Language, Faith and Healing in Jamaican Folk Culture

Peter L. Patrick
University of Essex

The act of healing essentially includes a spiritual or religious component, and language is often a prime medium for enacting it. Personal narratives are sites for the negotiation and construction of cultural and linguistic norms; healing stories recontextualize bodily struggles as social and spiritual conflicts. This paper examines a personal narrative of spiritual healing told in the language of *Rastafari*[1], the Jamaican religious movement. A discourse analysis of the narrative focuses on elements of Rasta Talk in order to discover how Rastafarian beliefs underlie and shape the telling, which is itself an act of faith and a profession of commitment. The healing itself, however, draws primarily on a variety of non-Rasta spiritual and occult traditions of Jamaican folk culture; their relation to Rastafari, and the reasons for employing Rasta religious rhetoric in the narrative, are also explored.

Rasta Talk, a register of Jamaican Creole (JC) undergoing functional expansion, is characteristically (though by no means exclusively) used by Jamaicans who follow the Rastafari religion. Rastafari is a syncretic Afro-Christian faith which invokes and reinterprets Old Testament Biblical imagery in the service of particular religious, cultural and political themes. This narrative of supernatural illness and cure applies a historical critique of colonialism and racism to the healthcare system, allows the teller to reposition himself discursively to alleviate suffering and stigma, and claims the moral high ground for Afro-Jamaican ethnomedical practices and traditional values through the enactment of Rastafarian principles.

Rastafari is briefly introduced first in relation to other Jamaican faith traditions, and Rasta Talk is described. The narrative is outlined chronologically. Subsequent analysis links linguistic features to key elements of Rasta beliefs, which – together with elements of Jamaican folk medicine and culture – provide the necessary context to understand the healing narrative as an act of identity.

Rastafari in Jamaican folk religious and cultural tradition

Jamaica has a very rich and productive tradition of indigenous Afro-Christian religion, covering a wide spectrum, and also retains strong elements of pre-Christian belief systems. Rastafari is a relatively new member: a syncretic sect with strong Christian roots which claims Africa as its spiritual homeland, it emerged only in the 1930s and 1940s in an urban context (Smith, Augier & Nettleford 1960, Simpson 1978). It arises directly from Jamaican Revivalism (Chevannes 1995). *Myal*, a folk religion whose roots in central African traditions extend from the eighteenth century throughout and beyond the slavery era (Schuler 1979), was cross-fertilized with the Native Baptist strain of Christianity, introduced to Jamaica by former American slaves who were preachers and rapidly developed by their Jamaican converts, under the influence too of British missionaries. This led to the Great Revivals of 1861 and 1862 (Curtin 1955, Simpson 1970, 1978, Vest 1992, Bilby 1993). Hundreds of new churches were founded, with African influences and innovations freely incorporated alongside Christian materials, and a dynamic tradition flowing from Revivalism continues strongly up to the present.

On the one hand, then, Rastafari owes much of its substance to this input, and is also based squarely in other aspects of Jamaican folk culture (Chevannes 1995). Yet Rastafari vigorously opposes many aspects of Revival belief and ritual, and is clearly differentiated

from all other religions in Jamaica today, projecting a positive Afrocentric awareness. Rastas reject the colonial Christian God and revere Haile Selassie I, former emperor of Ethiopia, as the living incarnation of *Jah* (identified with Yahweh, the Old Testament god). The religion crystallized rapidly after Selassie, whose given name was Ras Tafari, ascended the throne in November 1930, and has continued unchecked since his death was (falsely, in their view) reported in 1975. As Selassie's rule is both divine and political, Rastas acknowledge no allegiance to the state of Jamaica and its instruments of authority, collectively labelled *Babylon*; their cultural, political and religious focus is Ethiopia, and thence Africa as a whole.

Rastas have a well-developed analysis of history, especially regarding European colonization and oppression of Africans and their descendants. (It will be convenient to speak of a single set of Rasta beliefs, practices or analyses; however, the reader should be aware that this often oversimplifies matters, as Rastafari is a relatively non-hierarchical and decentered religious movement with many groups differing in specific beliefs and a strong individualist ethic.) Though non-violent and often estranged from current political processes, Rastas constantly articulate protest, and forward an Afrocentric vision that has challenged yet powerfully influenced their society's self-image. They are thus also firmly situated in a long Caribbean and Jamaican tradition of resistance to slavery, plantation society and colonial rule, including the *Maroon* wars,[2] slave rebellions, peasant movements and, in the twentieth century, Marcus Garvey's movement, and political organization through labor and nationalist parties (Patterson 1973, Chevannes 1978, H. Campbell 1987). This Rasta critique, and its symbolic forms of expression, have been taken up widely outside the movement, whose strictly religious membership has always remained fairly small in number.

At the same time, despite overtly championing the African elements of Jamaican identity, Rastafari is forced to rely on other components of Jamaican folk culture which have older and more direct lines of African descent. The religious traditions of *Kumina*, *Pukumina*, and *Convince* (Seaga 1969, Simpson 1978), as well as the Maroons (Bilby 1981, 1983), have their own healing traditions which may overlap with each other and even with the occult methods of *Obeah* (Bilby 1993)[3], but there is no distinctly Rastafarian collection of healing practices. Though adherents of each of these groups often profess to be at odds with each other and with urbanized European-derived institutions – e.g. Rastas denounce the established churches, 'Pocomania', and Obeah alike – they all exist as elements of a creolized Jamaican culture, available as a base for individuals to select, synthesize and improvise from as needed. Nevertheless, this complex web of interlinked traditions and innovations is generally perceived by Jamaicans on a polarized axis of European versus African. In such terms, Rastafari is considered to be African, alongside e.g. the Maroons and Obeah.

