
Right Throughs, Rings and Taws: Marbles Terminology in Trinidad and Tobago

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**Right throughs, rings and taws:
Marbles terminology in Trinidad and Tobago¹**

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ABSTRACT

Marbles games (“pitch”), perhaps the most widely played of all traditional boys’ games in Trinidad and Tobago, have declined precipitously in the last two decades. This article documents close to 200 marbles terms found in Trinidad and Tobago English Creole. Although most are British in origin, there are East Indian, French Creole, and possible African influences on this lexicon. An analysis of the discourse of marbles talk in its sociocultural context was prompted by its high affect for men who had played pitch as boys. Using frameworks from the sociology of games and from studies in language and gender, marbles talk is shown to demonstrate features of “masculine” gender-linked use of language and games, including highly elaborated rules and strategies, and competitive and confrontational use of language. (Caribbean, change, creole, discourse, games, gender, marbles, obsolescence)

Marble playing, generally known as *pitch*, used to be perhaps the most widely played of all traditional boys’ games in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T). In recent years, however, marble playing has declined in popularity, and the games and their rich vocabulary are dying out. The purpose of this article is to discuss terms associated with marbles in T&T and to assess their socio-cultural importance, particularly as part of socialization into gender-related styles of discourse.

Marble terms in T&T were gathered as part of on-going work on a historical dictionary of the English/Creole of T&T and come from several sources: (1) an extensive local survey (Ashby 1981) based on oral interviews throughout Trinidad and across age groups; (2) a segment on marble games from

"Gayelle," a local magazine-type television program (Banyan 1985); (3) novels, poems, and memoirs of childhood (Araujo 1984; Innis 1910, [1932] 1970; Keens-Douglas 1975; McDonald 1969; Narine 1979; Pires 1991); (4) the extensive personal experience of one of the authors (Boos) as a native Trinidadian marbles player; (5) written and telephone responses to a request for information in local newspapers; and (6) a number of oral interviews in T&T with men mostly between the ages of 50 and 75 years. Although there is no claim for completeness of this marble lexicon, it seems unlikely that there is a significant number of omissions.

Marble vocabulary has received considerable attention in England and the United States (e.g., Cassidy 1958; Combs 1955; Ferretti 1973; Harder 1955; Sackett 1962). Researchers have all found heavy attrition in modern marble playing and terminology. "This picturesque slang has many dozens of terms used nowhere else in any language. Phrases like *fen sidings*, *dubs*, and *tribs* . . . were known and used by American children during the late 19th and early 20th century, but have since largely faded from usage" (Randall & Webb 1988:7). This is certainly true for T&T, often making it impossible to determine the precise definition or distribution of a term. "With the disappearance of such marbles as 'kodens', 'kiaws', and 'bone agates' these terms are known only by the older speakers and are no longer used since their referents are not used" (Ashby 1981:7).

Marble terms vary to some extent by locality and by generation. The most important regional difference in T&T appears to be between "South" – the area right in and around San Fernando – and the rest of the country, including Tobago. (No attempt is made here to denote regional usage differences systematically.) Where etymologies are given, E = English, FC = French Creole, TEC = Trinidad and Tobago English Creole.

MARBLE HISTORY

Small balls, usually about 1.5 cm in diameter, made of clay, stone, ceramic, or glass, are used for one of the oldest and most widespread types of game worldwide. Their origin is prehistoric: Clay and stone marbles have been found in caves in Europe, in burial mounds of Native Americans in Mississippi, and in China. Throughout Africa, small stones are tossed rapidly and successively into a series of holes. In Europe, marbles are known from a 14th-century French manuscript, and in England from at least 1450 (Randall & Webb 1988:9). Marbles came to colonial North America with the British, French, and Dutch (*ibid.*). The pervasive British influence on marbles playing in T&T doubtless first came with the children of the British colonial planters.

In modern times, Germany was virtually the only major manufacturer of stone and glass marbles until about 1900, when glass marbles were produced

in quantity in the United States (Ferretti 1973:32). Machine-made marbles were dominant by the 1920s, but by the late 1930s, demand was beginning to slow down; foreign imports again appeared in the early 1950s, with the Japanese "cat eye" marble (Randall & Webb 1988:10).

Adult collectors have developed a strong market for marbles; rare specimens can trade for hundreds or thousands of dollars apiece in the United States (Baumann 1970; Dickson 1988:101-102; Randall & Webb 1988). But many older players have lamented the decline in true popularity of marbles, as well as other traditional children's games (Cassidy 1958:19-22). Despite official tournaments organized in the United States, for example, Ferretti (1973:23) noted that "the spontaneous, unsupervised, catch-as-catch-can marbles games we once played exist only in our memories."

Marbles were popular partly because of their relatively low cost and because games are easily set up, taking into account local circumstances – from rough pavements to snow banks (Ferretti 1973:80-81, 129). An Australian memoir (cited by Ferretti 1973:25) noted that, in the 1860s, "the footpaths belonged to the small boys as much as to the city council, and they had no compunction in digging their 'nuck' holes wherever they wanted to play." In T&T, as in most places, marbles games are seasonal. "Pitching is mainly played by school-age children and like kite-playing is seasonal. During the months of January to June – the Dry Season – marbles appear to be one of the more common games played" (Ashby 198:11).

TYPES OF MARBLES

Some T&T names for marbles indicate their particular function in a game. Perhaps the oldest and most consistently known English term is *taw* (*tor*) [tɔ:] 'large or choice marble used to shoot at other marbles, rarely parted with or betted' (< E).² Any marble in the ring is a *dooz* [duz] (? < TEC *doos* < FC 'sweet, easy'). A chipped marble is a *falsy* [falzi] (< E *false*); no terms were found to indicate deliberate roughening of the marble's surface.

The targets and prizes played for can be marbles or other items. Often used were shiny black *tambran* [tambran] 'tamarind' seeds, *jumbie* [dʒʌmbi] *beads*, or *crab eyes* (the bright red and black seeds of *Abrus precatorius*), and *soap seed* (the soapy hard round seed of *Sapindus saponaria*); *cog* [kɔg] or *crown cork* [krɔŋ kɔ:k] (the cork liners from bottles of *sweet drink* 'carbonated soft drink,' beer, etc.); small smooth round river stones; and buttons. The commonest of these were *khaki* [kaki], khaki-colored buttons taken from shirts or the flaps of the prezipped khaki short pants worn by schoolboys.

In a circle drawn in the dust were scattered white, blue, and red buttons. Anybody knocking a button out of the ring with his marble could keep that button. For the village boys buttons were as precious as coins . . . As

I came up I saw a fellow hit a mother-of-pearl button, worth five “khakis,” out of the ring from over a yard away . . . They all had their eye on a gilt button lying right in the centre, half-covered by dust . . . it was worth at least a dozen “Khakis.” (McDonald 1969:70–71)

Even if buttons or stones were used as targets, the taw was always some type of marble or a ball bearing. “He was using a keow. One of his opponents was using a shiny steel ball-bearing and the other a white crystal taken from an old soda-water bottle” (McDonald 1969:71).

