

Creole in the Caribbean: How Oral Discourse creates Cultural Identities

Le créole des Caraïbes : comment le discours oral crée des identités culturelles

Maria Grazia Sindoni



Electronic version

URL: <http://africanistes.revues.org/2563>
ISSN: 1957-7850

Publisher

Société des africanistes

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 juin 2010
Number of pages: 217-236
ISBN: 978-2-908948-35-6
ISSN: 0399-0346

Electronic reference

Maria Grazia Sindoni, « Creole in the Caribbean: How Oral Discourse creates Cultural Identities », *Journal des africanistes* [Online], 80-1/2 | 2010, Online since 01 June 2013, connection on 30 September 2016. URL : <http://africanistes.revues.org/2563>

The text is a facsimile of the print edition.

Société des africanistes

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Abstract

The fictional recreation of Creole in Caribbean English literature has been traditionally studied using Eurocentric criteria. When compared to British English, Creole was considered a debased deviation (DeCamp, 1971; Hall, 1966). Creole is associated with oral discourse, one reason for its growing use in literature. Caribbean writers have represented the Caribbean experience through the use of fictional Creole. The contemporary novel has thus been transformed by African-derived modes of narration which highlight the performative role of communicative interaction. With its attempt to reconstruct the processes involved in this transformation, this paper addresses issues relating to oral and written literary traditions that shed light on the linguistic forms of Creole as used in postcolonial Caribbean English literature. These forms may be seen as cultural determiners of Creole identity.

Keywords : creole, caribbean english literature, oral discourse, cultural identity

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Résumé

La récréation fictionnelle du créole dans la littérature caribéenne de langue anglaise a été traditionnellement étudiée selon des critères eurocentriques. Le créole était considéré comme une déviation de l'anglais britannique (De Camp, 1971; Hall, 1966). Le créole est associé à des formes de communication typiquement orales, l'une des raisons de son utilisation accrue en littérature. Certains auteurs ont représenté l'expérience caribéenne en utilisant un créole fictionnel littéraire. Le roman contemporain a donc été transformé par des modes de narration d'origine africaine, qui soulignent ce qui peut être défini comme fonction performative de l'interaction communicative. Ayant pour ambition de reconstruire des processus impliqués dans cette transformation, cet article se penche sur les thèmes liés aux traditions écrite et orale, pour illustrer comment des formes linguistiques du créole sont employées de manière créative et deviennent des facteurs culturels déterminants de l'identité créole.

Mots-clefs : créole, littérature caribéenne de langue anglaise, oralité, identité culturelle

* Professeur associé en linguistique et théorie de la traduction, Università degli Studi di Messina, Italia. E-mail : mgsindoni@unime.it

ORAL TRADITIONS AND LITERATURE

Definitions of literature and oral traditions and assessments of their mutual influence have led to a constant flow of studies and publications in many disciplines. Linguistics, cultural studies, history and literary theory are just some of those disciplines that delve into the rich cultural arena where oral and written modes collide, merge, overlap and, at the same time, exhibit a set of traits specific to each of them (Halliday, 1989; Hymes, 1974).



Different ages, cultures and places present new and unpredictable combinations of oral and written modes in different texts, so that theoretical models require constant adjustment (Tannen, 1982). Until quite recently, oral literatures suffered from academic prejudices for a number of reasons: first of all, so-called “Third-World” cultures were studied using Eurocentred literary paradigms based on writing that marginalised genres belonging to oral-based cultures. Despite the fact that just like written genres, oral genres display complex aesthetics, they were read and evaluated as the product of “inferior societies”, as objects of interest for the ethnologist or folklorist, as reified representations of whole populations rather than examples of individual works of art or expressions of genius (R. Finnegan, 1992). Finnegan argues that, along with nationalist movements, Romanticism placed: “emphasis on local origins and languages, accompanied by an enthusiasm for the collection of ‘folklore’ in various senses – what now would be called ‘oral literature’ (ballads, folk songs,

stories) as well as ‘traditional’ dances and vernacular languages and ‘customs’” (34). Discussing a cline whose poles are the value of collective art and the genius of the poet, she explains that the latter was assumed to be a *writer* (34-5). From the Romantic age on, two separate paradigms were established as regards orality and literature, paving the way for long-lasting epistemological theories, which influenced interpretations of texts, languages and whole cultures until the second half of the 20th century.

Parry and Lord (1954) gave a new impulse to the question, discovering that such cornerstones of European literacy as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were not the upshot of a single mind, but a powerful accumulation of multiple authors’ oral performances across time. The idea of an original written text was brushed aside and replaced by an innovative view, which also superseded outdated literary theories and linguistic analyses. These works of art were now considered to be the product of complementary features: popular culture, ancient myths, traditions and the creativity of the epic storyteller, whose craft was revealed via his/her performance. Each time a performance took place, a new version of the story was made available (Minchin, 2001; Okereke, 1998).

