Comparison of south african and jamaican english

ASSIGN BUSTER

This essay will give brief linguistic descriptions of two varieties of English, one that formed in the South of Africa and the other located in Jamaica.

The English of South Africa started to develop in the 18th century, when the British first occupied the Cape in 1795, however, in history, the arrival of the 1820 settlers in the Eastern Cape is considered to be the birth of a new English dialect called South African English. What took place upon the arrival of the British settlers is the process of “ koineization” or mixing across the various dialects of English that served as inputs and the output was a new variety of English (Bekker 2012). The majority of literature cited in Bekker (Lanham and Macdonald (1979) or Lass (1995)), on the development of South African English states that this first wave of settlers primarily came from lower-class origins of the south-eastern area of England including London. However, Bekker claims that this is oversimplifying and that the structure of the settlers should be further looked into, because this would mean that South African English would primarily be influenced by 19th century Cockney, which would make it similar to Australian English. In that regard, Welsh claims that the initial criteria for emigration were too strict and thus the settlers were at first primarily members of educated classes and there were not many coming from the lower class background since there was no need for, as Welsh puts it „ labourers and artisans“ to do “ pioneering work” (Welsh 1998: 127). This would explain the fact that South African English does not display some of the typical features of Cockney English that can be found in Australian English, e. g. the use of *–in* for *–ing* for the present participle (*talkin’* for *talking*) (Bekker 2012). One other thing that makes the situation slightly more complex is the fact that the area,

which the settlers arrived to had already been partially settled by speakers of what was by then a form of Proto-Afrikaans (Bekker 2012). There was much intensive contact through personal relationships like marriage between the English and Afrikaans groups and a lot of authors, mentioned in Bekker (2012) (Lanham, Macdonald (1979), Lass and Wright (1986)) disagree on whether South African English was influenced by Afrikaans on not only the lexical or lexicogrammatical level, but also on the structural level. After the initial settlement, the second phase in the development of South African English was upon the arrival of the more middle-class to upper class settlers in the period between 1840s and 1850s. In addition to the difference of the class structure in comparison to the 1820s settlers, this time there was no Afrikaans influence on the koineization process and there was distinctly the influence of the north of England variety of English and the output of this phase can be called Natal English (Bekker 2012). Many authors say that the formation of South African English ends at this point, Schneider (2007: 176) explains that in both the first settlement in 1820s, frequently reffered to as the " Cape English" (Bekker 2012) and in the Natal Period a " recognizable founder effect" is present and the two groups of settler formed a foundation for the main features of the present-day South African English. Bekker (2012), however, argues that another phase of the development of South African English took place during the development of Johannesburg that was followed by the discovery of gold in that area. Bekker states that Johannesburg was another " tabula rasa" situation and it was a place where another process of koinezation happened (2012). This third phase included the input of many varieties of English, including Cape English, Natal English and many other English accents along with L2 varieties as English spoken by

L1-Afrikaans and L1-Yiddish speakers of the many Eastern European Jews that were among the first immigrants to Johannesburg. The final result of this third process of koineization as argued by Bekker (2012) is the variety that is referred to as South African English and it is spoken primarily (although certainly not exclusively) by " white" L1-speakers of English in South Africa and henceforth referred to as White South African English. There are three variants (termed " The Great Trichotomy" by Roger Lass 1995) that are commonly identified within White South African English; 1) spoken primarily by White South Africans: " Cultivated", closely approximating England's standard Received Pronunciation and associated with the upper class; " General", a social indicator of the middle class; and " Broad", associated with the working class, and closely resembling Afrikaans English. During the formation of White South African English other varieties of English formed as well, including South African Indian English (SAIE), Cape Flats English/Coloured English (C[F]E) and Black South African English (BSAE) (Bekker 2012). Gough (1996) states that English has typically been seen as the language of liberation and black unity, unlike Afrikaans that has been considered to be the language of the oppressor. However, very few Africans, claims Gough, display a complete language shift to English away from African languages. While English is perceived as the language of prestige and power and is used when it is necessary to assert such qualities (Gough 1996), African languages are typically maintained as a solidarity code. Hence, the results of the latest census that state that only 1 percent of Africans state English as their home language, while 33 percent of them have the knowledge of English, are not surprising (Gough 1996).

The variety of South African English that I will try to linguistically describe in this essay is Black South African English. Most of the characteristics of South African English are related both to native-language transfer as well as universal features relating to language learning and usage, which makes it similar to other new Englishes (De Klerk and Gough 2002: 363).

