

Overstanding Idren: Special Features of Rasta Talk Morphology*

Benjamin Slade
University of Utah, Dept. of Linguistics
b.slade@utah.edu

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‘Me no stutter, no stammer, so nah try feh edit me grammar.

Power gone, you cannot duplicate I sound.’

Prezident Brown & Axx of Jahpostles

‘I Sound Is From Creation’

I Sound Is From Creation (2012)

Tads Records

1. Intro

Far from being simply a dialect of English or an anglophone creole (or just a variant of Jamaican patois), ‘Dread Talk’ reflects the speaker’s resistance to perceived oppression (both historical colonial prejudice and current economic disenfranchisement) and the sense of the overwhelming potential spiritual redemption that Rastas can achieve. Here patterns of speech really do reflect patterns of thought. (Pollard 2000: xiii)

As Pollard (2000) indicates, the speech variety variously called ‘Dread Talk’, ‘Rasta Talk’, ‘Iyaric’, ‘Livalect’ &c. has a number of features which distinguish it from both Jamaican Creole (‘patois’, ‘patwa’) and other varieties of English.¹ Pollard (2000) examines lexical/morphological features of Rasta Talk, grouping innovative forms into three categories: Category I ‘in which known items bear new meanings’; Category II, ‘words whose phonology bear/are made to bear the weight of their phonological implication’; Category III, ‘/ai/ words’.

The formal linguistic features of Rasta Talk have not in general attracted the attention that they deserve. The majority of serious studies of the formal properties of this language variety are those of Velma Pollard (1980; 1982; 1983; 1990; 2000) and more recently by Havenol Schrenk (2015; 2016).² I concentrate here on two particular morphological, word-building processes of Rasta Talk which are linguistically unusual and thus interesting: specifically, what are referred to as **overstandings** (Slade 2009, Zwicky 2009), roughly corresponding to Pollard’s

¹*Iyaric* is an I-word form based on *Amharic*; *livalect* is an overstanding from *dialect*, see Table 1 below.

²Other in-depth discussions of Rasta Talk tend to focus more heavily on sociolinguistic and other non-formal features, including Chevannes 1994; Homiak 1995; Patrick & Payne-Jackson 1996; Patrick 1997; McFarlane 1998; Bean 2014, amongst others.

Category II words (the two sets are overlapping but non-identical), and **I-words**, Pollard's Category III.

In his introduction to Pollard (2000), Rex Nettleford remarks regarding Pollard's Category II words:

There are also words which bear the weight of their phonological implications though in need of explanation for understanding. 'Downpress' which is used for 'oppress' makes more sense to the Rasta man, then, since if one is being pressed (weighted) down by the injustice and marginality of his Babylonian captivity, this cannot possibly be 'up' (sc. 'op'). (Nettleford, in introduction to Pollard 2000: xi)

The characterisation of this class of words is adopted directly from Pollard's text, 'words [that] bear the weight of their phonological implications' (Pollard 2000: 24), though elsewhere she formulates the class in slightly different, 'active' terms as 'words whose phonology is made to bear the precise burden of meaning' (Pollard 2000: 9). This latter definition is preferable, given that this particular class of words exhibits a specific type of morphophonological reformation. Pollard (2000: *passim*) provides numerous examples of this category of words (her Category II) — though I would suggest that her Category II does not actually form a homogeneous class.

One of the goals of the present study is to distinguish overstandings from, on the one hand, folk etymology (change in the form of a word based on misunderstanding or unfamiliarity of a speaker with one or more of its components), and on the other hand from punning and other types of wordplay. Overstandings resemble both of these morphological processes, and, indeed, some of Pollard's Category II words are not overstandings but superficially similar types of wordplay. I examine the principles underlying the process of forming overstandings, and present formal criteria for distinguishing these from seemingly similar processes.

I-words, I would argue, are even further removed from word-play and punning than are overstandings. Thus I disagree with Nettleford's assessment:

The play on words — a Jamaican facility that extends from theatrical punning to everyday speech — is artlessly embraced by the Rastafarian in the repertoire of 'I' (ai) words which Mrs Pollard indicates will, on closer examination, disclose that 'ai' is not merely used as

a pronominal form to replace the Jamaican Creole ‘mi’ but is also used as prefix to some nouns a replacement for the initial sound in any number of words of varying function in a sentence.(Nettleford, in introduction to Pollard 2000: xi–xii)

Rather, both overstandings and I-words are features of the Rastafari concept of ‘word-sound-(power)’, which, as Homiak (1985: 289) describes it, ‘has both iconic and indexical characteristics (and which expresses a creative conjunction between internal subjective realities and external events)’. Or, as Chevannes (1994: 227) suggests, the idea that ‘word is both sound and power. It is sound not only because its effect is aural but also because it is capable of quality, capable of being “sweet”, of thrilling the hearer. It is power because it can inspire responses such as fear or anger or submission.’ Another suggested explanation of Rastafari ‘word-sound-power’ is ‘[that it] signifies the shared experience of sound quality, the agency and spiritual potential of a speaker, and the collective resistance against linguistic forms imposed by colonial rule’ (Bean 2014: 49). That is, ‘word-sound-power’ is at least a partial rejection of the normally arbitrary relation between signifier and signified, and an attempt to wrestle external signifiers into shapes resembling their semantic signification.

The examination of I-words constitutes the second half of this study: the other major goal of this study being to delve into the diachronic evolution of I-words and the process which creates them:— which I dub **Iformation**, as a self-illustrating term, parallel to overstanding. I suggest the possibility that reformations in the pronominal system of Rasta Talk ultimately do in fact form a primary source for the productive morphological process of I-word formation, though perhaps not the sole source. I suggest a possible path of development for I-words, and provide some discussion of their phonological and semantic properties.

Aside from the examples drawn from the secondary literature, my examples were generally gathered opportunistically, as I came across them in texts or music, or on the internet. In other cases, in order to gather more examples of particular forms in context, I conducted web-searches. As an anonymous reviewer points out (and as I have tried to indicate where relevant) in some case the online examples cannot be positively identified as generated by Jamaican speakers of Rasta Talk.

Drawing data from online sources, particularly forums, is problematic in the sense that it is generally hard to determine speakers’ linguistic backgrounds; many

of the Rastafari forums have large non-Caribbean membership, including many members resident in non-English speaking countries. Some of these members may be Jamaicans resident in those countries,³ but certainly the forums include many ethnic Germans, Danes, Swedes &c. This raises a more general problem of Rasta Talk and the question of ‘authenticity’: do innovations in Rasta Talk made by non-Caribbean speakers ‘count’? Even Caribbean Rasta Talk is far from uniform — see Pollard (2000: 53–68) on differences between Jamaican Rasta Talk and the varieties found in St Lucia and Barbados. Pollard discusses an interesting case of a Jamaican Rasta Talk item *ital* ‘spiritually clean’⁴ being re-analysed by Barbadian speakers as *high-tal*,⁵ which opened the door for a later Barbadian creation of *low-tal* ‘unclean’ as an antonym of *ital/high-tal* (Pollard 2000: 59–60).

