

Creole: Language & Black Identity in Britain

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Abstract

In this article I attempt to show how language is linked with questions of identity and how it is used strategically in addressing racism. One strategy of young African Caribbeans in Britain to counter racism is the use of Creole as a symbol of black identity. The use of Creole strengthens and stabilizes a common identity, which is based on the shared experience of racism. Language thus provides the ground for a common political struggle against discrimination.

However, the political meaning of Creole becomes undermined through its appropriation by whites. As long as racism continues to exist, these appropriations of black cultural forms of resistance by whites, innocent as they may seem, inevitably have to be seen in the context of unequal 'race' and power relations in the wider society.

The appropriation of black cultural expressions undermines the struggle of black people for equality and against racism. Since appropriation occurs under different guises, it is important to look at and discover these subtle forms contributing to the perpetuation of racism¹.

¹ Terminology: 'race', 'racial', 'interracial':

'Race' as a historically, culturally and socially grown construct is a powerful concept still used in politics and by individuals, thus perpetuating the myth of different 'races' and maintaining the status quo of unequal 'race' relations. 'Race' is a concept on which racism is built, i.e. without the notion of different 'races' racism does not exist. Yet racism is a social reality, and in order to write about this reality I need words to describe this reality. And I cannot write about this reality of racism without making use of the concept of different 'races'. However, doing so would mean to perpetuate the notion of different 'races', thus providing further ground for racism. A vicious circle. For the time being I therefore put the terms 'race', 'racial' and 'interracial' in inverted commas, thus acknowledging the present reality of racism based on the notion of different 'races' and at the same time emphasizing that 'race', as gender and class, is a social construct with no biological basis.

'black' and 'white': Instead of the racially used term 'black' the political term 'Black' with capital letter 'B' has been introduced in recent socio-political struggles in order to emphasize the historical, political and socio-economic basis of the concept 'race' and

Historical background

The presence of black people in Britain goes back to the 16th century. In those days black people living in Britain were mainly sailors and servants. In the mid-18th century, about 3 per cent of the London population were of African origin (cf Edwards 1986:12f, Wong 1986:110, Sebba 1993:1ff). Large-scale emigration from the Caribbeans to Britain set in after World War Two, partly triggered by the socio-economic situation in the Caribbean and partly by the increasing demand of labour in Britain. The Caribbean thus served as a „reserve army of labour“ (Wong 1986:111) for the growing British economy.

Because of labour shortage British corporations such as the National Health Service and London Transport actively recruited labour from the Caribbean in the 1950s and 1960s. African Caribbeans were recruited to take up low-paid, low-status and unskilled jobs British people at that time of economic prosperity could afford to turn down. Most African Caribbeans settled in the decaying inner city areas of Britain's major cities. They built the lowest section of the working class in Britain, facing low-paid jobs, bad housing conditions, racism and discrimination. Thus the history of exploitation of black labour in the former colonies has continued in the 'motherland' (cf Coard 1971:34f, Race Today 1975:181, Edwards 1986:12f, Wong 1986:111f, Nehaul 1996:1).

British Jamaican Creole as a symbol of black identity

With the first generation of African Caribbean migrants different varieties of Caribbean Creoles², including French-related Creoles, were introduced in Britain. Contrary to expectations, despite early linguistic assimilation and

current 'race' relations. Since the political term 'Black' generally refers to all people of colour, I have however decided to use the term 'black' in small letters in this article in order to specifically refer to people of African Caribbean and African origin in Britain, attaching to it the political meaning of the term 'Black'. In a similar way I use the term 'white' for people of 'Caucasian', European descent, bearing in mind that both the concepts of 'black' and 'white' (of different 'races') are social constructs that have no biological basis whatsoever.

