Poetry in Patois: Applying a Sociopsychological Approach to the Analysis and Interpretation of British Afro-Caribbean Poems

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El Caribe anglófono suele describirse como una sociedad diglósica cuyos textos literarios están escritos en inglés estándar. Sin embargo, encontramos textos en lengua criolla (*Patois, Patwa, Creole, Nation-language*) en diversos géneros. Si nos centramos en analizar aquellos poemas donde la lengua criolla aparece con mayor frecuencia, observamos que se trata de textos escritos fuera de las Indias Occidentales, principalmente en Gran Bretaña. El artículo sugiere que para entender las causas, el alcance y el significado de ese hecho es conveniente un marco sociopsicológico: la Teoría de la Identidad Etnolingüística propuesta por Howard Giles.

Aplicando la teoría de Giles a los poemas escritos por autores británicos afro-caribeños, vemos, en primer lugar, que el contenido de los mismos es una excelente ilustración de la teoría. Y en segundo lugar, nos permite llegar a la conclusión de que el uso de la lengua criolla es una respuesta (no homogénea) a la identidad social negativa de los afro-caribeños en Gran Bretaña. Para lograr una identidad social más favorable, el grupo afro-caribeño busca dimensiones en las que salgan favorecidos en la comparación, adoptando para ello diversas estrategias lingüístico-sociales que surgen motivadas por las decisiones y estrategias de otro grupo: el de la comunidad blanca británica.

1. THE QUESTION OF THE LANGUAGE IN WEST INDIAN LITERATURE

In postcolonial anglophone Africa or Asia, the problem of choosing a language for their literary production is impossible to obviate for non-white native writers. It has been said that if the choice falls on their mother tongue, writers renounce international readership and recognition, as to reach a wider public requires generally intelligible forms of internationally

accepted language. But if they decide upon standard English, the consequences for them may range from being accused by ultranationalist critics of "whoring after foreign gods" (Sridhar, 1982: 293), to considering themselves traitors while they feel they are "sucking their native community dry but giving nothing back to it in its own vernacular" (Le Page, 1969: 1).

The linguistic situation in the West Indies would seem to make the dilemma non-existent because standard English is part of the repertoire of non-white members of the literate middle classes (Lawton, 1982: 269) - West Indian authors (and readers) writing (and reading) in the twentieth century are the educated products of the dialect-speaking group, which means that they have a familiarity with the **dialect** and a competence in the **standard English** of their education (Ramchand, 1974: 201). In the diglossic Caribbean society the Low language, the so-called 'dialect', is Creole, also referred to as 'Patois' or 'Patwa', which is the language of everyday life, the home, family and neighbourhood; the High language, standard English, is used in government administration, state schools and the media (Gramley and Pätzold, 1992: 386). In spite of the seemingly rigid divisions between the functions of the two varieties, as a matter of fact **both** languages forge the **vernacular** of literate Black West Indians, whose linguistic competence ranges from standard English to Creole[1]. Both varieties are constantly interacting in speech. But not necessarily in writing. Writing is another matter. Until the 1940s English was almost the sole language of literary expression for the West Indian writer[2], Creole being relegated to a marginal position in literature: more for comic and satiric purposes, or to provide local colour or build up a character, than to reflect the authentic Caribbean voice.

The political transformations Caribbean societies have undergone in the last part of the century have complicated the matters further. From the beginning of the 1950s, dialect began to be consciously used in poetry, mainly as a medium of social protest, struggle for political revolution and ethnic resistence. The following extract, taken from a poem published in one of the new magazines of the period, calls for political change (`Federation') through the rhythm of drums and the Caribbean dialect:

[...]
So beat dem drums
Boys beat dem drums,

'Til Federation come
Den we go jump in time
To the Creole rhyme
Around de town.
[...]

(La Fortune, 1958).

Once independence was achieved in islands such as Jamaica, the acceptability of Creole as a medium of communication began to improve, allowing instances of dialect in various literary and non-literary genres[3], albeit standard English still is by far the most frequent means of expression in literature. From a political point of view, the birth of new Caribbean nations has put West Indian writers in the dilemma of whether they should write in the wake of the English literary tradition, or whether they must help to create a national Literature of their own. From the personal point of view of economic success, the writer, just like his/her African or Asian colleagues, has had to look to either a regional readership or to an international one when selecting the language. Furthermore, as the agencies who publish West Indian literature are often outside the West Indies (Roberts, 1988: 144) and publishers and readers frequently share Krapp's ideas on literariness[4], the options have actually been very limited, though some times regarded by critics "as resulting in 'authentic' representation for personal and national satisfaction, or 'watering down' to achieve economic success" (Roberts, 1988: 143), a statement not far from the accusation of "whoring after foreign gods" that so many African and Indian authors have been made.

The limitation of choice has entailed that, in actual fact, for the Caribean writer there has been no real option between English and another language (Ramchand, 1970: 82) -one must use English if one writes at all. And truly most novels, poems, journals, magazines, and, of course, essays are written in standard English. But WE DO FIND LITERATURE IN CREOLE, a fact which is not only due to the aforementioned causes, namely an urge for embellishment to give local flavour, a search for the comical, the writer's political stance, and his/her desire of economic success (or the lack of it). The reasons for the use of dialect may be those and/or various others, often more complex and mixed up. In the rest of the paper I will attempt to outline them, first listing the types of texts where Creole is more likely to be found. Then, focusing particularly on poetry, I will su-

ggest that a socio-psychological framework can enrich our comprehension of the phenomenon.

