

ABSTRACT

English Language Problems in Antiguan Secondary Schools:

A Sociolinguistic Study

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The present study is a sociolinguistic examination of English Language problems which affect the vast majority of Antiguan School children. Without prejudice to Creole and from the point of view of social convention the writer assumes that proficiency in Standard English is of prime functional importance and therefore an essential goal of the educational process.

The thesis focuses on the secondary level, and indicates that even after a minimum of six years of formal education in a primary school, pupils fail to appreciate the various linguistic and socio-linguistic differences between Antiguan Creole and Standard English. It is pointed out that this incompetence exists more noticeably among Creole-speaking children of lower class families. In the writer's view, this is a reflection of the socio-economic differentiation of Antiguan society.

The study begins with a brief socio-cultural history of the island of Antigua and shows how Antiguan English Creole developed and crystallized out of this situation. It also includes an examination of the two schools which provided data for the research.

It is noted that these two schools contrast in several ways including their physical location, the reading facilities available to students, the socio-economic background as well as the overall academic performance of their respective student bodies.

The greater part of the study is devoted to the identification, categorization and qualitative analysis of actual errors made by pupils of forms one to five of both schools. Of these errors, the greatest difficulty is seen to be encountered in the area of verb usage, a fact which can be readily attributed to the vast divergence between the verbal systems of Standard English and Creole and the constant interaction between these two distinct codes.

The research is chiefly of pedagogical concern. With the official recognition of Creole as the 'home language' of a large percentage of the school population, the Antiguan English language teacher is in a very real dilemma. He/she is called upon to emphasize the functional importance of Standard English, but must do so without implying any inferiority of Creole. Given the social ambivalence and cultural ambiguity which obtain in Antiguan society, this task is by no means easy or straightforward.

The study concludes that in the context of formal education, an enlightened and adequately trained teaching corps can make a significant contribution towards minimizing the English/Creole conflict. It suggests that success will be possible only through the adoption of a quasi-foreign language approach which takes into account the psychological concerns fundamental to the teaching of English to English Creole speakers.

Much work is being done on Creoles and their implications for education in the region. The study at hand is envisaged as a practical contribution to this field.