Names for types of marbles based on physical characteristics may be applied to different marbles in different regions or by different age generations of children (Randall & Webb 1988:7). Plain or painted clay marbles are the most basic and widespread of traditional marbles, their long-lived popularity probably due to their low cost. The most common marble in T&T was the *koden* [koden], made from the local *white clay* (actually gray) and fired in a kiln. These were brittle and broke easily, but they were cheap. “A shop on Erthig Road which sold marbles would let us have ten codens and two agates for the six cents” (Araujo [1984], reminiscing about the 1930s). Sometimes boys tried to pass off a koden as a more valuable *keeow* [kiəu] by rubbing it carefully in dry laundry blue or on a blue copybook cover. Poorer children might be scorned for playing with such low-status materials. “Boy, where yuh learn to play marble? dis is town yu know, We play with no river stone, No cudden neither. Is strictly glassy, agate, keeow” (Keens-Douglas 1975:43).

In the old days, glass marbles could sometimes be obtained from marble-stoppered bottles (Ingram 1972:19), as in this passage about the 1930s.³

Whenever we got our hands on a sweet drink bottle . . . we would break it . . . and extract the glass ball, which then became your crystal taw. The only problem with them was that when your opponent was using an iron taw, you had to “chinks” a lot out of his way, since a fiercely pitched iron taw could shatter a “crystal.” (Araujo 1984)

These *crystals*, also known as *water crystals*, were usually clear or light green in color. In the period after World War II, imported crystals – somewhat larger, in different colors but usually clear and transparent with a green tinge – became available. They were sometimes called *cent* or *penny* marbles from their price.

Steel ball bearings about 1.5 cm in diameter became popular as taws in the United States and T&T during World War II.⁴ They are known as *balls bearing*, *doodle* [dudəl] (? < E *doodle* ‘to deceive’), *doogle* [duəəl] (? < E *doodle*, or *doogs* ‘number of marbles risked in a game’), *google* [gugəl], *iron doodle*, *iron doogle*, *iron google*, *iron tetay* [aɪjən tete] (? < FC *tete* ‘woman’s breast’), *ironise* [aɪjənəɪz], *slug*, and *slugs*. They are often favored by poorer

pitchers because of their blasting power (Ferretti 1973:106); they are unbreakable and dangerous.

Partner, we dont play with no doogle, Dat is not real marble, Dat is balls-bearing . . . Yu want to mash up people taw? (Keens-Douglas 1975:44)

The crystal . . . [was] easy prey for the "iron goggles" (or wheel bearing slugs) that were used by the more aggressive players who often time broke up (smashed) your gentler marbles. [Letter]

Many of the marble types and terms widely known in the United States appear to have had virtually no use in T&T. Many of the less common U.S. marble types, such as *sulphides* (with figures inside) or comic picture marbles, or even common ones, such as *swirls* and *slags* (Ingram 1972), have been and are unknown or as occasional modern imports, or if present are labeled quite differently. An *agate* [agat] in T&T is usually purple-blue or spotty blue in color. It is never called *aggie*, as in the United States and the United Kingdom, where *agates* or *aggies* are made from semiprecious agate stone of layered colors, usually browns and reds. Such common U.S. terms as *alleys* and *commies* are not used.

Most T&T names for marble types are derived from English and TEC words. Local terms include *glassy* [glasi], an opaque white glass or porcelain-like marble with patches or streaks of color in it; *crystal agate* or *Chinee agate* [tʃami agat], a clear marble with two or three stripes in the center; and *snake eye*, or more commonly *veiny* [veni], an opaque glassy porcelain marble, white or shell-pink in color, with thin veins of color running through it. The common modern marble known elsewhere as *cat's eye* (clear glass with color blades inside) is called locally a *cherry-seed crystal*, from its resemblance to the flanged seed of the West Indian cherry, *Malpighia puniceifolia*.

Keeow (*keow*, *kiaow*) [kiaʊ] (? < French *caillou* 'pebble') usually refers either to a white opaque glass or porcelain marble with red or blue design. A *big-keeow* is a matte gray marble with a blue streak. A *keke* [keke] is a solid white marble. Ashby (1981:14) described *bone agates* as marbles of opaque colors, sometimes variegated. The *big mook* [big muk] (cf. TEC *mook* 'solid blow or hit') or *big-goonks* (*big unks*) [big unks] (cf. U.S. *goonger* 'an especially big marble', Cassidy [1958:34]) is a larger than normal glass marble, bigger than a crystal, about 3 cm in diameter, usually opaque milky-white with streaks of color in the outer surface. A less common term, possibly fairly recent, is *jacks-eye* [dʒaksai] (? < TEC *jacks*, several species of fish, or ? < E *one-eyed jacks*, in cards) for a very small, solid, colored marble, like those used for Chinese checkers.

As elsewhere (Ferretti 1973:50; Gomme [1894] 1964:364), different types of marbles have relative values for trading or compensation. In T&T, for example, a keeow might be worth two kekes, or two or three crystals, depend-

ing on size. Such values fluctuate with availability of marbles and funds and with local traditions.

TYPES OF MARBLES GAMES

The general term for any marbles game is *pitch*, for example, “Dey playin pitch in de road.” The origin of this term is probably E *pitch* ‘to throw so as to fall in or near a definite place’, although a TEC *pitch* is not a throw or toss but a forceful moving of the marble, held in the crook of the forefinger, propelling it forward by strongly and sharply flicking the thumb against it. The name for the game is possibly related to or convergent with the long-standing TEC *pitch* ‘asphalt’.

Some of the better games were played on the “pitched” areas of schoolyards and roadways. The pitch would get soft in the hot sun, and a hole could be made by spinning on a heel to make a depression for each hole, and rings or bounce could easily be scribed in the soft pitch. It was due to this smooth pitching surface that the ability to “spin” the marble to control its roll and to make it circle a hole was needed to win. Also back spin could allow you to hit an opponent and reverse direction to “pot” the desired hole. [Letter]

Marbles games are sometimes identified according to the item played for: for example, *ups kabat* [ʌps kəbət], in which jumbie beads are used (Ashby 1981:23); *button win*, in which buttons are targets and are thereby won or lost; and *kaks for bokee* [kaks fɪ/fə boki], in which players place their marbles at random, each player then tries to hit another’s marble, and the player whose marble is hit gets a bokee penalty (see later discussion under penalties).

However, games are generally called a specific name according to configuration, for example, “Leh we play rings.” Marble games comprise several types:

chase games in which two or more players alternately shoot at each other along a makeshift meandering course; enclosure games in which marbles are shot at other marbles contained within a marked-off area; and hole games in which marbles are shot or bowled into a successive series of holes. (Ferretti 1973:21)

There are also “bounce” games, in which the taw is shot directly or indirectly at one marble, without any other defining elements; and racing games, in which competitors’ marbles leave the starting line at the same time. The following game types are found in T&T (other cited terms in this section are explained further on).⁵

Chase games

Chase is a game usually played on the way home from school. Each pitch is aimed at the direction of home, thus allowing slow progress home as players follow the marbles, stopping to pitch from the end of each roll. There is generally no penalty, the game's purpose being to "sharpen your skills, to show off, and to go home slowly."

