Caribbean English Phraseology in the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*: Reflections of an African Worldview

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Abstract

Among the most characteristic features of Caribbean English (CE) lies its phraseology, namely the lexicalisation of concepts through linguistic specificities whose etymological roots are to be found in West African languages. Not only are such peculiarities widespread in spoken CE and English-based Creoles, but they are also illustrated in the extensive body of Caribbean English literature. By adopting an overarching definition of phraseology, this article aims at showing that phraseological units typically used in CE work as a cultural agent. Within the vast inventory of African substrate survivals, attention is paid to compound-like vocabulary items which are word-for-word translations of West African idioms into English rather than *ex novo* combinations of English lexemes. A sample of eight commonly-used compounds, all referring to parts of the body, was extracted from the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* and then compared with entries – if any – in the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* and the *Merriam-Webster Unabridged Online*, the two reference works that are the pillars of English: although such phrasemes employ Standard English (SE) words, they do not mirror conventional SE lexical practices. Therefore, by looking at the images conveyed through their culture-specific phraseology, the article depicts the distinctly non-European worldview of West Africans transplanted to the Caribbean by European colonisers during the transatlantic slave trade.

Keywords; Africanism, Caribbean English, culture, phraseology, transatlantic slave trade, worldview.

* Both authors contributed to the overall drafting of the article in equal measure: Jeannette Allsopp is mostly responsible for the selection and interpretation of data and the conclusion, namely sections 6 and 7; Cristiano Furiassi, who conceived the article, is accountable for the introduction, the acquisition of data and the bibliography, namely sections 1 to 5.

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1. Introduction

According to several authors, among others Holm (1994), Allsopp R. (2003b) and Aceto (2009), one of the most striking qualities of Caribbean English (CE) is its phraseology, that is the characterisation and attendant lexicalisation of concepts, ideas, situations and behaviours by means of linguistic peculiarities which are to be traced back to African etyma. These features, which witness the creative and graphically descriptive potential of CE, are more likely to occur in speech but also enrich the impressive body of Caribbean English literature[1]. They may be found in the different varieties of CE, for instance Jamaican English, Barbadian English and Guyanese English – all belonging to Internationally Accepted English (IAE) – as well as in co-existing English-based Caribbean Creoles, such as Patwa in Jamaica, Bajan in Barbados and Creolese in Guyana, thus also witnessing the continuous competition between the creolisation of CE varieties and the decreolisation of CE creoles.

By pondering on the wide-ranging definition of phraseology provided in the linguistic literature on the topic, including, *inter alia*, Mel'čuk (1995), Cowie (1998) and Nuccorini (2006; 2016), this article aims at showing that African-language-derived phraseological units are typically used in CE and that their inclusion as entries in the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (DCEU) contributes to the lexicographic mapping of the specificities of the English-speaking Caribbean as a whole.

Within the vast inventory of phraseology attesting to how common West African substrate survivals – and the viewpoints they express – have affected several vocabulary features of CE from the 17th century onwards (Alleyne 1980: 33), this contribution analyses *ab origine* African-language compounds represented by English words now fully accepted into the Caribbean variety of English. Indeed, the widely-used compounds considered, listed below and extracted from the DCEU, are calques made of Standard English (SE) words which, however, do not reflect SE lexical conventions or collocational patterns (Allsopp J. 2000: 54). The eight compounds analysed, each incorporating at least one element referring to parts

[1] See Warner-Lewis (1999) for a comprehensive depiction of Caribbean literature in English.

of the body, are the following: *big-eye*, *cut-eye*, *eye-water*, *foot-bottom*, *hand-middle*, *hard-ears*, *neck-back* and *suck-teeth*.

The discussion of the selected pan-Caribbean compounds, to be viewed as "calques from African languages into English rather than *a priori* combinations of English lexemes" (Furiassi 2014: 99), is intended to establish their intrinsic link with West African and Sub-Saharan languages, especially the Niger-Congo family, including Fulani, also known as Fula, Igbo, also known as Ibo, Kikongo, also known as Kongo, Mende, Twi, Yoruba and Wolof[2]. Ultimately, this article explores how culture-specific phraseology may convey a distinctly non-European worldview by mirroring the perception of reality peculiar to the West Africans brought into the English-speaking Caribbean during the transatlantic slave trade (Dorigny and Gainot 2017: 24-29), which was – and partly still is – vastly different from that of European colonisers.

