

# Pickney Tink Natin

## On Jamaican English

In this paper I will attempt to describe the development and distinctive features of Jamaican English as a variety of English. The development of such variety will be anchored in a historical stance enriched with sociolinguistic descriptions, while the features it possesses will be divided into phonological, grammatical, and lexical. To support this description, literary writings will be analysed to show language in socially situated use.

In the second part, I will discuss how knowledge of this variety should be built into the ELT context found in Argentinian educational system, particularly in the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) at secondary schools.

It is not an easy task to classify Jamaican English when its historicity shows elements of different languages such as English, African languages, Spanish and Portuguese. However, this variety as a whole has been recorded in the Dictionary of Jamaican English, English is the official language, and Jamaica, with a population of 2,804,332 (July 2008 est.)<sup>1</sup> is considered to be part of the inner circle following Kachru's classification (Melchers and Shaw, 2003; Jenkins, 2003: 16). In addition, Crystal (2003:63) lists Jamaica as a country where the variety of English spoken is a pidgin or creole, though he estimates in 2,600,000 the number of speakers of English as L1 and in 50,000 as L2. Another view is proposed by McArthur (1998, in Jenkins, 2003:19), who puts forward different standards of English among which we find Caribbean Standard English from which Jamaican National Language stems. Despite its complex matrix, some aspects have been agreed as regards its origin and linguistic evolution.

First, it is important to consider that such a linguistic development of English could be better understood if we take into account that, as Leith (1996, in Jenkins, 2003: 9) points out, the pre-colonial population of the islands was replaced by new labour from West Africa. This labour practice mixed the English spoken by traders and sailor with the African slaves brought to work in the sugar plantation on the island, a system started by the Spanish as early as 1517 (Crystal, 2005: 436). During the time of slave trade onto the island, a distinctive kind of speech emerged as the result of contact between slaves and traders. Traders' policy was to bring people from different linguistic

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jm.html>, last accessed 20 October 2008.

backgrounds so as to avoid possible plots against their masters. Such a measure not only split tribes but also languages which became into contact with English picked up from the sailors on the boats to the so called West Indies (Bragg, 2004: 268). This bond between slaves and traders gave rise to several pidgin forms of communication which continued once arrived in the Caribbean. This pidgin English, pidginisation in general in fact, could be defined as

the simplification processes which result from contacts between people who speak different languages. A *pidgin* is an auxiliary language which arises to fulfil certain limited communication needs among people who have no common language (O'Donnell and Todd, 1991: 42)

In Jamaica, pidgin was used among the black population themselves, since they had come from different parts of Africa, and between them and traders and landowners. According to Bragg (2004) this auxiliary language featured the following simplifications:

- Reduction in number of words
- Dropping inflections: two *knife*
- Accusative forms used as nominatives , for example, 'him' for 'he': *him* can read
- Plurals are formed from a singular noun and 'dem': *de dog dem*
- Passive form is avoided
- Adjectives used in place of adverbs: I do it *good*
- Omission of the auxiliary do in questions: Why you hit him?

Once these slaves settled down on the island and began to have children, a new picture emerged. Their children began to use pidgin as their mother tongue rather than the African languages spoken by their parents as they realised that by using pidgin as a means of communication they could interact with most of the population (Bragg, 2004: 264). This resulted into the first black creole in the region with local variations (Crystal, 2005: 437).

Creole could be defined as a pidgin which has become the mother tongue of a new speech community, that is, the sons and daughters of the slaves transported to Jamaica. This creole

has become capable of expressing the entire range of human experience. Its vocabulary is thus more comprehensive, and its syntactic system more flexible and precise than the majority of even expanded pidgins. (O'Donnell and Todd, 1991:43)

At this point, complications arise as we are in the presence of a coexistence of varieties of English, or even languages as such on their own right since we experience a language continuum (Melchers and Shaw, 2003: 123; Sand, 2004) which goes from pidgin to creole and Standard English or the English spoken by Americans and British on the island in the past. To expand the concept, such a continuum ranges from pidgin and Jamaican Creole as basilects, the variants furthest from the standard language or prestige variety, which, given the political influence Britain had in the region, is BrE/RP, that is, British English/Received Pronunciation (Melchers and Shaw, 2003, Crystal, 2003: 40) to acrolects, the variants closest to Standard English, like Jamaican National Language or Jamaican English. This process of speakers becoming closer to the acrolect is termed de-creolisation (Leith, 1996:211).