Tense and Pronoun Copying

The tense system has been identified as a characteristic feature of Black South African English(es) by e. g. Gough (1996) and De Klerk and Gough (2002) along with pronoun copying, or the use of a resumptive pronoun in the noun phrase, e. g. [*some of the people they*], has been regarded as " one of the most prototypical features of BSAE, and probably one of which teachers are more consciously aware" (Van Rooy 2004). Both Gough (1996: 62) and De Klerk and Gough (2002) state that the past tense is a feature that is not always marked in BSAE, which is visible from these two examples:

(1) In 1980 the boycott *starts* .

(2) We stayed at home until the boycott *stop* .

In both (1) and (2), the verb is not marked linguistically for tense since it is missing the –ed suffix used for indicating the past and therefore encodes the present tense. However, it is visible from the semantics of the sentence that the event took place in the past. Another feature of Black South African English is pronoun copying and the use of resumptive pronouns, that refer to the use of a personal pronoun, either directly following a coreferential preceding the noun phrase in question as it is the case in 3 or occurring in a

relative clause which describes the coreferential noun phrase as it is in 4. Gough (1996: 61) and De Klerk and Gough (2002: 362) present this with the following two examples:

(3) My standard 9, I have enjoyed *it* very much.

(4) The man who I saw *him* was wearing a big hat.

Mesthrie (1997) claims that this kind of construction should be understood as being one of several forms of fronting or topicalisation, i. e. the movement of focused pieces of information into positions which they usually do not occupy. In 3 and 4, the elements *my standard 9* and *the man* have been moved to the beginning of the sentence and these fronted noun phrases are coreferential with a copy pronoun in the main clause (*it* and *him* in 3 and 4respectively).

Realisation of Vowels in Black South African English

To further describe Black South African English it is necessary to say something about the specific traits regarding pronunciation. South African English is like English in southern England, such as London, non-rhotic. One of the most distinctive features of South African English is the so called “ kit-bit split”, which means that the words kit [kɪt] and bit [bət] do not

rhyme. The sound [ɪ] is used when it occurs next to velars, as in the words *kiss, gift, lick,*

big, sing and kit , after /h/ as in *hit* , at the beginning of a word as in *inn* , and before /ʃ/

as in *fish* . The sound, [ə] is used elsewhere. The " kit" vowel tends to be " split" so that there is a clear allophonic variation between the close, front [ɪ] and a somewhat more central [ɪ̈] (Bekker 2012). Van Rooy (2004) states that the Black mesolect realizes it [i], whereas in the Black acrolect, the quality varies between [ɪ] and [i]. As for the " happ y " vowel (/i/), the Black mesolect realizes it as [ɪ], whereas in the Black acrolect, the quality varies between [ɪ] and [i] (Van Rooy 2004). Furthermore, /iː/ (the " fleece" vowel) is realized as [i] in Black mesolect, whereas in Black acrolect, the quality varies between [i] and [ɪ] (Van Rooy 2004). Van Rooy (2004) says that the /ʊ/ (the " foot" vowel) is realized [u] in the Black mesolect, whereas in Black acrolect, the quality varies between [ʊ] and [u]. The /uː/ (the " goose" vowel) is realized as [u] in the Black mesolect, whereas in Black acrolect, the quality varies between [ʊ] and [u], which is the same as the previously mentioned " foot" vowel. As for the /e/ (the " dress" vowel), in Black South African English it is realised as [ɛ] (Van Rooy 2004). /ə/ (the " comm a " vowel) in Black mesolect is pronounced as [ä], whereas in the Black acrolect as [ə]. Particulary interesting is the raised /æ/ or the /æ/ (the " trap" vowel)., which is in Black South African English raised to [ɛ], which would mean that *South Africa* would sound more like *South E frica.* Also specific is the /ɑː/ (the " bath" vowel), which is according to Van Rooy (2004) realized as [ä] in Black mesolect, whereas in Black acrolect, the quality varies between [ä] and [ʌ]. As for the /ʌ/ (the " strut" vowel), the Black mesolect realizes it as [ä], whereas in Black acrolect, the quality varies between [ʌ] and [ä] (Van Rooy 2004). Van Rooy (2004: 944) summarizes the general phonological status of Black South African English as including the reduction of typical English vowel contrasts (*bad, bird* and *bed* as [bed] or [be: d]), occasional

consonant cluster reduction and syllable timed stress patterning, which can be considered to be related to Bantu languages.

