

Jeannette Allsopp & Zellynne Jennings (eds.)

Language Education in the Caribbean: Selected Articles by Dennis Craig. Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2014. xx + 171 pp. (Paper US\$ 22.00)

Ian Robertson & Hazel Simmons-McDonald (eds.)

Education Issues in Creole and Creole-Influenced Vernacular Contexts. Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2014. xii + 291 pp. (Paper US\$ 40.00)

Dennis R. Craig, a prolific writer and highly acclaimed researcher in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, was born in Guyana but “owed many of his accomplishments to his adopted country—Jamaica—where he lived for most of his life” (Allsopp & Jennings, p. viii). He taught at the University of the West Indies, Mona, and served as dean of its faculty of Education. In Guyana he was the first director of the National Centre for Education Research and Development, and in 1991 he became vice chancellor of the University of Guyana. Throughout his career he tirelessly advocated for the improvement of the educational and social conditions of Creole speakers in the Caribbean. His writings inspired many of his contemporaries and continue to resonate with researchers and educators in the Caribbean and more widely. It is therefore only fitting that two volumes have been published in his honor.

Language Education in the Caribbean opens with a preface highlighting Craig’s proactive social engagement through a discussion of his popular *Viewpoint* columns written for the Guyana Broadcasting Company and an introduction outlining the main concerns of his academic publications. It then reprints four of his articles dealing with the sociolinguistic context of the English-official Caribbean and four focusing on effective teaching and learning policies and approaches for this context. With respect to the first issue, Craig echoes the creole continuum perspective and argues that the English-official Caribbean is characterized by variation between Standard English and local creoles resulting from Creole speakers’ “striving for social status through English” (p. 17) and inappropriate teaching methods. This has given rise to a third system, the “interaction area” (p. 17) or the mesolect(s); children from Creole dominant homes mistakenly equate it with English and thus face problems in school where Standard English norms are enforced. Craig argues that all three varieties share the same conceptual base but make use of different grammatical principles and lexical forms to express it. The Creole and Creole-influenced varieties (or mesolects) mostly share the same grammar and mainly differ on the lexical level. Thus shifting simply entails substituting English-like lexical forms for creole ones. However, since there are significant structural differences between the Creole and English forms, acquisi-

tion of English requires learning of a set of new procedures, rules, and principles.

Given this situation, Craig argued that traditional teaching and learning models that assume Caribbean children to be native speakers of English and attempt to teach children English through implicit correction are not only ineffective but also contribute to children's linguistic insecurity and negative representations about their primary language. Instead, he advocated an approach termed "Bidialectal Education" that takes into account and actively raises awareness about the sociocultural and linguistic distinctiveness of creole languages and English while at the same time acknowledging the existence of overlap, or rather similarities, between the two systems. The approach also maintains that effective language education has to be based on children's actual practices and communicative needs and should introduce new features gradually and in a systematic manner through a combination of structured communication oriented and culturally adapted activities. Instead of an immersion approach, he argued, shared and known features should be practiced before new ones are introduced. Finally, children should at all times be encouraged to freely draw on all their linguistic resources for meaning making.

Education Issues is a collection of fifteen original essays introduced by a short foreword and preface which pay tribute to Craig's important achievements. In the first of the book's four parts, "Dennis Craig in Caribbean Language Education," Jeff Siegel and Beverley Bryan discuss Craig's contribution to Applied Linguistics generally and English language teaching in the Caribbean. Siegel argues that Craig's work was instrumental in raising awareness about the unique educational issues in the Caribbean and related contexts and in highlighting problematic assumptions underlying traditional educational models, but that his most important contribution consisted in proposing feasible alternative models. Bryan explains how Craig's research findings spurred educational reform in Jamaica and sowed the seeds for new educational projects such as the Bilingual Education Project.

In the second part, "The Background to Caribbean Language," Richard Allsopp discusses the contribution of African languages to Caribbean creoles, and Hazel Simmons-McDonald revisits and refutes statements about the deficient nature of creoles and pidgins. Finally, Pauline Christie examines existing language-teaching models in the Caribbean in the light of current research on varieties of English. She argues that Caribbean educational systems need to develop their own set of norms for English based on actual usage in professional contexts.

Part III, "Policy Issues and Perspectives on Vernacular Education in the Caribbean," includes five articles. Peter Roberts revisits Craig's 1999 book,

Teaching Language and Literacy: Policies and Procedures for Vernacular Situations, with a view to assessing the factors “that should provide a basis for adding to and modifying the detailed organization of syllabus and techniques set out in the book” (p. 82). He advocates greater attention to affective rather than rationalizing factors and to children’s actual language practices. Hazel Simmons-McDonald discusses her inclusive language education program that aims to concurrently develop greater levels of proficiency in and knowledge about Standard English, the main medium of instruction in schools in St. Lucia, and children’s primary languages, Kwéyòl, and the English-lexicon Vernacular. Ian Robertson’s paper, in line with Craig, argues for greater attention to well-structured and systematic grammar teaching that focuses on “the meaningfulness of the element being taught” (p. 164), rather than simply formal accuracy. Some of the results of the latest education project, the Bilingual Education Project (BEP), are the focus of Hubert Devonish and Karen Carpenter’s contribution. Analyzing grade 4 literacy test outcomes, they show that while “the English-language competence of the BEP pupils was not greater than that of the non-BEP group by the end of four years” (p. 179), the results confirm that bilingual Creole-English education does not negatively affect children’s cognitive and English-language abilities. Finally, Valerie Youssef’s essay examines language use in the classrooms of fifteen Trinidadian teachers. She demonstrates that while teachers were fully proficient in Standard English and also used it as their main means of instruction, they (particularly those below the age of 45) also made strategic use of Trinidadian Creole for a variety of reasons such as facilitating potentially face-threatening speech acts and “to establish realistic local context effectively” (p. 201).

In the final section, “Issues of Context,” Kathryn Shields Brodber draws attention to the pragmatics of English in the Caribbean. Identifying Standard English in the Caribbean with the formal domain and negative politeness practices (and denying the existence of negative politeness practices in creoles), she argues that English language teaching should be used as a vehicle for teaching students about the concept of formality and decorum. Velma Pollard, discussing two thematic units for the teaching of literature, explains how a multi-sensual and interactive approach that extends to “creative material not usually considered literature” (p. 227) fires students’ imagination and leads to positive engagement with literature. Jeannette Allsopp reviews the history of the teaching of French in the Caribbean, showing how traditional teaching methods and problematic stereotypes about the language have led to a situation where there are few competent speakers of the language despite its relative importance in the local tourist industry. Finally, two contributions focus on the North American context. Ian Roberts reflects on the social and particularly linguist situation

of Caribbean children in North America, while John and Angela Rickford discuss the merits of a new reader for African American children to be adopted by the California Department of Education, and outline the way the contrastive approach can be applied to sensitively and effectively raise students' awareness about the differences between African American English and standard English.

Taken together, the two volumes provide a compact and highly stimulating overview of language education research in the English-official Caribbean. Although many of the social and language-based inequalities described by Craig still persist, it is clear that ongoing social change and language-based research are contributing to the destigmatization of Caribbean language practices and are generating new responses to and understandings of this context.

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