



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
INST FÖR SPRÅK OCH LITTERATURER

ENGELSKA

Non-standard Language Use in Performing Poetry

A Linguistic Study of Benjamin Zephaniah's
Propa Propaganda

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Bachelor's Degree
August 2012

Abstract

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to examine the extent and type of non-standard language use in Benjamin Zephaniah's poetry collection *Propa Propaganda*. It also investigates variables such as identity, situation and style by comparing the poet's artistic language use with his speech in other contexts such as a debate and a speech.

The method was a quantitative as well as qualitative analysis of the non-standard language use comparing spelling (reflecting pronunciation), grammar and words in the different situations.

This study shows that Benjamin Zephaniah's artistic language use contained a higher degree of non-standard forms than could be found in other speech contexts such as a debate and a speech. The influence of the non-standard forms was also different in these contexts. The artistic language use was more influenced by his Jamaican background than his speech in which more of a regional British accent could be detected.

Keywords: Non-standard language use, Benjamin Zephaniah, Jamaican influence, language and identity, artistic language use

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1 Introduction

It is not an uncommon phenomenon that artists adopt a certain style and language when performing. This style might be quite different from their ordinary speech. Certain genres are connected with a particular language and to be convincing and successful in this genre the artist has to adopt it. However, unless the artist is an actor, people generally prefer the artist to be authentic in his or her expression. Rap artists are more convincing if they come from the streets and reggae musicians if they are from Jamaica. In this paper a British poet of Jamaican origin, Benjamin Zephaniah, will be studied from this perspective. His non-standard language use in the poetry collection *Propa Propaganda* (1996) will be investigated and compared to his speech in different contexts.

1.1 Background: Benjamin Zephaniah

Benjamin Zephaniah is a poet who was born and raised in Britain and mainly grew up in Handsworth, an inner city urban area in Birmingham, which became the centre for the Afro-Caribbean community in Britain. His parents were from Jamaica and Barbados and immigrated to Britain in the 1950s like many other West Indians in that era. His family was poor during his younger years but so were most people in the area where he grew up. His parents separated when he was in secondary school which led to him and his mother constantly moving.

He knew from an early age that he wanted to become a poet but this was not encouraged by the people around him. The priority was to get an apprenticeship and bring in money to the household (Spencer 2009). However, being black and a second generation immigrant in Britain his situation was different from that of his parents. They were West Indians and could return there one day but he was British and knew very little of his parents' home country. However, being British at that time did not include being black. Many British born black young people in Handsworth instead turned to Rastafarianism with its positive attitude towards blackness and its view of Africa as Utopia. Their West Indian parents were disturbed since the Rastas in Jamaica were the outcasts, now their own British born children embraced this movement (Dennis 2000:188-192).

In contrast to the USA, the American Black Power movement was very short-lived in Britain and instead taken over by Rastafarianism in the 1970s. The reasons were many but the Afro

Americans were an ethnic group among others in the US and had their right to the American dream just like any other group. Britain's history was different with its legacy of slavery and empire that decided how it regarded all non-whites.

Zephaniah was expelled from a reform school when he was 13 years old and this meant that he left full time education. Being dyslectic, he was hardly able to read and write at this age. He was involved in petty criminality and was sent to a borstal and it was during his time there he decided to find a new direction of his life.

Early on he had performed his poetry in the Afro Caribbean community in which the oral tradition was strong and there were idols like the dub poet Miss Lou who Zephaniah could listen to on the radio as well. Zephaniah was influenced by reggae music and dub due to his West Indian background. Most of us are familiar with reggae music but dub and dub poetry are probably not so well known among the general public. Dub music is a remix of reggae where the vocals have been omitted and instead you hear heavy bass and echoes. The origins of dub poetry can be traced to 1970s Jamaica and England when "toastmasters" (Jamaican disc-jockeys) sang or recited their own words over the dub versions of reggae records (African Echo 2012 [online]). The language used was often Patois, a Jamaican and black British vernacular. The subject was often protest against racism and police brutality, celebration of sex, music and ganja (marijuana) and Rastafarian religious themes (*Dub Poetry* 2012, Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms [online]). Dub poetry is an art form where the performance is the most important part but today a lot of the poetry has been written down and published, which is the case with Zephaniah's poetry.

Benjamin Zephaniah's production so far is extensive and diverse, ranging from poetry for children via teenage novels to introductions and reviews of work by other authors. His particular interest in societies where oral tradition forms a strong part of the literary tradition has led him to travel over the world today and participate in various projects with this focus.

1.2 Aim

The aim of this study is to examine the extent and type of non-standard language use in Benjamin Zephaniah's poetry collection *Propa Propaganda*. This study also investigates variables such as identity, situation and style by comparing the poet's artistic language use

with his speech in other contexts such as a debate and a public speech. The influence of Jamaican English and the Birmingham dialect (also called Brummie) will also be investigated when identifying the type of non-standard language use.

1.3 Previous research

Coulmas (2005) mentions that in early sociolinguistics, categories such as social class, sex, age and ethnicity - to which linguistic variation was tied, were regarded as being stable. It was first in the 1990s that a more constructivist approach to identity inspired sociolinguistic research. Depending on whom we are talking to, in what situation and what our aims are we can vary our way of expressing ourselves. With this more dynamic view of identity every speech act becomes important. "Each individual's memberships and identities are variable, changing in intensity by context and over time." (2005:179) . This view, however, that style did not matter much to linguistic variation before the 1990s is contradicted by Chambers (2009:5) who points out that style, as many other factors, was firmly established as an independent variable in sociolinguistics by Labov in his survey of New York City in 1966.

Another aspect of language and identity is also discussed by Coulmas (2005) and is that low-prestige varieties such as African-American Vernacular English are not discarded by its speakers and replaced by more highly regarded varieties. Coulmas points out that the most persuasive answer is that they serve as symbols of identity on various levels such as local, social, ethnic and national. To assert one's identity by especially choosing the variety of a disadvantaged group is an act of defiance and only understood from its sociohistorical context. These preferred non-standard variants have also been named covert prestige forms by Trudgill (1972).

