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# **Speakin' and Spokin' in Jamaica: Conflict and Consensus in Sociolinguistics**

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## **1. Introduction: Language as Commodity**

Given the material and social rewards attached to speaking standard language, why do some speakers prefer non-standard varieties? One explanation sees the standard as a commodity (Gal 1989). Although the supply of symbolic resources is not limited in the same ways that material ones are-- one can easily imagine all speakers in a community using the standard-- access to standard language is controlled by institutions like schools (Bourdieu 1977), so that some speakers are not permitted to learn the standard even if they want to speak it.

This control enhances the value of elite varieties, which become defined as standard. Since speakers may claim to value one variety yet behave as if they value another, responses vary when access to the standard is limited. Speakers may all agree that the standard is valuable and aspire to speak it-- this has come to be called the **consensus model** of a speech community. **Conflict models**, on the other hand, have been used to describe an array of cases in which non-elite speakers value their own variety more than the standard (Rickford 1986a, b).

The choice between consensus and conflict models of the speech community reflects the analyst's orientation to different models of the social world. Consensus is linked with Parsonian structural-functionalist models (Rickford 1986, Williams 1992.) Conflict is linked with Marxist and neo-Marxist social theories, like those of Bourdieu, Dahrendorf, and Gramsci.

## **2. Sociolinguistic Models: Consensus and Conflict**

William Labov's (1966) study of New York City exemplifies the consensus model of speech communities. Labov (1966:5) argues that because New Yorkers are similar in their evaluations of language use, and their patterns of shifting between formal and informal speech styles, they constitute a single speech community even though the speech they produce is quite diverse.

John Rickford (1986a,b) and Kathryn Woolard (1985) have focused attention on disagreements between speakers' evaluations and their actual behavior. While Labov asked New Yorkers to rate speech varieties according to the most statusful job such a speaker could hold, Rickford and Woolard further investigated the degree of solidarity subjects felt with speakers, and portrayed speech communities in more conflictual terms.

Rickford and Woolard also differ from Labov, however, in explaining agreement on linguistic norms. Rickford's (1979, 1986) work on Guyanese Creole in the village of Cane Walk investigates both evaluative norms and language use. The principal social classes in Cane Walk are Estate (plantation workers) and Non-Estate (petty bourgeois). He describes speech acts and attitudes illustrating both consensus and conflict ("concord and contrast"):

**Table 1: Speech Norms and Speech Use in Cane Walk, Guyana**

Consensus	Shared use/interpretation of <i>Rowing</i> (public verbal disagreement)
	Agreement on association of speech styles with certain occupations (status measure)
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Conflict	<i>Talkin' Nansi</i> (telling African-derived folktales-- done by Estate Class only)
	Disagreement on which speech styles are most likely to be used by those they would label "friends" (solidarity measure)

Given such differences in ways of speaking within a small village, Rickford concludes that the defining characteristic of a speech community cannot be consensus on the value of speech: even small speech communities may have internally contrasting patterns of language use/evaluation.

Woolard (1985) considers language norms in Barcelona. Castilian is the main language of school instruction, mass media and government. Yet Catalan speakers were rated higher on both status and solidarity measures, by both Catalans and Castilians. Woolard explains this surprising result (1985:743):

"no linguistic market is ever so integrated that there are not private markets where the vernacular can be used, and where standards are relaxed".

For Woolard, unlike Rickford, it is not conflict which must be explained (by reference, e.g., to social and economic history). Instead, as for Bourdieu and other reproduction theorists, consensus requires explanation: Why do speakers hold norms which devalue their own preferred language?

Woolard argues that such norms result from linguistic hegemony, "the legitimation of the cultural authority of the dominant group" (1985: 739). She takes the positive evaluation of Catalan (the non-official language in Barcelona), or urban vernaculars in many Western cities, as evidence that non-elite speakers actively contest standard norms (see Trudgill 1974 on covert prestige).

