The role of social prestige of phonetic variants in Jamaican-Canadian dialect mixture

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In the Toronto Jamaican community, the ethnolinguistic repertoire of Jamaican Creole (JamC) contributes to the linguistic performance of second-generation diasporic speakers, which bears many of the characteristics of an "contemporary urban vernacular" (Rampton 2011). As he points out, "enregistering practices" (291) such as crossing/stylization that co-define these vernaculars are not exclusive to adolescents, but instead are also part of the linguistic practices of many adult speakers.

To answer what determines the outcome of migration-induced dialect contact, this presentation studies the speech of (i) a group of second-generation Jamaican Canadian adults and (ii) a group of adults living in Toronto without any Jamaican heritage, whose linguistic practice nonetheless draws on forms of JamC. For both, the analysis considers discourse practices and variation in the realization of English vowels, which are acoustically measured and compared against the aggregate measurements from a JamC and a Canadian English (CanE) reference corpus.

Group (ii) members’ use of JamC-influenced features is markedly different from that of group (i). While non-Jamaican individuals target stereotypical features of JamC and use them with high frequency and consistency, e.g. backing/rounding of STRUT, Jamaican-heritage speaker avoid these, targeting instead those features of the ethnolinguistic repertoire that are also present in the dialect of the local majority (CanE), but whose more typically ethnolectal deployment is a matter of distribution across contexts (e.g. monophthongization of the FACE vowel, which occurs much more generally in Jamaican English and Creole than in CanE). The latter findings dovetail with what previous research has concluded regarding dialect contact outcome (Kerswill & Williams 2000).

This difference between both groups suggests that Toronto Jamaican speech has not been enregistered as far as new linguistic practices in London have, where a new dialect, based partly on JamC, now exists (see Cheshire et al. 2011 on Multicultural London English).

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