Rasta Talk as symbolic expression

Rastas are commonly identified by a number of symbolic elements: chiefly, their hair, worn in *dreadlocks* ("a sacred and inalienable part" of their identity, Chevannes 1995:145) or formerly in beards, but also foodways (*ital* food, which is saltless), display of colors (red, gold and green), and their language use. Rasta Talk is a register of Jamaican Creole: an internal variety, or functional code, distinguished from everyday Jamaican speech only by simple overlays upon the common JC grammar (Patrick 1997). It does not significantly differ in core areas such as phonology and syntax, but is characterized primarily by lexical choice, productive morphological mutation rules, and rhetorical strategy (including some prosodic features), all often metaphorical in motivation.

Rasta Talk has been described as "lexical expansion within a creole system" (Pollard 1994:1). Pollard notes four types of distinctive morphemes and lexical items (1994:31-8):

Category I: "in which known items bear new meaning"

Ex.: *chalice* = pipe for smoking *ganja*, a sacred herb; *block* = speak seriously

Category II: "in which words bear the weight of their phonological implications"

Ex.: *downpress* for 'oppress', *overstand* for 'understand'

Category III: "/ai/-words" of two types:

(a) serving a pronominal function

Ex.: *I, I-man, I-and-I* = 'me, I, mine, myself'; *I-and-I* = 'we'

(b) "initial syllable replacement" in words of varying function

Ex.: *I-dren* = 'brethren', *I-ditate* = 'meditate', *I-nite* = 'unite'

Category IV: new lexical items, not previously attested

Ex.: *livity* = way of life, livelihood, or vocation; *donza* = money

Roberts (1988:36-44) includes rhetorical strategies, adding use of "biblical and apocalyptic words" and puns or wordplay to this list. Though these are generally-available activities, and quite common in Jamaican speech, in Rasta Talk they are especially frequent and, more importantly, systematically employed with a subtext of Rastafarian themes, as shown below. Chevannes (1995) gives texts of Rasta *reasonin* sessions with many such examples, and argues that the inventory of distinctive expressions may have evolved through such intensive debates within an influential Rasta community, the Youth Black Faith, in the 1940s-50s.

However, as with other symbolic expressions, Rasta Talk has been appropriated by many non-Rastafarian users in Jamaica to the point where it now forms part of the generally accessible set of styles, registers, and ways of speaking that are known and recognized throughout the JC speech community as rhetorical resources. Indeed, it is widely found throughout the Caribbean (Pollard 1990, 1994) and beyond: Hewitt (1986) notes that it has been secularized and incorporated into a stylistics for British black urban youth culture. Just as, in the post-slavery era, Revival "reconstruct[ed …] a world-view in response to European subjugation and dominance" (Chevannes 1995:33), Rastafari has done so in post-colonial times; and the success of this ideological work, deeply bound up in the rhetoric that embodies it, has led to its adoption wherever Caribbean peoples have immigrated in strength. While there are linguistic aspects of Rasta Talk that make it suitable for such expansion as a functional code (Patrick 1997), here we are concerned with the cultural context within Jamaica that enables others – Rasta or not – to use it creatively and interpret it readily.

Coppa's narrative of illness and cure

The text examined here was recorded in summer 1992 by the author, a white American who lived in Jamaica from childhood and is a near-native speaker of JC. The principal speaker is *Coppa*: a cane-cutter in his 40s and a native to the area, a sugarcane-dominated rural community in St. Thomas parish, at the eastern end of the island. Coppa and a co-worker (*Joe*; all names are pseudonyms) gave life-history interviews to the author and a local fieldworker, relating important incidents in a self-regulated alternation of turns. After a while the session became a sequence of speech events featuring Coppa. In response to a question about supernatural events, he volunteered a long narrative of personal illness and healing. The session was held outdoors, in a shady bend of a dusty lane; gradually a small crowd (4-6) gathered. During this narrative several crowd members felt licensed to, or were invited to, participate through back-channels or brief utterances.

The most salient points of the story are the cause of Coppa's illness – he portrays himself as the victim of malicious Obeah working, and was cursed with a painful disease known as *bigfoot* – and the eventual cure: Coppa went through a long series of healers who

each proved inadequate to the task, before discovering the right one. Given the length of the narrative, and its non-chronological sequencing, a summary of the main events is presented here, reconstructing them in the order in which they are said to have occurred. Subsequently the major instances of Rasta Talk are reproduced and analyzed. (For a lengthy analysis which illustrates the events in the original words, see Patrick and Payne-Jackson 1996.)

Chronological outline of narrative events

I. Coppa gets Bigfoot from occult sources (Obeah, duppy)

a. Coppa never believed in the occult (*Obeah*), felt it couldn't harm him
b. But a *duppy* gave Coppa *bigfoot*; somebody was *sciencing* him
c. Coppa drank milk, went to bed, and then felt the milk down in his foot
d. Coppa's foot was so swollen, it took him 4 hours to walk a half-mile
e. His head swelled and felt hot, and yet he had done nothing
f. It felt like walking on eggshells; it was so painful, he couldn't even put on his boot
g. He couldn't drink warm liquids; he had to cool them before swallowing

II. Bio-medical diagnosis and treatment of Bigfoot

a. Medical science found nothing wrong: no arthritis, kidney trouble, or heart trouble, and 6 X-rays showed nothing but 'vapor' to 4 doctors
b. Dr. K operated once on his foot, then said it needed 2 more operations
c. Then Coppa's foot burned him. He laid in bed 3 months, and couldn't move
d. Coppa paid $1600 for the operation by Dr. K
e. He had to sell a cow worth $2000 for only $1100, just to pay doctor's costs
f. After recovering Coppa returned to the hospital for the 2nd operation

III. Ethnomedical "Reading" (etiology) of Coppa's occult illness

a. On entering the hospital, the nurse told him he was either blind or an idiot
b. The nurse said his foot had a spirit wound: doctors couldn't help him
c. Tears dropped from Coppa's eye; he was a man lost in another world
d. At 12 noon he went through the hospital gate, saw a woman selling refreshments
e. She asked what was wrong with him; Coppa said he didn't know
f. The woman's spirit took her; she *read* his illness, saw he needed a "woman's care"
g. The woman fell down on the ground and tears dropped from her eyes
h. Coppa asked if the woman would find help for him