Bell's work on audience design is also important to take into account when studying linguistic variation in different situations. When Bell (2010) twenty years after he first introduced his approach looked at the gist of audience design framework he mentioned ten statements out of which I have selected the ones most relevant to my study namely: "Style is what an individual speaker does with a language in relation to other people. So style really focuses on the person." Furthermore, Bell explains that "Speakers design their style primarily for and in response to their audience." Schilling-Estes (2002) gives a similar definition when stating that stylistic variation encompasses a number of different types of variation in the speech of

an individual speaker including shifts in dialects and registers. Another feature that Bell takes up and modifies somewhat after twenty years is the statement about initiative style-shift. He states:

“Initiative style-shifts derive their force and their direction of shift from their underlying association with classes of persons or groups. They often focus on an often-absent reference group- for example by adopting a non-native accent-rather than the present addressee. Referees are third persons not usually present at an interaction but possessing such salience for a speaker that they influence style even in their absence.” (2010:37)

Furthermore, the descriptions of Jamaican Creole (sometimes called Patois and West Indian Standard English) by Hannah and Trudgill (2008) proved useful when trying to identify the possible Jamaican influence on Benjamin Zephaniah’s poetry. The authors also point out that in Jamaica there is no sharp linguistic division between Creole and English but a social continuum of language varieties with Standard English at the top and an English-based Creole at the bottom. The ‘top’ varieties are referred to as acrolects, the intermediate varieties as mesolects and the most creole-type varieties as basilects.

Another study on London Jamaican was made by Sebba (1993) who in his study relates that the increased use of Jamaican Creole by London youths in the 1980s was a matter of concern for teachers at that time. Sebba’s study set out to see if a London Jamaican really existed by interviewing young people and then comparing the results to Jamaican Creole, Jamaican English, London English and Standard English. The study showed that there was a new London English variety with elements of Jamaican Creole in it. The variety was spoken by both black and white young Londoners in varying degrees (1993:72).

1.4 Definitions and terms

1.4.1 Non-standard language

The term non-standard language use is not unambiguous. Does it only refer to slang or are regional dialects also classified as non-standard? It depends on whether we choose to define non-standard language use as “associated with a language variety used by uneducated speakers or socially disfavored groups” (Nonstandard 2009, The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language,[online]) or “that is not regarded as correct and acceptable by educated native speakers of a language” (Nonstandard 2003, Collins English

Dictionary, [online]). These two different definitions can lead to different results. Therefore I have chosen to first decide on a definition of what standard language use is. In this study standard language use has been defined as Standard English which is the dialect normally used in printed books and newspapers and in the education system. It is also the dialect you find in dictionaries and grammar books (Trudgill 1994). Standard English is of course somewhat different depending on what part of the English speaking world we are referring to. The most appropriate choice in this study, however, is the Standard English of England since Zephaniah grew up in Birmingham and produced and performed his material during the first part of his career in England. Language variation is not only regional and social but also time bound. This fact becomes obvious when looking at examples of for instance Jamaican influenced words today used in Standard English (*Rastafarian*, see also section 3.1.3.3) Thus the definition of non-standard language in this study will be any spelling, grammar and words that deviate from standard English (henceforth also referred to as SE). This will include slang as well as regional dialects.

1.4.2 Jamaican English

As mentioned in section 1.3 Jamaican English is a linguistic variety that has no sharp linguistic division between Creole and English but a social continuum of language varieties with Standard English at the top and an English-based Creole at the bottom. Certain forms that are found in Jamaican Creole (henceforth also referred to as JC) or the so called basilects cannot be found in the mesolects (i.e. the mid varieties) or the acrolects (i.e. the top varieties). In this study the term Jamaican English (henceforth also referred to as JE) that is used in the tables in section 3 will include all these varieties.

The following description of JE only deals with some major differences to standard English and the selection of linguistic features is also limited to what has been relevant for this study, namely certain aspects of phonology and grammar. When comparing vowels and diphthongs the following differences between JC and Received Pronunciation (RP) can be found (Sebba 1993:154):

Table 1.4 Examples of differences in vowels and diphthongs between JC and RP

word	JC	RP
hot	ʌ	ɒ
north	a: (r)	ɔ:

letter	ɐ	ə
make	e:	eɪ
letter	ɐ	ə
boy	aɪ	ɔɪ

When it concerns consonants the most salient differences in pronunciation are that JC does not distinguish between [ð] and [d] so *that* is pronounced as *dat*, furthermore the voiceless [θ] is pronounced as [t] so *think* becomes *tink*. Another feature is that final consonant clusters may be reduced so that *just* is realised as *juss*.

Grammatical features that distinguish JC from SE are for example the use of personal pronouns instead of possessive pronouns. There is no distinction between case, so the first person singular pronoun is *mi* in all three forms where SE has *I, me and my*. The other personal pronouns are *yu* (you), *im,i* (s/he, it) and in the plural *wi* (we), *unu* (you), *dem* (they). The tense and aspect system of JC is also different, the most salient features are the use of the two preverbal markers such as *en* and *a*. For example *Mi en ron* means *I have run* and *Mi a ron* means *I am running*. Furthermore, past tense is not marked morphologically. The same verb form is used in JC for both present and past such as *brok* (*break/broke*). Another feature is that the use of the copula is not required with adjectives, for example *Disya buk ould* (*This book is old*). Multiple negation is also a regular feature as in *Im neva du notin* (*He never did nothing*). The preposition *a* replaces SE words such as *at, to and in*. (Sebba 1993)

1.4.3 Brummie

The dialect and accent of Birmingham is often referred to as Brummie. While middle-class speech in the city is RP or near RP the features listed in the table apply mainly to working-class speech.

Table 1.4.3. Examples of differences in vowels between Brummie and RP

word	Brummie	RP
bath	a	ɑ:
but	ʊ	ʌ
boot	ʊ	u:
happy	əɪ	ɪ

Another feature of the Brummie accent is that words ending in –ng tend to close with a voiced velar plosive, for example *singing* is pronounced as [sɪŋgɪŋg]. Grammatical features that occur can be the use of *her* instead of *she* as in *What's 'er doing then?* However, this is more common among older speakers. (*Birmingham* 1998, *Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language* [online]).

2 Material and Method

2.1 Material

The material for this study was Benjamin Zephaniah's (henceforth also referred to as BZ) poetry collection *Propa Propaganda* (1996) and one speech and one debate he appeared in on television.