2 In general, creole languages develop from pidgins, which emerge in situations of language contact involving two or more mutually unintelligible languages. While pidgins are characterized by a small vocabulary, simple structure and a limited range of functions, creoles are fully fledged languages and, in contrast to pidgins, are the first language of a group of people (cf. Singh 2000:2ff)

integration policies, these Creoles have survived. Jamaican Creole in particular - colloquially referred to as 'Creole' or 'Patois' - has become the dominant Creole spoken within the British African Caribbean community, since about 60 per cent of African Caribbean migrants were Jamaican. Over the years Jamaican Creole, influenced by local forms of English, has changed and a distinct British Jamaican Creole, with minor regional differences, has emerged. The continued use of Creole in Britain has to be seen against the background of racism and discrimination in British society. For the second and third generation of African Caribbeans Creole, in particular Jamaican Creole, has become a symbol of a common black identity forged by a shared experience of racial discrimination. This common identity provides African Caribbeans of different Caribbean origins and backgrounds with a common ground for political and cultural struggle against racism and for equality (cf Sutcliffe 1982:5, 22, 95ff, 138ff, Edwards 1986:16ff, Sebba 1993:1ff,).

Sutcliffe (1982:4f) identifies two major strategies used by black people to respond to racism and socio-economic as well as political inequality: assimilation, i.e. „becoming Black Britons in every sense“, or affirmation of a distinct black identity, i.e. „fostering a distinct Black, non-European identity“. A vital role in developing and affirming a positive black identity plays language. As language transmits common values, attitudes, beliefs and views of the world, it is an important part of identity, and a person's linguistic choice thus reflects an important part of their identity. Thus Jamaican-based Creole has become a significant symbol of black identity and resistance to assimilation, particularly for the younger generation of British African Caribbeans (cf Sutcliffe 1982:32ff, LePage & Tabouret-Keller 1985:115ff, 235ff, Sebba 1993, Kramsch 1998:3ff). The use of Jamaican Creole has been particularly promoted by the Rastafarian movement, which originated in Jamaica in the first half of the 20th century. This movement sought to bring about liberation of black people all over the world and provided a cultural, spiritual and political response to oppression and racism. With migration from the Caribbean, the Rastafari movement has also been introduced in Britain. It has since contributed to promoting the popularity of Creole as a common language of young African Caribbeans in Britain, which has developed its own distinct characteristics, reflecting the unique British black experience(s). Experiences of 'racial' discrimination in particular have made many

young African Caribbeans turn to Rastafari as an alternative to the dominant white mainstream culture. It offers a sense of community, solidarity and a common identity. English as the language of the former colonial power is seen to reflect social and racist biases pervading British society. Therefore, emphasis is put on Creole, which is considered to be „a defence against the assimilationist encroachment of the dominant society“ (Wong 1986:113) (cf Garrison 1979:15f, Bones 1986a:37ff, 1986b:64, Moore 1986:68, Wong 1986:113ff).

In order to employ Creole as a marker of ethnic identity, people however need not be fully competent in it. Most British-born African Caribbeans are first language speakers of English. As Creole is generally not encouraged by parents, many second and third generation African Caribbeans acquire Creole during their adolescence, through socialization. In addition, Jamaican Creole is not every African Caribbean's heritage language. Competence largely depends on the degree of identification with and integration into the black community. Mastery of Creole varies from speaker to speaker, yet to emphasize a distinct black identity does not depend on actual competence in Creole. While some speakers ethnically mark their speech by incorporating only a few Creolisms, others may use a wide range of Creole features. Sebba (1993:18) thus distinguishes between the linguistic act of actually 'speaking Creole', and the social act of 'chatting Patois', whereby the latter may only involve some features of Creole to evoke and claim a distinct black identity through language (cf Edwards 1986:55,109,128f, Sebba 1993:18f, 38f, 73ff).

On the whole, it can be said that African Caribbeans in general have two distinct linguistic systems at their disposal, from which they can draw: a local variety of British English, and Creole (cf Edwards 1979:19f, Sutcliffe 1982:114ff, Sebba 1993). When members of the younger generation 'chat Patois', they mainly focus on Jamaican Creole. The result is not Jamaican Creole, however, but a social construct of what is perceived stereotypically as Jamaican Creole. Nevertheless, this social construct is regarded as a distinct linguistic system. Since the speech of young African Caribbeans also shows features of British English, it is suggested that what actually happens is a kind of code-switching between Creole and British English (cf Sebba 1993:33f, 97ff). Thus the linguistic behaviour of British-born African Carib-

beans can be regarded as the behaviour of bilinguals. However, despite the notion of code-switching between English and Creole, there is no neat distinction between these two linguistic systems. The Creole of most African Caribbeans shows influences from the various local varieties of English, thus differing from Jamaican Creole. Thus a new linguistic system has been created, which in the case of London with its large African Caribbean community is neither Jamaican Creole nor London English, but a distinct form of speech, London Jamaican (cf Sutcliffe 1982:152; Sebba 1993:137).