Such studies pioneered the development of new hermeneutical tools when interpreting oral texts, which are of special relevance in any society, be it pre-literate or highly developed (Zumthor, 1990 [1983]). Oral texts were no longer considered inferior and other studies were seminal in establishing relationships between power and communication (Todorov, 1982), communication and technology (MacLuhan, 1962), orality and its development into literary genres (Havelock, 1982, 1986), writing and orality as two overlapping categories (Halliday, 1989; Ong, 1977, 1982), historical methodology (Vansina, 1973) and many others. Discussing oral and written literatures, Okpewho underlines that “there are certain techniques which may be used to good effect in oral literature; on the other hand, there are certain techniques and elements in written literature which may be seen as borrowings or survivals from oral literature.” (1992: 5).

Like Okpewho’s (1979, 1992), other studies are oriented towards the exploration of particular cultures, such as colonial or postcolonial contexts and related oral texts, with reference to their impact and influence on national culture, transnational or neo-colonial affiliations and their relationships, if any, with written texts. Postcolonial areas were, in fact, faced with several issues under the pressure of diverging forces: questions of cultural identity formation, controversial cultural affiliations with the mother country, resistance against cultural hegemony and positioning at the margins of the former Empire. Language was recognized by a number of intellectuals across the postcolonial world as the arena where conflicting

cultural influences were brought to the fore and where indigenous forms of resistance could be articulated (Skinner, 1998).

In the Creole-speaking Caribbean islands, both oral and written texts came to represent forms of resistance to colonial cultural dependence in the crucial years of transition from British imperialism to the postcolonial age. In Brathwaite's essays (Brathwaite, 1967), critical theory merged with indigenous cultural practices. Music, in particular, was considered as one of the most distinguishing traits of "Negro" and Caribbean tradition. His essays were groundbreaking in that he refused to comply with conventional, Euro-centred and canonical cultural domains, establishing a connection between literature, calypso, jazz and African-derived modes of communication:

It is here, in the new element of calypso and ska, and of course in the more elaborate structures of West Indian poetry and novels, that we can find a connection (or rather a correspondence), between jazz (the American Negro expression based on Africa), and a West Indian Negro expression based on Africa. (Brathwaite, 1967: 278).

He then goes on to explore:

Some modes of New World Negro cultural expression, based on an African inheritance (...) but also (...) built on a superstructure of Euro-American language, attitude and techniques (Brathwaite, 1967: 278).

The "folk" tradition in the United States and in the Caribbean is envisaged as an alternative to the English Victorian tradition as epitomized by the typical European literary genre, the novel. The bourgeois novel (Watt, 1963 [1957]) was in fact a typical example of the Western literary tradition and a number of postcolonial writers – such as Sam Selvon from Trinidad, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o from Kenya, Mudrooroo from Australia, J. M. Coetzee from South Africa to name but a few – were at pains to come to terms with European genres and languages in their attempts at articulating expressions of cultural autonomy.

However, it would be misleading to consider the novel as a unique example of cross-fertilization between orality and literature, of European genres and Caribbean culture. Other African influences are found in other oral genres. Dathorne (1981: 33) lists a series of Caribbean oral genres, whose origins can be traced back to African cultures: "if one examined the spoken ritual of *santería*, *brujería*, voodoo, the *queh-queh* (or wedding songs from Guyana), the Shango shouts in Trinidad, and the songs of Pocomania and Myal in Jamaica, he would readily observe that these constitute an important body of African oral literature, especially as it extends itself into the New World".

A hotchpotch of different textual oral and written genres may be considered as a representation of Caribbean culture *tout court*, as they represent its many and inextricable cultural strands. An example of the cultural hybridism discussed by Bhabha (1990) may be found in some Caribbean written literature, where traces of orality and the presence of Creole language and culture “contaminate” the canonical Western genre, the novel. Okonkwo (1999: 37) points out that :

A novel conceived in the tradition of the oral performance of a primary oral culture must necessarily differ in terms of plot structure, language and methods of character delineation from a novel conceived within the chirographic tradition.

How all these elements are arranged in postcolonial Caribbean fiction will be discussed below. However, the use of a typical Western genre is a revolutionary act, whose radical force lies in the combination of two features: narration inspired by oral traditions and the use of the only possible national language, Creole.

PIDGIN AND CREOLE AS CONTACT LANGUAGES

Before looking at the use of Creole as a narrative tool, its origins and features may be briefly characterised. In the Caribbean multilingual area, the rapid development of a *lingua franca* was needed to make communication possible among slaves, who were separated on their arrival in the New World from their language groups by their white masters in order to reduce collusion and possible revolts. The faster the acquisition of a new interlanguage was, the greater were their chances of survival (La Page, 1985). In this context the pressure to acquire a second language was high. Linguistically speaking, this stage is referred to as a “period of nativization” (Romaine, 1988). Creolization is the evolution of Pidgin towards more codified forms, developing when a second generation of speakers acquire it as their mother tongue.