In total there are 51 poems in *Propa Propaganda*. They vary in length from 5 lines to 60. The total number of words were 8189. Many of the poems in this collection have been published or performed in other contexts as Zephaniah points out in the preface. That is probably the reason why there is no logical connection in his collection but rather many different themes. *Propa Propaganda* is therefore different compared to his two other poetry collections for grown-ups (as they are categorised by Zephaniah himself) *City Psalms* and *Too Black, Too Strong* which are more thematic in their approach. This was also one reason for choosing this collection since it displayed a wide spectrum of Zephaniah's work. In this volume there were influences from Jamaican dub poetry on themes dealing with subjects from music traditions, street politics and discrimination to poems about animal rights' defenders written in standard English.

The second item for my investigation was a clip of 2 minutes from a TV-debate in which BZ had been invited to discuss Mother Teresa (youtube (2009) [online]). He was one of the critics and was probably on the panel as his poetry and songs often dealt with social injustice in Britain and in the world. The reason for choosing this clip was that I found the situation of interest from a linguistic point of view. It was a debate, he put forward his views but it was not a performance. It was a different context from his poetry collection and therefore it could shed some light on his language use in another situation.

The third part of the investigation was a speech he held at Leicester University when he received his Honorary Doctorate title. The speech was of interest since BZ described his background in it, the choices he made in his life and how this affected him and to some extent his family. He was serious, joking, ironic, etc, in this speech which made it interesting to study from a linguistic point of view since the context was different from the debate as well as the style required in this situation.

2.2 Method

When investigating the non-standard language use in the poetry collection, the non-standard forms of spelling (reflecting pronunciation), grammar and words or expressions were identified. All the words in each poem were counted, the number of examples of the different categories were noted for each poem as well. This was made in order to see the extent of the non-standard language use and to be able to compare it with the other contexts, i.e. the debate and the speech.

A division into recognisable themes was made based on the contents of the poems in order to examine a possible connection between contents and the use of non-standard language. Each poem in the collection was also put into a group depending on whether it contained one category, two categories or three categories of non-standard language or none at all.

A closer study of the non-standard language use in six poems was also carried out to see what Jamaican linguistic influences could be identified.

When investigating the occurrence of non-standard language on different levels (pronunciation, grammar and words or expressions) the decision was made that each word which was spelled differently was counted as an example of non-standard pronunciation. In non-standard grammar examples such as subject-verb agreement only one word was counted as non-standard, for example *he don't like* unless it was an expression consisting of two different examples of non-standard grammar such as *me thinks (me instead of I)*. When counting non-standard words or expressions, the choice was made to count them as words. For example the expression: *So rewind and cum again* was counted as five words. The reason for making this choice was that using the unit "word" throughout the investigation made comparisons easier when looking at the occurrence in different themes and contexts.

Another question of definition that appeared in this investigation was when a word should be regarded as non-standard or not. In the poems there are examples of Jamaican influenced words that today are used in Standard English as for instance *Rastafarian*. This will be further discussed in section 3.1.3.3.

When dealing with the clips of Zephaniah's speech, the two different sequences were transcribed. With the help of the transcript, non-standard forms regarding pronunciation, grammar and word or expressions were identified and marked. To investigate the extent of the non-standard language use, the percentage of non-standard forms in the debate and the speech were calculated and these figures were then compared with those of the poetry collection. After this, the non-standard forms found were compared to Jamaican influenced speech and regional accents of the Birmingham area in order to identify possible influences. This was then compared to the influences found in the poetry collection. When trying to identify different regional influences, intonation is an important factor. However, this investigation has not dealt with this aspect.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Non-standard Language Use in *Propa Propaganda*

The results of the investigation of non-standard language use in *Propa Propaganda* will be presented in the following section. Section 3.1.1 shows the general occurrence of non-standard language use in the poetry collection. In section 3.1.2 the non-standard language use is put in relation to different themes. A closer look at some examples is then presented in section 3.1.3. together with an analysis of possible influences.

3.1.1 Occurrence of non-standard forms in *Propa Propaganda*.

The non- standard forms including spelling, grammar and words make up 9.4 % of all the words in this poetry collection. If we look at how these forms are distributed in the collection we find that 36 of the 51 poems (70.6%) contain at least one form of non-standard language use. This might explain the impression you receive, namely that the non-standard use is not a feature restricted to just a few poems but more probably a part of the poet's style. However, whether this impression is correct or not will be investigated in the next section.

Table 3.1.1 Non-standard language use in *Propa Propaganda*

	Non-standard language use	Total	Percentage of non-standard language use (%)
Number of words	768	8189	9.4
Number of poems	36	51	70.6

3.1.2 The non-standard language use in relation to particular themes in *Propa Propaganda*

Since *Propa Propaganda* is a collection of many different poems written on different occasions there are many subjects treated in them. To categorise them into a few categories that cover the whole collection is therefore not easily done. However, to avoid too many themes, I have broadened the scope when naming them.

Table 3.1.2.a The division into themes.

Theme	Number of poems	Total (words)
1. Politics and Discrimination in Britain (including Being Black in Britain / Discrimination, Language and discrimination, Social injustice, Politics in Britain)	21	3143
2. The Situation in the World (including colonialism)	9 +2 ¹	2412
3. The Course of Life (including personal issues, animal rights)	9+ 1	1544
4. Being a Poet	6+1	1111
5. Musical Traditions	4	472

¹ The second digit refers to the number of poems partly dealing with the theme

Table 3. 1.2. b Non-standard language use related to theme.