2. CREOLE IN WEST INDIAN LITERATURE

In what type of texts is it more likely to find Patois?
To start with, the literary genre usually makes a difference. Creole appears primarily in genres which are performed or recited in front of **local audiences**: drama, short story (historically connected with the folk tale, which has a long tradition of communal 'recitals' behind it), and some types of poetry, a genre which deserves to be analysed separately because of its peculiar characteristics.

In fiction, a genre which is not to be performed before an audience, but to be enjoyed by solitary readers, not necessarily West Indian, the occurrence of Patois is much less. When Creole appears in novels, it is generally kept for dialogue, whereas standard English is employed in other parts of the text -reported speech, descriptions, the speech of the omniscient narrator, ... As a rule and given the markedness of dialect in the West Indies, fictional conversation may have the essential function of transmitting a realistic representation of their society[5], as novelists try to reflect actual language variation by putting dialectal forms in the mouths of their characters. Samuel Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* (1952) is a clear example of language demarking different Trinidadian social and ethnic groups, Negroes and Indians included. Morover, the effect of dialect in conversation may be pragmatical, showing changes of status and relationships, the pressure of emotions, distance or intimacy.

But, as Ramchand (1970) noted in his pioneer study of the context of Creole in Caribbean fiction, literary Patwa is a West Indian literary invention "shaped to meet wider expressive needs than the demands of social realism". Some novelists have developed a language of introspection which is a brilliant mixture of both standard English and Creole, a very appealing transgression reflecting "the wide spectrum of dialectal usage - from very broad vernacular to educated local usage- which is a feature of the verbal behaviour of many West Indians" (Le Page, 1969: 7). The stream of consciousness conveyed in this spectrum from English to Creole has been successfully exploited in the last forty years by a few novelists in

the wake of Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) with the purpose of rendering the West Indian's inner experience accurately.

3. THE CASE OF WEST INDIAN POETRY

My intention is to focus on poetry because contemporary poetry is an extremely adaptable genre, a form open to meet the writer's personal needs and polititical views. As the poet is subject to few constraints, there are no apparent causes which might compel a poet to use Creole or standard English, although some may be outlined tentatively. Broadly speaking, the choice of English or Creole in poetry might be given by its function (whether it is to be performed or not), its theme and its tone.

Paula Bennet, editor of the anthology *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse,* discusses in her introduction the language of Caribbean poetry which she aligns in two different traditions, a literary and an oral one, the former associated to the use of standard English, the latter with nation-language or Creole. It cannot be denied that folk tales, riddles, proverbs, childrens' rhymes and folk songs are traditional oral genres that have always enjoyed great popularity in the West Indies; when they are recorded in writing, it is often in the form of poems in Creole. But, important as this factor seems to be, it does nor explain by itself the amount of poetry in Creole that can be found, although it might help us to understand why authors who write poetry embedded in the Caribbean folk tradition (e.g. proverbs), such as Louise Bennett or James Berry, would use Creole. Peter Roberts moves a bit further when he points out that the poetry which is 'performed' (in the broadest sense of the word) is that which is written in the vernacular, whereas that which is written in standard English tends to be treated as cerebral (Roberts, 1988: 147). As 'cerebral' means non-sentimental, Roberts hints at the tone of the poetry as a second aspect to be taken into account in the poet's choice of language.

"If tone in poetry can be taken to include the communication of an attitude to self, to language and craft, to one's raw material and to the readers, then early West Indian poetry has no tone or an extremely naïve and sentimental one" (Ramchand, 1974: 198). The sentimentality which pervaded early Caribbean poetry was self indulgent and compassionate, sometimes grotesque, sometimes ironic and often comical. The same slightly mawkish tone is still present in part of the poetry of the twentieth century in

Creole, but now, under the influence of literary movements of social realism and social protest, garnished with a growing concern for social themes and a good proportion of piercing irony:

Girl chile darling yuh ole muddah hay
Praisin' de Lord fuh 'E blessing an 'E mercies
You is many many blessin's an' all o' me mercies
Glory to God!
Uh get de 5 pound note an' de Christmas card
God bless yuh!
But de carpenter ain' come to put on de shed-roof
So uh spen' it an uh sen' Rosy pretty to de
Exhibition gal, yuh should see she!
Next month when yuh sen me allowance again,
We will see wuh kin happen in de name i' de Lord.
[...]

(Bruce St John, "Letter to England". In Brown, 1992: 91).

The mixture of sentimentality with social concerns in the poetry in 'Patwa' led for some time to the undesirable interpretation that there were only two possible modes of perception and expression, one dramatically antagonistic to the other -standard English was wanted to appeal the intellect, literary Creole to voice emotional political protest[6]. Unfortunately these type of claims are too naïve to explain what goes on in the writer's personal choices.

Because of all that and related to it, the subject matter may also be a decisive element to explain the use of one or another language. In a way, it is as if the theme, the subject of the poem would demand one or other language. As the poet Grace Nichols put it: "in writing a poem I don't consciously set out to write it in Creole or standard English. The language, like the form and rhythm, dictates itself." (Markham, 1989: 297). In general and probably because "the middle class likes to reserve the fiction of total ignorance of Jamaican Creole and variously refer to it as patois, broken talk, or `labrish'" (Lawton, 1982: 271), often we find that "poverty and deprivation on the one hand, and the world of property and power on the other, are cogently spliced with the deft use of both Jamaican Creole and Jamaican [standard] English to correlate with each phrase of the social scene" (Lawton, 1982: 262). Not only is poetry in standard English treated as