For online examples I have favoured cases where the context makes it more likely that the source is Jamaican; for certain examples I have my doubts about speaker’s/writer’s control of Rasta Talk, e.g. (23b), (23c). However, as Havenol Schrenk points out (p.c.), even non-Jamaican examples of Rasta Talk, as found in the Rasta Talk speech forms of speakers in other parts of the Caribbean — and indeed in some linguistic productions of non-Caribbean speakers — who have internalised ideological tenets of the Rastafari philosophy and Rasta Talk speech patterns, can be interesting and instructive, as may be the case for forms like *downsession*, see discussion around (15). Certainly the extension of Rasta Talk features to other languages and linguistic contexts is of some interest (see Williams 2016 for a study of a South African context involving Rasta Talk), but is beyond the scope of this study.

2. Overstandings

Overstandings involve a morphological reforming based on (1) a perceived morphological analysis of a word, (2) switching of an element standing in a binary opposition to the other member of the opposition, in accordance to perceived positive/negative connotations of the words. The concept of ‘comprehension’ is positive, but *understand* is perceived to be composed of *under* in the sense of ‘below, lesser, lacking’ (cp. *underling*, *underhanded*, *underfunded*, *underdeveloped*,

³On uses of Rasta Talk in the diaspora, see Hinrichs (2015).

⁴See (31) below for discussion.

⁵See fn. 56 on the non-phonemic status of /h/ in Jamaican Creole.

underpay &c.)⁶ and *stand*. *Under* stands in a binary opposition to *over*, and thus the word is reformed as *overstand*, as if *understanding* meant ‘a lesser, lacking comprehension’ and *overstanding* thus ‘a higher, full comprehension’.⁷

At first blush overstandings appear to be a type of folk etymology⁸, where a speaker’s unfamiliarity with one or more morphemes (or putative morphemes) of a word, either due to the obsolescence of that element in the language, or because the word is from a foreign language unfamiliar to the speaker, or due to a more general mishearing or misunderstanding on the part of the speaker.

Examples of folk-etymologies from loan words into English include:

- (1) a. *woodchuck* ‘N. American marmot, also known as a groundhog’
< an Algonquin form like *otchek*, perhaps Cree *wuchak*
- b. *cockroach* < Spanish *cucaracha*
- c. *crayfish* < Norman French *creveis*
- d. *cold slaw* ‘a salad made with raw cabbage and mayonnaise/buttermilk, usually served chilled’ < *cole slaw* (an anglicisation of Dutch *koolsla* ‘cabbage salad’)
- e. *sparrow grass* < Latin *asparagus*

Examples of folk-etymologies from native English words where one of the elements became archaic include:

- (2) a. *bridegroom* < Old English (OE) *brydguma* ‘bride-man’ (OE *guma* ‘man’)
- b. *hangnail* < OE *angnægl* (where *ang-* ‘pain’ is cognate with *anguish* &c.)
- c. *sand-blind* (as if ‘blinded by the sand’) < OE *sam-blind* ‘half-blind’ (*sam-* is a once-common prefix cognate with Latin *semi-*)

Example of folk-etymologies arising from mishearing or misunderstandings include:

⁶Historically, the *under* of *understand* had the sense of ‘amongst, in’.

⁷A nice illustrative quotation: ‘Babylon try fi keep the people Under-Stand, but Rasta come fi mek them Over-Stand!’ from <http://forums.rastaman.co.uk/smf/index.php/topic,4011.msg57523.html#msg57523>.

⁸Folk-etymologies are also sometimes referred to as ‘eggcorns’ (Lieberman 2003), particularly when not well-established, or representing one-offs. For a collection of a number of English folk etymologies, see Palmer (1882); also see the Eggcorn Database [<http://eggcorns.lascribe.net/>] for modern examples.

- (3) a. *when all is **set*** and done* [*=*said*]
 b. *a new **leash*** on life* [*=*lease*]
 c. *a **hare**'s* breadth* [*=*hair*'s]
 d. ***baited*** breath* [*=*bated* (cognate with *abate*, i.e. 'halted breath')]

Overstandings differ sharply, in fact, from folk etymology, when the features of these processes are examined. Folk etymologies all involve morphological re-formations where the new phonological form is similar to the earlier phonological form. Thus *sparrow grass* is similar, phonologically, to *asparagus*, /gɹu:m/ is minimally different from /gum/ &c. In some cases there is an attempt to preserve some sort of sense: having sand in one's eyes is sort of like being half-blind, cole slaw is often served cold, asparagus has green stalks, like grass &c. Though in some cases, e.g. *woodchuck*, there is little sense in the folk-etymologised form — note that it still bears an obvious phonological similarity to the original Algonquin form.

The process of overstanding involves no requirement that the resulting form have any sort of phonological identity or similarity to the original form. Rather, the constraint on the resulting form is that the perceived semantics of the component pieces of morphology have to bear a compositional relationship to the perceived semantics of the word as a whole. Thus *understanding* violates this constraint, if the semantic contribution of *under* is taken to be something like 'lesser', 'lacking' &c., as this would suggest that *understanding* should mean something like 'lesser comprehension'. The transformation to *overstanding* thus matches the expected interpretation of 'fuller comprehension'.

An examination of overstandings shows that all of the transformations involve 'flips' of elements in binary oppositions, one negatively-charged, one positively-charged. See the examples in (4); here we observe the following binary oppositions: *under:over*, *down:up*, *out:in*, *hate:love*, *dead:(a)live*, respectively. This binary opposition of negative:positive might be even better formulated as Babylonian:Zionic, as *downpression* and *outformers* are associated with Babylon, with *apprecilove* and *livication* are associated with Zion — in the sense that Rasta Talk has a clear lexicalisation of the concepts of 'our group' vs. '(hostile) outsiders' in the terms *Zion* and *Babylon*.

Note that overstandings fit into Rasta Talk's linguistic pattern of reversal of

certain kinds of binary prototypical ‘good’ vs. ‘bad’ oppositions, especially the connotations of *black* vs. *white*, of which a nice example is Rasta Talk *blackheart man* which means ‘a righteous, good-hearted man’ (Katz 2009).

