ELECTRONIC ORATURE:
The Deejay’s Discovery

Hubert Devonish

ABSTRACT

This paper traces the role of orature in the emergence of national languages and national identities associated with these. The main reference points are the language of the Greeks of the Classical period and the originally oral works associated with them, i.e. the ‘Iliad’ and the ‘Odyssey’, traditionally attributed to Homer. The argument is that, long before the widespread use of writing and print, the development and consolidation of national identities took place through works of orature. With general use of writing and the development of the printing press with its increased powers of dissemination, written language and literature came to perform this role. The paper is suggesting that, in the case of Jamaica and its emerging national language, Jamaican, modern electronic technologies have done for speech what print has done for writing, i.e. massively increased the potential audience for any given piece of language communication. This has produced the re-emergence of orature as a means of projecting the national language and the national identity. The example which is the focus of paper is the oral art form referred to as Dance Hall and its performers, the Deejay.

IF HOMER HAD A CHANCE TO COME BACK AGAIN

If Homer had a chance to come back again, he would come back a Jamaican deejay. Accompanying himself to a ‘ridim’ played on his phorminx or katharis, he would ‘build’ lyrics about a powerful and fearless ‘don’ and Helen, his woman, the ‘gyal wid di wikidis slam’. Menelaus goes to ‘foreign’ leaving Helen to ‘run things’. She meets Paris, a visitor from Troy. They fall for each other. Together, they strip Menelaus’ house of its valuables, and run off to Troy. On his return, Menelaus is ‘rahtid’. He can almost hear them laughing in Troy. He has been ‘dissed’. That was something that happened to lesser men, not to Menelaus, the ‘don dadda’. He gathers his ‘massive and crew’ together. ‘Community leaders’ come from far and near, each one a ‘don’ in his

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own area. And with them came their ‘posses’. Over hot beer, they decide on a course of action. This ‘dissing’ by the outsider from Troy cannot be allowed to go unpunished.

The ‘posses’ of ‘posses’ prepares for war, the dons and their followers armed to the teeth. They bear AK47s, M16s, Uzis and Glockes and weeks supply of ammunition. They travel to Troy in a fleet of some of the finest ‘krisas’ ever assembled, Lexuses, Benzies, BMWs, Audis... They open up on Troy with heavy and sustained gunfire. Then, confident in their superiority, they charge towards the fortified walls. They are greeted with heavy gunfire which cuts many of them down. The attack by Menelaus and his posse of posses is thwarted. Odysseus, a ‘hactical don’ and the craftiest of those gathered, puts forward a plan. Menelaus and his posse pretend to withdraw in disorder, leaving many of their finest ‘krisas’ behind. In the trunk of each vehicle is hidden a man.

Paris and the people of Troy are overjoyed at the flight of their attackers. They tow the vehicles back into their fortress as trophies of war. That night, as the Trojans sleep, the hidden men come out of the vehicles, open the gates and let the rest of the posse in. The guns bark, ‘Booyaka, Booyaka’, as Homer, the deejay, invites his audience to symbolically join in the slaughter. The attackers shoot everything that moves, man, woman, child, even dogs and cats. A special chant of ‘Boom By By’ is reserved by Homer and his audience for when Paris is cornered, captured and executed. Blood everywhere. Troy is put to the torch. The posses of posses departs, each don heading off in his own direction. Behind them, johnccrows circle over what remains of Troy.

This piece, called ‘Iliad’, is a hit when Homer performs it at the popular stage show, ‘Sting’. He goes to the recording studio and cuts a record. It is a smash hit. He is invited to perform at almost every stage show, in Jamaica, New York, London, Toronto and Tokyo. There is soon a demand for more. Homer goes back to the recording studio and cuts another record, a kind of sequel, on the same Iliad ‘ridim’, a ‘ridim’ that every deejay in town is now ‘riding’.

The new piece is entitled the ‘Odyssey’. This is about the crafty Odysseus, and his adventures on his long and dangerous journey back home. Eventually, Odysseus reaches home. He finds his house overrun by men eating his food, drinking his rum and whisky, driving his Benz and his Pajero and trying to steal his woman, Penelope. Penelope, with a ‘Coca Cola bottle shape’ and a very solid ‘Bumper Betty’, has a body that every man wants. This crowd of men are taking liberties they would not have dreamed of taking had they thought that Odysseus, ‘the one don’, was still alive. Odysseus enters in disguise. At the opportune moment, he outs his M16 and, to the staccato accompaniment of ‘Booyaka, Booyaka’ executes them, one by one, in their drunken state. Blood and marrow decorate the walls.

The ‘Odyssey’, is a smash hit too. To understand the impact which Deejay Homer has, one needs to understands the context within which all this taking place. This is a Jamaican state run by an elite whose claim to power is that they are able to use English, particularly in its written form. English is the official language of this Jamaican state. Although Jamaican is spoken by everyone, it is not generally written. And, as a ‘bastard’ language variety with no widely known standardised writing system, it is not a fit and proper medium for formal public communication. The few cranks who try to write Jamaican, particularly if they try to use a standardised spelling for it, are mocked in the press as ‘foolish promoters of ‘Yahoolish’.

