

Jamaican Patois

Jamaican Patois	
	<i>Patwa, Jamiekan / Jamiekan Kriyuol</i> ^[1] , <i>Jumiekan / Jumiekan Kryuol / Jumieka Taak / Jumieka taak / Jumiekan languif</i> ^{[2][3]}
Native to	Jamaica, Panama, Costa Rica, Colombia (San Andrés y Providencia).
Native speakers	3.2 million (2000–2001) ^[4]
Language family	English creole <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Atlantic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Western <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jamaican Patois
Dialects	<u>Limonese Creole</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Bocas del Toro Creole</u> <u>Miskito Coast Creole</u> <u>San Andrés–Providencia Creole</u>
Official status	
Regulated by	not regulated
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	jam
Glottolog	jama1262 <p>(http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/jama1262)^[5]</p>
Linguasphere	52-ABB-am

Jamaican Patois, known locally as **Patois** (**Patwa** or **Patwah**) and called **Jamaican Creole** by linguists, is an English-based creole language with West African influences (a majority of non-English loan words of Akan origin)^[6] spoken primarily in Jamaica and among the Jamaican diaspora; it is spoken by the majority of Jamaicans as a native language. Patois developed in the 17th century when slaves from West and Central Africa were exposed to, learned and nativized the vernacular and dialectal forms of English spoken by the slaveholders: British English, Scots, and Hiberno-English. Jamaican Creole exhibits a gradation between more conservative creole forms that are not significantly mutually intelligible with English,^[7] and forms virtually identical to Standard English.^[8]

Jamaicans refer to their language as *Patois*, a term also used as a lower-case noun as a catch-all description of pidgins, creoles, dialects, and vernaculars. Creoles, including Jamaican Patois, are often stigmatized as a "lesser" language even when the majority of a local population speaks them as their mother tongue.^[9]



Female patois speaker saying two sentences



A Jamaican Patois speaker discussing the usage of the dialect, recorded for Wikitungues.

Jamaican pronunciation and vocabulary are significantly different from English despite heavy use of English words or derivatives, but their writing system shows commonalities with the English alphabet.^[10]

Significant Jamaican Patois-speaking communities exist among Jamaican expatriates in Miami, New York City, Toronto, Hartford, Washington, D.C., Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama (in the Caribbean coast), also London,^[11] Birmingham, Manchester, and Nottingham. A mutually intelligible variety is found in San Andrés y Providencia Islands, Colombia, brought to the island by descendants of Jamaican Maroons (escaped slaves) in the 18th century. Mesolectal forms are similar to very basilectal Belizean Kriol.

Jamaican Patois exists mostly as a spoken language and is also heavily used for musical purposes, especially in reggae and dancehall as well as other genres. Although standard British English is used for most writing in Jamaica, Jamaican Patois has been gaining ground as a literary language for almost a hundred years. Claude McKay published his book of Jamaican poems *Songs of Jamaica* in 1912. Patois and English are frequently used for stylistic contrast (codeswitching) in new forms of Internet writing.^[12]

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Phonology

Accounts of basilectal Jamaican Patois (that is, its most divergent rural varieties) suggest around 21 phonemic consonants^[13] with an additional phoneme (/h/) in the Western dialect.^[14] There are between nine and sixteen vowels.^[15] Some vowels are capable of nasalization and others can be lengthened.^[14]

Consonants^[16]

	<u>Labial</u>		<u>Alveolar</u>		<u>Post-alveolar</u>		<u>Palatal</u> ²		<u>Velar</u>		<u>Glottal</u>
<u>Nasal</u>	m		n				ɲ		ŋ		
<u>Stop</u>	p	b	t	d	tʃ	dʒ	c	ɟ	k	g	
<u>Fricative</u>	f	v	s	z	ʃ						(h) ɦ
<u>Approximant</u>				ɹ			j		w		
<u>/Lateral</u>				l							

^{^1} The status of /h/ as a phoneme is dialectal: in western varieties, it is a full phoneme and there are minimal pairs (/hiit/ 'hit' and /iit/ 'eat'); in central and eastern varieties, vowel-initial words take an initial [h] after vowel-final words, preventing the two vowels from falling together, so that the words for 'hand' and 'and' (both underlyingly /an/) may be pronounced [han] or [an].^[17]

^{^2} The palatal stops [c], [ɟ]^[note 1] and [ɲ] are considered phonemic by some accounts^[18] and phonetic by others.^[19] For the latter interpretation, their appearance is included in the larger phenomenon of phonetic palatalization.