- (4)
 - a. *overstand* < *understand*
 - b. *downpress* < *oppress* (as if *up+press*)
 - c. *outformer* < *informer* (in the negative sense of ‘grass, snitch’)
 - d. *apprecilove* < *appreciate* (as if *appreci-hate*)
 - e. *livicate* < *dedicate* (as if *dead-icate*)

- (5)
 - a. Ras Mandingo, you original question puts a serious limitation pon the overstanding of Rastafari. Cause Rasta a not no ‘organized religious faith’ like some church denomination. Seen.⁹
 - b. Babylon School Downpress Rasta¹⁰
 - c. Cockney say grass, We say outformer man [Smiley Culture, ‘Cockney Translation’, 1984]¹¹
 - d. I-man personally highly apprecilove the courageous and lucid analysis’s that led this Elder to confront rhetoric (formal discourse) of Rastafari Livity with effective negative realities resulting from Babylonian behaviours plaguing InI communities.¹²
 - e. Livicate rasta concentration energy to goodness sake, from any plutonium, uranium or yellow cake. [Midnite, ‘Vibration’, *Ina Now*, Rastar Records (2009)]¹³

Examples like (4b), (4d), (4e) make it clear that folk etymological processes may be involved in the process of overstanding, but they are not necessary, nor do they represent an end result. That is, *oppress* is (re-)analysed as if it were *up+press*, before being transformed to *down+press*. *Dedicate* is analysed as if it were *dead+icate*, though etymologically its composition is *de+dicare*. These are processes which are at least very similar to folk-etymology, though perhaps they

⁹<http://rastafaritimes.com/rasnews/viewnews.cgi?newsid1046656525,67496,.shtml>

¹⁰From a forum post from a Rasta whose Catholic school won’t let him grow dreadlocks: <http://www.rastafarispeaks.com/repatriation/index.cgi?noframes;read=34648>

¹¹<http://youtu.be/vvPuj4f5CKw>

¹²<http://rastaites.com/news/feedforward/nomoregoddess.pdf>

¹³<http://www.midnite-culture.com/lyrics/midnite-ina-now/vibration/>. The reggae band Midnite, with frontman/lyricist Vaughn Benjamin, is from and is based out of St Croix, US Virgin Islands (this group, with a slightly different configuration, now is known as Akae Beka).

represent wilful folk etymologies (it is not clear that the original Rastafari speakers who performed these overstandings would have actually felt that, for instance, *dedicate* contains the morpheme *dead*). It is the reformation along binary lines that constitutes the overstanding.

But overstandings, despite their reliance on semantic oppositions, do not operate to create antonyms but rather constitute ‘corrective’ forms with the same core meaning as their base. That is, *overstand* does not mean the opposite of *understand*, rather it ‘corrects’ the putative negative connotations of *understand*. These features make overstandings clearly distinct from other previously identified morphological processes.

- (6) a. *firstnight* < *last night*
 b. *come forward* < *come back*
 c. *wisemind* < *wisdom*

In (6) are three additional well-established overstandings¹⁴ which also fit into the same ‘corrective’ pattern of transformation. In (6a) we see *last* /laas/, which also carries negative connotations of ‘end (of existence)’ replaced by *first*; in (6b), *back*, with suggestions of regression, replaced by *forward* which carries positive connotations of progress; and finally in (6c), the *-dom* of *wisdom* is interpreted as *dumb* and so the word ‘corrected’ to *wisemind* (which involves tweaking of /wiz/ to /waiz/ as well).

I show that, while overstandings also superficially resemble puns and word-play of the pun-ish sort, they are not (*pace* Nettleford’s comment above, as well as Roberts 1988: 36–4 and apparently Patrick 1997). So while forms like *apprecilove* may look like puns at first blush, based on the similarity of certain phonological sequences of the original form (i.e. /iat/) with certain words (i.e. *hate*, realised as /iat/), they actually operate in very different ways.

Puns depend on identity or similarity of phonological forms of elements which bear distinct meanings. Thus in (7) Shakespeare puns *son* with *sun*, two words with identical pronunciations, but very different meanings.

- (7) Now is the winter of our discontent Made glorious summer by this
 son of York [W. Shakespeare, *Richard III*, I.i.1-2]

¹⁴Thanks to Havenol Schrenk for bringing these to my attention.

Thus puns operate when there is a phonological form associated with two opposed meanings (or two phonologically similar forms, with distinct meanings), such that the text can be interpreted in two different ways, according to two different scripts as it were (see Zwicky & Zwicky 1986 and Hempelmann 2003 for more extensive discussion). Thus in (7), there is one reading of the text in which winter is changed into summer by the *sun*, another in which a bad situation is made better by a *son* of the House of York clan.

- (8) How do you fix a train that can't hear? With an engineer.¹⁵
- a. with an engineer 'a train operator; a person who practices engineering'
 - b. with an engine-ear 'an ear for an engine'

The pun in (8) provides another example of how puns operate by referencing two separate interpretations, where each fits an accessible scenario: the first interpretation is contextually-appropriate in that an engineer is an appropriate person to interact with trains in technical ways (even if a train not being able to hear is a non-standard train issue), the other interpretation ('engine-ear') addresses the 'not able to hear' issue.

(9) provides other representative examples of puns. As in example (8), these puns operate by referencing a 'target' word/phrase, which is not overtly present, but which is summoned up via its phonological identity or similarity to the overtly present punning word/phrase.

- (9) Examples of Puns (taken mainly from Sobkowiak 1991)
- a. ingot we trust ('in god we trust' [printed on U.S. currency])
 - b. lava come back to me (lover come back to me)
 - c. where there's a pill* there's a way (*=will)
 - d. nobody knows the rubble* I've seen (*=trouble)
 - e. a crazy mixed up squid* (*=kid)
 - f. buy sheep*, sell deer* (*=cheap, dear)

The type of pun which bears the most resemblance to overstandings is the type which treats the target word/phrase as essentially meaningless or involving

¹⁵http://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/lbvtpg/what_is_the_bestworst_pun_youve_ever_heard/c9ajh0l

a less appropriate or at least less salient meaning than the pun word/phrase. This process which works well with proper names (which behave usually as meaningless designators of people/places), as shown by examples in (10); the typical effect is to produce a derogatory form. Thus punning reformations as in (10) treat the ‘target’ names as needing of modification which ‘reveals’ the ‘true’ character of the person/place/object. The reformation in (10d), for instance, suggests that city would be more appropriately named by referring to its homicide rate.

- (10) Puns involving reformation¹⁶
- a. Smellmo (Elmo)
 - b. Gay-vy Crocket (Davy)
 - c. Apple iBad (iPad), Apple iMoan (iPhone), Amazon Swindle (Kindle)
 - d. Bodymore, Murdaland (Baltimore, Maryland)
 - e. Shitsburgh (Pittsburgh)
 - f. Filthadelphia (Philadelphia)

Note that in all of these examples of puns, (7)–(10), the meaning of the punning form cannot replace the meaning of the target form. That is, both meanings must remain present; where the target meaning disappears, the pun both fails to be a pun and also either becomes uninterpretable/nonsensical (e.g. without the meaning of the target iPhone, iMoan makes little sense or suggests an entirely different product) or misleading (e.g. if the hearer believes, for instance, that a person is actually named Smellmo, and that this name is a non-meaningful designator like other names).

Thus, overstandings are distinct from puns in that they need not reference two different meanings. Once *downpress* has been formed, it does not depend on *oppress* for its meaning, or even necessarily summon up *oppress* in hearers’ minds; in fact, within Rasta Talk, a successful overstanding replaces its source.¹⁷

Note that Rasta Talk does engage punning and wordplay in addition to over-

¹⁶Place-name puns taken from <http://ask.metafilter.com/78838/More-like-St-Smellmo>; the tech examples are all from Richard M. Stallman, iBad and iMoan from <http://stallman.org/archives/2010-sep-dec.html>, Swindle from <https://www.gnu.org/philosophy/copyright-versus-community.html>; Gay-vy Crocket from <http://goo.gl/kttAF>.