Every state relies for its legitimacy on a sense of nationhood amongst its citizens. Around the world, this national feeling has been promoted, ever since the invention of the printing press, through literary expression in the national language. It is by this means that the English came to see themselves as a distinct nation based on the fact that they spoke English, the language of Milton, Chaucer, Shakespeare and the King James Version of the Bible.

The Jamaican state, at the time of independence in 1962, made English a symbol of the new national identity it was trying to foster along with literary expression in that language. The founders of independent Jamaica were operating in a world in which writing, and more importantly, print, dominated public language usage. For them, the fact that the vast majority of the population spoke, though they did not write, another language, Jamaican, was ir-relevant. Literary expression in English was to be the reference point of the new state.

This is illustrated by Brathwaite (1984: 28). He refers to an Independence Anthology of Jamaican Poetry which came out at the time of Jamaican independence in 1962. He comments on the treatment of Louise Bennett in this anthology. According to Brathwaite, Bennett, by the time of Jamaican independence in 1962, had published nine books in Jamaican and had established a national reputation as a performer of her own poetry in the language. Yet, in the anthology, she does not appear among the poets but at the back of the book under the heading ‘Miscellaneous’. It is clear that the Jamaican state, from its inception, tried to foster a national identity around a set of symbols and values.
associated with the English-speaking and, more importantly, English-writing elites of the country.

The intervention of Deejay Homer along with a number of other deejays, would produce for Jamaican a body of orature, i.e. a body of creative spoken language. They would achieve for Jamaican much the same kind of language standardisation which occurs as a result of a language coming under the influence of writing and print. The work of the deejays would serve as a point of national identification for that sector of the population which uses Jamaican and which has relatively limited control of English, either in writing or in speech. In the years which follow, the Iliad and the Odyssey in Jamaican would give rise to a national identity rooted in popular rather than elite consciousness, based on a spoken language, Jamaican, rather than a written one, English. In time, this increasingly strong alternative sense of Jamaican nationalism would give rise to a state which represents a mass-based popular identity.

As it consolidates its power, this state like every other established state, would become rather coy about the images of naked force on which all state power is ultimately based. However, perhaps because of the explicitly violent nature of its founding traditions as embodied in the oral works by its deejays, this new Jamaica state might need to go a step further. It might entirely eschew the display of guns at official state ceremonies. Visiting heads of state might be greeted by an unarmed ceremonial guard, twenty one of whom point two fingers of the right hand skyward as the large speakers in the background reproduce the sound of synthetic gunfire.

Looking on at the effect that he had had, Homer would say to himself, 'Done it again'. Providing a reference point for a shared language and identity is what his Iliad and his Odyssey had done in Pre-Classical Greece. Works of orature dating back to the period of Mycenaean Greece between 2000-1200 BC, preserved stories about the origins of the Greeks. In this period, the Greeks developed a complex state system based on trade carried out by a powerful fleet of merchant ships. During the existence of Mycenaean Greece, three different writing systems were employed. Writing seems to have been used mainly for commercial purposes. The Greeks of this period, however, had a tradition of heroic epic poetry which was composed and transmitted orally. The epics attributed to Homer, the Iliad and the Odyssey, are a product of this tradition (Hansen 1978:8, 10).

After 1200 BC, the civilisation collapsed. Knowledge of writing technology and more specifically the use of Mycenaean writing systems, disappeared along with the state system. The Greeks, for several centuries after this collapse, lived in small, humble and isolated communities. Although knowledge of writing was lost, the system of orally transmitting records and traditions remained intact. During this time, a sense of shared identity and common origin was preserved. This was achieved through the performance and transmission of the oral epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey. The Iliad tells of the assembling of a great army from the various Greeks states to fight the Trojans and the ensuing battle. The Odyssey tells of the experiences of one of the victorious Greek warriors, Odysseus, who goes through many trials on his homeward journey which lasts several years. When he arrives home, he successfully battles those who have tried to usurp his home and his wife.

The preservation of these works of orature over centuries by bards who learnt them and transmitted them orally, was crucial in maintaining amongst the Greeks a sense of a shared identity based on a belief in a common history. This would have been complemented by the influence which the poems would have had at the level of language. The Iliad and the Odyssey were composed and performed in the Ionic dialect of Greek (Hansen 1978: 13). Since they were widely performed across the wide geographical area occupied by the Greeks, the language of these oral poems would have had the effect of popularising this dialect as an oral standard.

The role of performers of oral epic poems in both the preservation of stories of origin and in language standardisation is reported for the Mandékean speaking peoples of West Africa. They are an ethno-linguistic group associated with the ancient Mali empire of West Africa. According to Bird (1970: 148), dialects of Mandékean spoken 800 miles apart have managed through several centuries to maintain a high level of similarity. He attributes this to the regular performance of the Sunjata epic stories of origin by oral poets who use a common dialect of the language for this performance (Bird 1970: 148,157–8).