2. Lexical features of Caribbean English

Caribbean English (CE), the variety of English spoken throughout the English-official Caribbean, is one of the several existing Englishes in use around the world[3]. Due to the complex sociolinguistic profile of each Caribbean territory, the vocabulary features of CE witness a dynamic and diversified reality. Spoken within a polyglot area, Caribbean English, also known as "West Indian English" (Reinecke *et al.* 1975: 373) or "West Indies English" (Nicholls 2003), is an all-embracing label which comprises a range of local varieties used in several territories throughout the English-speaking Caribbean by about 5.8 million people (Allsopp R. 2003a: xviii)[4]. Therefore,

[2] The Efik-Ibibio dialect cluster of the Nilo-Hamitic language, part of the Semitic family, and Hausa, a Chadic language belonging to the Afro-Asiatic family, are also quoted as plausible sources of CE phrases.

[3] See Furiassi (2014: 90) for a definition of "Englishes" and its extensive synonymic nomenclature.

[4] However, it is worth considering that English is not the most widely spoken language in the Caribbean. According to Jeannette Allsopp (2004: 11), "[a]lthough Caribbean English has been regarded as the major language of the Caribbean because of the geo-political dominance of the British, it is in fact Caribbean Spanish that is the major language, in demographic terms, having a total of fifty-one million speakers […]".

internal differentiations – linguistic fragmentation above all – must be taken into account when attempting to describe the conglomerate which stands at the core of CE[5].

In a nutshell, as far as the construction of the lexical inventory of CE is concerned, British English, Irish English, Scottish English, English-based Creoles and American English have blended over time and to various degrees with Amerindian languages, West African languages, Spanish, French, French-based Creoles, Dutch, Danish, Irish, Portuguese, Indic languages and Chinese; continuities from archaic English and the King James version of the Bible must be added to this list (Allsopp R. 2003a: l-li). The vocabulary features of CE are thoroughly summarised by Gramley (2001: 82), who lists the following:

1. African (substrate) survivals
2. Retentions from English (Scottish, Irish) dialects
3. The colonial lag (e.g. through isolation)
4. Interplay with various European languages and the languages of recent indentured labourers
5. The present-day competition of BrE and AmE in the Caribbean
6. Pan-Caribbean tendencies
7. Local processes of word formation

Moreover, as recognised by Crystal (2003: 160), the word-formation processes typical of the vocabulary features of "New Englishes", including CE, are "[c]ompounding from English elements", "[w]ord-class conversion" and "[v]arious processes of abbreviation, clipping, and blending", alongside "many examples in which a word or phrase from a well-established variety is adopted by a New English and given a new meaning or use, without undergoing any structural change".

All in all, it is on English-looking compounds translating African survivals that this article focuses. Indeed, "African languages have coalesced with European languages to create new languages

[5] As noted by Smith (1957: 38), "[t]he Caribbean as a geographical region appears to represent few problems of definition. Socially, however, the area is not a unit. It is differentiated internally by different metropolitan associations, by various religious, linguistic, and cultural affiliations, by different racial-population ratios, and by historical differences, particularly with regard to African slavery and its abolition".

indigenous to the Caribbean […], yet African languages in outsurviving that fusion have themselves been reshaped in phonology and syntax by European language forms" (Warner-Lewis 1999: 20). In other words, "Europe has affected Africa but equally Africa has affected Europe: the words are European, but the syntax is African" (Dalphinis 2015: 88).