Yet the linguistic situation of African Caribbeans is far more complex, not least because their linguistic behaviour shows a considerable degree of variation among individual speakers (cf Sutcliffe 1982:113ff, Edwards 1986:48ff, Sebba 1993:27ff). In general, both the relationship between speakers as well as the desire to express one's identification with a particular social group, have an impact on the linguistic behaviour of individuals. Thus speakers may vary their speech depending on who they talk to, the kind of relationship and degree of closeness or distance they have with their interlocutors, which may show in either convergence with or divergence from the speech of their interlocutors. In addition to the relationship between speech participants, the relationship between an individual speaker and a particular group also influences linguistic behaviour. In order to demonstrate group allegiances and to express the desire to identify with a social group, speakers may modify their linguistic behaviour accordingly (cf Sebba 1993:125ff, with reference to LePage & Tabouret-Keller 1985).

According to Sebba (1993:132) speakers „actually switch 'selves' from time to time, depending on 'who' they want to be at a particular moment, relative to their interlocutors“. Variation may occur even within a single interaction and consequently change the quality of the relationship and of what is said. Switching between different codes is thus employed in a strategic way, whereby a person may switch codes during a conversation in order to indicate who she desires to be at that very moment, who she desires to identify and be identified with (cf Edwards 1986:35f). However, variation must also be seen in relation to external, extralinguistic factors such as ethnicity, social class, gender, age, etc. These social variables also account for the variation found within single speech communities (Edwards 1986:41f). Thus the variation in the linguistic behaviour of British-born African Caribbeans depends on a „wide range of extra-linguistic factors“ (Edwards 1986:6).

In her study on linguistic variation among British-born African Caribbeans in a town in the West Midlands, Edwards attempted to gain insight into the relationship between linguistic behaviour and social variables. She presumed that the „diversity of social identities“ (Edwards 1986:22) among young African Caribbeans would be „reflected in their linguistic behaviour“. The extralinguistic factors taken into consideration in her study were „sex, education, social network and attitudes to mainstream white society“ (Edwards 1986:54), i.e. Edwards looked at the impact that education, work patterns, social networks, friendships and attitudes to white society had on her informants' use of Creole. She also considered the degree of integration into the black community. The general picture that emerged was that all speakers at least used some Creole in some situations. Edwards classified the various situations as either 'English' or 'Patois'. Since most informants did not use Patois consistently but switched between Patois and English, Patois situations were rather situations of code-switching. To be able to distinguish whether a person was talking Patois or English, Edwards therefore identified certain linguistic features of Patois as ethnically marked, indicating a Patois situation, and others as ethnically unmarked, indicating an English situation. Whether a situation was Patois or English depended on the formality of the situation and the ethnic background of the speech participants. Thus the formal interviews in an exclusively black and an exclusively white setting respectively as well as the mixed group conversations turned out to be English, whereas the informal conversations among black informants and black fieldworkers were conducted in Patois (Edwards 1986:54ff, 69ff, 109ff). Apart from the situational impact on linguistic behaviour, the extent of switching differed from speaker to speaker and was affected by the social variables mentioned earlier. Informants critical of mainstream white society, those with close ties to the black community as well as those less educated (the majority of them being male) tended to employ Creole/Patois more often than the rest of informants. On the whole, Edwards' study suggests that the use of Creole/Patois usually remains restricted to peer group situations and signals a common group identity, whereas if used in the presence of whites rather serves as a means of exclusion (cf Edwards 1986:123ff).

