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MAKING SENSE OF THE NOISY

Abstract:

Language ideologies that are intended to rationalize experiences of social injustice and linguistic inequality in the postcolony reflect notions of ruination, noise and silence. They are no simple metalinguistic statements, but performative and multimodal ways of expressing experiences of entanglement between Self and Other. In this essay, we take a look at language ideology and ideologized language practice in Jamaica, where we consider noise in tourism spaces, silences in waiting rooms, and the ways in which literacies reflect ideological concepts in a post-colonial setting. Rather than coming up with some kind of final analysis that explains away all the disruptions and inconsistencies of every-day life practices, we opt for an impressionistic, sometimes naive way of looking at ideological constructs of language, in order to make transparent our limited and subjective take on it, and the possibility of other voices.

Keywords:

postcolony ♦ noise ♦ silence ♦ literacy ♦ tourism ♦ language

1 Ideologies of Nothingness

...
*and the Arawak
 who leaves not the lightest fern-trace
 of his fossil to be cultured
 by black rock,*

*but only the rusting cries
 of a rainbird, like a hoarse
 warrior summoning his race
 from vaporous air
 between this mountain ridge
 and the vague sea
 where the lost exodus
 of corials sunk without trace –*

There is too much nothing here.

DEREK WALCOTT, Air.

There are no words left of all those that have disappeared in the tropical forests of Derek Walcott's poem, but a "shell-like noise which roars like silence, or ocean's surplined choirs," and then – most of all – nothing. The sheer absence of human voices is quite powerful here, we think. Derek Walcott's text is a reflexion of the Caribbean rain forest as an ahistorical space. This forest, as an emblematic concept of the tropics, seems to devour all culture and people: "there is no evidence of culture or creation in the Caribbean landscape and in the poem there are certainly 'no people'," as Ben Jefferson (2012: 6) observes. History therefore is presented as not being audible and not being visible; there is only silence, a huge void, which turns everything into ruins and nothingness. Walcott refers to a major stereotype of the 'tropics' in its colonial afterlife: the void is not simply a consequence of the violent past, but a characteristic and yet ambiguous feature of imperial debris and postcolonial ruination (Gordillo 2013). It clearly refers to the ruinous effects the tropical climate is supposed to have on all traces of past – colonial – activity, but at the same time reflects the invisibility of those who were subjugated and silenced. Walcott plays with the different meanings

enshrined in the tropical void – dissolving (White, Northern) ‘civilization’, hiding older pasts, negating ongoing ruination in a postcolonial world. In “Air,” as in many of his poems, he mimetically uses colonial motifs and thereby makes the effects of colonialism tangible: “Walcott only seems able to discuss an ‘empty’ landscape in the language of colonisation. If there truly is ‘nothing’ there, the poet knows where to assign the blame” (Jefferson 2012: 7).

It has frequently been observed, in various contributions on the colonial contexts of linguistics (e.g., Errington 2008; Irvine 2008; Makoni & Pennycook 2007) that European or Northern ideologies of language as separate object and fixed structure largely contributed to ‘unmaking’ language, in order to reinvent it as ‘mother tongue’, written and standardized (Bonfiglio 2010). Turning the gaze to the ‘unmaking’ rather than the ‘reinventing’ helps to actually make sense of the “noise which roars like silence“, we claim. The impact of Northern language ideologies on previously colonized societies has not simply resulted in replacing pre-existing ‘indigenous’ language ideologies and communicative practice. “The hegemony of metropolitan knowledge does not obliterate all others”, the Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell observes: “Alternative ways of thinking about the world certainly persist. But they are readily marginalised, as African discussions of indigenous knowledge have shown – intellectually discredited, dropped from the curricula of schools and universities, or ripped off by corporations pursuing intellectual property rights” (Raewyn Connell 2007: xi). Therefore, the “too much“ of “nothing“ in Walcott’s poem reveals a rather unsettling semiotic layer of the reading of the tropics as ‘void’: there is a space here in which the debris of the colonial remains present, as nothing piled on nothing. Even though Southern knowledges continue to exist, they are continuously turned, through their ongoing exclusion from authorized discourses and powerful institutions, into debris: they are nothing but colonial outfall.

Ann Laura Stoler, referring to Walcott as well, calls this “the rot [that] remains” (2013: 1 ff.). She encourages us “to ask how empire’s ruins contour and carve through the psychic and material space in which people live and what compounded layers of imperial debris on them” (2013: 2). The metaphor of ruination used by Stoler appears to stand in contrast to the colonial stereotype of the tropics as a void and ahistorical space. Ruin, Stoler says, is a very agentive verb, one that elicits the noise of destruction. On first sight, it seems to have nothing to do with the silence of the paralyzing, humid, silent tropics mimetically referred to by Walcott. But ruination, the process Walcott actually refers to in the poem, is noisy, appalling and unresting. At the same time, it results from disaster, from imperialism which deemed other forms of practice primitive, and noisy: “Noise – as a sonic experience – tends to be associated with ‘the Other’, a core figure in post-colonial theory, and certain types of bodies and spaces are commonly associated with noise: foreigners are ‘noisy’, African markets and bars are ‘noisy’, the working classes are ‘noisy’, genres of music – from jazz to hip hop – have been called ‘noisy’, political protests, demonstrations and crowds are ‘noisy’, and so forth“ (Deumert 2015: 12).