IV. Ethnomedical treatment by the Science-Man (occult practitioner)

a. The woman told her friend Long-Man to take him to a *Science-man*
b. Long-Man needed money; Coppa bought lunch, cigarettes, have him $20 cash.
c. They drove to S___ and went up the hill to the Science-man's yard
d. The Science-man turned out to be a cousin of Coppa's
e. Fearing the loss of his foot, Coppa began to cry
f. The Science-man promised he wouldn't lose his foot, and told him to stop crying
g. The Science-man diagnosed it as bigfoot and promised a cure
h. He took something and *marked ten* upon the foot
i. Then he gave Coppa an herbal bath and sent him home...
j. ...saying Coppa should go see a healer in M__ T__ & then return

V. Successful ethnomedical treatment by the Maroon Spiritual Mother

a. Coppa took his cousin's advice & went to M__ T__ to see Madda.
b. Madda saw his foot, doubted she could help – it was already bad (*mash-up*)

c. Madda wept tears at the prospect and for his pain
d. Madda used olive oil and lime on him; she laid hands on him
e. She made him drink *continuated water* from her hands
f. Madda extracted a 10d. nail, a *johncrow* feather, a bamboo peg, and black thread from Coppa's foot
g. Coppa's foot burned for 3 days afterward, just as w/Dr K's operation
h. This proves Madda's extraction truly healed – yet it left no cut-mark

VI. Testimonial to the power of the Spiritual Healer

a. Madda healed Coppa and saved his life, and now he walks again
b. So Coppa honors Madda greatly ("to the bone/the dirt/the earth")
c. Madda took only $20, and cured him; while the Science-man and doctor took $17,000 (*sic*), and still couldn't cure his bigfoot
d. Coppa saw Madda extract a stone from a sick woman's belly
e. The stone had two eyes, hair, a nose, and a mouth
f. People might say it's impossible but it's true; Coppa saw it himself
g. Now Coppa walks on his foot and feels no pain
h. Now Coppa can drink any liquid, no matter how hot, without feeling sick
i. Now Coppa's head no longer feels hot, so he knows that was Obeah
j. Coppa has felt the hands of duppy, the hands of *black-man*
k. It was an act of evil; he, God's child and a sufferer, was healed in order to show the power of faith
l. A man's belief is just his belief; Coppa believes Madda is the greatest
m. If anyone ever harmed Madda it would be the end of the world
n. Coppa would personally find the man and (do him harm)

Explanation of the healing narrative

(I) Coppa believes he was the victim of sorcery through Obeah, in which an individual may be harmed by an Obeahman or science-man through manipulation of a duppy (the shadow of a person, which remains behind after death).[4] A science-man differs from an Obeahman in that he (they are almost always men, unlike Obeah practitioners) has "book-learning" from European or American occult texts. One may also contract spiritual or occult illnesses by accidentally making contact with a duppy; a common sign of such contact is that one's head feels swollen or hot. Whether malicious or accidental, diseases caused by such contact require a cure by a sufficiently powerful practitioner of the right sort. In Coppa's case, liquid drunk went to his foot rather than his belly. Subsequently his foot became extremely painful, and he was unable to swallow warm or hot liquids without feeling sick.

(II) Coppa took his *bigfoot* – a folk illness which is sometimes also physically caused – for medical treatment, as is customary for Jamaicans (occult or spiritual healing are almost never the first resort; cf. Payne 1991). Extensive consultation failed to diagnose the problem, but resulted in the first of three surgical operations, which were so expensive as to cause Coppa to sell his possessions at cut-rate prices just to raise the money. The initial surgery caused Coppa's foot to burn painfully, and he was unable to walk (thus, to work).

(III) On reporting to hospital for the second operation, the nurse – often an intermediary between European medical and Jamaican ethnomedical systems – chastised Coppa, telling him his illness was not curable by medicine. At this moment Coppa wept, feeling himself "a man lost, in another world"; the clock struck twelve and he walked out of the hospital gates. These apocalyptic events mark a shift in awareness of causative force and cultural sphere: from medical, scientific and European to spiritual, occult and African. A *reader* or *revealer* –

a woman with the spiritual gift of being able to see *duppies* on people – saw the cause of his illness.

(IV) The reader sends Coppa to a science-man for an occult cure (Coppa details payment). The science-man, a distant relative, comforted Coppa, diagnosed the malady as bigfoot, and performed remedies but, unable to cure him, sent him on to a powerful Maroon healer.

(V) Coppa went to M_T_ to see the *spiritual mother*, here "Madda". She wept for his pain, laid hands on him, treated him, and performed a ritual extraction. The objects extracted include poisonous elements (bamboo), and a talisman from a *john-crow* bird – a powerful figure in *obeah* and Jamaican folklore. (The john-crow spirit *Opete* is also a *pakit* or spirit invoked in the Maroon healing ceremony *Kromanti Play*; cf. Bilby, 1981.) Black thread, also found in the wound, is frequently associated with powerful or harmful objects throughout the Caribbean and West and Central Africa: it typically binds an object to contain its power. After the extraction, Coppa's foot burned for three days – just as with Dr. K's operation – but as Madda's procedure left no incision, her skill is shown to be superior.

(VI) To confirm Madda's powers, Coppa tells of another extraction he witnessed. He also compares the cost of the treatments, to Madda's credit; and attests to the cure, since he can use his foot without pain, and drink hot liquids again. Coppa also notes that his head stopped feeling hot, showing that the cause was indeed a duppy (sent by a *black-man* or Obeahman), which has been removed. Finally, Coppa proclaims that his illness was an evil act, and that his cure came about so that he could testify to the power of faith in God. He expresses his faith in and respect for Madda's power, and warns that he would personally seek out anyone who harmed her.