Theme	Non-standard language use (words)	Total (words)	Percentage of non- standard language use (%)
1	316	3143	10.1
2	250	2412	10.4
3	8	1544	0.5
4	171	1111	15.4
5	122	472	25.8

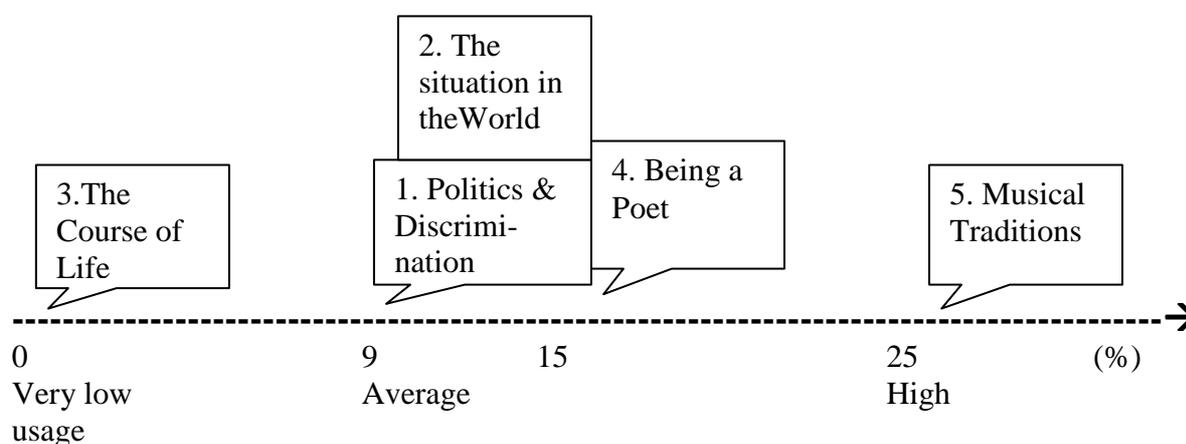
Table 3.1.2 b. shows that there are mainly two themes that deviate from the general usage of 9.4 % for the whole collection. These are no 3 and 5. Theme 3 called *The Course of Life* with a very low occurrence of non-standard language and theme 5 called *Musical Traditions* stands out due to its much higher usage of non-standard language. Theme 5 is by far the smallest category and therefore just one poem written in non-standard language can affect the total result of this theme in a disproportionate way. However, the subject of at least two of them concerns Jamaican artists and music. To use Jamaican English spelling, grammar and words then comes naturally in this context. As a contrast to theme 5, there is theme 3 treating more general issues that every human comes across during his or her life as well as some more personal issues for the poet (e.g. *Childless*). This theme is private as well as general as all good poetry is said to be. It is interesting that BZ here uses fewer non-standard forms. It might be a very conscious choice as he wishes to address a broader audience. Less non-standard forms might appeal to a larger audience or at least another audience than he is aiming at in theme 5.

I previously stated that the overall usage of 9.4 % non-standard forms showed that it was probably a more or less natural part of the poet's language. However, when looking at different themes and his non-standard language use there seems to be a connection. Subjects related to Jamaican music increases the use of Jamaican English spelling (pronunciation), grammar and words. Theme no 4 treating what it is like being a poet or writing poetry also has a somewhat higher percentage of non-standard language. The reason for this is harder to explain and to find an answer you need to analyse the language use in the different poems belonging to this category.² Furthermore non-standard language use is not necessarily related

² Due to the limited amount of time this investigation could not be made here.

to Jamaican influence. BZ is also from Birmingham and dyslectic as well. In section 3.1.3. the Birmingham influence will be investigated.

Figure 3.1.2 The use of non-standard language connected to themes



3.1.3 Non-standard language examples used in *Propa Propaganda*

3.1.3.1 Spelling/pronunciation

Three poems have been selected when investigating BZ's non-standard language use. The criteria have been that they all present examples from all three categories; spelling/pronunciation; grammar; words. The poems are called *Self Defence* (henceforth SD) from theme 1, *De Queen and I* (henceforth DQ) from theme 4 and *Heckling Miss Lou* (henceforth HML) from theme 5. Table 3.1.3.1.a shows the examples together with the standard English version. The last column of the table states whether the examples are typically Jamaican English (JE) or not specifically JE. Jamaican English (JE) includes creole varieties as well as standard Jamaican English. The reason for this is that the varieties appear on a continuum and sharp distinctions are therefore difficult to make (Hannah and Trudgill 2008).

Table 3.1.3.1 a Non standard spelling indicating pronunciation

no	Non standard example	Standard English	Type of influence
1	<i>de; wid; dem; dat (SD)</i> <i>de;dat; dis (DQ)</i> <i>dat ;deh ;wid; den; de ;a nodder (HML)</i>	the; with; them; that the; that; this that; there; with; then; the; another	Jamaican English (JE) ³
2	<i>frens (DQ) juss; ress (HML))</i>	friends; just; rest	JE
3	<i>Lard (HML)</i>	Lord	JE
4	<i>fe (SD) wan (HML)) cum (HML) an (SD)</i> <i>(HML) (DQ) wea(DQ) messin; guessin</i> <i>(DQ)</i>	for; one; come; and; where; messing; guessing	Not specifically JE
5	<i>bowy (HML); me (DQ)</i>	boy; my	JE
6	<i>yu (HML)</i>	your	JE
7	<i>mek (DQ)</i>	make	JE
8	<i>sey (SD)</i>	say, said	Most likely JE
9	<i>yu (DQ)</i>	you	JE
10	<i>a (DQ)</i>	at	JE

The Jamaican influence on the pronunciation/spelling is dominant. For example the pronunciation of [ð] as [d] is frequent in BZ's poems. This is a typical feature of Jamaican Creole but not of Jamaican Standard English (Sebba 1993). An interesting difference, though, is that another regular feature of Jamaican Creole, namely the pronunciation of [θ] as [t] never occurs in BZ's poems. In Jamaican Standard English we find this distinction, however. Then why is BZ's language not influenced by JC regarding [θ]? Are there other influences? Sebba (1993:157) discusses the fact that both London English and Jamaican Creole in initial *th* [ð] might pronounce it as [d]. So BZ's difference in pronunciation could be an influence from a London accent as well as a Jamaican accent. Is there an influence of a Birmingham accent, too, since BZ grew up in Handsworth, Birmingham? Looking at the spelling in these poems there is nothing that can be detected as being particular for a Birmingham accent (often called Brummie see section 1.4.3). Reducing the *g* in examples such as *messin* is common for spoken language. The same for the dropped *d* in *an*. *Fe* is a word noted in the online dictionary of Rasta/Patois but not meaning *for* as it does here. So *fe*, *wan*, *wea* might just be phonetic spelling by BZ.

³ These features are typical of Jamaican English but occur in other accents, too.

However, is the dominating Jamaican influence due to the selection of poems i.e. all having examples in all categories? To investigate this further a comparison was made with three other poems from the themes with very low or average usage of non-standard forms. The poems selected were *Cybersex* (henceforth CS) and *Childless* (henceforth CL) from theme 3 which had a very low usage and *Terrible World* (henceforth TW) from theme 2 which had an average usage.