Sutcliffe (1982:148ff) and Sebba (1993:73ff) also point out the generational differences regarding Creole use. In his survey of Creole use by children of

African Caribbean descent, Sutcliffe argues that, similar to Edwards' findings, use of Creole is highest in the peer group, among black friends. At home, with parents or other adults, use of Creole is highly asymmetrical. African Caribbean parents generally tend to disapprove of their children 'chatting Patois', since the acquisition and mastery of 'good' English is considered essential to achieve in school and later on in wider society. While parents may nevertheless use Creole when speaking to their children, children are expected to respond in English. This asymmetrical use of 'black' language is a feature observed across the African diaspora, in the Americas as well as in Britain. According to Sutcliffe, this pattern of unreciprocal use of Creole resembles the use of 'tu' and 'vous' forms found in numerous languages, whereby the 'tu' form indicates closeness and familiarity and is used among equals, and the 'vous' form signals social distance and formality and is used when speaking to persons of authority. However, once their children are competent speakers of English, parents may become more tolerant of their children speaking Creole, particularly during adolescence, when Creole is strategically used by young speakers as a marker of ethnicity.

Appropriation of black culture: white use of Creole

With the settlement of African Caribbeans in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, 'interracial' contacts have become a feature of British urban life. Reactions among the native white population towards the presence of African Caribbeans ranged from blunt rejection to actual embrace and absorption of black culture into mainstream white culture. The emerging distinct black youth culture in particular has had a major impact on white British youth culture. Even white adolescents not having direct contacts with black people have gained access to and imitated black cultural forms such as dress, language and music (cf Hewitt 1986:1ff, 46ff, Jones 1988, Rampton 1995:25). However, the effects of this cultural imitation have remained largely unreflected. The desire to adapt and imitate black cultural expressions, often appears under the guise of cultural acceptance and open-mindedness, yet has to be seen in the historical and present-day context of unequal 'race' and power relations. As black cultural expressions function as symbols of black identity and solidarity, the employment of these forms by whites may undermine the political meaning of these cultural expressions. Consequently, unthoughtful ad-

aptations of black culture may, though unintentionally, contribute to the perpetuation of 'racial' inequality & unequal 'race' relations (cf Hewitt 1986:200ff, Jones 1988:177ff, Rampton 1995:22ff).

bell hooks (1992) and Eske Wollrad (1999)³, though writing from different angles and positions, provide important insights into - often subtle - forms of appropriation of black culture by white people in a society dominated by 'white' cultural norms and values, and where black people are mainly perceived as Other. Wollrad distinguishes between two kinds of looking at the Other (Wollrad 1999:186ff), one being through 'Andern', i.e. 'to other', a term used by Toni Morrison and borrowed by Wollrad. 'Andern' means that the Other is seen as totally different to one's self, thus avoiding any serious confrontation with the Other and consequently with oneself and one's perception of the world. Any changes which may result from such a confrontation become impossible. „Die Konstruktion des Anderen zielt auf Konfliktvermeidung und die Verhinderung ernsthafter Selbstkritik“ („The construction of the Other serves to avoid conflict and earnest self-criticism“) (Wollrad 1999:187f).

Another extreme way of looking at the Other, being the opposite of 'Andern', is through 'Einverleiben' (Wollrad 1999:189), through appropriation, or as bell hooks (1992:21) calls it, „eating the other“. „Die Suche nach dem Eigenen und das angebliche Wiedererkennen des Eigenen im Fremden bezeichnet den Prozeß des Einverleibens“ („The process of appropriation is a process of looking for oneself and seemingly recognizing oneself in the Other“) (Wollrad 1999:189). 'Einverleiben' means according to Wollrad „sich das Fremde zu eigen zu machen, es aufzulösen und zu vereinnahmen ... es ist der bloße Widerhall des Eigenen, bereits Gewußten und Vertrauten“ („to appropriate and dissolve the Other ... it is the mere echo of oneself, of what is already known and familiar“) (Wollrad 1999:188). Thus through appropriating the Other, the self only seeks to affirm and enlarge itself, without really confronting one's self with the Other, without reconsidering one's perception and images of oneself and the Other. Again, as with 'Andern', any serious confrontation and possible change is avoided. bell hooks sees the basic motivation for appropriation, for 'eating' the Other, stemming from a crisis of identity, which particularly seems to afflict young

³ bell hooks is an African American feminist theorist and cultural critic, Eske Wollrad a white German feminist theologian.