Moreover, this continuum is also seen from a sociolinguistic point of view. While the people who use Standard English represent the powerful and the most educated, the users of creoles, on the other hand represent the street, the local colour materialised in the spoken language, and in between we can find different sociolects which depend upon variables such as social level, occupation and education (Crystal, 2005:437). What is particularly relevant in this speech community is the fact that the mastery of both basilect and acrolect by speakers, a situation that could be interpreted as a case of diglossia, is regarded as an asset given the fact that this diglossic performance facilitates communication with almost any Jamaican. On the other hand, the monoglot speaker is viewed as socially inferior or pretentious (Irvine, 2008). Meade (2001, in Sand, 2004) adds that most Jamaicans acquire Jamaican Creole before Jamaican English.

As regards its features, the panorama remains complex since there is no clear cut distinction between Jamaican English and Jamaican Creole given the fact that most features described below can be found in both varieties along the continuum afore mentioned.

From a phonological point of view, Jamaican English presents distinctive characteristics which can be discovered in vowels, consonants and diphthongs. The following table (Table 1) shows vowels and diphthongs together with key words and their realisation in RP.

Jamaica	Trinidad	Bahamas	Key word	RP
ɪ	ɪ	ɪ	KIT	ɪ
ɛ	ɛ	ɛ	DRESS	ɛ
æ	æ	æ	TRAP	æ
æ x ɒ	ɒ	ɑ	LOT	ɒ
ʌ	ɒ x ʌ	ʌ	STRUT	ʌ
ʊ	ʊ	ʊ	FOOT	ʊ
æ:	æ x ɑ	ɑ:	BATH	ɑ
æ: x ɔ:	ɔ x ɒ	ɔ:	CLOTH	ɒ
ʌ x ʌ r x ɜ:	ɒ x ɜ	ɑ:	NURSE	ɜ:
i:	i	i:	FLEECE	i:
e: [ie x e:]	e	e:	FACE	e:
ɑ:	ʌ x ɑ	ɑ: ɑɪ	PALM	ɑ:
ɑ: x ɔ:	ɒ x ɔ	ɑ:	THOUGHT	ɔ:
ɑ: [uɔ x ɑ:]	ɑ	ɑ:	GOAT	ɑ
u:	u	u:	GOOSE	u:
aɪ	aɪ	ʌɪ	PRICE	aɪ
aɪ x ɔɪ	ɔɪ	əɪ	CHOICE	ɔɪ
ɑʊ	ɑʊ	ɑʊ	MOUTH	ɑʊ
e:r [ie:r eɪ]	eə	eə	NEAR	ɪə
e:r [ie:r eɪ]	eə	eə	SQUARE	eə
ɑ: (r)	æ x ɑ	ɑ:	START	ɑ:
ɑ: (r) x ɔ: (r)	ɒ x ɔ	ɑ:	NORTH	ɔ:
ɔ:r	ɒ x ɔ	ɑ:	FORCE	ɔ:
ɔ:r	ɒ x ɔ	ɑ:	CURE	ʊə

Table 1: Phonology. Caribbean lexical sets (Melchers and Shaw, 2003:124)

In addition to the features above, Jenkins (2003: 100) and Bragg (2004:271) list the following:

