

The Creation of Language through Revolution

Language is created every day in the way we speak language to others. From street slang like Ebonics to the various cultural slangs of Spanish, we speak freely and change our language whenever we think of something new. Half of the time we don't even realize that language is evolving right in front of our eyes. By the time we stop to think about language and why something is said or spelled the way it is, is because of a new trending phenomenon that everyone can't help but to talk about and use. In this report I plan to discuss the revolutionary history and language creation of Patois in Jamaica.

Patois is a language that comes from a rich and innovative history. It is only truly spoken by the people of Jamaica. As of 2015, the country has approximately 2.7 million people and is one of the most recognized, due to a distinct culture, compared to other islands in the Caribbean.

Patois was developed in Jamaica when slaves were brought from Africa to the island. The language started as a coded dialect that slaves created as their own form of English so that the slave owners wouldn't understand what they were talking about. The attractive, yet confusing dialect has grown into a language of strong culture and creates pride in the people of Jamaica. Until this day it is a uniting force between Jamaican people all over the world.

Rumors have been spread by various ethnicities of people who say Patois isn't considered an 'official language'. However, Jamaicans *will* say otherwise. The argument is that since Patois is just a form of English, then is it really a Creole language? There are varying forms of Creole across the Caribbean which causes people to believe that Patois should be viewed as a dialect, not a language. Interviews were conducted to clear up these rumors and assumptions that people have about the Jamaican language and culture. [names have been changed to protect identity].

A graduate assistant at the KSU-Marietta Campus, Sasha Anderson, who is from Saint Elizabeth, Jamaica and speaks Patois fluently, begs to differ. She says, "I was taught that Patois is a Creole language. But personally, I would not say it is Creole because Patois is very different from any other language in the Caribbean that you will come across."

Creole can be defined as "a language that has its origin in extended contact between two language communities". It incorporates words, grammar, and phrases from each community. A Creole language is formed when multiple languages encounter each other and a new dialect or language is formed.

Justin Oakland, a Mechanical Engineering student at the KSU-Marietta Campus from Montego Bay, Jamaica who also speaks Patois fluently, shared his insight about Creole languages in relation to Patois.

BR: Would you consider Patois a Creole language?

JO: Yeah, I would.

BR: Why?

JO: Well Creole is just a subset of broader spoken languages. It's a variety of different languages. Not only Patois.

BR: Do you know how Creole languages are formed?

JO: From what I know, mostly through slavery. Like Haitian Creole is a broken French and Patois Creole is a broken English.

Both examinees are right. Language is something that can be bent and changed. It's all about usage, knowledge of the variations, the way we feel, and many other effects.

According to Paxton Belcher-Timme who wrote *Rhetoric of Reggae, Patois: the language of Jamaica* (2009), "The issue with not acknowledging Patois as a language lies in how established this languages' culture has become already. The Jamaican Patois has had a long and trying history that has gone through adversity, and heartache." What Paxton Belcher-Timme means is that Patois must be recognized as a language due to the impact it has made on the way communication is delivered in the Jamaican culture. Patois has been through hardship and trials of the heart to get where it is as a language due to the history of its creation.

When you compare the Standard American English we speak to the English spoken in other countries, it can also be very different from what we have been taught academically. Then, we find ourselves confused when encountering foreigners who speak English in a way that we don't. This is what happens when people encounter Jamaicans in America. The language seems so foreign that our immediate reaction is, "What are you saying? Talk more. Say something else." Rather than trying to learn and understand the actual words presented to us. We want to expand our knowledge of altered language but how do we do that?

Patois is a language that cannot be ignored by the people who know it or by the people who struggle to comprehend it. When I first met Justin Oakland as freshmen attending Southern Polytechnic State University (now named KSU-Marietta Campus), I immediately knew he was Jamaican. When I lived in New York as a teenager, I had Jamaican and Haitian friends. Since I have been exposed to both, I learned at an early stage in life that the variations between the types of Creole is relatively distinct. For example, in Haitian Creole to greet someone by saying what's happenin' would be 'sak pase' and a reply to that would be 'map boule' which means 'I'm good.' Comparatively in Patois to say what's happenin' someone would say 'wah gwan' meaning 'what's going on.' A simple reply to that would be 'not'ing nah gwan' which means 'nothing much is going on.' Patois is actually easier to understand than any other Creole because it is just a Broken English.

That is how I was able to readily identify Justin as Jamaican; by the way he spoke to me. It's rather interesting too because the first day I met him, he actually insulted me with the assumption that I wouldn't know what he was saying. That's where he was wrong. He said, "that maad gyal over there, mi ah t'ink she's out of her bumbacлот mind, man. Mi ah go run before everybody ah go dead." Translation: "that crazy girl over there, I think she's out of her f***ing mind, man. I'm going to leave before she kills everyone." I didn't mention it verbally to him that I understood Patois but I'm sure my firm facial expression said enough. He laughed and then actually fled the scene.

The interviews that I conducted individually with both Sasha Anderson and Justin Oakland were insightful, helpful, and enhanced my knowledge of Patois as a language. I learned from these two Jamaicans how truly fascinating and amazing their native language is from an outside perspective. There were some parts of the interviews where they spoke to me in Patois, which I really enjoyed.

BR: What is your favorite phrase or something that you say a lot in Patois?

SA: Me can' bother.

(This basically means, "I can't waste my time" or simply, "I can't bother").

