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Abstract
          There are two positions on the
relationship of the speech of Blacks and whites, and they
are quite opposed to one another. One position observes
virtually no differences in the speech of Southern whites
and Blacks and therefore assumes that the historical
development can be traced to a British dialect. The other
sees many significant differences and therefore assumes
that Black dialect is derived from a creole-based system
more like the Caribbean creoles than it is like a British
dialect. In order to resolve some of the issues at the
heart of this controversy, Wolfram, Shuy, and Fasold have
begun extracting data from 50 lower socio-economic class
children (Black and white) between the ages of six and
eight. This specific age range was chosen to represent a
period when the children would be past the developmental
stage but at an age when the awareness of the social
consequences of speech would be minimal. The age is also
crucial because both Stewart and Dillard maintain that only
among children do certain creole-like features exist.
Analysis of the third person singular, possessives, copula
absence, invariant "be," and word-final consonant clusters
lead the author to conclude that there are definite
Black/white speech differences that can not be dismissed as
"statistical skewing": some are qualitative. However, the
extent of these differences is not nearly as great as is
sometimes claimed; they differ in surface rather than deep
structure. (DO)

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BLACK/WHITE SPEECH DIFFERENCES REVISITED

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BLACK/WHITE SPEECH DIFFERENCES REVISITED: A PRELIMINARY REPORT

The possibility of ethnic correlates of speech behavior has always been an issue charged with emotion. For the layman, the fact that there might be speech differences between Black and whites has often been interpreted to have a direct relation to the physical and mental attributes of the Black: the admission of speech differences meant that the Black had certain inherent obstacles to the acquisition of standard English. Quite under-standably, those who wished to emphasize the potential of the Black population minimized any differences that might exist between Black and white speech. On another level, the possibility of Black/white speech differences has become quite charged for linguists interested in American English dialects. The implications on this level, however, have nothing to do with the physical or mental attributes of Negroes, but with the social and historical origin of varieties of English used in the United States. The question is whether the language usage in Black culture was sufficiently different from other American groups so as to result in a language variety quite distinct from any other American English dialect.

Dialectologists were first among linguists to even consider the notion of Black/white speech differences. On the whole, their treatment of such a possibility was to reject it. Thus, Kurath

summarizes his position as:

> By and large the Southern Negro speaks the language
> of the white man of his locality or area and of his
> education.... As far as the speech of uneducated
> Negroes is concerned, it differs little from that of
> the illiterate white; that is, it exhibits the same
> regional and local variations as that of the simple
> white folk (Kurath 1949:6).

In the most careful investigation of this question by dialect-
ologists, McDavid and McDavid concluded in their important article,
"The Relationship of the Speech of American Negroes to the Speech of
Whites":

> First, the overwhelming bulk of the material of
> American Negro speech—in vocabulary as well as in
> grammar and phonology—is, as one would expect, borrowed
> from the speech of the white groups with which Negroes come in
> contact. Sometimes these contacts have been such that
> Negroes simply speak the local variety of standard English.
> It is also likely that many relic forms from English dialects
> are better preserved in the speech of some American Negro
> groups than in American white speech... After all, the
> preservation of relic forms is made possible by geographical
> and cultural isolation (McDavid and McDavid 1951:1)

In the last several years, this traditional view of dialectology has come under harsh attack, primarily from those with some background in creole languages. Linguists such as Bailey (1965, 1968) Stewart (1967, 1968) and Dillard (1968) have insisted that the speech of Blacks shows more of a relation with some Caribbean creoles than it does with English dialects. Thus, Bailey, in "Toward a New Perspective in Negro English Dialectology", says:

> I would like to suggest that the Southern Negro "dialect"
> differs from other Southern speech because its deep
> structure is different, having its origins as it
> undoubtedly does in some Proto-Creole grammatical structure.
> Hence, regardless of surface resemblances to other dialects
> of English....we must look into the system itself for an
> explanation of seeming confusion of persons and tenses (1965:172)

Stewart, in several articles on the historical development (mainly taken from literary records of Black speech) of the speech of Blacks in the United States (Stewart 1967, 1968), suggests that present-day Negro dialect has resulted from a process he calls "decreolization" (i.e. the loss of creole features). Through contact with British-derived dialects the creole variety of English spoken by 17th and 18th century Blacks merged with other dialects of English.[1]

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[1] The one exception to such a merger is Gullah or Geeche, spoken along the South Carolina and Georgia coastal islands. The position of this creole is actually quite crucial to the argument of the origin of Black dialect. The creolist sees this variety in a continuum relation with other varieties of Black speech in the United States, whereas the dialectologist sees it as an anomaly among American Negro dialects, accounted for by extreme cultural isolation.

specific linguistic features which have been central to this dispute. On the basis of a specific examination, we should then be able to generalize concerning the nature of Black/white speech differences.