Here, we are interested in taking a closer look at the ideological implications of ruination. This contribution bases on travels in Jamaica, which we have conducted together with our colleague Andrea Hollington, and during which we sought to gain some insights into the discourses that continuously frame the Caribbean, in an emblematic way symbolizing the South, as an empty, ruinous space and language as something that is lost, and therefore continues to be emergent but not yet there. Established methodologies, concepts of ‘the field’, and ideas about language which we had used in the disciplinary context we had been brought up in were not all helpful, and so we attempt to tell smaller stories here, on particular places, and on whom we turn into in them. To that effect, we present various impressions on how language was used in public spaces during our visits. We allowed our attention to latch on to fleeting moments of linguistic experience that might not usually appear as related: in this way, we are able to present a kaleidoscopic arrangement of noisy and fragmented encounters in bars, signs posted in emergency rooms, billboards, souvenirs from indoor-markets, and air-port art. However, what may appear random and simply impressionistic is intricately interconnected, by our analytical gaze, but more importantly, by the pure focus of each instantiation of language use on direct material immediacy. The postcolonial linguistic landscape of Jamaica, we reveal, aligns noise and silence in realization of languaging as a bare-bones tool. Silence shuts out noise, and noise cancels silence. Together, we maintain, they fare well in the absence of ‘deep content’ – and this absence is a more precise characterization of the state of language in postcolonial days than attempts to assess language use against traditional linguistic notions such as Creolization or Standard English. It is the noisy and the silent that bring out what languaging does, something that can only be captured with wandering attention.

2 Language on Sale

The perhaps most ubiquitous sight of language here is that of language as commodification. Ideological constructs of language as an object that yields profit, and as an emblematic part of a place or an activity – such as touristic sight-seeing – seem to be at the basis of marketing a large array of tourist items: The selection of souvenirs offered by any seller at a tourist market in Port Antonio, Jamaica, usually consists of objects decorated with Rastafari emblems, imitations of household items that cite foods and motifs of ‘the tropics’, and various forms of language. While the Rastafari and flag-of-Jamaica objects are intended to appeal to foreign tourists who visit Jamaica in search



Figure 1. Language on sale (photo AS)

of safe adventure, exotism, and an illusion of liberty, the household emblems cater more to home-comers and tourists with a Jamaican background who wish to take childhood memories and feelings of belonging back to their foreign homes (see *Figure 1*). The language on sale is more ambiguous; it comes in the form of wall hangings that illustrate emblematic sayings in Jamaican, but also in form of tourist language performed by the vendors themselves. These languages are all Other languages – Jamaican as postcolonial, tropical and Creole, and the tourist languages as foreign, non-Anglo. The performances of these Other languages do not aim at demonstrating sophistication, and they don't yield complex multilingual repertoires. They are semiotically simple, and largely serve as decoration, as a means of creating a linguistically appealing ambiance. This also holds true for countless other tourist places, such as a tiny bar on stilts, that once was a man's dream. Nearby the small town of Treasure Beach, a small bar has been built on a sand bank in the midst of the sea. Originally, the bar was created by the local entrepreneur Floyd in 2001, who says that he started building the structure on stilts after having dreamt about a bar in the water. Today, only very few local fishermen visit the bar, which has turned into a tourist place (even though tourism brochures still advertise the bar as a “hang-out spot of the locals“, constructing authenticity and uniqueness; (see for example Ward 2014). Consumptions at the bar include not only food, joints, and drink, but also people. The bar serves as a spot to which female sex tourists come with their Jamaican temporary partners for an outing or where single women can meet young men and establish ‘romantic’ relationships (see *Figure 2*). Language at the bar is noisy, not orderly speech. It consists of a few



Figure 2. Consumptions (photo AS)

emblematic words, yelled, whispered, sometimes written on a ship. It emerges out of people's mouths and out of noisy objects, which are driftwood, smart phones, loudspeakers, souvenirs, and license plates, as illustrated in *Figure 2* and *Figures 3a-b*. A variety of codes are present at the bar, which however all are constantly turned into something similar, into noisy, particularized discourse. Language is made simple in terms of structure, but then also more complex – if one considers its multimodality and materiality. Even though most of the customers who visit the bar are Americans, there are also others: Germans, Italians, and Canadians, for example¹. Whenever tourists have problems grasping the extremely reduced English, the

¹Considering the fleetingness of the bar and its visitors, we avoid presenting any statistic figures here; our conversations with visitors as well as an evaluation of posts in social media and travel-related websites (such as tripadvisor) reveal, the backgrounds of tourists patronizing the bar are very diverse.

