

Overstanding Idren

Special Features of Rastafari English Morphology

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"Me no stutter, no stammer, so nah try feh edit me grammar.

Power gone, you cannot duplicate I sound."

Prezident Brown & Axx of Jahpostles

"I Sound Is From Creation"

I Sound Is From Creation (2012)

Tads Records

- examine two prominent morphological processes in Rastafari English
 - OVERSTANDINGS like *downpress* “oppress”
 - cp. Pollard (1980, 2000) “words [that] bear the weight of their phonological implications” & Douglas’s (to appear) Positive/Negative Phenomenon + Phono-Semantic matching
 - I-WORDS like *Itinually* “continually” [see, again, Pollard 1980, 2000]

Overstandings

- *overstand*
- *downpress*
- *outformer*
- *apprecilove*
- *livicate*

Properties of overstandings

- Morphological reformation
 - perceived morphological analysis of a word
 - negative/positive connotations of component morpheme(s)
 - transform component morpheme(s) to their binary opposites
 - align connotations of component morphemes with connotations of entire word

Examples of overstanding

understand > *overstand*

- *under-* carries negative connotations (e.g. *underling*, *underdeveloped*, *underhanded* etc.)
- the meaning of UNDERSTAND is seen as positive (“knowledge”, “comprehension” etc.)
- the misalignment of connotations is “corrected” by switching *under* to its binary opposite, the antonym *over*

oppress > *downpress*

- *op-* (ultimately from Latin *ob-* “against, towards”) is analysed as *up-*, with positive connotations
- OPPRESSION is viewed as negative
- misalignment is resolved by replacing *up* with its binary opposite, *down*

- Folk Etymology involves reformations of words where one or more morphemes are unfamiliar to the speaker
 - often triggered by the obsolescence of a word/morpheme, or because the word is borrowed from another language

Examples of folk etymology

Examples of folk etymology

- *woodchuck* < an Algonquin form like Cree *wuchak*
- *sparrow grass* < Latin *asparagus*
- *bridegroom* < Old English *brydguma* (“bride-man”)

Why overstanding is not folk etymology

- folk etymologies result in forms which are phonologically similar to their base
 - folk etymologies result in forms which may be more semantically-unmotivated/nonsensical than their base
 - e.g. *woodchuck* = does not chuck wood or do anything else with wood
 - but *woodchuck* is phonologically similar to its base *wuchak*
- overstandings have no requirement to be phonologically similar to their base
 - overstandings are much more constrained by semantics: the resultant form must “make sense” in both whole and parts
 - though the trigger for overstandings may be something like folk etymologies (e.g. *oppress* = *up+press*)

- PUNS involve a phonological form (or two phonologically similar forms) associated with two opposed meanings with two or more possible “readings”
 - “Now is the winter of our discontent Made glorious summer by this **son** of York [W. Shakespeare, *Richard III* 1.i.1–2]
 - two co-existing interpretations: *sun* (warmth, associated with summer) and *son* (members of York dynasty)

Other examples

- ingot we trust
 - I love parrots in the springtime
 - buy sheep, sell deer
-
- none of these involve any real transformation, unlike overstandings

Puns/Word-play involving transformation

- there is a type of word-play/punning which does involve transformations (typically used for insults, negative connotations)
 - Bodymore, Murdaland (Baltimore, Maryland)
 - Flithadelphia (Philadelphia)
 - Smellmo (Elmo)
- like folk etymologies, even puns involving transformations have constraints requiring output form to be phonologically similar to base

Non-overstandings neologisms in Rastafari English

- Rastafari English also makes use of negatively-charged wordplay (≠ overstandings)
 - *politricks* (politics)
 - *shitstem* (system)
 - *sufferticket* (certificate)
- other neologisms born from analogical processes
 - e.g. *sistren* by analogy to *bredren*

Prototypical overstandings

- transformation involves switching elements to their binary opposite, resulting in proper alignment of the connotations of the components with the connotations of the whole
 - reflecting a lexicalised negative:positive opposition between **Babylon:Zion**

Examples of prototypical overstandings

- *overstand* < understand
- *downpress* < oppress
- *outiquity* < iniquity
- *truebrary* < library
- *apprecilove* < appreciate
- *strongstart* < week-end

Non-prototypical overstandings

- non-prototypical overstandings involve a transformation to something other than a binary opposite (but still aligns negative/positive connotations of parts & whole)

Examples of non-prototypical overstandings

- *higherstand* < understand
- *fulljoy* < enjoy
- *firstday* < yesterday

- the Rastafari English I-TRANSFORMATION replaces (generally) the first syllable of a word by *ai*
 - *I-quality* (equality)
 - *I-serve* (deserve)
 - *I-tinually* (continually)
 - *I-ses* (praises)

Semantic effects of I-transformation

- generally I-transformation has minimal semantic impact, e.g. *Itinually* bears the same meaning as *continually*
 - plays a sociolinguistic role in speakers using linguistic forms to mark identity/community membership
- individual cases where there is a change in semantics
 - *Ital* “spiritually clean food” (< vital)
 - *Idren* “male or female Rastafari” (< bredren/sistren)

Pronominal system of Rastafari English

	Standard English	Jamaican Creole (Patois)	Rastafari English
1sg	I / me / my	mi	I, Iman, (I and I)...
2sg	you / your	yu	de I, de Iman, (thy)...
3sg	he, she, it / him, her, it / his, her, its	im, (i, shi, ar)	(im, i, shi)...
1pl	we / us / our	wi	I and I, (I, we)...
2pl	you (all) / your	yu, unu	de Is, (unu)...
3pl	they / them / their	dem	(dem, dey)...

Changes in pronominal system as seed of I-words?

- since “I” replaces not only “me” but also sometimes “you” perhaps the first “I-words” involved replacement of the phonological sequence *yu* by *ai*
 - *I-man* < human (*yuman*)
 - *Inite* < unite (*yunait*)
 - *Iniversal* < universal
- with the transformation later be generalised to replacing the first syllable of any word

relationship between overstandings and I-words

- the I-transformation can even be applied to overstandings, e.g.:
 - *iverstanding* < overstanding
- in some cases the I-transformation may be a last resort operation to produce an overstanding
 - where there is no clear semantic opposite or repair
 - *I-ses* < praises (with negative connotation of “prey”)
 - *I-nana* < banana (“ban”)

Mystical syllables?

- the l-transformation does often impart a “mystical” significance
- a partial parallel in the use of the syllable *om* in Sanskrit (replaces final syllables before pause; see Hock 1991) in Vedic ritual recitations

Example (*OM* as a mystical syllable in Vedic Sanskrit)

- . . . yasyendraḥ pītṛvā vṛtrāṇi jaṅghanat; pra sa janyāni tāriṣo3m [=tāriṣat]
“...Of whom having drunk, Indra slew the Vritras; may he extend (our) people.” [*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 2.20.14]
- śomsāvom . . . śaṁsāmodaivom . . . [*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 3.12.1–4]
 - = śaṁsāva ...śaṁsā madā eva
“Let us two recite . . . Recite, rejoice indeed.”

- the *om*-transformation, however, does not apply systematically at the word-level, unlike the l-transformation

Conclusions

- OVERSTANDINGS and I-WORDS bear certain affinities to other morphological processes, but are distinct
 - overstandings are similar to folk etymology & word-play/punning in certain ways, but non-identical
 - overstandings can involve folk etymology as a sub-component

Topics for further research

- establish a chronology for the innovations in Rastafari English
- investigate changes in the pronominal system and relation to I-words

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