white people in the West. According to hooks the „desire for contact with the Other“ (hooks 1992:22) is not in itself bad, indeed she suggests that it can be considered to be potentially revolutionary and transforming. However, as long as the Other is considered to serve only one's own needs, to „assuage feelings of deprivation and lack that assault the psyches of radical white youth“ (hooks 1992:26) who hope that „the Other can provide self-sustaining alternatives“, acting on this desire remains potentially violating and damaging. It merely reflects and affirms existing unequal power relationships through another kind of exploitation, which is mainly cultural, emotional and spiritual. The notion of the Other as being more alive, more exciting and more intense is particularly exploited by the advertising industry. The presentation and image drawn of the Other promises pleasure. A fantasy notion of the 'primitive' that provides pleasure - particularly physical pleasure - in abundance, suppressed and hidden (and forbidden?) desires and needs associated with the primitive, as well as harmony with nature are projected on the Other (cf hooks 1992:29ff, Wollrad 1999:190). This notion and projection of the primitive on people of colour perpetuates racial and racist stereotypes (hooks 1992:32ff). Instead of cultural appropriation hooks proposes cultural appreciation. She argues that only serious confrontation of racism by members of both dominant and subordinated groups, painful as it may be, may eventually lead to a better understanding, mutual acceptance and respect and the valuation of differences as well as commonalities. Wollrad points out that such an encounter requires from both sides to accept and acknowledge a condition of uncertainty and chaos, of „Unordnung, ... Verunsicherung und Verwirrung des Vertrauten und Gewußten“ („chaos, ... uncertainty and confusion of the known and familiar“)(Wollrad 1999:190)⁴.

A major element of white appropriation of black culture is the appropriation of language, of Creole, the marker of black identity and solidarity (cf Hewitt 1986:151ff, Jones 1988:146ff, Rampton 1995:34ff). The use of a less

⁴ During a stay in England I watched a TV show hosted by African American rap singer Queen Latifah. It was in this show where I saw hooks' and Wollrad's proposal for confrontation put into practice. Two young people, one black, one white, both with strong opinions about the respective 'other race', agreed to challenge their views by spending two weeks with a family of the 'other race'. Whether this project turns out to be successful has however yet to be seen.

prestigious linguistic system by socially powerful speakers of a prestigious linguistic system may be regarded and at times is intended to be an act of violence, „a further ... appropriation of one of the sources of power“ (Hewitt 1986:162). The mass media play a major role in this process of appropriation. By incorporating Creole in radio and TV programmes people all over the country gain access to Creole, which on the one hand can help to promote and acknowledge the language of African Caribbeans as a part of British life, on the other hand however considerably diminishes the control of the black community over Creole and its social and political meaning. By using Creole whites 'cross' cultural boundaries which are considered as defining boundaries of a black identity, thus using a language which does not 'belong' to them (cf Hewitt 1986:151, Rampton 1995:14ff, 55). The difference between African Caribbeans' and white people's use of Creole alongside English is therefore a qualitative one. Rampton (1995:275ff) differentiates between code-switching of African Caribbeans and code-crossing of whites. Code-crossing implies the crossing of a boundary, a linguistic boundary, of a minority group language lacking wider social prestige, by members not belonging to that group.

However, not all uses of Creole by whites can be categorized as code-crossing or linguistic appropriation. Local varieties of English in ethnically mixed urban areas do not remain unaffected by the linguistic diversity resulting from migration. They show influences and traces of various minority group languages as well as of regional English dialects and sociolects. Linguistic elements which initially may have been marked 'ethnic' or 'foreign' have been incorporated into and become an integral part of a local form of English. Hewitt refers to these local varieties, to this emerging „new ethnically mixed 'community English'“ (Rampton 1995:128, quoting Hewitt 1989a:139) as 'multiracial local vernaculars' (Hewitt 1986:129). In areas with a substantial African Caribbean population Creole has considerable influence on the multiethnic local vernacular. Anglicized Creole words and expressions of black adolescents are taken up by their white peers, who subsequently spread it to white youths not in direct contact with black people. This way Creole items become part of the local multiethnic vernacular, their use being ethnically unmarked. Thus London English for instance contains many Creolisms, though their Caribbean origins are often unknown to its speakers (cf Hewitt 1986:126ff).

