

ABSTRACT

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE LEXICON OF TRINIDADIAN ENGLISH

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This study examines the lexicon of the continuum of language varieties which comprise Trinidadian English (TE), from the perspective of the socio-historical forces which shaped its development. The time frame under investigation extends from the pre-historical Amerindian occupation to the contemporary period.

A number of methods have been employed in this investigation. The socio-historical background was gleaned from research into the primary historical sources and a review of the secondary sources. Reconstruction of the socio-historical linguistic framework emerged from a composite of the historical readings and analyses presented by previous scholars, both of which were mediated by the author's own analysis.

Trinidadian English has developed and spread at the expense of the other languages and groups of languages spoken by significant sections of the population during the island's history. It is evident, however, that despite the decline of these languages, the present-day TE lexicon reflects their presence. The contributions of the following languages and groups of languages to the TE lexical corpus were investigated: Amerindian, Trinidadian Spanish, Trinidadian French Creole, African, Indian, and regional/social class dialects of English and English-lexicon Creoles.

Because the study surveys the entire period of the island's history and hence all the major languages historically involved in the speech community, it is possible to do an exploratory comparative analysis of the kinds of semantic fields in which lexical items from the different languages have been retained in TE. Such an analysis also enables us to draw conclusions about the relationship between socio-historical process(es) and lexical form. Finally, the work explores the usage of these lexical corpora in the TE continuum through such sociolinguistic variables as ethnicity, age, geography, education, social class, occupation, and setting.