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Linguistic Parallels: *The Igbo Influence on Patwa's Body Naming And Lingua*

By Chuka Odike

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LINGUISTIC PARALLELS

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Abstract Jamaican Patwa, a Creole language born from the transatlantic slave trade, carries profound linguistic and cultural imprints of West African languages, particularly Igbo. One striking area of this influence is the naming structure of body parts in Patwa, which reflects the descriptive and symbolic tendencies of the Igbo language. This article explores the linguistic...

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Jamaican Patwa, a Creole language born from the transatlantic slave trade, carries profound linguistic and cultural imprints of West African languages, particularly Igbo. One striking area of this influence is the naming structure of body parts in Patwa, which reflects the descriptive and symbolic tendencies of the Igbo language. This article explores the linguistic parallels between Igbo and Patwa, demonstrating how symbolic and location-based naming conventions have been preserved and adapted. The shared features reveal how African languages have shaped the linguistic landscape of the Caribbean, ensuring cultural continuity despite displacement.

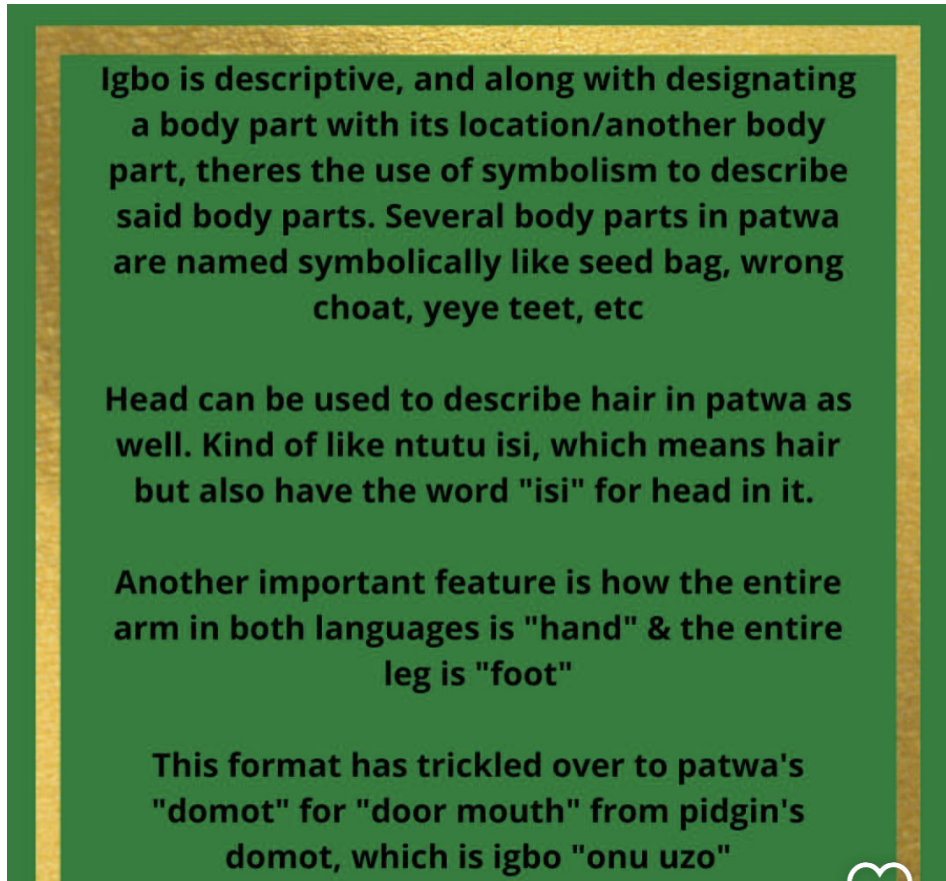


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Introduction

Jamaican Patwa, also known as Jamaican Creole, emerged as a product of cultural exchange and survival during the transatlantic slave trade. Its vocabulary, grammar, and idiomatic expressions often trace their roots back to African languages, with Igbo standing out as a significant contributor. The descriptive naming of body parts in Patwa closely mirrors the Igbo naming system, both in structure and symbolism. This connection serves as a testament to the enduring legacy of African languages in Caribbean culture.