However, as mentioned above, European prejudice to “oral” languages and oral literacy was strong until recent years (Ong, 1982). Thus, Creole was stigmatised as a deviation from a European language, a failed attempt on the part of the colonized to acquire their masters’ languages. Lexical similarities and morphosyntactic patterns exhibited relationships with European languages, while African linguistic influences were, significantly, not recognized until recent times. In 1971, David DeCamp, writing about Jamaican Creole, claimed that :

Each pidgin or creole has been traditionally classed as a deviant dialect of a standard language, usually European. (...) These are genuine languages in their own right, not just macaronic blends or interlingual corruptions of standard languages. (1971: 15).

Todd (1974) adopts a similar position when he claims that Pidgins and Creoles are not dialects of a language and that languages that come into contact are reciprocally influenced. Part of the problem derives, in Romaine's words, from "the lack of descriptive models for dealing with highly variable and rapidly changing systems" (Romaine, 1988: 7). The influence of conservative philological approaches – which based their descriptive models on the study of written documents of dead languages – biased the study of "oral" languages, which evolve very rapidly by definition and defy codification.

Pidgin and Creole languages were at a disadvantage because of their oral nature and their poorly documented written tradition made scholarly investigation difficult. Early evidence of these languages in the New World was provided by Europeans and Americans in the 18th and 19th centuries, who reported in their diaries anecdotal and unsystematic examples of the slaves' speech. They were heavily influenced by the colonial sense of cultural superiority and their reports were animated, at best, by a condescending desire to educate or eradicate bad linguistic habits. Moreover, the Creole speakers themselves were not willing to admit that their mother tongue was Creole, in particular in the ex-colonies, given its low prestige status and painful associations with cultural repression, feelings of self-loathing, self-contempt and failed social achievements (Morgan, 1994).

To summarize, the conservative view that a Pidgin or Creole grammar is a simplified version of the English language is today untenable. However, long-lasting prejudices and associations with orality, considered as inferior to written tradition, add to its community of speakers' mixed feelings and conflicts of loyalties. However, valorisation of Caribbean speech encourages the formation and development of cultural identities, construed as a necessary step towards autonomy in the ex-colonies. Creole represents the core of cultural rebirth as it is the national language in the Caribbean area, incorporating at the same time painful memories of the colonial past and the resilience of survivors. It is this status-switch whereby, through literature, the language of the underdog is transformed into a weapon of cultural superiority, with its concomitant expression of the empowerment of a community that requires careful investigation.

Caribbean English Creole

What are the main features of Caribbean English Creole? A series of studies have shed light on what Caribbean Creole languages have in common with African, Indian, Eastern languages, i.e. non-European cultures. Cultural retrieval was intended to counter imperialist attempts to

erase the past, present and future of colonized communities. Dalphinis (1985), for example, claims that Caribbean Creoles arose as a result of the contact between West African, Bantu grammar and European vocabulary. Whereas Caribbean and European lexicons display similarities, Caribbean Creoles are closer to African languages in their syntactic structure. He lists thirteen common features, such as the similar use of adjectival verbs, preference for aspect-based pre-verbal markers (rather than time-based tense markers of European languages), use of stabilizers, predicative adjectives, emphatic elongation of vowels, emphatic repetition, grammatical *say/for*, plural affixes, front focalisation, topicalisation, catenation, suffixation of the definite article and pronouns, non-differentiation of the third person singular (Dalphinis, 1985: 2-10). As Todd puts it, “when English-based pidgin and creole are compared with English, it becomes clear that there has been a reduction in the number of grammatical devices employed” , (1974: 15). He points out that Creole has no synthetic plurals (plural can be signalled by inserting *dem* or *them* after the noun), no gender distinction, no agreement between subject and verb (both are invariable, the verb is unmarked), a reduction of the English set of pronouns, and, finally, a considerable variability in pronunciation and, to a lesser extent, in intonational patterns. However, a fixed word order and greater syntactic regularity, counter, in Todd’s view, phonetic instability (1974: 16-9). Furthermore, Creoles employ other iterative devices to clarify or reinforce the speaker’s perlocutionary communicative acts, such as those found in Austin Clarke’s short story, “I Hanging on, Praise God!”: “And listen good good good.”, (in Markham, 1996: 195); “All these years, people people people, more people.”, (in Markham, 1996: 196); “A shame, a shame!”, (in Markham, 1996: 197).

The “period of nativization” requires the adoption of a series of linguistic strategies, such as direct translations from the speakers’ own language, use of reduplicated forms, of *calques* (loan translations) and word compounding. Romaine (1988) argues that both expansion and restructuring can take place in both Pidgin and Creole *continua*. However, these changes tend towards progressive normalization and stability, whose general final outcome is “decreolization” (Bickerton, 1981). The latter, in the case of Caribbean Creoles, is a movement towards the higher prestige language. i.e. English. In other words, when Creole is in direct contact with, and above all in competition with, its superstrate language, decreolization occurs. Roberts discusses a paradoxical situation as regards West Indian Creole:

On the one hand, as a result of the constant presence of English accompanied by more social intercourse, economic betterment and greater educational opportunities for many, the linguistic spectrum seems to be losing its extreme Creole varieties;

on the other hand these same factors are creating less insecure and more nationalistic peoples who believe that the extreme Creole varieties preserve their historical and cultural experience and allow for more genuine expression of things West Indian. (Roberts, 1988: 13-14).