Language consciousness is another product of orature. This occurs as a result of the emergence within a community of the sense that a language variety spoken by them is an entity separate and apart from all other language varieties. Let us again use the case of the Sunjata epic of the Mandékean speakers of West Africa, with which the Greek epics have often been compared. A strong consciousness of language identity is displayed in the Sunjata epic. Here, the importance of language to the identity of the Mandékean speaking peoples is explicitly stated. In the epic, there is reference to those who were present at Sibi, the place of the battle which, according to the story, marked the foundation of the Mali empire. It is stated that ‘... all the sons of Mali were
there, all those who say 'N’ko,' all who speak the clear language of Mali were represented at Sibî' (Niêne 1966b: 55).

Between 900 and 800 BC, as part of this new period of state or (re)formation, the Greeks borrow and adapt for use in their own language the writing system of the Phoenicians. The influence of the Greek oral poetry attributed to Homer spills over into writing when writing for literary purposes makes its appearance in Classical Greece in the 7th century BC. It is at this time that these orally transmitted epics became committed to writing (Hansen 1978: 8). These epic poems at this point become works of literature and are transformed into models of usage for written Greek.

TECHNOLOGISING SPOKEN LANGUAGE THROUGH THE DEVICES OF ORATURE.

Language is a system of oral communication designed for speakers and hearers in face-to-face communication with each other. Put another way, the canonical situation of utterance for language is a spoken exchange between interlocutors who share the same time and space (Lyons 1977: 637). It is in this situation of utterance that children in every culture and every society learn naturally to use language without being taught it.

Language has an obvious advantage over other forms of communication available to humans. It is able to communicate about any topic, and to transmit any message, however complex, about that topic, including messages which have never been transmitted before. As a consequence, efforts by humans through the millennia to improve their ability to communicate have been focussed on extending the scope of language beyond the here and the now.

There are two aspects of the problem. The spoken word, like the sped arrow, comes not back. Finding a way to make pieces of language communication permanent is, therefore, one task. The second task is that of ensuring that, once made permanent, such communication can be conveyed to people who are not present when the original language message is produced. A rudimentary solution to both aspects of the problem is to have someone memorise the particular piece of language communication. This deals with the problem of giving the message some permanence. Then, if that person travels to other places, the message can be repeated to audiences far away from the place where the original communication took place.

1 'I say' in Mandakan.

The problem with this solution is that the human memory has limits. There is the problem of how much the person memorising the message can recall with accuracy. There is also the issue of how much the eventual recipients of the message will themselves be able to recall after receiving it from the messenger. The use of a variety of mnemonic devices to jog the memory and ensure recall of language messages represents the earliest application of technology to language. Poetic metre and music are the specific devices that I will examine here. It is language to which technology has been applied that, after Ong (1982), will refer to as technologised language.

The way technologised oral language works is that restrictions are placed on the language form of the message. To fit what is being said into this restricted mold, someone orally performing and improvising on the way has to have resort to clichéd forms which fit easily into the frame. From the perspective of the producer of such work, this set of prefabricated phrases constitutes the basic building blocks for the orally performed poem. From the perspective of the hearer or "consumer" of this work, the tight frame and the clichéd construction which is forced on the composer/performer, are easy to remember. In addition, expressing meaning within a very constrained language framework, is aesthetically pleasing. This adds to the ease and the accuracy with which the text can be remembered. Artificial structure imposed on a piece of spoken discourse is a form of technology.

The Greek oral poems attributed to Homer were structured in just this way. They were delivered according to a well established rhythmical pattern. Traditional Greek poetry worked on the principle of syllable length. There were two kinds of syllable type in Greek, long syllables and short ones. The basic rhythmical pattern for the Iliad and the Odyssey involved one long syllable followed by two short ones. Also permitted was a long syllable followed by another long syllable. No other sequence was allowed. Six such sequences made up a 'line'. This metre or rhythm is what is referred to as a dactylic hexameter (Hansen 1978: 11). It is to this beat that Homer is supposed to have delivered his lyrics backed by music which he played on the phorminx or katharos, an instrument resembling the lyre (Hansen 1978: 22).

An extreme example of the artificial imposition of constraints on a piece of spoken discourse is provided by traditional oral Somali poetry. Somali poets work out a word-for-word composition in private. They then either recite it in public or teach it to someone who would recite it. This poetry has an unusually complex and rigid rhythmical pattern. This rigidity and complexity make it difficult for the reciter to improvise or otherwise vary from the
original. The reason is that, at any point in the poetic line, there are few if any words which the reciter could substitute for the original work and which, at the same time, would both make sense and fit the rhythmic pattern. There are also restrictions on what syntactic structures are allowed in this poetry. Only two syntactic structures are allowed in this poetry out of the hundreds possible in normal speech (Ong 1982: 63-4).