¹⁷Manget-Johnson (2008) in fact refers to *downpress* as corresponding to Standard English *depress*, so there truly seems to be no necessarily synchronic connection between the overstanding and its Standard English source.

standings, as illustrated by (11) and (12).

(11) Negatively-charged Rastafari wordplay

- a. politricks (politics) [Peter Tosh]
- b. shitstem (system) [Peter Tosh]
- c. sufferticket (certificate)
- d. liesbury (library)
- e. Combullus (Columbus)

Example (11a) involves a minor modification of the phonological form of the form, playing with the phonological similarity between *-tics* and *tricks*; likewise *shitstem* involves phonological identity of the second syllable of both pun and target, and phonological similarity between *shit* and *sys-*. Example (11c) is more complex, as the pun form involves word-internal metathesis; this example is almost one of intentional folk-etymology (since the pun form is made of two common English words, with the target being more formal, Latinate). The wordplay in (11e) associates Columbus, seen negatively in the Rastafari community, with *comb*, also a negatively-charged word for Rastafari, who often eschew combs and keep uncombed locks.

The positively-charged examples of Rastafari wordplay in (12) work similarly; again these instances of wordplay are similar to folk-etymologies, though apparently intentional rather than accidental.

(12) Positively-charged Rastafari wordplay

- a. Rasta Far Eye (Ras ‘Prince’ Tafari [Haile Selassie’s pre-regnal title & name] > rastafari)
- b. Jah-man-can (Jamaican; [Pollard 46 c.II])
- c. Carried-beyond (Caribbean; ‘because we were carried beyond Africa’ [Mystic Revelation of Rastafari, *Carried beyond* (2007)])

That Rasta Talk also employs punning and word-play should not be surprising, but such examples should be not be collapsed with overstandings.

Returning to true overstandings, *overstand*, *downpress* and their derivatives seem to be among the best established overstandings. *Apprecilove* and *livicate* are also common. However, the overstanding operation is a live, active morphological

process in Rasta Talk, and so new overstandings continue to appear, including some potential one-offs.

An overstanding which enjoys a fairly wide usage and which appears to represent a more recent coinage (it does not appear in Pollard 2000) is *fulljoy*, for which see examples below in (13).

- (13)
- a. 'I am keeping my father's legacy and ambitions alive, of natural and sustainable ideas, of giving back, of sharing, and of making the world a better place - all the values of a true Rastafarian. I am just a vehicle for carrying on what my father started. He was the first entrepreneur. He ran a recording studio in the backyard, a press implant for pressing vinyls, a record shop, and he made T-shirts. So I am proud to do this. I don't just enjoy it, I **fulljoy** it,' Rohan [Marley] told Open Magazine.¹⁸
 - b. Sometimes we try to transform words and change them around even though it's all in the Rasta community where a man would say, "enjoy" and we would say, '**FULL-joy**' or a man would say, 'judgement' and we would say 'FULL-ment'. [Bushman, interview]¹⁹
 - c. 'The [band] name [**Fulljoy**],' says guitarist Mark Cosgrove, is a nod to Jamaican patois. 'When the Jamaicans say "enjoy," it sounds like "end joy," and they don't want to end joy,' he said.²⁰

It is notable that in many places where *fulljoy* appears, it appears either alongside *enjoy* or with an explanation, which also suggests its newness — though, as Havenol Schrenk (p.c.) points out, English glosses or explanations are often offered by Rastas where they consider a form likely to be opaque to hearer, so this is not an entirely reliable guide to newness of a form.

As indicated by (13c), *fulljoy* is an overstanding of *enjoy*, treated as *end+joy*. *Fulljoy* is somewhat deviant, as overstandings go, as it doesn't utilise a replacement

¹⁸<http://jamaica-star.com/thestar/20130304/ent/ent1.html>

¹⁹http://www.reggaeville.com/nc/artist-details/artist/peter-tosh/news/interview-bushman-talks-the-bush-doctor/ac/news.html?tx_shreggae_pi1%5BnavNews%5D=3&cHash=36f1cfb8e562d51ec465a460050922b7

²⁰<http://www.reggae141.com/index.php/general-reggae-news/itemlist/tag/fulljoy%20reggae%20band>

form which is a polar opposite of *end*. However, I have located one example of an overstanding of *enjoy* which does just this: *startjoy*, see the example in (14).

- (14) yeah man. mi '**startjoy**' cape town!! plan to go back...hopefully before 2010.²¹

An apparent hapax legomenon is *downsession*, based on *obsession* /apsejan/:²²

- (15) It isn't really surprising to find eroticism/amorism (in the West termed 'homophobia') in this book, as I-and-I are all aware that Rastafari fell into a **downsession** against gays approximately around that time, fuelled by *dunza* (money) greedy reggae stars who fed themselves on the colonial-induced brainwash of the Jamaican general Anancy population.²³

Livealog(ue) in place of *dialog(ue)* appears at least twice:

- (16) a. Care must be taken about petitioning the government to allow I-and-I the facility of movement to eventually leave this blessed, yet accursed island. The level of contact with black states particularly on the continent should be a main priority. Starting and continuing an on-going **livalogue**, is of a vital and paramount importance, yet more importantly is to get them to have discussions among themselves, also on an ongoing basis, to fathom how best problems that will eventually arise can be tackled, and overcome.²⁴
- b. Still looking for the Reasonings and the **Livalog**, I-man try to keep the faith.²⁵

In addition to *informer* reformed to *outformer*, there exists also *outiquity*:

²¹<http://www.reggaeboyzsc.com/forum1/showthread.php?t=10992>

²²Cp. *downstroy* < *destroy* for the replacement morpheme (called to my attention by Havenol Schrenk); but note that *downstroy* seems to clarify/re-inforce the negative connotations of *destroy* while *downsession* is replacing the perceived positive *up* with negative *down*.

²³<http://www.amazon.com/review/R2RAPCZ1AQS403/?ie=UTF8&ASIN=1890358002&linkCode=&nodeID=&tag=>

²⁴In Girma Yohannes Iyassu Menelik *Rastafarians: A Movement Tied with a Social And Psychological Conflict*, p.131.