In order to resolve some of the issues at the heart of this controversy, we (i.e. Roger Shuy, Ralph Fasold, and I) recently began extracting data from 50 lower socio-economic class children from Lexington, Mississippi, a rural town of 3,000. The informants, equally divided among Black and white, are all between the ages of 6-8. This specific age range was chosen to represent a period when the children would be past the developmental stage, but at an age when the awareness of the social consequences of speech would be minimal. The age is also crucial because both Stewart and Dillard maintain that only among children do certain creole-like features exist. Traditionally, dialect geographers have selected adults. In fact, in many instances, the older the informant, the more information one was likely to get about the settlement history of a particular area. Although we have still not completed all our analysis, the data from this study, combined with analysis of Negro dialect in other areas (see, e.g. Labov, et al. 1968; Wolfram 1969) can reveal considerable insight into this dilema. On the basis of these data I will attempt to show in what ways some features of Southern white and Black speech are alike and in what ways they appear to be different.

Third person -Z

A well known feature of Negro dialect is the absence of -Z with third person singular present tense forms, so that we observe

he do, he go, or he talk where standard English has he does, he goes, or he talks. The dialectologist (see McDavid 1967:35,39) notes that this feature is also characteristic of Southern white speech, apparently derived from its usage in the Southern part of England. Our data would certainly support this feature as a characteristic of both Black and white Southern speech. A closer inspection of the data, however, reveals two essential factors. First, we observe that absence of -Z always alternates with its presence for the white informants, and in most cases, its presence is statistically predominant (85% presence in preliminary tabulations). For many Negro informants, there is categorical or near categorical absence of -Z. (87% absence in our preliminary tabulations). The explanation that McDavid gives (1965:258) for such a difference is "statistical skewing because of the American caste system". But the near categorical absence of -Z for the Black children and its nearly invariant presence for the white children suggests that in the one case we are dealing with "inherent variability" (i.e. the alternation is an integral part of the system) while in the other case we are dealing with the basic absence of -Z as a grammatical category. (From this perspective any instances of -Z occurrence are attributed to "dialect importation" from white speech). The quantitative evidence is further supported by structural clues indicating a basic unfamiliarity with -Z third person singular forms. Black children, in attempting to use this form, often hypercorrect so that -Z occurs on non-third person forms (I does),[1] sometimes use it on infinitives (to goes), and sporadically even use it with other types of non-finite constructions (e.g. I get rounds). This type of

[1] This usage is to be distinguished from its use in non-standard white English in certain narrative styles.

hypercorrection, as I have pointed out elsewhere (Wolfram 1969: 46)
is an important clue to structural unfamiliarity. This, together with
the quantitative evidence, indicates that although there are some
similarities between Southern white and Black children with respect to
this feature, the presence of -Z third person singular as a grammatical
category differs in the two systems.

On the other hand, there are some views about the absence of
-Z third person (cf. Dillard 1968:10, Loflin 1967b)which make far
stronger claims about the absence of -Z among Black children than
seem warranted. Dillard, for example, maintains:

> ...Negro he do is NOT simply a grammatical
>
> equivalent of he does differning only in
>
> "dropped" inflectional ending (1968: 10)

Dillard, following the position first stated by Loflin, maintains
that this category indicates "generic" as opposed to "non-generic"
aspect. Our descriptive analysis of the actual usage of tense among
Black speakers, however, clearly does not support such a view. Rather,
the correspondence between the absence of -Z among Southern Blacks, the
optionality of -Z among white Southerners,and the obligatory presence
of -Z among standard English speakers is on a relatively superficial
level of grammatical structure (i.e. it is not a "deep structure"
difference).

Possessive -Z

In many respects, the use of -Z possessive (e.g. man hat for
man's hat) functions like third person singular -Z with respect to

Black/white speech differences, except that -Z possessive absence is considerably more rare than -Z third person for the white informants. Again, however, it is clear that it is in alternation with its presence, whereas such a case cannot be made for its use by many of the Black children. In addition, the types of hypercorrection that are found (Jack's Johnson car) indicate that the -Z possessive category is non-existent in the variety spoken by some of the Black children.

More interesting than the -Z with reference to the possessive is the use of pers⋯⋯. pronouns such as she, and he where the standard English pronouns his and her would be used. Thus, we get she book or he book for her book and his book respectively. For the white informants, such a form is totally absent, but there is a significant minority of our Black informants who do use this form, in most cases alternating with the standard English norms for possessive pronouns.