### 3. Speaky-Spoky: An Overview

We now turn to a phenomenon in Jamaican speech which raises new questions about how consensus and conflict are expressed in language use. This section describes a mode of talk known to speakers of Jamaican Patwa (an English-related Caribbean Creole) as Speaky-Spoky, or Speakin' and Spokin'. The data for our account were gathered by Patrick in 1989-90. During a year's fieldwork in a mixed-class neighborhood of East Kingston, he recorded 150 hours of sociolinguistic interviews, language questionnaires, tests, group sessions and spontaneous discussions with 60 speakers (Patrick 1992).

To label another Jamaican's talk as "Speaky-Spoky" is to challenge its social appropriateness, to claim that the speaker is using (Standard Jamaican) English when they should be using Patwa-- and to ridicule them. At first glance, therefore, it seems a straightforward example of Patwa speakers contesting standard language norms by castigating other Patwa speakers for valuing and using the standard. But Speaky-Spoky often implies two other claims:

(i) the speaker is laying linguistic claim to a social status higher than they deserve (they "pass their place", as Jamaicans say); and

(ii) the speaker is disqualified from the desired higher status because their very talk is not "English" enough (i.e., it contains "mistakes").

We argue that the picture of Patwa speakers challenging the hegemony of standard language oversimplifies language allegiance, evaluation and use in Jamaica. Though Speakin' and Spokin' is possible only for speakers who primarily use Patwa, we believe the negative evaluation of this mode of talk is NOT always best understood as a clash between lower-class and higher-class speakers-- in fact, such conflict also occurs among speakers of the same class.

### 4. Speaky-Spoky as Linguistic Hyper-correction

Speaky-Spoky is a type of qualitative hyper-correction. In a recent discussion, Janda and Auger (1992) distinguish qualitative hyper-correction from its quantitative counterpart. Qualitative hyper-correction refers to a phenomenon known to scholars of historical linguistics and dialectology since the early 19th century. It occurs when non-elite speakers generalize a prestigious linguistic form to inappropriate environments, producing utterances which the grammar of the elite would not generate-- for example, in American English, *WHOM did you say is calling?*

Quantitative hyper-correction, in contrast, is exemplified in Labov's (1966) classic description of the stratification of post-vocalic (r) production in

New York City, where lower-middle class speakers used a significantly and unexpectedly greater frequency of consonantal (r)-- the prestige variant-- in their most formal speech styles than the social class above them.

Jamaican Patwa differs from the relevant metropolitan varieties-- North American, British or Jamaican Standard Englishes-- in several ways that are exploited in modelling Speaky-Spoky. Two linguistic features characterizing Speaky-Spoky are syllable-initial /#h/ and the back round lax vowel /ɔ/.

Jamaican Patwa has in its phoneme inventory no mid- or low-back rounded vowel corresponding to /ɔ/ (see Patrick 1992). The relevant word-classes here are known as Short-O, Long Open-O, and O-(before-)R; or in Wells' (1982) exemplifying labels, the *Lot*, *Thought* and *North* word-classes. Also absent is initial velar fricative /h/, which does not occur in Patwa words or morphemes whose metropolitan counterparts do have it : thus Patwa *Hat*, *Heart*, *Hit* and *Hold* are homophonous with *At*, *Art*, *It*, *Old*.

However, Jamaicans realize that these sounds occur regularly in more prestigious standard varieties. If Speaky-Spoky is an attempt to claim the social status which normally accompanies standard speech in Jamaica, the linguistic path towards this goal involves incorporating these prestigious /ɔ/ and initial /#h-/ sounds into one's speech. The difficulty for speakers is in systematically placing these features in the precise linguistic environments where they occur in the metropolitan varieties. When a prestigious sound occurs in places where standard speakers would not natively use it, it is an instance of qualitative hyper-correction.