²⁵<https://yaadbwoyintergalactica.wordpress.com/2009/06/12/african-union-libya-italy-jamaica-reparations-interesting-convergence-indeed-convergence-of-interests-well-see/>

- (17) The words of their mouths ARE **outiquity** and deceit: they have left off to be wise, AND to do good.²⁶

Truebrary replaces *library* ‘lie-brary’:

- (18) Lang time InI never see yuh at the African Roots **Truebrary** any more!!! did the I move to the new location yet or is the I still in the same location? I jus got a whole heap a books fi di **Truebrary** still. Nuff books on His Majesty and the Movemant, Marcus Garvey, Ithiopia, all from one bredrin donation.²⁷

Similar to *apprecilove* is *crelove* (< *create* ‘cre-hate’):

- (19) a. JAH JAH favours those who watch his & her example and **crelove** it in themselves. He doesn’t need to be bothered by the good. He is busy preparing for the wicked right ya now.²⁸
 b. InI must chant Nyabinghi itinual... **crelove** the R energy that will carry in the word, and that word is JAH. InI know and sight the living God, in whose image InI are created.²⁹

A number of overstandings turn on an opposition between *weak* and *strong*, replacing the morpheme *week*: *in the strong* ‘next week’³⁰, and *birthstrong* ‘birthday’, but presumably formed from *birthweek*:

- (20) a. big up pon yuh **birthstrong**³¹
 b. Invites all to attend the first annual Empress Mennen [*sic*] **birthstrong** and Rastafari Womans Mother’s Day Celebration³²

Birthstrong seems to be losing ground to an alternative *earthstrong* (*day*), which presumably is itself a wordplay on *birthstrong*:

- (21) a. Perhaps I missed it if it is posted somewhere else, but today is

²⁶<https://www.facebook.com/melchizedekpsalms/posts/549704961708947>

²⁷http://jah-rastafari.com/forum/message-view.asp?message_group=2218

²⁸http://jah-rastafari.com/forum/message-view.asp?message_group=3528

²⁹http://jah-rastafari.com/forum/message-view.asp?message_group=2877

³⁰According to Pollard 2000: 47 — who oddly places it in her Category III /ai/-words. I have not found any examples of this phrase in use, however.

³¹<http://forum.dancehallreggae.com/showthread.php/111974-big-up-pon-yuh-birthstrong-Chaos6403>

³²<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nyahbinghifyah/message/142>

anniversary of HIM's **earthstrong**.³³

- b. Coming together to celebrate Bob Marley's 68th **Earthstrong**, the deep respect and gratitude the people of Jamaica, and the world, have for Bob Marley was felt in the positive vibration of the people attending.³⁴

A few examples of *strong-start* as replacing *week-end* also appear:

- (22) a. One Love sistren Amber. Have a super strong start.³⁵
- b. Again if you can't attend this strongstart, the show will be up for a whole year.³⁶

Strong-start is interesting in involving a double overstanding: *strong* for *week* and *start* for *end*, with no residue, so to speak, of the original base form remaining.

Pollard (2000: 43) provides examples of *first* replacing *last* or *yesterday*, *first night* for *last night* and *firstday* for *yesterday*.³⁷ She also provides examples of *blind* [blam] replacing *see* [si] in *cigarette* and *UCWI* > *blindgarette* and *youbblind* (Pollard 2000: 10), which represent prototypical overstandings.

Table 1 provides a summary of a number of overstandings and the linguistic oppositions they involve.

Certainly some of the hapax legomena represent latent morphological potential of the Rasta Talk process of overstanding. The example of *downsession* (< *obsession*) cited above in (15) is an excellent example of the overstanding as a live, active morphological process. Pollard (2000: 96–108) in her discussion of the globalisation of Rasta Talk, examines a number of online Rastafari wordlists and notes a couple of illegitimate entries which she attributes to 'new Rastas'. One of these is *lovepreciate* (cp. *apprecilove*), since it does not eliminate the negative element (*h*)*ate* (Pollard 2000: 105). I note that *lovepreciate* is found in the wordlist of Faristzaddi (1982), from which many of the online lists appear to originate. Faristzaddi (1982) also seems to be the source of *outvention*, as all online examples of this word are either definitional as in (23a), or else clearly used by non-Rastas,

³³<http://forums.rasta-man.co.uk/smf/index.php?topic=5666.0>

³⁴<http://www.bobmarleyllove.org/inspirations/kingston-earthstrong>

³⁵<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/rastafari-org/message/3949>

³⁶<http://www.rastafarispeaks.com/cgi-bin/forum/archive1/config.pl?noframes;read=86946>

³⁷Though she classes these as her Category I, 'in which known items bear new meanings', rather than Category II, which would more closely correspond to my overstanding designation.

Negative (Babylonian) form	Positive (Zionic) form	Shift	Examples
under	over	under > over	understand > overstand
under	higher	under > higher	understand > higherstand
out	in	out < in	outformer < informer outiquity < iniquity
down	up	down < up	downpress < oppress downsession < obsession /apseʃan/
blind	see/sight	blind < see	blindgarette < cigarette youblind < UCWI Blind'aga < (Edward) Seaga
lie	true	lie > true lie > truth	library > truebrary July > June-truth [see Schrenk 2015]
die	live	die > live	dialect > livalect diatribe > livatribe [P. Tosh] dialogue > livalogue
dead	live	dead > live	dedicate > livicate
weak	strong	weak > strong	next week > in the strong week-end > strong-start birthday > birthstrong/earthstrong (day)
end	start	end > start	week-end > strong-start enjoy > startjoy (also fulljoy)
last yester	first	last > first yester- > first	last night > first night yesterday > first day
hate	love	hate > love	appreciate > apprecilove create > crelove

Table 1: 'Babylonian': 'Zionic' oppositions and overstanding reformations

as in (23b) and (23c).

- (23) a. **Outvention** replaces 'invention', because mechanical devices are seen as outdated, and because it is the inner experience of being a Rastafarian that is invention.[on a 'How to Speak Rastafarian English' wiki page]³⁸
- b. Mind you, a rastafarian seeing it would probably think: '**outvention** but, me aprecilove'. Apologies to any rastafarians for my poor Lyaric [*sic*] [*recte* Iyaric].[comment on a posting

³⁸<http://www.wikihow.com/Speak-Rastafarian-English>

about a car painted with ‘Rasta colours’]³⁹

- c. I and I bin thinkin’ that all this be an politricks **outvention** of the followers of the Whore of Babylon to continue the downpression of the Rastafari....[a sarcastic comment on a forum thread involving complaints about the ‘corruption’ of the English language from Americanism or ‘slang’]⁴⁰

So *outvention* may be an illusionary word of dictionaries, but it does not violate the Rastafari grammar in the same way that *lovepreciate* would. Examples like *downsession* show the active nature of the overstanding process.