3. The relevance of phraseology in Caribbean English

Despite its centrality in language description, as underpinned by Nuccorini (2006: 37-38), the notion of phraseology, comprehensively examined by Cowie (1998), is still undoubtedly problematic. According to Mel'čuk (1995: 217), "the concept of phraseme is a very general one: Any complex linguistic sign that must be stored in the dictionary is a phraseme". More operationally, in Gries's (2008: 6) words, "a phraseologism is defined as the co-occurrence of a form or a lemma of a lexical item and one or more additional linguistic elements of various kinds which functions as one semantic unit in a clause or sentence and whose frequency of occurrence is larger than expected on the basis of chance".

In greater detail, Nuccorini (2016: 60-61) treats phraseology as an overarching concept comprising variegated sequences of language items such as "phrases of various types", "proverbs and idioms", "expressions […] subject to syntactic, lexical, semantic, and pragmatic constraints", "grammatical and lexical collocative uses", and "collocations […] closely time- and culture-specific", implying a "distinction between grammatical and lexical collocations". Similarly, Pulcini, Furiassi and Rodríguez González (2012: 13) suggest that "[p]hraseological units are readymade – phrase-like or sentence-like – expressions having semantic and syntactic stability, which play idiomatic, pragmatic and morphosyntactic functions in language. […] types of phrasal/phraseological patterns include collocations […], idioms […], catch phrases […], routine formulas […] and proverbs […]".

For the specific aim of this article, the working definition of phraseology is limited to compound-like pieces of language that are in fact calqued from West African languages into CE[6]. It is also

[6] See Kouwenberg and LaCharité (2004) for a similar study focusing on

worth noticing that some of these phraseological units, endowed with an inherent metaphorical meaning, are distinctly idiomatic, i.e. *big-eye*, *cut-eye*, *hard-ears* and *suck-teeth*, while others are not, i.e. *eye-water*, *foot-bottom*, *hand-middle* and *neck-back*.

4. Africanisms in Caribbean English

Without doubt, "it is sub-Saharan African 'talk' that emerges […] as the sharpest […] influence on today's Caribbean English 'talk'" (Allsopp R. 2003b: xxxii). For example, "[s]everal words found in the Anglophone Caribbean derive from Twi, a language spoken in Ghana on the Lower Guinea Coast […]. Other African languages are represented as well: […] Fulani, a language spoken in Nigeria and other locations on the Guinea Coast" (Aceto 2009: 215).

However, as duly noted by Aceto (2009: 215) himself, "[t]he influence of African words can be traced beyond straightforward borrowings". In the specific case under scrutiny, it is paramount to consider that "African languages also affected Creole lexicon by means of calquing, that is, the word-for-word translation of an idiom" (Holm 1994: 359)[7]. This article then looks at the "Afrogenesis" (Allsopp R. 2006: 14) of such calqued phrasemes, namely camouflaged lexical units endowed with an inherent African heritage[8], worthy of their status as 'Africanisms' proper.

Despite Carrington's (1993: 37-38) claim that "[t]he term 'Africanism' is unsatisfactory because it […] refers to an entire continent with a multiplicity of language families […]", in this article 'Africanisms' are interpreted *sensu lato* and defined as follows:

> Caribbean compounds of English words as labels of Caribbean peculiarities of behaviour for which the etymological explanations are found in African languages. They are folk-translations, in word and deed, of African cultural 'modes'. Everyday phrases, too, […] are ways of putting things calqued

reduplication, a syntactic phenomenon involved in word formation typical of Niger-Congo languages, in Jamaican and Surinamese creoles.

[7] In line with Dalphinis (2015: 83), "[i]t is therefore not surprising that a literal word-to-word translation of many African languages would give close approximations to Caribbean Creole languages".

[8] According to Smith (1957: 38), "the idea of an African heritage refers to that which is handed down and is African in origin".

or 'copy-translated' from one or other, sometimes several sub-Saharan African languages. These idioms reflect an African life-view and there are hundreds of them surviving in Caribbean English. (Allsopp R. 2003b: XXXII)

By generalising Carrington's (1993: 41) view of "Africanism", in "[t]he case of idioms […] the feature must relate to the relevant African language by showing a similar technique for the representation of reality without any necessary reference to phonetic shape. What are commonly listed as calques would fit into this category, with the requirement that they show similarity of conceptualization of the meanings that they are intended to express (e.g. items such as 'eye-water' […] and parallel expressions in several African languages […])".