Coppa's personal narrative has taken the listeners on a grand tour of the Jamaican healing spectrum. On the European end, there is Dr. K, who caused great pain, cost Coppa all his property and took away his livelihood and the use of his foot. The nurse assists with Dr. K's first operation, but also directs Coppa away from the second one. The reader (from a spiritual tradition, but not herself a healer) reveals the occult nature of his illness. The science-man, who also combines European and traditional skills, makes initial treatments, using folk remedies (herbal bath), and refers Coppa to the Maroon woman. Practically the only missing elements in the Jamaican tradition are the *bush-doctor* (a folk-healer specializing in herbal, rather than occult or spiritual, methods) and the various spiritual healers within the Christian tradition (Revival *shepherds* or *shepherdesses* in a *balmyard*, etc.; cf. Barrett 1973, Wedenoja 1989, Vest 1992).[5]

Occult power, especially Obeah, is strongly associated with traditions derived from Africa; in slavery days, only the African-born could be *obeahmen* or *-women* (Bilby 1993). The more "African" a healing and/or religious tradition, the more distant it is considered to be from biomedical practice, and the more powerful (and dangerous) it is (Hogg 1961, Seaga 1969, Cohen 1973). Jamaicans believe the most purely African religious and healing traditions, as well as the strongest Obeah, are carried on by Maroons, as well as other "African" peoples in eastern Jamaica, especially St. Thomas parish (home to Coppa, as well as the Convince, Kumina and Bongo traditions; Simpson 1978, Schuler 1980). In contemporary Jamaica, Maroons have the strongest claim to African roots, and they are accordingly duly respected, feared, and even reviled.

The content of Coppa's healing narrative, and the healing traditions through which he sought treatment, show no direct involvement of Rastafari. In fact, it was only much later, after transcription and analysis of the narrative had begun, that elements of Rasta beliefs and language use began to emerge. Even here Coppa is selective and subtle in their use. At no time did Coppa overtly proclaim himself to be a practising Rasta, or perform any of the ritual speech events typically associated with Rastafari discourse, such as charging the researcher

as a representative of Babylon (Chevannes 1995:208ff), proclaiming the divine nature and authority of Selassie as Jah Rastafari, or the explicit "idealization of Africa" (*ibid*.:34) through the prospect of repatriation to Ethiopia.

Yet repeatedly across the life-history interview and the narrative, especially when bystanders express any scepticism of his account, Coppa liberally uses elements drawn from the vocabulary and rhetorical strategies of Rasta Talk. This evidence is considered next, and then the question of why Rasta Talk should be employed during the narration of events which partake of other, competing religious and folk traditions is taken up.

Analysis of Rasta Talk

In more than 2 dozen instances, Coppa's speech can be characterized as Rasta Talk. While a majority of these occur outside the narrative *per se*, its continuity of subject with the life history is evident. In both Coppa is concerned to present himself as having suffered pain and misfortune yet behaved in a morally correct manner; he is also overridingly intent on finding a divine purpose for his suffering in life. He repeatedly uses the major Rasta trope of seeing as understanding, asserts the primacy of personal experience, shows a conviction that evil is an active force, and expresses a concern for a righteous mode of living. The use of Rasta Talk in both life-story and healing narrative – sometimes the same phrase or term, developed in subsequent use – knits the two together, as context and primary example, to invoke the values with which he characterizes his experience.

Coppa uses the affirmative tag *siin* ten times. Related to the English verb *see, seen*, it occurs in environments where an English speaker might use *yes/yeah/ok/alright* – options also available to a JC speaker, who might additionally use *na* 'no?' (in a non-contradictory manner). *Siin* is a very salient and easily identified marker of Rasta Talk, and clearly a grammaticalization from a verbal use. The expression of understanding through metaphors of vision (including the related full verb *sait* 'comprehend', from English *sight*) is so common in Rasta Talk as to have been noted not only by linguists like Pollard (1994) but also other observers of Rastafari (e.g., Owens 1976, Nettleford 1976). Coppa employs *siin* to gain the hearer's acquiescence to propositions which, since they rest on the authority of his direct experience, are intended to be unassailable, however unexpected they may seem:[6]

(1)	a(n) aafta i **kom** oot yi no	*and after it came out, y'know*
	mi no sii nowe we it **kot**,	*I couldn't see where it was cut,*
	an a chrii dies **schriet**	*and it was three days straight*
	di plies **born** mi.	*that the place burned me*
	(pause) ***siin***, sa?	*(pause) Alright, sir?*
(2)	so **mi** av,	*So I have,*
	mi av likl ek**spiy**rens af	*I have a little experience of*
	mi likl puar **kon**chri, ***siin***?	*my little poor country, ok?*

In (1) Coppa argues the superiority of Madda's skill at extraction to the medical doctor's surgical operation (V:g, in the outline above), making an assertion for which he might expect to need rhetorical support. (2) is Coppa's final utterance, at the end of the narrative and the interview (it follows the former after a moment's digression in which he elaborates on the history and nature of the Maroons). A masterly understatement, it identifies the speaker with his poor and suffering Jamaica, and links to his earlier statement given in (4) below. As the addressee, a white foreigner, necessarily agrees, the contrast between two peoples and historical experiences is clearly drawn.

Siin is an example of Pollard's Category I, where existing forms shift or extend their semantics and – in this case and a few others – grammatical category. Another example of semantic extension, which also embodies a central concept of Rastafari, is words related to English *suffer*: JC *sofra, sofrin*, etc. In characterizing his education, Coppa says,

(3)	so, mi get mai likl l- mai likl **lar**ning bai ***sofrin*** an **thii**vin.	*So, I got my little-- my little learning* *by suffering and being robbed.*
(4)	ye, m'afi ek**spiy**rens, mi get a ***sofrin*** ekspiyrens af Ja**mie**ka.	*Yeah, I had to experience,* *I had a suffering experience of Jamaica.*

Later, he contrasts the view people may have held of him as a child with his own perspective, in light of his current goals of self-improvement and righteous behavior (= *liviti*, see below):

(5)	mi **lef** dem tu kom **bet**ar 'at hwen dee shal **sii** mi, **aan** dee go, "a 'i 'ikl ***sofa'a*** bwai dat", "ah, a **Cop**pa dat!"	*I left them to better myself* *that when they shall see me,* *and they (shall) say,* *"That was the little sufferer boy",* *"Ah so that's [what became of] Coppa!"*

