

Definitions starting with L: Language

Bahamian terms referring to language suggest that Bahamians had a very accurate perception of the linguistic realities of their country long before linguists started trying to explain this. The terms themselves originated in Britain but at least one was modified by African usage and all were made to fit the particular situation of the Bahamas. Linguists describe this as a continuum of overlapping varieties of English, ranging from a Creole retaining the most influence of the grammar of African and other languages (the basilect) to a variety of English with only negligible differences from the Standard English spoken elsewhere (the acrolect). Bahamians describe the extremities of this continuum as [DEEP](#), i.e. deep slang (the basilect) or deep English (the acrolect). The closest British meaning of deep is ‘hard to fathom’; this was probably influenced by African usage such as Yoruba *ijinle* ‘deep; pure (of languages)’ (Oyedeji p.c.). By way of contrast, Acklin Islanders (who are noted for their deep accent) refer to the English of other Bahamians as [SHALLOW](#), a metaphor that seems to correspond to those varieties between the extremes (the mesolect). In the Bahamas [SLANG](#) can refer not only to expressions but also to grammar and pronunciation. Speaking the basilect is TALKIN’ BROAD – and BROAD-SPEAKING has the extra connotation of being plain, honest and righteous. The basilect is also called [BROKEN ENGLISH](#), probably referring back to the way people born in Africa spoke English brokenly as a foreign language. Mesolect and acrolect speakers usually refer to the basilect simply as the dialect; in the Bahamas Creole refers only to the French-based language of Haitians and Bahamians find linguists’ use of this term in reference to their English puzzling. Other terms referring to speech include [STREET TALK](#), the latest slang of young people, in reference to their [PLAYING THE BLOCKS](#) or standing around talking on street corners. When this includes the fashionable terms of Jamaican Rastafarians, it is called RASTA TALK. Big city American blacks are said to speak with a [CURVED ACCENT](#), while those from the rural South talk [GEECHEE](#). An [EXPENSIVE](#) word is what Americans call a ‘sixty-four dollar word’ (that is one that is erudite), but in the Bahamas a [FIVE-POUND WORD](#) is an obscenity (from the fine one might receive for saying it).

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