

**SHORTWOOD TEACHERS' COLLEGE
LANGAUGE ARTS DEPARTMENT**

CHARACTERISTICS OF JAMAICAN CREOLE

Grammar (Key: SJE – Standard Jamaican English; JC – Jamaican Creole)

1. Plurals: In English, a noun is made plural by simply adding 's' to the end of the word in many instances. JC makes a noun plural by adding the particle 'dem' to the singular of the noun. For example in SJE, the speaker would refer to one dog or several dogs. In JC, the speaker would say a dawg or dawg dem.

2. Subject & Verb: In SJE, the verb changes as the subject changes to third person. In JC, the verb does not change whatever the subject is. For example:

SJE: He/she/ It plays

JC: Me walk/you walk/we walk

3. Tense: In JC, there are few changes of tense. The verbs do not change form to express the tense. It is the context that is used to show time. In SJE, the verbs are always enough to show the tense (e.g. adding 'ed' for past tense, 'ing' for continuous etc.)

Simple present tense:

SJE: Look at how Alan **walks**

JC: Watch how Alan **walk**

Simple past tense:

SJE: He **walked** quickly that time

JC: Im **walk** faas da time deh

Present continuous:

SJE: He is **walking** too fast

JC: Im a **walk** too faas

Past continuous:

SJE: He was walking when he fell

JC: Im did a **walk** wen im drap

JC: Every day, Jane **walk** go a Kay yard an den di two a dem **walk** go a town.

SJE: Every day, Jane **walks** to Kay's yard and then they **walk** together into town.

4. Personal pronouns: There are six personal pronouns in JC. The JC makes no distinction between male and female so 'im' can mean either 'he' or 'she'. In JC, there is also no distinction between subject and object. In the SJE, there are eleven personal pronouns. SJE has pronouns whose job it is to show possession.

5. Inversion: One sentence type which is basic to JC but which is not common in SJE is the inverted sentence type. In JC, it is usually used for emphasis

JC:	We a talk bout Mary	A Mary we a talk bout
	Me a go deh now	A deh me a go now
	Dat a dawg	A dawg dat

6. Passive form: There is no distinct passive form in the JC – it is the context that tells active or passive form.

7. Auxiliary verbs: Verbs which accompany and assist main verbs are called auxiliary verbs. For example, "I am going" or "She was sleeping". The 'auxiliary' verb in the JC is the word 'deh' which is of African origin.

JC: Dem deh bout de place

The above are only rough sketches or outlines of JC grammar. However, the main features of the language particularly those which differ from SJE, have been described. For more details, read F. G. Cassidy, Jamaica Talk, especially Chapter 4.

References:

Maxwell, P. L. (1996). English and Jamaican Speech. A1 Printers Limited, Jamaica

Pollard, V. (2003). From Jamaican Creole to Standard English: A Handbook for Teachers. University of the West Indies Press, Jamaica