TRINIDAD ENGLISH CREOLE ORTHOGRAPHY:
LANGUAGE ENREGISTERMENT AND COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICES
IN A NEW MEDIA SOCIETY

BY

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Trinidad English Creole Orthography: 
Language Enregisterment and Communicative Practices in a New Media Society

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Abstract
In this study, I argue that new media discourse has facilitated the enregisterment of orthographies for languages that were primarily oral in the ‘pre-network society’ age. Specifically, I will look at this phenomenon as it applies to Trinidad English Creole, a formally oral Creole language from Trinidad and Tobago. I will investigate the sociolinguistic implications of orthographic and scriptural choices, and how such practices both index and constitute social hierarchies, identities, and relationships (Jaffe et al 2012). Prior to 1990, Trinidad English Creole rarely appeared in written form apart from fictional speech in postcolonial dialectal literature or as indirect speech in newspaper articles. Coinciding with ‘the rise of the network society’ (Castells 2000), Trinidad English Creole is increasingly being employed by diasporic members for written personal communication in computer-mediated discourse. Through the utilization of theoretical frameworks that have been posited by social scientists in regards to our interactions in this new ‘mediascape’ (Appadurai 1996), I intend to show that (i) computer mediated communication is facilitating the enregisterment of Trinidad English Creole, a formally oral language, and (ii) these orthographic choices are employed metapragmatically as a means of enacting a subversive identity, and more particularly, a cosmopolitan postcolonial identity.
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Abbreviations:

1. TEC – Trinidad English Creole
2. STE – Standard Trinidad English
3. SE – Standard English
1. Introduction

Historically, what may be called ‘identity through orthography’ has received very little attention. Linguists have traditionally viewed the act of writing solely from a technical point of view: that is, as a matter of assigning “one letter only for each phoneme” (Pike 1938). It was not until the 1990s that a number of researchers began to develop the link between language ideology and orthographic choices.

While discussions of orthography have tended to focus on prescriptive issues that at the surface involve practical concerns over which kinds of scripts are most suitable for language standardization, at a deeper level orthography and orthographic choices can be viewed a means of situating oneself in the world through language (Shieffelin and Doucet 1992, 1994). Variationist sociolinguistics, which explores the relationship between sound and social meaning, has clearly shown that linguistic form has the potential to index specific social positions. This field, however, has privileged the spoken word as its focus of study. The analysis of orthography, the graphic medium of expression, has been largely neglected from a sociolinguistic point of view. Yet orthography can also be a critical site for the production of social identities: for instance, speakers can switch between orthographic choices in a manner that parallels conversational code switching. That is, vernacular writing, as a choice of spelling that departs from an existing standard, may constitute “social action” (Sebba 2007), and the choice to comply with or break existing norms may afford social meaning.

The link between language ideology and orthographic choice has coincided most notably with the rise of the internet and the new network society (Castells 2000). One of the most direct impacts this new network society has had on social structure has been in
regard to traditional power relationships. With its ability to transcend and disrupt historical social hierarchies such as the sovereign state, schools and media, the internet offers diasporic communities in particular a space in which they can bypass the traditional power apparatus. This enables members of such communities, in the words of media theorist Madhavi Mallapragada, “to articulate their marginal voices and negotiate their dual identity as they enact, produce or construct new hybrid identities and cultures” (Mallapragada 2000, p. 179)

This negotiation of identity can be noted in the online practices of Trinidad English Creole speakers who, while utilizing and accessing Trinidadian diasporic online forums, enact socially salient markers of their Trinidadian identity through the use of orthographic representations of Trinidad English Creole. As Bucholtz and Hall (2005) have shown, identities may be linguistically indexed through labels, implicatures, stances, styles, or linguistic structures. New media contexts therefore provide an important field site in which it is possible to examine how Trinidadian English Creole users employ, enact and index a postcolonial Trinidadian identity through scriptural means, and how these identities are relationally created and intersubjectively constructed through several, and often overlapping, complementary relations, including similarity/difference, genuineness/artifice, and authority/delegitimacy (Bucholtz & Hall 2005).

In many of the Caribbean islands, one of the most noticeable post-independence sociolinguistic developments has been the rise in prestige of Creole languages, which have now become symbols of local cultural identity. Though there are several theories regarding Creole genesis, it is generally agreed that Creole languages are created through language contact and the subsequent incorporation of features from two or more
unrelated languages. In many areas of the world, Creole languages normally possess a European superstrate (or lexifier language) while the grammatical structure is usually derived from a combination of non-European languages. Due to the legacy of European colonialism, the European superstrate language has historically been afforded a high social status, and as such, is regarded as the more appropriate variety for most public and formal types of communication. Creole usage therefore is generally reserved for, or relegated to, informal environments (Deuber 2013). The language ideologies that govern orthographic choices can thus be understood as a key concern of a sociocultural linguistic approach, as language ideologies are “representations, whether explicit or implicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world” (Woolard, 1998, p. 3). Working within a framework of language ideology, the employment of Trinidad English Creole in new digital environments leads us to consider the shifting indexicalities of the Trinidad English Creole language and its ideological positioning with respect to Standard Trinidad or Standard Caribbean English.

I will begin this study by first discussing the sociocultural and ethnonlinguistic context of Trinidad English Creole. Pertinent linguistic features of the language will be outlined followed by the theoretical media frameworks that inform my research. The Trinidad English Creole forum community will be introduced followed by an analysis of two specific communicative situations that are illustrative of the sociocultural frameworks that inform this discussion. My argument regarding orthographic choice is two-fold. First, I argue that computer mediated communication is facilitating a ‘democratic grassroots’ enregisterment of Trinidad English Creole, with enregisterment defined as the process by which a linguistic repertoire comes to be associated with a
sociocultural group or identity (Agha 2003). Second, I argue that Trinidad English Creole orthography is employed in computer mediated spaces as a means of enacting a subversive identity, and more particularly, a cosmopolitan postcolonial identity.

1.1 Diglossia and the politics of conquest

Diglossia is a bidialectal or bilingual language situation in which one language variety is accorded high status over and against another variety that is seen to fulfill more vernacular functions. The high variety, learned largely through formal education, is usually the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, yet it is not normally used by any sector of the community for ordinary ‘everyday’ conversation.