'cerebral', as Roberts states, but also as elitist, refined, and non-popular. While standard English intends to represent 'high' culture, the intellect, and the world of the upper middle classes, Creole helps to denounce the harsh living conditions of the lowest social groups. This is so especially from the 1970s, when political commitment urged a group of poets, the 'dub' poets, to take up the social and political themes, changing the sentimental tone into a combative one, the humour disappeared or transformed into openly subversive irony. Their poetry is heavily influenced by music and created to be performed (in fact it is easier to find their poetry in a video than in a book) and is aimed to articulate the needs and hardships of the powerless, using their music and language. 'Dub' poetry describes people's appalling living conditions as a means of protest and struggle for social revolution. They use the language of the common man as a linking device with the oppressed and their experience. One of its main representatives, the poet Michael Smith, stoned to death by four men in Jamaica in 1983, declared in an interview a year before his death that he used Creole because he drew his sources from his own people, who widely use Creole. He added: "And if me can really spend some time fi try learn the Englishman language and so, the Englishman can spend some time fi learn wha me seh too, you know -or the American, fi that matter, any one a them, it no really matter. Them can really spend some time and understand. That's the only way them can get over some of them romanticism that them have bout Jamaica and Jamaican people ...". (Markham, 1989: 282).

4. THE POETRY OF WEST INDIAN EMIGRANTS

There is another fact which cannot be ignored. If we examine closely anthologies of contemporary poetry such as *Ain't I a woman!: Poems by Black and White Women* (Linthwaite, 1987) we find that the only instances of Creole are those by West Indian writers who have emigrated to Great Britain: in the fifteen poems by the seven poets born in Jamaica or Guyana, Creole is used only by Dazzly Anderson, Valerie Bloom and Grace Nichols, the only three who emigrated to England in the 1960s or 1970s. In the book *Caribbean Poetry Now* (Brown, 1992), only 34 out of 120 poems are written in Creole, a rough 25%. Of those, apart from the 'folklorist' Louise Bennett, we find 'dub' poets as Oku Onuora, Malik, Fred Nunes, A. Hinkson, or the late Michael Smith. The rest of the poets who ever write in nation-language are living or have lived abroad, most of them in Britain: Edward Kamau Brathwaite, James Berry, Linton Kwesi John-

son, John Agard, A. L. Hendriks, Amryl Johnson, "Shake" Keane, Valerie Bloom or Grace Nichols. As for the anthology edited by E. A. Markham, *Hinterland. Caribbean Poetry from the West Indies and Britain*, the only ones who use Creole consistently are, apart from the aforementioned Louise Bennet and the 'dub' poet Michael Smith, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, James Berry and Linton Kwesi Johnson, the three of them having spent a great part of their lives far from the West Indies. After all this evidence, one is tempted to say that since Claude McKay moved from his Jamaican home land to America, where in 1912 he published his nostalgic *Songs of Jamaica in a mixture of* Creole and standard English, **Creole is used in a much higher proportion by Caribbean poets who write outside their native land**, although not all the poets who emigrated use dialect.

Literature is one of those 'institionalized settings' where there are explicit norms regarding the appropriate language to be used, and, because of "lack of motivation or mutual negative intergroup attitudes", it is precisely only in 'institutionalized settings' that members of different ethnic groups usually encounter one another (Giles, 1979: 255-56). However, against expectations, some Black BRITISH poetry is flooded with Patois. It seems as if Black writers from the Caribbean living abroad would need to symbolize their West Indian identity by means of Creole precisely because they are in "London, mother of metropolises" (Markham, 1989: 118). This would not be at odds with George Lamming's statement that the sense of belonging to a West Indian community, the feeling of "West Indian-ness" has taken place out of the Caribbean:

> It is here [in London] that one sees a discovery actually taking place. No Barbadian, no Trinidadian, no St. Lucian, no islander from the West Indies sees himself as a West Indian until he encounters another islander in foreign territory. ... In this sense, most West Indians of my generation were born in England. The category West Indian, formerly understood as a geographical term now assumes cultural significance. (Lamming, 1960: 214)

Edward Kamau Brathwaite, together with Lamming one of the main figures of black Caribbean literature, acknowledges having experienced something similar in Britain (Markham, 1989: 118). Both Brathwaite and Lamming recognize certain common features as belonging to them and contributing to their sense of unity and "community". One cannot avoid concluding that, because the feeling evolved in Britain, it has arisen when confronting another community, namely, the white British, AGAINST

WHOM THEIR FEELING OF IDENTITY SEEMS TO HAVE TAKEN SHAPE. When they write their poetry in Britain, we immediately realize that the choice of the language is not a stylistic trivial device, but the core of the message, and loaded with ideology. In addition to that, Creole is not only the artistic medium but the subject matter of poetry. Creole therefore serves as both event and medium of communication (Roberts, 1988: 145-46).

My suggestion is that a socio-psychological framework (namely, **Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory**) is needed if we want to fully comprehend both the causes, scope and significance of this fact, and the contents of the very many poems by Black British authors which deal with the issue of the language. I will ground NOT on Nichols' idea that "the language, like the form and rhythm, dictates itself" (Markham, 1989: 297), but rather on the hypothesis that the poet's use of one or other code is a conscious choice which presupposes that a personal decision has been made and a **strategy** enacted (Giles and Johnson, 1987: 69). These decisions and strategies are part of "**intergroup** phenomena to the extent that they are being fostered side by side or in conflict with decisions and strategies of members of another group": Non-Black British. Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory, which was originally formulated to study the role of language for ethnicity and intergroup relations, specially the issue of who in an ethnic group uses what language **strategy**, when, and why, in interethnic encounters[7], can provide us with a valuable tool for my purposes.

Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory starts from the assumption that speakers of powerless groups tend to converge towards the speech of the dominant group, that is 'adapt' their speech to the dominant group's speech. This 'accommodation' is due not only to their desire to gain social approval or attain communicational efficiency, but also to the fact that it is an essential accomplishment for participation in the wider society. The theory is specifically concerned with explaining why it is that in certain situations some members of a group accentuate their ethnolinguistic characteristics (be it by dialect, language, or whatever) when conversing with outgroup speakers, while others converge toward them by attenuating their linguistic distinctiveness. They are particularly interested in instances of divergence when the outgroup language is the societal norm and ethnolinguistic differentiation can invoke considerable social sanctions as a consequence.

If one considers poetry written by British Afro-Caribbean as a special case of 'conversing', and takes into account that the outgroup language -in this case, Standard English- is the societal norm (the language of literature MUST be standard English), the consequences of not adapting may be "socially catastrophic", as deviation from the societal norm may result in discouraging potential readers, diminishing readership, reducing economic profits and the lack of social recognition as 'artists'. The literary use of Creole in Britain seems a clear instance of interethnic encounters in which the interlocutors are British readers (Black or White), and the artist has chosen to 'diverge'. These type of acts fall under the scope of Ehnolinguistic Identity Theory, so it seems reasonable to examine it and see what it has to say on the matter.

5. ETHNOLINGUISTIC IDENTITY THEORY

Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory applies Tajfel's Theory of Intergroup Behaviour[8] to language. Tajfel's central concepts include: a) a sequence which is described as: Social Categorization - Social Identity - Social Comparison - Need for Psychological Distinctiveness; and b) a series of Group Strategies. The theory can be outlined as follows: Individuals are active from the moment they are born in defining themselves and the world. In order to achieve this, one of the most important devices they have is categorization- they categorize people as male or female, blacks and whites, ... Their knowledge of the particular categories or ethnic groups to which they belong, and of the value attached to those categories or groups in positive or negative terms determines their social identity. Social identity is only acquired by comparison with other groups. Intergroup social comparison will induce individuals to perceive and act in such a manner as to make their own group favourably and psychologically distinct from other groups, seeking qualities of their own group which allow favourable comparison with other groups. Members of a group will share a satisfactory social identity only when they perceive that their group is positevely distinct from other groups because it compares favourably with them.

In general, groups will struggle to gain a positive linguistic distinctiveness when compared with outgroups, following different sociolinguistic strategies which will depend on the intergroup situation, and on whether they are dominant or subordinate linguistic groups. Ethnolinguistic Identity

Theory is a dynamic model because Giles stresses that relations among ethnolinguistic groups are not 'given', but they may change, and the theory specifies the conditions and strategies that dominant groups may follow to maintain their linguistic superiority (by means of compulsory education in their own language, or legitimising the outgroup's low status, for example), and subordinate groups may adopt to favour change.

People who are members of a dominant or superior group will derive a positive social identity, and thus will not be motivated to change the relationship between their group and subordinate groups. On the contrary, in general they will do everything on their power to maintain the present intergroup situation. By contrast, when the existing intergroup situation provides members of a group a negative social identity, they will desire a change in the relationship between their group and the superior group in order to gain a more positive social identity. But that change will only be possible if members of subordinate groups become aware of cognitive alternatives. This awareness would rest on two main factors: the perceived stability-instability of the situation (that is, whether things may be changed), and the perceived legitimacy-illegitimacy of the intergroup relationship (whether it is fair or just). If members perceive that no cognitive alternatives to the existing status relationship are possible, they will do nothing to change their group situation, but may adopt either of these two individualistic actions as a means of attaining a positive social identity: one would be to compare one's individual condition with members of the ingroup rather than with that of the dominant group; the other is called social mobility, which can be achieved by modifying one's own cultural values, dress and speech style so as to be more like that of the dominant group's.

If members of groups with a negative social identity become aware of cognitive alternatives, Tajfel suggests that a subordinate group may adopt four group strategies, non mutually exclusive, to attain a more positive social identity. The first strategy a group will probably adopt will be to assimilate culturally and psychologically with members of the dominant group. If this does not work, a second strategy may be to redefine the previously negatively-valued characteristics of the group (skin colour, language, ...: *Black is beautiful*, *Afro hair-style is cool*, ...). As a third strategy, members of subordinate groups might create new dimensions not previously used in intergroup comparisons on which the group may assume a new positive distinctiveness from the dominant group. The fourth strategy

would be direct competition, something which generates conflict and antagonism between the dominant and the subordinate group.

Giles and his associates at Bristol University applied this theory specifically to language, naming it Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory (Giles, Bourhis and Taylor, 1977; Giles, and Johnson, 1987). If we use Giles/Tajfel's theoretical framework to the analysis of literary texts by British Afro-Caribbean writers, it is possible to find the sequence of: social categorization - social identity - social comparison - need for psychological differentiation, together with a their group strategies mapped over a series of poems written by Jamaican-born poets who are now living in Britain. At the same time, and because, as I remarked before, language is not only the artistic medium but the subject matter of Caribbean poetry, the contents of those poems will illustrate Giles/Tajfel's key concepts and strategies. We shall see that the approach also provides us with a final and definite device to explain the use of one or another language in West Indian literature: the writer's response to Black West Indian social identity.

6. THE SOCIO-LINGUISTIC IDENTITY OF BLACK WEST INDIANS

It has been demonstrated that language is one of the human attributes which can be used as an important marker of group membership: one of the bases to categorize social groups is their distinct speech style. When a group regards its own language or speech variety as a dimension of comparison with outgroups, the evaluation of its language becomes one of the most important dimensions of their ethnic identity (Giles, 1977). As the group's identity only acquires meaning in contrast with other group's, it is in situation of language contact that people use their own language as a marker of group membership. Often, as Fishman has noted, not only skin colour or religious affiliation, but ethnic dialect is a very important dimension of the group's cultural identity, so important that language often becomes THE symbol of ethnicity (Fishman, 1977). We are now in a position to understand the fact previously noted that it is precisely in Great Britain that some West Indian writers prefer to use Creole in their literary works.