Yet, the distinction between unconscious, ethnically unmarked and therefore sanctioned use of Creole as part of the local vernacular and conscious, ethnically marked use of Creole is difficult to make. The „linguistic demarcation“ (Rampton 1995:123) between Creole and multiethnic local vernacular is difficult to draw. Whether use of Creole items is marked or unmarked depends on demographic factors, on the context of interaction, and the speakers themselves. Since the extent of Creolisms varies from area to area, the speech of whites containing Creole forms may be accepted as unmarked in one area, particularly in areas with a high black population, whereas in areas with a low black population the same use of Creole by whites may be regarded as highly marked (cf Hewitt 1986:126ff, 188ff, Rampton 1995:120ff).

White uses of Creole range from unconscious use of Creole forms as part of the local multiethnic vernacular, to conscious use in competitive and game-like contexts to full and conscious identification with black culture. Conscious white use of Creole may meet the disapproval of black people as it may be regarded as a cultural transgression, undermining the symbolic meaning of Creole as a marker of black identity used in the struggle against racism and for 'racial' equality (cf Hewitt 1986:126ff, 135ff, 161f). „It seems they are stealing our language“ (Hewitt 1986:161, quoting a black boy of fifteen). This disapproval is further nurtured by a kind of white use of Creole that is clearly racist in that it aims at parodying and mocking black speech and consequently black people. Apart from this offensive use and the unconscious use of Creole as part of the local vernacular, Hewitt identifies four different modes of white conscious use of Creole: competitive, oppositional, cultural and interpersonal. Thus, Creole may be strategically employed in competitive situations including games or game-like situations, banter and playful verbal abuse between friends. This use of Creole by whites is largely tolerated and fairly inhibited by black speakers. Another sanctioned white use of Creole is its use in opposition to adult authority figures such as teachers. This oppositional use of Creole has become an integral part of an „oppositional pupil culture“ (Hewitt 1986:154) in ethnically mixed areas. Since Creole is also associated with working class life, Creole may also be used, alongside the local English vernacular, in opposition to poshness, up-

per-class and mainstream culture (cf Hewitt 1986:108ff, 154f, Jones 1988:149, Rampton 1995:45f, 113ff).

Whereas Creole use by whites in the oppositional or competitive modes does not necessarily indicate identification with black culture, white adolescents attracted to black youth culture however may use Creole to assume a black identity (cf Hewitt 1986:136, 142ff, Jones 1988:147). In order to claim a black identity linguistic markers are used to create a temporary fictive social identity, to establish an imaginary black identity. The conscious cultural use of Creole by young white people appears to be motivated by a strong affiliation to black culture, yet at the same time by a desire for self-differentiation, which becomes most prominent during adolescence. The extent to which white adolescents use Creole for cultural identification depends on several factors. In areas of low black population, where Creole has little or no impact on the local vernacular, white adolescents may know and use only few forms of Creole such as fixed expressions and phrases to claim a black identity. Their access to Creole is generally restricted to the mass media, popular music, reggae records and black TV shows. Apart from access and locality, identification with black culture will only be successful if these attempts are accepted and supported by black peers. In the context of current 'race' relations and the significance of Creole as a symbol of black identity and solidarity, however, white cultural use of Creole may rather provoke disapproval or even hostile reactions by black people. As the social and political implications of white conscious use of Creole becomes most evident in 'interracial' interaction, white adolescents - often intuitively - tend to avoid using Creole in the presence of black peers, rather showing their affiliation to black culture in all-white situations.

However, despite a general disapproving attitude towards white use of Creole, a paradox can be observed in close 'interracial' friendships, where black adolescents not only tolerate but at times actively encourage and support their white friends' use of Creole (cf Hewitt 1986:162ff). Thus a black adolescent otherwise disapproving of white use of Creole may tolerate a white friend speaking Creole. However, this use of Creole differs from linguistic appropriation in an important aspect. Here the use of Creole features is not primarily motivated by a desire for identification with black culture but rather used as a „marker of intimacy“ (Hewitt 1986:163), a speech align-