Table 3. 1.3.1.b. Non standard spelling indicating pronunciation in poems with low non-standard usage

Non standard example	Standard English	Type of influence
<i>dat; dis (CS); dan (TW)</i>	that; this; than	JE
<i>waz (2t) (CS) (1t) (TW)</i>	was	Other, possibly Brummie
<i>rhymster (CL)</i>	Rhymester	Other
<i>luv (TW)</i>	love	Other
<i>redda (TW)</i>	redder	JE or Brummie ⁴

In this category with low or average usage, the Jamaican influence is not so extensive as in the poems earlier investigated. The other influences might be Northern / Birmingham English (Brummie) as in (*luv*). The spelling of *waz* and *rhymster* might just be phonetic. However, final *s* as in *was* is sometimes voiced in the Brummie accent.⁵ In the poem *Cybersex* ‘was’ is spelled *waz*, 2 times out of 5. In *Terrible world* there is only one example and it is ‘waz’. So there might be another Brummie influence. Comparing with the first poems there is an indication that increased non-standard spelling is linked with Jamaican influence.

⁴ One feature of the Brummie accent is that final unstressed [ə] may be pronounced as [a]. (*Brummie* 2012, Wikipedia [online]). This could not however, be confirmed in by other dictionaries.

⁵ Only mentioned in (*Brummie* 2012, Wikipedia [online]).

3.1.3.2 Grammar

Table 3.1.3.2.a. shows the non-standard grammar examples from the three poems investigated in section 3.1.3.1.a.

Table 3.1.3.2 .a Non-standard grammar examples

No	Non standard example	Standard English	Type of influence
1	<i>Whip I wid dat wicked word style; Move I wid yu riddim (HML)</i>	Whip me with that wicked word style; Move me with your rhythm	Jamaican English (JE)
2	<i>Den study she (DQ)⁶</i>	Then study her	JE
3	<i>Wea me born; how me sexy (DQ)</i>	Where I was born; How sexy I am	JE
4	<i>An dem strategy is fe kill we. (SD)</i>	And their strategy is to kill us.	JE
5	<i>How me sexy (DQ)⁷</i>	How sexy I am	JE/ JE?
6	<i>But me check her out already (DQ)</i>	But I /have/checked her out already	JE
7	<i>When yu done (2t) (HML)</i>	When you are done	JE as well as other non-standard varieties
8	<i>Now she studying Reggae (DQ)</i>	Now she is studying Reggae	JE as well as other non-standard varieties
9	<i>Ain't no Black in de Union Jack (SD)</i>	There is no black in the Union Jack	JE as well as other non-standard varieties
10	<i>I nar tell no lie (DQ)</i>	I never tell a lie	JE as well as other non-standard varieties
11	<i>She study (me history) 6 t; She check out; She check(2t); When she get confuse; She treat; she want; she don't like (DQ)</i>	She studies etc	JE as well as other non-standard varieties
12	<i>But I done study she (DQ)</i>	But I have studied her	JE
13	<i>She a study Rastafari, guy.(DQ)</i>	She is studying Rastafari, guy.	JE
14	<i>Me is (de Queen's book a bedtime) (2t); I is (DQ)</i>		other non-standard varieties

6. .

⁶ If this had been a pure JC feature *she* would have been *im* which is the 3rd person singular pronoun

⁷ In wh-word questions, subject-verb inversion may occur in JC. This example is not from the same type of clause but shows similarities which could explain the feature. *How* is rather an adverb here and the clause could be compared to an indirect question.

The Jamaican influence is also dominant when it concerns non-standard grammar but not to the same extent as in the case with the spelling. The typical features of Jamaican English mentioned in section 1.4.2. can be seen in these poems, for example there is no distinction between case when it concerns personal pronouns (no 1 and 2), personal pronouns are used as possessive pronouns (no 4), absence of tense markers on verbs (no 6 and 12), the particle *a* is used in JC to form tenses or aspect instead of auxiliary verbs (no 13). Then there are non-standard features that can be found in JE as well as other non-standard varieties such as absence of the copula (no 7 and 8), double negation (no 9 and 10) and absence of 3rd person – s on verbs (no 11).

To see whether there is the same tendency in themes with low or average usage of non-standard forms, three poems of these categories were examined. These were *Homeward Bound* (henceforth HB) from theme 3 which had a very low usage, *De Rong Song* (henceforth DRS) from theme 1 and *The President is Dead Again* (henceforth PDA) from theme 2 which both had an average usage.

Table 3.1.3.2.b Non-standard grammar examples in poems with low non-standard language use

Non standard example	Standard English	Type of influence
<i>He don't understand (HB)</i>	He doesn't understand	JE as well as other non-standard varieties
<i>They be dead (PDA)</i>	They are dead	other non-standard varieties
<i>You ain't got nowhere to go (DRS)</i>	You have nowhere to go	JE as well as other non-standard varieties

Table 3.1.3.2.b shows that the influence of the non-standard grammar in this category is not specific to JE. It can be found in other non-standard varieties as well. So there seems to be the same tendency for grammar as for spelling. The higher the non-standard language use the higher the Jamaican influence.

3.1.3.3 Words

Table 3.1.3.3.a. shows the non-standard word examples from the three poems investigated in sections 3.1.3.1.a. and 3.1.3.2.a.

Table 3.1.3.3.a Non-standard words

Non standard example	Standard English/ Explanation	Type of influence
Riddim (DQ) (HML)	Rhythm	JE
Ago (SD)	are going to	JE
Beast (SD)	policeman	JE
nar (SD) (DQ)	never	Other?
Rastafari (DQ)	Rastafari religion	JE

The Jamaican influence dominates the non-standard words. Looking a bit closer at them they contain a mixture of typical JC words and slang. Apart from being the Patois pronunciation of rhythm, *riddim* also refers to the instrumental accompaniment to a song in reggae. (*Riddim 2012, Wikipedia* [online]). *Ago* was probably originally *a go* where the particle *a* was used to indicate the tense. The meaning of *beast* is probably a type of slang (Rasta/Patois Dictionary [online] Pawka 1992). *Nar* as a form of the word *never* cannot be found in any descriptions of JE or in Rasta/Patois Dictionary [online] (Pawka 1992). But it is clear that this is the meaning from the context. *Rastafari* is a Jamaican word formed from the pre-regnal name of Haile Selassie, Ras (Head) Tafari (his name). (*Rastafari movement 2012, Wikipedia* [online]).