Consonants in Black South African English

In Black South African English, voiceless plosives are generally unaspirated in all positions. The fricative and affricate phonemes of South African English are /f, v, θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, ʒ, x, h, tʃ, dʒ/. South African English is one of the very few varieties to have a velar fricative phoneme /x/, but this only exists in words that have been borrowed from Afrikaans. Another distinctive feature of the South African English is the tendency to pronounce /θ/ as [f]. Therefore, the /θ/ sound is merged with other sounds as in the case of the word *three* which is pronounced as *free* . Another characteristics is to pronounce the sound /h/ as a voiced /ɦ/ when it comes before a stressed vowel in Black South African English. The sonorant phonemes of South African English are /m, (hw), w, n, l, r, j, ŋ/.

Jamaican Creole

The second variety of English that I am going to describe in this essay is Standard Jamaican English and Jamaican Creole. The English settlement in Jamaica started in 1655, when the English navy captured the Island from Spain. The English established Kingston in 1692 and designed it as a port and a trading centre that was built mostly by African slaves. Racial difference, inequality and conflict is something present in Jamaica since forever and it is fundamental to its history, society, demography, politics and economics (Patrick 1999). From its beginning, the makeup of Kingston was quite different from the rest of Jamaica, it consisted of African slaves, which

were craftsmen, domestic-and dock-workers and “ creoles” or “ coloureds”, which were locally born non-slave people of mixed African and European blood and free black. Furthermore, free whites, both English and locally born also lived in Kingston and were divided into an elite and a lower class, the “ whites” were mostly English, Scots or Irish. Since the beginning, Kingston has been the natural home of many marginal and minority groups, the centre of contact and communication between different parts of the island’s population. In this mixture of different culture and languages, Jamaican identity has developed with its many specific characteristics.

The official language of Jamaica is English, however, it is clear that on a simpler level a difference exists between the standard, official English and the common language of everyday use in Jamaica. Therefore, I will try to briefly stress out the specifics of both Standard Jamaican English (SJE) and Jamaican Creole (JC). The language situation in Jamaica can be described as “ a creole continuum” (Patrick 1999). This means that SJE and JC are not strictly divided with clearly visible limits between them, but that there are many levels between the two varieties of English that show variation stretched across the basilect, mesolect and acrolect. In this essay I have decided to use JC to refer to the basilect and mesolect in order to differentiate them from the acrolect (SJE). While the use of the acrolect is most widely spread in literacy, government, education and print media, the basilect is characteristic of the rural Creole (Figueroa 2015). In addition to that, Patrick (2004) argues that the mesolect contains a somewhat systematic, but variable grammar of Creole that consists significantly of elements of English structure.

Vowels in Standard Jamaican English and Jamaican Creole

SJE is largely influenced by British Received Pronunciation, which is the model for SJE. However, the JC's phonetics were largely shaped by an early pidgin in the 17 th and 18 th century that consisted of English dialects, a West African language (Twi or Ewe) or a Portuguese-West African pidgin (Figueroa 2015). One feature of JC that can be attributed to the influence of Twi, which is known as a tone language, is that JC syllables do not have the same stress-prominence found in English, but show " an evenness of accent" (Figueroa 2015). JC has a system of five basic vowels, but there is one presentation of JC that suggests it to have three long vowels and four dipthongs with both peripheral and back vowel harmony, which would mean that within a syllable only sequences of peripheral vowels (/i/, /u/, /a/) are allowed to occur. Therefore, JC has *biini* (tiny), *buut* (booth), and *baaba* (barber) and the four dipthongs: /ia/, /ai/, /ua/, and / au/, as in *biak* (bake), *baik* (bike), *buat* (boat), and *taun* (town), claims Figueroa (2015). The Creole continuum can also be illustrated with phonological variation as Cassidy and Le Page exemplify with the word " face" that is in JC pronounced with a /ie/ diphthong as *fies* and the speakers of SJE pronounce it as *féis* . Therefore, we can attribute *fiés* with a rising diphthong /ie/to the low mesolect, and *fes,* with a short, tense /e/ to the high mesolect, argues Figueroa (2015).

Morphology

An interesting feature of Jamaican Creole is reduplication, which is productive in JC and while some words coined that way are from African languages, others are English based, and serve different functions, such as

attenuation, continuation, intensification, multiplicity, repetition, onomatopoeia or derivation (Figueroa 2015). Examples taken from Figueroa (2015):

African-based: *kos kos* to have a heated dispute, intens. of *kos* (to quarrel)

nyam nyam foodstuff, noun derived from *nyam* (to eat)

pam pam to persecute, intensification of *pam* (to spank)

tum tum onomatopoeia for the mashing of yam

English-based: *cry cry* to cry continuously

liki liki enjoying food, adjective derived from *lick*

likl likl attenuation of little

tief tief to steal repeatedly

If one goes into further morphological analysis of JC, it is necessary to make a distinction between the mesolect and basilect (Figueroa 2015). For example, in the mesolect verb inflection is considered to be common and important, while in the basilect, the occurrence of bare uninflected verbs is quite often, according to Patrick (2004). In order to support this claim, it would be relevant to mention the fact that most of the English verbs that normally undergo a change in their stem have only one form in the basilect (Figueroa 2015). This is visible from the example of irregular verbs and the usage of their past form, such as *los* (lose), *marid* (marry), *gaan* (go away) (Figueroa 2015).