BR: [Laughter]. That is such a lazy phrase and it's funny to know you say that.

SA: Yeah, I say it at least once a day.

BR: My favorite word is probably 'gweh' because people are always asking me to do something and I'm just like 'go away'

The closeness that Patois has created between the cultures of Jamaica is phenomenal. When I asked Sasha what her favorite thing about Patois is she said the intimacy that it creates between the people who understand it because like any other language it forms a "secretive" conversation to those listening who don't understand. She also loves that there are multiple ways to say the same thing and that there is no specific way to write Patois, you simply write it how it sounds. Patois is more of a spoken language than a written language.

I also asked Justin the same question during his interview:

BR: What is your favorite thing about Patois?

JO: So many t'ings dhem. Um mi enjoy cuss people sometime but ya haff fi be careful cause like one time, mi a call this dude a "batty bwoy" an' him turn around so like um ya know mi Jamaican too? I jes haff fi laugh an' dhen was like oh my bad yute, bless up.

To explain the above quote from Justin, The term 'batty bwoy' in Jamaica/Patois is equivalent to calling someone a 'faggot' in America/English. So to translate what Justin said, "I called this guy a faggot in Patois and he turned around to say that he was Jamaican too. I had to laugh and say sorry man/young person, God bless."

Out of curiosity I dug a little deeper into the specifics of what other things that Justin truly appreciates about the language of his culture by asking him more questions during the interview.

BR: You said that there is a long list of things you love about Patois. Can you go ahead and just list those off for me and give me examples as you go?

JO: My absolute favorite thing stems from the creativity of it all. Patois is a language that is constantly evolving like I leave Jamaica for a while and come back then be lost on what people sayin' because it's a new speech. One time, I came back and my aunt was saying, "ray tay tay" and it took me a while to figure out what she meant. Do you know what that means?

BR: It sounds familiar, but I can't really say that I know.

JO: So like if ya ah tell a story 'bout somet'ing dhat 'appen to you dhen ya say um I went to work today and this gyal was sayin' she dislike me and ray tay tay and t'ing.

BR: Alright. So ‘ray tay tay’ is kind of like saying blah blah blah?

JO: Well not exactly. It’s more like saying ‘and so on.’

I asked Justin to continue his list for me to record. He said that he also loved how dramatic people are when they express things in Patois and how there are so many different metaphors and idioms for things that people say. An example is instead of saying, “throw away the food” in Patois someone might say, “bax ‘way the food” or “kick ‘way the food.”

My favorite thing about speaking Patois is how diverse the language is. In my own experience with Caribbean people from Haiti, Grenada, Trinidad, Guyana, St. Lucia, and Jamaica, I have learned that, out of all the islands, Jamaica seems to be the most diverse. Justin agreed with me. He said, “When it comes to the history of Patois I know there were slaves and those kinds of things, but I really like the diversity of how others leave their mark on Jamaica like Chinese, Irish, and even Spanish ‘cause it gives flavor to the culture.” Of course there were others like Britain which originally colonized Jamaica and African language brought over by the slaves. Nonetheless Patois demonstrates how the country of Jamaica is a cultural trend setter, especially through the music industry and popular culture.

When people in America talk about Jamaica, the first thing they reference is Bob Marley, dreadlocks, smoking weed, and the exceptional dance moves. When I think of Jamaica, I think of the music and how a lot of people listen to the music. I have had associates and peers who know about Reggae, Dancehall, and a few other genres of Jamaican music who love to dance at parties to those various stylings; but the question is, do you really understand the lyrics? Do you understand Patois? I’ve come to realize that Jamaican music is very passionate and sexual.

Here is an example of the intimate language used in Jamaican music:

“Phone tek a picture yeh a that you fi tweet
Tell them gyal them wine yah cyaa even compete
Mi a bum it, and a kotch it, pon the beat mi just a drop it
How mi twerk it and a slop it pon the ground like mi a map it
How mi stuck it, and a pop it, and a wine it, and a lop it
Take a picture you fi snap it Facebook it but crap it
Yes a so mi like it
Ride it like a bike it
Cock up and a sit down and a wine it”

These lyrics come from a song performed by Spice, a female Jamaican dancehall and reggae artist. She started out singing on other artists’ song tracks and then went into DJ-ing. She is currently a mother and still known by the industry with a strong presence. The above lyrics from her song, ‘So Mi Like It’ are extremely enticing and seductive.

Here is the translation:

“Take a picture with your phone, tweet that
Tell those girls their wine can’t even compete

I'll enjoy it, and kotch it, on the beat and I'll drop it
How I twerk it and slap it on the ground like I'm mopping it
How I hold it and pop it and wine it and loop it
Take a picture for Facebook but crop it
Yes that's how I like it
I'll ride it like a bike
Sit up for me to sit down and I'll wine on it"

Patois, although not the most practiced language, is suitable for the people of Jamaica. Patois is a large part of what Jamaican culture has formed into today. Patois has as much of a right to be a language as any other recognized language, and even has a stronger history than most official languages.

Patois was created through a revolution of language and should be spoken in Jamaica for as long as people teach it to each other. Yes, it can be considered a Creole language because it is a broken English. Yes, it has made Jamaica the trend setter of language in the Caribbean Islands. And the essence of Jamaican culture, pride, and authenticity is displayed through the creativity, the intimacy, and the sexuality of Patois and the exotic people who speak it.

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