



Review

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Susanne Mühleisen, *Genre in World Englishes: Case studies from the Caribbean* (Varieties of English Around the World, G67). Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2022. Pp. viii + 229. ISBN 9789027211385.

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Genre plays a basic role in shaping written and spoken communication, providing a frame in which language use is situated; nevertheless, the study of how genres have developed in World Englishes and differ across cultural spaces has so far been relatively neglected, as the author notes at the outset of this volume (p. 2). Her aim is not only to contribute towards filling this research gap, but to put forward and apply a theoretical framework for research on discourse and genre studies in World Englishes (p. 12). The approach focuses on transfer, adaptation or transformation of the different component aspects of genres and considers spoken, written as well as digital text formats (p. 12), as is reflected in the title of the introductory chapter 1: ‘Genre in World Englishes: The global and the postcolonial in oral, written and digital texts’ (pp. 1–15). Apart from outlining the aims and framework of the volume, this chapter includes cogent definitions of *genre* and related terms as well as lucid explanations of key aspects of genre that highlight its dual character between convention and innovation. Furthermore, it introduces the regional focus of the volume: the Anglophone Caribbean (p. 13). This region overall has not only been subject to diverse linguistic and cultural influences, but it is made up of numerous islands (as well as two mainland nations) that have each been shaped by different historical, political and economic circumstances as well as geographical, demographic and other factors. Among these islands the present volume deals specifically with Trinidad and Jamaica. This choice is well motivated in that these are the two largest islands, they are culturally influential within the region and beyond, and they look back on different linguistic and cultural histories. At the same time, this reviewer very much shares the hope expressed by the author that the research presented here will inspire further research in other Caribbean contexts. In particular, the kinds of approaches applied, based on selected sample texts or relatively small self-collected corpora (see p. 15), seem well suited for further investigations on the all too often neglected small islands that are not represented in available corpora. As the chapter overview (pp. 13–14) indicates, Trinidad is most in focus in the seven remaining chapters of the volume. The chapters cover four traditional written genres (chapters 2–5), one digital genre (chapter 7) and two oral genres, one spoken (chapter 6) and one musical (chapter 8), and progressively introduce different dimensions of genre.

Chapter 2 ‘*Callaloo, stewed maniocou and doubles: Caribbean culinary transformations in Trinidadian print and online recipes*’ (pp. 17–42) begins with a general introduction to the topic of transformations in foods and their preparation in Caribbean contexts. Then it moves on to a discussion of the genre of the cooking recipe, which includes a historical perspective along with an explanation regarding the scarcity of research on this genre in postcolonial English contexts, and furthermore provides a well-exemplified explanation of formal and functional features. This lays a solid foundation for the detailed and illuminating analysis of selected Trinidadian print and online recipes in the next two sections, before the chapter concludes with some well-reflected comments on the issue of cultural appropriation in the globalization of cooking recipes that has been spurred by the genre’s arrival on the World Wide Web.

A second Trinidadian case study is presented in chapter 3 (pp. 43–75). This is devoted to ‘Personhood, genealogy and remembrance in death notices and obituaries’. It proceeds structurally in a similar fashion to the previous chapter. A general introduction, in this case to last rites in the Caribbean and particularly Trinidad, sets the scene and is followed by a detailed introduction to the genre that includes not only a historical background but also a comparative perspective across different cultures as well as languages; in drawing comparisons and identifying core and optional moves in the genre, the author lucidly elaborates the foundation of a detailed genre analysis in terms of formal and functional elements. Against this background, the quantitative analysis of 100 death notices from the *Trinidad Guardian* (2010/11) which is presented in the chapter succeeds well in establishing a clear picture of this genre in Trinidad. A further qualitative analysis of death notices from 2018 also includes online and televised ads; this comparison across time and media finds only minor changes while the overall format remains stable. The analysis of death notices is complemented by a contrasting analysis of the related but different genre of obituaries, where a framework of narrative analysis is applied to two obituaries for Derek Walcott. The chapter is well rounded off by a brief consideration of death notices and obituaries in new media formats that broadens the perspective beyond Trinidad.

