

Handout # 5

It should be noted that the most important characteristic of the pronouns of Caribbean Creole languages is that they tend not to change form, irrespective of whether they are the subject, object or possessive. This is quite different from the European languages like English, French, Spanish and Portuguese from which they took most of their vocabulary. Using technical terminology, one could say that Caribbean Creole languages do not inflect their personal pronouns for case, i.e. change their form according to the function they perform in the sentence. It is purely their position in the sentence, e.g. *im tel mi* 'he told me' rather than *mi tel im* 'I told him', which tells us whether *im* or *mi* is the subject or object of the sentence.

Nouns

A Grammar of Caribbean Creole Nouns

A generic noun is one which we see as representing the whole of a class or category. In English, generic nouns are usually marked by the plural marker '-s' as in the sentence. This can be seen by the examples under 'Generic' below. In the Creole examples below it, the whole category 'boy', without any reference to a specific boy or boys, is considered to have carried out the act. As can be seen by the examples, In Caribbean Creole languages, the generic involves the bare noun with no additions whatsoever.

When one wishes to refer to a single member of a group or class, without being specific about which member of the class, i.e. any member would do, English would use 'a(n)' as in the English example under the Indefinite (Sing.) column. The Creole equivalent is to place before the noun a word which means the number 'one'.

In the column showing Indefinite (Plur.) more than one member of a class but as in the singular, the members are not specified, i.e. the two boys in the examples below could be any two boys out of the entire class of boys. English, in addition to having the noun preceded by the numeral 'two', also marks the noun with the plural marker '-s'. In the Creole examples, however, since the nouns continue to non-specific, whether it be any boy or boys, as in the generic column, a boy as in the indefinite singular column or two boys as in the indefinite plural column,

In the definite singular column, two of the Creoles, Jamaican Creole and Papiamentu, have the definite article, *di* and *e* respectively, come before the noun. Haitian Creole, like all the French Creoles in the Caribbean region, has the definite article, *a*, following the noun.

When one wishes to refer to more than one specific known members of a class, as can be seen in the Definite (Plur) column, these are represented by the noun being preceded by a

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speak English feel naked about not having a good English form equivalent to *unu* or *alyu*. They respond by either going for the 'You guys' option, or formulations such as 'You lot', 'You all', 'You people', etc.

Jamaican Creole
Personal Pronouns

	1 st Pers.	(Singular)			(Plural)			
		2 nd Pers.	3 rd Pers.		1 st Pers.	2 nd Pers.	3 rd Pers.	
			Masc.	Fem.	N.			
Subj.	mi	yu	im/am	im/am	i	wi	unu	dem
Obj.	mi	yu	im/am	im	i	wi	unu	dem
Poss.	(fi) mi	(fi) yu	(fi) im	(fi) im	-	(fi) wi	(fi) unu	(fi) dem

The second person plural pronoun *unu*, is the Igbo item for 'you (plural)'. Igbo is a West African language, a member of the Kwa sub-family of languages, and is spoken in mainly in southern Nigeria, in the area around the Niger River delta.

For the first and second person plurals, there is a lot of variation across English-lexicon Creoles. Bajan, has *wuna* for 'you (plural)' and Bahamian has *yena*. The English-lexicon Creoles of Guyana as well as those of the Leeward and Windward Islands have *awi* or *alwi* for 'we, us, our'. These same Creoles have *ayu* or *alyu* for 'you (plural)'.

Haitian (French Lexicon) Creole
Personal Pronouns

	1 st Pers.	(Singular)			(Plural)			
		2 nd Pers.	3 rd Pers.		1 st Pers.	2 nd Pers.	3 rd Pers.	
			Masc.	Fem.	N.			
Subj.	mwen	u	li	li	li	nu	nu	yo
Obj.	mwen	u	li	li	li	nou	nou	yo
Poss.	mwen	u	li	li	li	nou	nou	yo

Papiamentu (Spanish-Portuguese Lexicon Creole)
Personal Pronouns

	1 st Pers.	(Singular)			(Plural)			
		2 nd Pers.	3 rd Pers.		1 st Pers.	2 nd Pers.	3 rd Pers.	
			Masc.	Fem.	N.			
Subj.	mi	yu	e(le)	e(le)	e(le)	nos	boso	nang
Obj.	mi	yu	e(le)	e(le)	e(le)	nos	boso	nang
Poss.	mi	bo	su	su	su	nos	boso	nang

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child. It is not my brother nor my sister. Then who is it?' Without a moment's hesitation, Blair answer, 'It must be me, of course.' Bush travels back to the US and calls in Donald Rumsfeld and asks him, 'My mother and father have a child. It is not my brother nor my sister. Then who is it?'. Rumsfeld replies, 'Mr President, I'll get back to you on that.' Rumsfeld calls a meeting of his advisors and asks them the same question. Everybody is puzzled. Rumsfeld goes to the toilet and recognises Colin Powell's shoes in the cubicle next to him. He calls out, 'Colin! My mother and father have a child. It is not my brother nor my sister. Then who is it?' Powell replies, 'Easy. Me, of course.' Rumsfeld rushes out and heads for the White House. He informs Bush that he has the answer. Bush asks, 'Who is it?' Rumsfeld answers, 'Colin Powell.' Bush replies, 'Donald, don't be stupid. The answer is Tony Blair.'

The hook behind the story is the supposed inability of the US political hierarchy to interpret the shifting meaning of 'Me.' The appropriate answer is, of course, 'Me,' whoever the question is asked to. The two characters being mocked conclude that the answer is either Colin Powell or Tony Blair, the two persons who answered 'Me'. The fact that this pronoun represents any person who uses it, hence the two absurd conclusions arrived at by the persons who are the butt of the joke.

All language begins with the speaker. When the speaker X says 'I', that 'I' refers to speaker X. When the hearer, Y, starts to speak and uses the form 'I', this 'I' refers to Y, not to X. In turn, when speaker X says 'you', it is Y that is being referred to. However, when speaker Y says 'you', it is X that is being spoken of. When you hear someone saying, 'I', you can only interpret who the 'I' is if you know who the speaker is. That explains our annoyance when, on answering the phone, we hear the person at the other end saying 'It is me' and you say to yourself 'Damned fool! Me who?', as you are scraping your brains trying to guess from the voice, who it might be. Apart from the pronouns used to represent the speaker and the addressee, there are pronouns used to represent someone or something the speaker and hearer knows about, but who is not participating in the conversation. Personal pronouns are used to refer to the various participants in a discourse, as well as non-participants. The non-participants, in English, are represented by the pronouns 'he', 'she' and 'it'.

Caribbean Creole Pronouns

Of course, we could pluralise the pronouns. If we want to refer to the speaker and at least one other, the form 'we' is used. And if one wishes to refer to the hearer and at least one other, in English, one normally uses 'you' again. 'You' is ambiguous for whether it refers to the hearer alone or whether it includes the hearer and others. This accounts for the need in very trendy varieties of colloquial English to use a phrase like 'You guys' to represent the hearer and others. Where one wishes to represent more than one person or thing not participating in the discourse but known to the participants, we get 'they' in English. Generally, most speakers of an English-lexicon Caribbean Creole who also