Hello

I’m Guyanne Wilson, and I’m the author of *Language Ideologies and Identities on Facebook and TikTok: A Southern Caribbean Perspective,* a new Element in the Elements in World Englishes series.

In this Element, I tackle language on social media, and particularly content created by social media users from Barbados, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago. I wanted to find out:

* Specific phonological, lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic features of Caribbean Englishes and Creoles content creators use in their memes and videos to create identity
* I was also interested in non-linguistic elements and I do a multimodal analysis, in which I look not only at language but also aspects such as layout, colour and costuming.
* And finally, I wanted to know whether and how attitudes and ideologies surrounding language use in the region reinforced or challenged, in social media content?

I analyse over 200 image macro memes that were circulated on Facebook. The memes I look at are concerned with language, and usually they compare British or American English to Trinidadian English Creoles. They give fresh insights into ideas of norms and norm orientations in Trinidad. A former British colony, English and Creole in Trinidad was heavily influenced by British English, but the memes show an increasing tendency towards endonormativity- the use of local norms.

But Trinidadian English/Creole isn’t the only endonormative variety online. Barbadian and Guyanese English/Creoles might be doing the same. My second data set comprises TikTok videos. I studied a set of videos called the Caribbean Alphabet series, in which TikTokers from the three territories record the distinct vocabulary of their varieties in daily videos, meant both to entertain and educate. I see the videos as kind of a layperson’s dictionary- providing meanings and examples very much in the same way professional lexicographers might set about the task.

Looking at memes and TikTok Videos gave me a more nuanced understanding of how language and identity are performed in a place I call home. In a lot of previous research, identity in World Englishes is linked to national identities. But nation-states are complex, with many different groups of people, and the Caribbean is no different. So for instance the language features identified in the memes were linked to aspects of ethnic identity, regional identity, like north versus south, and even very specific forms of identity such as type of schooling.

The data highlight how a number of contesting ideologies coexist both in physical and online spheres. On one hand, the fact that the memes and videos are meant to entertain means that in some ways, Creoles are still seen as humourous, and they are important for grassroots identities, but not really taken seriously. But on the other hand, the comments suggest that social media users don’t adhere to the belief that only Standard British English is acceptable.

The Element is free for the first two weeks and you can also learn more about my work by following me on X at dquirkylinguist