

# GLOSSARY OF BAHAMIAN DIALECT

## STANDARD BAHAMIAN ENGLISH AND BAHAMIAN DIALECT

Nearly all Bahamians speak a variant of Standard Bahamian English. Linguistic variations occur among the various islands, and among settlements or communities on the islands. On the least populated and most isolated of the Out Islands, such as San Salvador Island, many residents speak Bahamian Dialect, which combines basic English vocabulary with grammatical characteristics typical of several Western African languages. Linguists classify Bahamian Dialect as a member of the northern branch of the Eastern Atlantic English Creole languages. Bahamian Dialect is in many ways similar to Gullah, another English-based creole language. We observed that some speakers are bialectal, sometimes choosing to speak to their peers in Bahamian Dialect, but to visitors in Standard Bahamian English. Sometimes speech involved systematic use of some creole and non-creole features. Bahamian Dialect is typified by different verb usage, highly irregular verbs, and different pronunciations of English letter combinations. Speakers of Bahamian Dialect often cannot reproduce the “v” and “th” sounds typical in English, replacing them with “w” (for “v”) and “d” or “t” (for “th”). Thus the word “welcome” is pronounced “velcome,” and “that” becomes “dat.” Words

ending in “-ing” are typically pronounced without the letter “g.” It is important to note that such speech characteristics are not a reflection of social class, but instead, represent a distinct living language. In recognition of this fact, the first Bahamian Dialect dictionary was published in 1982, and the College of the Bahamas has instituted studies of the Bahamian Dialect within the Bahamian Studies curriculum [Holm and Shilling 1982; Odell 2009].

### *Some Commonly Used Expressions and Vocabulary on San Salvador Island*

**Bark it off** The process of removing the bark off a branch or log, typically for the purpose of using the bark for medicine (e.g., *“Just tell him to get the bark for you, and bark it off, and let it dry.”*).

**Benne** Sesame seed or plant; the African name for sesame (e.g., *“We grows benne. That’s what they call it here. We call it the benne. The old people learn us the benne, some fine little seeds.”*).

**Berry** A juicy fruit, or any kind of capsule or dry pod.

**Bound** Constipated.

**Bruiser** A thick heavy stick, shaped somewhat like a bat, used for threshing seed.

**Bush** Shrubs, or herbaceous annual or perennial plants.

**Carry** (1) To lead a person around, or lead a group of people somewhere, usually on foot (e.g., *“Some students came. I carry them around.”* or *“I can carry you to the*