A curious attested example of reformation in Rasta Talk is *satisful(l)*, which could either be a blending of *satisfy* and *full* ‘fill (v)’, or else a non-prototypical overstanding:

- (24) a. I was truely **satisfull** that Prince Emmanuel had been benificent towards me and Itations and happy to have achieved that even against the protestations from the Priests that the Prince DONT allow any more photographs to be taken in the camp⁴¹
- b. ‘Mi **satisfull** (I am satisfied) with everything, man,’ [Winston Rodney aka Burning Spear] says, managing another laugh. ‘Remember nothing neva a gwaan (was happening) early on, yuh nuh, so when something a gwaan now yuh haffi (have to) give thanks.’⁴²
- c. Mi juss a lissen to the radio (as per usual) and mi hear one bwoy a chat to one radio host and a talk bout apprecilove and **satisful**. Bwoy dem a tek this thing way too far now. [non-Rasta complaining about overstandings heard on the radio]⁴³

It is not entirely clear whether the base *satisfy* is felt to contain a negative element (*satis+fie?*), which would be necessary if it constitutes an overstanding. In some

³⁹<https://jellyandcustard.wordpress.com/in-the-begining/tickled-pink/>

⁴⁰<http://www.pprune.org/jet-blast/265060-english-language-whats-happening-5.html>

⁴¹<http://goo.gl/5eHJk>

⁴²<http://www.ipsnews.net/1999/03/music-jamaica-burning-spear-keeping-things-fresh/>

⁴³<http://forum.dancehallreggae.com/archive/index.php/t-137792.html?s=4742fceb3c430e66bc6e1948544eafff>

cases, there exists no clear semantically-opposed replacement for a negative element, e.g. *praises*, analysed as ‘prey-ses’; in this case the transformative process involved in the production of I-Words, examined in the following section, functions as a ‘last resort’ operation to rescue a positive-charged word from the negative-association of putative component morphemes: *praises* becomes *Ises/Izes*.

An example of Rasta Talk word-creation which is superficially similar to overstanding is found in (25).

- (25) How can you compare a youth telling his parents that he sights Rastafari to someone coming out the closet as being gay? There is some upful **livity** to be found in Rastafari, while homosexuality is a **deadity** (lifestyle of death). [From <http://www.rastafarispeaks.com/cgi-bin/forum/archive1/config.pl?noframes;read=71541>.]

Here the speaker is not attempting to replace *livity* ‘righteous living’, but rather is devising an antithetical counterpart to *livity* which makes use of the same sort of binary opposition which underlies the overstanding process but which is not itself an overstanding for it is not ‘corrective’ but rather constitutes a new coinage with a distinct meaning.

3. I-Words & Iformation

I-words, the results of the application of Iformation (I-transformation), are much less constrained and seemingly more productive than overstandings. Such forms, on the phonological side, seem to in their simplest instances involve a simple replacement of a word’s initial syllable by *I* /ai/, e.g. *unity* > *Inity* /ainiti/; or, in the case of monosyllabic forms, of the initial segment by *y* /j/, e.g. *food* > *yood* /jud/. There are a number of anomalous examples, some of which are briefly examined below, such as *forIever* rather than *Iever* or *Imes* (< *times*) rather than /ai/ or /jaimz/. However, my major concern in this study is examine the possible diachronic evolution of Iformation.

This section contains some deal of speculation given that early stages of Rasta Talk are not well-documented. Homiak’s (1995) research points to Iformation as likely originating from a particular Rasta group, the I-gelic House (< Angelic), which formed in the late 1950s and ultimately ended up in Trench Town, situating it

to be able to influence the speech of quite a number of Rastas (including potentially Bob Marley and Bunny Wailer, amongst others).

There is another salient feature of Rasta Talk which seems possibly intertwined with Iformation, and that is the replacement of Jamaican Creole (Patois/Patwa) /mi/ with Rasta Talk *I* or *I and I* (*I an I* &c.), with second person pronominal *you* /ju/ frequently similarly replaced by *the/de I(s)*.⁴⁴ In general, Jamaican Creole (and Standard English) forms are still available, but first person forms are almost always replaced by Rasta Talk forms and second person forms at a lesser frequency. See Table 2 for an overview,⁴⁵ and the examples in (26) for illustrative instances of use.

	Standard English	Jamaican Creole (Patois/Patwa)	Rasta Talk
1sg	I / me / my	mi	I, Iman, (I and I)...
2sg	you / your	yu	de I, de Iman (thy)...
3sg	he, she, it / him, her, it / his, her, its	im, (i, shi, ar)	(im, i, shi)...
1pl	we / us / our	wi	I and I, (I, we)...
2pl	you (all) / your	yu, unu	de Is, (unu)...
3pl	they / them / their	dem	(dem, dey)...

Table 2: Pronominal forms in English, Jamaican Creole, and Rasta Talk

- (26) a. /ai man a faawod/
‘I am leaving now.’ (Pollard 2000: 8)
- b. /ai and ai taakin tu di ai ier an telin di man dat di king av kings
liiv diiz dakument ier . . . /

⁴⁴Interestingly, the curious development of a first-person pronominal form (Rasta Talk *I* /ai/) into a second-personal pronominal form (Rasta Talk *the I* /da ai/) is not entirely unparalleled. In Hindi, the most formal second-person pronominal form is *āp*; similarly Gujarati also uses *āp* in this function, Marathi *āpan*, and Assamese *āpon*, and these forms all derive ultimately from Sanskrit *ātman*- ‘self, soul’ (originally ‘breath’ > ‘life-force’), which also furnishes Hindi with the reflexive pronoun *ap* ‘self’. (See Turner 1962–1966: #1135 and Bloch 1965[1934]: 191.) Nepali sometimes uses *āphu* instead of *tapāt* for its most formal (non-royal) second-person form, but this likely reflects Hindi influence. Other Indo-Aryan languages often show reflexes of Skt. *ātman*- with second-person pronominal functions. In general, reflexes of *ātman*- show a range of meanings from ‘soul’ to ‘self’ to ‘you (formal)’. In certain languages the inclusive forms of ‘we’ are also built from reflexes of Skt. *ātman*-, e.g. Marathi *āpan* (homophonous with the formal second-person form; see above) and Gujarati *āpane*, both ‘we (including you)’ vs. *āmhi*, *ame* ‘we (excluding you)’.

⁴⁵Forms in round brackets are less common.

'I have been talking to this man here and telling him that the king of kings has left these documents here.' (Pollard 2000: 12)

- c. /denfram di taim now ai an ai waakin wid ai an ai opan wi shuolda an wi get biitn far it . . . /
'Then from the time that we have been walking with our religion wi shoulders and we have been beaten for it' (*Ibid.*)

The (King James) 'Biblical' pronoun *thy* (the old singular second person pronoun of English) does not appear to be targeted in the same fashion, though of course this form only occurs in certain registers.⁴⁶ *Thy* appears to be able to co-occur with I-replaced forms of *you*, e.g.:

- (27) a. Glad to see **the IMan_i** thriving and studying to show **Thyself_i** approved unto Jah.⁴⁷
b. Thanking **the i_i** for this day, for giving **i and i_j our_j** daily bread. And **thy_i** Kingdom come, on Earth will be done as there is a Mountain Zion. [Israel Vibration, 'African Unification']⁴⁸
c. Rather, seeing thy Trust (Faith) in His Majesty, Our Father, we appeal to **the I_i** and **thy_i** bredren as fellow kinsmen to BE STRONG in HIS MAJESTY, and in the Power of HIS MIGHT (Ephesians 6:10). [The Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah Mission, Inc., Rastafari Order of the Church of KR-STOS (R.O.C.K.), LOJ Society of the Nazarene - Prisoners Outreach Ministry of the GOODNEWS of H.I.M....]⁴⁹

The reasons for the replacement of /mi/ and /ju/ are not fully apparent, but at least one contributing factor in the case of /mi/ > /ai/ would seem likely to be linguistic meta-analysis regarding *me* /mi/ as an object form in opposition to *I* /ai/ as a subject form, with connotations of agency/non-agency of subjects and objects. This

⁴⁶An anonymous reviewer points out that this at least in the case of (27b), which involves a quotation from the Bible, and (27c), where the pronominal form perhaps is anticipatory, preceding a Biblical reference, this may be due to a desire to remain faithful to the 'original' Biblical language.