Enclosure games

All enclosure games in T&T are played in a fairly small ring and/or in relation to one line or two parallel lines. *Rings* is always played with a ring about 18 inches in diameter. Usually, each player puts two marbles (or buttons) into the ring, and with the taw tries to knock them out of the ring, where they are then kept. When there is only one marble left in the ring, and the shooter is sure to get it, he need not shoot, but just place a second marble in the ring as his *ante*. The other players *ante-up* by putting in two marbles, and another game starts. In rings, you must knock out a marble *and* your taw must also leave the ring *but* remain close to the line to be in position to knock another out. Four or five can play, each player betting one or two marbles each, and keeping what he wins. Competition in rings, almost always played *for self* 'to keep winnings,' is usually intense. "All three [boys] were fiercely in earnest. The best object in the game was to hit an opponent's marble because then all the buttons left in the ring came to that marksman" (McDonald 1969:71).

Nearest line is played in two ways. In the first, two lines are drawn some 4 to 5 meters apart. The players *bead* [bid] marbles on the second line, with the players trying to hit the targets by throwing from behind the *bounce* [bɔŋs] 'first line'. The second type, *lines/nearest line*, is described later under Drop Games.

Lerkee [ləɾki, lərki] (Narine 1979:9) is a type of rings but is unusual in two respects. First, it is the only term that may be Indian in origin. (Although it is similar to the Hindi word for *girl*, usually pronounced [ləɾki] in Trinidad Bhojpuri-Hindi, there is no clear link to this as an etymon.) Second, although it can be played by individuals, it is the only marbles game regularly played with partners or sides. A side, usually consisting of four players, arranges their marbles in the ring and designates players on the other side to target each marble (the weakest players are required to make the most difficult shots).

Hole games

Unlike some marble games, which

can only be enjoyed when played in a large outdoor yard, there is a type of pitching which can be played in a small enclosed area, especially under

houses which are built above five or six feet high, and are not paved with concrete. Having such ideal conditions, the main item being the earthen floor and at the same time the house to protect them from the rain, the children set about their business. (Rampersad ca. 1963:98)

Holes are smoothed out in the ground by turning on your heel. Games with more than one hole always have them arranged in a straight line, about 18–24 inches apart. In *one-hole*, marbles are played from the starting line or the last play position to the single hole. Each *potting* of the hole (i.e., getting the marble into it) is scored at 10 points, and the first player to reach 100 wins.

Three-hole and *seven-hole* are variants of the same game. Three holes are smoothed out in the ground, by turning on your heel, about 18–24 inches apart. Hole 3 is at the bounce, followed at intervals – usually a *pace* – by hole 2 and hole 1. The sequence must be completed by potting holes in order: 1-2-3 for three-hole, and 1-2-3-2-1-2-3 for seven-hole. The potting of the last hole makes a winner. If a player misses a hole, he relinquishes his turn. If a marble goes into the wrong hole, out of sequence, the player loses the game. In seven-hole, the direction of play is referred to as *going up* (3-2-1) or *going down* (1-2-3).

Hundred-hole is a type of three-hole in which the first player to make 100 points wins. A player gets 10 points for potting a hole or for hitting an opponent's marble. To win, hole 3 must be potted to make 100. If you miss this hole and go over the bounce, you get 100, but if the next player pots the hole for his 100, he wins, even though you got to 100 "first."

A game called *blochay/bloshay* [bloʃe] in Trinidad and *zip-zap-zabat* [zip zap zabat] in Tobago has been described best in Innis's (1910:84 [1932] 1970:26) reminiscences of the 1840s, and by Rampersad (1963:98). It is played with buttons, cashew nuts, or marbles. A hole about 4 inches deep and 3–4 inches in diameter is made, usually off the ground in a tree trunk, post, pillar, or wall. Players must stand on a line drawn 3–4 feet away. According to Innis, one player holds two nuts and requests two more, then throws them in the hole. If all go in, he wins; if two go in and two out, he also wins. If three go in and one does not, he loses. With more than four, they must be all in, or even in and even out, for a win; an odd number loses. Similarly:

When the game is about to commence, the first player asks the rival players how many objects are they going to begin with. If the number decided on is six, he then holds six objects in his right hand, stands erect and endeavours to throw the objects in the hole. If by chance three objects enter the hole and three remain outside, the objects which remain outside are seized by the rival Player. The first player commences to throw again, and if he is unfortunate not to have any objects thrown in the hole, they are

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again seized by the rival player who now takes his turn at the hole. (Rampersad 1963:98–99)

The manner of the game – throwing things into holes – appears more commonly African than European. However, especially given that Rampersad (1963:98) referred to this game as “blockshing,” the name *bloshay* may possibly be FC < French *bloquer* ‘to fill holes in a wall.’

Bounce games

Bounce and ex [bɔŋs ɪ eks] is a game in which you pitch your marble against a wall, making it bounce back to fall within an *ex* [eks] (hand-span) of the opponent’s marble in order to win it.

Drop games

Lines or *nearest line* (type two) has only one line. Players try to *bead* their marbles by *bouncing* on it. That is, each player drops his marble so that it ends up as close to the line as possible, trying at the same time to knock opponents’ marbles that are already close to the line further away.

Zopanex [zɔpaneks] involves placing a marble on the ground and dropping or pitching another marble onto it from a high *ups* [ʌps], in order to capture or smash the marble on the ground.

Race games

Racing marble can only be played where there are hilly roads, as in San Fernando. Marbles are lined up at a starting position, usually in a dry drain, and allowed to roll downhill to see which one reaches a given target first or goes farther.

GAME SETUPS, RULES, TACTICS, EVALUATIONS, AND PENALTIES

Marbles games are often highly localized in nature. “One man’s rules are another’s discards, and structure in Surrey is ridiculous in Wheeling” (Ferretti 1973:56). In T&T, boys who spent holidays with relatives, or who moved from one area to another, frequently found their normal plays ridiculed or disallowed. Although there are widely accepted conventions of marble play – for example, that a player who fails to achieve his objective of either potting a hole or hitting another player’s marble must yield his turn – complexity and potential conflict between different rules, and choice of whether or not certain rules are invoked, mean that the rules themselves can become a central part of the game. “Much of the effort in [U.S.] marbles games is devoted to making up and enforcing the ad hoc regulations for the various games” (Ferretti 1973:63).

There is little negotiation of rules among players who regularly play together, although an individual play might provoke a rule citation, sometimes

argument. Nonetheless, particularly with new players, much of the conversation during games revolves around elaborate rules, including recapitulations and explanations that can be incomprehensible to outsiders.