## 5. Initial /#h-/ Insertion

Consider initial /#h-/. The Patwa norm is /#h-/ Absence as in (1), while the typical Speaky-Spoky pattern is /#h-/ Insertion as in (2):

(1) /oot a di oos/ "out of the House"  
/put im ed pan i han/ "put Him Head upon He Han"

(2) /hoot pan di ruod/ " \_ out on the road"  
/hop a di yaad/ " \_ up at the yard"

(/#h-/ also occasionally occurs as a purely emphatic marker in words of extra-heavy lexical stress, which is possible in Jamaican Patwa precisely because /h/ lacks phonemic status). /#h-/ Insertion is a well-known feature of upwardly mobile speakers; it crops up in many Jamaican jokes, including one about a student/teacher interaction. The student's line always involves salient /#h-/ Absence; the teacher's response, however, is invariably /#h-/ Inserting:

(3) Hemphasize you Haitches, you Hignorant Hass!

Among Patwa speakers /#h-/ Absence and -Insertion frequently co-occur in the same breath. This is not surprising inasmuch as Speaky-Spoky is not a separate code but an overlay of particular highly-salient features, including /#h-/ Insertion, upon the speaker's native Patwa, which includes /#h-/ Absence. The excerpt in (5) was recorded from Opal (a young working-class woman in Kingston, a high school graduate, and like most Jamaicans a native Patwa speaker). Asked to read the printed sentence (4), she produced it as (5):

(4) Half-hour to Christmas dinner, Henry, and you eat off the whole ham already? Lord help me!

(5) half hour to Christmas dinner, Henry, and you Heat off the wHole ham already? Lord Help me!

(An underline indicates /#h-/ Absence, the capital H indicates /#h-/ presence, and H indicates /#h-/ Insertion). The reading passage is a classic example mixing all three patterns: /#h-/ Absence in *half*, *Henry*, *ham*; hyper-correct Insertion in *eat*; and the standard initial vowel in *hour* and initial /#h-/ in *whole*, *help*. Since reading is a formally learned behavior based on a non-native dialect (Standard Jamaican), this performance parallels the hypercorrection that occurs in Speaky-Spoky.

Consider now the incidence of /#h-/ Absence and /#h-/ Insertion in one-hour segments of informal interviews recorded with two elderly Kingston residents. Tamas, 70, is a retired shoemaker, factory worker, and agricultural laborer who completed the 3rd grade before leaving school. Rose, 82, is a former head nurse of the island's largest public hospital, who completed secondary school and technical training and is a long-established member of the urban middle- class. As they contrast in material indicators of socio-economic status (housing type and repair, dress, residence), as well as occupation and education, so they contrast in their frequencies of /#h-/ Insertion and Absence:

(6)	Tamas	Rose
(h)-Absence	222/331 67%	138/388 36%
(h)-Insertion	61 cases/hour	10 cases/hour

Hyper-correction in the context of such informal interviews complements the reading-passage data and reflects a broader tendency to shift towards features of the standard language, of which Speaky-Spoky is one manifestation.

## 6. Vowel Substitution with /ɔ/

Jamaican Patwa lacks the rounded back vowel /ɔ/ entirely, and always has a low central vowel /a/ where standard varieties would have /ɔ/. We can clearly see this lack of a front/back, unround/round distinction of /a/ and /ɔ/ in Figure 1, which charts a subset of Tamas's vowel system in acoustic space.

The first and second formant reversed scales closely mimic conventional triangular plots of vowel space. The chart (from Patrick 1992) contrasts the vowel formants for Tamas in all the historically A-words (eg *Cat*, *Calm*, *Cart*, represented here with solid triangles) with their O-word counterparts (such as *Cot*, *Caught*, *Cord*, represented here with empty squares).

In Standard Englishes these word-classes may comprise four different phonemes: /æ/, /a/, /ɑ/ (unrounded low back) and /ɔ/ (rounded mid or low back). But lower mesolectal Patwa speakers like Tamas lack the low front /æ/ and back round /ɔ/ phonetic variants entirely, assigning all word-classes to one phoneme: low central /a/. Thus *Cat*, *Cot*, *Cart*, *Calm*, *Caught* are realized /kat/, /kat/, /ka:t/, /ka:m/ and /ka:t/ with only a length distinction among the vowels. (Jamaican Patwa is non-rhotic in this environment.)