Hubert Devonish, a linguist who has worked extensively with several Caribbean Creoles, posits another term in reference to instances of diglossia in the Caribbean: *conquest diglossia*. Linguistic diversity in the Caribbean is the result of European colonization, which began around the end of the fifteenth century and continued for more than four hundred years. This period of conquest resulted in the creation of several Creole languages, created through language contact and the subsequent incorporation of features from two or more unrelated languages. For most of these languages, the superstrate language is the language of the colonizer, while the substrate languages come from the languages spoken by the colonized. In the case of Trinidad English Creole (TEC) in Trinidad, the Creole utilizes English as the superstrate or lexifier language while deriving its grammatical structure primarily from West African languages. The interaction between the colonizer and the colonized thus provides the sociological context in which language contact took place and the resulting ideologies associated with Standard English and Trinidad English Creole emerged.
While emancipation had brought freedom to slaves in Trinidad as far back as 1834, the period of British colonization continued into the 1960s. Chamberlin describes the place of language in the West Indian colonization process as follows:

In the West Indies after emancipation, colonial experience and imperial ambition converged in a determination to turn blacks into whites, or Africans into Europeans. To many European listeners, the absence of articulate language – or more precisely the pressure of what was construed as the inarticulate babble of African languages (with the transfer of some of their intonations into West Indian speech) – was inevitably associated with the absence of coherent thought and civilized feeling. Even enlightened nineteenth-century reformers believed that racial and political equality would only come about when blacks started behaving like whites. (1994:73)

In Caribbean countries in which English is the official language, there are therefore *conquest diglossic* relations between the Standard language and the widely spoken Creole varieties in use. In most of these countries, this involves interaction between English, the official and public formal language, and the English-lexicon Creoles, which remain the languages of private and informal interaction. However, there is an absence of clear lines of demarcation between Standard-lexicon language varieties and Creoles. The distinction between those varieties that may be considered English, on the one hand, and those that may be considered Creole, on the other, are often ambiguous. A considerable amount of research has taken place into characterizing what has come to be called the *post-creole continuum* (Rickford 1987). The post-creole continuum refers to the situation in which a Creole language consists of a spectrum of varieties between those most and least similar to the superstrate language. Due to social, political, and economic factors, a creole language can *decreolize* toward one of the languages from which it is descended, aligning its linguistic features (i.e. phonology, morphology and syntax) to the local standard of the dominant language. Yet this alignment happens to different degrees, depending on a
speaker’s status. As such, Creole speakers normally have repertoires that span varying ranges on the continuum. For any speaker, more formal social situations would be likely to produce the use of varieties more closely approximating English, and less formal situations, varieties closer to Creole.

Linguistic anthropologist Michael Silverstein (2003) uses the term *ethnolinguistic identity* to account for people’s intuitions of the relationship between language, social status and national origin. These intuitions emerge from certain cultural assumptions about language that construe it as constituting a basis for divisions among types or kinds of people. This especially occurs because people conceive languages to be the central and enabling vehicle or channel of thought and culture. It has been well documented that throughout the Caribbean region, classifications of color are inextricably linked with expectations regarding education, social status and value (Roland 2013). As such, when viewed through the lens of conquest, the ethnolinguistic identity of Creole speakers is inextricably linked to slavery, indentured servitude and degradation, while varieties of English that most closely resemble Standard English indicate that a speaker has a claim to social participation.

2. Ethno-linguistic history of Trinidad and Tobago

Believed to possess one of the most varied ethnocultural and linguistic histories of any island in the Caribbean, Trinidad has received over six centuries of extended language contact between speakers of a variety of languages. Historical records show that the Amerindian people existed in Trinidad for almost six thousand years prior to the arrival of Columbus, numbering at least forty thousand at the time of the first Spanish settlement on the island in 1592. With Trinidad being the closest island to the mainland of South
America—separated by just seven miles at its closest point—it was often the first point of entry to the Caribbean by the Amerindian cultures that extended all the way to the Amazonian basin. The Amerindian language families spoken in Trinidad were the Arawakan and the Cariban languages, and while the Amerindian population was almost completely decimated, a substantial number of place names, flora and animals on the island have retained their Amerindian names still to the present day.

Trinidad remained a Spanish possession from the 15th century forward, however. Due to a perceived lack of precious metals, few attempts were made by the Spaniards to establish a European community on the island. In 1793, the Spanish Crown issued the Cedula of Population decree. This decree was an attempt to establish a European community and quickly populate the island by offering free land and monetary incentives to anyone of European heritage who agreed to immigrate to the island. This encouraged massive immigration of planters (who arrived with their slaves) from St. Domingue (Haiti), Guadeloupe, Grenada and Martinique. What had once been a small colony of one thousand Spanish colonists in 1773 had boomed to 18,627 inhabitants by 1797, resulting in a population that was now predominantly of French heritage. In 1797, The British captured Trinidad from Spain and negotiated an amicable treaty of rule. French and French Creole, however, would remain the lingua franca of the island until the mid 1900s.

In 1834, under British rule, slavery was abolished. Even though the island had been under British rule for at least forty years at this time, most African descent slaves spoke French Creole. As plantations began to experience significant labor shortages due to the loss of slave labor, estate owners had no choice but to turn towards indentured
immigrant labor to fill the ensuing labor gap. Workers were brought in from several countries, among them Venezuela, China, Madeira, and Syria. However, one of the largest and most enduring waves of indentured laborers were those brought in from India. Starting in 1845, and continuing for a span of almost fifty years, close to one hundred thousand indentured laborers were brought to Trinidad from the then British colony of India. Most of the Indian indentured workers spoke languages such as Urdu and Bhojpuri and practiced religions such as Hinduism and Islam. While the Indian workers were only contracted for a period of eight years—and had the option to return to India at the end of their contractual work period—the majority of the Indian workers chose to remain in Trinidad at the end of their bonded servitude. The descendants of these laborers now make up the largest ethnic group in Trinidad’s population.

Tobago, however, existed separately from Trinidad for centuries. Named for the tobacco cultivated by the original Carib Amerindian population, the explorer Christopher Columbus sighted the island in 1498 but never came to shore, and for several centuries, no attempts were ever made to colonize Tobago. Once European powers realized that Tobago’s geographic position made it a strategic harbor, colonial powers routinely fought over the island, and as such, the island changed ‘colonial hands’ more than thirty times. During the period of British rule in the late 1600s, sugar, cotton and indigo plantations were established and thousands of Africans were brought to Tobago as slave labor. In 1781 the French invaded, but by 1814 the island was ceded to Britain. In 1889, during a period of economic decline, Britain annexed the smaller Tobago to Trinidad as an administrative ward. The islands achieved independence from England in 1962 and became the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in 1976.
Historically, Tobago received far less varied immigration, and with a population that was approximately 90% African, there would be less opportunity for interaction between African slaves and their European masters. Additionally, Tobago never received immigrants from India. As mentioned, Creole languages are shaped primarily through contact between different languages, and as such, the vast demographic differences and immigration patterns between Trinidad and Tobago shaped the Creoles on the two islands in very different ways. Because of this, many Caribbean linguists consider Tobago English Creole to have features that make it more similar to Jamaican English Creole than the English Creole of Trinidad. With these key differences in mind, and an understanding of how Creole languages emerge through language contact, scholars agree that Tobagonian English Creole is a distinct linguistic variety that is vastly different from the English Creole spoken in Trinidad (Winer & Gilbert 1987). Moving forward, it should be noted that for the purpose of my research, when I discuss the features of Trinidad English Creole, I am referring specifically to the English Creole variety that is spoken on the island of Trinidad.