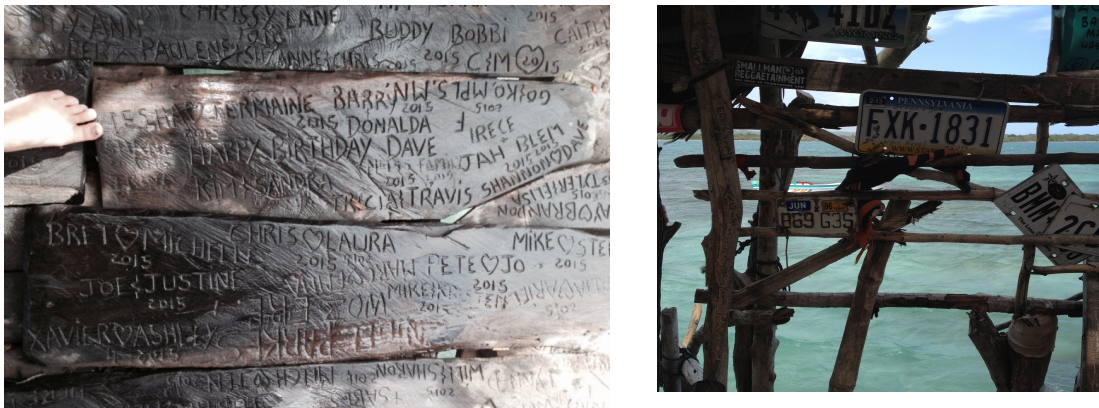


Figure 3a-b. Language on driftwood (photos AS)

tourism and sex workers would greet and approach them with short emblematic phrases that represent other codes – *hallo wie geht's*, *alles klar*, *ciao a tutti*. Jamaican tourist workers we talked to claim that it is essential to build one's repertoire in this way, not because one can then sell more souvenirs or service features to the tourists, but because everybody, even those who don't understand English, should feel comfortable and relaxed. The linguistic knowledge that is used to construct such repertoires is imported; it comes from Jamaicans who have worked and stayed abroad, learned these languages and, as homecomers or holiday guests, teach friends and relatives. The tourist and sex workers at the bar (and elsewhere) however are not controlling multilingual repertoires in a more established sense of the word. They claim – in the interviews and discussions we shared with them – that they know how to use a particular vocabulary by referring to several tourist languages, but these are turned – through the similarities in meaning and practice – into one similar language, just one tourist code that doesn't reach far beyond touristic sites and is not used outside these places.

This might be seen as striking, given the many enthusiastic debates shared by sociolinguists on how much multilingual, agentive South—ways of knowing and doing different from the hegemonic European-American customs—there is everywhere, even in the North, even within postcolonial domains such as tourism (Fanon 2004: 101 f.), for example. Already more than two decades ago, Marc Augé and Michel de Certeau have demonstrated that such binarisms are too simplistic and that concepts such as 'super-diversity' are insufficiently theorized as the mere result of new forms of migration, transition, inequality, and so on.

Augé published a groundbreaking study on an anthropology of adjacency, the ethnographer's present and immediate Other, in 1992, in which he coined the term *surmodernité* – “super-modernity.” He argues that, while there is no radical subversion of hegemonial practices of the construction of history and space as such, there is an overabundance of events and places that complicates cognizance and communication. As dimensions of networks and the acceleration of travel increase, visual and imaginary connotations multiply, place increasingly turns into what Augé calls *non-lieux*,

“non-places.” These are places that are theoretically framed as transient, temporary, and fleeting: Built environment inhabited by those who offer consumption (and to whom non-places are working spaces) and those who consume what is offered (and who tend to spend less time in these places). Very obvious forms of non-place constructs are found in tourism settings, but also in exhibition centres, malls, parking lots, edgelands and so on. These places are constructed as a space where communality is ideologically rationalized as the quick and evasive, and where practices of inhabitants are more likely to be controlled by neoliberal commodification. In Augé’s critical take on late capitalism, non-places are theorized as sites of an overabundance of individual references, of the noise of particularity – not of concerted speech.

Augé’s super-modernity is consequently characterized by overabundances of events, places and individual references. And these overabundances create more non-places which are conceptualized as not being historically or relationally relevant to those who are meant to pass through them (to Augé, the place of the traveller is the archetype of the non-place). However, non-places never exist, like anthropological places, as pure entities; within them, places are rearranged and relations reconstructed, and their inhabitants continue to adapt their “arts of doing“ (de Certeau 1990) in and to them. This is precisely how practice results out of, or is created through presupposed multiplicities within non-places: through the power of words (which emerges out of the names of, e.g., holiday resorts and shopping malls) and their readability as linguistic landscapes.

To Augé, language in non-places is largely the rhetoric of others, even though words and symbols that still have their roots in other localities circulate through them. And so, super-modernity is characterized by what has previously been termed “contact” as the prevailing form of communicative practice and experience. In Augé’s non-places, there is no triumph of one language over others, but a spread of a universally comprehended vocabulary into all languages alike. This vocabulary brings as much clarity as non-places might require; the remaining communication is more ambivalent, creatively making use of the noisy and opaque.

