

A Note on West-African Pidgin English

I enjoyed the interesting article in *Names* 24.4, "The Day Faith Died" by Gilbert D. Schneider and Walter M. Brasch. The Cameroonian lorry names reminded me of the pushcart names of Jamaica, W.I.,¹ obviously in the same tradition.

But may I offer correction of one detail? On page 232, line 15, *las fo mowtow* (the exhaust) is translated as "the last thing of the motor; the behind." This it certainly means, as the authors understand in also calling the exhaust the *anus*. But *las* is actually to be derived from *arse*, and has cognate forms in related English-based creoles: Jamaican *raas*²; Sierra Leone Krio *rasól*, rectum, and *rasklót*, sanitary napkin,³ and for the *l*-form as in Cameroon, Surinam creole (or Sranan) *lasí*, "het achterdeel, achterste, aars", which is derived from "Eng. arse".⁴ The word was certainly borrowed early into pidgins, and continued in creoles, in one form or another; it has made its way also into Chinese pidgin as *as*, buttocks.⁵ (I suspect it is used in other creoles not accessible to me.)

The sequence of development would logically have been from *arse* by metathesis to *ra(a)s* then by lambdacism to *las*. The *r*-less form *as* corresponds to American *ass*, *arse*. It is not impossible that the initial *r* was due to metanalysis from *your ass*, but metathesis seems to me the simpler and more likely explanation. In this development the *l*-forms (so Cameroon and Sranan) do indeed become homonymous with *last*; it is also true that the buttocks *come last* in the human body. Such a coincidence of coincidences is understandably misleading.

While we are at it, another suggestion: I take the word *gari* (page 235, line 2 up) to represent *gully*. If this is right, it would be an example of the contrary substitution: *r* for *l*. It would also make a far better translation of the proverbial saying than does *gari* (from *gurry*?) meaning grated cassava.

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¹ David DeCamp, "Cart Names in Jamaica," *Names* 8.1, March 1960, pp. 15-23. See also J. L. Dillard, *Afro-American and Other Vehicle Naming Practices*, Institute of Caribbean Studies, Special Study 1, 1965; Dillard "Names or Slogans. . ." *Caribbean Studies* 9.4, Jan. 1970, pp. 104-110.

² F. G. Cassidy and R. B. LePage, *Dictionary of Jamaican English*, Cambridge University Press, 1967.

³ Ian F. Hancock, *Dictionary of Sierra Leone Krio*, London 1970 sixth draft (prepublication).

⁴ Hendrik C. Focke, *Neger-Engelsch Woordenboek*, Leiden 1855, p. 70.

⁵ John J. Murphy, *The Book of Pidgin English*, Brisbane (Smith & Paterson) 1966 (revised ed.).