Such brand-new compounds formed by joining two lexical items that can be found separately in British or American English are in fact genuine CE products; widespread throughout the Caribbean, they can be taken as characteristic examples of culturally-connoted typically-African CE vocabulary.

5. Lexicographic sources: the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*

As far as CE vocabulary is concerned, the most recent and authoritative lexicographic contributions aimed at establishing a shared pan-Caribbean norm, namely catering for "the linguistic and cultural identity of one people" (Allsopp J. 2012: 81), are the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (DCEU*,* Allsopp R. ed.), first published in 1996 and reprinted in 2003, and its supplement, the *New Register of Caribbean English Usage* (NRCEU*,* Allsopp R. ed.), published in 2010. Both the DCEU and the NRCEU include an authentic record of current English spoken in the Caribbean archipelago, Guyana and Belize. More specifically, the DCEU lists over 20,000 entries and the NRCEU over 700 entries (Allsopp R. 2010: xi), thus totalling roughly 21,000 lexical items.

In Richard Allsopp's (2003b: xxii) words, the DCEU was mainly conceived to provide "[a]s complete an inventory as practicable of the Caribbean environment and life-style, as known and spoken in each territory but not recorded in the standard British and

American dictionaries". The explicit intention of attempting a systematisation of local norms into one shared pan-Caribbean norm is not only justified on the basis that CE is fragmented into many different sub-varieties but also on the fact that an existing model "could not be found by reference to British or North American English. Their dictionaries […] practically ignored Caribbean items and totally ignored Caribbean usage […]" (Allsopp R. 2003b: xix). In the introduction to the DCEU it is explicitly stated that the dictionary is "equipped to function as a cultural agent" (Allsopp R. 2003b: xxxi), which makes it eminently suitable for the scope of the present analysis. Certainly, as remarked by Béjoint (2010: 202), "[a]ll dictionaries […] are part of the culture of the society in which they are produced. They are the mouthpieces of a society, texts in which it describes not only its language but also its culture and formulates its view of the world, its *Weltanschauung*".

6. Calqued phraseological Africanisms in the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*

The following sub-sections include an alphabetically-ordered list of eight sample entries extracted from the DCEU – alongside their definitions – which exemplify how the uniqueness of CE vocabulary reflects a prototypically African worldview or, quoting Richard Allsopp (2003b: xxxiv) *verbatim*, "an African way of putting things". Attention is paid to compounds incorporating at least one element referring to parts of the body: *big-eye* "shamelessly greedy", *cut-eye* "a […] gesture of contempt", *eye-water* "tears", *foot-bottom* "the sole of the foot", *hand-middle* "the palm of the hand", *hard-ears* "stubbornly disobedient", *neck-back* "the nape of the neck" and *suck-teeth* "to suck air in […] producing […] an unpleasant sound with the saliva, as a sign of disgust, contempt, frustration, vexation or […] self-pity".

Each entry quoted below, marked by one or more territorial codes[9]

[9] All entries belonging to the common core of CE are signalled in the DCEU by the labels CarA, i.e. Caribbean Area/Region, or ECar, i.e. East Caribbean, if limited to the Eastern Caribbean, i.e. the Lesser Antilles: the labels CarA and ECar bear witness to the existence of a shared norm, at least lexical, throughout the Caribbean. Vice-versa, as far as the territorial codes implemented in the DCEU

and different levels of formalness[10], shows forms and/or usages which somehow deviate from British or American English norms. In order to prove the total (or partial, in some cases) novelty of CE vocabulary, the DCEU entries considered are compared with data present in the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (OED) and the *Merriam-Webster Unabridged Online* (MWU), representative of the two best-described varieties of English, *ergo* emphasising that CE is an independent variety with its own formal characteristics and cultural nuances.

