Artikel: How to learn Jamaican English - In 10 steps

step one: Listening to reggae music

Take a cd with songs of a Jamaican singer; such as Anthony B., Mr. Perfect, Lutan Fyah, Eek a Mouse, Morgan Heritage or Lady Saw. If you do not know any of these famous singers just grab a Bob Marley record from your father's lp-collection. I started learning Patois with songs of Gentleman, a German reggae artist who has been living in Jamaica for many years. He left his school in Cologne aged 17, heading for Kingston, Jamaica. Today, one does not notice any difference to Jamaican singers (except for his colour of the skin). If you want to be as succesful as Gentleman keep studying and go over to Step Two.

step two: Singing the songs

In order to get the feeling for the language try to sing the songs after having listened to them a couple of times. It might be useful to stop the cd every once in a while and repeat the chorus and main parts of the song aloud in your room. Or sing it in front of your family.

step three: Noticing that something is „strange“ (Some smart guys might have done this already in step two)

Looking at the booklet of your Bob Marley vinyl you will see the strange song title: „No Woman No Cry“. Bob Marley, the peace-loving, friendly guy from next door as a women-hating crybaby? No. Here we have the first language problem. In Patois, the Jamaican English, the negation is not formed with 'to do'. Instead, the Jamaicans simply use the word 'no'. Translated into Oxford English, the song title thus means „No Woman, (please) Do Not Cry“. Our image of the always-laughing Bob does not have to be thought over (no has to be thought over) again and we come to step 4.

step four: „Dem a go a door“

If you had a nickel for every time you heard the word „a“ in a reggae song you'd be a millionaire. Since there is probably no one willing to give you so much money you will rather get frustrated than rich after sentences like „Aal a dem a go a door“. Learning every meaning of the word „a“ can be very difficult. But you are already in step 4 and so this will be easy for you. „A“ is the main Jamaican letter and word. It can be used for to, is, will, it, of and many other words. Translated into Oxford English the sentence above means „They will go outside“. At this point you may wonder about what has happened to the second „a“. Since the Jamaicans use a picturesque language it has to be imagined. They go to the door in order to go out of the door. They go outside.* But let's get back to some easier topics. Here is step five.

step five: Some vocabulary

Make a list with the most important Jamaican words. For remembering them better you can also write them onto little file cards or into a special vocabulary book.
haffi: have to
deh: there
gal: girl
inna: in
bwoy: boy
go weh: to go away, go away!
aal: all
nuff: enough
wha: what
likkle: little
caan: cannot
galang: to keep on doing sth.

step six: Pronunciation

Not only are there special words in the Jamaican language but also they pronounce „normal“ English words differently.
For example a Jamaican reggae singer who wants to complain about the western civilisation criticises the [sivilaizej] and thinks that reggae music is a [c[ui:]] but that the [b[a:d]*] government will never accept that. So basically you should learn three groups of words (this should be enough for step six) which are pronounced differently. Words with the vocal a, i or u. The 'a' is pronounced like a German 'a' more often than in England ( except for some northern parts in Britain I guess ). 'i' is often pronounced [ai ] when we would say [i] and 'u' is often [u] instead of [ə]. Now that you know how to pronounce the words correctly talk to someone for practising (attention: your English teacher would not be the right person. Hearing your pronunciation he would doubt that you have learned anything in his lessons)

step seven: Di th and di fi

Everyone who still has problems pronouncing the 'th' correctly: Forget about it! You do not need it for learning Patois. In the Jamaican language 'th' becomes 't' or 'd'. Nice ting dat? (Isn't that nice?)

For example Damian Marley, one of Bob Marley's 12 official sons, sings: 'Some bwoy nuh know dis' 'And won't tink twice to shot yuh'. So just relax, pronounce it lously and it will be just as well!

But in some cases not only the 'th' changes: Di slaves try fi escape. Almost eyery 'the' becomes 'di'.

Fi means to in a causal sense. The slaves try to escape.
If you did not get that read it again or go over to step eight.

step eight: The progressive forms

In Patois you often leave out the auxiliary in sentences with a progressive form. E.g.:
We floating inna di mystic wind while dem_gloating inna destructive sin ( 'Mystic Wind' – Gentleman feat. Tony Rebel)
step nine: The pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oxford English</th>
<th>Jamaican English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am seeking the truth.</td>
<td>Me seeking di truth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our yard</td>
<td>We yard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My yard</td>
<td>Me yard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their yard</td>
<td>Dem yard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your yard</td>
<td>Yuh yard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They go away</td>
<td>Dem go weh.</td>
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<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
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step ten: practising, practising, practising

Congratulations! Now you have the basic knowledge of the Jamaican language. Di early bird catch di worm! So keep on practising by listening to some more reggae-songs, get the lyrics and learn the vocabulary. Also, it is useful to speak in Patois with your friends.
For more information about the fascinating culture and language I would also recommend „Advanced Patois Learners“ which allows an insight of the Jamaican way of life.

*a door = outdoor

**Advanced Patois Learners**

cultural background:

Jamaica is an old English colony in the Carribean Sea. In the time of the slave-trade some Africans could escape from the ships which were on the way to Northamerica. They swam to the coast of Jamaica to avoid getting sold as slaves.
The history of the country is marked by violence in the ghettos of the big cities. In the 1960s the first reggae songs were played. Often, the musicians wanted to protest against the government, society and violence. But during the last years more and more singers have become famous who sing about sex and party. Some of them do not criticise violence in the ghettos any more but present it as if it were adventurous.
The traditional singers especially talk about consciousness and love in their songs. If you listen to a reggae song you should be careful with the language which is used. In many songs homosexuals are discriminated against as chi-chi or batty.