With a constant acceleration of travel and transitions, and a fast increasing number of people who live outside territorial bonds, as tourists, migrants, refugees or businessmen, experiences of abundant communicative particularity and noise become more and more average, and “arts of doing“ (communication, communality) are adapted considerably. Moreover, as people spend more and more time in such transient spaces (both, in terms of their spatial and symbolic position), communicative interactions saliently concern objects, which in turn participate in the spread of common vocabularies and ways of expression: credit-card machines, mobile phone apps, loudspeakers, sound systems, motors, and so on.

The quick and the noisy of these settings can be exemplified in a case study on any built environment – a bar, tourist resort, service area or waiting hall that might be readily available for an exercise in participant observation. It could be, to some extent, grasped by simply (re)watching Sophia

Coppola's *Lost in Translation* (2003). It is also obvious in the virtual non-places that exist in the commentary areas and chatrooms in the social media. Here, we have, however, selected a setting that represents earlier super-modernities, ancient overabundances of events, spaces and individual reference that all went along with imperial ruination, forced migration and coloniality more than three centuries ago: tourist destinations of the Black Atlantic, in the Caribbean, for instance Jamaica. With imperial ruination as an ongoing process, continued mental slavery, and new forms of human trafficking and slavery playing into this setting, the creation and remaking of non-places, noise and cracked language is also a contemporary phenomenon there, which links such spaces in postcolonial Southern settings to those of the European-American North.

Linguistic attempts to express difference, as a contrast to anonymity and similarity, potentially result in linguistic nothingness: noisy, cracked language. And as people move through these places, they are turned into anonymous individuals, who are getting declassified in the course of their transit. And so, an obese, aged female sex tourist might be a *cougar*, while the man serving her is a *boy*, and a newly-arrived single female tourist is a *milk bottle*. But there is nothing subversive in such terminologies; they don't offer much social meaning in the void of this space, but rather express social distance and a continuation of biosocial, colonial concepts.

Noise in non-places in Jamaica has, in our experience of public spaces there, a silent companion: linguistic landscaping shaped by written code that can be found where people look on as passers-by or while waiting to transition out of the display space to another activity. This form of soundless public languaging is on display in various domains of daily life and in educational contexts. The textual patterns vary in accordance with the purpose of such displays which can range from instruction on health matters, admonition with respect to individual conduct, advertising and product placement, educational mottos and encouragement, to messages of personal inspiration (see *Figures 4-11* below)². As is the case with written language on display elsewhere, the examples we came across all share in common their silence; their content must be spelled out by the minds of readers who may or may not engage with the message. Meaning, in other words, can only be made when engagement is happening. Like the noisy cracked non-conversations among anonymous strangers, written displays put into relief, either in the colonial language English or in its ruined companion Patwa, another aspect of imperial ruination: islanders need admonishments about how

²Note that illustrations of our observations in Figures 4 to 11 might be made about literacy displays in northern contexts, as well. Our aim is not to generalize, however, but to offer a particular joint perspective of languaging in public spaces as we experienced it on the island. We are thus not looking for things un-northern or un-linguistic, but for the specific underpinnings of languaging in this one particular post-colonial contexts, and we are reading the displays as we are taking in the noise of public encounters at the same time. We do so from the vantage point of northernness in that we cannot and do not wish to make abstraction from being northern in origin, training, and academic affiliation. In combining our respective gaze onto linguistic landscape of Jamaica, we are thus not offering a non-northern perspective. Instead, we show how one might think together noise and silence when shedding traditional northern linguistic methodologies. Our thanks go to our astute reviewers for helping us make this stance more explicit.

to dress and speak in public, about how to improve their grammar and education, or about not bringing weapons to the emergency room of a hospital.

Literacy in public languaging mirrors noise in public interaction because ‘deep content’ is also absent here. Displays with an explicit didactic message target an ideal of behavior that in its very existence suggests that a lack thereof might occur in the absence of such admonishments. These displays can be best characterized as a form of self-imposed inverse diaspora: writings in the colonial language structure non-places without directly engaging in them or with the people present. We were often told that English is a language that Jamaicans do not speak, yet it is the norm for writing.

Even though they suggest a need for instruction for proper conduct, the displays we report on here in reality seemed to serve as mere placeholders for an anonymous authority that defines the expected but most count on non-compliance. This kind linguistic landscaping blends in with the non-places of its implementation as a simple reminder of the existence of authority. Written displays advertising goods or services appear once removed from this type of silent authority in that they contain residual traces of interactive intent: read the ad and then visit a store and make a purchase. Here, we are dealing with different kind of choice: a customer may or may not act upon a shop sign's imperative. Hence, such displays may relax the strictures of code and use local forms of English grammar and spelling. What both authoritative and enticement displays have in common is the silence in which any engagement with them take place. One cannot respond to them noisily because they target behavior. Language devoid of interaction, in this way, partners up with the linguistic reductionism of the noisiness of non-places.