No ups, no downs, no chinksin in holes, no fens, and you're allowed the normal game, you can fats, you go back to bounds, if you get dab you go back to bounds and you remain in the game. Your share in the ring is three, and if you dab or shut a man, you would entitle to take out three marbles out of the ring. (Banyan 1985)

Yu self ehñ hear me say fen-hikes an no everys? An wha yu brushing dat dust for, Yu ehñ hear me say fen-brush? (Keens-Douglas 1975:44)

If your marble could knock my marble out of the hole I did chinks it then the game is digs-eeñ digs-out . . . I digs eeñ my marble, you have to digs it out. [Interview]

Foreseeing opponents' possible moves and establishing dominance of your own rules before others put you at a disadvantage is crucial, and a quick eye for strategies is essential.⁶

It required good tactics to get close to the ring yet avoid coming too near to an enemy's marble. The three played warily, judging angles and distances. (McDonald 1969:71)

In my old neighborhood in Yonkers, New York, a marbler had about a dozen prescriptive shouts he could use, and a fast lip was almost as important as a skilled thumb. (Dickson 1988:97)

Quite often one boy, an older player, is tacitly given the role of judge, based on age, skill, or experience in knowing how to interpret the rules in his turf. It is important to judge when someone has broken a rule.

Partner yu bringsing, Like yu hand have foot, How it moving up so? (Keens-Douglas 1975:44)

Dont hustle, yu cant butards yet, My play still, an he before yu, Yu tink country people stupid? (Keens-Douglas 1975:44)

Judgments are often contested.

Never mind dat, yu "fat" [taw remained in ring]. How yu mean [ah] "fat," yu blind or wha"? De marble naturally outside de ring. (Keens-Douglas 1975:44)

Because ah lae lae up close yuh grinding? Is not tips we playing yu know, De way all yu grow yu finger nail Tank god is not up an x, or ah bus'. (Keens-Douglas 1975:44)

During attempts to enforce rules, some bullying and *advantaging* (TEC 'taking advantage of') smaller boys may take place. "Shut yu mout' when ah

pitching, yu hear? Yu want to given me goat mout', eh? An making dumb sign eh go help allyu, Like allyu playing pard on me head" (Keens-Douglas 1975:44).

Game setups

Although there is general agreement on how game configurations are arranged, there is a certain amount of flexibility about distances and so on. Players sometimes negotiate setups: "How come de rolls-up so far? Is ah cricket pitch allyu have here?" (Keens-Douglas 1975:44). The following section is a list of typical procedures and conventions of preparing for games in T&T.

ante. One of the relatively few marble terms taken from adult gambling terms and not common in T&T. It is usually used in rings; each player first puts two marbles into the ring and tries to knock them out of the ring, when they are then kept. When only one marble is left in the ring, and the pitcher is sure to get it, he need not shoot but just place a second marble in the ring as his ante. The other players ante up by putting in two marbles each, and another game starts.

bank. Depository of extra marbles not in current play.

banker. Person who keeps extra marbles and gives them out on the owner's order.

beads; bounce. (v.) To toss or drop a marble onto the *bounce* or starting line in order to determine the order of players. The closest to the line goes first; others follow in order of distance. If a marble is on the line, you can drop your marble on top of it to knock it off, hoping your own will be closer. In hole games, the line is drawn through the diameter of one end-hole.

bombay [bɒmbe, ? bʌmbe], *plumbay* [plʌmbe] (TEC 'female pubic mound' ? < Timne *a-bombo* 'female pudenda, pubic region'). (1) A low mound of earth on which the opponent's marble is placed so that it can be hit more easily. (2) A low mound of earth or the closed fist of the nonshooting hand used to pitch from.

bounce (v.) See *beads*.

bounce [bɒŋs]; *bounds* [bɒŋs]; *bouncing line* [bɒŋsɪn laɪn]; *boundary* [bɒŋdri, bɒŋdʒri]; *lines* [laɪns]. (n.) The starting line, the line from behind which the marble is pitched to start; the line that marks the border of the area of the game in which rules apply.

fat, fart [fa:t] (< E adj. *fat* 'of a marble, remaining in the ring') (v., adj.) Of a taw, to remain in the ring after knocking out one of the target marbles. When this happens, the player is out of the game entirely, can miss a turn, or can *buttards* without missing a turn.

for keeps; for self. Game in which all the marbles knocked out of the ring belong to the successful player.

friendlies; not for self. A friendly game in which players return to the original owner(s) all the marbles they have hit out of the ring.

hole. A small shallow hole in the ground, usually scraped out with the heel, for games like *three-hole*.

lines. See *bounce* (n.).

manos manos [manos manos] (TEC 'one-on-one competition, game, bet' < Sp. *mano a mano* 'hand to hand'). A marbles competition with only two players.

not for self. See *friendlies*.

pitch. (n.) (1) The area of ground marbles are played on. (2) Any marble game involving pitching.

pitch; play pitch; pitch marble. (v.) (1) To propel your marble by placing it in the crook of the forefinger and flicking it out with the thumb. (2) To play any marbles game involving pitching.

pitcher; shooter. The person currently pitching.

plumbay. See *bombay*.

punt. To stake your taw as a guarantee when you *croaks* but wish to remain in the game. If you do not hit out a marble from the ring, you must surrender your taw.

rings. A small circle, usually about 18 inches in diameter, in which the marbles are placed in rings games.

rolls-up. The distance from the *bounce* to the *ring*.

shooter. See *pitcher*.

set (E *set up* 'stake, give amount to start up'). To lend marbles to a player who is *croaks*. If the player does not win any marbles, he will have to surrender his taw to his guarantor.

ten. Points awarded to a player each time he pots a hole or hits his opponent's marble in hole games.

talalines [talalɔɪnz]. (n.) (? E *taw line* 'line toward which marbles are rolled to determine order of shooting or from which marbles are shot toward the ring'). (v., adj.) Of a pitched marble, to stop on the line of the circle, and therefore be out of play.

Claims and advantages

The following terms can be used to claim the right to utilize a particular tactic or rule, or to prevent someone else from doing so.

dou-screw million down [du skru mɪljən dɔŋ]. Shouted in a hole game, when your opponent pots the wrong hole in sequence, thereby reserving the right to knock his marble out of the hole from the rim position by as many turns as it takes. However, if your opponent can shout "ups" or "one up" before you can shout this, you have to attempt to knock his marble out of the hole with one shot from the *ups* position.

downs [dɔŋz]. Shouted by an opponent to ensure that you pitch from the position where your last turn left you and that you can claim no alteration to your status.

down taw, downs taw. A command shouted to an opponent whose taw has slipped from his hand while playing, to leave his marble on the ground and thus prevent him from replaying, or to guarantee that his taw remains a good target.

everys [ɛvriz]. Agreement reached before the start of a game establishing right of players to ask for any advantage they want, or shouted by a player before his turn to allow himself to take any move or advantage that may be of benefit to him.

false [falziz]. Shouted to claim any extra marbles another player might have inadvertently placed in the ring.

fen, fain [fen, fen]; *fens* [fenz, fenz], *fenzen* [fenzen], *venzen* [venzen] (E ? < *defend*). Used in a phrase to claim the right to carry out a particular tactic or invoke the right to a rule, for example, *fens-up*: used to ask permission to use an *ups*. Also a game in which you can *fen* whatever is appropriate. With *no*, for example, *no fens-up*, it prevents a claim for that rule or maneuver.

fen-brush. To reserve the right to clear away any obstacles (e.g., pebbles) in front of a marble to ensure a better chance of a hit.

fen dooskoo [dusku] (*fen* + ? *dou-screw*). To claim the option to move a marble from an unfavorable position.

fen downs [dɔŋz]. To opt to pitch from a *down* or *downs* position at a point where it is traditional to pitch from an *ups* position. For example, when you have inadvertently gone across *bounce* in the game of three-hole, you usually have to pitch from an *ups*; but if you have a better chance to hit an opponent from a *downs*, you can say “fen downs” or “fen draws” to get as near as possible to the position of the opponent’s marble.

fen draws. To ask to move laterally, usually along the bounce line, that is, to take a *draws* or *downs*.

fen everys. See *fen no fens*.

fen hike. To claim the right to *pitch* by resting the marble on top of your other hand, in a fist, placed on the ground, to provide a higher place to pitch from, that is, *hikes*, *cups on knucks*, *ups on knucks*.

fen no. Used in a phrase before any advantage has the effect of disallowing it. If a player can anticipate or predict a move that his opponent may wish to make he can either shout “fen no + (specific advantage)” or “nothing” before the turn, thus not allowing the opponent to take that advantage. This can be established before the start of the game or told to a player about to play.