⁴⁷https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ly0TWUAkexY&lc=pzC4vDYAztdBvU0bh_thi5eIGB_kTDlwsVHI8YDZmna

⁴⁸http://www.lyricsfreak.com/i/israel+vibration/african+unification_20657215.html

⁴⁹http://www.lojsociety.org/aymero_pdf/prisoners_outreach_ministry_of_the_goodnews_of_him.pdf

would seem at least to be in accord with Rastafari reasoning regarding slavery and liberation in both literal and mental/spiritual senses. Even more speculatively, the replacement of *yu* /ju/ by *the/de I* would seem to be a means of non-distancing a second-person addressee by a first-person addresser, while still maintaining a grammatical distinction between first and second person proforms. So *the I* recognises a second person as another ‘I’, that is, another ‘first person’, another self/soul, but grammatically distinguishes this form from the first person *I* by, in fact, treating it (linguistically) as a third person element.

I-words appear to be connected to this change in the pronominal paradigm. While the I-transformational process ultimately ended up being (theoretically) applicable to any word, replacing the first syllable with /ai/, it is plausible that this represents the final stage of a replacement process which originally was restricted to a more limited environment. That is, just as *I* replaced *you* (simplifying somewhat) in the pronominal system, so the early I-transformational process may have targeted words containing the phonological sequence /yu/, replacing it with /ai/.⁵⁰

- (28) a. *human* /yuman/ > *I-man* /aiman/
- b. *unite* /yunait/ > *Inite* /ainait/
- c. *universal* > *Iniversal*

Other prominent — and thus potentially early — I-words include many whose standard English bases are vowel initial, suggesting that vowel-to-vowel transformations, involving less distortion, may have also formed an earlier environment for the application of this transformation:

- (29) a. I-quality < equality
- b. I-men < amen
- c. I-ssembly < assembly
- d. I-cient < ancient

Certain other prominent examples, however, do not involve vowel initial words. Such examples may represent a later widening of the environment for I-transformation to the initial syllable of a word regardless of whether the base word is vowel-initial:

⁵⁰Potentially, this process also included replacing the orthographic sequence <me>, if not the phonological sequence /mi/, if the ubiquitous *irie* derives from *merry* (‘me+ry’, but /meri/). This is entirely speculative, as one anonymous reviewer points out.

- (30) a. I-serve < deserve
 b. I-sire < desire
 c. I-ceive < receive
 d. I-tinually < continually

Though certainly the I-transformation synchronically does not appear to be restricted either morphologically or phonologically (other than being confined, apparently, to replacing the word-initial syllable), as in the examples below:

- (31) a. I-kril < mackerel
 b. Imes < times⁵¹
 c. I-rits < spirits
 d. I-ses < praises
 e. Ital ‘“kosher”, vegetarian food suited to Rastafari diets’ < vital⁵²
 f. forIver

Example (31f) is notable in that the I-transformation targets not the word-initial syllable, but instead the second syllable. As an anonymous reviewer points out, *forever* is analysable as a compound word and the I-transformation ends up targeting *ever* (perhaps for similar reasons as for *Imes*, cp. (31b), in that in the expected alternative, *Iever**, the underlying base form is not easily recoverable). Havenol Schrenk (p.c.) pointed me to the form *wond-I-ful* ‘wonderful’, which similarly involves a medial rather than initial replacement.

In monosyllable words (with some exceptions, like (31b)) rather than the first syllable being replaced — which would result in all monosyllable collapsing into the single form /ai/ — typically the first segment is replaced by *Y* /j/, e.g.:

- (32) a. *yood* /jud/ ‘food’
 b. *yife* /jaif/ ‘life’

Given that /j/ is essentially the semivowel equivalent of /i/, its appearance as an

⁵¹Note the phonological irregularity here; expected, perhaps /ai/, or more likely /jaimz/ — see (32). As an anonymous reviewer points out at least part of reason for the unexpected outcome may be that the first alternative (/ai/) has not enough phonological bulk to be recognisable. The latter alternative (/jaimz/) perhaps is eschewed in favour of /aimz/ because the I-transformation here takes advantage of the fortuitous identity of the underlying vowel of /taimz/ with *I*.

⁵²*Ital* is an excellent example of the special semantic shifts that certain I-words undergo.

‘onset’-replacer rather than a ‘syllable’-replacer (like *I* /ai/) is not entirely unexpected in monosyllable targets where syllabic-replacement is unfeasible (if the underlying form is to be recoverable).

Though its use is a visible marker that the speaker identifies as Rastafari, the I-transformation often has little effect (at least in comparison to overstandings) on the semantics of the word it is applied to, though it generally imparts a basic ‘spiritual’ and positive connotation (see below discussion of *I-ses*). Certain I-words, however, have denotations which differ significantly from their bases:

- (33)
- a. Iman < human (but meaning similar to pronominal ‘I’ (see above))
 - b. Iration < creation⁵³
 - c. Ital ‘spiritually clean food, ~ “kosher”, “halal”’ < vital
 - d. Idren ‘male or female co-Rasta(s)’ < bredren(brethren)/sistren
 - e. Iwa < hour, but generally meaning ‘time’⁵⁴

Interestingly, the I-transformation can even applied to words which have undergone the overstanding transformation, as:

- (34) iverstanding < overstanding

Also, I-transformations can be involved in overstanding-like processes, which, while not prototypical overstandings, still work to remove perceive negative implications from word for things/concepts deemed to be positive. This seems to be particularly common in the case of morphemes with perceived negative associations which have no straightforward semantic opposites in positively-charged words, for example *I-ses/I-zes*, an overstanding of *praises* [=‘prey-ses’], where *prey* has no obvious positively-charged polar opposite available for repair. In this case, the I-transformation can serve as a sort of last resort repair:

- (35) Explanation of I-ses:
 I-ses, is a Rastafari reasoning of removing the sound ‘Prey’ from praises and making it personal, hence I-ses.⁵⁵

- (36) I-nana ‘banana’ [Schrenk 2015]

⁵³Note here the phonological irregularity; expected: /aieit/.

⁵⁴Though English *hour* can have this sense as well.

⁵⁵<https://www.facebook.com/raselijah.tafari.5/posts/10200311697171126>

As pointed out by Schrenk (2016), Iformation is not applied haphazardly, but rather usually occurs only in case either (a) the word has a morphological component with a negative association (usually as a prefix), in which case Iformation may apply eliminating this component, as in the case of *praises* > *I-ses* discussed above; or (b) the speaker desires to make an already positively-associated word (which has no disharmonious morphological elements) more clearly positively-associated as in the case of *I-noited* ‘anointed’, *I-ternal* ‘eternal’, &c. as well as the majority of the examples in (28)–(36) above.