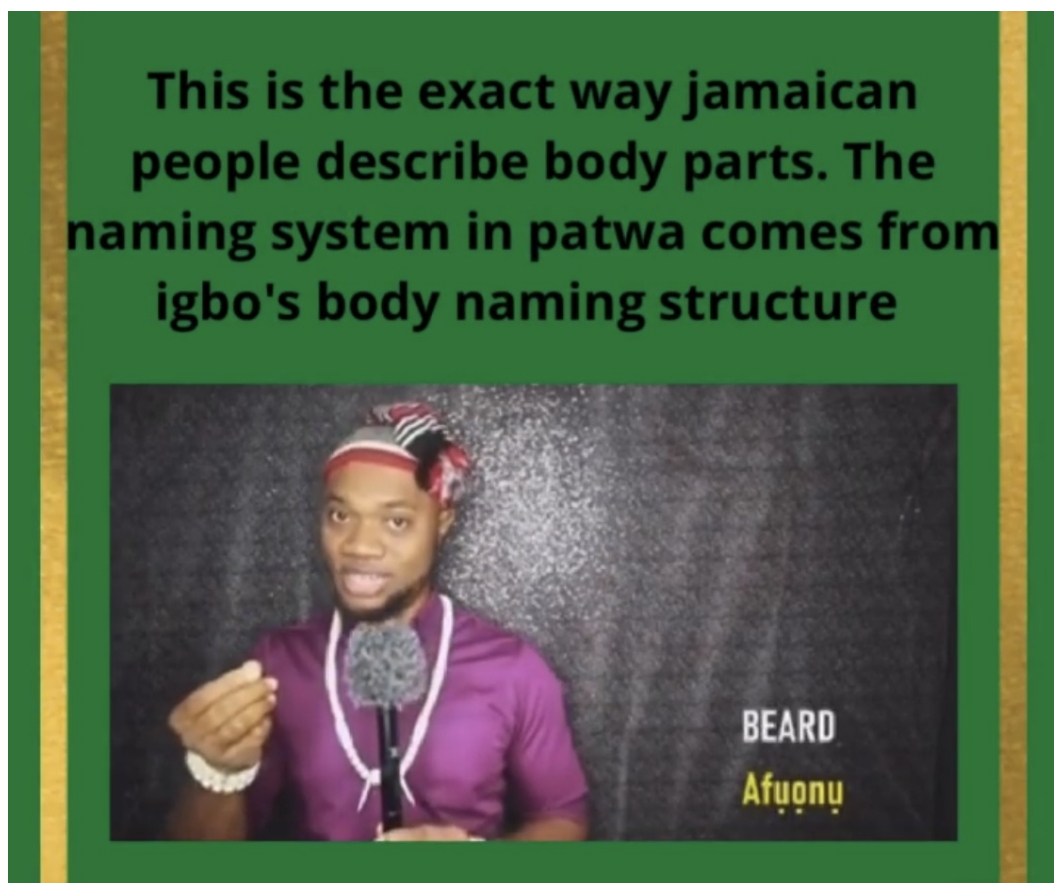


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Descriptive and Symbolic Naming of Body Parts

In both Igbo and Patwa, body parts are named descriptively, often combining references to physical features, functions, or symbolic associations.

In Igbo, body parts are often named by referencing their location or another body part. For example:

Similarly, Patwa retains this descriptive structure:

Hair: Referred to as “head” in some contexts, similar to the inclusion of isi (head) in Igbo’s ntutu isi.

Soles: “Foot bottom,” echoing the Igbo obu ukwu.

Palm: “Han miggie,” mirroring obu aka (middle of the hand).

Both languages use symbolic descriptors to name body parts:

In Igbo, the tonsils are called aki akpiri (literally “seed of the throat”), emphasizing their shape and location.

In Patwa, the testicles are referred to as “seed bag,” symbolizing their function in reproduction.

In both languages, the entire arm is referred to as “hand” (aka in Igbo, “han” in Patwa). Similarly, the entire leg is “foot” (ukwu in Igbo, “foot” in Patwa).

Pluralization in Patwa often relies on context or additional markers rather than suffixes like “s.” For example, “two hands” is rendered as “han dem” or “2 han,” echoing Igbo’s otu aka for “one hand.”

Body Part	Igbo	Igbo/Patwa Translation or notes	Patwa
Tears	Anya mmiri	Eye water	Yeye wata
Saliva	Onu mmiri	Mouth Water	Mout wata
Pupil	Anya ojii	"Eye-black/eye baby"	Eye baby
Nostrils	Oghele imi	-	Nouz hol
Lips	Egbugbele onu	Lip Mouth	Mout lip
Hand/ Arm	Aka	-	Han
Elbow	Nku Aka	-	Han elbow
Palm	ọbụ aka	-	Han miggie
Waist	Ukwu	Can also be vagina/ butt in Patwa	Ukku
Leg/ foot/ feet	ụkwụ	-	Foot
Heel	àní ụkwū	-	Foot/ Heel back
Soles	ọbụ ụkwū	-	Foot bottom

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Connection to Broader Linguistic Patterns

The influence of Igbo extends beyond body parts to other descriptive terms in Patwa. For instance, the word "door mouth" (domot in Patwa) for a doorway derives from the Igbo "onu uzo" (mouth of the door). Such parallels highlight the consistency in semantic structures between the two languages.

Igbo words that are commonly found in Jamaican Creole (Patwa), reflecting the influence of the Igbo language on Jamaican culture and speech:

1. Unu/Una – Meaning "you (plural)." In Igbo, unu means "you

(plural),” which is directly carried over to Jamaican Patwa.

2. Nyam – Meaning “to eat.” Derived from Igbo *nyā*, which means “to eat.”

3. Pikin – Meaning “child” or “small child.” From Igbo *nwa pịkìn* (small child).

4. Di – Meaning “the.” Similar to the Igbo *dị* example; “*nke dị*”, which is a copula or used to describe existence.

5. Chaka-chaka – Meaning “messy” or “disorganized.” from Igbo onomatopoeic expressions for disorder. “*O na eme chaka-chaka*”.