Though it retains the usual meaning of one who endures pain, injury or distress, in Rastafari *sofra* further denotes a black person – an African or 'Ethiopian' – who has unjustly suffered the loss of humanity and power under oppression by *Babylon*. *Sofrin* is thus never an unlucky, accidental or meaningless event. Coppa has been denied a proper education and consequently forced to work as a seasonal agricultural laborer, the lowest and most dangerous occupation; he has also endured bodily and economic suffering at the hands of European medicine. Both can be attributed to an actively oppressive society. Thus, *sofrin* is not an isolated experience: it affects a majority of black Jamaicans, but especially those who are 'conscious Ethiopians', i.e. Rastas who are aware of and resist their 'downpression'. It is linked to the existence of a righteous black God with an Old Testament-style penchant for retribution. When Coppa speaks to Jamaican listeners of his "suffering experience of Jamaica", he thus invokes more than his own personal pain, and places himself in the context of a historical movement in which *sofrin* is only one, penultimate stage.

Coppa uses the term *bredrin* 'brethren' several times. Here he refers to friends who, like him, have benefited from an adult-literacy program:

(6)	far mi af ***bredrin*** oot de noo we gaan an a **far**in gaan **liv**...	*For I have brethren out there now* *who have gone abroad to live...*

This fictive-kin term referring to "male friend(s) holding same beliefs as the speaker" (Pollard 1982:29; *sistren*, created by analogy, is used for women) emphasizes the wider sense of community among Rastas linked by such experiences. *Bredrin* can be an address form, in a practice with evident Christian roots, but also may be used to or of a single person, which may be a Rasta innovation. In any event, today the unmarked case in Jamaica is that address or reference with *bredrin* is a salient marker of Rasta rhetoric (though there are contexts, such as a sermon in church, where this identification may be cancelled).

As such, it is an example of what Roberts (1988:38) calls "biblical and apocalyptic words... subject to re-interpretations and extensions in meaning... in the context of Jamaican ghetto life". Here the roots of Rastafari in Revival and other Christian traditions are clear, but so is the extension: the term *bredrin*, and even moreso *Idren*, activates several levels of

meaning, i.e. 'male relative' (brother, cousin etc.), 'intimate', 'Rasta (co-religionist)', and 'one who displays commitment to Rastafari in a symbolic manner'. In popular usage among non-Rastas, it also means simply someone whose style and/or values resemble the speaker's; and it can be used exclusively, to designate a Rasta by someone who does *not* share Rasta beliefs. In contrast, among Rastas the usage is generally inclusive and reciprocal, as in (6).

A final example of a Category I item is *penichriet*, from English *penetrate*, meaning 'comprehend, hear and understand, pay attention, think about' (Pollard 1998). Asked about Anansi stories (folklore) in a dialogue immediately prior to the narrative, Coppa replies:

(7)	**cho**, som a dem mi **rii**li-	*Cho, some of them I really-*
	mi jos nat ***penichriet*** som a dem	*I just didn't understand/learn them,*
	an **som** a dem dee jos **gya**da	*and some of them, they're just gathered*
	somwe ina mi **brien** yeso stil.	*somewhere here in my brain still.*

In several places, Coppa makes use of Category IV items, i.e. forms not previously known to exist outside of Rasta Talk. One of these is *liviti*, 'livelihood, vocation, way of life', a holistic notion that carries a stronger sense of purpose or mission than simply (*making a*) *living* does in English. Among other terms, *liviti* may be opposed to *friinis* ('free+ness'), meaning charity or an unearned handout; the "freeness mentality" is an unhealthy view of life, though Rastas also scorn the capitalist system:

(8)	weda tu **work** it ar get it **frii**li wel, m-	*Whether to work or get it freely, well,*
	ar tu mek a-	*or to make a-*
	weda **skil** ar edyukietid ar ***liviti***,	*whether skilled or educated or livelihood*
	a **dat** mi na noo if i'a beta ***liviti***.	*that's what I don't know, if it's a*
		better livelihood.

Coppa continues with biblical rhetoric in a number of examples occurring within the healing narrative, the immediate function of which is persuasive: to overcome several sceptical questions and interjections by bystanders at the beginning of his account. As Coppa narrates how the milk went into his foot rather than his belly, his co-worker Joe gives a questioning grunt, "Mm?" and then begins to laugh quietly through the next several lines (I:c). "Mary", however, is more argumentative, and suggests he must have simply dripped the milk directly on his foot. Coppa insists on his account, adding as corroborating information that he paid $1600 for an operation on it. When Mary also gives a sceptical "Mm?", Coppa proceeds to remove his boot and show onlookers the (healed, yet) still-swollen foot. Simultaneously, he invokes divine warrant for his trials and tribulations:

(9)	az mi niem **man**, man,	*As I am a man, man,*
	mi- mi a wan a **gad** chilr-	*I- I am one of God's childr-(en.)*
	mi afi **bier** i ***chribileshan***	*I have to bear the tribulations*
	go pan **ort** noo,	*upon the earth now,*
	far evri **gad**-	*for every God-*
	evri **wan** a gad pikni	*Every one of God's children*
	go chru ***chribilieshan***,	*goes through tribulations,*
	ya no.	*you know.*
	iz a **big**- mi get mi **big**fut man,	*It's big- I got the bigfoot, man,*
	sii't ya **man**?	*See it here, man?*

Drawing on tradition uses of biblical language both within religion and as a general proverbial resource (most Jamaicans grow up quite familiar with the King James Version), Coppa sets up a framework for evaluating truth which is quite sophisticated both in its logic and its verse-like structure, and then applies it to his argument, with its Rasta ideological content. As this structure occurs again in a moment, it is worth closer examination. A general and undeniable premise ("as I am a man, one of God's children") leads to a particular and personal consequence ("I have to bear tribulations upon earth… I've got bigfoot"), proof of which is reinforced by the evidence of sight ("see it here").

