

John A. Holm with Alison Watt Shilling. Dictionary of Bahamian English. Cold Spring, New York: Lexik House Publishers, 1982, Pp. xxxix + 228.

Dictionaries of regional English have a long and honourable heritage, and the latest addition - the Dictionary of Bahamian English (DBE) - comes close on the heels of the Dictionary of Newfoundland English. These dictionaries are modelled on the monumental Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles (OED), each entry being supported with an elaborate scholarly apparatus of written and oral sources, etymologies, dictionary references, variant spellings, exact dates of attestations, etc. DBE is the second important work of lexicography to appear on an English-based Creole of the Caribbean region. The first was the Dictionary of Jamaican English (DJE) (1st ed. 1967, 2nd ed. 1980), and it is above all to this dictionary that DBE must be compared.

First, a word about the authors of DBE. The principal author, Dr. John A. Holm, is an American linguist who specializes in Creole English. His doctoral dissertation was entitled The Creole English of Nicaragua's Miskito Coast (University of London, England). With the help of grants from City University of New York, and the National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington D.C., he carried out four years of field work and research in the Bahamas in order to produce DBE. He at present teaches English at CUNY. Dr. Shilling is originally from Great Britain. She received her Ph.D. in linguistics at the University of Hawaii with a dissertation on Bahamian English, and at present teaches at University of Southern California. Both authors are prominent contributors to English World Wide, a journal started in 1980 in West Germany.

DBE contains over 5,500 entries of which about 4,000 derived from written sources much more slender than those in the DJE: it is pointed out that "Jamaica was simply more important to the British in many respects and therefore received the attention of more writers" (DBE: xii). The DJE must contain over 10,000 entries, according to my rough calculation of 25 entries per page x 485 pages, although the exact number of entries is nowhere stated in DJE. As for oral sources, there are some 1,500 entries in DBE, whereas, again, figures are not supplied in the DJE.

The OED format is adopted, with headword in bold type, pronunciation (if required), part of speech, usage label (e.g. rare, obsolete, dialectal), dictionary references, etymology, definition(s), and citations of the word in context, from written or oral sources. Citations from oral sources stand out in the DJE by the expedient of phonemic spelling within slants; in DBE, both written and oral citations are given in italics, the distinguishing feature being a date-author-page reference for written sources, whereas for oral, the only reference given is geographical source (e.g. Nassau).

In both of these dictionaries, the sense of a word is not always clearly set off from its etymology: e.g. in DJE angel-fish, guaco, and in DBE, obeah, where information of differing sorts - dictionary refer-

ences, etymologies, actual meaning, run into each other within a single paragraph with no clear-cut divisions. The Prince Edward Island Word-book by Terry Pratt, now in progress, is superior in this respect: here, each type of information is given a heading, clearly setting it off from the rest, e.g. definition, citations, description, statistics (see: Prospectus for A Prince Edward Island Wordbook, 1982).

The DBE is distinguished by many innovations, chief among which are the following:

- usage notes introduced by the symbol \diamond
- angle brackets $\langle \rangle$ to indicate geographical location
- the label pan-creole to indicate the existence of a given form in French and Portuguese-based creoles, as well as English-based creoles, e.g. Bahamian foot, Papiamentu pia, Portuguese creole of Guiné pɛɛ, = leg from the knee down. Big-big = very large: cf. Haitian grand-grand, Portuguese Creole of Senegal grandi-grand, and reduplicated African forms, e.g. Kongo múpátipáti, Yoruba ńlánílá. Big-eye = greedy: cf. Haitian gwo ye; U.S. Black big-eye; Igbo ana uku; Twi ani bre.
- A glossary of linguistic terms
- two pages of sample entries illustrating the various lexical aspects treated (etymology, citations, social & geographical distribution, etc.)
- a list of the 246 informants and field-workers employed for the oral survey, and the island each came from
- maps of the Bahamas, dialect regions of the U.K. and eastern U.S.A., Sudanic and Bantu languages of West Africa, and creole languages of the western hemisphere (U.S., Caribbean, the Guyanas, West Africa, Indian Ocean)
- an outline of Bahamian phonology and syntax (DJE has only phonology)
- lastly, one of the most important innovations, twenty-eight special articles on various aspects of Bahamian culture, such as African Words, Bush Medicine, Festivals, Folklore, Handicrafts, Marriage, Obeah = (witchcraft), Skin Colour.

