

Linguistics in Language Education. The case of Jamaica.
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Abstract

This presentation provides an outline of the rationale behind, and the structure of workshops offered as the Professional Development of Primary School Teachers (PDPST). The PDPST is a project initiated in 2015 by lecturers in the Department of Language, Linguistics & Philosophy and in the School of Education at The UWI, Mona. It is grounded in Linguistics and Pedagogy, arising out of a conviction that the language education classroom is best served if Linguistics informs its programmes.

The goal of the PDPST is to improve English language proficiency among students in Jamaican public primary schools by enabling teachers to gain the background linguistic knowledge and the pedagogical skills deemed necessary to teach English given the language situation in the country.

The guiding assumption is that Jamaican Creole (JC), spoken natively by the vast majority of Jamaicans, has sufficient linguistic differences from English, its main lexical source, to be a language in its own right. Nonetheless, as an English-lexified Creole, there are shared lexical items and similarities in pronunciation between JC and Jamaican English (JE), causing boundaries between the languages to be blurred, and very real linguistic differences at the structural level to be concealed.

Against this background, the project positions “language awareness” as a foundational principle. Language awareness is promoted when explicit learning of aspects of language takes place and is based on the notion that only what is noticed is learned. In the Jamaican linguistic context, what needs to be “noticed” are the differences in structure and usage of the two languages spoken in the society.

The significance of PDPST lies in the long-recognized fact that low levels of proficiency in English are a contributory factor to what is considered to be the under-performance of many Jamaican students across all subject areas in primary and post-primary schools. It is unique in that it twins linguistic insights with pedagogies adjusted for the Jamaican public primary classroom.

[316 words]