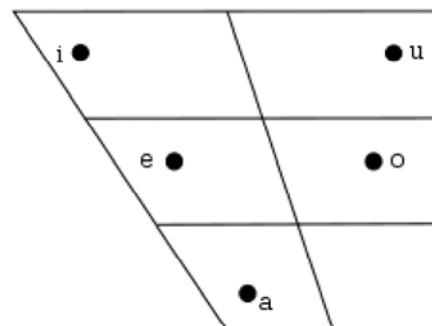
Examples of palatalization include:^[20]

- /kiuu/ → [ciu:] → [cu:] ('a quarter quart (of rum)')
- /giaad/ → [jia:d] → [ja:d] ('guard')
- /piaa + pīaa/ → [piã:pīã:] → [piã:pīã:] ('weak')

Voiced stops are implosive whenever in the onset of prominent syllables (especially word-initially) so that /biit/ ('beat') is pronounced [ʙi:t] and /guud/ ('good') as [gũ:d].^[13]

Before a syllabic /l/, the contrast between alveolar and velar consonants has been historically neutralized with alveolar consonants becoming velar so that the word for 'bottle' is /bakk/ and the word for 'idle' is /aigl/.^[21]

Jamaican Patois exhibits two types of vowel harmony; peripheral vowel harmony, wherein only sequences of peripheral vowels (that is, /i/, /u/, and /a/) can occur within a syllable; and back harmony, wherein /i/ and /u/ cannot occur within a syllable together (that is, /uu/ and /ii/ are allowed but * /ui/ and * /iu/ are not).^[22] These two phenomena account for three long vowels and four diphthongs:^[23]



Vowels of Jamaican Patois. from Harry (2006:128)

Vowel	Example	Gloss
/ii/	/biini/	'tiny'
/aa/	/baaba/	'barber'
/uu/	/buut/	'booth'
/ia/	/biak/	'bake'
/ai/	/baik/	'bike'
/ua/	/buat/	'boat'
/au/	/taun/	'town'

Sociolinguistic variation

Jamaican Patois features a creole continuum (or a *linguistic continuum*):^{[24][25][26]} the variety of the language closest to the lexifier language (the acrolect) cannot be distinguished systematically from intermediate varieties (collectively referred to as the mesolect) or even from the most divergent rural varieties (collectively referred to as the basilect).^[27] This situation came about with contact between speakers of a number of Niger–Congo languages and various dialects of English, the latter of which were all perceived as prestigious and the use of which carried socio-economic benefits.^[28] The span of a speaker's command of the continuum generally corresponds to social context.^[29]

Grammar

The tense/aspect system of Jamaican Patois is fundamentally unlike that of English. There are no morphologically marked past participles; instead, two different participle words exist: *en* and *a*. These are not verbs, but simply invariant particles that cannot stand alone like the English *to be*. Their function also differs from English.

According to Bailey (1966), the progressive category is marked by /a~da~de/. Alleyne (1980) claims that /a~da/ marks the progressive and that the habitual aspect is unmarked but by its accompaniment with words such as "always", "usually", etc. (i.e. is absent as a grammatical category). Mufwene (1984) and Gibson and Levy (1984) propose a past-only habitual category marked by /juusta/ as in /we: wi juusta liv iz not az kuol az ii:/ ('where we used to live is not as cold as here').^[30]

For the present tense, an uninflected verb combining with an iterative adverb marks habitual meaning as in /tam aawez nuo wen kieti tel pan im/ ('Tom always knows when Katy tells/has told about him').^[31]