3. Linguistic description of Trinidad English Creole.

It has been claimed that there is no ‘true creole’ in Trinidad due in part to decreolization in the direction of English (Winer 1993). Linguist Dagmar Deuber, in a 2013 study involving attitudes towards newscaster accents in Trinidad, concludes that “the notion of standardness is not centered primarily on one particular variety but rather on distance from one particular variety” (Deuber 2013, p. 309). In order to understand the orthographic choices of speakers of Trinidad English Creole in the upcoming data sections, it is important for us to understand the patterned predictability of the language’s
phonological, morphological and grammatical system. This section is not meant to be an exhaustive description of all features associated with Trinidad English Creole; given the language’s lack of full investigation and study, we will need to be aware only of the most salient features that speakers tend to orient to while creating an orthography. As I will discuss later on, the issue of linguistic predictability—and spelling consistency—becomes extremely important, as it underscores the role of the reader and their knowledge, expectations and framework of interpretation (Jaffe 2008).

Many of the features included in this section were obtained from data collection sessions that I have conducted over the past two years with three Trinidad English Creole speakers. Additional information regarding the phonological and phonemic inventory of Trinidad English Creole were garnered from Warner (1970), Winer (1996) and Winford (1978, 1979).

3.1 Consonants

The consonant inventory of Trinidad English Creole is generally similar to that of English: stops /p, b, t, d, k, g/; fricatives /f, v, s, z, ʃ, ʒ/; nasals /m, n, ɳ/; and approximants /h, j, l, ɹ/.

Chart 1: Consonant Inventory of Trinidad English Creole
Consonant Conventions:

1. The nasal /n/ is velarised after the back vowel /u/. For example, for the word ‘stronger’ [stʌŋɡa] /n/ became velarized when it followed a back vowel.

2. Voiceless dental fricatives (θ) that appear in utterance final position become the voiceless dental stop /t/

3. Voiceless dental fricatives (θ) that appear in utterance initial position become voiced dental stop /d/

4. Voiced dental fricatives (ð) become voiced dental stop /d/

5. There appears to be a lack of diphthongs in this language. As such, words that have two vowels next to each other are modified so that only one vowel appears. e.g ‘around’ [aˈʃəŋ]

6. The nasal /n/ is velarised after the back vowel /u/. For example, for the word ‘stronger’ [stʌŋɡa] /n/ became velarized when it followed a back vowel.

7. Voiceless dental fricatives (θ) that appear in utterance final position become the voiceless dental stop /t/

8. Voiced dental fricatives (ð) become voiced dental stop /d/

3.2 Stress, Intonation and Vowels

**Stress**

One of the most notable differences between TEC and English is the tendency for Trinidad English Creole to have syllable timing, i.e. a pattern in which every syllable receives an equal amount of time and there are no reduced syllables with reduced vowels. TEC tends to have full vowels where English has reduced forms: eg. TEC [fədə] vs English [ˈfaðə]
**Intonation and Suprasegmental Features**

The overall intonation patterns are clearly different from those of Standard English. The intonation patterns of TEC have been associated very broadly with African tone languages and intonation patterns seen in Bhojpuri. Most noticeable is that compared to Standard English, speakers exhibit a characteristic rising, ‘question like’ intonation at the end of an utterance as if the speaker is in doubt or asking a question (Allsopp 1972). Spectrogram readings from my three TEC speakers confirm marked changes in pitch in non-question utterances. The following examples illustrate the prosodic features of TEC:

Note: Capitals indicate stress and apostrophes indicate a rising pitch.

- COCKroa’ch
- TRInida’d
- CARpen’ter

**Vowels**

With regard to vowels, TEC appears to have more lengthened monophthongs (or pure vowels) and an absence of diphthongs.

**Chart 2. Spectrogram of the word ‘baba’, TEC Speaker**
3.3 Grammatical Features of Trinidad English Creole

Some of the general grammatical features of Trinidad English Creole discussed in this section was garnered from previous research conducted by David Jay Minderhout (1973), David Decamp (1971) and Mary Chin Pang (1981)

(1) The copula or forms of 'to be' are usually absent and are generally deleted after pronouns, for example, /di bwai dem wrkrd/ “De boy dem wicked” (TEC) 'The boys are very wicked or mischievous' (STE)

(2) There is generally no past tense indicator, although the continuous tense is marked by the verbal suffix –ing, for example: /i wakn dɔŋ di strit/ “I walking dong de street” (TEC) vs. “I am walking down the street” (STE).

The present and habitual tense is marked by the word 'does'. For example: /shi daz go ta çəɔɔɛ bri de / “She does go to church every day” (TEC) vs. “She goes to church every day” (STE)

Future tense is marked by the word 'go'. For example: /a go go si di dakta/ “Ah go go see de doctor” (TEC) vs. “I will go to see the doctor” (STE)

(3) Plural markers are deleted.

(4) The following pronominal system is found in TEC:

---

Chart 3: Vowel Space of Trinidad English Creole
### Chart 4: Pronominal system of TEC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard Trinidad English</th>
<th>Trinidad English Creole</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>/a/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>me</td>
<td>/mi/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td>/yu/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he</td>
<td>/i/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>she</td>
<td>/ʃi/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>her</td>
<td>/ʃi/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we</td>
<td>/wi/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>us</td>
<td>/wi/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you (plural)</td>
<td>/allju/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they</td>
<td>/dɛm/ or /de/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>them</td>
<td>/dɛm/ or /de/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is no case in the pronouns, except that /a/ may be used in reference to /mi/.

(5) There is no subject-verb agreement, e.g. 'the caterpillar where it wants to'.

(6) There is no passive form of the verb

(7) The negative particle corresponding to 'isn't' varies from /ɛnt ~ ɛn ~ɛ /

(8) Multiple negation - Whereas two negatives within the same core sentence are understood in Standard English to equal a positive, in Trinidadian Creole, multiple negatives within the same clause simply indicate negative.

(9) Questions are not realized by the inversion of the corresponding statement but by a declarative sentence ending with a high tone.

(10) Use of the repetitive sentence is quite common. For example: /ɪz dɛd ɪ dɛd wi/ for “Is dead he really dead, oui?” (TEC) vs. “he is really dead” (STE).
(11) The dummy subject constructions 'there is' or 'there are' are usually replaced by the existential 'it' in 'it have' as in /ɪt hab tu man/ “It have two man” (TEC) vs. “There are two men” (STE)

(12) Reduplication is not a characteristic of lower social class. It spans the breadth of the entire continuum and is accepted by all social classes. Thus it is quite common to hear expressions like /hwoli-hwoli/ 'full of holes'.

(13) Another feature that is characteristic of Trinidad English Creole is that of associated plurals. The use of these associated plurals is generally limited to the lower classes of creole speakers. Some examples are: /jan dem / 'John and his companions'

(14) Some nouns are also used for verb functions. Whereas in Standard English the verbal counterpart of the noun 'thief' is 'to steal', in Trinidadian Creole, the verbal equivalent of the noun 'thief' is 'to thief'. Similarly, whereas in Standard English there exists the noun 'tote' meaning 'carry-all', there is no such noun in Trinidadian Creole. Instead, there is the verb 'to tote' which means 'to carry'.