Is then the Jamaican influence dominant in poems with low or average non-standard usage? In table 3.1.3.3.b. three poems from theme 3 with low non-standard language use are investigated: *One Day in Babylon* (henceforth ODB), *Homeward Bound* (HB) and *Childless* (CL).

Table 3. 1.3.3.b Non-standard words in poems with low non-standard language use

Non standard example	Explanation	Type of influence
Babylon(ODB); Rastafarians (HB)	The corrupt establishment / the western world ; A follower of Marcus Garvey who worships the Almighty in the person of Haile Selassie	JE
Rhymster (CL)	Rhymester- an inferior poet ⁸	Other

The non-standard word examples differ somewhat from the other categories since the poems with low non-standard usage show the same level of Jamaican influence as the poems with high usage. However, the number of examples is very limited in both groups and therefore it is difficult to draw any bearing conclusions from this material. It can be discussed whether it is appropriate to classify Rastafari / Rastafarian as non-standard. It is rather a Jamaican influenced word but belonging to Standard English today.

The example of *rhymester* can also be discussed whether it belongs to the category non-standard in its usual sense. It might be more correct to regard it as an unusual word belonging to a more literary style.

3.1.4 Summary of investigation of non-standard language use in *Propa Propaganda*

The extent of the non-standard language use in *Propa Propaganda* is about 9 %. This use displays a certain covariance with the theme treated in the poem. A higher usage when treating a theme such as *Musical traditions* and a very low usage in a more general theme such as *The Course of Life*.

The most frequent type of non-standard language is spelling which should reflect pronunciation followed by grammar and words. The last category is very small, however.

⁸ Assumed that it was a new coinage, but the origin of rhymester is Middle English from Old English *-estre*, originally a feminine agent suffix where the ending *-ester* (*Memidex 2012* [online]) <http://www.memidex.com/rhymester>

The Jamaican influence of the non-standard language is clearly dominant in poems with a high non-standard usage while in poems with low or average non-standard language use it is not. When referring to the Jamaican influence on the pronunciation, however, analysis showed that it might as well be an influence of London Jamaican since BZ's spelling displays certain features more in line with London Jamaican than Jamaican Creole (see section 1.3 and 3.1.3.1). In poems with a low usage of non-standard language, some influences of the Brummie accent could be detected for example final *-er* is pronounced as [a] instead of [ə].

3.2 Non-standard Language Use in Benjamin Zephaniah's talk in the debate

To find out whether Zephaniah's language use in his poetry collection, henceforth called artistic use, is different in other situations a comparison with his participation in a debate was made.

3.2.1 Non standard pronunciation in the debate

Table 3.2.1. shows the examples of non-standard pronunciation found in BZ's language in the debate and the explanation of the deviation from standard pronunciation.

Table 3.2.1. Non standard pronunciation

example	explanation
appalling wrong	both are pronounced with a k-like sound at the end.
Took (2 times) Money (2 t) young	all are pronounced with a [ʊ] (northern BrE pronunciation)
fend	BZ has probably a slight lisp as he says fend instead of sent

3.2.2 Non-standard grammar in the debate

In table 3.2.2. the examples of non-standard grammar found in BZ’s language in the debate are listed.

Table 3.2.2. Non standard grammar

Example	Explanation
<i>This great and wonderful</i>	Absence of copula (he is then relating what people are saying or would say in a particular situation)
<i>she could at least given them beds</i>	Absence of the auxiliary verb <i>have</i>
<i>we going back</i>	Absence of copula (might be slightly heard or swallowed.)

3.2.3 Analysis of Benjamin Zephaniah’s talk in the debate

The few examples of non-standard pronunciation are mostly influenced by a Birmingham or northern British English pronunciation, such as the [ʊ] in *money, but* and *young* instead of [ʌ]. (Trudgill 1994). The glottal quality of the ending *g* which almost sounds like a *k* is more likely to be a non-standard British accent rather than any Jamaican influenced one since glottalisation is not to be found in Jamaican English.

The non-standard grammar that appears in Zephaniah’s speech clearly displays the dropping of the copula “be“ and in one case the omission of the auxiliary “have”. These are typical features of Jamaican Creole but can also be found in other non-standard varieties such as the African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

There are not many examples in the debate, but it is interesting to note in what situations BZ uses them. The first example is when he is relating to what poor people are saying or rather would not say. This is a very clear example of Bell’s (2010) explanation about initiative style shift mentioned earlier namely that an absent reference group can be so important for the speaker that he adopts their style of speaking to the people present. The second example is said in a moment in the debate when different views clashed and feelings were upset. Since the speaker’s attention is then less on his speech and more on content, a style shift can be noted that displays the speaker’s first acquired language variety. As Labov’s result in his

interviews in New York City survey in 1966 showed (Schilling-Estes 2002:379), the more casual the situation was, the higher the use of the vernacular. The third example will not be discussed here since it is uncertain whether BZ said it or not.

There were no non-standard words or expressions in the debate that could be analysed.

3.3 Non-standard Language Use in Zephaniah's Honorary Speech

To investigate Zephaniah's style further, his language use in another more formal speech situation was examined. The tables 3.3.a and 3.3.b list the examples and explain the deviations from standard language use.

Table 3.3.a. Non-standard pronunciation in The Honorary speech

Example	Explanation
<i>Little</i>	pronounced with a glottal stop in the middle
<i>Interesting;</i> <i>Staying; wrong;</i> <i>Everything; ring</i>	all are pronounced with a [k]-like sound at the end.
<i>But</i> (2 t)	pronounced with [ʊ]
<i>Rut</i>	pronounced with a [ʊ] sound instead of [ʌ]
<i>Here</i>	pronounced as <i>her</i> which is probably in this context a mistake by BZ. Probably interference from the next phrase where he says <i>her</i> and means it.
<i>Important</i> (2 t); <i>Borstal;</i> <i>Story; Unfortunately</i>	All these words are pronounced with a somewhat longer and emphasized [ɔ:] than standard RP.
<i>Don'</i> ; <i>Wha'</i> ; <i>Tha'</i>	T-dropping at the end of these words

Table 3.3.b. Non-standard grammar in The Honorary speech

Example	Explanation
<i>Gonna</i>	Be going to
<i>Wanna'</i> (2t)	Want to
<i>You was</i>	You were

3.3.1 Analysis of non-standard language use in the Honorary speech

Looking at the pronunciation there is really no indication of any Jamaican influence. It is probably more likely that it comes from the Birmingham area. For example, the way

'but' is pronounced with [ʊ] compared to [ʌ].