- *en* is a tense indicator
- *a* is an aspect marker
- (*a*) *go* is used to indicate the future
- /mi ɽon/
 - I run (habitually); I ran
- /mi a ɽon/ or /mi de ɽon/
 - I am running
- /a ɽon mi dida ɽon/ or /a ɽon mi ben(w)en a ɽon/

- I was running
- /mi did ɔn/ or /mi ben(w)en ɔn/
 - I have run; I had run
- /mi a go ɔn/
 - I am going to run; I will run

As in other Caribbean Creoles (that is, Guyanese Creole and San Andrés-Providencia Creole; Sranan Tongo is excluded) /fi/ has a number of functions, including:^[32]

- Directional, dative, or benefactive preposition
 - /dem a fait fi wi/ ('They are fighting for us')^[33]
- Genitive preposition (that is, marker of possession)
 - /dat a fi mi buk/ ('that's my book')
- Modal auxiliary expressing obligation or futurity
 - /im fi kom op ja/ ('he ought to come up here')
- Pre-infinitive complementizer
 - /unu hafi kiip samtiŋ faɹ de gini piipɹ-dem fi biit dem miuzik/ ('you have to contribute something to the Guinean People for playing their music')^[34]

Pronominal system

The pronominal system of Standard English has a four-way distinction of person, number, gender and case. Some varieties of Jamaican Patois do not have the gender or case distinction, but all varieties distinguish between the second person singular and plural (you).^[35]

- I, me = /mi/
- you, you (singular) = /ju/
- he, him = /im/ (pronounced [ɪ] in the basilect varieties)
- she, her = /fi/ or /im/ (no gender distinction in basilect varieties)
- we, us, our = /wi/
- you (plural) = /unu/
- they, them, their = /dem/

Copula

- the Jamaican Patois equative verb is also a
 - e.g. /mi a di tiitʃa/ ('I am the teacher')
- Jamaican Patois has a separate locative verb *deh*
 - e.g. /wi de a london/ or /wi de inna london/ ('we are in London')
- with true adjectives in Jamaican Patois, no copula is needed
 - e.g. /mi haadbak nau/ ('I am old now')

This is akin to Spanish in that both have 2 distinct forms of the verb "to be" – *ser* and *estar* – in which *ser* is equative and *estar* is locative. Other languages, such as Portuguese and Italian, make a similar distinction. (See Romance Copula.)

Negation

- /no/ is used as a present tense negator:
 - /if kau no did nuo au im tuotuol tan im udn tjaans piejsiid/ ('If the cow knew that his throat wasn't capable of swallowing a pear seed, he wouldn't have swallowed it')^[36]
- /kiaan/ is used in the same way as English *can't*
 - /it a puou tinj dat kiaan maf ant/ ('It is a poor thing that can't mash an ant')^[37]
- /neva/ is a negative past participle.^[38]
 - /dʒan neva tiif di moni/ ('John did not steal the money')

Orthography

Patois has long been written with various respellings compared to English so that, for example, the word "there" might be written ⟨de⟩, ⟨deh⟩, or ⟨dere⟩, and the word "three" as ⟨tree⟩, ⟨tri⟩, or ⟨trii⟩. Standard English spelling is often used and a nonstandard spelling sometimes becomes widespread even though it is neither phonetic nor standard (e.g. ⟨pickney⟩ for /pikni/, 'child').

In 2002, the Jamaican Language Unit was set up at the University of the West Indies at Mona to begin standardizing the language, with the aim of supporting non-English-speaking Jamaicans according to their constitutional guarantees of equal rights, as services of the state are normally provided in English, which a significant portion of the population cannot speak fluently. The vast majority of such persons are speakers of Jamaican Patois. It was argued that failure to provide services of the state in a language in such general use or discriminatory treatment by officers of the state based on the inability of a citizen to use English violates the rights of citizens. The proposal was made that freedom from discrimination on the ground of language be inserted into the Charter of Rights.^[39] They standardized the Jamaican alphabet as follows:^[40]

Short vowels

Letter	Patois	English
i	sik	sick
e	bel	bell
a	ban	band
o	kot	cut
u	kuk	cook

Long vowels

Letter	Patois	English
ii	tii	tea
aa	baal	ball
uu	shuut	shoot

Diphthongs

Letter	Patois	English
ie	kiek	cake
uo	gruo	grow
ai	bait	bite
ou	kou	cow

Nasal vowels are written with *-hn*, as in *kyaahn* (can't) and *iihn* (isn't it?)