Coppa's *sofrin* is thus established in fact and as divinely ordained ("Every one of God's children goes through tribulations"), but he has not yet revealed to his listeners the ultimate purpose. This occurs some moments later, after he has narrated Madda's extraction (V), and shown the inadequacy of medical science (VI:c) for his occult disease:

(10)	yu en nuo wen yu **bruk** eg **shel**?	*You know when you break eggshells?*
	an yu a **waak** pan di eg-shel	*And you're walking on eggshells,*
	ar yu a **waak** pan machiz baks?	*or walking on matchboxes?*
	a **SO** mi yuus tu **waak**-	*That's how I used to walk--*
	a **SO** di fut yuus tu **fiil**.	*That's how the foot used to feel.*
	Ksst![7] .. an **sii't**, **uo**.	*Ksst! And see it, oh!*
	Ksst! **sii't** de	*Ksst! See it there!*
	mi se mi di' **get** di fut	*I say I got the (big)foot*
	da mi **kyan** giv gad	*so I can give God*
	tangks an **priez**	*thanks and praise.*

Once again, he appeals first to common and undeniable knowledge ("You know when you break eggshells?"), then asserts his personal experience ("That's how the foot used to feel"), understanding of which is confirmed again by visual evidence ("See it, oh! See it there!"). Note too, the emphasis on parallel items in paired clauses that rhythmically reinforces his message. This time divine purpose is made clear: the reason for Coppa's suffering and healing is so that he can duly praise God. Such praise is certainly a part of traditional Christian prayer, but "give praises" or "chant praises" is a ubiquitous feature of Rasta discourse, both ritual and everyday. The 'reasonin' excerpts in Chevannes 1995 are replete with cries of "Jah Rastafari!" "King of Kings, Lord of Lords!" "Praise HIM!" (HIM standing for His Imperial Majesty) "Haile I Selassie I!", and so forth.

Coppa immediately proceeds to develop his revelation in a similar vein (VI:k):

(11)	so mi nuo- mi **nuo** se yiivl de.	*So I know-- I know that evil exists.*
	man **kaan** fuul mi man.	*People can't fool me, man.*
	huu, mi a di f- mi a **gad *pikni***	*Who, I am the-- I am God's child*
	huu av evri**ting** tu bier.	*who has everything to bear.*
	mi ga fi- fi- fi **shuo**- shuo **pii**pl tingz	*I have to-- to show people things,*
	yu no?	*you know?*
	se ting kyan hapm tu **pii**pl,	*That things can happen to people,*
	fi **chuu** se if yu uonli aav **fiet**,	*truly, if you only have faith*
	tu in**jyuur** an biliiv se	*to endure and believe that*
	dier iz a **kriet**a av hevn an ort.	*there is a creator of heaven and earth.*

With these verses, Coppa's role in the story has evolved fully: from poor and oppressed patient, feeling pain and at the mercy of the biomedical establishment, he has passed through the stage of sufferer, actively experiencing his place in the divine scheme and undergoing

healing by the 'African' agents of a righteous deity. Ultimately he has become a witness, a divine agent himself who sees and comprehends God's purpose, and whose job is to narrate: not only to tell the events of his story, but to convey their significance, to give praises.

This transformation from one who merely experiences, to one who sees and understands, to one who proclaims divine revelation, is expressed with admirable concision in a proverb with Rasta associations (it was the title and refrain of a popular 1966 song performed by Rasta prophet Bob Marley, and written by his Rasta associate Bunny Wailer). Coppa used it twice earlier in relating events in his life, and repeats it now at the end of the narrative to powerful effect (VI:k):

(12)	wel **chuu** mi nuo wat wikidnis iz,	*Since I know what wickedness is*
	bot no **man** kaan fuul mi se	*No man can('t) fool me saying that*
	wikidnis no de pan **ort**.	*Wickedness does not exist on earth.*
	faar ***huu FIILZ it,***	*For "Who FEELS it,*
	NUOZ it.	*KNOWS it."*
	[Joe:] yee	*[Joe:] Yea.*
	[Coppa:] yee, an mi **fiil** it	*[Coppa:] Yea, and I('ve) felt it,*
	an mi **nuo** it	*and I'(ve) known it,*
	an mi **sii** it.	*and I('ve) seen it.*
	[3 second pause]	
	yee.	*Yea.*

Stressing the opposition of good and evil that is ever-present in Rastafari, Coppa invokes the proverb to confirm his personal experience of malice: for what is proverbial is, practically speaking, undeniable in oral cultures. Building on Joe's affirmation of this general wisdom, he deftly turns it into the first part of another paired verse structure. Moving, once again, from the general to the specific, Coppa personalizes the proverb, presenting his experience as part of the wider dispensation of *sofrin* and concluding his evaluation with devastating effectiveness. This is the final instance of Rasta Talk in the healing narrative.

Language, faith and healing

In the above text, the speaker makes use of a particular register of JC to index a set of cultural themes, which serve to empower and identify him with a range of rhetorical positions familiar to Jamaicans. He does so:

- by using terms that are clearly of Rastafarian origin and identity: *seen, livity, penetrate, brethren,* and *suffer/sufferer/suffering*
- by developing the more general, related notions of *God's children/tribulations*
- by quoting a saying (*Who feels it...*) closely associated with Rastafari
- and by simply stating he was "born for Rasta", indicating his hair as evidence.

In his life-story interview Coppa tells us that, as a child at school, he was beaten for his hair-style; natural and disordered as he wore it, it was taken for Rasta dreadlocks:

(13)	mi neva riili get **lik**, yu-	*I never really got beaten, y'[know].*
	mi get lik fi di **hier**, yu no, mi.	*I got beaten for my hair, y'know, me.*
	[IV:] fi di heyr?	[IV:] *For your hair?*
	[Coppa:] fa mi-	[Coppa:] *For my--*
	mi get lik fi di **hier**,	*I got beaten for my hair,*
	fa mi ***baan fi rasta***, ya no.	*for I was born to be a Rasta, y'know.*

This nearly-casual comment, dropped in an exchange with his co-worker Joe about school discipline, takes on added significance in the light of the whole discourse, as one of his first *sofrin* experiences. There is an additional clue, however: a photograph of Coppa taken after the interview shows, almost hidden under his work-clothes, a braided belt of the Rastafarian style in the colors red, gold, and green.