In normal speech, a speaker is capable of producing an infinite number of well formed sentences. By contrast, in the performance of oral poems there is a set of restrictions imposed on what is possible, e.g. (i) the kind of syntactic structures as in the Somali case, (ii) the need to fit what is being said into lines of a particular length, (iii) the requirement to conform to artificially regular patterns imposed by the requirements of rhythm, rhyming, alliteration, etc. according to the traditions of the genre. The result is that what is possible in these oral performances is only a subset of what is possible in speech.

Music, as we have already noted in relation to the Greek oral poems, is very often used in combination with oral poetic devices to technologise language. Long prayers, traditional stories, praise poems, etc. are often sung or chanted or performed to the accompaniment of specific music. Ong (1982: 63) cites the Japanese ‘Tale of the Heike’ as a case in point. The narrative is chanted to a musical background. However, some sections of this narrative are sung without accompaniment from musical instruments. There are, as well, interludes which consist entirely of instrumental music. Apprentices, who begin as young children working with an oral master, memorise the narrative and musical accompaniment through rigorous drill over several years. Ong (1982: 63) suggests that in the ‘Tale of the Heike’, the music manages at some points to completely fix the text. He argues that this is an example of music seeming to assist in achieving close to verbatim recall of an oral narrative.

In technologised language such as we have analysed it, producers of such bodies of material remember the frame. The memory now only has to differentiate between the possible language forms which can fit into this frame, rather than the infinite range of possible utterances which could otherwise be produced. The tighter the frame, the fewer the possible utterances which could fit into the frame. What the frames create is a situation in which only a limited number of phrases and structures will fit. Oral poetry, therefore, comes to be formulaic, being produced through using and reusing selections from a restricted set of phrases.

The Greek epic oral poems, the Iliad and the Odyssey attributed to Homer, represent a case in point. The work of Milman Parry as cited in Ong (1982: 17-28) suggests that these poems were composed almost entirely of formulae. Taking the first, regularly occurring names of characters such as Odysseus, Hector, Athena and Apollo, were constantly used in particular phrases and in relation to certain verbs. This ensured that they fitted into the rhythmic pattern of the particular line in the poem. Odysseus, for example, is constantly described as polymeria ‘clever’, irrespective of whether his cleverness is relevant to the particular action he is involved in. The reason is that, without the use of this adjective, the name ‘Odysseus’ could not have been easily worked into the rhythmic pattern of the poem (Ong 1982: 58-9).

Evidence for viewing oral formulaic devices as technology comes in the form of observations made by Renfrew (1987: 255). He suggests that orally transmitted epics date back to societies in which craft and occupational differentiation is taking place for the first time. The category of bards and poets who emerge in these periods is merely one of the craft and occupational groups which are appearing. This can be seen in the actual text of the Greek oral epic, the 'Odyssey'. In this poem, oral performers play a part in the story and when they are mentioned are classified as public craftsmen, a group that included doctors and carpenters (Hansen 1978: 23).

A similar such classification exists in other societies and cultures. One such is the 16th century Soninke state of Jaara in West Africa, the social structure of which has survived to this day. One stratum of the society consists of craft and occupational groups such as cobblers, blacksmiths and ‘people of the mouth’. Members of the last group are responsible for preserving and broadcasting the oral tradition of their patrons (Diarawa 1989: 110). A similar kind of classification exists among the related Mandekan speaking people of West Africa. Here again, the craft and occupational group of carpenters, basket makers, canoe repairers, leather workers and blacksmiths, etc. includes within it bards and specialists of the word. Some members of this last group specialise in transmitting the Sunjata epic and other traditional accounts of the 13th to late 16th century Mali empire (de Moraes Farias 1989: 153-4).

Oral poets, be they Greek Bards, Malian specialists of the word or Jamaica deejays, are technologists in the literal rather than just the figurative sense of the word. They apply technologies to bodies of language in order to overcome the problem of the impermanence of spoken language.

TECHNOLOGISING LANGUAGE THROUGH WRITING

Writing represents a fundamental improvement on oral formulaic devices as a medium for preserving language messages over time and transmitting them.
over distance. As described by Coulmas (1989: 19, 35), writing is the engraving or drawing, the scratching or incision of signs representing units of spoken language. As argued by DeFrancis (1989: 56), the aspect of language represented by all writing systems is sound. Thus, writing is not a system of communication in and of itself. Rather, it is a form of technology applied to language.

Writing gives solid, visible, relatively permanent material form to language. It was, at the time of its invention five thousand years ago, the ultimate technology capable of extending the communicable abilities of language beyond the situation of face-to-face interaction. Writing conferred an additional advantage on language. Language could now be used as an efficient medium for the keeping of records.

The basic building blocks of any of the five thousand or so languages spoken in the world is a small number of recurring units of sound referred to by linguists as phonemes. Alphabetic writing systems use signs to represent the individual phonemes in a language. Each message, no matter how complex, will consist of combinations of the phonemes within the language. Thus, all that has to be done to write such a message is to use the appropriate sign for each phoneme in the message. Since, the written signs are used to represent phonemes which constantly recur, the written signs themselves end up as recurring elements in the written text.