The diglossic Caribbean context is portrayed in a number of writers, such as Selvon, Lamming, Harris, Naipaul, Clarke, Lovelace, whose “linguistic indecision” refers to the etymological origin of the term, that is “being torn between two languages” (Hall, 1966: 131). Another connection between Creole and orality thus becomes clear. The high prestige language (i.e. British English) in a diglossic context is the language used in official contexts, such as writing, education, administration, while the low prestige language (i.e. Creole) is mainly spoken by people in private life, solidarity social relationships and popular culture. In the West Indies, oral culture was mainly expressed in Creole, creating a separation between “high” culture (as expressed by the English language and literature) and “low” culture (as conveyed by Creole and a varied range of multicultural oral genres). Labels such as “high” and “low” are self-evident and clearly represent attitudes on the part of both colonizers and colonized. From this perspective, Lawson (1993) argues that language is not “a formalized system of fixed rules within a homogenous social whole (langue), but instead the *loci* of power and of inequalities, a dynamic flux in which different forms, groups and varieties tussle for dominance within a linguistic arena of conflict which mirrors conflict on socio-economic and political level.” (Lawson, 1993: 272-3).

After World War II, in the age of transition from colonialism to postcolonialism, Caribbean writers were torn between these two languages in a complex political and linguistic arena. Many opted for a linguistic compromise, using Standard English for the voice of the narrator and Creole for the dialogues. Orality was significantly expressed via Creole, while narrative and descriptive passages were written in English. Moreover, Caribbean writers had been educated in English, studied English literature, so they found it difficult to articulate their voices in a language other than the Queen’s English. However, orality came back with a vengeance via Creole (Sindoni, 2006).

CREOLE AND ORALITY IN CARIBBEAN ENGLISH FICTION

Typical Creole features in Caribbean English novels are thus mainly to be found in dialogues. However, some pioneering works extend their use of Creole to the voice of the narrator. A differentiation in strategic use of Creole is interesting, because when a character was given the opportunity to speak for himself/herself, the use of Creole was considered legitimate in

that it realistically represented how people spoke in the Caribbean. Narrative, lyrical and descriptive passages were written in British English, as indicators in the colonial or early postcolonial period of the author's ability to write in fluent British English. In his collection of essays, *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960), George Lamming, a writer from Barbados, makes ample reference to Caribbean writers' passion for showing their skills in refined literary British English, while Sam Selvon from Trinidad shows that their imagination had been colonized as well. As he puts it: "In the hot tropical atmosphere I dreamed of green fields and rolling downs, of purling streams and daffodils and tulips, thatched cottages and quiet pubs nestling in the valleys" (Selvon, 1987: 35). Literary, linguistic and cultural affiliations with Britain were strong and difficult to disentangle, especially in the years immediately following the separation from the British Empire. Most Caribbean writers were thus psychologically willing to let their characters speak in Creole but whereas dialogues made specific references to oral traditions, the narrative voice was identified with the author's proficiency in a "high" language.

A selection of Creole features will be provided below, with related examples from a number of Caribbean writers. A system of phonetic imitation of Creole is used by authors who tried to reproduce Creole speech as closely as possible:

- 1) "Play that theah 'Baby Blues'," she said. "Them good spenders ovah theah done buys you this drink and ask foh it." (Claude McKay, "Mattie and Her Sweetman", in Markham, 1996: 64); [= *Play that there (i.e. the) 'Baby Blues',*," she said "*Those good customers (over there) have bought you this drink; it's their way of asking for it (i.e. some music)*"]
- 2) "Yo' mek me sick," she said. "Go call he yo'self, yo' ole hag." (Eric Walrond, "The Wharf Rats", in Markham, 1996: 102); [= "*You're making me angry,*" she said. "*Why don't you call her yourself, you old hag.*"]
- 3) Gwan, you ol red nayga yu. (Olive Senior, "You think I Mad, Miss?", in Markham, 1996: 269); [= *Be off with you, you old drunken nigger.*]

Creole thus shows many of the features that typically characterize oral discourse, in particular when pressures to conform to a written standard are missing and when new linguistic communities are formed, classically as a result of colonization. These processes are well documented (Dalphinis, 1985) and have characterized many forms of language evolution, for example, the development of the Romance Languages from Latin and, of course, the formation of English itself. They include erosion of the morphosyntactic structure of the colonizing language so that, for example, the subject-verb system (i.e. in Hallidayan terms the participant-process structure cf. Halliday, 2004 [1985]) is remodelled, as is the demonstrative and possessive adjective system. Similarly, new ways of expressing

negatives are also pressed into service. All of these specific phenomena are typically characterized by an underlying process of reduction in the paradigmatic inventory (e.g. inflections, endings) and a corresponding increase in the syntagmatic inventory through reinforcement or replacement of, for example, “weak” forms by “stronger” forms as happens in Example 1 in terms of the demonstrative system. In this example, “the” is replaced by “that theah” while “Them ... ovah theath” suggests the possible emergence of a three-term demonstrative system, typical of many spoken traditions (e.g. Southern Italian dialects *Kistu/kissu/killu*, cfr. Maiden, Parry, 1997) which often give way in many standard languages to a basic two-term system (e.g. Modern French *Celui-ci, Celui-la*) or, alternatively, a borderline three-term system such as Italian (*questo/codesto/quello*) and English (*this/that/yonder*).