There is no regular rounding or backing difference among the A- and O-word classes for Tamas: the two overlap heavily, and there is little basis here for calling them distinct. In contrast, Rose in Figure 2 shows essentially no overlap; the clear separation in F1/F2 space at 1400 Hz is evidence for the kind of phonetic distinctness in production that must underlie a system-level phonemic distinction, such as exists in standard varieties.

But to speak as the metropolitan speakers do, it is not enough simply to have a distinct acoustic target for /ɔ/: the problem is knowing which words to use it in. A clear example of this comes from a dramatic skit Patrick observed in Kingston in 1989. A working-class Jamaican man leaves his girlfriend Madge (/madj/, with a low central vowel ) to go to New York City. He returns laden with metropolitan symbols-- a Yankees cap, a fancy boombox, an expensive track suit-- and bearing a linguistic symbol of prestige. He now repeatedly calls his girlfriend /mɔdj/, to her bewilderment and the audience's delight.

Never mind that the actual North American pronunciation of this name uses the much *fronter* vowel /æ/, even raising up to /Iə/ in /mIədj/ for many New Yorkers. What the actor, the audience and Madge herself responded to was the prestigious sound /ɔ/-- even though its placement in that environment marks it as hyper-correction, and a clear case of Speaky-Spoky.

The quote in (7) from a formal language-attitudes interview illustrates these Speaky-Spoky features (hypercorrection is again indicated by \_H\_, \_O\_). Opal was asked to describe situations in which "proper English" is appropriate:

- (7) You are in /\_H\_in/ a business place.. speaking to somebody, or you are making a complaint /k\_O\_mpleynt/ to a particular /p\_O\_rtikyula/ teacher or principal... or you are in /\_H\_in/ a conference /k\_O\_nfrens/.

Fig. 1 : Tamas, A-words vs. O-words

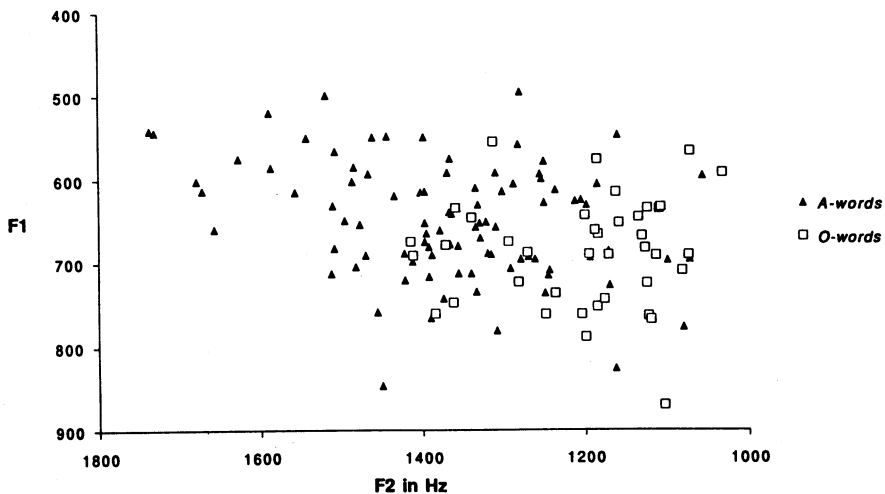
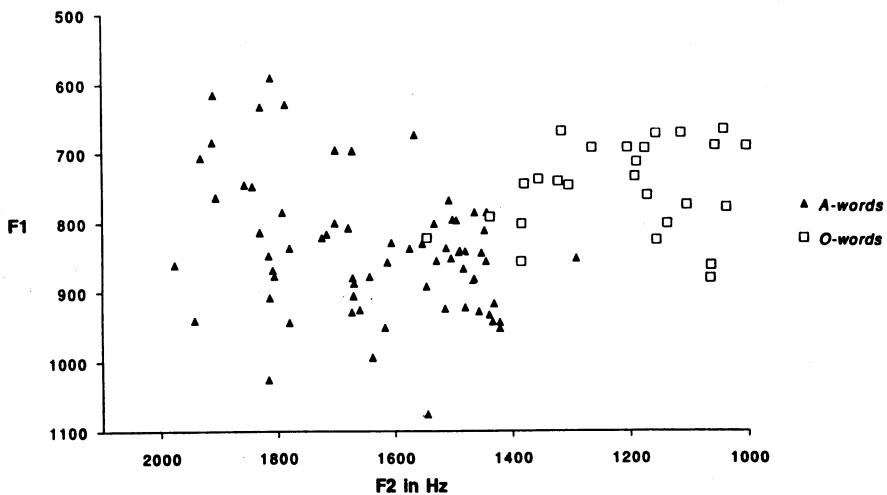