TECHNOLOGY WRITING LANGUAGE THROUGH PRINT

The limitation which exists with writing is that, even though it manages to freeze language messages in time, it is not very effective in distributing such messages to a large audience. The only way that one could read a written message in the pre-print era was to travel to where the written message was located or have that written message sent to one. Where the communication was intended simply to involve two people, this was no problem. What, however, about one person wishing to communicate with a large body of persons? Moving a written message from one person to the other or having everyone travel to where the written text is located, would have been cumbersome. The alternative would have been to laboriously make copies of documents by hand, each of which could then be sent to a potential recipient. This situation would have placed and did indeed place a severe restriction on the role of writing as a medium of mass communication.

The emergence of the Gutenberg printing press in mid-15th century Europe provided a solution to the problem of a mass readership for written material. The printing press allowed large numbers of identical copies of a written work to be produced. There could be as many copies as there were people willing to read the work. A single writer could now communicate with thousands, and even hundreds of thousands.

The technologies associated with the mid-15th century Gutenberg press in Europe were significant. Firstly, there was the use of letters cast in separate pieces of metal type. Replicating this metal type from molds meant that each individual piece of metal type in a given type face, was identical to any of the hundreds of other casting of the same letter. A given letter in print could be produced by any of hundreds of identical casting from the same mold. Words could be composed by using individual letters which would be assembled together on a plate. Making a plate to be used for printing involved all of the techniques of the assembly line. Replaceable parts in the form of individual pieces of type representing in each case a particular letter, were assembled together to produce identical objects, printed words. Each printed version of the same word in the same type face would be identical to any other. It was this assembly line principle which, three centuries later, came to be employed in manufacture during the Industrial Revolution (Org 1982: 118–9).

This entire process placed the printed word at the centre of a manufacturing process. Extremely sophisticated technology was being employed in printing. This led to a heavy dependence on capital. In addition, given the heavy expense of preparing for the actual print reproduction of a text, the larger the number of copies produced, the cheaper the per unit cost. This led to a drive for mass production of the printed word and the development of consumer demand for it. Written language had been transformed by print into a commodity. Mass production and the accompanying stimulation of mass consumption of commodities other than the printed word only became general with the arrival of the Industrial Revolution. In fact, Gaur (1984: 203) argues that the European printing revolution represented the Industrial Revolution casting its shadow three centuries in advance.

It is not surprising that the reproduction of written language involved the earliest application of many of the features of industrial production. In fact, the mass production and consumption of ideas, knowledge and information, is a necessary precursor to the mass production and consumption of goods and services. For the technological advances associated with the Industrial Revolution to take place, there needed to be a period of rapid spread of ideas and knowledge. Language to which writing technology had been ap-
plied, and which in turn led to the printing technology applied to it, was the medium by which these messages reached all sections of the potential market.

Print triggered the emergence of literatures in European vernacular languages. Literature, like technologised orality, tended to build language consciousness, i.e. an awareness of the distinction between what is supposed to be the language of the group and that which is the language of others. And, also as with technologised orality, shared bodies of creative language, this time in print, tend to be regarded as linguistic models for all members of the speech community. This leads to language standardisation amongst people who consider themselves users of a common language (Eisenstein 1981: 61).

An awareness of difference relative to outsiders and of that which is shared within the group is the hallmark of a developing national consciousness. Therefore, literature facilitated by print becomes a cornerstone in the development of national consciousness. It is, for example, literature in print which facilitated the emergence of an English nation defining itself as consisting of people who speak the language of Milton, Shakespeare, Chaucer and the King James Version of the Bible. A similar process of national formation took place in Spain at the end of the 15th century. Based on the development of vernacular literature in print, Castilian emerged as the national and official language of Spain, displacing Latin (Ilich 1981: 37–47).

The print revolution is possibly the most significant technological development of this millennium. It has resulted in the mass production of written language. The state, particularly as it has evolved since the mid-15th century development of the printing press, relies heavily on written and printed language for its existence. The existing Jamaican state is no exception. It operates English as the sole official language, and the only language in which written records are kept. And the elite version of the Jamaica national identity on which this state is based has as its reference point literature in English, albeit literature produced by Jamaicans.

**THE NEW JAMAICAN ORATURE**

Deejay/dance hall is an art form involving the delivery of spoken language to a predetermined rhythmic pattern established by an accompanying recorded bass and rhythm sound track. The rhythmic background serves to constrain the text. The language produced, in addition to fitting the oral poetic framework established by the genre and the particular piece, must fit into the frame set by the bass and rhythm track. To raid di ridim 'ride the rhythm', which is what the deejay does, is to deliver lyrics within the rhythmic frame set by the bass and rhythm track. It is an image which, in part at least, derives from the disc jockey origins of the deejay. The disc jockey turned deejay rides the rhythm on the sound track of a disc.