In many ways, it needs to be recalled that, while Caribbean English is unquestionably highly distinctive, many of the structural processes, morphosyntactic processes in particular, are typical of oral traditions associated with many languages, including the “substandard” varieties of English that thrive in major cities in the English-speaking worlds. Distinctions between oral and written modes of discourse may thus be discussed in terms of the recurrent structural features of oral English, which are manifested with different “surface” realizations in different varieties. These recurrent features include heavy simplification of morphosyntactic devices. Creole English, for example, uses the following basic structure: *verb particle/auxiliary + unchanging form of the verb*. More often than not, the verb particle is reduced to zero. Thanks to this relative flexibility, speakers can employ a range of choices that make their meanings more or less specific and/or accurate.

4) “I just going down the road to carry this *cuatro* for Felix.” (Earl Lovelace, “A Brief Conversation”, in Markham, 1996: 211). [=I’m just going down the road to carry this *cuatro* (four-ring guitar) for Felix]

5) “We getting off at the next stop.” (Austin Clarke, “I Hanging on, Praise God!”, in Markham, 1996: 192). [=We’re getting off at the next stop.]

The literary texts analysed here seem to be suggesting that when Creole speakers want to form a question, as opposed to a statement, they rely heavily on intonation as opposed to syntactic devices such as different word order and/or modal support that are used (though by no means exclusively) in written and spoken forms of discourse in many English-speaking communities. However, caution needs to be exercised about overstating the structural differences involved. While Examples 7), 8) and 9) show systematic elimination of the distinctive modal support found in many “standard” varieties of English, nevertheless, as Example 7)

illustrates, other syntactic devices are pressed into use, such as the use of a final tag “eh”, to reinforce the international interrogative pattern. This structural device is akin in its interpersonal force (as its use in the context of the novel demonstrates) to the reassurance-seeking functions of the elaborate tag systems that exist in many varieties of “standard” English as exemplified by *We sure frightened them, didn't we?*

Tag systems, however primitive as compared with the complex and possibly unique tag system of standard varieties of English, *do* exist in other communities including both standard Italian *vero?*, found in questions in clause-final position, and the striking bound morpheme tag *ne?* found in the same environment in some communities in Northern Italy.

6) “We frighten them, eh?” (V. S. Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, 180). [= “We sure frightened them, didn't we?”].

7) “He fall down?” (George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*, 43). [= “Has he fallen down?”].

8) “You here?” she cried. “How long you been listening?” (Wilson Harris, *The Palace of the Peacock*, 74). [= “What are you doing here?” she cried. “How long have you been listening/eavesdropping?”].

In this paper, a very small part of the transitivity system (Halliday, 2004 [1985]), namely the participant-process relationship and participant involvement in particular, will be investigated. In this respect, verbal processes and the effects that the loss of tense distinction has in Creole novels should be noted. In English it is generally accepted that there is an opposition between present and past: “**tense** is a grammatical category that is realized by verb inflection. Since English has no future inflected form of the verb, the threefold semantic opposition is reduced to two tenses: the **present tense** and the **past tense**, which typically refer to present and past time respectively.” (Greenbaum and Quirk, 1990: 47-8).

As mentioned above, in Creole, tense is usually zero marked, so that Creole would appear to rely on other features, including context, for the interpretation of time:

9) “A man in Swampland *offer* me a whole pile of cedar for seven dollars.” (V.S. Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, 260, emphasis mine). [= “*A man in Swampland offered me a whole pile of cedar for seven dollars*”]

10) “They *give* me a cow and this old mud hut in Barataria, and they *give* me you.” (Sam Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, 141, emphasis mine). [= “*They gave me a cow and this old mud hut in Barataria, and they also gave me you*”]

11) “What a nice watch you have, dear,” said one of the ladies. “Mih Uncle Herman *buy* it for mih.” (Merle Hodge, *Crick Crack Monkey*, 41, emphasis mine). [= “*My uncle Herman bought it for me*”]

How does the loss of tense distinction enhance or hinder the goals of the writers quoted above? In this respect, some of the functions of tense in

English narrative texts may be recalled with reference to the paragraph in Greenbaum and Quirk (1990: 441-6) entitled *Tense, aspect, and narrative structure*:

As a further indication of the importance of time in language, all finite clauses (and many nonfinite ones) carry a discrete indication of tense and aspect. Although the contrasts involved are severely limited in comparison with adverbial distinctions, they contribute to the textual cohesion and progression. Alternation of past and present in this way is a regular mode of switching reference from the “then” of the narrative reference to the “now” of both the narrator and the hearer or reader (some items like parenthetical *you see* being confined to this “now”: More usually, however, texts comprise much greater time-reference complexity They will have a mixture of state verbs and discrete-action verbs; the narrative will weave backwards and forwards, with a mixture of tenses and aspects, of finite and nonfinite clauses, enabling the narrator to depart from the linear sequence of historical order so as both to vary the presentation and to achieve different (e.g. dramatic) effects. (Greenbaum and Quirk, 1990: 441-3).