According to Giles' approach, in a situation of language contact, the social identity of the group will reflect the ingroup and the outgroup's feelings and evaluation about their language. And how is the speech of the

Afro-Caribbean evaluated in Britain? Well, unfortunately, the low status of Black culture in British society is faithfully reflected in the low status of their speech, which the British frequently feel to be lazy, inferior, careless, slovenly, or 'merely broken English' (Edwards, 1985)[9]. In "New World Colonial Child", the Jamaican poet James Berry offers us some insights into Black feelings about their speech- the confusion and bewilderment at the contempt towards their language, and the subsequent loss of their social and self identity when living in their mother country:

[...]
How can I know my voice
isn't that grunt of a pig,
isn't the squawking of a goose,
or the howling of wind?
[...]

(Berry, 1984: 189).

Black West Indian writers are painfully aware of the low status of their own ethnic speech style, Creole, which is not "merely" a dialect of English, but the language of a race of slaves, as Walcott stated at the end of his poem "Gros-Ilet":

[...]
There are distinctions beyond the paradise
of our horizon. This is not the grape-purple Aegean.
There is no wine here, no cheese, the almonds are green,
the sea grapes bitter, the language is that of slaves.

(Walcott, 1987).

7. THE WEST INDIANS' NEED FOR A POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTINCTIVENESS

People who define an encounter with a member of another ethnic group as an intergroup one and value their language as a core aspect of its identity will wish to assume a positive identity by means of adopting various strategies of 'psycholinguistic distinctiveness' such as switching to ingroup language, accentuating ethnic dialect and slang, etc. If despite the poor evaluation of Creole, it is used in literature, it must be as part of a

process whereby British Afro-Caribbean groups are comparing themselves with the dominant group and using language as a means of attempting to attain some cultural distinctiveness. Although psychological distinctiveness against a dominant group does not mean necessarily that an ethnic group has achieved a positive social identity, it may help a lot. In fact, Oakes and Turner proved that taking the opportunity of differentiation in an intergroup situation has as a consequence a more positive self-concept. The passage from the poem "A Stray from the Tribe", by the Barbadian Rudolph Kizerman, who settled in Britain in 1952, shows how ingroup speech can serve as a symbol of ethnic identity and cultural solidarity. It reminds the group about its cultural heritage, and transmits group feelings. The end of the poem demonstrates that, as Giles states, under conditions of ethnic threat, certain lexical terms emphasize and signal ingroup membership (Giles, Bourhis and Taylor, 1977: 307).

Every time I see that old-timer intellectual,
smooth, aloof and Black,
the cat, has lost something
and gained something
[...]

I remember the days
when this cat walked tall
with chunky volumes on Rousseau,
Kant
and the obligatory Greek
and Roman Empires.
From the wealth of his received
philosophical vocab',
he'd only find time to expatiate
on semantics,
dialectics,
somebody's empiricism
and on that universalist, Shakespeare.
Nat Turner,
Pushkin,
Harriet Tubman,
Sojurner Truth:
he had no place in his repertoire
for them!

[...]
Anyway,
now, he turned on
to familiar Black scenes;
he switches on
such hip jive
you'd hardly believe:
cool it,
swing it,
groove it,
dig it,
screw it,
knock it,
rip off,
pig,
motherfucker,
right on,
keep yer cool,
don't blow yer gig,
don't blow yer stack,
don't yer thing,
shit, baby!

Let the brother be;
the cat's just trying
to find his way
back to the tribe
on a new
word train.

(Rudolph Kizernam, "A Stray from the Tribe". In Berry, 1984: 126-129).

Giles proposes that people will accentuate their speech style, diverging from the outgroup, when (among other things) they perceive their own group's vitality to be high, and identify themselves subjectively and strongly as members of the group, and regard its status as changeable (Giles, 1987). When the poet Michael Smith in the passage quoted above stresses that the English and the Americans must take the trouble to learn some Creole, remarking the powerful appeal that the Caribbean peoples have for the Americans, he hints at the high West Indian vitality (or attraction). He makes thus clear that linguistic divergence, that is, differentiating psycho-

linguistically from the Americans and the Bristish, implies a political resistance to the oppression of the English-speaking group by making the British and the Americans see them on their own terms. This psychological distinctiveness might entail a more favourable social identity.

8. LINGUISTIC STRATEGIES OF SUBORDINATE GROUPS FOR POSITIVE PSYCHOLINGUISTIC IDENTITY: A) WHEN COGNITIVE ALTERNATIVES ARE NOT PERCEIVED

Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory claims that although subordinate groups derive a negative social identity from the existing intergroup situation, as in the case of Black British, they will not struggle for that change if they perceive that the situation is unchangeable and impossible to transform, or if they consider the intergroup relationship legitimate or just. In that case, members of subordinate groups, as individuals, may either compare their speech style with members of the ingroup rather than with members of the dominant group, or modify their speech style so as to be more like that of the dominant group's. It is interesting the fact that individuals who adopt linguistic strategies of social mobility are not always viewed favourably by members of their own group, and are often considered traitors.

