

ABSTRACT

Language Confidence and Competence: Issues in the Oral Use of the Standard by Jamaican Future Performers

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Jamaicans studying to be Drama Teachers and Theatre Professionals at the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts - School of Drama (EMCVPA-SoD) commonly display a low level of confidence (LoC) and oral skills when performing a poetical text in Standard Jamaican English (SJE). Conversely these student-performers (SPs) enrolled in years 1-4 of the SoD programs, master language confidence and oral skills when presenting a Jamaican Creole (JC) poem. This research aims to identify the causes for this variation in oral performance delivery. Specifically, this study focuses on the factors affecting the SJE oral performance quality of these future professionals at EMCVPA – SoD.

Independent consultants examined acoustic material recorded performances by 47 SPs performing the poem “Flowers” by Dennis Craig (1999). They focused on identifying the actual standard (ST) feature production and the use of semantic and prosodic elements in the oral performance of the poem. Two questionnaires requested SPs to report on their level of confidence when performing in JC and SJE; and collected SPs’ linguistic background metadata. An analysis of the SPs’ sociolinguistic and educational background is used to identify possible causes of The SPs’ self-reported level of confidence, ST feature production and assessed oral performance of the poem.

The examination revealed a high production of standard features but the oral performance was generally assessed with low values. This indicated that SPs present problems interpreting the written text. The causes for this level of language competence are rooted in the sociolinguistic and educational background of the SPs where SJE is an external language. An intervention is needed in the SoD programs to enable SPs to approach SJE oral performance with a linguistic awareness aimed at developing a communicative relationship with the standard.

Key words: Elizabeth Montoya-Stemann; Standard Jamaican English; Jamaican Creole; language confidence; language competence; oral Performance; bilingualism.