6. Akra – Refers to a fried dough or fritter, similar to Igbo *àkàrà*, which refers to fried bean cakes.

7. Duppy – Meaning “ghost” or “spirit.” Possibly linked to the Igbo word *ndụ mmụọ*, meaning “spirit life.”

8. Oonoo – Another form of “you (plural).” Reflects the Igbo *unu*.

9. Pickney – Meaning “child.” From Igbo *pikin*, a term for small children.

10. Soso – Meaning “only” or “nothing but.” Similar to the Igbo word *sọsọ*, meaning “only” or “just.”

11. Bobi – Meaning “breast.” Similar to the Igbo *àkụ bọbọ*, which can refer to breast or milk in some dialects.

12. Imu – Meaning “nose.” Derived from Igbo *imi*, meaning “nose.”

13. Ochi – Meaning “laughter.” Similar to Igbo *ọchị*, which means “laughter.”

These words demonstrate the linguistic impact of Igbo speakers in

Jamaica, blending with English and other African influences to create the unique language of Jamaican Patwa.

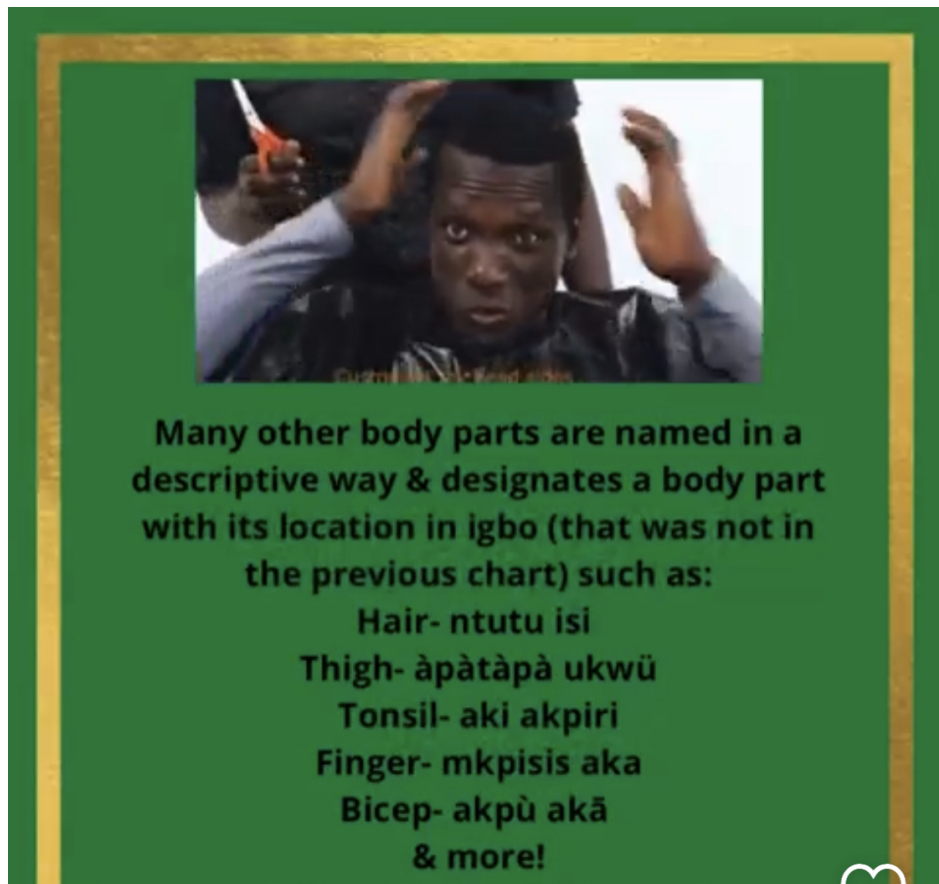


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Cultural and Linguistic Significance

The descriptive nature of Igbo body naming reflects a worldview that emphasizes interconnectedness and functionality. This linguistic feature was preserved and adapted in Patwa, demonstrating the resilience of African cultural expressions in the Caribbean. The symbolic naming of body parts in both languages also underscores a shared cultural tendency to inspire language with metaphorical richness.

Conclusion

The parallels between Igbo and Patwa body naming structures reveal the deep linguistic and cultural impact of African heritage in Jamaica. These shared features not only reflect historical connections but also highlight the adaptability of African linguistic traditions in new cultural contexts. The enduring influence of Igbo in Patwa underscores the resilience of African identity and its ability to shape and enrich the Caribbean linguistic landscape.

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Comparative linguistic analyses of African languages and Caribbean Creoles.

Examples of symbolic body part naming in other African diaspora languages.

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I'm a dedicated civil engineer with a passion for infrastructure development and community empowerment. With a strong background in engineering, my work focuses on creating sustainable solutions for urban and rural development projects. Outside of my professional career, I'm deeply interested in Igbo history and culture. I actively explores ways to impact society by using historical lessons to inspire and educate others about the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people, aiming to bridge tradition and modern development.



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