Fig. 2 : Rose, A-words vs. O-words



Yet the use of hyper-correct /#h-/ and /ɔ/ is neither necessary nor sufficient to evoke the label of Speaky-Spoky. Rose, above, showed 10 tokens of /#h-/ Insertion in an hour; but as a woman who has long since achieved a recognized high status, she would probably not ever be labelled as Speakin' and Spokin'. When asked directly to define Speaky-Spoky talk, Patrick's subjects could not agree among themselves whether it implied "mistakes" or incorrect English structures. Many insisted that perfectly correct English could be labeled Speaky-Spoky if the social criterion applied: the intention to present oneself as a standard speaker. Opal again illustrates this in the language-attitudes interview:

- (8) Patrick: Suppose you can speak quite well, and you don't make any mistakes: is [it] still speaky-spoky?  
 Opal: Yeh, they still call you Speaky-Spoky, it depends on who... the person is.

Hyper-correction, then, is neither a sufficient nor a necessary criterion for Speaky-Spoky. Though it has a characteristic linguistic shape, the phenomenon is primarily socially constituted. Let us take a closer look at the social criteria for using Speaky-Spoky which distinguish it from ordinary hyper-correction.

## 7. Social Description of Speaky-Spoky

We have identified Speaky-Spoky talk as laying claim to a higher social status than the speaker's normal Patwa implies. In colonial days, the highest social status in Jamaica was claimed by the British and Anglophile white ruling-class, native speakers of a foreign metropolitan variety. Differential access to the standard has long been a feature of Jamaican social life, and is closely associated with the rise of the middle-class and the expansion of education. Education is crucial to the acquisition of social status and prestige, and the appropriate use of standard language is both an unambiguous symbol of that achievement and a prerequisite to further advancement.

But the degree of education necessary for a Patwa speaker to acquire Standard English as a non-native variety is far from universally available; consequently, though the standard's symbolic value is recognized by all, competence in its grammatical structure is stratified by socio-economic status.

In contrast, all the Jamaican speakers surveyed in Patrick (1992) not only recognized Patwa patterns, but showed great consistency when asked to produce examples of them-- what Rickford has called concord of Patwa norms and use. Patwa, the non-prestige vernacular, is nevertheless a shared linguistic base for most Jamaicans-- the language of everyday life, friends and family, local community and indeed of national identity-- which marks the Jamaican situation off from the familiar opposition of regional dialect vs. national standard.

Jamaicans whose competence in the standard is similarly incomplete, like many working-class residents of Kingston, nevertheless often take part in situations where the value of prestige speech is invoked for social ends. For example, at a youth-club meeting a speaker, Roasta, was charged by a leading club member (the cricket team Manager) with speaking English badly.

Roasta began his reply in mock-parliamentary English ("With your permission, Mr. President, I would like to address this charge..") and then completed his rejoinder in very down-to-earth Patwa. The audience's sentiments were originally with Manager, but Roasta's ability to command both Patwa and Standard English forms at strategic moments won them over, marking him as not only a skillful speaker but one who has not abandoned the "local-team" norms and values (Blom & Gumperz 1972) embodied in the Patwa.

Since the benefits and opportunities to which the standard is linked are valuable and limited, people of the same class and community compete for them. Such claims and invocations are frequently contested. The charge of Speaky-Spoky is a powerful way to expose a community member's ambitions--to brand them a social climber, opportunist or betrayer of local values.

