

Abstract

It is the thesis of this study that certain features of Trinidadian language use appear in consistent patterns across the levels of syntactic variation which seem to divide the Trinidadian community. These features, in that they are expected and necessary in certain semantic contexts, must be construed as part of Trinidadian linguistic competence.

Existing Creole theory which accounts for variation at the level of performance is adequate in relation to the speaker's function in second language but unsatisfactory as an explanation of the native-speaker's language competence.

This dissertation examines the inadequacies of categorial theory with respect to variation in Trinidadian and suggests a theoretical base and technique of analysis for systematic examination of the reality of Trinidadian language use. It examines form only in relation to function. The unit of analysis is a form-meaning correlation termed the communication device which is described according to its privileges of occurrence within the communication act.

The analysis treats this communication device within the communication act rather than linguistic form within the linguistic construct of the sentence.

In order to test the analysis a project was constructed with stringencies suitable for producing the necessary data.

Description has necessarily been limited. Only communication devices which realise strategies for relation within communication acts of narration and description are described. An innovative theory was a necessary basis for constructing the analytic procedures. Much has been borrowed from the theory of the linguistic community in the work of Gumperz and Hymes.

No attempt has been made to produce a coherent, unified, exclusive body of rules, or to define clear-cut syntactic boundaries for Trinidadian. All that is attempted is to affirm an identity and to describe its distinctive features.

Even within these limitations, it is evident that the Trinidadian speaker realises meaning in patterns of language use which differ from those used by non-Trinidadian speakers.