Jamaican English - Patois

With English being the language of the government and used in education and media, makes it the present official language of Jamaica. But that is more so used for professional environments.

A more casual way of communicating, in day to day life is Jamaican creole, that is also called patois (or patwah). Patois is an english based creole language. It has gained its popularity through music, like reggae and dancehall. It has its origin in the english the slaves that were abducted from West Africa used when they came to jamaica. It was born out of colonialism, war, trade, slavery and the plantation system. Patois was first only a pilgrim language between the enslaved Africans and then later on developed into an english-based creole language.

The majority of this creole language has its roots in english, but it is also mixed with some West African languages, some Spanish and even hindi. For example ganja, which is Hindi for marijuana.

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Vocabulary

Examples of how english words are changed in patois:

- Dung-down
- Cyaan-can’t
- Aks-ask
- Deh-there
- Fi-for, to and ought(could have several meanings)

History

Jamaica is an island country situated in the caribbean Sea, southeast of the United states.

Before the european colonization of (what’s now called)Jamaica, was claimed by the natives, known as the Taino people (or the Arawak people).
They were enslaved by the Spanish and nearly extinct by 1600, partly by all the diseases that the Europeans brought with them. The Spanish also enslaved hundreds of West Africans and
transported them to the island. The English invaded the Spanish colonists in 1665, and defeated them. The enslaved Africans seized the moment of the political commotion and fled to the island's interior and formed independent communities, now known as the Maroons. Jamaica continued to serve as a British state for 307 years, until it finally reached independence from the UK in 1962.

Sociolinguistics

Jamaican patois is partly known for its musical swing, and rhythm to the word. A sociolect in Jamaican creole, that originally is a reaction to patois (that is the residue of “slave mentality”), is the new words of the rastafarian believers. For example, “overstand” instead of “understand. And the many I-words, for example i-man, i and i, i-dren and rastafar-i. The rastafaris even took African words (mostly Ethiopian words) that were originally not in the Jamaican creole language, patois (which was the result of colonialism, trade and slavery), like “yin” and “mas”.

References

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