A striving for authenticity figures prominently in people’s social behaviour, fulfilling a social-regulative function. Every individual member of a society may be authentic in a minimal sense to the different domains and levels of the collective social system – for instance to the web of cultural meanings (Geertz 1973), in which various forms of cultural learning and mimetic practices effect the conservation of traditional values and norms and make possible the prediction of the behaviour of social agents (Strathern 2004). Authenticity has also been associated with and explained in terms of “the social regulation of [a person’s] emotions” and “a personal ethical ideal” (Salmela and Mayer 2009, 2), which of course makes authenticity something which may be approached but hardly fully attained and/or sustained. Also, being authentic, as an assumed condition of autonomy, implies that a person can only be authentic, or autonomous if they “act for reasons that are truly [their] own” (Betzler 2009, 51).

Linguistically, the quest for authenticity expresses itself in discourse at all levels of formality and mediated indirectness, i.e. in what has been referred to as the discursive construction of authenticity and inauthenticity (Coupland 2001). Context, as an “interactively constituted mode of praxis” (Duranti and Goodwin 1992, 9), may be linguistic, social, cultural or stylistic in nature and plays an important part in producing or failing to produce authenticity. Different situational frameworks of linguistic authenticity may be distinguished, e.g. the traditional, local and supposedly “natural” environment of spontaneous face-to-face interaction, but also non-territorial spaces such as media platforms provided by local radio or online chat forums, to name but a few.

As will be appreciated, the wide conception of linguistic authenticity which we are advocating here goes against both widespread folk notions of genuine dialect and the traditional consensus in variationist sociolinguistics, which both hold that the geographical or social context in which languages (or varieties) originated is where the most authentic speakers are to be found. In that respect, vernacular or basilectal Creole speakers – speakers whose speech is furthest removed from the standard form of a language – would therefore stand as the best representatives of linguistic authenticity. From the viewpoint of classic variationism, authenticity would tend to correlate with
geographically and socially demarcated settings, where authentic speech behaviour manifests itself along a socio-stylistic continuum. Contrary to this position, however, we, and several contributors to this special issue, would argue that authenticity can also emerge in communities of practice (Meyerhoff 2002), whether they constitute themselves in fairly localisable social frameworks or in deterritorialised media spheres (Mair and Lacoste fc.).

A couple of questions arise from this: Is authenticity the yardstick to distinguish between language use in a tightly knit local community ‘on the ground’ and a widely dispersed, loosely knit web-based community with fluctuating membership? Does authenticity correlate with situated adaptive behaviours? Can it also constitute the grounds for performative flexibility? When re-defined as the product of processes of discursive authentication, linguistic authenticity may reveal itself to be an adaptive and flexible concept, relevant to any communicative constellation (oral vs. written, face-to-face/direct vs. mediated/distant, spoken vs. sung) in which speakers work together to create shared “contexts of intelligibility” (Blommaert 2010, 108) and respond to sociolinguistic and socio-cultural changes in a flexible manner (Lacoste et al. fc.).

But how do we get from the general problem of ‘authenticity in discourse and interaction’ to the specific issue of ‘authenticity in creole-speaking contexts’? We hope to show in this special issue that there are many creole-speaking contexts which offer extremely propitious historical, linguistic and socio-cultural platforms to study linguistic authenticity in highly mobile populations, in the local and global media (old and new) and, not least, in conditions of economic commodification. The high international profile of some Jamaican Creole vernacular resources, for example, is in no small measure due to their having become marketable goods for the global entertainment industry.

In the Caribbean, the Atlantic Slave Trade has made the history of the region a painful one, characterised by fragmentation, discontinuity, disruption and destruction of traditions, and unexpected types of forced cultural and social contact. Sometimes, the suffering released creative energies, which manifested themselves in various types of syncretism, the hybridisation and fusion of cultures. In view of the demographic and sociolinguistic disruptions which are at the foundation of modern Caribbean history, one may wonder whether linguistic creolisation historically represented a scenario where speakers of the lingua franca, or pidgin, displayed ‘inauthentic' linguistic behaviours, as they lost their linguistic autonomy and, with it, the sense of stability created by the generation-to-generation transmission of languages. Linguistic identities were confused, permuted and then perhaps re-established with the birth of creoles, at least if one follows classic accounts of creole genesis. Beside linguistic concerns, one might want to examine whether linguistic creolisation can serve as a template to understand Afro-Caribbean culture, which was for a long time described in negative terms of break-down
Introduction

and imperfect mimicry of authentic models, although there is nowadays an
emphasis on recovering and promoting the Afro-Caribbean heritage especially
in music and the arts.