A poem by Jimi Rand, "Is You", illustrates both an individual strategy of social mobility, and the contempt that the Black community feels towards this type of strategic lack of solidarity. Its author, a Barbadian playwright and poet who lives in London, sneers at these 'traitors' - *coloured*, as they are mocking and scornfully named-. He tells of the encounter with an old Caribean acquaintance of a Black West Indian immigrant who has changed his Caribbean name and adopted an English one. As the latter is with an English girl with *posh voice an money to burn, real middle class*, he feels obliged to pretend that he did not know him, uttering in Oxbridge accent, that is, **diverging** from the speech of his own community, as if he had a hot potato in his mouth that he was mistaken. The humorous effect is achieved precisely by the writer's ability to portray the insecure condition of those Black individuals who try to mark themselves off the Black community denying their membership in the Afro-Caribbean linguistic group, whose vitality they probably underscores, or whose status they may regard as 'serving them right':

Ah walk de street de odder day;
Ah hea a man bawl an shout,
is I name him atek liberty wid:
`Gubba, Gubba, Gub'. Him acall to I
so me stop in I track, wonderin who know me so.

Tis long, long time now me astop use dat name;
ever since Ah did come to Hingland from back home
Ah use a different handle,
just like de Hinglish people dem.
First, mister, den I two Christian name;
den I surname, den a dash, den I odder surname.
After dat I put I title, ESQ just like dat.
It does look good on a letter see.

So dis man him acome run-in up to I,
real hard foot, pantin' an out a bret,
breathin' fast fast.
`Gubba, Gubba, is you, is you!' him sey.
Grabbin' I by I hand, but me apull way
an pretend not fe know him.
`Awful sorry old chap, but I'm afraid you're somewhat mistaken'.
Me atell him in Hinglish voice:
not Cockney, but in Oxbridge accent,
like me had hot patato in I mout.
Ya see a does tek off de voices dem.

Well him adraw back an peer up in I face.
'Is you, is you', him sey. 'Me not forget notin:
me know you face anywhere.
Is thief I an you athief togedder wen we was back home.'
Well ya can imagine I consternation -
nice word dat eh?
Dere me was, dressed up fit fe kill
in I best Sunday go-to-meetin' suit. Only it was Wednesday.

An ah had dis gal wid I.
Hinglish gal dat, posh voice an money to burn,
real middle class.
[...]

(Jimi Rand, "Is You". In Berry, 1984: 106-07).

The poem also exemplifies the first individualistic strategy the theory mentions: members of a subordinate group may compare themselves with members of their own group, instead of with members of the dominant group, deriving from that comparison a more favourable personal identity. I am referring to the cynical insinuation about the Blacks who, out of jealousy, try to berate ("lowrate") those of their brothers "who are doing better than them" -that is how the member of the community who has adopted such individualistic strategy would perceive his own group's response:

[...]
Sa me hav fe tell she fe ignore he,
cause some black people dem so-jealous an ting-
hallways atry fee lowrate dem fela black man,
wen dem see ya doin' better dan dem.
[...]

(Jimi Rand, "Is You". In Berry, 1984: 108).

We can apply the same framework to the behaviour of the Black critics who underrate their brothers' use of standard English, those who accuse Black writers of disloyalty to Black culture or "whoring after foreign gods". The theory illuminates the attitude of both those writers who, as an individualistic strategy, make up their minds to succeed in the world of English literature, and those critics who, as a response to a situaton that they perceive as a sociolinguistic and cultural threat, demand that writers should act in terms of ethnic solidarity rather than conformity to societal norms, otherwise accusing them of being 'sold' to the Whites. I have witnessed James Berry's unjustified claims that it is because Walcott follows 'classical English tradition' that the white Establishment favours him.

9. LINGUISTIC STRATEGIES OF SUBORDINATE GROUPS FOR POSITIVE PSYCHOLINGUISTIC IDENTITY: B) WHEN COGNITIVE ALTERNATIVES ARE PERCEIVED

The four atrategies that, according to the theory, members of a group with a negative social identity who realize that the situation is unfair and/or unstable may adopt to attain a more positive social identity can be applied to Caribbean poets' stance on the language of their works; but they

can also be found, sometimes co-occurring, in the message of poems by British Afro-Caribbean authors which deal with the question of language.

The first strategy would be assimilation, which is the term to refer to a subordinate group taking on the characteristics of a dominant group to achieve equality with them, to become an accepted part of it. Total assimilation would imply the whole Afro-Caribbean British group using only standard English so as to write within the English literary tradition, and although there are good examples of West Indians who have succeeded doing this, some prefer to use Patois.

In order to understand why some British Black poets did not assimilate and still write in Creole, we must examine the White-Black intergroup situation in Britain. Large numbers of West Indians arrived in Britain during the 50's and 60's and accepted poorly paid jobs, conceiving the hope that their ambitions would be realized by their children. Twenty-five years later, the Commission for Racial Equality reported that most West Indian families lived in crowded, unmodernised conditions (CRE, 1977); also, they held low status positions, with earning substantially below those of other group of workers (Smith, 1976; 1977). By the 70's assimmilation began to be perceived as unsatisfactory because the expected integration with Whites did not occur. The second generation felt dissatisfied. They were young Blacks full of anger and frustration who knew they are likely to occupy the same low status position in British society as their parents. West Indian leaders called for assimilation to end because it had not brought about the expected integration with the White British. If assimmilation was not possible, then a re-assertion of their own identity against White society became imperative. That entailed a redefinition of the previous negative evaluation of their speech. They re-evaluated their language in a more positive direction, and evidenced pride in the maintenance of it. The use of Creole was a way to affirm their Caribbean identity against the wider community, the access to which was restricted for them. They no longer felt ashamed of Creole. The attempts at speaking like Whites were felt now as humiliating and rejected by the black community, as we saw in Jimi Rand's "Is You". Increasingly the language was used in public, which fostered group solidarity and cohesion further. For example, it has been reported that it is now not rare the cases of British-born Black youths who previously showed no evidence of black speech and have started to use Creole in adolesce against their parents' desire. As Desmond Johnson accurately expressed, from being 'broken talk', a submissive and meek langua-

ge, Patwa (or 'Yard Talk', which means for them "the language of Home", "the language of Jamaica") would finally succeed in bursting through and conquer:

[...]
mi words
like de stammer of sentences in de bottom
of some people's throat
yardtalkinglishintosubmission
till mi patt-wa bus tru an conquer
[...]