- fen no fens; fen everys.* Reserves all rights to the person saying it before someone else prohibits these rights by declaring *fen nothings*.
- fen slips.* Shouted by a player whose taw has slipped from his hand in order to prevent someone from claiming *down taw*.
- fen ups, fenzen ups.* To ask for or claim the right to take an *ups*, to pitch from an *ups* position, when the usual position to pitch is from a *downs*, or crouching.
- handle taw; taw ped.* Shouted to a player who touches his marble before his turn. He is allowed to put one marble in the ring and return to bounce.
- hops; obs* [hɒps, ɒps] (E *obstruction* or *obstacle*). Complaint that another player is obstructing play, enabling the player to *pitch* again in another direction.
- knucks in* [nʌks in]. Shouted to a player whose marble is in a spot where it would be awkward for the player to play (e.g., against a wall or behind an obstacle), forcing him to play in that position, preventing him from claiming the advantage of *knucks out*.
- knucks out, knuck out.* Shouted by a player immediately before his turn so that he can remove his marbles from an awkward or disadvantageous position.
- leaves.* Called when you *kaks* ‘hit’ an opponent but want to have as many marbles to aim at as possible in the ring, so that marble is left in.
- nothing, nothings.* Prohibits anyone from claiming any rights or advantages.
- obs.* See *hops*.
- one up.* A prohibition to other players, from a player at a disadvantage whose marble was in the wrong hole, in order to prevent them from claiming other advantageous privileges by shouting “dou screw million down”; thus the request for *one up*, limiting the penalty to only one shot at the marble in the wrong hole.
- rattles and cannon.* To claim points if you hit your opponent’s marble more than once in one shot, due to rebounds off objects or corners, or hitting two opponents’ marbles on a *cannon shot*.
- right throughs.* Shouted by a player before his turn allows him to keep all the marbles he has hit out of the ring, as well as claim points for any opponent’s marbles that have been indirectly hit.
- right-through, right throughs, rings and taws.* Shouted before pitching in *rings* when you intend to roll your marble through the field of play and keep anything you hit, including your opponent’s taw.
- shakes mine.* Shouted to claim a *hit* when a marble is not actually hit but did *shake* as a result of the taw brushing away part of the *bombay*.
- slips.* A misplay in which the shooting marble falls from the player’s hand and the player can try to claim the right to reshoot.
- stands.* See *ups*.

taw ped. See *handle taw*.

up, ups; stands. Advantage asked to allow player to stand and *pitch* instead of to stoop, as is normally done.

up taw, ups taw. Shouted to a player who plays out of turn, possibly costing him his turn or even his game.

*Tactics and moves*⁷

The following terms describe various specific actions used in setting up a taw, pitching, and influencing the distance or nature of the path between taw and target.

bitta [bita] (E *bittas* 'mark to be toed, starting point in leaping or playing'). A type of extension to enable player to reposition his marble, the length from elbow to tip of little finger when the hand is spread.

braps, bramps [braps, bramps] (TEC *braps* 'to describe something sudden, sharp, direct; e.g., fall or blow'). *dab* [dab] (E 'to touch, strike softly'). A gentle hit of one marble on another.

brings, bringzay (brɪŋz, brɪŋze) (TEC *brings* 'to bring forward, move up'). (v.) To cheat by moving the shooting marble slightly forward before shooting.

bringsin, bringsing [brɪŋzɪn]. (n.) Cheating by moving the shooting marble slightly forward before shooting.

brush; dust. To smooth or level off ground, remove obstacles from the area where the closed hand is resting to pitch, or remove obstacles from the shooting path, especially on rough dirt or sharp gravel.

bust [bas] (E 'finish, destroy, bankrupt'); *croak, croaks* [krok, kroks] (E *croak* 'die'); *strakes* [streks]. To lose all your marbles to a more successful player; to win all someone's marbles.

butards, buttards, butters, buttereds [bʌtɑ:dz, bʌtɑ:z] (? < Fr. *boutarde* 'outburst'). To pay a small fee, lose a turn, or lose a marble, in order to enter or re-enter a game, usually having to add something to the ring if the marble *fats*.

cannon shot. A shot in which you hit two opponents' marbles due to the taw rebounding off the first to hit the second.

chinks [tʃɪŋks] (TEC 'to be stingy' < E *chink* 'small piece'). To move closer to the ring in exchange for losing a shot; to delay, to cheat.

cog [kɒg] (E 'to beat, strike'). To hit a marble with a taw.

croaks. See *bust*.

cup and knucks. See *ups on knucks*.

dab. See *braps*.

digs in [dɪgzɪn]. When one marble is pushed slightly into the ground to make a hole to make the marble difficult to dislodge.

digs out. When one marble is *digs in* and the opponent tries to hit it with his marble hard enough to dislodge it from the hole.

dirt shake; *shakes*. Advantage asked for by a player before his turn to allow him to be awarded points even though he has missed his target, because he has struck the dirt near the target, which may cause it to shake.
dooskoo [dusku]. To stay in place with no option to move out of an unfavorable location. See *dou-screw million down*.

dust. See *brush*.

ex [eks] (< E *extend*, *extension*); *garb*, *gabs* [gab, gabz], *gambi*, *gamby*, *garbic* [gambi] (? < E *gambit*); *span*, *spawn* [spɔn] (E *span* ‘hand width’); *ex-span*. The distance from thumb to last (little) finger – sometimes to second (forefinger). The taw can be advanced this distance to improve the shooting position. The thumb is used as a pivot for a circle, drawing the resulting circumference as the boundary of the *ex*; pitching is permitted from any point on this line.

gabs, *gambi*, *gamby*, *garb*. See *ex*.

galay [gale] (? < E *dally*). To “loiter” around the ring, moving to get into better position to aim at a particular target.

go down. In a hole game, hole 3 is at the *bounce*, followed by hole 2 and hole 1. Holes must be potted in order: 1-2-3-2-1-2-3. The direction of play 1-2-3 is referred to as *going down*.

go up. In a hole game, hole 3 is at the *bounce*, followed by hole 2 and hole 1. Holes must be potted in order: 1-2-3-2-1-2-3. The direction of play 3-2-1 is referred to as *going up*.