(15) Certain verbs are semantic converses from Standard English, for example, 'learn' and 'teach', are sometimes expressed by a single word. Trinidad English Creole speakers usually say “I learned the alphabet this week” but they also say “learn she sums” as in: 'teach her how 'to do sums' (math).

(16) One of the most complex of the grammatical and phonological variables of TEC is hypercorrection. Hypercorrection arises when a distinction in the standard language is neutralized in a particular dialect. For example, in TEC, verbs are not marked for number and person. However, TEC speakers hear speakers of Standard Trinidad English using verb forms that are marked for number and person. They are not aware that there are certain rules that apply to form these paradigms in certain contexts. They only know that persons of higher social standing, who are better educated than they are, use these verb forms in their language. Thus, in a social situation in which a vernacular closer to Standard English is required, they produce unacceptable and un-grammatical sentences such as:

(a) *I has to go to town today. (b) *We uses to go to the market. (c) *YOU wants a cup of coffee? (d) *They is a lazy people.

Hypercorrection is a complex grammatical issue because many of the erroneous forms are systemic i.e. speakers of TEC employ one of these hypercorrected forms as a means of indexing a TEC speaker of a lower social status.
4. Attitudes towards Creole English in Trinidad and Tobago

The interaction between the colonizer and the colonized provides the historical and sociological context in which language contact took place in Trinidad. As a former British colony, Trinidad inherited a linguistic situation in which British English functioned as the prestige standard while Trinidad English Creole was associated with the black and brown laboring underclasses. Colonial officials often expressed negative views of the Creole language, often disparaging it—and its speakers—in the strongest possible terms. The recognition of Trinidad English Creole as a legitimate language has thus been slow, due in part to its sociological and ethnolinguistic association with poverty, slavery and indentured servitude.

The following excerpt is a letter that was written to the editor of a Trinidad & Tobago newspaper, The Express. When viewed through the lens of Mikhail Bhaktain’s theoretical framework (1974) that asserts that words are loaded with inherited cultural and historical implications, references to the language as “a butchering of Oxford English” provides a window into the historical sociological narrative that has taken place regarding Trinidad English Creole and Trinidadian culture as a whole:

We do not have a common philosophy, culture or religion which could arouse common literacy and artistic sentiments in drama, dance, song or story-telling. That is, official English is adequate for a people of multi-ethnic background. Trinidadians are followers. Language essentially deals with ideas which convey emotions. What we will surely do will be to introduce the four-letter word even to describe the music of Chopin, Mozart, or Bach. Slang is not dialect or vernacular.
The truth is, we want to boast of originality and creativity, but to create a Trinidad dialect is to butcher Oxford English – the English in which all West Indian scholars excel. Do you want to make a dougla\(^1\) of that great language? We are too lazy to pronounce and enunciate correctly. We want short cuts to everything. For example, ‘th’ in ‘the’ is never heard. It takes too much effort. (Letter to the Editor, Express newspaper, 19 Oct 1986)

A key element in postcolonial studies is the examination of the process by which the colonized native is rendered a marginalized subject with little access to his ‘own’ identity. Postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha’s seminal work titled ‘Mimicry and Men’ (1994) explores and analyzes the distortion that takes place in the postcolonial national. Bhabha posits the idea that the colonized national’s only true identity is an identity of mimicry: that is, that all of his actions are imitations of the colonizing culture. Local culture, norms and language therefore are eschewed and are relegated to positions of inferiority. Many arguments against the use and legitimation of Trinidad English Creole as a language are therefore steeped in sentiments that see the culture of the colonized as debased and inferior to that of the colonizers. The following statement regarding Trinidad English Creole is especially revealing: “What we will surely do will be to introduce the four-letter word even to describe the music of Chopin, Mozart, or Bach.” Here, the speaker creates a social dichotomy, with Trinidadians and their language on one side and European musicians such as Chopin and Bach on the other. Using Bhaba’s framework of distortion as a guide, we see that the speaker has explicitly reduced his own culture by positioning it as diametrically opposed to European classical culture; the language is posited as coarse and crude, merely a multitude of ‘four letter words’ (a reference to the expletive utterance ‘\textit{fuck}’). Trinidad English Creole, and by extension its speakers, are

\(^1\) Dougla = a person of Indian and African descent. In this instance, it is being used as a pejorative.
coarse and socially unsophisticated, culturally inferior to the refinement of the European world.

In spite of this, there appears to be a general shift in public attitudes towards Caribbean Creoles. With the rise of nationalism associated with a post-colonial and post independence era, many people are beginning to view the language as an integral part of national cultural identity rather than a shamefaced vestige of slavery and indentureship. Carrington (1988:11-12) lists several additional factors that he believes has contributed towards the marked positive shifts towards Caribbean culture and its Creole languages. These factors include changes to, and the subsequent erosion of, the power of traditional land owning classes, which has led to changes in social structure and increased mobility within Caribbean society. Social mobility, once tied to ethnicity and one’s ability to successfully assimilate British cultural values, has been partially subsumed by citizens’ ability to access a new global dialectic regarding their culture and identity. Culture, once tied to a given space and time (Castells 2000), has now shifted to a more mobile space of flows, or as Castells calls it, the network society. Historic structures of power and prestige can to some degree be bypassed on the internet. Cultural pursuits once deemed unworthy of the public sphere can now be actively constructed, produced and consumed by those who ascribe to those values.
5. Standard Caribbean English: Formal Enregisterment Movements

"It is clear that large numbers of students across the Caribbean have not mastered the use of Standard English. There continues to be interference from dialects and patois used throughout the region”.


Between 1962 and 1983, twelve of the political entities in the Commonwealth Caribbean gained independence from Britain. Up until the 1960s and the beginning of the independence movement in the Caribbean, the unquestioned target for English language usage in the Caribbean had been models that most closely resembled Standard British English. But in 1971, in the aftermath of the first four Anglophone counties gaining their political independence, the Caribbean Lexicography Project was established. The project was based at, and to a significant extent financed by, the University of the West Indies, a Tertiary institution owned and wholly funded by all the territories of the Commonwealth Caribbean, with the exception of Guyana. In addition to university support, the project received direct financial support for the governments of Guyana, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago. This was as close as one could get to an official transnational enterprise for codifying an officially recognized variety of Caribbean English so that it could function in the role of official language in the respective countries.

The objective of the project was to codify and produce the Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage, which was to function as a reference point for Standard Caribbean English across the Anglophone Caribbean. The expectation was that this Standard Caribbean variety of English would function as the national language in each of the twelve independent states of the Commonwealth Caribbean and provide the
prescriptive rules necessary for the administering and grading of standardized Caribbean Council Exams.

