

ABSTRACT

Rasta Talk as a Tool for Self-Elevation: A Morpho-Phono-Semantic Analysis

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Why would English forms such as “cup”, “June” and “yesterday” be considered undesirable for use by Rastafarians and the Rasta Talk forms *yop*, *June-truth* and *firstday*, be deemed suitable replacements for them? The answer, as this dissertation will show, is that Rastafarians, a cultural group founded in Jamaica in the early 1930's, have consciously and deliberately created a new variety of language, Rasta Talk, which exhibits significant differences to both English and Jamaican Creole (JC), the two dominant languages of Jamaica. In this thesis, I argue that Rasta Talk is a Lexicon characterized by word formations which are based on specific ideological tenets that are rooted in the Rastafarian worldview, the most salient of which I have named the Positive-Negative (P-N) Phenomenon. Lexical creations in Rasta Talk represent a direct application of the P-N Phenomenon to the output of the cognitive process of Phono-Semantic Matching, first described by Zuckermann (2000, 2004). It is imperative in Rasta Talk that words display Morphological Harmony, bearing consideration to the P-N Phenomenon, and that they are perceived to be semantically transparent, qualities which Rastafarians deem to be missing from English and by extension from JC. I examine how Rasta Talk, using processes of lexical creation including antonym replacement, I-prefixation, internal compounding, and lexical replacement, comes to demonstrate significant morpho-semantic and lexical differences to English and JC. This study has looked at whether Rasta Talk could categorically fit as a register of JC, supporting the suggestion of previous researchers such as Pollard (1986, 1994) and Patrick (1997, 2000). This thesis also considered the likelihood of Rasta Talk being a secret language, mixed language or youth language and has concluded that Rasta Talk is a distinct Lexicon, capable of being imposed on both English and JC. Data for this thesis was drawn from the published works of Pollard (1986, 1984), Homiak (1996), Pochard (1985, 2000) as well as my own research and conversations with Rastafarians over the years 2006 – 2015.

Keywords: Havenol Magdalen Schrenk; Rastafari; Rasta Talk; Positive-Negative Phenomenon; Phono-Semantic Matching; morphological harmony; semantic transparency; I-Lexicon; I-Language; lexical creation; lexical manipulation; semantic manipulation; Internal Compounding