Some displays of written code have straightforward connections to the places of display, as is the case with the hand-crafted posters displaying information on the Chikungunya virus (a viral disease that has affected islanders in recent years) in the waiting room of an emergency clinic. The posters on the blackboard may well be the result of well-intentioned volunteer work or a class-project; they give information about infection, symptoms, and progression of the virus disease, and the fact that this is done suggests that at the time of their creation, there was an interest in getting this information to people to protect them or to enable them get help for themselves or others. These intentions, it is our impression, exist in contrast to the lack-lustre presentation in the waiting room; affected by heat and humidity, the posters are wilting and fading. People waiting to be seen by a doctor have tired and passive expressions, and we do not see anybody study the displays. Would their absence matter to anyone? Is there anybody that cares whether anyone receives the information on display? It may be the tedium of waiting in a room with barred windows that will eventually motivate reading as it is the only offering for whiling away time (see *Figure 4*).

Anonymity characterizes the interaction of written displays with their readers in all instances of public display, in Jamaica and elsewhere. Their purposes differ according to the nature of the non-

places where they are installed, but they are by nature indifferent to their addressee: whoever happens to move through the landscapes that are this shaped can be a potential recipient of these messages. However, whether or not the messages are engaged with, heard, followed, or refuted is of no importance, such that in addition to being silent, they are also by nature non-interactive, a static display of whatever intent led to their creation. In our waiting room, the sleepiness of those waiting appears



Figure 4. ER waiting room in Kingston (photo CMB)

to us in stark contrast to the importance of being warned of a dangerous virus. Who prepared the displays and what did the creators anticipate about the effectiveness of delivering their message?

One might also ask such questions in contexts where more care and forethought have gone into choosing, designing, and displaying the written messages in our next example. At a historical site on the island, aphorisms have been painted on the walls and stall doors of a public bathroom. Some are in a handwriting font, some all in capital letters, some printed, and care has been taken with their spatial display so that the result is an aesthetically motivated variation on the usual graffiti found in public toilet spaces. Perhaps the creators and choosers of the messages had young people



Figure 5. Aphorisms at the Marceys Garvey Center in Kingston (photo CMB)

in mind when planning the display, but also here, readers will be anonymous, not least because the site affords an intimate apart-from personal space to those visiting the larger public space of the historical site. In this case, the language on display does not convey practical information. Rather, one suspects intentions of silent edification in that the aphorisms are to be taken in as personal guidelines for confident and proud living. Or, to put it differently, African heritage seen through the eyes of Marcus Garvey can be sampled here and then

taken as an imperative for future living, by Jamaican school children or tourists from abroad (see *Figure 5*).

Reading the lines printed inside and outside the single stall for doing business, however, and this is for certain, will not bring about immediate changes in conduct or outlook. Onlookers may take photographs to preserve them in memory, as these authors did, but it is not the content that counts but the underlying pride associated with the larger containing landscape of the historical site. In this way, edifying happens even in the privacy of doing business. It is also interesting to note that no impromptu graffiti or commentary have been scribbled on any of the display surfaces; how the nature of bathroom business might reflect on the pride expressed in and by the aphorisms presumably remains part of private contemplation in case the displays are read at all. Like in the waiting room, absence of other stimuli might be conducive to reading, and again we have a display of written code devoid of deep content precisely because the local of display is a non-place. Even though the purpose of the display is connected to the edifying intentions of the historical side, the aphorisms have become part of a particular design and as such have become detached from their original meaning in their historical context.

Displays of written code, then, can have us re-encounter the void of ‘deep language’ that characterizes non-places of oral language use. Still, there is a strong sense that the kind of linguistic landscaping that takes place in this way is emblematic in the particularity that characterizes the void. It is not, of course, a complete void, in that it is at least tangentially related to communication. A hidden, implied creator of the signage seeks to encode expectations of behavior or disposition while well aware that no engagement with the display may occur. It may remain unread and ignored, or there may be those not literate that can only take them in visually without any decoding. What matters is the display itself, much like ‘art for art’s sake.’ This, in turn, has as a consequence that readers cannot interact with the message, they cannot object, criticize, or modify, and it is in this absence of interactivity that one must look for the colonial underpinnings of the language choices made in the displays.

Linguistic choices may be seen as what Ann Laura Stoler (2013) has referred to as “imperial formations” – “directed towards remaking the normative conditions of subjected societies” (Rao 2013: 314). It is obvious that signage targeting conduct and attitude carries with it implications of normativity. When Jan Blommaert remarks that supervernaculars “have all the features we commonly attribute to languages” (2011: 4) we can infer from his claim that in super-diverse postcolonial language contact situations, we still have all the ingredients of ‘language,’ no matter the mix. Certainly, the diversity of linguistic resources that have historically shaped the speech of Jamaicans has been of concern to linguists along these lines: which features of which language(s) occur on what occasions? The argument that in the end, such classification is cumbersome and separates language from its speakers, is only slowly entering discussions of linguistic variation. Taking the

purview of languaging one can trace imperial remnants in association with the authority of message on display without making broad claims about speaker intentions or knowledge.



