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Schizophrenic Worshippers and Monolingual Gods: Deconstructing the Jamaican Discourse on Language in Religion

Joseph T. Farquharson, *University of the West Indies, St. Augustine*



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Schizophrenic worshippers and monolingual gods: Deconstructing the Jamaican discourse on language in religion

Joseph T. Farquharson
University of the West Indies, St. Augustine
joseph.farquharson@sta.uwi.edu

Whereas religious expressions in Jamaica have generally been studied in the context of ideology and philosophy, scholars often ignore the central role that language plays in religion. In so doing we have missed the insights to be gained from exploring the attitude of worshippers to the various linguistic codes they have at their disposal, and what they intend to signal by their choice of one code over the other. The paper, through analyses of newspaper articles, historical accounts, works of fiction, etc., deconstructs the national discourse on language in religion which has been carried on in Jamaica over the past three centuries. Even as the paper appropriates the tools of postcolonial literary theory, it foregrounds the circular nature of hegemony by unveiling auto-hegemonic linguistic practices in Jamaican religious expression. Worshippers-cum-speakers make linguistic choices that, on the surface, are not consonant with the physical and political freedom that they supposedly enjoy. This provides further evidence that as with all social phenomena, the ideological landscape is much more complex than the binary concepts common in postcolonial criticism would have us believe.

Name: Joseph T. Farquharson

Joseph T. Farquharson is a lecturer in linguistics in the Department of Liberal Arts at the St. Augustine campus of the University of the West Indies. His research interests include lexicography, morphology, syntax, and cultural studies. In addition to several peer-reviewed articles on pragmatics, morphology, literature, and language and identity, Farquharson has recently co-edited with Lars Hinrichs (Texas) the volume *Variation in the Caribbean: From Creole Continua to Individual Agency*.

Affiliation: University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Email: joseph.farquharson@sta.uwi.edu

Phone: (868) 701 1866