

LINGUISTICS RESEARCH DAY 2016

ABSTRACTS

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Tyrone Ali

ELFU, DMLL, FHE, UWI, St Augustine

When Fiction Becomes Real Life: Examining Language and Affect among the Transgender

The multiplicity of negative linguistic and paralinguistic constructions used in the everyday discourse of describing, expressing and experiencing non-heteronormative sexualities generates an emotive language use that has come to characterize language and affect of members of the LGBTQ community in very real and disruptive ways. The transgender sex and gender identity has not escaped such a diatribe unscathed. In actuality, such individuals may very well be seen as the recipients of an even more acute application of pejorative language use that has resonated deeply with them and so carries them beyond the ambit of person versus person conflict to (d)evolve into the more alarming person versus self struggles.

This is case with the male-to-female transgender Caribbean-born but Toronto-raised protagonist of Shani Mootoo's 2015 fictional work, *Moving Forward Sideways Like a Crab*. The vagaries of sex, gender, race, ethnicity, geography and social class become a delicious milieu to interrogate language and affect in Mootoo's literary craft along the lines of a feminist research ethic with its attendant four-dimensional focus on attentiveness to power, explicit boundaries, relational subjectivities and contextual situatedness.

Since art mimics life and literature itself is mimetic, it would prove extremely interesting to ascertain whether Mootoo's work resonates with a real life transgender individual who, like Mootoo's protagonist, is Caribbean-born and of Indian descent but is transgenering from male-to-female and is on the throes of deciding on corrective surgery. Does such an individual find a kindred spirit in Mootoo's character? Or does she generate a separate and distinct gender identity that is the product of language and affect in the social constructivist reality that is her own?

This paper seeks to interrogate experienced language and affect that has shaped the gender identity and social realities of two transgender individuals – one fictional and one real. The focus will also determine if parallels and divergences in experiences fraught with the tensions, contentions and collisions that is a salient part of the transgender's everyday life is the legacy of language and paralinguistic that has shared meanings in a largely heteronormative community and the impact of this in the lives of the transgender overwhelming minority. Further, the extent to which art mimics real life will be examined since this paper further allows for rich comparisons in the overarching theme of language and affect as it impacts on the transgender community.

Petra Avillan

Universidad de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras

Perceptions of Language Threat in the Caribbean: The View of the Speakers

Issues of language threat, language attrition and language endangerment have surrounded the languages in the Caribbean since the colonising period. The interactions among the different cultural and linguistic groups in the Caribbean created the need for new languages, allowing Creoles to develop. Eventually, the imposition of the languages of the colonisers transform the new languages and provoke the attrition, and endangerment of many of them.

Seeing the need to explain these phenomena, linguists have created categories and descriptive levels of threat and endangerment (Fishman, 1991) which enable them to classify, evaluate and make critical judgments over the languages being studied. Based on the linguists' expert and scientific opinions, languages which appear to be undergoing the final stages of their existence are documented and at times subjected to language awareness, maintenance and preservation projects (Crystal, 2010).

In my own quest to understand the evolution of the languages in the Caribbean, I found that the language endangerment descriptors, the decisions about language policies, language awareness projects and language maintenance initiatives around the world were made mainly by the linguists and policymakers and on few occasions stemmed from the indigenous languages or Creole speakers. If it is true that "Each individual makes decisions about how and when, if at all, to use the I-language and as a result the external or communal language changes. [And that] In that sense, each individual is responsible for the evolution of the language..." (Mufwene, 2001), then shouldn't the individual and the communities of speakers also participate of the decisions and the initiatives to preserve or not the languages? Wouldn't it be not only necessary but also useful (as well as practical) to listen to the concerns, needs, dreams and expectations of the speakers of threatened or endangered languages (Crystal, 2010) as part of the protocols for establishing language preservation projects?

This is one of the guiding questions of my doctoral dissertation and I will answer it partially through this paper. I will discuss the results of interviews which I conducted at Paramin, Trinidad, with Patois (French Creole) speakers and describe the First Creole and Endangered Languages Colloquium hosted by the University of Puerto Rico on 21 January 2016 and which was developed in response to a request from the Patois speakers. This first colloquium was attended by Caribbean researchers, graduate students, professors, Patois and other Creole speakers, members of the indigenous communities and students in general. The enthusiasm and the interest generated was reflected by the petition that a second colloquium be celebrated next January 2017.