6.1. *Big-eye*

big-eye *n* (CarA) [*AF—Joc*] […] Prompt greed; avarice. […] [Cp […] Igbo *anya ukwu* (*eyes big*) 'greed'. […]] (DCEU)

On the one hand, in the MWU there is no trace of *big-eye* as an entry; however, *give the big eye*, meaning "to make eyes – usually used with *to*", is recorded under the entry *eye*. On the other hand, *big-eye* is included in the OED: "*Caribbean* and in African-American usage. Covetous; greedy". The OED adds the following etymological details: "compare Igbo *anya ukwu* covetousness, Twi *ani-bere* covetous, envious, malevolent (both lit. 'eye big'); compare also Haitian Creole *gwo je* greedy (lit. 'big eye')". Moreover, the OED also lists the adjective *big-eyed* among its entries.

According to Holm (1994: 359), "Creole *big-eye* means 'greedy; wanting the biggest and best for oneself'. This metaphor is widespread in Africa: Twi *ani bre* or Ibo *aŋa uku* both literally 'big eye' meaning 'greedy'". This claim is supported by Aceto (2009:

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are concerned, here follows an alphabetically-ordered list: Angu (Anguilla), Antg (Antigua), Baha (Bahamas), Bdos (Barbados), Belz (Belize), Berm (Bermuda), Brbu (Barbuda), BrVi (British Virgin Islands), CayI (Cayman Islands), Crcu (Carriacou), Dmca (Dominica), Gren (Grenada), Grns (Grenadines), Guyn (Guyana), Jmca (Jamaica), Mrat (Montserrat), Nevs (Nevis), Panm (Panama), PtRi (Puerto Rico), Srnm (Suriname), StKt (St Kitts), StLu (St Lucia), StVn (St Vincent), Tbgo (Tobago), TkCa (Turks and Caicos), Trin (Trinidad), USVI (US Virgin Islands), ViIs (Virgin Islands, i.e. both British and American).

[10] The various levels of formalness indicated in the DCEU are as follows: *Formal [F]*, *Informal [IF]*, *Anti-formal [AF]* – sub-categorised into *Creole [AF—Cr]*, *Jocular [AF—Joc]*, *Derogatory [AF—Derog]*, *Vulgar [AF—Vul]*, and *Erroneous or Disapproved [X]*.

215), who states that "*big-eye* meaning 'greedy' has a number of correspondences among languages spoken on the Guinea Coast in Africa".

It is interesting to note that there is also a version of this idiomatic compound in Yoruba, namely *o mi ojukokoro*, lit. 'he has eye of insect', i.e. 'big eyes', meaning 'he is greedy'. In other words, from a West African viewpoint, the eye becomes the instrument of whatever it is the person desires, so that if the eye is big, then the person is manifesting an inordinate desire for something. In addition to *gwo je* in Haitian Creole, as observed in the OED, a similar expression, *gwo-zyé*, exists in Dominican and St. Lucian French Creole: the etyma would be the same in the case of French Creole as they are in CE.

6.2. *Cut-eye*

cut-eye *n* (CarA) […] A woman's gesture of contempt for sb, shown by her looking at the person and closing her eyes while turning her face sharply away. […] (DCEU)

cut […] **cut your eye after (sb)** (Jmca, Mrat) **/at, on (sb)** *vb phr* (CarA) […] ***give (sb a) cut-eye*** (CarA) ‖ ***watch (sb) cross-eye/cut-eye*** (Dmca, Gren) […] **[**Of Afr origin, the same gesture being widely known in West and Central Afr. Cp Igbo *a wa la anaya* 'Don't cut eyes!' (= Don't be rude!)**]** […] (DCEU)

Although the compound *cut-eye* is not encountered as an entry in the OED or the MWU, it must be noted that *cut one's eye* is recorded under the entry *cut* in the MWU, which defines it as "to glance obliquely", and that *to cut one's eyes* (also *eye*) (*at a person*) is recorded in the OED under the entry *eye*. The OED provides the following definition of *to cut one's eyes*: "(*Caribbean*) to glance at (a person), catching the eye, and then deliberately turn away, as an insult. Also †*to cut eyes*".

