

## “Di game show bout spellin’ and ting”

### Performance, production, and parody of stereotypes in *Jamaican Countdown*

In 2020, the BBC released their new sketch series *Famalam* starring Black British actors. The clip *Jamaican Countdown* openly displays stereotypes about Jamaicans and has sparked a heated public debate.

Previous research on the appropriation and performance of Jamaican Creole (JC), e.g., in reggae and dancehall music (Gerfer 2018; Westphal 2018), showed that non-Jamaican singers only use a limited range of some stereotypical phonetic and morphosyntactic features of JC as well as lexical items of the creole register Dread Talk (Pollard 2000). Lopez and Hinrichs (2017) analyzed the appropriation of JC by a European American character in a VW Super Bowl commercial. They found that the linguistic representation is restricted to stereotypical features which would be identified by an American viewership. Additionally, the actor’s language use and his non-verbal performance index images of “the dreadlock-wearing Jamaican Rastaman” (Lopez & Hinrichs 2017: 140) as well as associated social practices such as smoking marijuana.

Our study addresses the following research questions: 1. How do the actors perform JC in *Jamaican Countdown*?, and 2. Which cultural stereotypes are portrayed and how? To answer these research questions, we conducted a qualitative linguistic analysis focusing on the actors’ use of JC phonetic, morphosyntactic, and lexical features, and a multimodal analysis of the content, the actors’ outward appearance, their gestures and facial expressions, as well as background music. The results show that the use of JC in *Jamaican Countdown* is remarkably accurate and not only based on a few stereotypical features. This ‘authentic’ use of JC may only be intelligible to audience members who are familiar with the language. However, viewers do not necessarily need to understand JC to understand the sketch but be able to recognize the displayed cultural stereotypes, which are highly exaggerated: Jamaicans are portrayed as being musical, highly sexualized, well-endowed, undisciplined, uneducated, and drug users.

#### References

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