Looking at the non-standard forms of grammar, we see the common forms in informal speech such as 'wanna' and gonna'. What sticks out a bit however, is the form, 'you was'. What is interesting in the context is that this stigmatized form appears when Zephaniah retells what he will say to his mother. If he is then actually retelling the exact way of phrasing it, he would then use a non-standard form which could be of Jamaican influence. Bell's explanation for initiative style shift can also be applied to this situation.

3.4 Comparison of Non-standard Language Use in Debate and Speech

Table 3.4 shows the occurrence of non-standard language use in Benjamin Zephaniah's talk in the two investigated contexts.

Table 3.4. The extent of non-standard language use in BZ's speech

Non-standard language use	Debate (%)	Speech (%)
Non standard pronunciation	3.6	1.9
Non standard grammar	1.4	0.4
Non standard words	0	0
Non standard language use	5	2.3

The occurrence of more non-standard forms in Zephaniah's language in the debate than in his speech is in line with previous research. In a more formal speech situation people tend to adapt to a higher degree to the standard variant of the language and therefore to a larger extent discard the non-standard forms. Pronunciation is the factor that is most difficult to manipulate for a speaker, especially if you are emotionally involved as Labov's New York survey in 1966 showed (Schilling-Estes 2002:379). The use of correct grammar is generally taught in school so there is a certain awareness among most people what form is the most appropriate to use and in what situation. However, as previously mentioned, the effect of being emotionally involved makes it more difficult to keep to an acquired form. The total absence of non-standard words is not so surprising either since this factor is the one that is easiest for the speaker to control. The speech is usually prepared and therefore the speaker has full control.

However, in a more formal debate on television, in which you meet participants of other backgrounds, there is no natural reason for using words particular for your own group.

3.5 Comparison of Non-standard Language Use in the Debate and Speech with the Artistic Use

As table 3.6. shows the artistic language non-standard language use is almost twice as high compared to BZ’s use in the debate. The use in the debate is then twice as high as the use in the speech. The largest difference is displayed in pronunciation. As regards grammar, there is no difference between the debate and artistic use.

Table 3.5. Comparison of non-standard language use in different contexts.

Non-standard language use	Debate (%)	Speech (%)	Artistic (%)
Non standard pronunciation	3.6	1.9	7.3
Non standard grammar	1.4	0.4	1.4
Non standard words	0	0	0.8
Non standard language use	5.0	2.3	9.4 ⁹

Looking at the influence of non-standard pronunciation, there is a clear difference between the debate and the artistic use. The former has more of a Birmingham/ Northern England accent while the latter is clearly influenced by Jamaican English. The difference between these two influences can of course be explained by the different situations. In the debate BZ might adapt to other persons in the panel on the debate and there is probably no one there with a Jamaican background. Bell’s theory on audience design could explain this linguistic behaviour. However, is BZ’s Jamaican English just a poetic device? Probably not, as we see some examples of style shifting both in the debate and in the speech when he is relating to poor people and to his mother. However, on these occasions it is mainly the grammar that is affected towards typical features of Jamaican Creole, not the pronunciation. This is somewhat surprising since the pronunciation is the hardest feature to manipulate rather than the grammar. One needs also to take into account that BZ is about 13 years older in the speech

⁹ The decimals for each category have been rounded up therefore the sum does not seem to be correct judging from this table.

situations. Today he lives in the countryside when not working abroad. Earlier he lived in Handsworth and London where the West Indian communities are much larger. During this time he has also become a recognised poet known nationwide and although his heart still seems to be with the less advantaged, he probably socializes with the elite of society as well. This might have affected his pronunciation to become less influenced by the Jamaican accent. In addition, we cannot say how close BZ's style in the debate is to his vernacular. The situation is not so casual that the speaker can relax entirely and pay no attention to his speech.

4 Conclusion

This study showed that Benjamin Zephaniah's artistic language use contained a higher degree of non-standard forms than could be found in other speech contexts such as a debate and a speech. The influence of the non-standard forms was also different in these contexts. The artistic language use was more influenced by his Jamaican background than his speech in which more of a regional British accent could be detected.

The influence of his Jamaican background varied in the poetry collection, too. In poems related to musical tradition the influence was highest while in poems more related to the course of life there were very few non-standard forms. There was hardly no Jamaican influence in these poems either. Since reggae and dub are Zephaniah's musical genres, both originally from Jamaica, the influence of Jamaican English in poems about music is rather natural. The low usage of non-standard forms in poems related to the course of life could be explained by Zephaniah wanting to address a broader audience.

The debate displayed a higher usage of non-standard forms than the speech. This result is in line with previous research since people in a more formal speech situation tend to adapt to a higher degree to the standard variant of the language. The few examples of non-standard pronunciation showed no influence by Jamaican English but more of a Birmingham accent. The examples of non-standard grammar in the debate such as dropping of the copula and omission of the auxiliary *have* are features of Jamaican Creole but appear in other non-standard varieties as well.

What was noticeable in the debate and the speech, were the situations in which the non-standard grammar was used by Zephaniah. Two out of three times the non-standard grammar

appeared when Zephaniah referred to a situation where people of his background played a part. Bell (2010) has explained this in his research about initiative style shift, namely that an absent reference group can be so important for the speaker that he adopts their style of speaking to the people present.

Although, Zephaniah's Jamaican English language use is more prevalent in his poetry than in his ordinary speech it cannot be said that it is only a poetic device. A more extensive study of Zephaniah's speech in other contexts would be needed in order to verify such a statement.

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6 Appendices

6.1 Appendix 1

Benjamin Zephaniah slams Mother Teresa (youtube clip from BBC)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrPjX5_gI1c

Transcript of the debate (blue colour= difference in pronunciation; yellow colour= difference in grammar)

Moderator:

- Benjamin, how do you feel about this elevation of suffering, the beauty of suffering because it takes you nearer to Jesus and of being **poor**.