When the MWU records *cut one's eye* under *cut* and defines it as "to glance obliquely", this in no way conveys the level of anger or deprecation that the associated gesture conveys in CE, which is meant as a deliberate insult or expression of withering contempt for the person to whom it is directed. The definition supplied by the OED approximates the CE version a little more closely but

does not fully capture the nuances of the gesture as it is used in CE. Widely known in West and Central Africa – and highly frequent in CE – *cut-eye* was brought to the Caribbean by the millions of Sub-Saharan Africans during the transatlantic slave trade and has lived on as inherent in the kinesics of Afro-Caribbean people.

6.3. *Eye-water*

eye-water *n* (CarA) [*AF*] […] Tears. […] **[**A calque from many Afr langs, exs Yoruba *omi l'oju* (*water from eye*(*s*)) 'tears', also Igbo *anya mmili* (*eye water*) 'tears', etc; […]**]** (DCEU)

Eye-water, meaning 'tears', is recorded as a solid compound, namely *eyewater*, and labelled as "archaic" in the MWU. The OED defines *eye-water* as "[c]hiefly *literary* and (in later use) *Caribbean*" and provides the following etymological information: "[i]n Caribbean use […] perhaps after a model in a West African language (compare in the same sense e.g. Twi *ani-nsu*, Igbo *anya mmili*, both lit. 'eye-water')". As in several other cases, these findings attest that some CE expressions have their roots in older dialectal forms of British English, Scottish or Irish (Hickey 2004: 326-330).

This compound is an interesting one as it has the connotation in current CE that the *eye-water* or *tears* being shed are not sincere but are meant to create a particular effect, namely to put on a show of grief or distress that is not genuine. However, it seems that this was not so in earlier times. The same notion is also found in the French Creole of Dominica and St. Lucia in the phrase *glo-zyé*, which, literally translated, means 'water-eye' or 'tears'. The rendering of this concept in Yoruba is *omi l'oju*, lit. *water from eyes*, thus 'tears'.

6.4. *Foot-bottom*

foot-bottom *n* (Bdos, Guyn, Jmca) [*AF—Cr*] The sole of the foot. […] **[**A prob calque from W Afr langs. Cp Twi *na -ase* (*foot-bottom*) 'sole of the foot'**]** (DCEU)

The compound *foot-bottom* is absent from the OED and the MWU. This is one of the prototypical examples of the practical way in which West Africans viewed (and still view) the world, as it literally expresses the concept that would be rendered as the 'sole of the

foot' in British English. Similarly, American English, which for obvious historical reasons is patterned off British English, would also not lexicalise such a concept.

6.5. *Hand-middle*

hand-middle *n* (Belz, Guyn, Jmca) [*AF*] […] The palm of the hand. […] **[**Cp Twi *nsa-yam* (*hand-inside*) 'palm of the hand'**]** (DCEU)

As for *foot-bottom*, a similar observation can be made in regard to the compound *hand-middle* and its absence from the OED and the MWU. *Hand-middle* indeed represents a basic, elemental way of naming the palm of the hand. It seems to be confined to the English of Belize, Jamaica and Guyana and would indicate the Ghanaian lexical contribution to those territories in particular. It may once more be pointed out that this compound reflects the very practical view of the world – and items in it – held by West Africans as, literally speaking, the palm is indeed the middle of the hand[11].

6.6. *Hard-ears*

hard-ears […] *n* (CarA) [*IF*] Stubborn or persistent disobedience. […] **[**Noun made from the calque *(your) ears are hard* from W Afr langs […]**]** […] Used only in ref to children. (DCEU)