Patwa speakers do sometimes use Speaky-Spoky to perceived elites. In this literary example, Miss Clemmie is described as using "her best speaky-spoky voice" to a white American visitor (from *Ascot* in Senior 1986):

- (9) Yes'm, Hascot is de Heldes' but is not de same fader.  
"Yes'm, Ascot is the eldest, but he doesn't have the same father."

(Note the /#h-/ Insertion in *Ascot, eldest*.) Frequently, however, speakers use Speaky-Spoky talk in interaction with others of a similar social level. Below Miss Myrtella, an elderly Jamaican woman who has travelled abroad, talks Speaky-Spoky to her distant cousin Horace, in the course of an ultimately successful courtship. Example (10), from *Real Old-time Ting* in Senior (1986), shows both /#h-/ Insertion (in *oh, it is, awful, a woman, all alone*) and hyper-correct low-back rounded vowels (in *I, what, alone*):

- (10) "Ho, Cousin Orris", she call out. "Oi don't know wot to do hit his so howful to be ha woman holl holone hin this worl."

Speaky-Spoky is often negatively evaluated (Senior 1986:57ff; emphasis added):

- (11) "Miss Myrtella... **talk in a little-little voice** like she caan mash ants... <They> used to laugh at Myrtella for.. her **foreign ways and the way she talk funny**... Patricia always there passing word about Myrtella... How she don't have no class. How **she can't speak properly**... [But people] getting to love Miss Myrtella for once you get used to her **speaky-spoky ways** you find out she have a heart of gold inside."

Unlike *Talking Nansi* in Cane Walk, *Speaky-Spoky* is not simply a case where one social group, identifiable by class or ethnicity, employs a unique code. Though *Speaky-Spoky* is associated with lower mesolectal speakers--acrolectal and upper mesolectal creole speakers are more often seen as appropriately using Standard Jamaican English, and not making linguistic errors in its use-- it is not associated with all such speakers at all times. There is certainly conflict, but it is not always conflict **between** social groups: it is often among comparable members of the **same** group.

For it is not actually Standard English as a code that is being used to claim benefits. *Speaky-Spoky* talk manipulates a few highly salient, prestigious sociolinguistic variables, rather than an entire grammatical system; it is widely available to Patwa speakers, whatever their command of the standard. What is necessary is that the **intention** to speak "proper English" be made visible; the substitution of /ɔ/ and insertion of initial /#h-/ are clear signals of that.

Because someone who challenges talk as *Speaky-Spoky* is in part objecting to perceived errors in Standard English, labelling talk *Speaky-Spoky* can be seen as policing Standard language norms. But since the challenger may also be objecting to the speaker distancing themselves from the Patwa, the *Speaky-Spoky* label can also be used to enforce "local-team" Patwa language values.

The respect generally accorded to "proper English" motivates individual speakers to employ *Speaky-Spoky* to claim higher social status. The positive values widely (if covertly) associated with Patwa allow the community to unite in ridiculing *Speaky-Spoky* and opposing such strategies. In these shared evaluations, we see something akin to consensus across the Jamaican speech community.

"Proper English" and the Patwa are in constant conflict, yet both are part of culturally available discourses; either position may be invoked in any given verbal interaction, by any speaker. This linguistic conflict in Jamaica makes available to core Patwa speakers a variety of resources: they can define themselves against one another by their choice of linguistic variety, claiming different kinds of social status, appealing to contrasting norms, and asserting distinct positionings at strategic moments of conflict.

*Speaky-Spoky* as a mode of talk is only partially constrained by the unequal allocation of economic and educational resources that underpins the neo-Marxist analyses of both Rickford and Woolard (see the latter's use of the concept of hegemony). It allows Jamaicans to construct identities *among* fellow group members by drawing on symbolic resources of *between*-group conflict that are generally available. *Speaky-Spoky* simultaneously resists and constructs the authority of the standard, by using linguistic resources drawn from the standard in non-standard ways, and thus further enriches our understanding of how social conflict and collaboration are expressed in language.

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