Consonants

Letter	Patois	English
b	biek	bake
d	daag	dog
ch	choch	church
f	fuud	food
g	guot	goat
h	hen	hen
j	joj	judge
k	kait	kite
l	liin	lean
m	man	man
n	nais	nice
ng	sing	sing
p	piil	peel
r	ron	run
s	sik	sick
sh	shout	shout
t	tuu	two
v	vuot	vote
w	wail	wild
y	yong	young
z	zuu	zoo
zh	vorzhan	version

h is written according to local pronunciation, so that *hen* (hen) and *en* (end) are distinguished in writing for speakers of western Jamaican, but not for those of central Jamaican.

Vocabulary

Jamaican Patois contains many loanwords, most of which are African in origin, primarily from Twi

(a dialect of Akan).^[41]

Many loanwords come from English, but are also borrowed from Spanish, Portuguese, Hindi, Arawak and African languages as well as Scottish and Irish dialects.

Examples from African languages include /se/ meaning *that* (in the sense of "he told me that..." = /im tel mi se/), taken from Ashanti Twi, and Duppy meaning *ghost*, taken from the Twi word *dupon* ('cotton tree root'), because of the African belief of malicious spirits originating in the root of trees (in Jamaica and Ghana, particularly the cotton tree known in both places as "Odom").^[42] The pronoun /unu/, used for the plural form of *you*, is taken from the Igbo language. *Red eboe* describes a fair-skinned black person because of the reported account of fair skin among the Igbo in the mid 1700s.^[43] *De* meaning *to be* (at a location) comes from Yoruba.^[44] From the Ashanti-Akan, comes the term *Obeah* which means witchcraft, from the Ashanti Twi word *Obayi* which also means "witchcraft".^[41]

Words from Hindi include *ganja* (marijuana), and *janga* (crowdad). *Pickney* or *pickiney* meaning child, taken from an earlier form (*piccaninny*) was ultimately borrowed from the Portuguese *pequenino* (the diminutive of *pequeno*, small) or Spanish *pequeño* ('small').

There are many words referring to popular produce and food items—*ackee*, *callaloo*, *guinep*, *bammy*, *roti*, *dal*, *kamranga*. See Jamaican cuisine.

Jamaican Patois has its own rich variety of swearwords. One of the strongest is *blood claat* (along with related forms *raas claat*, *bomba claat*, *claat* and others—compare with *bloody* in Australian English and British English, which is also considered a profanity).

Homosexual men may be referred to with the pejorative term /biips/^[45], fish^[46] or *batty boys*.

Example phrases

- /mi aalmuos lik im/ – I nearly hit him^[47]
- /im caan biit mi, im d3os loki dat im won/ – He can't beat me, he simply got lucky and won.^[48]
- /siin/ – Affirmative particle^[49]
- /papi'juo/ – Foolish exhibition, a person who makes a foolish exhibition of him or herself, or an exclamation of surprise.^[50]
- /uman/ – Woman^[51]
- /bwoi/ – Boy^[52]

Literature and film

A rich body of literature has developed in Jamaican Patois. Notable among early authors and works are Thomas MacDermot's *All Jamaica Library* and Claude McKay's *Songs of Jamaica* (1909), and, more recently, dub poets Linton Kwesi Johnson and Mikey Smith. Subsequently, the life-work of Louise Bennett or Miss Lou (1919–2006) is particularly notable for her use of the rich colorful patois, despite being shunned by traditional literary groups. "The Jamaican Poetry League excluded her from its meetings, and editors failed to include her in anthologies."^[53] Nonetheless, she argued forcefully for the recognition of Jamaican as a full language, with the same pedigree as the dialect from which Standard English had sprung:

Dah language weh yuh proud a,

Weh yuh honour an respec –

Po Mas Charlie, yuh no know se

Dat it spring from dialec!