Chapter 4 (pp. 77–104) is the first of two chapters presenting studies of Jamaican data. It is titled ‘*Metathesiophobia, nutty professors and Patois: Language debates in Letters to the Editor (LTEs) in a Jamaican newspaper*’. The consideration of a genre that forms part of traditional print newspapers provides a link to the previous chapter, while the LTE format takes the discussion of genre forward to dialogically oriented discourse. As in the preceding chapters, the introductory section provides an entry to the analysis of the genre in question in the Caribbean context that also addresses the historical dimension of the genre; next, the issue of public language debates is introduced, again including a historical perspective. Formal and functional features of LTEs are then explicated in detail, with illustrative examples provided from the author’s LTE corpus from the Jamaican *Gleaner* newspaper. This corpus consists of over 100 LTEs from two time periods (around the turn of the millennium and the second decade of the present millennium) that centre on the debate about the status of Creole (Patois) in Jamaica. A quantitative analysis of the corpus reveals a rather stable mixture of attitudes that

indicates a continuing controversial discussion, with peaks in terms of the number of contributions at certain times. One significant point in time is 2019, the year a petition was made to make Patois a co-official language in Jamaica. The outlook on opinion comments in social media given in the concluding section then looks at comments on the Facebook page of one of the proponents of the petition. In terms of genre this allows the author to highlight similarities and differences between LTEs and Facebook comments, while the content of the comments supports the finding of mixed attitudes from the LTE analysis; furthermore, certain comments serve to introduce the thorny issue of Creole orthography, one of the aspects that need to be considered when analysing the use of Creoles in computer-mediated communication.

Another dialogic newspaper genre is discussed in chapter 5 ‘*Tell me Pastor: Certainty, directness and the assertion of moral norms in a Jamaican newspaper advice column*’ (pp. 105–32), again following the structure that begins with a general introduction, gradually leads up to the specific analysis of the Jamaican data and ends with an outlook on online communication. The chapter first contextualizes the advice column in terms of the general speech act of advice, also considering politeness strategies to mitigate the concomitant face-threat. Next follows a general discussion of the genre that introduces the format, illustrating its structure by a typical example, and provides historical and comparative perspectives. Following a general discussion of advice columns in Jamaican newspapers, the particular column that is in focus in the chapter is introduced. The examples presented and discussed help to provide a transparent insight into the features of the genre. Also important for the reader not familiar with the culture is the explanation regarding the role of religious discourse in public life in Jamaica, which, as the author argues, ‘is often agonistically toned in a fashion which is typical for the psychodynamics of oral culture’ (p. 121). A quantitative analysis of sixty *Tell me Pastor* columns reveals that the advice seekers are mostly younger females and that the topics span quite a range, but with relationship and family issues being especially prominent. Answers, which are also varied, often show a strong moral tone but also personal concern for the writers, as is illustrated by several examples. The outlook on advice in the context of an online forum where users respond to each other highlights the difference from an advice column where the responses come from a figure of authority – according to this analysis, a format that continues to hold appeal for members of a young generation as they find their way in society.

Chapter 6 (pp. 133–57) shifts the focus back to Trinidad, addressing the topic of ‘*Morning Caller: Negotiating power and authority in a Trinidadian radio phone-in programme*’. As the title indicates, the chapter also represents a shift in focus in the discussion from the written to the spoken mode. At the same time, there are links to previous chapters – as pointed out by the author at the outset of the chapter, public debating, as also seen in the written mode particularly in chapter 4, holds an important place in Caribbean culture. The chapter applies a conversation analytic approach that is explained in the introductory section; furthermore, the general characteristics of the genre as well as the main aspects addressed by previous research are described, after which the discussion zooms in on phone-in programmes in the Caribbean while also

mentioning research on the genre conducted in other postcolonial contexts. The analysis of the Trinidadian phone-in programme *Morning Show* that is presented in the chapter is based on transcriptions of the show during one week in 2007; it scrutinizes how claims of membership of the discourse community are made in opening sequences, illustrates how a caller challenges the authority of the host in a discussion, and describes contested closings. Overall it becomes evident that the discussions analysed are rather confrontational, in line with the author's initial observation, to which she returns in the concluding section, that argumentative talk, related to oral culture, plays an important role in Caribbean societies. Nevertheless, as she also mentions, there are of course less confrontational phone-in programmes as well, whose nature further research could illuminate. In contrast to previous chapters, the present one does not end by taking the discussion into the digital sphere but rather points out the continued relevance of the genre in spite of the rise of social media platforms.