A start can be made on understanding how writers compare with this model when the use of tense from a passage from Selvon (my underlining), is examined. The passage has been divided into three narrative chunks to highlight their different functions:

1) ... you roaring to go though to tell truth winter don't make much difference to some of the boys they blazing left and right as usual all the year round 2) to talk of all the episodes that Moses had with woman in London would take bags of ballad 3) Moses move through all the nationalities in the world and then he start the circle again everybody know how after the war them rich English family sending to the continent to get domestic and over there all them girls think like the newspapers say about the Jamaicans that the streets of London paved with gold so they coming by the boatload and the boys making contact and having big times with the girls ... (Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 1986 [1956]: 102-3).

The ironic/subversive nature both of the novel's title and this passage, in particular, can be appreciated when the passage is translated into British English. The following is my somewhat loose interpretation of what (based on the context in the book) the text means and the way it might look in a more “standard” variety of English:

1) ... now you are roaring to go. Though, to tell the truth, winter really doesn't make much difference to some of the boys. They go on blazing left, right and centre as usual all the year round. 2) If I mentioned all the encounters that Moses had with women in London, it would take a very long time to tell the whole story. 3) Moses chased after girls from all the nations in the world and when he had been through every single nation in the world, he started his endeavours once more. Now everybody knows how after the Second World War rich English families decided to look for au pair girls and servants on the Continent. Now all these girls would be thinking rather dumbly, not unlike the way in which Jamaicans are presented in the (London) newspapers, that the streets of London are paved with

gold. So the girls came by the boatload and the boys were ready to pick them up and had great fun with them...

Of the 17 underlined verbal structures in the Creole text, most comply with the elimination of the past: present tense opposition in a way that the “translation” into standard English does not. However, while this is entirely true in the Chunks 1 and 3, this is not the case with Chunk 2. While time reference is expressed throughout this passage through adverbial structures such as “after the war” and “all the year round”, what is striking is that in Chunk 2 non-present verb forms, such as “had” and “would take”, are pressed into service to express hypotheses, whereas in other parts of the passage present tense verb forms refer to material events (“English family sending”), mental processes (“them girls think”) and verbal processes (“newspaper say”). This seems to suggest that from a discourse standpoint, the distribution of verb forms may be much more complex than the simple reduction of tense marking that is often suggested.

However, the concern in this paper is mainly with participant involvement. By way of introduction to the problem, some of the typical reductions that take place in Creole as represented in my corpus of texts may be briefly tabulated.

First, there is absence of agreement between first person subject pronoun and auxiliary verb “to be”, for example in the following relational clauses of the identifying type:

12) “I is a family man now.” (Earl Lovelace, “A Brief Conversation”, in Markham, 1996: 209). [= “*I am a family man now*”]

13) “I is a young married man.” (Wilson Harris, *Palace of the Peacock*, 54). [= “*I am a young married man*”]

Second, in relational clauses of the attributive type (Halliday, 2004 [1985]: 219-26) the verb “to be” is typically omitted:

14) “It good, it good. It better that way.” (V. S. Naipaul, *Miguel Street*, 91). [= “*It’s good, it’s good. It’s better that way*”]

15) “The river bad like a devil.” (Wilson Harris, *Palace of the Peacock*, 53). [= “*The river is as bad as the devil*”]

Third, subject and object pronouns and possessive adjectives come to be used interchangeably:

17) “I see she since foreday morning.” (Wilson Harris, *Palace of the Peacock*, 44, emphasis mine). [= “*I saw her very early (before sunrise) this morning*”]

16) “If Laura have she way, she go try every man once” (V. S. Naipaul, *Miguel Street*, 86, emphasis mine). [= “*If Laura had her own way, she would try every man once*”]

17) “People would be askin’ lots of questions in the future ‘bout who they father wus.” (George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*, 127, emphasis mine). [= “*People would be asking lots of questions in the future about whom their father was*”]

Fourth, the distinction between singular and plural verb and nouns is lost and there is some evidence of subject pronoun omission:

18) “Is the biggest house in Trinidad. It have policemen guarding it. It have ah hundred window!” (Sam Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, 80, emphasis mine). [“It’s the biggest house in Trinidad. There are policemen guarding it. It’s got a hundred windows!”]

19) “These things is his life.” (Earl Lovelace, “A Brief Conversation”, in Markham, 1996: 209, emphasis mine. [“These things are his life.”]