Figure 6. Shop sign in Kingston (photo CMB)

The Kingston shop sign depicted in *Figure 6* bears witness to the remaking of the colonial language. ‘Ladies, men, and children wear,’ or ‘married gowns and suits’ are advertised; a shop owner is seeking to attract customers, and the sign above the door lists the availability of items that might not be obvious from the window display. While this message is quite clear, it gives the colonial linguist worries of its own kind, given the absence of an apostrophe in *ladies’ wear*,

or the use of the adjective ‘married’ in conjunction with the inanimate objects ‘gowns and suits.’ These manifestations of postcolonial remaking may be separated out from the colonial model, leading to structuralist claims like the following:

Thus, spelling choices are studied as expressions of the cognitive models that writers hold for the relationship between the two language systems at their disposal. Specifically, we show that spelling choices can shed light on whether speakers understand Creole to be a dialect within the larger system of English or a separate language system. (Hinrichs & White-Sustaita 2011: 47)

One might well ask whether ‘married gowns’ are a feature of another language system or are they a dialect of English? Are they different from ‘Carmen’s Couture?’ Assuming that the shop sign has a single creator whose spelling choices might or might not have been edited by the sign designer, it is difficult to imagine the separate use of dialect or language systems on one occasion. Deliberation may have been used, but the metaphor of co-existing systems rather than an inventory of repertoires seems limited in its usefulness.

Clearly, written language requires a form of selection for codification, and which selections are made is an interesting question. When dealing with what one might term, again with Stoler, outfall from “imperial debris,” linguists have frequently put themselves into the role of relentless classifiers, as a result of what Orman (2013: 4) calls

[...] the seemingly unwavering conviction that there are actually discrete languages or language varieties ‘out there’ waiting to be identified and counted, which itself

also entails the possibility of unambiguously identifying the structural components of which they consist.

As for the shop keeper's message, one might imagine a competition between local and colonial conventions for the written encoding of English. Note, however, that such debates have no bearing on the content of the shop sign.

Still, content and its encoding do meet on another plain. Even though waiting room, bathroom, and shop displays are all in the public domain, there is a sense of a more anonymous authority in didactic-purpose writing than in the individualism of a shop sign. Correct, that is, colonial spelling and grammar of English encode the voice of authority, and it is language that belongs to nobody in particular, is not voiced, but supposed to resonate within the reader to bring about desired effects. This is not, in essence, an issue of several language systems, but of rhetoric and its evaluation. Inverse diaspora through literacy occurs because of the intersection of public space with displays of authority where the authority remains unidentified.

This is, however, not language in the more idealist or instrumental senses (as something constitutive of our soul, or as a mere tool), but rather language as an ongoing scenario of inequitable transactions and interactions (Chow 2014).

The difference in conventions between anonymous didactic and individuated commercial messages can thus be seen as one of sensuality and soul versus inequity and impersonality.

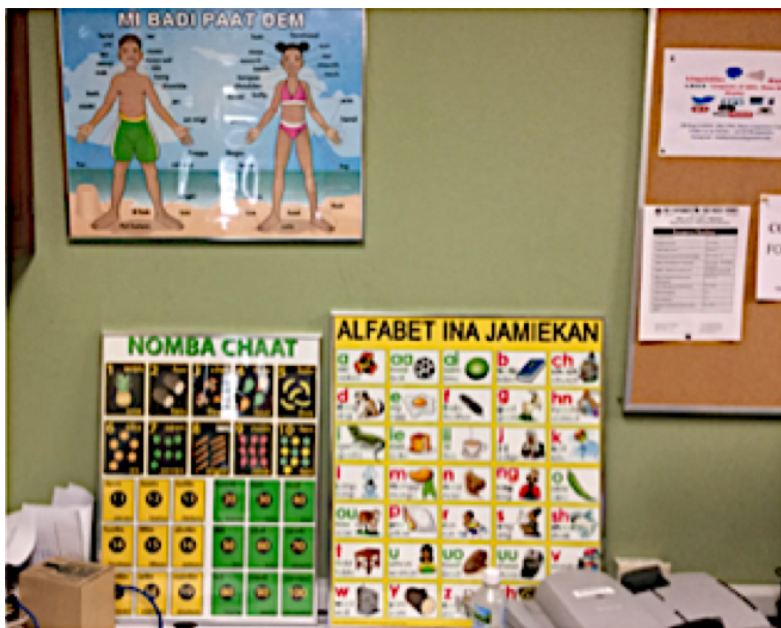


Figure 7. Spelling charts for Jamaican children (photo CMB)

Overall, literacy practices in Jamaica today are related to efforts to make visible and not just audible the way Jamaicans speak. In this vein, Hubert Devonish of the University of the West Indies at Mona, a staunch advocate of linguistic emancipation of Jamaican Creole and bilingual schooling in Creole and English, has contributed to the codification of Patwa in writing, using a phonetic spelling system (see *Figure 7*) derived from proposals by Fred Cassidy,

the Jamaican-born lexicographer and editor of the Dictionary of American Regional English (Casidy 1985).

