



Book review: Language, Culture and Caribbean Identity

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Language, Culture and Caribbean Identity. Jeanette Allsopp & John R. Rickford (eds.). Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2012. vi + 178 pp. (Paper US\$ 35.00)

This vibrant celebration of the legacy of Richard Allsopp, a pioneering lexicographer and cultural researcher, explores various aspects of language, culture, and identity in the Caribbean from the perspective of leading Caribbean scholars, some of whom were Allsopp's students and many, his colleagues and friends. The book is a living sign of the Caribbean togetherness that Jeannette Allsopp calls for in her own text. Its sixteen chapters are divided into six sections on themes that were dear to Richard Allsopp's heart.

The importance of studying Caribbean English is demonstrated by Pauline Christie's essay on the varieties and statuses of English in the Caribbean. Creole linguistics in the Caribbean is now recognized as a major field of investigation. Three linguistic contributions on Guyanese are included: Alim Hosein treats reduplication and shows that the classic decreolization hypothesis does not hold; Walter F. Edwards revisits the use of future markers *go* and *gun* and shows that they derive from different sources; and John R. Rickford investigates variability among personal pronouns. Rickford argues that in our excitement about the social and identity elements in sociolinguistic variation we easily forget the anchoring effect of linguistic structure. He shows the importance of internal constraints on variation and the structure of variability in the linguistic system.

Lexicography is also well represented with contributions by Jeannette Allsopp, John Simpson, and Lise Winer. Winer makes an interesting methodological point about the use of (old/colonial) photographs as a means of word elicitation, even if European photographers have reinforced and perpetuated stereotypes by the way they "selected, posed and framed images and exoticized" (Bravman 1990) large parts of the population in the world. Photographs, she argues, transcend time and space, and might help to elicit words and bridge "cultural gaps."

Two sections are devoted to culture in the Caribbean: one on folklore and religion and another on literature, music, and dance. Hazel Simmons-McDonald shows the afrogenesis of French Creole proverbs, while Ian Robertson links a Guyanese folkloric character, Mamma Mingi, to cultural and spiritual (African, Amerindian, and Caribbean) practices. Kean Gibson treats the adaptation of African Comfa to the Guyanese context. In "Narrative as autobiography of the folk," Velma Pollard analyzes short stories by Olive Senior in the light of race, religion, and class. Literary devices are particularly vivid in Caribbean calypso, as Claudith Thompson shows.

Caribbean identity is addressed by many contributions, but specifically by H  l  ne Zarmor and Mervyn Alleyne in its relation to creole identity. Although appealing, Alleyne argues that "creole identity" is an ill-defined concept, variable, and complex. Its first meaning, "person of European descent born in the New World," reminds us that the European prerogative to give names was a major instrument of control for setting norms. The term "creole" was never used in the English colonial Caribbean, in either popular or scientific discourse, whereas in the French colonial Caribbean, the term belongs to popular discourse and has gained literary, cultural, and identitarian meaning under the term *cr  olit  *. For Alleyne, in the French Antilles, the term "creole" rejects essentialist notions such as origin. But, like any term, it is polyphonic and may be redefined in discourse on identity. See the evolution of what it means to be "French Guianese" and/or "Creole" in French Guiana (Hidair 2008, Migge & L  glise 2013). H  l  ne Zarmor's essay departs from the term *creolization*,

reminding us how difficult the 1946 departmentalization was in the history of the French Caribbean, and highlighting the contradictory positions that emerged at that time in various movements—including within *négritude*. It was such a hostile political environment that identity became a challenge for French Caribbean people. Although language is vital in constructing identity, she argues that music and dance—because they employ French Creole language—have sustained this language and changed people's attitudes to it.

Finally, two contributions address language issues in Caribbean schools—one by Martha Isaac and another by Karen Carpenter and Hubert Devonish. Carpenter and Devonish remind us that bilingual education projects in Jamaica developed from a monoliterate transitional bilingual approach (using the home language, Jamaican Creole, as a bridge toward English, the language of education) to a pilot project of fully bilingual education or dual language education (using both L1 and L2 as subjects and medium of instruction). They discuss some results of a fully bilingual pilot project implemented over the last ten years, showing better literacy results to national tests for pupils within this project and the greater preference by boys for Jamaican Creole, leading them to certain (negative) attitudes toward English and literacy in English. Although they show evidence of the fact that the use of Jamaican Creole in education yields educational dividends, policy makers are still difficult to convince, and it is a good thing that “the struggle for language education policies based on evidence rather than opinions continues” in Jamaica and in the Caribbean, as well as all around the world.

This book is inspiring for further research. It is recommended for graduate students and scholars interested in linguistics and Caribbean Studies.

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