The themes of Rastafari invoked by Coppa include the following:

- his experience of life as *sofrin*, an experience due to
- his oppression under, and resistance to, *Babylon* (here, European medicine?) and
- given special meaning through faith in a righteous and vengeful God, for whom
- Africans are the chosen people, who (if they live *upfully*) can look forward to
- repatriation to Africa (represented symbolically by Madda's traditional cure).

Yet there are also many key points, very typically sounded in Rasta discourse, which are not articulated by Coppa: e.g., the divinity and power of Selassie, rejection of Jamaican authority structures, Rastas as the true Israelites, the sacrament of the herb *ganja*, explicit reference to racist or colonialist power relations, opposition to competing heretic doctrines, and so on.

Linguistically, too, it is curious that Coppa restricts his ventures into Rasta Talk to Categories I and IV only – leaving out entirely the most productive and obvious operations, and those too with the most explicit metaphoric potential. Instead, Coppa uses Rasta Talk more generally, to rhetorically support his identification with Afro-Jamaican folk traditions and ethnomedicine – a stigmatized position – in the face of heckling and direct challenges from the Jamaican audience of bystanders, and the unspoken pressure of the foreign white interlocutor, to whom he tells his story. He draws on the register in order to vigorously defend his beliefs, to gain the moral high ground as a man of religious convictions (which provide a ready-made critique of European practices, such as biomedicine), and to position himself firmly in the mainstream of traditional Jamaican values and expression – not to identify himself as a follower of Rastafari and to proclaim the values of that faith.

It is not possible or necessary to determine the individual man's beliefs and practices precisely: it is not clear whether Coppa professes a Rastafarian faith. But it is clear enough that Coppa's spiritual convictions are integral to his healing, and that he presents himself as having undergone a conversion or renewal. Healing of mortal sickness typically requires transformation of both one's personal identity and one's community relations: the stigma of illness must be thrown off and the patient accepted as whole, physically and morally. Where sorcery is involved, especially, demonstration that one's affliction was undeserved is a key element in healing.

If one's previous life-history could not adequately predict or explain the experience of suffering, perhaps it is the old narrative that is at fault: Coppa's new one succeeds in giving coherence to events, in articulating and politicizing their pain and injustice. It satisfies the three elements essential to the positive transformation of illness meaning in symbolic healing, according to Brody (1980): an explanation consonant with the sufferer's belief systems; evidence of adequate social support and caring (the healers who cried tears and laid on hands), rather than isolation; and a sense of mastery and control, rather than helplessness. To satisfy the first, it may be necessary to modify or even radically change beliefs; to satisfy the third, in Coppa's case, requires an act of faith.

It is possible that Coppa's reintegration into society through professing this faith had a moderating influence on the extent to which he adopts, or at any rate publicly proclaims, Rasta values. Like Rastafari itself, his language has much in common with the rhetoric of Revival Christianity; but unlike the former movement, his vision is outwardly an integrative

one with respect to other healing and faith traditions. Coppa's task is to reconcile his direct allegiance to Madda's African-derived practices – historically closely associated with *obeah*, which is nowadays generally feared and despised – with the wealth of Christian imagery that is ever close to the heart of Jamaicans, a most religious nation. Moreover, the Maroon knowledge that he credits with healing him is secret, and like Maroon religion is jealously reserved to those with Maroon blood; while the Western biomedicine he rejects, though secular, is allied with mainstream, denominational Christianity.

Rasta Talk, the voice of Rastafari itself, allows him to accomplish these ends. It is powerfully African-oriented, yet Christian in idiom; agentive and self-aware, conferring power on its user, deeply grounded in folk-speech and yet not stigmatized by contrast to the standard language, which carries colonial values. Coppa's is no momentary performance: he presents a consistent self-portrait across a range of speech genres in an extended interaction. He proves himself a skilled speaker, drawing on a rich vein of verbal resources and deeply at home in Jamaican folk culture, able to spellbind an audience and silence the most skeptical objectors. It is ultimately a moving accomplishment – an admirable fusion of language, faith and healing.

NOTES

*An earlier version of this analysis appeared as Patrick and Payne-Jackson (1996). Deep thanks to my colleague Arvilla Payne-Jackson for sharing with me her knowledge and understanding of Jamaican ethnomedical and religious practices, during the writing of that article and later in fieldwork together.

[1] The religion is variously called *Rastafari* or *Rasta*; both terms are also used for its followers. More remote observers tend to call the religion *Rastafarianism* and the followers *Rastafarian(s)*. The word *Dread* is also used both as an adjective and as a name for Rastas; thus Pollard (1980 and later) calls their speech *Dread Talk*. Jamaican Creole words and names are italicized here on first use.

[2] Jamaican Maroons trace their lineage directly to free Africans and runaway slaves who escaped into the mountainous interior of the island in the 17th century and defeated the British in 1738, establishing self-rule by treaty (Long 1774, Patterson 1973). The Windward Maroons remain geographically, politically and culturally distinct from other Jamaicans, with clearly non-Christian religious practices and linguistic heritage that link them more closely in some ways to Maroons in Suriname and the Guianas than to other Jamaicans (Bilby 1983, C. Campbell 1984, Kopytoff 1987, Alleyne 1988).

[3] *Obeah* is a pre-Christian spiritual and occult tradition which includes healing and divination (Bilby 1993). Unlike its relative *Vodoun* in Haiti it has always remained strictly opposed to Christianity. Most Jamaicans today (including Rastas, and academics, e.g. Chevannes 1995; but cf. also Patterson 1967: 185-95, Braithwaite 1971:219) only recognize it as portrayed by its earlier missionary foes, as black magic and sorcery for evil ends.

[4] The narrative implies that Coppa's awareness of occult causation was a later realization.