(Desmond Johnson, "Yard Talk" (1984).

"Talk, Talk: Nigger Talk Talk" , written by Jimi Rand, is a strong vindication of the speech of the Blacks which attempts to redefine the language of the group more positively, and where the word *nigger* acquires a very different connotation. Old self denigration is lost and the talk of the nigger is vindicated as located in the very depth of their hearts. It is not grammatical, does not contain *big words*, is not appropriate for *high up* occasions or important people, *liberals* or *coulouredl* people would not speak like that; but it is the speech of Black people:

Listen na, is me turn to talk now ya know
Ahna gwine hav ahna turn later.
So sit down and let me talk na.
Let we rap togedder.
All we gwine talk: talk nigger talk.
Me hope ya can understand I
Cause me no talk no London talk
Me no talk no Europe talk
Me talking black, nigger talk;
[...]
If ahna got soul
Ahna gwine listen.

If ya black, ya dig it.
If ya is a nigger
Ya gwine talk it
But if ya coloured, ah know ya don't wan it.

Fa is talk, talk, nigger talk:
Dat's wha I da talk
Cause de talk is togedder talk,
[...]
Na liberal talk
Na grammar talk
Na big word talk
Na high up talk:
People talk
Black people talk
Black, nigger people talk.
[...].

(Jimi Rand, "Talk, Talk: Nigger Talk Talk". In Berry, 1984: 112-14).

Creole constitutes a badge of group membership and an assertion of the difference from the surrounding British society while it accentuates solidarity among their members. According to this poem, people's linguistic behaviour is a more authentic reflection of their ethnic allegiance than the skin itself -"if you are black, you like and understand it; if you are a nigger, you will talk it; but if you are 'coloured', I know you don't want it". It is not surprising, as one cannot exert control over their skin, but one has a choice over their language (Giles, Bourhis and Taylor, 1977: 326). That is the reason why Afro-Caribbean ethnic identity finds its linguistic expression in loyalty to a language which symbolizes not only group membership but adherence to a set of values. If you use Creole, Jimi Rand seems to tell us, you commit yourself to the values of the Afro-Caribbean community. They apparently link values and language in the surprising way the British professor Le Page did: "One cannot really write like an Englishman without in some sense becoming an Englishman" (Le Page, 1969: 2), a very deterministic (and thus controversial) statement indeed!!.

The third strategy the theory puts forward for dominated groups is the search for new dimensions on which to compare themselves favourably with the dominant group. Rastafarians' compulsion to coin a new tongue is probably part of this process of creation, but it is not the only instance. Other British Blacks also use their creativity to establish a positive social identity by means of the use of speech rhythms of the Caribbean together with humour in their literary works. John Agard or James Berry are masters

on this - directly violating the Cooperative Principle of conversation (at least Grice's maxims of Quantity, Quality and probably Manner). In some of their poems we find a voice boasting of what he obviously is not and does not have (something not terribly appreciated by British White culture!). "It is an attack on deprivation, where people overdo what they do, a kind of compensation for what they don't have"[10]. The standard spelling employed in this particular poem must not lead us to read it as it were a poem in standard English; they are poems to be read aloud with the rhythms and pronunciation of a West Indian voice, otherwise we would misunderstand its tone and sense:

At a disco girls cluster and dance me in,
at a party everyone knows I don't take gin.
I walk in a room that's tangled with fight
I cool it, calm it, make things right-
shove a head back on where it came adrift;
shove an arm back on where it had left.
Kisses wash me for that ease in my tough;
gifts are piled on me though already I've enough.
Cos - I'm a social rover,
I overspend - I'm a goldcard lover,
but man, you know, rhythm's the thing
and girl, you know, I got the style that sings.
[...]

(James Berry, "Let Me Rap You My Orbital Map". 1988. Pp. 43-44.).

As a lot of poems addressed to the Caribbean youths in Britain it is composed to be recited (or rather, performed) in the ragged way reggae sounds, as if 'rapping' (or 'dubbing', as West Indians prefer to call it). But the term 'dub' poetry is more accurately referred to the type of reggae music whose lyrics deal with poverty, unemployment, rebellion, fights with the police, and everyday experience. Most of them are overtly political, as "Di Great Insohreckshan", written by Linton Kwesi Johnson, which tells the riots in the London district of Brixton in 1981, emphasizing the battles between Black youths and the police:

it woz in April nineteen eighty-wan
doun inna di ghetto af Brixtan
dat di babylan dem cause such a frickshan

an it bring about a great insohreckshan
an it spread all ovah di naeshan
it woz a truly an histarical okayjan
[...]

Often 'dub' poems, so characteristically Caribbean, constitute the fourth of the strategies of the theory: direct competition not engendering but engendered from British hostility and antagonism. As Tajfel acknowledges, comprehension of any particular instance requires placing these social psychological dynamics within a sociological context. If we look closely at the context of race relations in Britain from the 1960's, we shall realize that they reflect the struggles experienced to maintain the social identity of White and Black British. We can understand, for example, how the discriminatory Immigration Acts of 1962, 1968 and 1971 were the responses to "an intensification of precautions aimed at keeping the superior group in its position". As Husband states, "for much of the 1960's [...] the White population increasingly identified the Black population as a threat. Initially, the West Indian migrants felt themselves to be 'British'. [...] However, more recently, the White hostility has engendered a more direct and militant response from different sections of the Black community who have achieved new social identities through their experiences of this hostility" (Husband, 1977: 231-232). Their violent challenge is conveyed in their poetry as well. For example, the above poem continues:

it woz event af di year
an I wish i ad been dere
wen wi run riot all ovah Brixtan
wen wi mash-up plenty police van
wen wi mash-up di wicked wan plan
wen wi mash-up di swamp Eighty-wan
fi wha?
fi mek di rulah dem andahstan
dat wi naw tek noh more a dem oppreshan
[...]

