent on paper the exact sound produced by the speaker.

2.1.1 Its disadvantages are many:

- a) The symbols involved are unknown to non-linguists. Do you know how to say a A I E or u?
- b) There is a very large number of symbols as each shade of difference is represented.
- c) In the days of typewriters phonetic symbols could not be typed using normal keyboards.

The symbols are now available to computer users equipped with normal keyboards but some six additional procedures are required to type each one. If Jamaica were to decide to use this system a programme of reeducation would be required in addition to the production of specially designed computers and keyboards. Despite the apparent inconvenience there is nothing inherently wrong with this approach. The keyboards used in Saudi Arabia and Korea are specially designed for representing the relevant languages.

2.2 ALPHABET

As we have all been trained in the Roman Alphabet it is unlikely that

Jamaica would opt for the Arabic or Cyrillic (Russian) writing systems.

The issue then is how to spell Creole words using the alphabet we know. We have experience of two possibilities.

- a) etymological spelling
- b) specially created phonemic spelling.

2.2.1 Etymological Spelling

This can also be referred to as English spelling. It is the type of spelling used by Louise Bennett and by most poets who use Creole. It is called etymological because the words are spelled by reference to the English words upon which they are based e.g. cerfiticket. Non.. English words are written using the usual English spelling of similar sounds e.g. backra.

2.2.1.2 Arguments in Favour of Etymological Spelling

- a) Familiarity makes for easy reading by Jamaicans who already read English.
- b) It is familiar to speakers of English who have been trained to read English. There is therefore a greater possibility of dissemination of our literature within the English speaking world.

2.2.1.3 Arguments Against Etymological Spelling

- a) English spelling is itself fraught with problems arising from its own history, all of which would be imported into and imposed on Creole spelling. See the observations of Mark Twain and George Bernard Shaw in your handouts.

- b) Its use results in inconsistency and uncertainty as no two writers will represent the same words in exactly the same way. Your handout featuring two versions of Louise Bennett's "Uriah Preach" illustrates what can happen even when the same writer is involved.
- c) The use of English spelling maintains the psychological link to English. Creole is seen not as a language in its own right but as an offshoot or quaint dialect of English.
- d) English spelling accompanied by apostrophes to indicate missing sounds and slight adaptations such as through through maintains the image of Creole as Broken English.
- e) Your handout entitled "The Straight Dope" provides an example of how foolish etymological spelling can look when taken to the extreme. The reader cannot help but think that the speakers of this ridiculous looking language must themselves be ridiculous.

2.2.2 PHONEMIC SPELLING

Frederic Cassidy has designed a system for writing Jamaican Creole using the Roman Alphabet. It does not, however, rely on English spelling. The Cassidy system is described as PHONEMIC because unlike phonetic spelling it does not attempt to represent every existing variation of sound. It only represents those differences which affect meaning. The result is a more manageable number of symbols.

2.2.2.1 Characteristics of the Cassidy System

See handout entitled the Cassidy/Le Page Writing System

- a) short vowel sounds are represented by a single vowel character: a e i o u.
- b) long vowel sounds are represented by a doubling of the relevant vowel: aa ii uu.
- c) all diphthongs (combinations of vowel sounds) are represented as such: ai ou ie uo.
- d) the system avoids the problems associated with English "c" by using "c" only in the combination "ch".
- e) "g" always represents the "hard" g of goli.
- f) the sounds of "j" and "z" are represented in the same way regardless of position within the word — jook dienza daj: zups rizis az.
- g) "k" replaces the hard "c" e.g. kaal.
- h) "q" is unnecessary and therefore eliminated as "k" can perform its functions.
- i) "x" suffers the fate of "q" e.g. siks.

j) “y” and “w” are used in combination with other consonants to represent palatalization and labialization respectively: gya] bwaai.

2.2.2.2 PROBLEMS OF THE C.ASSIDY SYSTEM

The following have been pointed out by users of the system as shortcomings.

a) The sound of vowel ÷ r as in “servant” is represented by “or”. Some consider this inappropriate and prefer to use “er” which more closely con in the minds of English speakers, to the relevant sound.

b) Cassidy uses “ng” to represent both the final consonant of a word such as “king” and the nasalised vowel of words such as him i.e. “irtg”. Look at Anansi and King’s Son for examples. To be sure of the meaning of “Ing waang food” one must resort to context. Compare the pronunciation of ng in these words.

Ing si di king — He/She saw the king

Mi waang go dong de — I want to go down there

The letters used to represent the Creole vowel system are a, e, i, o, and u. The second column contains a Creole word in which the particular vowel occurs.

C/LP System	Creole	Equivalent English Term
a	hav	have
e	get	get
i	win	wind
o	kom, bot	come, but
u	ful, gud	full, good

Three of the vowels, i, a, and u, can occur as double vowels, as in the following examples. The second column gives a Creole word in which the sound occurs.

C/LP System	Creole	Equivalent English Term
aa	haaf	half
ii	biit	bait
uu	skuul	school

In addition to these, there are four diphthongs (combinations of two different vowel sounds). The final column contains English words in which the sound occurs.

C/LP System	Creole	English Term
ai	laik	like, I
ou	house	house, out
ie	flesti	facety
uo	buot	boat

Finally, the combination of the letters "er" as in Creole "werl" (English: world), will be used in translations in this booklet. "er" however, is not carried as a single symbol in the C/LP writing system.

C/LP System	English	Equivalent Creole Term
b	bite	bait
p	pick	pik
d	dead	ded
t	take	tek
g	gully	goli
k	kite, call	kait, kaal
m	mother	mada
n	never	neva
v	van	van
f	feather	feda
z	zip, as	zip, az
s	storm	staam
j	just, danger	jos, dienza
l	light	lait
w	week	wiik
r	rain	rien
y	yellow	yelo
h	house	hous

Most varieties of Jamaican Creole use "h" for emphasis. Some varieties however, use this sound in a way similar to English.

There are six other consonants which occur in the sound system of Jamaican Creole. Each of these is represented in the C/LP writing system by a combination of two letters. The second column gives a Creole word in which the sound represented by the pair of letters occurs.

C/LP System	Creole	Equivalent English Term
gy	gyal	girl
ky	kyan	can
ny	nyam	eat
ng	ting	thing
sh	shuga	sugar
ch	chakachaka, wach	untidy, watch

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THE SOUNDS OF JAMAICAN CREOLE

VOWEL SOUNDS

SHORT	LONG	DIPHTHONGS
a bat	aa baak	ai bait
e bet		
i bit	ii biit	ie biet
o bot		ou bout
u butu	uu buut	uo buot

NB: the sound heard in English "world" "whirl" "curl" is represented in the Cassidy writing system by the letters "OR".

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THE SOUNDS OF JAMAICAN CREOLE

CONSONANTS

SINGLE LETTERS	DOUBLE LETTERS	LETTERS NOT USED
b d f g – hard sound only h – optional/emphatic j – hard sound only k l m n p r s t v w y z	bw - labialization gy - palatalization ky – palatalization ny – palatalization; ng – nasalization pw – labialization sh ch	q → kw x → ks c – does not occur alone but in combination with h → ch