Codification and transmission of literacy practices occur via curriculum development and through schooling, and schools depict themselves as communities of practice with a moral obligation of learning. The degree of adult literacy in Jamaica is quite high at 87% (UNICEF), although it is obtained in the L2 English, but embedded in a heavily normative context: bilingual programs are rare, and there is much educational pressure toward the mastery of Standard English, especially for the purposes of academic writing and communication.

Much of the concern with literacy in Jamaica today is intertwined with the role of the many churches that run their own parochial schools, many of which are conservative in their linguistic attitudes and supportive of English as language of education. This can help explain a certain conservatism in attitudes about language and spelling. Language with a capital L serves the individual, but, more importantly, society at large as capital with

which to bargain and participate in the global economy. In our supermodern global reality, Papien (2015) observes that “[...] ability of six- and seven-year-olds to read or write is taken as a factor [...] in debates about a nation’s economic prosperity and international status.” Pressure is thus felt to perform, and this pressure is certainly a motivating factor for private initiatives (see Figure 8) offering tutoring outside of school: “It’s old time grammar, comprehension, and composition.”

Note that the reference to ‘old time grammar’ in this flyer found on the message board of a local store ties right in with the tradition of parochial schooling and pressure towards standardization in church contexts. While in didactic displays the authority remains unnamed, the advertising of tutoring refers explicitly to Christianity and Jesus Christ and passages from scripture. The flyer itself is quite ‘old time’ in its use of print handwriting and idiosyncratic capitalization. The normative ideas informing this kind of tutored training hint at a common function of public literacy displays: while silent, they resonate with the inner states of their readers and make claims on public behavior.

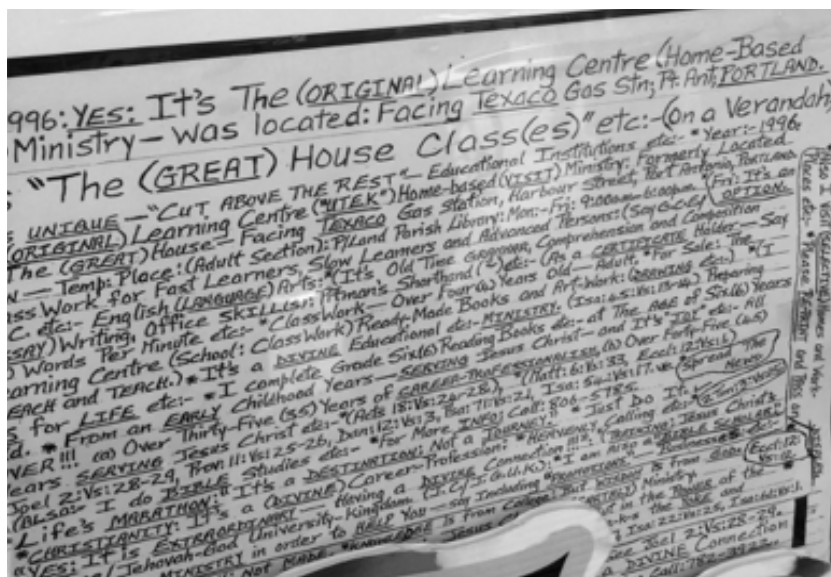


Figure 8. Tutoring offer (photo CMB)

'Languaging' in this sense involves a silent negotiation within the individual to bring about compliance; i.e. publically displayed imperatives shut out the messy and non-conventional and hence have a silencing function, be it in inexpert handwriting or printed out neatly.



Figure 9a. Signage at a shop near Portland (photo CMB)

Just how, though, is one to describe the linguistic embeddedness of such admonitory practices when seeking to avoid the binary fallacy inherent in structuralist description? (cf. Boellstorff 2005: 38) One possibility is to focus on the dialectic of noise and silence in public spaces. Taken from this perspective, the relationship between linguistic form and function which, in the absence of any deep meaning, becomes reduced to behavior (noise) without message, or manipulation of behavior (display) without recipient. Noise and silent display alike are forms of colonial outfall, and the association of anonymous authority with the colonial language may be intended to underscore this authority.

Shutting out undesirable behavior and noise are quite obvious functions of literacy on display. Admonishments can be handwritten or in print (see Figure 9a), or may be employed in combination with displays of imminent enforcement of compliance.

Enforcement can occur via explicit statements to that effect, be it via gate-keeping, or be it through the presence of enforcing security personnel (see Figure 9b).

Jamaica's landscapes of resounding but noiseless linguistic imperatives form a stark contrast to another pervasive practice of languaging, namely the formulaic responses to open questions that serve as the discourse of non-places characterized above. *No problem, monn*, – *absolutely no bother* – are expressions of a laid back attitude performed with pride and available in the form of bumper stickers or refrigerator magnet to tourists upon leaving. Here again we find a dialect interaction: statements of being laid-back do not simply



Figure 9b. Security check for ER workers in Kingston (photo CMB)

portray laid-backness. Instead, they are intimately tied to the frequent display of rule enforcement and the didactic practices of church and civic authorities. In their emblematic and mere formulaic use, they are dialectically tied up with the practice of shutting out; they signal the end of discourse, not its opening, and in shutting out noise, they themselves have become just that.