hand-dab. For *hagarsee*, a move in which you pick up your opponent’s losing marble, which you hold in one hand and hit with the taw to *lick* or *dab* it away into the *piss*. To do this, the marble has to have ended up within a *span* of the hole the player was attempting to pot.

heads. To play by standing directly over the opponent’s marble and holding one’s marble between thumb and forefinger, usually in front of one open eye, and dropping it on the other marble. This position may only be used if the opponent’s marble is very near the player’s. In some areas, it is only done in deciding the player sequence at the bounce before the game starts.

hit; *tap*. (v.) To hit an opponent’s marble with one’s own.

kaks, *caks*, *cax*, *kacks*, *kax* [kaks], *kak*, *cack*, *kack* [kak] (< sound of two marbles hitting each other forcefully). To give an opponent’s marble a good solid hit, as in “I kaks him!” (intj.) The sound of a solid hit, as in “I hit him kaks!”

king dooz [kɪŋ duz]. Any *buttards dooz* or marble that is *matched*.

lele, *lae-lae*, *lay-lay* [lele] (TEC *lele* ‘to screw, twist, turn, spin, swizzle’).

To pitch closer and closer to the ring with each turn, or to *pitch* the marble with the spin to make it stop where it falls.

lerkee [ləɾki]. A point received in the game of *lerkee* for knocking a target out of the ring.

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lick out (TEC 'to hit and break or push away'). To hit or strike an opponent's marble out of the ring.

match. To put one's marble near the ring and in front of a *dooz* to facilitate hitting it with the next turn. This can only be done for *buttards*.

play pard [ple pa:d], *play paid* [ple ped]. To cheat by cooperating secretly with another player.

plumb dab. See *zop*.

pot. To pitch a marble into a hole.

puks, pucks, puksay [pʌks]. To pitch so forcefully that the hand moves forward from the spot on which one is supposed to play.

raff [raf] (TEC *raff* 'to steal, snatch, grab' < Fr. *rafler* 'sweep off, carry off'). To grab all the marbles madly in a scramble.

shakes. See *dirt shakes*.

shut [ʃʌt]. A type of hit: "Your share in the ring is three, and if you dab or shut a man, you would entitle to take out three marbles out of the ring" (Banyan 1985).

span, spawn. See *ex*.

stands. See *ups*.

strakes. See *bust*.

tap. See *hit*.

tips, tip. To slightly hit a marble to register a *hit*, but not disturb its position, or to slightly move the marble and carry it along with you, to continue to use each *hit* or *tips* to continue your turn. At every turn, you are allowed to take a *span* from the edge of the hole or from the position of your marble when it comes to rest. You replay until you either miss or hit the marble entirely out of the ring.

up(s) on knucks; cups on knucks. Formation of the nonplaying hand into a fist from which the player shoots.

ups; stands; ups-stand. To stand up and pitch the marble down from the hand when you say *ups* or *stands*.

zop [zɒp] (< sound of direct hit). (v.) To hit another marble directly. (n.) A direct hit of one marble by another.

zop; braps; plumb dab. To hit at the end of a curved trajectory without the shooter touching the ground.

Evaluations

Baj [bedʒ] (TEC *Baj* < *Bajan* < *Barbadian* < reputation of Bajan cricketers as accurate bowlers, thus, anyone who can hit targets well). An expert marbles player, accurate pitcher.

fowl knucks; fufu knucks [fufu nʌks]. Used to describe a person who holds the hand in an incorrect or awkward position while pitching.

fufu knucks. See *fowl knucks*.

knucks in, knucks een [nʌksin]. Said when a player's aim is very accurate, as in "Yuh knucks in, boy."

knucks out. Said when a player's aim is not very accurate.

Penalties

The loser in a marbles game may suffer loss or deliberate destruction of his marbles, even his taw. There may also be physical punishments. The most common is *bokee* (*bokey*, *boki*, *bokie*) [boki], also known as *bo-knucks* [bɒnʌks], *martee* (*marti*) [mɑ:ti], *mataks* [mataks], *noko* [noko], and *progo* [progo]. The winner either snaps a finger hard against the loser's fingers or knuckles, or pitches the marble hard against the knuckles of the loser's closed fist. *Fat pork* is a swelling resulting from receiving bokee, from the resemblance to the small fruit, *Chrysobalanus icaco*, with this common name.

When a particular game is organized, an agreement is made, or *cut for*, on what the prizes and penalties will be. At the end, the loser must *come for* the penalty and submit to it, or win by successfully potting the hole, at which point the penalty is said to be *cut*.

If marbles were scarce, you could play with buttons, and your shooter of course, or play for "bokie" where you returned your winnings, but the loser would submit to placing his closed fist on the ground, knuckles down, and the winner would pitch his taw against the joints of one's fingers for five or ten or however many "bokies" were bet or "cut for." [Letter]

In hole games, before the game players may *cut for hagarsee* [haga:si], making an agreement about the penalty to the loser, for instance, "ten bokee." In another common hagarsee penalty, possibly more common in South, each winning player can take an ex from the rim of the hole nearest to the point where the loser's marble has stopped and try to hit it away from the hole, from which point the loser once more has to attempt to pot the hole. The object is to hit the loser's marble hard enough to break it, or in the case of a hand dab, to make it land in the *piss*, a hole filled with mud and urine. Having endured this penalty from all the winners, the loser then can *cut hagarsee*, that is, indicate that the penalty has been paid and the contract is now finished, by linking little fingers with an opponent and "cutting" them apart with the downward slash of an open palm (a gesture also used in adult betting).

Although some penalties carry obvious humiliation (e.g., putting someone's marble in the piss), most involve loss of marbles or physical blows. Such penalties are not exactly a badge of honor, in that they indicate a (temporary) lack of skill at winning. Nonetheless, the ability to withstand bokee, like other blows, is a source of some respect or admiration. "Yu see dese knuckles? Is bokey I stan' have dem look so" (Keens-Douglas 1975:43).

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MARBLES IN SOCIAL CONTEXT

Cultural influences

The immediate source of most of the marbles games and terms played in T&T is the United Kingdom. This is hardly surprising, given the overall impact of British colonial culture in the country. It is possible that there is some French influence, through the French colonial planters, and there may be some relationships to games from India (*lerkee*) and Africa (*zip-zap-zapat/blochay*). No evidence was found linking marbles with Chinese immigrants, although they brought or were associated with many adult gambling games. There is virtually no influence from English words that are American rather than British, despite the fact that most 20th-century machine-made marbles probably came from the United States and that U.S. influence has arguably been eclipsing British cultural influence since World War II.

Lexical metaphor

Like cricket terms in British and Caribbean English – and baseball terms in the United States, but to a much lesser extent – some marbles terms are used outside the immediate game context. One term originally from marbles known in most varieties of English is to *knuckle down* ‘to get down to work, become serious.’ (To *lose one’s marbles* ‘to go mad, crazy’ is of unclear derivation, but is usually linked to the game.)