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[11] As far as body parts are concerned (see both *foot-bottom* and *hand-middle*), it is worth noting that the descriptive pragmatism herein attributed to the specificities of the African languages spoken by transplanted slaves had presumably already been present in 17th century Island Carib, an Arawakan language, now extinct, historically spoken by the native inhabitants of the Lesser Antilles in the Caribbean. Instances confirming this claim are found in the following entries, extracted from the *Caribbian-Vocabulary* included in Davies (1666): "*[m]y fingers*, Noucabo-raün; *as if you said the little ones or Children of my hand*"; "*[m]y thumb*, Noucabo-iteignum, *that is properly*, *what is opposite to the fingers*"; "*[m]y toes*, Nougouti-raim, *that is properly*, *the little ones of the foot*"; "*[t]he sole of my foot*, Nougouti-rokou, *that is properly*, *the inside of the foot*". On a final note, it must be pointed out that Davies's work, written in 1665 and published in 1666, is the partial English translation of the account given by Charles de Rochefort, originally written in French in 1657 and published in 1658. Thanks are due to Alison Harvey at the *Special Collections and Archive*s section of the *Arts and Social Studies Library* at *Cardiff University* for granting the authors of this article access to the first editions of the above-mentioned publications.

ears […] **your ears (are) hard** *vb phr* (CarA) [*IF/F*] […] **[**A likely calque from W Afr langs. Cp Twi *n'aso yɛ de!* (*His ear(s) be hard*) 'He is stubborn'; also Yoruba *eti ẹ di* (*ear(s) his blocked*) 'He is stubbornly disobedient'**]** […] (DCEU)

The compound *hard-ears* is absent from the OED and the MWU. This piece of phraseology is indeed one that clearly demonstrates the very literal way in which not only ostensive items but also modes of behaviour are viewed by West Africans and so expressed in their languages. As a noun, it is both descriptive and colourful, as stubbornness indicates that, when spoken to or reprimanded, a child simply does not pay any attention to what is said to him or her and persistently continues to do whatever he or she was doing, thus demonstrating whatever behaviour is considered undesirable by parents or other people, whether older adults or children. It is common for West Indian parents to take a child by the ear and chastise him or her by holding and shaking it to show that the ear is deaf to the guidance of others. It is interesting to note that, although this item is largely confined to the stubborn or wilful disobedience of children, it can also occur in relation to adults, where it is used as an adjective to indicate the same kind of determined insubordination or blind disregard for what is thought to be useful advice on the part of the person being proffered that advice.

6.7. *Neck-back*

neck-back *n* (Guyn, Jmca) [*AF—Cr*] The nape of the neck. […] **[**Prob a calque from W Afr langs. Cp *foot-bottom***]** (DCEU)

Largely confined to Guyana and Jamaica, *neck-back* also illustrates the elemental view of the world held by West Africans. In spite of its absence from the OED and the MWU, the *Dictionary of Jamaican English* (Cassidy and Le Page [1967] 1980) cites the item as also being present in Surinamese Creole. Although *neck-back* most certainly appears to derive from West African languages, its precise origin has not been ascertained and no etymon has been identified yet. Nevertheless, its morphosyntactic pattern definitely suggests that Afrogenesis is at play and its semantics clearly indicates a typically-African conceptualisation.

6.8. *Suck-teeth*

suck-teeth […] *n* (CarA) […] The action or sound of SUCKING YOUR TEETH. […] **[**An ingressive salivary sound similarly made and with similar significance is found throughout W Afr cultures and in other Sub-Saharan cultures as well. There is usu a name for the sound, or a vb (phr) the equivalent of the CE vb phr SUCK YOUR TEETH. Note Mende *i ngi yongɔui vofoin lɔ nya-ma* (*he his teeth suck be me-on*) 'he sucked his teeth at me' Cp nouns […] Hausa *tsaki* 'the noise *pf* wh one makes contemptuously', Yoruba *p'oṣe* 'unhappy sigh made with the saliva'; Efik *asiama* (for the sound); also verbs […] Ibibio *siɔɔp* 'make a sound of disgust, impatience, etc'; Wolof *čipu* 'to make the rude sound with the lips'; Kikongo *tsiona* 'make an insulting sound with the saliva', etc**]** […] (DCEU)

The item *suck-teeth* is unmistakably Caribbean and, as noted in the DCEU, it permeates West African and many other Sub-Saharan cultures; it is uniquely West African and has been directly inherited by the entire Caribbean. The sound is one that is calculated to indicate utter disgust, disdain and disrespect, and also to express extreme frustration, anger or even self-pity. The way in which it is produced is totally alien to European or North American cultures, a fact which is likely to explain the absence of the corresponding entry from the OED and the MWU. It is usually a sound that is either short and sharp, depending on the emotional state or mood of the person uttering it within a specific context, or drawn out to demonstrate the degree of disgust, disdain, disrespect, frustration or anger being experienced by the speaker, so that the hearer or hearers cannot fail to understand the level of displeasure expressed.