- Substitution of /ð/ and /θ/ with /t/ and /d/ producing 'dat' for 'that' or 'natin', or even 'nafin' for 'nothing', 'think' becomes 'tink'.
- Labilisation when the sound /b/ is followed by certain vowels e.g. 'boys' is pronounced 'bwoys'
- Dropping of word final consonants: 'pas' for 'past', 'tan' for 'stand'
- Lack of weak vowels especially schwa, so that 'rapper' is pronounced /rapa/.
- Dropping of /h/ so that 'hand' becomes 'and'.
- /w/ becomes /v/ so that 'what' is pronounced 'vat'

With reference to syntax, we find these aspects in the literature reviewed:

- A marker of completed action is *don* placed before or after the verb, and there is also a 'irrealiz' marker, *go*, indicating that the action of the following verb is not (yet) a part of reality (Melchers and Shaw, 2003:125).
- Plural forms of nouns are also indicated by particles placed before or after the noun, e.g. *di man dem* (Melchers and Shaw, 2003:125).
- Interchangeable use of pronouns: 'im' for 'he', 'mi' for 'I'.
- Use of present tense for both present and past. Also, the past tense may not be used when there is an adverbial which indicates a reference to past time (Thomas, 1996:232).
- Elimination of tense suffixes
- Negation with 'no' (Jenkins, 2003:100)

Jamaican English lexicon is composed mainly of words from English, that is, English is the 'lexifier' (Melchers and Shaw, 2003: 126). Only a small percentage of words or their formation comes from other languages such as African languages, Spanish and Portuguese (Table 2).

African languages (reduplication as word formation)	Spanish	Portuguese
Poto-poto = slimy	Parasol = umbrella	Sabi = to know
Batta-batta = to beat rapidly		Pickni/pickney = child
Big-big = huge		
Picky-picky = choosy		

Table 2: Lexicon (from Melchers and Shaw, 2003; Braggs, 2004; O'Donnell and Todd, 1991)

As stated above, Jamaican English covers a speech community who takes pride in being able to use the varieties their history has produced. This continuum exploitation is discovered, among other representations, in creative writing. The use of Jamaican

Creole, for instance, is not only used to achieve a comic effect but also to portray the most essential aspects of Jamaican past. In the excerpts below we discover Jamaican Creole used by Jamaican writer Olive Senior in her story 'Do Angels Wear Brassiers?' (1989, in Gerschel, 1996: 61):

'Is true. And you know I wouldn't mind if she did only get into mischief Miss Katie but what really hurt me is how the child know so much and show off. Little children have no right to have so many things in their brain. Guess what she ask me the other day nuh? – if me know how worms reproduce.'

'Say what, maam?'

'As Jesus is me judge. Me big woman she come and ask that. Reproduce I say. Yes Aunt Mary she say as if I stupid. When the man worm and the lady worm come together and they have baby. You know how it happen? – Is so she ask me.'

'What you saying maam? Jesus of Nazareth! '

'Yes, please. That is what the child ask me. Lightning come and strike me dead if is lie I lie. In my own house. My own sister pickney. So help me I was so frighten that pickney could so impertinent that right away a headache strike me like autoclaps. But before I go lie down you see Miss Katie, I give her some licks so hot there she forget bout worm and reproduction.'

'In Jesus name!'

In this passage we discover most of the features outlined above together with other characteristics:

- Absence of subject: *Is true*.
- Variable use of the verb copula: *as if I stupid, What you saying..., could so impertinent*.
- Interchangeable use of pronouns: *if me know how, me judge*.
- Elimination of tense suffixes (both present and past): *what really hurt me, the child know, she say, how it happen, she ask, lighting come and strike me, she forget*.
- Lack of weak vowel schwa in initial position: 'bout' for 'about'
- Lexicon: *pickney* (child)

In 'The Boy Who Loved Ice Cream,' Olive Senior (1989, in Greschel, 1996) departs from the acrolect and features aspects which are more connected with pidgin and creole as basilects. In the following extracts Senior's orthography tries to capture the phonology of the characters:

"Stan still yu jumbo head bwoy or a konk yu till yu fenny,"she hissed at him.  
(1996: 72)

In the line above we notice the reduction of consonant clusters,'stan,' the reduction of vocalic sounds,'yu,', the intrusion of /w/ and the use of creole vocabulary such as 'konk' (hit) and 'fenny' (cry).