Ben Braithwaite

Linguistics, DMLL, FHE, UWI, St Augustine

The Diversity of Caribbean Signed Languages and What It Means for Linguists and Linguistics

Linguists are only now beginning to investigate Caribbean signed languages in systematic ways. Recent documentation projects have begun to investigate previously undescribed languages in Haiti, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Cuba, Suriname and Jamaica. Gradually, a picture of considerable linguistic diversity is emerging. We now know of at least ten signed languages indigenous to the Caribbean, and there are almost certainly more that have not yet been identified by linguists. Four more languages with origins outside the region are used natively by Caribbean signing communities, and another, British Sign Language, has left its mark across the region. This paper provides an overview of sign language diversity in the Caribbean, discusses what these languages can teach us about questions of linguistic theory, and raises some ethical and methodological challenges for linguists interested in investigating them further.

Ben Braithwaite and Ian Dhanoolal

Linguistics, DMLL, FHE, UWI, St Augustine

Sign Languages in San Andrés and Old Providence

Signed languages are critical to the development of deaf children, and to the human rights of deaf citizens. The language situations of deaf people from the Caribbean have been largely ignored, with inevitably disastrous consequences for many individuals and communities. This paper contributes towards efforts to address this lacuna by describing the complex linguistic situations which exist among the deaf populations of the Archipelago of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina, Colombia. It provides the first new description of the signing community of Providence Island since Washabaugh and Woodward described a unique indigenous sign language in the 1970s and '80s, and the first ever description of the language situation among the deaf population of San Andrés.

Kathy-Ann Drayton
Linguistics, DMML, FHE, UWI, St Augustine

“Wagonists make the most noise”: Performing football fandom through language

Football fandom has traditionally been viewed as an expression of social identity, with the fans constructing and performing their sense of self and community (Goffman 1959; Butler 1999) in their relationship to the team and other supporters within their network. This performance involves what fans wear, what they sing and chant before, during and after games, as well as the various rituals that they perform to demonstrate their team allegiances. With greater access to internet and advances in social media, and the globalisation of team support, sports fandoms, like other types of mediated fandoms, have moved into virtual spaces as the primary setting for their performance of fandom (Kerr & Emery 2011). Fans may spend several hours a day on social media sites, discussing all aspects of the team, players, and matches, demonstrating their commitment and seeking to maintain their status as ‘real’ fans as opposed to the undesirable label of a casual or fake fan.

This study examines an online community of fans of an English Premier League Team, in a closed Facebook group of 700+ members from Trinidad & Tobago. These members negotiate two main identities: (i) as fans of an English Premier League team; and (ii) Trinbagonian football fans. Within the forum they perform these identities through language, using Trinidadian English (TrE) and Trinidadian English Creole (TrEC) in various communicative acts including in-group and out-group picong, during conflict, and for game commentary. At the same time, group members have also adopted certain language forms used by English fans of the team, such as the use of British style player nicknames, use of current British English (BrE) slang terms, and the widespread use of team chants. The Trinbagonian and British fan language blend into a fan performance that reflects their complex identity and asserts their status as ‘real’ fans.

Renée Figuera
Linguistics, DMML, FHE, UWI, St Augustine

Globalisation and Translocalisation: Evidence from Trinidadian Gangspeak

Studies on the language used among gang members and members of the underworld are usually glossaries from metropolitan locations, which do not include the language used by their Caribbean counterparts (See Knox, 1997; Green, 2011; Roman, 2014). In addition, glossaries or dictionaries from these non-Caribbean territories do not usually highlight cultural and linguistic resources from other international contexts, as influencing the language use of gang members in their own territories. This exploratory study examines the translocalisation of lexicon and discourse styles in gang-related communities of Trinidad, as evidence of “the transporting of signs or objects attached to one place into those other places, where they can be reinterpreted otherwise” (Pennycook, 79). As can be expected, the language in use in these gang communities, draws its sociocultural and sociolinguistic

characteristics from local and global contexts. The study uses a triangulated methodology based on snow-ball sampling. This includes initial elicitation from a cultural informant, archival data from movie scripts, verification in gang and correctional dictionaries and member checks among six informants from three districts in Trinidad. The results show a transidiomatic practice of creating a combined code of linguistic resources, from a range of communicative channels, both local and distant. The communities of practice surrounding gang operations and the global spread of hip-hop, rap and dancehall reveal translocalised and transidiomatic effects, from these sources among others, as present in the codes of more than one gang-community within Trinidad. Despite the phenomenon of borrowing, an opaque characteristic of local gang-speak may be attributed to polysemy, "talking in heights" and the complex morpho-semantic resources which make meaning equivalents unavailable in metropolitan dictionaries. This type of research is relevant to the fields of language contact in sociolinguistics, cultural criminology, and anthropology, as well as to a cross-section of stakeholders, who may find it useful to their understanding of gang culture. Among these interested parties are linguists, police officers, educators, social workers, criminologists and lawyers.