We may summarize the use of these two aspects of possessives in different varieties of English by means of the following table. V_1 refers to a most varieties of standard English, V_2 to a variety of white Southern non-standard English, V_3 to most varieties of Northern Black English and V_4 to a variety of Southern Black English. The symbol (+) stands for invariant presence, (-) for invariant absence, and ($\sim$) for inherent variation.

	-$\underline{Z}$ Poss.	Differentiated Poss. Pro.
V_1	+	+
V_2	$\sim$	+
V_3	-	+
V_4	-	$\sim$

-Z Poss

V_1	man's book	her book
V_2	man book $\sim$ man's book	her book
V_3	man book	her book
V_4	man book	she book $\sim$ her book

Examples

Table 1: Poss. -$\underline{Z}$ and Poss. Pronoun in four Varieties
of English

It is apparent, in the above table, that although there are
similarities between the white non-standard Southern variety (V_2) and
Black English varieties (V_3, V_4), there are also essential differences
in the function of possessives.

Copula Absence

The absence of copula in present tense is another important feature characteristic of Black speech and crucial to the controversy about Black/white speech differences. In Black speech we find <u>He ugly</u> or <u>He gonna</u> corresponding to standard English <u>He's ugly</u> or <u>He's gonna</u>. Our data indicate that the dialectologist is right when he says that copula absence is also characteristic of white Southern speech, but wrong when he assumes that it operates in identical ways. There are some aspects of copula absence which seem to be unique to Black dialects. In the first place, we must point out that all dialects of English must have a full form of the copula when the copula occurs in what we may call the "exposed" position (i.e. clause-final such as <u>I know he is</u>, "tag" questions such as <u>He not home, is he?</u>) In unexposed position, though, there is considerable variety, so that one can find either a full form or a contracted form (<u>He is ugly~He's ugly</u>). Where-ever standard English can have contraction, we find that many of the Black children in our sample have only full forms or copula absence, but not contraction (<u>He is ugly~He ugly</u>). For the white children and most Northern Black varieties, the full form may alternate with the contracted form or copula absence (<u>You ugly~You're ugly~You are ugly</u>). Thus, we see an important difference in the way copula absence functions between Black and white children in the South.

The white speakers always have variation between full forms, contracted forms and absence while one variety of Black English may only have variation between full forms and copula absence.

There is also a further way in which copula absence functions differently between the groups. In the white speakers, we find that copula absence occurs predominantly when the underlying form would be ARE, but not IS. That is, we normally get They nice but not He nice from white Southern speakers in our sample. The one notable exception to this rule occurs with gonna, in which case copula absence occurs regardless of the underlying form.

The fact that we have concluded that no contracted form is inherently variable in the speech of a variety spoken by some of our Lexington Black children (V_4) has implications for the descriptive statement of copula absence. Labov (1969) has concluded that zero copula is simply an extention of contraction for his Black informants in New York City (V_3). But is is unlikely that such a process can be justified for some of the Black Lexington informants. Labov concludes that deletion follows contraction in the ordered sequence of rules, operating on the contracted form (e.g. 1. $\partial z \rightarrow z/X$ 2. $z \rightarrow \emptyset/X$). The fluctuation between contraction and deletion in near identical environments[7] is cited as evidence for the close relationship of these processes. But in the case of V_4, the evidence for fluctuation between contraction and deletion is lacking; we only have evidence for fluctuation between full forms and zero copula. The rule must therefore be written to account for deletion but not contraction. The environment for the applicability of this rule is nearly identical to the environ-

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[1] The one environment in which deletion may not operate on contraction is the first person form I'm (i.e. *I happy). The general principle for deletion is only operative when the output of contraction is z or r, but not m.

ment that is needed in Labov's rule,[1] but the output is different. Furthermore, there is no motivation to posit the rule as phonological as Labov has done for V_3. The rule for V_4 will take a grammatical route such as Cop $\rightarrow$ $\emptyset$/X rather than the phonological route that Labov posits for V_3.

Although we have suggested a qualitative difference in the way that copula absence operates for Southern whites and Blacks, our analysis does not support the notion that there is a "deep structure" difference as some (cf. Bailey 1965) have suggested. For example, Stewart (1967) has suggested that copula absence can only be used for "momentary" aspect (i.e. <u>He busy right now</u> but not *<u>He busy all the time</u>). Our data, however, do not support such a descriptive analysis. In our data, we observe <u>He busy all the time</u> as well as <u>He busy right now</u> (or its alternative <u>He is busy right now</u>). The conclusion, then, is that there is a Black/white speech differentiation with reference to copula absence in the South, but it is on a relatively superficial level of language structure.