A small number of words that apparently originated in marbles are extended to use in other contexts. *Kaks* can indicate any kind of overwhelming, quick victory (e.g., “I get him, cax!” “I cark him, man!”). To say “Mi knucks een” (interpreted either as ‘my knucks are in’ or ‘I am knucksing’) means not only to be shooting well, but to be successful or have a run of good luck: “Mi knucks in, and ah kyaan lose today.” Similarly, someone whose knucks are often in, or who is skillful at something, can be called *baj*: “I is a baj today!” In marbles, *right throughs*, *rings and taws* refers to claiming the right to keep anything you hit, to win everything, to overwhelmingly defeat your opponents. By extension, this can mean to do something thoroughly and forcefully, to do a proper job on, to devastate. It is often sexual in reference (e.g., “I move right through she, rings and taws”).

A number of terms have specialized marbles meanings but appear to have come from more widespread general terms. People can *chinks* with a drink by not putting in enough rum; a thief can *raff* a chain from your neck. The *bombay* or *plumbay* usually refers to the female pubic mound. The concept of *fen* is also known otherwise in the common childhood cry of *fen-half* (or *h-half*), to reserve the right to a half share, usually of food.

Socialization

Games are widely recognized as an important way in which children learn to function in adult society. In the Caribbean, Cave (1976) urged further study

of children's games in regard both to social learning (e.g., manipulation of subordinate and superordinate role playing, concepts of honesty and fair play, resistance to adult pressure) and to the learning and maintenance of linguistic skills.

Girls and boys are generally differentially socialized into games, especially as they become somewhat older. Explanations for differences have ranged from the physical – females are too “weak” for sport – to the social, for instance, the view that sports are for training future soldiers (Lever 1978:480). Girls are also usually expected to contribute more to household chores, particularly indoor tasks, and are supervised more closely.

Like most boys' games, marbles are played “either for the express purpose of winning property . . . from a less fortunate or skillful player, or to attain individual distinction” (Gomme [1894] 1964:460–61). Girls' games, on the other hand, tend to have less explicit goals, to be governed more by ritual than rules – prescriptions are minimal, disputes comparatively rare – and to focus more on turn taking and continuous play than on winning and losing. Boys “grant much more importance to being proclaimed the winner; they virtually always structure their games . . . so that the outcomes will be clear and definite” (Lever 1978:479). Sports games such as cricket, baseball, and football, involving organized teams, are governed by broad sets of rules covering a wide variety of situations, both common and rare; areas of ambiguity that demand rule elaboration and adjudication are built into these games.

For boys who are serious marbles players, the skills that such play fosters are an important part of their socialization. At one level, playing marbles is a way of forming and bonding friendships based on competition, competence, and respect for physical and strategic skills. Two key features typical of boys' games in general, and obvious in marbles, are: (1) a warlike nature, that is, an emphasis on loss and destruction beyond winning and losing, including punishment by the infliction of humiliation and physical pain; and (2) an intricate and constantly shifting elaboration of rules.

The warlike nature of boys' games, and the metaphorical similarity of game pieces and weapons, are striking, as in a typical baseball headline: “Gla-vine's bat, arm kills Cubs” (*Southern Illinoisan*, May 14, 1991). Often, the objective of games is clearly stated as the destruction of the article with which the opponent plays. For example, in British *conkers*, played with nuts on a string, the losing nuts are those broken by being hit by the winners.

The successful nut . . . has the merit and glory of having destroyed previously successful nuts . . . the destruction of the implements of the game . . . does materially increase [the owner's] importance . . . especially in the days when these articles were comparatively much more expensive than now, or . . . [required] the making of another implement. (Gomme [1898] 1964:471)

An American player makes the comparison explicit.

The stricter rules apply generally to . . . shooters' or gamblers' games, that is, the circle games. In these – though one might be playing with a friend – the aim is to wipe him out, take all his marbles, drub him, defeat him, humble him, send him home without his shooter. It's war in agate, and naturally one doesn't give an inch here, a relaxation of rules there. That's not done. (Ferretti 1973:60)

Not all boys are willing to go this far, however. "War – that's rings. I eh play that. You play that, you doh attach to anything, because as soon as you like one special marble, somebody will mash it up." [Interview]

The widespread English war metaphors for argument (e.g., Lakoff & Johnson 1980:81) and sports are carried over into male-dominated arenas [sic] such as politics and business.⁸ Conversely, real wars are spoken of in terms of games, to wit "the game of war," and it was easy to confuse talk about the 1991 Persian Gulf War with talk about Nintendo.⁹ Although it is simplistic to equate training in child play as directly responsible for adult behavior, games clearly serve a socializing function. Lever (1978:481) suggested that typical boys' games may better equip males for occupational milieux that share structural features with these games, for example, male-dominated, hierarchical, highly competitive bureaucracies, organizations (including universities), businesses, and armies.

Such emphasis on rules and war often leads to a highly developed code of honor.

The ability to play within and abide by the rules was of paramount importance. If for instance the game was "pitching" or marbles, over stepping the "bounce" or "bringsing" were not allowed. The practice of "chinksing" was considered cowardice and on no account were "raffing" and "paid" permitted. In fact, the discovery of any such action led to uncontrollable anger and "heave" ['vocal encouragement to fight']. The emphasis was on fair play and the slightest deviation brought instantaneous judgment. (*Express* [Trinidad and Tobago], August 9, 1987:6)

As Lever (1978:481) pointed out, players in such games learn to deal with interpersonal competition in a forthright manner. Boys experience face-to-face confrontations, often opposing a close friend, and must learn to depersonalize the attack. They must practice "self-control" and "sportsmanship." Players must learn to deal with the loss of valued possessions, either by refusing to risk them, by having "a fast tongue," or by learning to go away and lick their wound and return to fight another day.¹⁰ "When you play with the same people repeatedly, and lose repeatedly, the sometime humiliation of losing becomes pure shame . . . But most players were not losers always . . .

the best players are those who can accept both good days and bad with equanimity" (Ferretti 1973:62).

The language of marbles games can also be seen within an overall pattern of gender-linked discourse. As Tannen (1990:24-25) has shown, many men engage the world

as an individual in a hierarchical social order in which [they are] either one-up or one-down . . . conversations are negotiations in which people try to achieve and maintain the upper hand if they can, and protect themselves from others' attempts to put them down and push them around. Life, then, is a contest, a struggle to preserve independence and avoid failure . . . [Many women, however, approach the world] as an individual in a network of connections . . . conversations are negotiations for closeness in which people try to seek and give confirmation and support, and to reach consensus. They try to protect themselves from others' attempts to push them away. Life, then, is a community, a struggle to preserve intimacy and avoid isolation. Though there are hierarchies in this world too, they are hierarchies more of friendship than of power and accomplishment.

For girls, talking is a "glue of intimacy" that makes them friends. For boys, activities are more central; they play in larger, more hierarchical groups and are "expected to use language to seize center stage by exhibiting their skill, displaying their knowledge, and challenging and resisting challenges" (Tannen 1991:B3).