**Amina Ibrahim-Ali, Natalie Bhawanie, Janet Fullerton-Rawlins, Lazina Siew, Jamila Varacchia
CLL, FHE, UWI, St Augustine**

When the Adult Language Learner is not a Secondary School Graduate: Two Exceptional Cases at the EFL Unit at the Centre for Language Learning, UWI, St. Augustine

EFL at UWI caters primarily to English Language Learners (ELLs) from the Francophone and Hispanic Caribbean and South America and also to expatriate professionals and their families who temporarily reside in Trinidad & Tobago. The programme did not originally cater for beginners, but began making provision for lower levels in 2011 in response to a growing demand. EFL teachers have since employed suitable resources to satisfy the needs of learners who either match, or fall short of, the CEFR A1 level: learners who, by dint of their proficiency level, are called Basic Users of English but who, as secondary school or university graduates, are assumed to have a high literacy level in their own language. The present study focusses on the exceptional cases of two CEFR A1 English Language Learners (ELLs) enrolled in the EFL programme at UWI in 2014 and 2016 respectively, a retired Martiniquan and a resident Chinese, both without secondary school certification. A review of the registration process is, no doubt, imminent to flag cases where insufficient formal education may mean devising a more robust support system for lower level learners and tapping into another niche market and increasing EFL offerings.

Michèle M. Kennedy, Yewande Lewis-Fokum and Silvia Kouwenberg

Linguistics, DLLP, FHE, UWI, Mona, and SOE, UWI, Mona

Linguistics and Education Partnering in the Professional Development of Teachers in Jamaica

The paper outlines the philosophy behind the UWI-Ministry of Education Language Project for Primary School Teachers, and shows how educational strategies based on language awareness and linguistic insights can achieve greater success in the language and literacy classroom in Jamaica.

Lily Kwok

Linguistics, DMLL, FHE, UWI, St Augustine

Investigating Constituent Order in Trinidad and Tobago Sign Language (TTSL)

This study focuses on the syntax of Trinidad and Tobago Sign Language (TTSL), through an investigation of basic constituent order. A picture task, in the vein of Volterra et al (1984), was employed to elicit simple declarative sentences of two verb types: intransitive and transitive (reversible and non-reversible), and these were analysed for possible constituent order patterns. The sample consisted of 6 persons, 3 male and 3 female, within the 45-56 age group. The results suggested that TTSL does not have a fixed, basic constituent order, but shows a strong tendency towards SV(O) and SOV patterns, in accordance with the generalisations of Napoli and Sutton-Spence (2014). All other orders were unattested or rare. TTSL also exhibits pervasive use of constructed action, similar to findings by Engberg-Pedersen (2002). The data showed considerable inter- and intra-signer variation, and much of the data was not easily analysed using traditional grammatical categories.

Shaneise Pandohee

Linguistics, DMLL, FHE, UWI, St Augustine

Market Vendor Discourse in Trinidad

Market Vendor Discourse in Trinidad Abstract Discourse research has been conducted worldwide in formal business and radio contexts, but less so in market contexts regarding the interaction between market vendors and customers, and the influence on sales. However, linguists and anthropologists who have focussed on the language of the market context have concluded that vendors alter their speech based on their awareness of cultural and gender implications with the ultimate aim of achieving sales (Floyd, 1-11; Sherry Jr., 174-200). The main objectives of this study are to investigate, analyse and explain the variation in discourse structures (lexicon and codes) of two vendors in Trinidad, in association with three factors: (1) the customer's gender; (2) the customer's age; and (3) the volume of sales of the vendor.

The Norris Deonarine Northern Wholesale Market and the Tunapuna Market in north Trinidad provide focus sites for the study, by convenience sampling. Given the ethnic

and gender characteristics of these two markets in Trinidad as being demographically Indo-Trinidadian and male (as shown in the registers for the respective markets), two Indo-Trinidadian male vendors were selected as they represent the mass vendor population at each market. Based on a framework of communication-accommodation theory, the researcher's observations and the collection of audio and visual recordings of vendor-customer interactions in naturalistic market settings, the findings relate to the context of each vending site and to the three factors identified above. In all instances, the vendors exhibit structures indicative of convergence rather than divergence in solidarity with customers. Calls are tailored to suit the customers' gender and age, and are used to attract and persuade new customers into buying. Consequently, the use of calls is not dependent on the volume of sales. Conversely, the use of spiels varies considerably depending on factors of gender, age and volume of sales. The findings of this study fill a significant gap in linguistic research pertaining to vendor discourse in the market setting of the Caribbean, and in Trinidad, in particular. They identify specific linguistic structures and their functions used by market vendors in their interactions with consumers that are critical to sale volume per customer, and consequently, to the success of their businesses. There is a high social value attached to this knowledge about how one's speech can ultimately affect one's financial livelihood and formation of lasting vendor-customer relationships in the national market context.