In the following excerpts we find verb copula omission, use of past participles, and interchangeable use of pronouns. As for phonology, we have instances of dropping of final consonants, like in 'doan' and 'chile', Substitution of /ð/ and /θ/ with /t/ and /d/ producing 'de' and 'tank', and diphthong reduction in 'mek' for 'make'.

'Howdy Mister Seeter. Miss Mae. Children. Yu gone on early. '

'Ai. Yu coming? '

'No mus'. Jus a wait for lcy finish iron mi frock Mis Mac. A ketch [I'll catch] yu up soon. 'Awright Mis D. ' (1996: 76-77)

'How ever would he get any (ice-cream)? '

'Nuh mine, Benjy, 'Elsa consoled him. 'Papa wi gi wi [will give us] ice cream. When de time come. '(1996:80)

'Say tank yu chile. Yu doan have manners? ' his mother asked. (1996: 81)

'Now see here. A bawl yu wan` bawl? Doan mek a give yu something fe bawl [cry] bout, yu hear bwoy. '(1996: 81)

Together with Senior, Lorna Goodison, another Jamaican writer, uses varieties which are at the basilect end of the continuum in Jamaican English. Her orthography in the stories selected from Greschel (1996) attempt to materialise the realization of phonology in the speech communities associated with these varieties. In order to highlight more aspects of the dialect under study, I propose here a table (table 3) with the acrolect equivalent of the following excerpts.

Basilect features in Goodison (1989, in Greschel, 1996:88-96)	Acrolect: Standard Jamaican English
the devil telling me to done it	the devil telling me to do it
him look pon me and ask if [a baby]jis fi him?	he look(s/ed) upon me and ask(s/ed) if it is his.
when life look like it out fi tumble down pan her and mash her up	When life looks like tumbling down upon her and smashes her up.
Beyave! Gweyframme	Behave! (Go/Get) Away from me!

Table 3: Comparing ends of a continuum.

The description of Jamaican English presented above raises the topic of linguistic variation together with educational implications in the ELT field. It becomes necessary that teachers be aware of the sociolinguistic perspectives varieties of English impinge in the teaching of English as a foreign or second language. Consequently, learners need to be exposed to the real heterogeneity of English as an international language rather than being presented with a homogenous picture represented by BrE/RP or any other variety standing alone. This does not mean that teachers are expected to introduce their learners to all the possible varieties which can be encountered in any given setting. Görlach (1999:18-20) suggests that learners' receptive competence, i.e. reading and listening, should be confronted with texts from the periphery, that is, from inner circle varieties other than AmE or BrE, and the outer circle as well. He also views this situation as an opportunity to reflect upon prescriptive and descriptive stances together with the advantages of having one form of Standard English.

In the case of Argentina, where English is taught as a foreign language, both AmE and BrE/RP hold the position of mainstream varieties in teacher training colleges and educational institutions. In my experience, I was only exposed to BrE/RP in my university education and though some attention was given to other varieties or dialects, little was put into practice as it only remained in a theoretical plane. This situation is a widespread practice in Argentina, thus, teachers themselves are not exposed, trained or given the opportunity to discuss these issues, especially in a context where international relations are mainly carried out in English as an International Language.

Despite such a current scenario, I believe varieties of English should be introduced in the curriculum from secondary school to university education. Since this paper offers a panorama of a particular variety, Jamaican English, I will base my proposal on this dialect so as to suggest how knowledge of it should be built into the Argentinian ELT context.

It goes without saying that teachers as well as trainees should be the first recipients of a project which aims at introducing varieties of English. It would be highly beneficial to design an in-service training workshop so as to familiarise educators with EIL and its close links to Sociolinguistics. Such initiatives should contain both theoretical as well as practical aspects of the issue under consideration since more often than not teachers lack the possibility and willingness to be in contact with the so called World Englishes. It follows that teachers should focus on the description of a particular variety and then share their findings with others so as to discuss how they should be introduced in secondary education.