(Linton Kwesi Johnson, "Di Great Insohreckshan". In Berry, 1984: 65).

10. CONCLUSIONS

Using Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory as a framework to understand the reasons, range and significance of poetry in Creole, I have tried to prove that it is the Black West Indian response to an unfair inter-group situation which has determined a negative social identity for them. This might account for the fact that it is in Britain, where West Indian dialect is a 'marked' choice, that their preference for Creole seems to be higher. The reaction to their experience as Blacks is in no way homogeneous. This diversity would explain why some poets seem to feel at ease writing in standard English, whereas others reject it.

As Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory suggests (Giles and Johnson, 1987), some of the poems in Creole express their authors' strong and subjective identification with a group which considers language an important symbol of their identity, a high perception of this group's vitality, and insecure social comparisons with the White British. The accentuation of their ethnic style is part of a process of comparison with the dominant group, which has as a consequence the adoption of strategies to assume a more positive social identity. When poets or literary critics have regarded their own group's status as changeable, a lot of poets have chosen not to use standard English, in spite of possessing a competence in it, and several critics have demanded from Caribbean writers an ethnic solidarity which would entail refusing to use standard English. In this way, more than as a mere defence mechanism or as a symbol of defiance, poets and critics have attempted to establish an alternative social identity by means of Creole.

The use of the language of their daily life by some Afro-Caribbean British writers may have some effect on the West Indies. The mere existence of some British literature in Creole is likely to have linguistic, literary, cultural and political implications, the major one probably its contribution to the legitimacy, dignification and normalization of Creole. A positive international reaction towards it would undoubtedly be an affirmation of their ethnic and national dignity after so many years of colonialism, "associated with the growth of national culture, and the development of receptivity and consciousness towards that culture" (Le Page, 1969: 1).Those British authors are paving the way for future Caribbean writers and helping to create a potential readership for a new literature in Creole which soon will come of age. Their work is contributing to model a literary language shaped by the mutual influence between dialect and standard; a language

which is proving to be a ductile and flexible instrument capable to express West Indian consciousness - the psyche of the former colonized man who rejects being mentally and linguistically colonized any longer.

A socio-psychological interpretation of Black British poetry in Patois helps to demonstrate that, as Gumperz claimed (1982: 7), social identity and ethnicity are in large part established and maintained through language, and that the parameters and boundaries within which we create our own ethnic and social identity are communicatively produced, also through literature.

NOTES

1. In sociolinguistic terms, they would move along the mesolect continuum.
2. The colonies adopted the literary values of the metropolis, where by definition Standard English is the dialect of English which is normally used in writing. The universal recognition of this function of standard English has resulted in a scarcity of other dialects in the literature in English. Due to the fact that from the sixteenth century, non-standard features were adopted to depict qualities such as simplicity or roughness (Leith, 1983: 41) when non-standard dialects appeared in literary works of the 17th, 18th, and even 19th centuries, they were used simply for the conversation of certain characters, mainly for comic and satiric purposes or to give rural flavour, while standard English was used for prose, poetry and for the dialogue of most characters.
3. Newspapers daily carry sections written in non-standard English which are invariably comic in nature, deriding customs, behaviour or politics and also giving the latest gossip. (Roberts, 1988: 144). For examples of scholarly texts in Creole, the essays by the Guyanese linguist Hubert Devonish may be consulted, e.g. Devonish, 1991: 594-95.
4. George Philip Krapp, in his much quoted paper "The Psychology of Dialect Writing" (1926), stated that as a general rule, «the more faithful a dialect is to folklore, the more completely it represents the actual speech of a group of people, the less effective it will be from the literary point of view.» (p. 523)
5. According to Ramchand (1970), "West Indian literature would seem to be the only substantial literature in which the dialect-speaking character is the central character [...]. This [...] reflects the more obvious new event -the centrality of the Black or Colored character".
6. Some poets though warned of the dangers of leaving the possibilities of a different mode unexplored, and advocated the testing of the whole range of voices, modes, personae, themes and territories (Markham, 1989: 194).
7. It has already been used to explain why low-prestige language varieties persist: Ellen Bouchard Ryan, "Why do low-prestige language varieties persist?". In H. Giles and R. N. St Clair (eds.), *Language and Social Psychology* (Baltimore: University Park Press, 1979), pp. 145-157.
8. H. Tajfel and J. C. Turner, "An integrative theory of intergroup conflict". In W. C. Austin and S. Worchel (eds.), *The Social Psychology of Inter-*

group Relations (Monterey: Brooks/ Cole, 1979), pp. 33-53. An excellent summary of their ideas can be found in H. Giles, R. Y. Bourhis and D. M. Taylor, "Towards a theory of language in ethnic group relations". In H. Giles (ed.), *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations* (London: Academic Press, 1977), pp. 307-348.

9. In the USA until the 1930 a frequent hypothesis put forward to account for Black American speech was that it was "the blind groping of minds too primitive in modes of speech beyond their capabilities" (M. Herskovits, *Suriname Folklore (Oxford: Oxford University Press)*. Quoted in Edwards, 1986: 7).

10. James Berry reading his poems at the University of Alcalá de Henares, 26 February 1993.

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