Nicha Selvon-Ramkissoon and Nadita Maharaj

UTT

Teacher Education in Special Needs Education and Language Arts at
the University of Trinidad and Tobago

This paper is a synopsis of one that was presented at the ICTBS conference at Ryerson University, Toronto in July 2015, where we gave a critical analysis of teacher training in Language Arts and in Special Needs Education (SPED) at the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT). This analysis takes into account the transition of the education system as articulated by the National Task Force in Education policy document of 1993, to present day realisations of policy management. The University of Trinidad and Tobago, as the decade-old state university, designs programmes aligned to national development projects. The focus of this paper is twofold: on the one hand, it explores the execution of the SPED programme at the UTT as aligned with public national initiatives and, on the other, it examines the linguistic considerations that undergird teacher education in a Caribbean-Creole space.

Special Needs Education in Trinidad and Tobago has traditionally been a highly neglected area of study. In recognition of the need for formal training and professional development of special education teachers, the UTT stands as the forerunner in embracing inclusive education and as the sole tertiary level institution in Trinidad and Tobago that offers a Special Needs Specialisation programme. To this end, not only does it teach students about engaging with a special needs population in an inclusive environment that is

responsive to ever-changing local conditions that are indelibly triggered by international reform, but it also adopts the inclusive practices it proffers. Teacher education in Language Arts involves the enacting of language curricula documents premised on a progressive educational philosophy, juxtaposed against the sociohistorical events from which the formal education system and current language practices have evolved. The discursive practices within the Language and Literature specialisation at the UTT reveal a position of legitimizing public policy of inclusion, while at the same time interrogating the normalizing of limited dimensions of linguistic diversity in classroom practice. The challenges pre-service teachers face in negotiating language pedagogy theory and actual classroom practice; national education policy and culturally accepted norms; linguistic awareness and language attitudes are all considered in this paper.

In light of the presentation done at Ryerson, we will also share a pilot project which we began in September 2015 to promote inclusive education for the special needs community and English Creole-speaking students in Language Arts classrooms in Trinidad and Tobago.

Keywords: Teacher Training; University of Trinidad and Tobago; Language Arts; Special Needs Education; National Policy. Pilot Project.

Evening Session

Silvia Kouwenberg (UWI, Mona), Simon Mitchell (UWI, Mona) and John Victor Singler (NYU)

Linguistics, DLLP, FHE, UWI, Mona and NYU

The use of computational phylogenetic tools to estimate the typological relatedness of languages appears at first blush to be an exciting development in the debate on creole typology. However, the outcome of using these tools can only be as good as the data that are fed into them. We will demonstrate that the use of these tools by creolists (Bakker, Daval-Markussen, Parkvall & Plag 2011, and related works) fails to meet appropriate standards regarding the size and quality of the database. Whether the tools that Bakker *et al.* employ can be profitably used remains unresolved; the results that they present in 2011 are simply unreliable.

Bakker *et al.* employ computational tools for “large-scale empirical investigations of the status of creole languages as a typological class” (2011:5), claiming to demonstrate conclusively that creole languages pattern in ways that separate them from other languages. Hancock’s (1987) data for 33 English-lexifier creoles, Holm & Patrick’s (2007) *Comparative Creole Syntax* (CCS) and Parkvall’s (2008) WALS-based scores for creole and non-creole languages provide input. We argue that any methodological flaws in those databases are passed on to a computational procedure that uses them. We also show that Bakker *et al.*’s use of CCS suffers from critical weaknesses as a consequence of incorrect feature values, both for creoles and non-creoles, and from misunderstanding what results are possible with a multiple linear regression analysis.

Similar problems arise where phylogenetic tools are applied to the different data sets, yielding phylogenetic networks, including rooted networks, which are to demonstrate evolutionary distance from English (Hancock’s data), and separation from non-creoles (CCS, WALS-derived data). The outcome, which is that just four features set creole languages apart from all other languages, is interpreted by Bakker *et al.* as demonstrating creole clustering, when in fact it is a demonstration of bias (DeGraff, Bass, Berwick 2013) and shows a complete lack of robustness in the output. It means, as we will demonstrate, that removing or changing some of the features has an immediate effect on the output of the software – whereas the output of this type of computational model is considered robust precisely when removing or changing some of the features does not affect it. We conclude that the database is too small and the quality of the input too seriously flawed, yielding output which cannot be used as the basis for any conclusions about evolutionary distance or typological clustering of creole languages.

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