Benjamin Zephaniah:

- I think this is a terrible thing you never hear people who're poor and suffering say **this great an' wonderful**. You never hear that. [Absolutely] [applause]I, I, I, I've been to the mission in Calcutta and I thought it was really appalling and I think the bottomline **is we going back** to expenses here ...millions of pounds have been givin' to that organization when you go to that place that should be a modern hospital ...with needles(applause) for everybody .(applause.) that should be a state of the art place (applause)but ,and you know, she took money from dictators who took money from some of the poorest people in the world in Haiti (applause) that was never **send** back to the people in Haiti it was all given to the Vatican an' I think that's wrong ,you know, she's a Catholic that's **true**, she's a Catholic but what

The female speaker comes in:

- I'd, I'd, I'd like to respond to that. Eh her mission was not to build hospitals and schools and have you know top notch modern technology.

The moderator comments:

- She had the money

The female speaker:

-She had the money.

BZ interjects:

- She could **at least given** them beds

The Female speaker:

- She had the money

The female speaker:

- That was not her mission. Her mission was first and foremost to work with the dying and to go out to people on the streets. Not for them to come [BZ interjects: Okay, okay] to her but for her to go out to them

Third male speaker comments:

- She never did though

Female speaker continues:

- And usually, can I just finish, usually they were minute hours sometimes minutes from dying. It was not about ..let's
[Many people in the audience shout]

BZ interjects:

- NoWhy

Female speaker continues:

- And she would work with them and move them to other homes she had

The moderator:

- Benjamin Zephaniah

BZ:

-I heard an example once of a young boy who could have been cured for a , a simple operation, [female speaker says: uhu] but Mother Teresa kept him in her place and wouldn't allow (h)im to go down the road and have a simple operation that would have saved his life that would have saved his life and he died there.

The female speaker interjects:

- Do you know the reason why? Why? Why?

BZ:

- Because...

(BZ is interrupted by a third male speaker)....

- I'm sorry , the reason why is that because the former editor of the Lancet Dr Robin Faults actually visited there and his actual word was haphazard that I agree entirely with Benjamin, if those people who she'd taken in had been given the chance they could have been saved rather than just eh

The moderator interrupts:

- Let me just say this it's very important to introduce this...Miracles

6.2 Appendix 2

Benjamin Zephaniah - Honorary - University of Leicester

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nj4Y-BsGZGU>

Transcript of the debate (blue colour= difference in pronunciation; yellow colour= difference in grammar)

Thank you very much. Um... I've been asked to say a few words and I'm gonna try and keep it as brief as possible I should start by saying that um it's kind of very difficult standing there listening to somebody eh talk about me like that I think it's nice and I wish my mother would introduce me to my friends like that. But eh it made me feel like a naughty schoolboy hu you know uhum it really is a pleasure to be here accepting this honor todayeh.. a part of life was a luxx tuxx [inaudible] which struck me last night was very important. A long time ago I lived in a li?le place near hear called Glen Parvor [audience laughs} Glen Parvor was then a borsal or a young boys' prison and uhm I got sentenced to 18 months in Glen Parvor and actually ehum I was told the other day I haven't read my entry in Who's who but I was told that uh it says there that eh educated in Glen Parvor Leicester [audience laughs } .graduated as well [..BZ laughs audience laughs] but it is very interesting because the hotel I was staying in was right next to Glen Parvor and last night I went there and drove around and had some sweet memories although I don't really remember what the outside looked like... [BZ laughs] hm but sitting here today and watching people come up I just thought that ,, we don't have the time but .. it would be really good to listen to everybody's story not just mine. Why do i have the privilege of talking for a few minutes because you've all taken different journeys of getting here... and you know, Mine started on the streets if you like and yes I was on the wrong side of the law but I've visited prisons lately and I've seen people who were just as as talented as me who were still in prison and they were involved in crime at the same time a, as me and they were just as talented as me but unfortunately for many varying reasons they are still in that route in that cycle and I managed to get out ...Ehm for personal reasons I believe because I, I was able to push myself but also because I took various opportunities that came up ..but I also noticed that a lot of you here for... sciences criminology and stuff like this and I wanna tell you that what ever you do, boys and girls , [audience Laughing] whatever you do , always have some poetry in your life, this is really really important It's always important to have somewhere else to go.

Poetry for me Is probably one of the most important things that I have I always spent my life fighting for the rights of men, women, animals and even plants sometimes ehm but you know poetry is probably the thing that keeps me going in times of war we still want poetry when you fall in love you want poetry and I had a very interesting experience once. I was eh in a place called Cambridge, some of you may have heard of Cambridge, it's a sort of a world but it's not far from here. I was rowing a boat down the river, slowly, with some friends ,hm we call it punting and eh this friend of mine who happens to be a professor because I hang out with professors and chancellors and people like that [audience laughing]...ehum He turned around to me and he said:

- Benjamin, you know I think we should make you in to a kind of professor of poetry.

And I said:

-Yeah you know that sounds good to me.

And he said:

- But there is a problem with your poetry, Benjamin.

And I said:

- Please help me out, what is the problem?

And he said :

-Benjamin, the problem with your poetry is that people **understand** it and that's not **good**, is it? [audience laughing]

So I said to him , I pleaded with him I said

-You know, I don' **wanna** be a poet that people understand I **wanna** be a real poet. So what do I do?

He said :

-Well, Benjamin, you go out to the real world and you observe things that are simple and you write about them and make them sound complicated.

And it was at this point I realized that the poet was different from normal people. Normal people look and see and watch but the poet **observes**.

And you know as you go for your journey whatever you are in life just keep observing, keep some poetry in your life and I really want to thank you for considering me for this honor. It's a ..It really means something to me because of this journey **tha'** I've taken and because of it is Leceister it has even more relevance to me. My mother has as mentioned earlier left Jamaica literally saw r a poster on the streets of Jamaica saying: Britain need you , come to the motherland, you'll be welcomed, you can work here, everything **g** will be wonderful and you'll get the same sunshine just like Jamaica [audience laughing] Ehum My mother came and she worked as a nurse she trained here as a nurse and eh she can't be with me today but I know she'll be really proud. As soon as I leave **her** I am going to ring **g** her and say:

-Mum you know what , Britain invited you and you came here and **you was** a nurse. But guess **wha'** mother, I'm a doctor. Thank you very much.