In the context of novels based on participatory audience-involving strategies, these phenomena can be used to establish the identity of participants. Greenbaum and Quirk bring out the interpersonal aspects of the participant-process structure in the section of their book entitled *Participant involvement*:

Whether this is made explicit or not, every text is addressed *by* someone (“I”) to someone else (“you”). But in addition to establishing identity of participants and to indicating authority for content, textual structure tends to be punctuated by periodic references to both participants. The hearer is addressed by name, not for clarity but out of courtesy and friendliness. The speaker may repeatedly refer to himself, often successfully giving thereby an impression of courtesy and modesty rather than of egocentricity... Direct allusions and appeals to the addressee are especially characteristic of speech, informally with interspersed comment clauses, *you see, you know, get it?, do you follow me ? yes? right?*; more formally, *as you well know, as you may know, if I make myself clear (to you), if you will pardon the allusion*. Addressee involvement obviously serves two related functions, often distinguished by intonation. On the one hand, the speaker wants assurance that the addressee is following the communication in all its detail and allusion; in this spirit, the involvement is essentially interrogative and the inserted items have a rising nucleus... On the other hand, the inserts may be assurances to the addressee that he is not being underestimated and that it is highly probable that he knows the facts already. In this case, they have a falling nucleus or are uttered with low prominence carrying no nucleus at all. (Greenbaum and Quirk, 1990: 468-71)

How does participant involvement work in the participatory, reader-involving texts that are typical of Caribbean fiction? The following passage, taken from “I Hanging On, Praise God!” the short story quoted above by Austin Clarke, a writer from Barbados who emigrated to Canada, helps to pinpoint the way in which Creole becomes a tool in the management of the narrative discourse. As with quite a few contemporary novels, Creole or otherwise, no narrator is present and the whole story is built up by means of a dialogue between two women from Barbados, Clemistine and Pinky; the passage, which, for the purposes of analysis, has been divided into 12 turns (for turn taking, see Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975 and Sacks et al., 1978), reconstructs their surprise and delight on meeting up after a very long time:

-1) “Gawd bless my eyesight! Clemistine!”

2) “Pinky! The Lord have his mercy, child, I seeing right?”

- 3) “Yesss! How long you here in Canada?”
- 4) “Child, I here now two years running ‘pon three. But I didn’t know *you* was up here, too! What the hell bring you in this godforsaken place though?”
- 5) “I come up ‘pon the Scheme. The Domestic Scheme. First little break in my whole life. And I glad for it. But I hanging on, meanwhile.”
- 6) “You damn right to hang on. Cause you know as well as I do that there ain’ no particular bed o’ roses back where we come from. You could live donkey years back in Barbados, and ‘cepting you have godfather or iffing you been to Queens College, or maybe you learn little needlework, you ain’ getting *nowhere*. But how you making out?”
- 7) “Child, now and then. Today, I up, tomorrow, I down.”
- 8) “Well, since I meet up with you, you might as well come and see where I lives. You ain’ in no hurry, though? ‘Cause you don’t look like no Canadian what always rushing, running, turning their blood to water, they in so much o’ hurry!”
- 9) “To tell you the truth, I came downtown to buy two-three item for the Missy, and...”
- 10) “How you and she gets along?”
- 11) “Betwixt me and you, I don’t care much for working for these people. They *too* smart! They counting ever’ grain o’ rice, and watching ever’ slice o’ bake pork you put ‘pon that table. But they want to go to the Islands, and then they would see *how* smart they is!”
- 12) “I list’ning.”

Clarke, “I Hanging On, Praise God!”, p. 191

Greenbaum and Quirk (1990) identify four textual resources that construct participant involvement that I have visually identified in the text as follows: naming devices (dotted underlining), repeated self-reference (double underlining), addressee-directed comment clauses (continuous underlining) and reassurance-seeking rising intonation (broken underlining). All four resources are used in this passage as textual devices that underscore the direct commitment on the part of the speakers who, precisely because they are far from their mother country, want to reinforce their personal friendship and shared cultural ties and values. Language, their language, is the vital factor in achieving this. How does their discourse function with respect to these devices? Initially, both characters call each other by their names to show that they have recognised each other. To maintain the intensity of the moment, they use affectionate naming attributives, such as “child” as in the above passage, but also subsequently many other such terms as “darling” (pp. 192-3), “soul” (p. 194), “honey” (p. 194) and, most interestingly, examples where naming is typically iterative, as in the expression “Pinky, darling, I telling you, child” (p. 195) ...

The second phenomenon mentioned by Greenbaum and Quirk is repeated self-reference. There is only one really striking form of self-

reference in this opening passage: “Today, I up, tomorrow, I down” (Turn 7). Compared with the above passage, subsequent passages are replete with humorous self-references, as may be appreciated from the following two passages where first Pinky speaks about herself and subsequently Clem(intine) responds in a similar manner:

“You see me here? Well, I don’t know how I keeping the little fat God give me on these bones!” (p. 192)

“So, I say to myself: ‘This place so hot and humid, you better lay down here in your slip.’ Well, I can’t tell how long I been laying down. But when I open my eyes! Missy standing over me, look, she there, right over me, examining ever’ hair in my head! I carry-on so stink, I make myself shame.” (p. 195).