Rastafarian Patois:

The Rastafarians are a religious group. In their songs they often sing about their religion, history and every day life.

The Rastafarian Patois has some special words which are influenced by the Rasta’s way of living and how they see things. Since the Rastafarians criticise politics some call them politricks. When they smoke weed during the meditations it is important for them to „see“ something to get to know the reasons for certain things. On the other hand they do not like cigarettes. But in the word „cigarettes“ there is the verb „to see“- a positive verb in a negative word. That is why they say blindgarettes. In their opinion everyone should have the same rights and there should not be hierarchical relationships. Understand gets overstand.

Babylon stands for the colonial system, police, church and state. Jah is the Rastafarian god. HIM is His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie I., jah rastafari, former king of Ethiopia. I and I means I, me, we, Jah

For practi-sing:

Jamrock
Damian marley
Intro:
Out in the streets they call it murder

Verse 1:
Welcome to Jamrock, camp where di thugs dem camp at
Two pound a weed inna van back
It inna yuh hand bag, yuh knapsack it inna yuh back pack
Di smell a give yuh girlfriend contact
Some bwoy nuh know dis, dem only come around like tourist
On di beach wid a few club sodas
Bedtime stories, and pose like dem name Chuck Norris
And don't know di real hardcore
Cause Sandals a nuh back too, di thugs dem weh do weh dem got to
And won't tink twice to shot yuh
Don't mek dem spot yuh, unless yuh carry guns alot to
A bare tuff tings come at yuh
When Trenchtown man stop laugh and block off traffic
Then dem wheel and pop off and dem start clap it
Wid di pin file dung and it a beat rapid
Police come inna jeep and dem caan stop it
Some seh dem a playbwoy a playbwoy rabbit
Funnyman a get dropped like a bad habit
So nuh bodda pose tuff if yuh don't have it
Rastafari stands alone

Chorus:
Welcome to Jamrock, Welcome to Jamrock
Out in the streets they call it murder

Verse 2:
Welcome to Jamdown, poor people a dead at random
Political violence caan dun
Pure ghost and fantom, di yute dem get blind by stardom
Now di Kings Of Kings a call
Old man to pickney, so wave oonu hand if yuh wid mi
To see di sufferation sick mi
Dem suit nuh fit mi, to win election dem trick we
Them they don't do nuttin at all
Come on let's face it, a ghetto education's basic
A most a di yutes dem waste it
And when dem waste it, dat's when they tek di guns replace it
Then dem don't stand a chance at all
And dat's why a nuff likkle yute have up some fat matics
Wid di extra magazine inna dem back pocket
And a bleach a night time inna some black jacket
All who nah lock glocks a dem a lock rocket
Them wi full yuh up a current like a shock socket
Dem a run a roadblock which part di cops block it
And from now till a mornin nuh stop clock it
If dem run outta rounds I brought back ratchet

Chorus:
Welcome to Jamrock Southside Northside
Welcome to Jamrock East Coast West Coast huh yo
Welcome to Jamrock Conwell MiddlesexAnd Hey
Welcome to Jamrock
Out in the streets they call it murder

Outro:
Jamaica Jamaica! Jamaica Jamaica! Now!
Jamaica Jamaica! Yo! Jamaica Jamaica!
Welcome to Jamrock, Welcome to Jamrock
EARTH A RUN RED - RICHHIE SPICE

OH MY MY MY YEAH
HEY YEAH YEAH
HEY YEAH YEAH

HEY WATCH THE PLACES YOU WALK AND MIND
THE WAY YOU TALK
WATCH OUT FI THE VAMPIRE WHO WILL SNEAK UP IN THE DARK
WATCH OUT FOR THE BIG TIME THIEF WHO CLAIM SEY THAT DEM SMART
STOP BRINGING THE CRACK AND THE GUN TO MASH UP THE YOUTH DEM HEART

CHORUS:
EARTH A RUN RED
TEN YEAR OLD A LOOK DEM OWNA TEA BREAD
I HEAR A NEXT YOUTH DEAD WHOA

EARTH A RUN RED
TEN YEAR OLD A LOOK DEM OWNA TEA BREAD
I HEAR A NEXT YOUTH DEAD YEAH

WATCH IT
THE MARK OF THE BEAST A COME IN UNDER SNEAKING UNDER MAN FEET
A REVELATION TIME, CHECK THE SIGNS OF THE TIME, YOU NO FEEL THE HEAT
FROM YOU SEE HOW THE YOUTHS THEM LEGGO OUT THE STREET
AND YOU KNOW SEH THINGS NAH GO SWEET
MAN A HUSTLE MAN A SHUFFLE HUNGRY BELLY DEH A YARD CAN'T FIND FOOD FI EAT

CHORUS:

IT DON'T EVEN MAKE NO SENSE YOU TELL THE MAN DEM PULL DOWN THE GUN
TALK AND TURN YOUR BACK, ANOTHER LIFE GONE DOWN
THESE ARE THE TIME WE SHOULD HAVE SOME FUN
GIVE TANKS TO JAH 'CAUSE THE MAN SOON COME
WOULDN'T MAKE NO SENSE YOU TELL DEM LEF' DEM POLITRICKS
TALK AND TURN YOUR BACK ANOTHER MAN GET TRICK,
MAMA

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