Pollard (2000) emphasises homophony of *I* with *eye*, and the importance of vision in Rastafari, as indicated also by elements like *seen* (with a range of meanings, including ‘agreed’, or ‘there it is’). *I* is also homophonous with *high* (due to the non-phonemic nature of *h* in at least Eastern varieties of Jamaican Creole),⁵⁶ from which are derived many prominent Rasta Talk words: *iya* (> *iyaman* ‘higher man’, i.e. ‘Rastaman’), *ites* ‘heights’, *aily* ‘highly’, &c. Homiak (1985: 289–290) states:

[Rastafari] brethren at some point invariably make note of the homonymy between ‘I’, ‘high’, and ‘eye’. Among other meanings, these correspondences reference the understanding that brethren possess inspired knowledge, having been ‘visioned’ by the Most High who reveals the truth to his saints.

Another prominent locus of homophony (existing and constructed) is found in the Rasta Talk pronunciation of the title of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, the last de facto emperor of Ethiopia, revered by Rastafari as the incarnation of Jah. The ordinal number in the Emperor’s title is often vocalised not as *the first* but as /ai/ (see Yawney 1978 and Pollard 1982: 21, amongst others). As one anonymous reviewer points out, this may additionally reveal the influence of rhyme with the Jamaican pronunciation of the Emperor’s pre-regnal name Ras Tafari /raas.ta.faa.raɪ/ and usually occurs in this form when the two names are often uttered in immediate succession (as they frequently are), i.e. as ‘Jah Rastafari, Haile Selassie I’ /jaa.raas.ta.faa.raɪ.ai.li.sa.laa.si.ai/. This may be further reinforced by the juxtaposition of an additional rhyming Rastafari epithet of the Emperor, ‘The Most High’, e.g.:

⁵⁶On the status of /h/ in Jamaican varieties, see Wells 1973: 12, Devonish & Harry 2004: 457, Harry 2006: 126.

- (37) Greetings in the name of the Most High (/ai/), Emperor Selassie I (/ai/), Jah Rastafari (/raas.ta.faa.raai/) [Nadia Harris McAnuff, ‘Marcus Garvey’, Peaceful Riddim, Inna De Yard/Lion Vibes, 2016]⁵⁷

I will point out that in other contexts Rasta Talk speakers do in fact vocalise the Emperor’s regnal number as ‘the first’. For but one example, consider the introductory salutation of the Jamaican reggae-revival artist Jah9 (Janine Cunningham) at the 2014 Rototom Sunsplash European Reggae Festival:

- (38) Greetings in the name of His Imperial Majesty, Emperor Haile Selassie the First. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0XP4VE9tFA&feature=youtu.be&t=27s>)

Interestingly, in other performances of this salutation, Jah9 adds Menen Asfaw, the Empress consort, and seemingly also gives her the regnal number ‘I’, **but** vocalises this as /ai/:

- (39) Greetings in the name of His Imperial Majesty, Emperor Haile Selassie the First and Empress Menen I (=ai/) the Balance. (see <https://youtu.be/5SvceUxzsNo?t=10m12s> and <https://youtu.be/nUrR1m-T-pE?t=12s>)

And the Emperor’s regnal number *I* is sometimes doubled, occurring both as /ai/ and *the first*:

⁵⁷<https://soundcloud.com/lionvibes/peaceful-riddim-inna-de-yard-x-lion-vibes-2016-sampler>

- (40) I truly want to Give Izes to the Most High H.I.M Haile Selassie I 1st and The Infinite Balance Queen of Queens Empress Menen!!! [Hempress Sativa (Kerida Johnson), 6 January 2017 Facebook post: <https://www.facebook.com/HempressSativaMusik/videos/1204134829673502/>]⁵⁸

All of these multisemous aspects of /ai/ ('I', 'eye', 'high', 'first', &c.) combine to give it a certain mystical force in Rastafari speech. *I* in Rasta Talk is thus in some ways comparable with Sanskrit *om* (ॐ), which by late Vedic times had become the mystical syllable par excellence in India. *Om* is used prominently in the recitation of mantras and prayers today, often forming both the first and the last part of the utterance of vocal offerings, as in for instance the recitation of the famous Hindu Gāyatrī mantra.

Om also functioned as a way of indicating assent, as an utterance which can mean 'yes', as in example (41).⁵⁹

- (41) anuśiṣṭo nv asi pitreti **om** iti hovāca
"Have you been instructed by your father?" 'Om,' he said.'
[*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 6.2.1]

Rasta Talk *I* also participates in utterances of assent, as in (42).

- (42) a. Yes, I
b. Yes, Iya

In certain ritual contexts, *om* replaces syllables; one such case is prepausal, as in

⁵⁸Cp.:

- (i) Greetings in the name of His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor **Haile Selassie I the First** (=ai.li.sa.laa.si.ai.de.fos/), and the Balance of the Earth, Empress Menen. We give Izes for the gathering. [A Dub Meeting by The LA River -The Scientist meets Hempress Sativa, live nyabinghi by Rootsman, Dub Siren HiFi Presents, 13 Oct 2016, https://youtu.be/_Y1MJT7t_DM?t=9s]

⁵⁹The Chāndogya Upaniṣad spells this out explicitly:

- (ii) tad vā etad ajñākṣaram yad shi kiṁ cānujānāti **om** ity eva tad āha
'This very (syllable) is a syllable of assent; for whatever one assents to, to that one says 'Om'.'

See Hock (1991) for extensive discussion of the use of *om* in Sanskrit; cp. Bloomfield (1890), Keith (1917).

(43), where the word *tāriṣat* ‘slew’ becomes *tāriṣo3m*⁶⁰.

- (43) . . . yasyendraḥ pītvā vṛtrāṇi jaṅghanat
pra sa janyāni tāriṣo3m [=tāriṣat]
‘. . . Of whom having drunk, Indra slew the Vritras; may he extend
(our) people.’ [*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 2.20.14]

A more extreme example of syllable-replacing *om* — again in a ritual context — occurs in (44a), which represents a transformation of (44b).

- (44) a. śoṁsāvom . . . śaṁsāmodaivom . . . [*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*
3.12.1–4]
b. (*) śaṁsāva. . . śaṁsā madā eva
‘Let us two recite . . . Recite, rejoice indeed.’ [See Hock (1991:
98–100) for discussion of this reconstruction.]

These usages of *om* are reminiscent of the transformational possibilities of Rasta Talk *I* in the formation of I-words, particularly in their imbuing of words with mystical significance.

4. Outro

Overstanding and I-transformation are prominent word-creation processes used in the introduction of salient Rastafari neologisms like *downpression* and *Ises*. This study demonstrates that these two morphological processes are distinct from superficially similar processes such as punning, wordplay &c. The formal properties of the two Rasta Talk morphological processes discussed here are worthy of further study, as are the innovations in the Rasta Talk pronominal system, itself apparently a source of the I-transformation process.

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⁶⁰With the 3 representing *pluti*, the overlong, extended vowel.

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