The decline of marbles

There is no question that knowledge of marbles, games, and terms in T&T, even in rural and economically poor areas, has disappeared or atrophied substantially. Traditional children's games have been in decline not only in T&T, but throughout the developed and developing world. For marbles, this phenomenon was noticeable by the early 1950s in the United States (e.g., Cassidy 1958) and about a decade later in T&T. Spontaneous or highly elaborated games are rare. Such loss is ascribed to various reasons. Dickson (1988:102) noted for the United States (also true of much of T&T) that "It was something kids did together on their way home from school . . . most kids don't walk to school anymore . . . Others point to affluence and the lure of electronic afterschool diversions." (However, he also mentioned the "theory of a shrinking supply of essential, hard-packed dirt, succumbing to asphalt and even to grass" – not a problem in T&T.)

What has replaced pitch? Partly, as with other aspects of traditional culture, U.S. imports.

What is life in the tropics today? It is an amalgam of Reeboks and Air Nikes and Nintendo and Ninja Turtles and *high school* and *summer hol-*

idays and the Video Soul Top 20 Countdown and Rock in America and Sony Walkmans and Go-bots. Kids don't play pitch any more. Today, it is only in St. Ann's [the mental hospital] that one can be said to have lost one's marbles. No one under 30 even knows what "pitch" means. (Pires 1991)

There are shifts in the types of games played in T&T. On the one hand, there is the increased institutionalization and inclusiveness of team sports such as cricket and small-goal football, for both boys and girls. Basketball, in particular, has been seen as an important means of organization and cohesion for lower-class Black players (Mandle & Mandle 1988). On the other hand, in the middle class there is a yearning for, if not always widespread access to, computer games and designer running shoes. This orientation reflects widespread factors such as global marketing, increased affluence, and the availability of more commercial games, with a (post-)modern cultural orientation that turns from the past and is attracted to the new, the conspicuously expensive, the American, the mechanical, the manufactured, the computerized, the televised, and the tie-in.

The loss of pitch is seen by many adult men now as deprivation of an integral part of one's "boy-days," which included "tops, pelting mango, catching bird, tiefing fruit and breaking biche ['skipping school']". The socialization this entailed is recognized explicitly, as in a memoir about life in Belmont, Port of Spain: "It was a place where 'Boy Days' meant the capacity to enjoy life, where 'Boy Days' were given the credit for almost all skills acquired in later life" (Bynoe 1985:vi).

Marbles, including explicitly their specialized lexicon, can be seen as a concrete symbol of national cultural unity and integrity.

When I was a boy we used to play pitch for hours under the guava tree in the Nantons' back yard. And, for all that it was played in the dirt with street rabs who came over the fence . . . it was the most sophisticated game I ever played. This was a game that was not content to have only a specialized set of rules and regulations. This was a game that evolved its own vocabulary. There is – used to be – a complete lexicon around the game of pitch that is being lost. There were words – such as the inimitable *pooksay* – that existed only for and in the game of pitch. This may be a greater cultural loss than the decline of pan in Carnival . . . Pitch also cut across all barriers: street rabs played against doctor's children and anywhere you went, from Carenage to Chaguanas, you could get a game of Hundred Hole or *leerkey*. (Pires 1991)

What has happened to the verbal socialization associated with marbles needs to be investigated.

CONCLUSION

This article has presented terms associated with marbles games played in Trinidad and Tobago known to the authors. Approximately 190 are documented, compared with perhaps more than 700 for the United States. Although many terms are synonyms and variants, it is still an impressive number. Most marble terminology in T&T is derived from British English terms, themselves often of considerable historical marbles depth; there are also indications of possible Indian and African influence. Marbles terms thus represent a significant linguistic and cultural continuity, with local terms supporting creole cultural and linguistic identity.

For (former) players, the use of terms, particularly in contexts outside of marbles, is a powerfully affective in-group marker. The linguistic and social skills learned in their marbles playing have had an influence beyond the immediate fun of a childhood game. As an archetypal boys' game, marbles provided a context for learning "masculine" modes of skill, interaction, and discourse styles. In the contemporary era, it is not clear where such socialization has gone. Perhaps it remains the same but is attached to other activities, or perhaps it has itself shifted because of changes in childhood activities and goals of socialization.

NOTES

1. The authors are grateful to all those who responded to requests in person or in writing for help with marble terms, and especially to Horace James, Taran Kalloo, Paul Keens-Douglas, and Ian Robertson.
2. Broad phonetic transcriptions are given here for TEC terms whose pronunciation may not be apparent from general British English patterns. TEC tends to be syllable-timed, and thus stress is not marked in multisyllabic words. For a discussion of the orthographic system used for TEC, see Winer (1990).
3. Such marbles, used from the early 1870s into the 1940s, were part of a closure device for "Codd" bottles used for carbonated beverages. Clear, azure, black, or translucent light green in color, they are distinguished by the presence of a mold mark or line around their circumference (Randall & Webb 1988:24).
4. Although most metal marbles were actual ball bearings, some hollow steel marbles, distinguished by an *X* where the metal was folded together to make a sphere, were produced in the early 1900s (Randall & Webb 1988:30).
5. A game known in the United Kingdom and the United States as *hogo* or *ship-sail* (Ferretti 1973:114; Gomme [1898] 1964:191-92) is sometimes classified as a marbles game, but was played in T&T, under the latter name, only with grains of corn (Innis [1932] 1970:26). A number of marbles (or grains) is held in a closed fist by one player, who says, "Ship sail, sail fast. How many men on board?" A guess is made by his opponent. If less, he has to give as many marbles as will make up the true number; if more, as many as he said over. Should the guess be correct, he takes them and starts over in turn (or eats the captured grains).
6. Strategies for being wary of fens in both marbles and the rest of life were parallel:

If you had cut "fen half" for example, that gave your co-cutters the right to claim half of anything nice you had to eat simply by their calling "fen half." So you had to be always on the alert, because the only way to avoid having to share your spoils was to beat them to the punch by shouting "fen-no-half!" (Araujo 1984:39)

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7. A tactic for which thus far a name has not been found is done for luck or to increase accuracy: "A secondary taw is kept in the other hand and rapped sharply at least twice before the shot is made, almost like chalking a cue in billiards. Some players make a noise with their mouths, like 'giddyapping' a horse – two short cheups ['suck teeth']. " [Letter]
8. A typical example of "cut-throat" business dealing with a marbles metaphor is found in a popular American novel (Resnicow 1987:178).

Aside from the honor and the glory, there could be a tremendous financial gain . . . He would, of course, lose everything he had in [the company], but it might be worth it . . . But how would he prove this without showing the papers that Kassel signed? We could take all his marbles for that.

9. The shift in games at least partly reflects changes in the technological nature of war.

One more thing about this generation of soldiers – they grew up in video arcades. It's no coincidence that watching the war's high-tech weapons on our TV screens is so much like watching computer games . . . And our soldiers have an absolutely intuitive Donkey Kong-honed, gut-level understanding of the technology behind it. (O'Rourke 1991:26)

10. Johnson's (1911) narrative of "Marble Time" clearly illustrates the possible progression from words to physical threats in such exchanges, for example, "Fen dubs." "Dubs." "I said it first." "You didn't." "I did." "Besides, you hunched." "I didn't." "You did, you big bully, you." "Don't you call me that." "I will, you big bully, you." "You say that again and I'll knock your block off!" "You big bully, you!"

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