alignment between close friends, whereby their speech patterns 'naturally' converge (Hewitt 1986:187). This interpersonal use of Creole in 'interracial' relationships may aim at breaking up the still existing 'racial' divisions in British society. Through language - though not solely through language - adolescents of different 'racial' backgrounds attempt to create and enter an in-between space in their friendships, which is outside accepted social patterns, a space of potential social transformation (cf Rampton 1995:19f, 204ff). However, these attempts to transcend the socially constructed 'racial' boundaries and divisions tend not to go beyond the confines of close friendships. Although interpersonal use of Creole is largely accepted among friends, the social pressures from the wider society may affect 'interracial' friendships. Intuitively feeling these social pressures and aware of the symbolic meaning of Creole, white adolescents may refrain from using Creole with their black friends in public and/or in the presence of other black people. Thus the interpersonal use of Creole remains a rather „private display between friends“ (Hewitt 1986:163). The interpersonal use of Creole differs from the cultural use in that the latter is rather used in public and serves as a means of identification with black culture. These two uses of Creole may of course overlap, and close 'interracial' friendships may indeed temporarily lead to a strong identification with black culture, which however is usually dropped by white youths in their late teens (cf Hewitt 1986:160, Jones 1988:143ff, 185ff).

Moving beyond appropriation

Coming into their mid- and late teens, young people begin to develop a political consciousness and become more aware of their cultural identity/identities. Through experiences with racism, it is at this stage that the contradictions in individual 'interracial' friendships may be felt more acutely and that white appropriations of black culture become less tolerated. Even within close friendships, white adolescents drawn to black culture become aware of the socially constructed 'racial' boundaries caused by racism in the wider society (cf Jones 1988:185ff). Consequently a process of growing out of a rather 'naive' phase of white appropriation may begin, accompanied by increasing contradictions and temporary confusion with regard to questions of identity. Jones refers to this process as 'awakening

process' (Jones 1988:185) or 'process of self-realisation' (Jones 1988:189). Illustrating this process, he quotes several young white men:

„[A]nd then come 16, 17, it just started to hit me you know. I just thought well, you're not this, you're not that and you can't do this no more“ (Jones 1988:186).

„I thought what I was doing was right, and then something came along which showed me I was all wrong. So I had to sit down and rethink the way I operated (...) I appeared to be taking something away from black people that was theirs (...) 'Cos if you take in the whole situation, there's still that dividing line between black and white, and I'm kind of caught in the middle (...) I'm caught in my own contradictions“ (Jones 1988:187).

Instead of giving in to the social pressure, accepting or tolerating the status quo of 'racial' inequality, ideally, this 'awakening process' involves serious reconsideration and reflection of one's own position in a racist society which fears difference and the Other, and willingness to confront that fear. This process may lead to greater awareness of racism, of personal and structural 'race' relations, eventually overcoming racism and bringing about new ways of relating. Since hope is one of the driving forces of life and change, I would like to finish with a quotation from Alice Walker (1990:317):

„Helped are those who are enemies of their own racism: they shall live in harmony with the citizens of this world“.

Zusammenfassung

Eine Strategie junger Afro-KaribInnen in Großbritannien gegen Alltagsrassismus ist die Verwendung von Creole als Symbol schwarzer Identität. In diesem Artikel setze ich mich mit der Verbindung zwischen Sprache und Fragen von Identität auseinander und versuche anhand der Situation afro-karibischer Jugendlicher in Großbritannien aufzuzeigen, wie Sprache im alltäglichen Kampf gegen Rassismus eingesetzt werden kann. Die Verwendung von Creole dient dabei zur Stabilisierung und Stärkung einer schwarzen Identität, die auf einer gemeinsamen Erfahrung von Rassismus basiert. Sprache wird somit zu einer Grundlage für einen gemeinsamen Kampf gegen Diskriminierung. Mit der Aneignung von Creole durch weiße Jugendliche wird jedoch seine politische Bedeutung beträchtlich geschwächt. Diese Art der Aneignung schwarzer kultureller Ausdrucksformen unterminiert auf subtile Weise den Kampf

schwarzer Menschen für Gleichheit und gegen Rassismus. Solange Rassismus eine soziale Realität ist, müssen solche Aneignungen von schwarzen kulturellen Formen des Widerstands durch Weiße kritisch betrachtet und im Kontext ungleicher sozio-ökonomischer und politischer Machtbeziehungen gesehen werden.

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