Notes to help you plan your analysis of a Caribbean poem

1. If the poem you have been given is long you may choose one section (approx.. 10 lines) to analyse.

2.. Use the example text below as a rough guide. Make sure that you divide the body of your text (which should concentrate on the *linguistic* features of the poem you have been given) into 3 paragraphs: one concerning spelling related to pronunciation, one concerning syntax and one concerning lexis.

3. The introduction should very briefly introduce the author (the name and provenance could be enough) and briefly introduce the structure and dominant stylistic features of the poem (for example the number of stanzas and use of rhyme and/or repetition).

4. Always give examples with line numbers for each feature of Caribbean English that you find in the text (notice that in English we write ‘in line 1’).

5. Take note of inconsistencies in the text such as a usage which is standard English in one part of the poem and Caribbean English in another.

6. State clearly when a meaning or usage is not clear to you and suggest one or more tentative interpretations.

7. When writing about spelling differences state clearly when you think a spelling is simply a more phonetic spelling of a standard English pronunciation or related to a specific Caribbean pronunciation feature.

8. When referring to phonology, use the correct terminology to refer to phonemes (eg a voiced alveolar plosive) and use phonemic symbols (written by hand if necessary).

9. In your conclusion you should say how understandable non- Caribbean readers would find your poem and how the language relates either to the subject of the poem or the possible aims of the poet.

10. You should make an analysis through your own careful reading without using sources.

**11. Please indicate at the bottom of your paper that you have watched the recording of ‘Spring Cleaning’ by Jean ‘Binta’ Breeze (link on the photocopy distributed in class), upload your paper on** [**https://www.compilatio.net/cartella/qymvs**](https://www.compilatio.net/cartella/qymvs) **and leave a paper copy in my postbox by 5th April. Thank you.**

Example text

‘Mek four’ is a poem written by John Agard, who was born in Guyana and moved to Britain as an adult. It does not have a regular structure, being divided into 5 sections of differing lengths, with few rhymes. One example of rhyme, ‘less, ness’ in lines 15,16 is only a half rhyme. One of its main stylistic features is repetition, as we see in the repetition of the phrase ‘when me and she eye mek four’ in lines 4,5,8,9,12,13.

If we consider spelling related to phonology, the text displays one non-standard spelling that is simply a more phonetic spelling of a standard pronunciation, ‘sey in line 1. There are also two non-standard spellings which reflect Caribbean pronunciation eg.’ mek’ in lines 5,9,13 and ‘de’ in line 7. In the first, the spelling suggests that the dipthong /ei / is pronounced as a monothong /e/. In the second example, the voiced dental fricative /δ/ is replaced by the alveolar plosive /d/, which is one of the most noticeable features of Caribbean pronunciation. However, inconsistency, which is another characteristic of Caribbean English, is also very evident in that ‘the’ in line 14 and ‘that’ in line 11 are both spelt with the standard English ‘th’ spelling.

In terms of syntax, we see the lack of present tense inflection in ’sey’ in line 1, lack of the modal ‘will’ in line 3 ‘ I tell you’ and lack of past tense inflection in ‘mek’ in line 5 and ‘walk’ in line 7. The latter contrast with the standard use of past tense inflection in ‘was’ line 10 and the past tense auxiliary in line 11 ‘didn’t need ’. Further syntactic features of interest are the dropping of the copular verb ‘to be’ in ‘we tongue locked’ in line 8, the lack of plural inflection in lines 4,8 and 12 ‘eye’ ( and possibly line 17 ‘tongue’) and the use of an object pronoun or a subject pronoun as possessive adjectives in lines 4,8 and 12 ‘me and she eye’. However, as we saw in previous examples, the verb ‘to be’ is used regularly in lines 10 and 14 and some pronouns, like ‘I’ in line 3, are standard English pronouns.

In terms of lexis, the repeated expression ‘when me and she eye mek four’, which can be translated as standard Engish ‘when our eyes meet’, can be found in other Caribbean texts such as ‘Like a Flame’ by Grace Nichols and may be a loan translation from an African language. There are no other non- standard lexical items.

In conclusion, this poem is a good example of the mixing of standard English and Caribbean creole features which is typical of Caribbean poetry. Agard is writing about the suitability of creole as a language of love so he wants his audience to have an idea of the Caribbean language of love and give a very Caribbean flavour to his poem. At the same time, if the poem used only creole, non- Caribbean readers would understand very little and standard English features seem necessary. Some ambiguity, which is a consequence of the compression of creole language, remains. The best example is line 17 ‘we tongue locked ‘which could be interpreted as ‘ we were tongue-locked’ , ‘our tongues were locked’ or ‘our tongues locked’ . In all three cases the meaning is similar and probably refers to the act of kissing.