The dictionary struggled, however, with a major underlying contradiction. This involved the features that made Standard Caribbean English distinctive from varieties of what was referenced as “Internationally Acceptable English.” The distinguishing features were manifestations of linguistic influences from the Creole languages that were widely spoken in the different countries. This presented a problem, for in order for Standard Caribbean English to be considered internationally acceptable English, the codification of Standard Caribbean English should not include Creole features. Caribbean linguist and lexicographer, Dr. Richard Allsopp, describes the problems with codifying the Creole forms as follows:

As home-made, the Caribbean linguistic product has always been shame-faced, inhibited both by the dour authority of colonial administrators and their written examinations on the one hand, and by the persistence of the stigmatized Creole languages of the laboring populace on the other (Allsopp 1996)

The dictionary approached this problem by establishing a hierarchy of formalness, which utilized four descending levels: Formal, Informal, Anti-Formal, and Erroneous (Allsopp 1996). This taxonomy was used as a basis for both describing forms and prescribing how they should be used. The Formal level was defined as language use that is “accepted as educated.” Informal was defined as “accepted as familial; chosen as part of well-structured causal relaxed speech, but sometimes characterized by morphological and syntactic reductions of English structure and other remainder features of decreolization” (Allsopp 1996). The Anti-Formal was defined as “deliberately rejecting Formalness; consciously familiar and intimate; friendly, vulgar, coarse or jocular”; or a “Creolized or
creole form of structure conveniently borrowed to suit context or situation.” Finally, the Erroneous level was defined as language that was “not permissible as Internationally Acceptable English, although evidently considered to be so by the user” (Allsopp 1996). It is not clear whether the erroneous forms were many of the systemic ‘hypercorrected’ forms that one often hears when speakers of Creole English try to appropriate a Standard English vernacular. Language forms associated with the Formal level were unmarked in the dictionary. The remaining two forms, Informal and Anti-Formal, were marked as such in the dictionary and noted as “influenced to a varying degree by a Creole language.”

After the political independence of Trinidad and Tobago in 1962, access to public education became easier for many of the country’s citizens. However, in a study published in 1975, Trinidad and Tobago’s Ministry of Education officially recognized that the majority of children in the school system had a first and sometimes sole competence in Trinidad English Creole. Even though Standard Caribbean English was officially becoming enregistered and codified, many of the students had little or no fluency in the language. In 1975, The Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of education called for the recognition of Trinidad English Creole as a real language and as a ‘legitimate vehicle for oral and written expression’. Coinciding with this official recognition of TEC as a language, the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) O Level testing introduced questions that allowed students to write in Trinidad English Creole. At the time, the syllabus elicited significant protest from parents, many of whom had objections based on the fear that the acknowledgment of such “inferior and useless speech” forms would lead to problems in learning “Proper English”—thereby limiting a child’s opportunity for
future academic success (Carrington and Borley 1977). There is conflicting information as to when, exactly, the Trinidad English Creole section of the English exam was removed. However, by 1996, which was the year in which I took the Caribbean O Level English exams, I can attest to the fact that the exam did not include any sections in which students were allowed to write responses using Trinidad English Creole.

While mandates such as attempts to introduce Trinidad English Creole into the school syllabus and Caribbean Examinations have given Trinidad English Creole a level of official legitimacy, there has been little success in regard to the language achieving the same social status as Standard Trinidad and Caribbean English. There are several reasons as to why official attempts to enregister and subsequently raise the social status of Trinidad English Creole failed. One of the primary reasons offered is that it is difficult for a language to enact a curriculum if the language lacks a standardized orthography and the accompanying conventional references, such as grammar textbooks and dictionaries (Winer 1990). However, I propose another reason as to why official attempts to raise the social status of Trinidad English Creole failed, and this has to do with how officials focused their efforts on incorporating the language into the ‘formal space’. In brief, it is my contention that these language planners did not account for the diglossic and highly compartmentalized use of the language. While efforts by the government to promote and recognize the language could be constructed as indeed noble, attempts to introduce it into the formal space were in conflict with the everyday linguistic patterns of how Trinidad English Creole is actually used within society. Proponents of this plan therefore faced opposition to the introduction of the language from several domains, as they failed to account for the diglossic compartmentalization of Trinidad English Creole and
Trinidadian identity. A similar phenomenon was noted in Corsica, where language planners attempted to raise the ‘low status’ of Corsican in relation to French by promoting and appropriating the use of Corsican in the high status or formal domain of mass media (Jaffe 1996). Attempts to elevate the status of Corsican ultimately failed, however, because language planners did not take into account the mixed nature of Corsican identity and language practices. They therefore violated ideologies that associate the Corsican language with intimacy and egalitarianism by attempting to position it within a domain of dominance (Jaffe 1996). In the case of Trinidad and Trinidad English Creole, studies have shown that attributes such as ‘correct’ and ‘refined’ are associated with Standard English, while ‘natural’ and ‘friendly’ are associated with Creole and Creole speakers (Muhleisen 2001). Therefore, to reposition Trinidad English Creole as a language of authority violates Trinidadian categories of linguistic value and identity, which are grounded in the diglossic separation of the domains in which the language is used.

6. The Network Society and Language Use

Information and communication technologies based on the Internet have enabled the emergence of new sorts of communities and communicative practices. A growing body of research in sociology, ethnic, media and cultural studies is beginning to explore how the World Wide Web is changing the way diasporic and immigrant lives are experienced (Mallapragada 2000: 179). Despite early assessments that the internet would act as a homogenizing agent and push ‘non-standard’ languages to the periphery (or even extinction), it appears that the internet has in fact become a haven for non-standard language use and socialization (Siebenhaar 2006), especially in more interactive spheres
on the web, such as chat, forums and e-mail. The general conclusion is that the technologies comprising the Internet, and all the text and media that exist within it, are in themselves cultural products (Wilson 2002) and are therefore allied with vernacular modes of expression.

In the late 20th century, the advance of electronic media fostered the formation of *diasporic public spheres* around broadcast media from the homeland (Appadurai 1996). Video films, satellite TV and audiocassettes have brought together producers and audiences across national boundaries and have accordingly helped diasporic audiences to sustain links to wider constituencies of national or ethnic affiliation. There is ample evidence that computer-mediated discourse can serve as a site for interactionally meaningful use of language alternation, even in the absence of established offline relationships. For example, users creatively exploit bi- and multilingualism for various communicative purposes: to attract the attention of other interlocutors, signal their authority, select addressees, delimit conversational topics, contextualize messages as non-serious or non-threatening, signal shifts between participant frameworks, restrict the audience, and challenge other participants’ language choices (Androutsopoulos & Hinnenkamp 2001). Appadurai’s (1996) concept of mediascape as “a large repository of images and narratives in diverse semiotic forms” (p. 331) provides a broader theoretical apparatus for situating the present study in the digitally-mediated discourse of the *socawarriors* forum, a forum space that I contend has become one of the many collaborative spaces in which Trinidad English Creole is (i) becoming enregistered and (ii) employed as a semiotic marker of a cosmopolitan Trinidadian postcolonial identity.
7. Data Collection and Methodological Framework

For the present study, I ‘fed’ sample text written in Trinidad English Creole language into a web crawling program nicknamed An Crubandan. This process created a statistical model for the language, which I then deployed on the Internet to capture text written in the target language. In the end, the process creates a word frequency list, after several filters are applied—among them language-specific filters—to produce a ‘cleaner’ word list. Yet this process posed a problem for Trinidad English Creole: from a statistical standpoint, python algorithm training models had a hard time distinguishing this variety from Standard English. Many of the salient phonological and grammatical features mentioned in the linguistic features section of this study turned out to be the most defining features for the language. The queries were then passed to the Google API, which returns a list of URLs of documents potentially written in the target language. These were downloaded and then converted into plain text.