Syntax of Standard Jamaican English and Jamaican Creole

Jamaican Creole is a SVO language, like English, however, JC does not make use of auxiliary, negative and question inversion, argues Patrick (2004: 15). In JC, the copular " be" does not appear in most cases and in order to introduce the subject into the sentence, JC uses *a–* , a morpheme that can also be used to depict the progressive aspect (*Mi en a sing* – I was singing. (Patrick 1999: 71), but here has the same meaning as the copular " be" as in: *Mary a one faama* . – Mary is a farmer. (Adams 1991). Furthermore, the negation in JC is denoted by a simple *no* (Patrick 2004: 18), as in *Mi neva tell im no lie!* (I didn't tell him a lie). Similar to English, the word order in JC is not always SVO, and Adams (1991) argues that there is yet another use of *a* in JC, in this case its possibility to appear in the beginning of the sentence, as in: *A no joke dem a joke* . (They are not joking.). When discussing subordination, it is worth mentioning that *se* and *dat* are declarative complementisers that can sometimes be left out. In addition to that, while *se* can only follow verbs of speech, thought, perception, or emotion as in: *Im tell wi se im bex* . He told us that he is angry, *dat* can only be used to express purpose as in 1b, argues Patrick (2004: 20). Regarding non-finite clauses, it is not always necessary to include particles, but the particle *fi* is in the basilect used a marker of the infinitive as in 1a, while in the high mesolect it interchanges with *tu* , states Patrick (2004: 19). The examples in 1a and 1b are taken from Figueroa (2015).

1a

I hard fi kraas di riba. It’s hard to cross the river.

1b

Dat mean him deh go tek set pon me . That means (that) he is going to become malignly fixated upon me.

Another interesting feature of Jamaican Creole is the formation of the imperative, which is formed with *pliiz tu* + verb (Patrick 2004: 19) as in: *Pliiz tu kom dis said* . – Come over here (lit. To come this side) (Figueroa 2015).

Looking at this brief description of Jamaican Creole, including the examples that stressed out the differences between Standard Jamaican English and Jamaican Creole, it is safe to say that the official language and the everyday variant are related, but also very different. The distinction between Jamaican English and other Englishes of the world is cleary visible when observing this part African, part English variety of English in Jamaica.

References

- Adams, E. 1991. *Understanding Jamaican Patois: an introduction to afro-Jamaican grammar* . Kingston: LMH Publishing.
- Bekker, I. 2012. The story of South African English: A brief linguistic overview. *International Journal of Language, Translation and Intercultural Communication. 1* , 139–150.
- Cassidy, F., Le Page, R. (eds) 2002. *Dictionary of Jamaican English* , 2nd edn., Kingston: University of the West Indies.

- De Klerk, V. and Gough, D. 2002. *Black South African English* , in Rajend Mesthrie (ed.) *Language in South Africa* . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 356-378.
- Figueroa, A. 2015. English and Creole in Jamaica: A brief linguistic sketch. *□□□□□□* , *49* , 7-14.
- Gough, D. 1996. *Black English in South Africa,* in Vivian de Klerk (ed.) *Focus on South Africa* . Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Lass, R. 1995. *South African English* , in R. Mesthrie (ed.) *Language and Social History: Studies in South African Sociolinguistics,* Cape Town: David Philip.
- Mesthrie, R. 1997. *A sociolinguistic study of topicalisation phenomena in South African Black English* , in: Schneider, Edgar (ed.). *Englishes Around the World* . Vol. 2. Amsterdam: Benjamins. 119-140.
- Patrick, P. L. 1999. *Urban Jamaican Creole.* Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Patrick, P. 2004. *Jamaican creole: morphology and syntax* ., in *A Handbook of Varieties of English, Vol 2: Morphology and Syntax* , eds. B. Kortmann, E. Schneider, C. Upton, R. Mesthrie & K. Burridge, New York: De Gruyter Mouton.
- van Rooy, B. 2004. *Black South African English: phonology. A Handbook of Varieties of English.* Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Welsh, F. (1998) *A History of South Africa* , London: HarperCollins.
- Wells, J. 1973. *Jamaican Pronunciation in London* . Oxford: Blackwell.