We have so far been occupied with the technical aspects of dictionary making, and it is now time to devote attention to what really matters, i.e. content. As one turns the pages of DBE, one cannot but be struck by the large proportion of standard English words like fool, or foot, in relation to the truly non-English, like foo-foo, of West African origin. (In choosing these words, I have randomly opened DBE at p.80.) These standard English words, of course, have a different usage and/or frequency in the Bahamas, and this brings us to one of the most important matters facing the lexicographer: the establishment of criteria to decide which items qualify for inclusion in the dictionary. The guidelines for acceptance as Bahamian regionalisms are as follows (DBE: xii):

1. a word first attested in a book written on the Bahamas, although such words may have later become a part of general English, e.g. glove sponge;
2. words obsolete elsewhere, e.g. colly for 'soot';
3. deviant forms, e.g. filimingo for 'flamingo';
4. differing meaning, e.g. hooker = 'a man who hooks sponges';
5. higher frequency of occurrence, e.g. fowl meaning 'a mature chicken';
6. Bahamian coinages, e.g. gritsy meaning 'not clean (in reference to teeth)'.

The authors of DBE claim these guidelines to be only 'a slight modification of DJE guidelines,' but I find, except for the first, that in fact they are quite different. Readers are invited to compare the guidelines as stated on p. xii of DJE (2nd ed.) with those of DBE, p. xii.

Over and above these guidelines, the general rule is to include those words used in the Bahamas not found in current standard British or American usage. This means that certain very characteristic local items are left out if they are familiar to English speakers the world over, whereas the less familiar are included. In the domain of fruit, for instance, guava and guinep appear as headwords, but banana and mango do not (except in compounds with different meanings, e.g. mango snapper = a fish). The same applies to DJE where banana and mango appear only in compounds, but guinep as a simple word. However guava is not in DJE in any form - simple or compounded - whereas grapefruit is. Grapefruit, in turn, though certainly cultivated in the Bahamas, is not in DBE, and so on: whatever the guidelines, and however refined the criteria, the gray areas and ill-defined boundaries are forever with us.

Finally, for the benefit of readers wishing a further sample of typical Bahamianisms, here are quotations from two of the special articles in DBE, African Words (first of the 28 special articles), and Transportation (last of these articles):

Some of these words became a part of general English, such as banjo (BANJA). YAM (NYAM) or OKRA. Others remained part of the regional English of the Bahamas, usually not understood by people from other places, African loan words in this second category include the names of various foods such as ACARA, AGIDI, FOO-FOO, and MOI-MOI. Others are everyday words such as JOOK, BENNY, or YINNA, or exclamations like BLOO-JOOM! Some folk-tale characters retained their African names, such as BOUKI, ANANSI, BAMAKANSA, U-SANGE-WILEY, and the monster YEHU. Some African personal names have been preserved, such as CUFFEY, CUSHIE and QUAKOO. Until the end of the last century, Bahamians still referred to ethnic groups in Africa

such as the MUNDINGO, ANGOLA, IBO, EGBA, and YORUBA, and even today many Bahamians know the terms CONGO and NANGO.

(DBE: 2)

Individuals travel from one island to another in their own sail boats or take the MAIL or a motorized POOP-POOP. The larger islands are also connected by Bahamasair,...coordinated with service on PLANE-BOATS to the smaller CAYS.

...Once on the open road it may be tempting to MASH the gas and MAKE THE LIMIT, but speeding could lead to a BUCK-UP with a STANDING POLICE.

For boys a BOX-CART may be fun, but a WHEEL is more practical and offers certain social advantages: they can give friends a TOW or PRANCE their bikes to impress girls.

(DBE: 210)

Creole studies have enjoyed phenomenal growth over the past two decades, and DBE is another landmark in this continuing saga. Those interested in the language of this area can look forward to the Dictionary of Trinidad English by Lise Winer (in preparation), and widest of all in scope, the Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage by Richard Allsopp (also in preparation).

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