As regards learners, teenagers in particular, Jamaican English may be attractive to them since they generally associate it with reggae, tropical settings, Rastafarian culture and Bob Marley as an icon in this schema. Knowledge of this variety could be introduced through the use of songs with lyrics within the learners' linguistic competence or rather near the acrolect end of the continuum (see Appendix for examples). Together with music, literature should be introduced not for literary studies but as a picture which shows the features shared by some members of the Jamaican English speech communities. Poems as well as short stories, even extracts from longer pieces, could be used to introduce grammatical, phonological and lexical features of Jamaican National Language. Needless to say, learners are not expected to incorporate such variety in their productive skills, but it is a way of raising awareness about the heterogeneity in languages since, in fact, there are as many variations in the English language as users (idiolects) of it.

In conclusion, we are now in a position to assert that Jamaican English does belong to the English Language together with other more dominant varieties such as AmE and BrE, having the same linguistic status. This knowledge should encourage language educators to see the present situation as regards English as an International Language in order to introduce a world of varieties in the classroom. This does not mean that a whole academic year will be devoted to the study of dialects; such idea might be considered extremely ambitious as well as impossible to produce any effect on the learners. What is proposed, instead, is an invitation to discover that there are no pure dialects or linguistic deformations adopted by speech communities. We should create

the possibility to discover the linguistic environment we are all part of and how distinctive each of us can become in the global community by simply uttering a couple words. Our dialect will reveal who we are.

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## Appendix: Songs by Bob Marley

'Redemption Song' (retrieved from <http://www.elyrics.net/read/b/bob-marley-lyrics/redemption-song-lyrics.html>)

Old pirates, yes, they rob I;  
Sold I to the merchant ships,  
Minutes after they took I  
From the bottomless pit.  
But my hand was made strong  
By the 'and of the Almighty.  
We forward in this generation  
Triumphantly.  
Won't you help to sing  
These songs of freedom? -  
'Cause all I ever have:  
Redemption songs;  
Redemption songs.

Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery;  
None but ourselves can free our minds.  
Have no fear for atomic energy,  
'Cause none of them can stop the time.  
How long shall they kill our prophets,  
While we stand aside and look? Ooh!  
Some say it's just a part of it:  
We've got to fulfil de book.

Won't you help to sing  
These songs of freedom? -  
'Cause all I ever have:  
Redemption songs;  
Redemption songs;  
Redemption songs.

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*[Guitar break]*

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Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery;  
None but ourselves can free our mind.  
Wo! Have no fear for atomic energy,  
'Cause none of them-a can-a stop-a the time.  
How long shall they kill our prophets,  
While we stand aside and look?  
Yes, some say it's just a part of it:  
We've got to fulfil de book.  
Won't you help to sing  
Dese songs of freedom? -  
'Cause all I ever had:  
Redemption songs -  
All I ever had:  
Redemption songs:  
These songs of freedom,  
Songs of freedom.

'No Woman No Cry' (retrieved from <http://www.elyrics.net/read/b/bob-marley-lyrics/no-woman-no-cry-lyrics.html>)

No, woman, no cry;  
No, woman, no cry;  
No, woman, no cry;  
No, woman, no cry.

Said - said - said: I remember when we used to sit  
In the government yard in Trenchtown,  
Oba - obaserving the 'ypocrites  
As they would mingle with the good people we meet.  
Good friends we have, oh, good friends we've lost  
Along the way.  
In this great future, you can't forget your past;  
So dry your tears, I seh.

No, woman, no cry;  
No, woman, no cry.  
'Ere, little darlin', don't shed no tears:  
No, woman, no cry.

Said - said - said: I remember when-a we used to sit  
In the government yard in Trenchtown.  
And then Georgie would make the fire lights,  
As it was logwood burnin' through the nights.  
Then we would cook cornmeal porridge,  
Of which I'll share with you;  
My feet is my only carriage,  
So I've got to push on through.  
But while I'm gone, I mean:  
Everything's gonna be all right!  
I said, everything's gonna be all right-a!  
Everything's gonna be all right!  
Everything's gonna be all right, now!  
Everything's gonna be all right!