After a text had been downloaded and converted, the language recognizer was applied to the plain-text candidate document. If the text was deemed to have been written in the target language, it was then added to the corpus. The Natural Language Toolkit (or more commonly NLTK) was used to process my raw text files into a final corpus databank. Samples of processed text and programming code used to process data are included in the appendix. My final TEC corpus contains approximately 600,000 tokens and several hundred conversational excerpts from Trinidian diasporic websites.

Because the forum that is the focus of this study is open and available for public use (that is, it does not require registration or a password), I consider it to constitute a public environment. As such, I did not seek informed consent from each participant on
the forum. In addition to viewing conversational excerpts that were pulled by the *An Crubandan* web crawling program, I used online ethnographic observation in order to understand some of the fields of discourse with which the participants align themselves.

It should be noted that I am acutely aware of my position as what anthropologists have called a “native ethnographer.” While I did not post articles or comment within the forum in question, the fact that I was born in Trinidad and Tobago and resided there until the age of sixteen no doubt influenced my observations of the data. I am also a member of the Trinidadian diaspora community that resides in the United States. Aware of my need to maintain methodological objectivity, I reached out to the forum administrator to inform him of my research interest, and I conducted a semi-structured interview to obtain information regarding his reasons for creating the site, as well as his reasons for his own personal use or disuse of Trinidad English Creole. Following a methodology posited by many conversation analysts, I believe that it is possible to identify social positions strictly from discursive information. I rely on the understanding that conversations are orderly and rule governed, not merely from the perspective of analysts, but also from the perspective of participating members (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). I also utilize Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) principle of emergence, which states that “identity is best viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices” (p. 588). In short, new media contexts provide an important ‘field-site’ for examining how internet users take up different positions towards specific topics, people, and the act of communication itself (Peuronen 2009).

The *Socawarriors* forum was my primary ‘field-site’ for this analysis. For the sake of clarity, I will first analyze examples that address the issue of dialectal writing as
well as the enregisterment that takes place when users utilize Trinidad English Creole as part of their computer-mediated communicative practices. Next, I will present and examine a communicative episode in which users ‘code-switch’ between TEC and Standard Trinidad English. These examples enable an examination of the ways in which users index specific identities and social positionings through their use or disuse of Trinidad English Creole orthography.

7.1 Socawarriors

*Socawarriors* is an online forum that displays posts of newspaper articles, sports, news and other social trends from Trinidad. Sporting a home banner that encourages users to “Talk yuh Talk,” as shown in Figure 1 below, the website makes overt use of TEC to cue its members to orient themselves to Trinidadian culture:

![Figure 1: “Talk Yuh Talk!”](image-url)
As with other forum sites, users identify themselves with ‘nicknames’ and organize topics and discussions according to themes. In keeping with the anonymity associated with the internet, many of these form users appear to be strangers who do not have an ‘offline relationship’.

*TallMan* is the moderator and owner of the socawarriors.net forum. A member of the Trinidadian diaspora, he has resided in the United States for over thirty years. Like many of the Caribbean immigrants who came to the United States during the 1970s, his mother immigrated to the United States under the guest worker program, where she worked as a domestic housekeeper in New York until her retirement in the late 1990s. A practicing Rastafarian, *TallMan*, though only in his mid 40s, is retired and lives a relatively understated life of opulence in the United States. During his mid twenties, after graduating from Pace University with a degree in Computer Information Technology, he moved to San Francisco where he founded a computer technology firm. By thirty-two, *TallMan* was worth over $100 million dollars, and in 2001, he was featured in Forbes magazine’s ‘100 richest people in technology’ edition.

*TallMan*’s affluence provides him with a significant amount of social capital within the Trinidadian diaspora community. While such extreme cases of success are rare, it is indicative of the marked social shifts within Caribbean society regarding success and social mobility. Once tied to ethnicity or the ability to successfully assimilate British cultural values, social mobility has been partially eroded by the ascendance of individuals once excluded from domains of power to positions that enable them to take advantage of a new dialectic in regards to culture, pride and identity.

When I asked *TallMan* why he decided to utilize Trinidad Creole English on the
forum, he responded: “But, eh eh, iz ah Trini – how else I suppose to talk?” I then asked his thoughts regarding the use of Standard Trinidad (or Standard Caribbean English) on the site:

**Example 1: “It depend on why yuh using it”**

1. It depend on why yuh using it-
2. There is ah fella who goes by de name diamondtrim.
3. He used tuh play de grammar card in de earlies. Rell kicks.
4. If yuh using it because dais how yuh does talk normally, den fine,
5. but if yuh using it to blanks people, me eh like dat at all – de queen is not we ruler no more.

The short excerpt above (which will serve as my ‘Example 1’), solicited with the intention of obtaining TallMan’s reasons for using TEC, provides a striking metanarrative and sociological perspective regarding STE use. As we can see from line 1 (“it depend on why you using it”), TallMan acknowledges that STE use may have many possible motivations, yet he also believes that speakers are acutely aware of the stances that can be indexed by its deployment. Although he concedes that some people utilize Standard English because, quite simply, “that is how they normally speak,” he sees its use online as often agentive and adversarial. Even though studies have shown that most Trinidad nationals—especially those from middle and upper class backgrounds—have great difficulty in performing an extended, fluent basilect variety of Trinidad English Creole (Winer 1993), TallMan appears to posses distaste for people who use it on his forum, particularly those who use it, in his own words, ‘to blanks someone’. The term blanks can be loosely defined as “to chastise or to ignore a person due to perceived self importance.” As such, we see that Standard English is ideologically conceptualized as a
language variety that indexes authority, status and importance, and is thus clearly associated with the invocation of social hierarchy.

Yet TallMan also expresses his distaste for people who use Standard English in explicit postcolonial terms: “The queen is not we ruler no more” (line 5). In this reference to the colonial rule of England, TallMan associates Standard English use with old historical social norms and colonial ideology. Standard English, and the orthography that carries it in this internet environment, is construed as a dour foreign identity, at odds with his true ethnolinguistic identity as a Trinidad national (Silverstein 2003).