On the world stage, Jamaican literacy is currently enjoying the first win of a Jamaican author of the prestigious Man Booker Award by Marlon James, now a professor at a university in the US. This win proudly announced in the local media (cf. *The Gleaner* 2015) is mentioned here to briefly illustrate that there is quite obviously a great bandwidth involved in Jamaican languaging. It is worth noting that the reductionism of language in public display is not particular to Jamaica and can also be found elsewhere, as in this instance at the entrance of a park in New York City (see *Figure 10*).



Figure 10. Park Entrance instructions in New York City

conservatism in their application in Jamaica than abroad. In this sense, literacy practices in Jamaica might be viewed as practices of inverse diaspora: noise and messiness must be separated from language – a postcolonial mission necessitated by binarism and the imperial ruin of ‘English,’ as well as the evolution of its mixed-heritage spin-offs. In this sense, literacy is not simply a set of practices but becomes a moral obligation (see *Figure 11*).

Moral imperatives, expected behavior, enticement to purchase goods or services are all possible intentions of the unseen creators of written language displays. The term 'linguistic landscaping' is chosen quite appropriately in that the displays become part of the visual imprint of any onlooker

Still, the dialectic of noise and silence discussed here is one particular to Jamaica: public space may be taken up by noise or by soundless displays of language. Public languaging in terms of signs addresses the reader with the purpose of manipulating behavior, be it to entice to the purchase of goods and services, or be it enforce compliance with expected conduct in stores, hospitals, or schools. Even though the diaspora is where the conservative norms for Jamaican literacy education have been established in the linguistic center, there is greater

regardless of whether or not the onlooker chooses to engage with the written content by reading it. Any expected response is not verbal, but always one of a course of action, which connects up linguistic choices in such displays with the question about the authority behind such calls for action, for a particular behavior, or compliance



Figure 11. Mooretown Elementary School (photo CMB)

with rules. In the case of not bringing guns into a hospital, the expected compliance has to be immediate, whereas imperatives about the importance of learning do not co-occur with such a prompt timeline. Greater authority seems to be associated with use of Standard English and hence a colonial imperative, suggesting a greater dependence on the norms of the colonial past than may be immediately obvious. Shop signs, by contrast, attempt a more intimate, personalized message and by nature have less authoritative impact on the actions of their readers; hence it seems that they have more expressive leeway. Note, however, that all linguistic landscaping on Jamaica happens with indexicality; indexed are authority and compulsoriness of compliance, and this is often done using the colonial language in the 'correct' form that is still transmitted in the local schools and can be seen as counteracting the dynamic changes brought about by moving away from colonial dependence.

Silence of signage and noise of non-places, then, are both forms of colonial outfall in that they manifest imperial conditions: tourism and its spurious interaction and signage with its absence of interaction are variations of the world functioning in the absence of 'deep language' in the post-colonial context of daily life in Jamaica. 'Perfect,' 'standard' or 'correct' are labels that do not concern linguistic code per se, but instead, they connote a degree of authority or engagement with the other. What is shared are the particularities of the coexistence of these phenomena in a multitude of linguistic choices and attitudes.

4 Some concluding thoughts: looking back

In Walter Benjamin's essay *Theses of the Philosophy of History*, there is a rather well-known passage that describes the Angel of History who looks not at the chains of events we see when we look at history, but faces change looking backwards:

A Klee painting named ‘Angelus Novus’ shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin 1968 [1940: VIII])

Languaging in non-places and the noise of ruination in current practices of shutting out are phenomena that are commonly associated with movements of people and commodification of language and identity within the realities of globalization. However, we suggest, non-places, languaging and ruination are not so much the consequences of current processes of change but have been in existence since a long time. Walter Benjamin provides an explanation that helps to understand the present situation: we understand his metaphor of the single catastrophe and the debris it still produces as an expression of globalized imperialism and its increasingly unmanageable consequences. And as the angel of history is not any longer able to look at history, but simply gazes at debris, we too are confronted with ongoing ruination which produces the rubble that covers the remains of the Other.

This is, we argue, the ‘dark side’ of banal globalization. In the important work on tourism by Crispin Thurlow and Adam Jaworski, there is an interesting analysis of how language is represented in the non-place: as a snippet, the representation of the already seen in a hermeneutic cycle, a soundscape, “detached from identity and used as a strategic styling resource“ (2011: 289): “It is, we suggest, at the level of ‘innocent’ texts and ‘harmless’ (inter)actions that globalization is actually realized“ (loc. cit.: 308). But Thurlow and Jaworski rightly locate the innocent and harmless at the “sites of ideological struggle, contestation, legitimation and authenticitation of ethnic, national and other subject positions“ (loc. cit.: 305). This is where the banal has been for a long time, hidden in Walcott’s jungle, thriving in entertainment culture, and creeping into most of our good intentions.

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