Chapter 7 (pp. 159–82) is then exclusively devoted to communication in the digital medium. It draws its data from a diaspora forum and pays close attention to how linguistic features are employed as part of identity construction in the interactions, as already indicated by the title: "... allyuh know how to parteeeeeeeeeeee. lawd!": Linguistic choices and membership construction in the *Trinidad & Tobago Possee Livin California* forum'. In this chapter, the introductory section first provides background information on the notion of diaspora and its application to the Caribbean context. A distinction is made between *Caribbean Diaspora I* (historical forced displacement to the Caribbean) and *Caribbean Diaspora II* (migration from the Caribbean to Europe, the US and Canada in the current era). Having established the latter as the social context of the data under examination, the discussion goes on to define the digital formats of blogs and forums that became popular sites for communication about Caribbean issues at the beginning of the 2000s. Further, the background discussion covers issues of language and identity in diaspora communities in general and those of the *Caribbean Diaspora II* in particular, as well as the use of non-standard orthography to represent Creole in performing linguistic acts of identity or to indicate features of oral discourse such as emphasis. The core section of the chapter begins with some notes on the forum analysed, an open Yahoo group which was in operation from 2000 to 2008, and the data obtained from it, which amounts to about 470,000 words. A first analysis section presents a broad qualitative discussion of orthographic-phonological, lexical and grammatical features of Trinidadian/English Creole and their functions in indexing Trinidadian identity, also drawing comparisons with previous research on Jamaican computer-mediated communication. This is supplemented by a further section that singles out second-person plural pronouns for a quantitative analysis which allows the author to demonstrate in succinct fashion how the writers negotiate between heritage/home and host variety. The concluding section also highlights this aspect, next to the recreation of an (imagined) virtual homeland in diasporic web communities; finally it notes that the analysis is now dated in the sense that groups like the one analysed have for the most part moved to closed forums on

social media platforms, but remains relevant for having established the important role that Creole has assumed in expressing identity in diaspora groups on the web.

The last chapter in the volume, chapter 8 on ‘*Picong* and puns, boasting and complaining: Oral performance in the language of calypso’ (pp. 182–210) traces the development of the genre of calypso from its origins to the present day. In so doing, as the author explains and illustrates in the introductory section of the chapter, it provides a different perspective on genre transformation than the other chapters: Calypso is not a genre that was adapted in a Caribbean context from an outside source, but originated in Trinidad and then underwent adaptations when it reached the international music scene. The second section of the chapter details the background of the genre, including the historical stages in its development as well as the linguistic changes that occurred in the process and the elements of oral culture that characterize it. The following two sections provide well-illustrated discussions of certain characteristic types of speech acts in traditional calypso, namely ritualized insults and boasting, with an additional perspective on female calypsonians. The final outlook of this chapter explains developments of the last decades, after traditional calypso had passed its peak, and presents a final analysis of calypso lyrics. This juxtaposes the lyrics of American Nat King Cole’s 1950s *Calypso Blues* with those of Trinidadian Calypso Rose’s successful recent reinterpretation, which changes the narrative perspective and rectifies some oddities in the representation of Trinidadian Creole, ultimately arguably reclaiming the song. This final twist makes for a fitting ending to the book.

The volume overall makes an important contribution not only to linguistic studies of the Anglophone Caribbean but also more generally to the study of World Englishes, which hopefully will inspire further research in this kind of framework. Noteworthy general features include the clear structural progression overall and in each chapter along with the careful introduction of key concepts and the numerous well-explicated examples, the historical and comparative contextualization of the case studies as well as the integration of recent developments in the digital medium, and the successful demonstration of the use and value of smaller, self-compiled data sets. These features also make the book a suitable resource for use in advanced university classes on World Englishes.

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