In the present, a different kind of destabilisation and fluidity is challenging
us to rethink notions of what is ‘authentically creole’. A colonial situation with
a neat sub-division into British, French, Dutch and Spanish political and
linguistic spheres of influence has given way to a highly fluid contemporary
zone of cultural and linguistic contact in which centres may shift and the
peripheries are much less clear than they were before. In the days of Empire, it
was relatively easy to define the British West Indies (as they were then
known) as a geographical location. Today's Anglophone Caribbean, by
contrast, is much less of a geographical notion, comprising important
diasporic communities in Britain, the US and Canada and, ultimately, also a
global ethnoscape and mediascape (Appadurai 1996) whose members
authenticate themselves by selectively using and circulating Caribbean creole
linguistic resources. The situation is comparable in the traditionally
Francophone/French-Creole sphere. Today, English is a much more important
strand in the sociolinguistic fabric of Haiti than it was in the 18th and 19th
centuries, just as Haitian Creole is much more visible in English-speaking
North America than ever before.

In most post-colonial communities, there has been a process of
endonormative standardisation, promoting the use of the locally emerging
standard in schools, public places and governmental institutions. In Jamaica,
for instance, this has led to the emergence of Jamaican Standard English as a
new local norm gradually establishing itself alongside with or even instead of
the traditional British colonial standard and the currently powerful US norm.
Although Jamaican Creole has not been officially standardised, it has become
a potentially even more powerful source of post-colonial authenticity. In these
contemporary creolophone societies, an important task is to uncover the
multi-layered functions of linguistic authenticity in continuum situations
where speakers have to navigate between the vernacular, i.e. the Creole
language, and its standard or acrolectal counterpart. We may ask how
speakers’ notions of linguistic and socio-cultural authenticity impact on the
assignation of overt and covert sociolinguistic prestige, as quite clearly a
dichotomous model in which all (and only) the overt prestige rests with the
acrolect and all (and only) the covert prestige with the creole is no longer
sufficient.

Contexts of language use reflecting mediated communication in diasporic
communities (for example, online forums and the arts) may be other good
candidates for studying how (virtual) linguistic authenticities are deployed
(Heyd and Mair fc.). In the diasporic and media spheres, the presence of large
numbers of occasional and less than fully competent users of creole languages
 raisesthe issue of authenticity in yet another form. In line with Coupland, we
ask: “Can mediated vernaculars retain their capacity to enact or represent
whatever authentic values they hold in ‘real’ social encounters?” (2009, 284). The promotion and the globalisation of aspects of Afro-Caribbean folk culture, marginalised religions such as Rastafarianism, and Caribbean creole languages suggest that the speakers concerned select and codify non-standard forms as authentic responses to the demands of the new medium or context. Their concern is not necessarily about complete replicability of island or traditional creole languages in a mimetic manner, but rather about selecting those vernacular resources that can be transported into the written or digital mode, in order to index local affiliation to Afro-Caribbean cultures and languages in a medium-specific way.

Overall, this special issue on authenticity in creole-speaking contexts proposes a situationally embedded notion of authenticity, paying particular attention to the historical, linguistic, socio-pragmatic and cultural underpinnings of the notion in creole-speaking settings. Authenticity is discussed in relation to (the generally preferred notion of) processes of authentication (Bucholtz 2003). Authenticity is first examined through the lens of the arts. Maike Lengemann investigates how politically motivated local artists use language in ever-changing ways to create authentic performances in a changing socio-political environment in almost four decades of evolution of Trinidadian rapso music. Next, Akinmade T. Akande highlights the different ways in which Nigerian hip-hop rappers appropriate African American Vernacular English and Jamaican Creole (or Patois) in their lyrics. A similar analytical perspective informs Mark Sebba and Susan Dray’s contribution, which illustrates how authentic language is done ‘in practice’ by British youth while using what has been referred to as ‘jafaican’, an approximation of a Creole language variety spoken by a person who is not of African-Caribbean origin. Agata Daleszynska continues on processes of authentication in relation to globalisation in a Creole speech community in the Caribbean island of Bequia. Finally, Valerie Youssef examines the relationship between language perception and authenticity through codification and literary representations with specific reference to Trinidad and Tobago, arguing that mixed varieties and mixed language usage should also be regarded as ‘authentic’.

Authenticity, alongside its multifaceted constituents, remains a most challenging notion for work in sociolinguistics and in the humanities as a whole. This special issue seeks to bring together sociolinguists and more specifically creolists in an effort to respond to some of those acknowledged definitional challenges.

Works Cited