The deejay/dance hall piece also possesses an internal structure which complements the structure laid down by the rhythmic backing. There is rhyme, the number of syllables per line, the number of lines per verse, etc. Deejays often use the phrase biihriks 'build lyrics' to describe the process by which lyrics are composed. The image of 'building', I suggest, is one which implies the use of oral formulaic devices. The act of building is one in which one brings together already existing component parts to produce an overall structure.

There is a requirement of a fixed rhythmic pattern for a poetic 'line', 'line' being an inappropriate term for an oral genre such as this. For the Jamaican deejay pieces I have studied, notably Buju Banton's 'Massa God World' which is transcribed below, there are four prominent or stressed syllables per 'line'. To indicate prominence in the transcription, I have marked the vowel of each prominent syllable by an accent.

The entire poetic structure is constructed around the last syllable in the 'line'. This syllable is marked to bear the fourth prominence in the 'line' and to rhyme with the last syllable of a preceding or following line. The rhyme gives the final syllables an extra salience which is important to the whole system since the rhyming syllable functions as a boundary marker between 'lines'.

The preceding three prominences in the 'line' are assigned backwards from this final prominence. They are spaced based on conventional principles. Either it is every other preceding syllable, every third preceding syllable or every fourth preceding syllable. The only constraint, which is only applied on some occasions, is that the syllable on which one of the three non-final prominences is placed must be able to bear prominence in normal speech. This is the basic pattern. Quite often, however, as can be seen even in the Buju Banton text below, the spacing of prominence is sometimes deliberately varied within the same line for effect.

What distinguishes the word bearing the fourth prominence in a 'line' from that of the preceding three is the rhyme. It should be noted that, unlike in English poetry, the location of the rhyme is not determined by the location of word stress. Thus, in English, for a rhyme to exist in any pair of words, all sounds must be identical from the vowel of the stressed/prominent syllable up to the end of the word. Thus, 'know', 'crow' and 'below', all of which stress the
final syllable, would rhyme since the shared sequence starts from the vowel of the stressed syllable. The shared sequence would be 'ow'. This is also true for items with stress on the penultimate syllables as in a pair such as 'recorder' and 'order', sharing 'order' and 'collector' and 'protector' sharing 'ector'. However, 'brother' and 'father' would not rhyme since the sequences starting with the vowel of the stressed syllable in each word is 'other' and 'other'.

These items borrowed into Jamaican, assign prominence in normal speech to the same syllable as in English. Of the 'er' and 'or' ending items above, every one of the equivalent items in Jamaican, 'rikaada', 'aada', 'kaleka', 'poteka', 'breda' and 'faada' are potentially able to rhyme with all the others. In the poetic structures used by deejays, the requirements for rhyming are the following. Provided that, in a pair of words, the vowel of the final syllable and any following consonants are the same, they are treated as able to rhyme.

In relation to final consonants in rhymes, we need to define 'same'. 'Same' here does not mean absolutely identical. Rather it covers cases in which the consonants involved share identical phonological feature such as nasality. This can also be seen in the deejay/dance lyrics of Buju Banton's 'Massa God World' transcribed below. Here, there are rhymes which consist of identical vowels followed by consonants which have similar but not identical phonological features, e.g. n, m, ng in the text below. These are all consonants which have a common feature, the fact that they are nasal. This makes them sound alike and causes them to take part in feature rhymes.

It is often the case that an entire deejay/dance hall piece operates a single rhyme. In the Buju Banton transcription, two related rhymes are involved. The first is or NasaI, for the first four lines and the last eight. The second is + Nasal for the inbetween eight lines. Thus, even though there is a deviation from the tendency to operate a single rhyme throughout, the common nasality in the two sets of rhymes makes them very similar to each other.

hav mórsi
Somádi plit...
Tel mè nòu ou massa gáad wòl a ròn
Pùt di waar a bòk an priez gáad ya mi sòn
Tel mè nòu ou pûpa jínó wòl a ròn
Mek wòz a biyin so dier mòs bi ën
Let os bi a beta niem far owa grûnchilirèn
An lôk ina wì ñàrt an si wè wì kyan mèn
Wier fi àm shouldn dier iz a problèm
Uman kyañ fain fàud fi gí di chilirèn

Wail di rich man hav di chëkin bak a fòd di daag dem
Bot wòo ën bì an tu dém
Hëi hëu rààds agèn puor pàpl shal përlis ina di èn
Tel mi nòu ou massa gàad wòl a ròn
Pùt di waar a bòk an priez gàad ya mi sòn
Mi wàa ngò fòu hòo pûpa jínó wòl a ròn
Mek wì kòm tògeda kàa di fàada suun kòm
Chruu di pòòir kyaan afòord di nañ jëm no get nòn
Dì rich man hav di dàâlaz an no wàng gi wì sòn
Bragaduòhos an buòòsi talk im a flîng dông
A pier wàn nànti ti Bënn im bring dông
('Massa God World',
Buju Banton, 1992)

The last syllable in each 'line' is central to the entire structure of the piece. It serves as a reference point for the assignment of the other three prominences within the same 'line'. It also serves to establish and maintain the relationship between the particular 'line' and the other 'lines' in the text. This second function is achieved through being the syllable to which rhyme is assigned. Rhyme in the deejay genre serves to (i) demarcate the ends of 'lines', (ii) mark syllables which are going to correspond to the fourth beat in the background rhythm, (iii) give unity to the 'lines' which make up the text by making them sound partly alike.