— *Bans a Killin*

After the 1960s, the status of Jamaican Patois rose as a number of respected linguistic studies were published, by Frederic Cassidy (1961, 1967), Bailey (1966) and others.^[54] Subsequently, it has gradually become mainstream to codemix or write complete pieces in Jamaican Patois; proponents include Kamau Brathwaite, who also analyses the position of Creole poetry in his *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (1984). However, Standard English remains the more prestigious literary medium in Jamaican literature. Canadian-Caribbean science-fiction novelist Nalo Hopkinson often writes in Trinidadian and sometimes Jamaican Patois. Jean D'Costa penned a series of popular children's novels, including *Sprat Morrison* (1972; 1990), *Escape to Last Man Peak* (1976), and *Voice in the Wind* (1978), which draw liberally from Jamaican Patois for dialogue, while presenting narrative prose in Standard English.^[55] Marlon James employs Patois in his novels including *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (2014). In his science fiction novel *Kaya Abaniah and the Father of the Forest* (2015), British-Trinidadian author Wayne Gerard Trotman presents dialogue in Trinidadian Creole, Jamaican Patois, and French while employing Standard English for narrative prose.

Jamaican Patois is also presented in some films and other media, for example, the character Tia Dalma's speech from *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*, and a few scenes in *Meet Joe Black* in which Brad Pitt's character converses with a Jamaican woman. In addition, early Jamaican films like *The Harder They Come* (1972), *Rockers* (1978), and many of the films produced by Palm Pictures in the mid-1990s (e.g. *Dancehall Queen* and *Third World Cop*) have most of their dialogue in Jamaican Patois; some of these films have even been subtitled in English. It was also used in the second season of Luke Cage but the accents were described as "awful" by Jamaican Americans.^[56]

Bible

In December 2011, it was reported that the Bible was being translated into Jamaican Patois. The Gospel of St Luke has already appeared as: *Jiizas: di Buk We Luuk Rait bout Im*. While the Rev. Courtney Stewart, managing the translation as General Secretary of the West Indies Bible Society, believes this will help elevate the status of Jamaican Patois, others think that such a move would undermine efforts at promoting the use of English. The Patois New Testament was launched in Britain (where the Jamaican diaspora is significant) in October 2012 as "Di Jamiekan Nyuu Testament", and with print and audio versions in Jamaica in December 2012.^{[57][58][59]}

A comparison of the Lord's Prayer

...as it occurs in *Di Jamiekan Nyuu Testament*.^[60]

Wi Faada we iina evn,
mek piipl av nof rispek fi yu an yu niem.
Mek di taim kom wen yu ruul iina evri wie.
Mek we yu waahn apm pan ort apm,
jos laik ou a wa yu waahn fi apm iina evn
apm
Tide gi wi di fuud we wi niid.

...as it occurs in English Standard Version:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Paadn wi fi aal a di rang we wi du,
 siem laik ou wi paadn dem we du wi rang.
 An no mek wi fies notn we wi kaaz wi fi sin,
 bot protek wi fram di wikid wan.

And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.^{[[Matthew 6:9–13](#)]}

See also

- [English-based creole languages](#)
- [Jamaican English](#)
- [Nation language](#)
- [Rastafarian vocabulary](#)

Notes

1. Also transcribed as [kɨ] and [gɨ].

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- Chang, Larry (2014). *Biesik Jumiekan: Introduction to Jamaican Language*. Washington, DC: Chuu Wod. ISBN 978-0-9773391-8-1.

External links

- The Jamaican Language Unit (<http://www.mona.uwi.edu/dllp/jlu/index.htm>)
- Jamaican Patois Dictionary (<http://jamaicanpatwah.com>)
- Jamaican Creole Language Course for Peace Corps Volunteers (<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED130535.pdf>)
- Jammin Reggae Archives Patois Dictionary (<http://niceup.com/patois.html>)
- Sample Jamaican Patois Translations (<http://growingupjamaican.com/jamaican-patois-mini-dictionary/>)
- Jumieka Langwij (<http://www.jumieka.com>)

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