7.2 Orthography as enregisterment

If we step back from the sociocultural implications of this interaction and view it through a purely technical orthographic lens, there are several key issues that can be noticed. Based on the linguistic rules of TEC, voiced dental fricatives (ð) are realized as voiced dental stops /d/. The voiced dental fricatives that appear in line 4 (‘that’ and ‘then’) and in line 5 (‘then’) have been orthographically represented to approximate the manner in which they are normally spoken: i.e., (dem) for /dɛm/. However in line 2, TallMan does not orthographically represent the word ‘there’ based on TECs consonant conventions (see pg. 17). In contrast to Standard English, a standard orthography does not exist for TEC and as such, personal orthographic preferences prevail on the forum and can be inconsistent. In addition to personal orthographic choices, speaker’s graphic choices are also potentially influenced by the Creole continuum: that is, as linguists have argued, Creole languages consist of a spectrum of varieties that exist between the two poles of substrate and superstrate. In sum, Trinidad English Creole orthography is subject to diversity due to a number of factors that include local dialect, standard language
influence, the Creole continuum and individual interpretation of phonemic rules and principles.

Preston (1982, 1985; cited in Jaffe 2008) identifies three categories of linguistic ‘respellings’: eye dialect, allegro forms, and dialect respellings. Androutsopoulos (2000) posits two additional categories, which he terms prosodic spellings and homophone spellings. These definitions, as we will see, prove useful in our discussion, as I hope to show that the online use of TEC suggests a form of dialect enregisterment that goes far beyond the ‘text speak’ language of a previous generation.

Eye dialect is defined as nonstandard spellings that normally do not vary and are simply alternate spellings of standard pronunciations. Examples commonly used in English include *sez* for the word ‘says’ and *enuff* for the word ‘enough’. Allegro forms are defined as nonstandard spellings that represent features of casual speech. For example, *gonna* for the word ‘going to’ and *kinda* for ‘kind of’. Dialect respellings are orthographic representations that reflect some phonological features of a speech variety, such as *git* for ‘get’ and *thang* for the word ‘thing’. Prosodic spellings represent prosodic patterns, such as illustrating vowel lengthening with multiple vowels e.g. *baaaaad*. Finally, homophone spellings are graphic alterations not related to pronunciation: e.g. *sk8er* for the word ‘skater’.

With the aforementioned orthographic categories in mind, I shall explore the following three excerpts. The extracts below, taken from the same discussion thread, illustrate how orthographic representations of TEC utilize both the grammatical and phonological conventions of the oral language.
Example 2: “Yuh does see she walking down the road…”

Re: Super Blue on the road to Germany  « Reply #4 on: December 05, 2005, 12:16:55 PM »

a. me eh saying he cyar have ah great tribute. If I was he fren I woulda be fighting he everyday..blows ah talking bout until he go to rehab. steups dat real sad

Re: Super Blue on the road to Germany  « Reply #10 on: December 05, 2005, 12:30:47 PM »

b. Ah man tell me he does see him in ah rubbish bin diggin it up. Truetrini, ah doh think dat was nice tuh say bout de man, we all know he have ah drug problem, but still be considerate with de things we say

« Reply #27 on: December 05, 2005, 02:13:13 PM » Quote from: MickeyRat on December 05, 2005, 02:08:00 PM

c. Plenty morning when I coming home from party yuh does see she walking down the road bout 5 in the darkness where yuh tink she going.

Using Jaffe’s (2008) definition of dialectal spelling as a guide, we can see that there is significantly more than mere respelling taking place in these excerpts. In addition to the phonological representation of oral TEC features, nonstandard orthography also carries many examples of systemic TEC grammatical markings. Several of these are noted below:

1. In extract (b) and (c) the speaker utilizes the known oral TEC habitual marker of ‘does’ /doz/ (Winer 1993)

2. In extract (b) the speaker utilizes the unmarked verb form ‘to tell’. Unmarked verbs forms imply a past perfective temporal reference (Winer 1993).

3. The pronominal system is consistent with linguistic studies of TEC. In extract (c) we see that pronouns are not marked for case: “yuh does see she”.

4. Speakers utilize an orthographic dialectal spelling that reflects the oral pronunciation for several personal pronouns. These include ah /a/ for ‘I’, yuh /yu/ for ‘you’ and she /ʃi/ for ‘her’. 
5. The TEC negative particle corresponding to 'isn't' varies from /ɛnt ~ ɛn ~ɛ/ (Winer 1993). In excerpt (a), it is orthographically represented as ‘eh’.

7.2 Trinidad English Creole use as a discursive stance

Even more interesting for the present discussion, however, is how forum members index local Trinidadian role relationships in this digitally mediated space. Speakers communicate social meaning throughout these interactions, as we will see, through a complex mixture of divergent orthographies and style shifts:

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**Trini football and its pundits**
« on: July 14, 2008, 08:16:15 AM »

a. **DiamondTrim**: Good day folk and kin alike,
As an avid and objective reader of the many issues put forward in this forum, I realise, sadly, that, for a large percentage of the forumites, Jack Warner seems to be the bane of football in T&T.

b. Like Lasana Liburd, a journalist whose intelligence and talent is superceded only by his and his employers thinly veiled personal vendetta against Jack, so do a lot of ppl on this forum so blindly follow in the footsteps of sycophancy.

c. I am not defending Jack or any of his cohorts, but simply grammatically illustrating how easily we as a ppl are led to be perpetuators of hearsay and innuendo, without the benefit of intelligent or credible information. Whilst I am certain that there are those amongst us who are privy to highly credible sources and their requisite scoops, honest hearts will admit to lending great amounts of credence to the he say she say philosophy.

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**Re: Trini football its pundits**
« Reply #19 on: July 14, 2008, 11:31:38 AM »

d. **Bake n Buljol**: allyuh bothering with dis shithong??.. steups.

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**Re: Trini football and its pundits**
« Reply #32 on: July 14, 2008, 01:02:47 PM »

e. **MEP**: Maybe you're here to play devil's advocate..but ah find yuh tone to be somewhat supercilious and pretentious...what exactly is yuh point?😊😊😊
Re: Trini football and its pundits
« Reply #52 on: July 15, 2008, 06:38:32 AM »

f. DiamondTrim: A note to Bake n Buljol....your command of the english language is both juvenile and laughable at best. You are not fit to touch the felt of my grammatical jacket. I suggest you continue in your futile attempts at insult with someone more suitable to your bovine talents.

Re: Trini football and its pundits
« Reply #57 on: July 15, 2008, 08:42:07 AM »

g. Bake n Buljol: Lol... fella (assuming you are a fella), you don't know the first thing about me, but I find your affected pomposity amusing. One thing I have never felt the need to do is to bandy about my qualifications and/or accomplishments in some silly cyber measurement of intellectual dicks.