So, woman, no cry;  
No - no, woman - woman, no cry.  
Woman, little sister, don't shed no tears;  
No, woman, no cry.

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*[Guitar solo]*

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I remember when we used to sit  
In the government yard in Trenchtown.  
And then Georgie would make the fire lights,  
As it was logwood burnin' through the nights.  
Then we would cook cornmeal porridge,  
Of which I'll share with you;  
My feet is my only carriage,  
So I've got to push on through.  
But while I'm gone:

No, woman, no cry;  
No, woman, no cry.  
Woman, little darlin', say don't shed no tears;

No, woman, no cry.

Eh! (Little darlin', don't shed no tears!  
No, woman, no cry.  
Little sister, don't shed no tears!  
No, woman, no cry.)

'Them Belly Full (But We Hungry)' (retrieved from [http://www.elyrics.net/read/b/bob-marley-lyrics/them-belly-full-\(But-we-hungry\)-lyrics.html](http://www.elyrics.net/read/b/bob-marley-lyrics/them-belly-full-(But-we-hungry)-lyrics.html))

Them belly full but we hungry  
A hungry mob is an angry mob  
A rain a fall but the dirt it tough  
A pot a cook but the food no 'nough

You're gonna dance to jah music, dance,  
We're gonna dance to jah music, dance,

Forget your troubles and dance,  
Forget your sorrows and dance,  
Forget your sickness and dance,  
Forget your weakness and dance

Cost of livin' gets so high  
Rich and poor they start to cry  
Now the weak must get strong  
They say oh, what a tribulation  
Them belly full but we hungry  
A hungry mob is an angry mob  
A rain a fall but the dirt it tough  
A pot a cook but you no 'nough

We're gonna chuck to jah music chuckin'  
We're chuckin' to jah music, we're chuckin'

Belly full but them hungry.  
A hungry mob is an angry mob  
A rain a fall but the dirt it tough  
A pot a cook but the food no 'nough  
A hungry mob is an angry mob

Pickney tink natin: On Jamaican English. Save to Library. Download. o Substitution of /A°/ and /Ī./ with /t/ and /d/ producing â€˜datâ€™ for â€˜thatâ€™ or â€˜natinâ€™, or even â€˜nafinâ€™ for â€˜nothingâ€™, â€˜thinkâ€™ becomes â€˜tinkâ€™. o Labilisation when the sound /b/ is followed by certain vowels e.g. â€˜boysâ€™ is pronounced â€˜bwoysâ€™ o Dropping of word final consonants: â€˜pasâ€™ for â€˜pastâ€™, â€˜tanâ€™ for â€˜standâ€™ o Lack of weak vowels especially schwa, so that â€˜rapperâ€™.Â My own sister pickney. So help me I was so frighten that pickney could so impertinent that right away a headache strike me like autoclamps. Pickney Lyrics: (Wheezy outta here) / Levitatin' off the pills, I'm defyin' physics / Paranoid, somebody knockin' at the door, who is it? (Woo, oh) / I'm from Rexdale, the Southside, I represent.Â Pickney is a braggadocious song in which NAV boasts about his copious and hedonistic lifestyle over a Wheezy-produced instrumental. He raps about his cars, money, and women. Read More. Nathan Pickney Facebook'ta. Nathan Pickney ve di Y'er tan d'klar nla iletim kurmak iÅsin Facebook'a katI. Facebook insanlara paylaÅma g¼c¼ vererek... In certain dialects of Caribbean English, the words pickney and pickney-negger are used to refer to children. Also, in Nigerian as well as Cameroonian Pidgin English, the word pikin is used to mean a child.[26] And in Sierra Leone Krio[27] the term pikin refers to 'child' or 'children', while in Liberian English the term pekin does likewise.