An additional feature of how deejays proceed to bil ilirik is their use of clichés which are employed to fill out the poetic line. The lyrics of dance hall pieces are filled with oral formulae such as 'Jomp an shak out', 'Mi kom fi ram daans haal', 'If you api an yu lov i ...', etc. These are either used to maintain a rhyming pattern which has already been set up or to fill in material in a line for which the rhyming syllable has already been determined.

**ELECTRONIC ORATURE: THE DEEJAY'S DISCOVERY**

The development of electronic sound recording technologies represents a solution to the problem of the impermanence of speech. Sound recordings are now able to freeze the spoken word in time, performing a role similar to that played by written. Sound recordings, however, involve a record of the actual physical sounds produced and these can be heard when the recording is played back. Writing technology, on the other hand, works by recording an abstraction from the spoken message, in which the language message is represented through its individual sound units. However, sound recording on its
own, like writing without print, has severe limits on its ability to reach a mass audience.

Other 20th century technologies have come to the rescue. Through radio broadcasting, it is now possible for people separated by space to receive the same spoken language message at the same time. This has overcome the limitations imposed on speech by space. When it employs sound recordings, radio broadcasting does for recorded speech what the printing press did for writing, i.e. it makes a single recorded message available to a mass audience.

Technologies for the mass reproduction of sound recordings or cheap and portable media, e.g. gramophone records, CDs, cassette tapes, etc., have also had an effect similar to that which print technology has had on writing. The mass production of copies of gramophone records, CDs, cassette tapes, etc., has resulted in the industrialisation of sound recording production, an important element of which represents spoken language. The electronic broadcast media have had the effect of making sound recordings available for mass consumption.

Modern Jamaica popular music as it began in the 1950s was an industrialised music. It started as a form of import substitution. Rival operators of sound systems which played amplified recorded music at dances were on the constant lookout for music which was exclusive to their sound system. The predominant form of recorded music played during this period was US rhythm and blues. Records owned exclusively by a particular Jamaican sound system were used as a drawing card to attract patrons to dances, and away from dances at which rival sound systems would play. Eventually, however, this quest for exclusivity proved fruitless when dealing with a commodity such as gramophone records which were mass produced and intended for mass distribution. The Jamaican sound system operators, therefore, resorted to using Jamaican musicians to produce their own ‘one of a kind’ music, in the form of ‘specials’ recorded on disc exclusively for a particular sound system. Many of these specials would include lyrics praising the sound system for which it had been created. From this beginning, sound system operators expanded operations, becoming producers of records of sale to the local public. They were the pioneers of the Jamaican recording industry. Initially, this music directly mimicked the style of the music on the imported records. Gradually, however, it evolved a style and rhythm of its own, eventually developing into the genres known as ska, rock steady and reggae.

Even though the language of the singing gradually drifted away from that which one would expect on a US rhythm and blues recording, English remained the dominant language of Jamaican music right into the reggae era. This is not to suggest that Jamaican was entirely excluded. The chorousess of many songs would often be in Jamaican and some songs were performed entirely in Jamaican. Nevertheless, Jamaican was the subordinate language used in the music, employed only when, for the sake of humour, directness or cultural appropriateness, English would not be appropriate.

Modern Jamaica music began its life as a creature of the recording studio, as the epitome of an industrial music. This fact had an impact on the way that it reached its consuming public. It first reached its mass audience primarily through gramophone records being played with amplification at dances and in other public places, as well as through being played on radio stations. It was usually after gaining popularity through these media that the music came to be performed by singers and bands before live audiences.

There appeared systems of sound amplification which allowed both the recorded music and the disc jockey presenting it to be heard at the same time. By the beginning of the 1970s, the practice developed at dances for disc jockeys to do live talking improvisations against the background of recorded music. To facilitate this, the recording studios began to produce dub sides, reverse sides of 45 rpm records with only the bass and rhythm tracks of the music. Against this musical background, deejays as they came to be called, would deliver improvised lyrics to live audiences. These lyrics were predominantly in Jamaican. Over time a new genre developed, known variously over the years as dub, rockers, deejay and dance hall.

In the early period of this genre, after multiple presentations in the dance hall to live audiences, particular deejay pieces would themselves become the object of recording technology. The recording would take the form of the deejay delivering lyrics against the background of an already recorded bass and rhythm track. This recorded performance would eventually reach a mass audience through cassette tapes, gramophone and compact disc records, the radio and most recently through music videos screened on television. By the 1980s, deejays had moved away from their origins as presenters of recorded music. They had become performing and recording artists in their own right.

