

## **ABSTRACT**

### Gender as a Sociophonetic Issue in Jamaican Dancehall Lyrics

Nickesha Tania Dawkins

The main purpose of this research is to investigate the phonetic variation of select vowels in the song lyrics of Jamaican Dancehall artists via acoustic measurements. Thus, this dissertation provides an insight into the study of vowel use by male and female artists in the Jamaican Dancehall music genre. The research considers how the primary target audience may have an influence on language use (relevant to linguistic style) in popular recorded songs. The relevant literature by linguists such as Gordon and Heath (1998) suggests that, when an option is available, men show a preference for back and low vowels, while women show a preference for high front vowels. Although the current study looks at linguistic styles associated with vowel use by male and female artists, the most fundamental issue in this research is the acoustic measurements of these vowels which depict the phonetic variations. Therefore, I tender acoustic evidence as well as sociolinguistic evidence in support of my arguments to show that acoustic factors such as F0 (associated with voice pitch), F1 (vowel height) and F2 (vowel frontness/backness) can be directly linked or associated with a social phenomenon such as gender. This association may assist in the understanding of how and why men and women use language in the way they do, especially when having a target audience in mind.

**Keywords:** Nickesha Tania Dawkins, Acoustic Phonetics, Phonology, Sociophonetics, Dancehall Music, Jamaican Creole, Language, Vowels, Gender, Dominance, Power, Overt and Covert Prestige, Community of Practice, Identity.