

From <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~gavinm/hcegrammar.htm>

Hawai'i Creole English

Some Grammatical Features of HCE

Note: HCE has its own spelling system. The examples here are given in that system and then in English-based spelling.

1. Basic sentences

Sentences giving a location use the word *ste* (stay):

Da kaet ste in da haus.
(Da cat stay in da house.)
'The cat's in the house.'

The word *get* is used for 'there is/are':

Get tu mach turis naudeiz.
(Get too much tourist nowadays.)
'There are too many tourists nowadays.'

Haed (had) is used for 'there was/were'

Haed dis ol grin haus.
(Had dis old green house.)
'There was this old green house.'

Like in many other languages, no verb is required in some sentences:

Nau yu da hed maen.
(Now you da head man.)
Now you're the head man.

Mai sista skini
(My sister skinny.)
'My sister's skinny.'

2. Tense and aspect

The verb is usually used without endings, but there are words that come before the verb which show when or how something happens. These are called "tense/aspect markers."

Past tense is commonly indicated by using *wen* before the verb.

Dey wen pein hiz skin.
(Dey wen paint his skin.)
'They painted his skin.'

Future events and those that have not yet occurred are marked by *go*, *gon*, or *gona*:

Yu gon trn in yaw pepa leit?
(You gon turn in your paper late?).
'Are you going to turn in your paper late?'

Events in progress may be indicated in three different ways: by *ste* (stay) before the verb either with or without the *-ing* ending, or just by the verb with *-ing*:

Da kaet ste it da fish.
(Da cat stay eat da fish.)

Da kaet ste iting da fish.
(Da cat stay eating da fish.)

Da kaet iting da fish.
(Da cat eating da fish.)

'The cat's eating the fish.'

The verb by itself (without a tense/aspect marker or ending) is used for talking about things that happen all the time or about something that the listeners already know happened in the past (for example, in a story someone is telling):

3. Negatives

HCE has four ways of making negatives. First, *nat* (not) is inserted when there is no verb:

Nau yu nat da hed maen.
(Now you not da head man.)
'Now you're not the head man.'

Mai sista nat skini
(My sister not skinny.)
'My sister isn't skinny.'

Second, no is used before ste, before modals such as kaen (can) and before verbs without any ending and without any tense/aspect markers.

Da kaet no stei in da haus.
(Da cat no stay in da house.)
'The cat isn't in the house.'

Jo no kaen plei.
(Joe no can play.)
'Joe can't play.'

Da kaet no it fish.
(Da cat no eat fish.)
'The cat doesn't eat fish.'

Third, neva (never) is used before verbs in past tense negatives:

Ai neva du om.
(I never do em.)
'I didn't do it.'

(Note that om (em) is used for 'him, her, it' after verbs.)

Finally, nomo (no more) is used for 'there isn't/aren't':

Nomo kaukau in da haus.
(No more kaukau in da house.)
'There isn't any food in the house.'

4. Verbal complements

Verbal complements are other verbal expressions that come after the main verb, such as in George decided to join the army. In HCE, these are introduced by fo rather than to:

Ai chrai fo kaech om.
(I try fo catch em.)
'I tried to catch it.'

Eribadi kam fo si daet haus.
(Everybody come fo see dat house.)
'Everybody comes to see that house.'

5. HCE grammar

Just like any language, HCE has its own grammatical rules. If you don't follow them, you'll produce a sentence that sounds odd to speakers of the language. On the basis of the description above, say which of the following sentences are OK in HCE and which ones are not. If the sentence is not OK, see if you can change it to make it acceptable.

- a) Wi wen saw daet muvi awredi.
(We wen saw dat movie already.)
'We already saw that movie.'
- b) Da ka red.
(Da car red.)
'The car's red.'
- c) Jo nat ste pleing futbawl.
(Joe not stay plaing football.)
'Joe's not playing football.'
- d) I ste rait da leta.
(Ai stay write da letter.)
'I'm writing the letter.'
- e) Shi wen it ng da kek.
(She wen eating da cake.)
'She was eating the cake.'

ANSWERS:

- a) Not OK. It should be:
Wi wen si daet muvi awredi.
OR Wi saw daet muvi awredi.
(We wen see dat movie already.
OR We saw dat movie already.)
- b) OK
- c) Not OK. It should be:
Jo no ste pleing futbawl.
(Joe no stay playing football.)
- d) OK
- e) Not OK. It should be:
Shi iting da kek.
OR Shi ste iting da kek.
OR Shi was iting da kek.
(She eating da cake.
OR She stay eating da cake.
OR She was eating da kek.)