7. Conclusion

This article has examined, through the eight phraseological units cited, the basically African nature of many phrases in CE. To a certain degree, it is not surprising to find some of these units, i.e. *big-eye*, *cut-eye* and *eye-water*, in the two most authoritative dictionaries of British and American English: on the one hand, their attestation may be motivated by the Caribbean diaspora present in both the UK and the USA; on the other hand, the careful dictionary-making practices at the basis of the OED and the MWU enabled

lexicographers to seek authentic Caribbean sources for calques of West African phrases known to occur with high frequency in CE.

However, it is clear that such phrases, which have now emerged as an integral part of CE, have their genesis in the many West African languages spoken by the millions of slaves forcibly brought to the Caribbean during the transatlantic slave trade operated in the 18th and 19th centuries by the British, the French and the Dutch in particular, although there is clear historical evidence of earlier slave trading on the part of the Spanish and the Portuguese, and of other Europeans such as the Danish, for example, but nowhere near the extent of the transatlantic slave trade.

The fact to be noted is that these retentions from the slavery period remain firmly fixed in the psyche of the victims of the trade who, instead of being regarded as having debased the European languages with which they came into contact, should rather be celebrated for their creativity in the most extreme of circumstances. As a matter of fact, they introduced not only into CE, but also into Caribbean French and, to a lesser extent, Caribbean Spanish, as well as Surinamese Dutch, lexical items that stand out for their clear-cut and practical view of the world into which the slaves were involuntarily brought. CE speakers resorted – and still resort – to British English (mostly) and American English (to a smaller degree and at a later stage) material in order to expand the lexical inventory of IAE, thus reshaping and at times remaking English vocabulary.

It is to be wished, as well as recommended, that this rich linguistic and cultural legacy inherited from the West African ancestors of Caribbean people will be preserved and will live on in lexicographical recordings of Caribbean English and Caribbean languages in general, and be fully credited with the great role that it has played in crafting Caribbean linguistic and cultural identity. To this end, there is ongoing work at the University of the West Indies at Cave Hill, Barbados, that is being produced by Jeannette Allsopp who, in collaboration with Wendy M. Griffith-Watson, has completed a school edition of the DCEU, which, it is hoped, will be published by 2021. This new edition, a simplified version of the linguistically complex and sophisticated original DCEU, is addressed particularly to children aged 11-18 attending Caribbean secondary schools. It is divided into themes for greater ease of both identification and retention of items in their linguistic context; CE

phrases are included in the section on general vocabulary since they derive from specific headwords, as is the case with the parent edition. Furthermore, in 2003, Jeannette Allsopp also produced *The Caribbean Multilingual Dictionary of Flora, Fauna and Foods in English, French, French Creole and Spanish* (CMD), a thematic unidirectional dictionary – the first of its kind – going from Caribbean English into Caribbean French, French Creole and Spanish, which, as an offshoot of the DCEU, is geared to include the major official languages spoken in the area. A second volume of the CMD on religion, festivals and folklore is also currently being compiled, and there should be specialised monolingual and bilingual glossaries on various topics to be produced in different Caribbean languages as time goes on.

In conclusion, it can be stated with fair certainty that there is no other English language variety which is richer and more colourful in regard to its idioms than CE. However, it must also be noted that it is not only the lexical items that have been bequeathed to Caribbean people, but also the graphic use of gestures to accompany these items, which is what makes them absolutely unique. These combined features should be constantly passed on to the descendants of Caribbean people, so that they are aware of the nature of CE idioms and Caribbean phraseology in general, as well as of their lasting contribution to Caribbean language and culture across the linguistic barriers of the region.

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