[5] As a *spiritual mother*, Madda is connected to this tradition (which also uses consecrated water and olive oil, as she does here), though Maroon occult methods dominate the present treatment.

[6] Each line represents a breath-group; principal stress is given in boldface, and the particular item of focus is italicized. Speech is transcribed in Cassidy's (1967) phonemic notation for JC, slightly modified to allow more evidence of phonological variation.

[7] *Ksst!* represents the sound known to Jamaicans as *suck-tooth* (Rickford and Rickford 1976) or *kiss-your-teeth* or *chups* (Cassidy and LePage 1980); it expresses negative affect or wonderment.

REFERENCES

Alleyne, Mervyn C. (1988). *Roots of Jamaican culture*. London: Pluto Press.

Barrett, Leonard E. (1973). Healing in a Balmyard: The practice of folk healing in Jamaica, W.I. In Wayland Hand (ed.), *American folk medicine: a symposium*, 285-300. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Bilby, Kenneth M. (1981). The Kromanti dance of the Windward Maroons of Jamaica. *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 55(1-2):52-101.

----- (1983). How the 'Older Heads' talk: A Jamaican Maroon spirit possession language and its relationship to the Creoles of Suriname and Sierra Leone. *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 57(1-2):37-88.

----- (1993). The strange career of Obeah: Defining magical power in the West Indies. Paper delivered to seminar at the Institute for Global Studies in Culture, Power and History. Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore MD, November 1993.

Braithwaite, Edward (1971). *The development of Creole society in Jamaica, 1720-1820*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Campbell, Carl (1984). Missionaries and Maroons: Conflict and resistance in Accompong, Charles Town and Moore Town (Jamaica), 1837-1838. *Jamaican Historical Review* 14:42-58.

Campbell, Horace (1987). *Rasta and resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney*. Trenton NJ: Africa World Press.

Cassidy, Frederic Gomes, and Robert Brock LePage, eds. (1980). *Dictionary of Jamaican English*. 2nd ed. (1st ed. 1967). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chevannes, Barry (1978). Revival and Black struggle. *Savacou* 5:27-39.

----- (1995). *Rastafari: Roots and ideology*. Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press.

Cohen, Milton (1973). Medical beliefs and practices of the Maroons of Moore Town: a study in acculturation. PhD. dissertation, New York University.

Curtin, Philip D. (1955). *Two Jamaicas*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Hewitt, Roger (1986). *White talk Black talk: Inter-racial friendship and communication amongst adolescents*. (Comparative Ethnic and Race Relations.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hogg, Donald W. (1961). Magic and 'Science' in Jamaica. *Caribbean Studies* 1(2):1-5.

Kopytoff, Barbara Klamon (1987). Religious change among the Jamaican Maroons: The ascendance of the Christian God within a traditional cosmology. *Journal of Social History* 20:463-484.

Long, Edward (1774). *The history of Jamaica*. 3 volumes. (New edition: Frank Cass, London 1970). London: Lowndes.

Patrick, Peter L. (1997). Style and register in Jamaican Patwa. In Edgar Schneider (ed.), *Englishes around the world: Studies in honour of Manfred Görlach. Vol. 2: Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Australasia*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: Benjamins, 41-56.

Patrick, Peter L., and Payne-Jackson, Arvilla (1996). "Functions of Rasta Talk in a Jamaican Creole healing narrative: 'A bigfoot dem gi' mi'." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 6(1):1-38.

Patterson, Orlando (1967). *The sociology of slavery*. London: Associated University Presses.

----- (1973). Slavery and slave revolts: A sociohistorical analysis of the First Maroon War, 1665-1740. In Richard Price (ed.), *Maroon societies: Rebel slave communities in the Americas*, 246-92. New York: Anchor Books.

Payne, Arvilla (1991). Traditional concepts in Jamaica folk medicine. *Latin American Essays* 3(April):147-160.

Pollard, Velma (1980). Dread Talk: The speech of the Rastafarian in Jamaica. *Caribbean Quarterly* 26(4):32-41.

----- (1990). The speech of the Rastafarians of Jamaica in the Eastern Caribbean: The case of St. Lucia. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 85: 81-90. Reprinted in Pollard (1994), *Dread Talk*, 45-57.

----- (1994). *Dread Talk: The language of Rastafari*. Kingston: Canoe Press, University of the West Indies Press.

----- (1998). The lexicon of Dread Talk in Standard Jamaican English. In P. Christie, B. Lalla, V. Pollard and L. Carrington, eds., *Studies in Caribbean language, II*, 178-186. St. Augustine, Trinidad: Society for Caribbean Linguistics.

Rickford, John Russell, and Rickford, Angela (1976). Cut-eye and suck-teeth: Masked Africanisms in New World guise. *Journal of American Folklore* 89(353):249-309.

Roberts, Peter A. (1988). *West Indians and their language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schuler, Monica (1979). Myalism and the African religious tradition in Jamaica. In Margaret Crahan and Franklin W. Knight (eds.), *Africa and the Caribbean: The legacies of a link*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

----- (1980). *"Alas, alas, Kongo": A social history of indentured African immigration into Jamaica, 1841-1865.* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Seaga, Edward (1969). Revival cults in Jamaica: Notes towards a sociology of religion. *Jamaica Journal* 3(2):3-13.

Simpson, George Eaton (1970). *Religious cults of the Caribbean: Trinidad, Jamaica and Haiti*. Rio Piedras: Institute of Caribbean Studies, University of Puerto Rico.

----- (1978). *Black religions in the New World*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Smith, Michael G., Augier, Roy; and Nettleford, Rex (1960). *Report on the Rastafari movement in Kingston, Jamaica*. Monograph. Kingston, JA: Institute of Social and Economic Research.

Vest, Jennifer (1992). History of Revivalist tradition in Jamaica and the role of women and healing within it. MA thesis. Washington DC: Howard University, Dept. of History.

Wedenoja, William (1989). Mothering and the practice of 'Balm' in Jamaica. In Carol Shepherd McClain (ed.), *Women as healers: Cross-cultural perspectives*, 76-97. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.