The interaction above begins with a post from the forum user DiamondTrim, who makes a reference to the former head of the Trinidad Soccer Association and the former FIFA vice president, Jack Warner. When addressing his fellow forum members, DiamondTrim uses what can be described as a “super standard English variety” (see Wolfram & Schilling Estes 2000, Bucholtz 2001), or at the very least, highly academic language: e.g., *As an avid and objective reader of the many issues put forward in this forum, I realise, sadly, that, for a large percentage of the forumites, Jack Warner seems to be the bane of football in T&T.*

DiamondTrim continues in this elevated manner until Bake n buljol chooses to respond with a succinct use of Trinidad English Creole orthography: *allyuh bothering with dis shithong?? steups.* Another poster by the name of MEP then responds to DiamondTrim with what can be described as a mixed code of TEC and STE: *Maybe you're here to play devil's advocate...but ah find yuh tone to be somewhat supercilious and pretentious...what exactly is yuh point?* We can see from MEP’s response that he finds DiamondTrim’s use of English “supercilious
and pretentious,” even chastizing him for his perceived “tone.” MEP’s comments are extremely illuminating for this analysis, as he clearly perceives the utilization of standard English as indexical of a superior social positioning—one that he feels compelled to counter with a strategic use of both language varieties.

_DiamondTrim_ continues to address forum members with SE orthography and explicitly confronts Bake n Buljol by name when doing so, calling him out for his poor command of English: _A note to Bake n Buljol...your command of the english language is both juvenile and laughable at best. You are not fit to touch the felt of my grammatical jacket. I suggest you continue in your futile attempts at insult with someone more suitable to your bovine talents. Bake n Buljol_ then responds to the insult by switching his orthography and register to what can only be described as a highly stylized Superstandard English, reminding _DiamondTrim_ that there is little point in arguing online: _I find your affected pomposity amusing. One thing I have never felt the need to do is to bandy about my qualifications and/or accomplishments in some silly cyber measurement of intellectual dicks._

The interaction above clearly illustrates that the use—or disuse—of specific graphic varieties can index particular social stances along a Trinidadian continuum. Through the employment of Standard English orthography, users index a stance that may be indicative of intelligence, but at the same time of superiority and privilege. It is apparent that all of the speakers are keenly aware of the meanings produced through this semiotic stance-taking, allowing certain stances of their own to emerge through unique combinations of orthographic choice. I suggest here that these stances are examples of Trinidadian communicative practices that have been ‘reterritorialized’ into virtual space, with participants drawing on multiple orthographic resources in order to position
themselves. Most critically, the use of particular orthographic styles works to situate forum members along a continuum of Trinidadian identity. For instance, the ability to use both language varieties skillfully, as MEP does in this exchange, positions users as both university educated and proudly Trinidadian, in stark contrast to previous understandings of these two positions as incompatible, if not mutually exclusive.

CONCLUSION

I have argued in this thesis that the internet is facilitating an orthographically mediated enregisterment of Trinidad English Creole. Users of the socawarriors website are social actors who draw on multiple communicative resources in order to position themselves within the specific context of Trinidadian societal norms. The analysis of these interactions reveals two things: First, Trinidad English Creole speakers orient towards Trinidadian language norms and cultural identities through their specific orthographic choices. Second, the use of Standard Caribbean English or Trinidad English Creole on a diasporic forum is a deliberate choice, with social implications being enacted through one’s decision to use a particular variety in a given situation.

These online forums, as part of the new network society, are facilitating a ‘democratic grassroots’ enregisterment of Trinidad English Creole. While past attempts to enregister Trinidad English Creole failed because officials did not account for the diglossic separation of Trinidad speech domains, the internet, with its ability to transcend and bypass traditional power structures, has now shifted the issue of orthography and Trinidad English Creole into the hands of the people. Language ideology and national identity are clearly linked, and Trinidad English Creole speakers’ decision to utilize the language of the private sphere in the public sphere constitutes a form of “social action”
that is at once personal and political. On forums such as socawarriors, this action can be seen as both an affirmation and subversive enactment of a new postcolonial identity.
References:


Jaffe, Alexandra et al. (2012). Orthography as social action: Scripts, Spelling, Identity and Power. DeGruyter Mouton


Appendix A:

Table 1: Population of Trinidad According to Ethnic Group

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<td>1,394 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>301,946 36.5</td>
<td>426,660 40.3</td>
<td>453,069 40.3</td>
<td>468,524 35.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>358,588 43.3</td>
<td>434,730 41.1</td>
<td>445,444 39.6</td>
<td>452,536 34.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>134,749 16.3</td>
<td>175,150 16.5</td>
<td>207,558 18.4</td>
<td>301,866 22.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>15,718 1.9</td>
<td>9,850 0.9</td>
<td>7,254 0.6</td>
<td>8,669 0.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>8,361 1.0</td>
<td>5,670 0.5</td>
<td>4,314 0.4</td>
<td>4,003 0.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrian, Lebanese or Arab</td>
<td>1,590 0.2</td>
<td>1,010 0.1</td>
<td>934 0.1</td>
<td>1,029 0.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6,714 0.8</td>
<td>2,900 0.3</td>
<td>1,724 0.2</td>
<td>2,280 0.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>291 0.0</td>
<td>2,350 0.2</td>
<td>4,831 0.4</td>
<td>87,718 6.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>827,957</td>
<td>1,058,320</td>
<td>1,125,128</td>
<td>1,262,366</td>
<td>1,328,019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B:

Corpus Sample, Trinidad English Creole

Tokenized Text, Part of Speech Tagged

```python
>>> file_content = open("/Users/Solange/Desktop/104855.txt").read()
>>> tokens = nltk.word_tokenize(file_content)
>>> tagged_tokens = nltk.pos_tag(tokens)
```
Appendix C:

Sample of websites identified by An Crubandan webcrawler as written in TEC

http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=21846.msg200823
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=54885.0 104819.txt
http://www.ttonline.org/threads/15259-I-am-Woman 104832.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=54044.0 104827.txt
http://www.ttonline.org/threads/18367-VOLNEY-FIRED-lool 104849.txt
http://www.ttonline.org/threads/17180-Never-a-Dull-Moment 104825.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=58300.0 104816.txt
http://www.ttonline.org/threads/18614-Pre-Budget-rally-tomorrow 104846.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=50634.0 104820.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=35964.0 104815.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=54044.0 104827.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=8745.0 104842.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=14015.0 104838.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=46155.0 104845.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=32434.0 104840.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=52810.0 104822.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=34233.0 104843.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=54791.0 104848.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=54084.0 104851.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=52582.0 104852.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=53867.0 104837.txt
http://www.ttonline.org/threads/20043-PNM-christmas-wish-list! 104830.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=41024.0 104839.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=53033.0 104824.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=58072.msg823686
104833.txt http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=28252.0 104813.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=56695.0 104814.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=57629.0 104826.txt
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=36675.0
http://www.socawarriors.net/forum/index.php?topic=58308.0 104835.txt
http://www.guardian.co.tt/columnist/2012-02-05/ah-wukless 104810.txt