However, what is really striking about the passage is the high incidence, as predicted by Greenbaum and Quirk, of comment clauses, i.e. the direct addressee-allusions and appeals. Here the speakers select somewhat surprising lexical forms that, even when compared with their probable British oral discourse counterpart, may be described as very marked, colourful and highly *playful* in their implementation of Greenbaum and Quirk’s *courtesy and friendliness over clarity* principle. Thus, while the encounter is clearly very *informal* (between two old bosom friends) the addressee-oriented comments used such as “cause you know as well as I do” (Turn 6), “To tell you the truth” (Turn 9), “Betwixt me and you” (Turn 11) equate, paradoxically, with the *formal* end of the cline implied by Greenbaum and Quirk. In other words, the author is cunningly and slightly ironically using the love of hyperbole and exaggeration, typical of Creole discourse, to underscore the mutual alignment of the two characters and their mismatch with coldness of Canadian society, which is, of course the major thematic that emerges from their interaction. In the subsequent stages of their interaction other highly creative addressee-oriented comments appear, such as “You ain’ in ‘greement with me?”, (p. 195); “How you mean?”, (p. 194), “Is like that, soul” (p. 196), all attempts to elicit a strong ideological and emotional response on the part of the addressee.

The fourth discourse device, which is skilfully reconstructed by Austin Clarke, is reassurance-seeking rising intonation which, given the down-trodden nature of the participants’ existence in Canada, may be expected to feature prominently in this discourse, as indeed it is. In the passage quoted, there are two intonation-based questions (presumably with rising intonation) which function as reassurance-seeking devices. Both have important discourse maintenance functions, the first in Turn 2, “I seeing right?”, seeks to establish both that the speaker is not mistaken in her recognition of her old friend and that the other person wishes to engage with her. This very same function is subsequently repeated in Turn 8 with

“You ain’ in no hurry, though?” There are many other examples in this story, such as: “Two-pound piece o’ steak for a fourteen-year-old kid? Ain’ that worthlessness to the height?” (p. 196), which in this case elicits reassurance in the form of an apparent denial: “You is a joker.” (p. 197).

This brief and very limited analysis of the use of Creole in oral discourse to construct identity may be brought to a close by again highlighting the creativity and playfulness with language that is recurrent. Further examples in the story analysed are such memorable clauses as “I out-out man outta my life, honey!” (p. 194) and “You see that rubber-stamp thing the Immigration People put on we passport when we land? You know what it say? Permanunt! And it mean just that. We permanunt in this hell!...” (pp. 197-8).

CONCLUSION

This paper has undertaken a very brief foray into the complex field of Creole narrative discourse in an effort to understand how Caribbean writers establish individual and collective identities in their works. The features outlined above are far from being an exhaustive account of Creole features that may be found in post-war Caribbean English fiction, but enough to show how the structure of the Western novel and short story fiction is in many respects subverted by modes of narration typical of oral literature. Other more complex textual strategies may be traced back to oral-based genres, generally expressed using Creole. Thus, when compared to written genres, oral narratives include: a higher number of repetitions, to make sure that the audience is properly following the storyline; a looser narrative structure, since the story is built through sheer accumulation of episodes instead of the well-plotted narratives of Western tradition; choral description of whole populations along with presentation of exemplary characters, much like epic (oral) narrations; extensive use of digressions, since the main plot is interrupted by secondary stories; use of colloquialisms, idioms, informal speech, as epitomized by the use of Creole. Especially in dialogues, overabundance of deictics or items of personal reference, such as first or second person pronouns, reinforces the idea of a shared context of situation. In speech, participants share a temporal and spatial background, as well as personal knowledge and cultural references that allow them to interpret and make sense of the conversation. On the contrary, writers usually need to be more specific, because they cannot rely on context or paralinguistic features to facilitate understanding. Reading written literature that is orally-oriented in conception is a very challenging task. Moreover, inserts, such as “eh”, “ah”,

“hm”, “ugh”, underline a typical oral mode of communication, since hesitations, pauses or intonation contours are common traits of spoken interaction. Inserts also have emotional and interactional meanings. However, segments of the Creole language are taken from the closer-to-Standard-British-English end of the oral/written cline, because novels and short fiction have to be marketed in the international context and need to be understandable to the general public.

In conclusion, operations of cultural empowerment are fundamental in the postcolonial age, because after the plundering perpetrated by Western civilizations, steps need to be taken to form and encourage the development of autonomous cultural identities. English is at the same time an instrument of socio-economic improvement and a witness of the colonial past. On the contrary, Creole is considered as a sign of cultural autonomy, which has been particularly significant in the post-war years, when forms of resistance to ideological and literary hegemony are needed to decolonise the minds of former colonized people. The hybridisation of English and Western literary genres with Creole and oral-based ones brought about by writers and intellectuals in the Caribbean English areas has thus contributed to building a new sense of community and to establishing a new sense of cultural worth. The latter is essential in dismantling English cultural and linguistic hegemony, one of the most dangerous weapons within the armoury of the British Empire.

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