

## ABSTRACT

Language and Ethnicity in Trinidad:  
A Description of the Linguistic Behaviour of Douglas

Ferne Louanne Regis

In their search for personal identity Trinidad's Douglas, the offspring of Indo-African unions, find themselves in a complex social, cultural and linguistic situation. This is reflected as much in their unclear and uncertain social positioning in a society of competing ethnic groups as in the linguistic possibilities open to them in their quotidian social interactions as they negotiate between their parent communities.

Trinidadian English Creole (TEC), the mother tongue or lingua franca of the majority of the population, has lexical items from donor varieties brought to the island during the period of its colonization. The extent to which Trinidadians employ these lexical items is linked to their affinity to the particular contributing input source. As a consequence of this, Douglas ethnicity and identity are hypothesized as being expressed chiefly through the use of lexical items available to them via their upbringing in specific communities.

This dissertation describes and analyses selected lexical items in use by six Douglas, who grew up in communities stereotypically marked Indic and Afric by Trinidadians or in communities where there is no numerically dominant group. This analysis was undertaken to determine the extent to which Douglas project a linguistic identity independent of both ancestral groups; or a biased identity linked to one or other ancestral ethnic group; or a shifting and unmarked identity based on accommodative strategies employed during interaction within their social networks. The results indicate that no prototypical Douglas identity could be established. Some Douglas employ salient Indic items to align themselves to their Indic ancestry while others employ unmarked forms to declare a default Trinidadian identity determined by them to be an alliance with their African ancestry and by other Douglas to be a nationalistic position. Further, the results show that it is possible for the same Douglas individual to manifest different identities in varying situations.

Keywords: Ferne Louanne Regis; Language; Ethnicity; Identity; Trinidad; Douglas.