In the deejay/dance hall genre which emerged, the background accompaniment, the ‘ridim’, is often identical for several pieces performed by different artists. The ‘ridims’ have become very simple and are often simply artificially produced by synthesisers. As many as 100 pieces are reported to have been recorded on a single ‘ridim’. Clearly, the musical form could hardly be
the central element of this genre. The focus of the genre is on the lyrics. That which is different from one piece to another is the lyrics and the style of delivery of those lyrics. The musical backing is simply a medium for helping to convey the language form and the message created by the deejay. A frequent criticism of deejay/dance hall genre is that it is not music at all. Or, expressed in a different way, much of deejay/dance hall is closer to the speech end of the continuum which exists between speech, at one extreme, and song at the other (Zumthor 1990: 142). The rhythms are simple and repetitive and the deejays in their delivery are well nigh monotonous in the musical sense. They often use a limited range of notes, two or three at most. If the background music is basic and clichéd, and the 'singing' involves very little variation in the notes used, then, I argue, one may not be dealing with a genre which even pretends to be operating with the framework of established European-influenced 'international' norms about what constitutes music.

What the deejays have done, of course, is to rediscover the orality known to the pre-Classical Greeks or the Mandinkan speakers of the Mali empire. But that is not all. They have discovered that the new technologies of sound recording and mass reproduction of those recordings, when added to the traditional technologies of orality, could produce a new and powerful medium within which spoken language can operate. Thus, multiple copies of recordings of oral language performances in Jamaican, in the main unwritten language, could be produced and spread to a wide audience. This discovery was occurring at a time which coincided with a newly emerging mass-based national sentiment. Linked to this was a language consciousness associated with the mass language, Jamaican. The conditions were right for the deejay material to play the same role in state formation and the development of language and national consciousness, as orality had played in many pre-modern states.

The oral material produced by the deejays, predominantly in Jamaican, is in fact fostering language consciousness. It is, in addition, bringing about standardisation within the language. It is also becoming a focal point for the development of a national identity, albeit one which is quite distinct from that being promoted by the existing Jamaican state. The deejays may be preparing the way for a world in which the spoken word, this time electronically enhanced, is again the dominant medium for constructing linguistic and national consciousness and administering the state structures to which these often give rise.

The industrialisation of sound production world wide has primarily involved music. The special circumstances of Jamaica and, arguably of people of African origin in the USA via rap, have precipitated the linkage between traditional technologies of orature and the new electronic mass production and reproduction technologies for sound. This kind of innovation was always unlikely to come from cultures which were transmitted by languages in which writing and print were dominant. The Jamaican deejay's discovery means that cultures in which there are languages without a widely known and used writing system, now have the opportunity for a new lease on life. Language standardisation across large geographical areas becomes possible using oral models of the language and without any resort to writing and print. A sense of sharing a common identity can also be achieved by these means. A national and official language may now emerge skipping the stage of writing.

The effect which the printing press had on writing and vernacular languages and cultures in Europe is likely to replicate itself in the effect which the mass production and dissemination of sound recordings will have on non-literate cultures and communities. Eventually, the role of audio-technologies in enhancing the power and importance of speech will have the same kind of effect on writing and print, that print had on oral language. Spoken language comes naturally to all humans who do not have a speech related impairment. By contrast, written language needs to be taught. Where both written language and spoken language have equal power, spoken language is likely to be preferred to writing. Therefore, writing and printing will, with the passage of time, eventually become technologies existing on the fringes of speech in its newly technologicalised electronic mode.

I suggest that the popularity of modern Jamaican music the world over, notably deejay/dance hall, is at least in part triggered by an unconscious recognition of its pioneering role in constructing a language and national consciousness around speech rather than writing. The fact that the genre is popular even in highly literate societies, e.g. Western Europe, Japan, USA, etc., is significant. The popularity of deejay/dance hall in highly literate societies simply indicates that even among literates, there is a longing for a medium which would facilitate the mass transmission of spoken rather than written creative language material. This is the gift which Jamaican deejay/dance hall genre has given the world.

CONCLUSION
The new orality which deejay/dance hall represents, returns to traditional
oral formulaic devices. This is done, however, with a novel twist. The musical backing, the 'ridim', which is also formulaic, may be generated electronically. The entire performance is manipulated electronically. Finally, the end product is transmitted to the market in one electronic form or the other. Deejay/dancehall is a new, electronically transmitted orality. It is producing a language consciousness and a national identity, neither of which relies for its existence on that left-over technology from the 15th century, the printing press.

Homer, the deejay, has hung up his lyre three thousand years now. What makes him decide to come back again is not the fact that a new generation has rediscovered the use of orality in nation and state building. It is the fact that the new technologies now give the oral poet awesome powers. The oral poet can reach millions of people by one broadcast or a single sound recording. This mass audience can be made to laugh together, cry together, and to feel that they belong together in the same community, the same nation. This is a once in a three thousand year experience. And, as Homer reaches for his lyre, he chants,

Av mörst...
Gi mi di llyad ridim, mi dis a will an tön,
Unu kler out di wie, Dijjie Hörmer a kóm!

REFERENCES