The following table summarizes the different dialects of American English with respect to copula, the symbolization of the dialects following that set forth in Table 1. In the following table <u>F</u> stands for a full form, <u>C</u> for contraction, and $\emptyset$ for absence.

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[1] The environment for V_4 will include first person singular on the basis that <u>I'm</u> may be an allomorph of <u>I</u> in this variety. Motivation for this claim is found in the use of <u>I'm</u> with a full form of the copula, such as <u>I'm is</u> or <u>I'm am</u>.

Variety	Exposed Env. IS/ARE	Unexposed Env. IS	ARE
V_1	F	$F \sim C$	$F \sim C$
V_2	F	$F \sim C \sim (\emptyset)$	$F \sim C \sim \emptyset$
V_3	F	$F \sim C \sim \emptyset$	$F \sim C^1 \sim \emptyset$
V_4	F	$F \sim \emptyset$	$F \sim \emptyset$

	Exposed Env. IS/ARE	Unexposed Env. IS	ARE
V_1	... I know he is	He is ugly ~ He's ugly	They are ugly ~ They're ugly
V_2	... I know he is	He is ugly ~ He's ugly ~ (He gonna)	They are ugly ~ They're ugly ~ They ugly
V_3	... I know he is	He is ugly ~ He's ugly ~ He ugly	They are ugly ~ (They're ugly) ~ They ugly
V_4	... I know he is	He is ugly ~ He ugly	They are ugly ~ They ugly

Table 2: Copula Full Forms, Contraction, and Absence in Four
Varieties of English

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[1] I am still uncertain whether this vareity of Black English can
be characterized by the contraction of ARE. For some of the infor-
mants in my Detroit corpus, it apparently cannot (cf. Wolfram 1969: 175)

Invariant Be

The use of be, as has been pointed out in a number of different
studies now (e.g. Fasold 1969, Wolfram 1969) seems to be one area
where there is a significant grammatical difference between Black
English and other varieties of English. Its use in a sentence such
as Sometime he be up there and sometime he don't indicates an habitual
or iterative aspect-- a grammatical function unique to Black English.[1]
Our study of Lexington Black children confirms the analysis advanced
on the basis of studies of lower class Black speech in Washington, D.C.,
Detroit, and New York. The white informants, on the other hand,
neither used the form nor indicated any sensitivity to it. This
thus seems to be a point at which there is a difference between
Black and white speech in the South on an underlying rather than
a superficial level. One may caution, at this juncture, that because
our Lexington informants do not use be, it may not be used
elsewhere in the South by whites. However, I have never seen any
evidence that white speakers anywhere in this country use be in the
iterative or habitual sense. Inasmuch as the white informants represent a
characteristic community of lower class rural white speakers, we
can say that evidence to the contrary must be provided before we
can come to any other reasonable conclusion.

_____

[1] This use must be distinguished from be derived from underlying
will be or would be (see Fasold 1969). The use of be as a surface
realization of will or would be, according to Fasold, may occasionally
be used in any dialect of standard English. In my own analysis, I
claim that there is always some phonetic vestige (e.g. a vocalic
glide or consonant lengthening) of underlying will or would in
standard English.

Word-Final Consonant Clusters

In word-final consonant clusters which share the feature of
voicing or voicelessness (e.g. , as in the word cold but not colt),
it is often observed that the final member of the cluster is absent
in Black English. Thus, we get tes', des', and col' for test, desk,
and cold respectively. As has been observed (see Wolfram 1969:60-61),
this feature is characteristic of standard English when the following
word begins with a consonant (e.g. wes' Detroit), but not when it is
followed by a vowel. In Black English, however, it may occur in
both environements, so that we find both wes' Detroit and wes' en'
in Black English; in standard English only the former is found.
In addition, Black English plurals for s + stop clusters, st, sp,
and sk are formed as if the final segment were s. This results in
the pluralization of desk, wasp, and test as wases, deses , and teses.
The The absence of clusters regardless of environment and the particular
pluralization pattern raises the question of whether there is
actually any "underlying"cluster as an inherent part of the dialect.
The easiest way to determine the solution is to observe what takes
place when a suffix beginning with a vowel is added, such as -ing, est,
or -er. If the informant consistently uses a cluster in such a case,
we have formal motivation to posit an underlying cluster (e.g. testing,
tester). But if the cluster is absent (e.g. tesing and teser), then
there is no formal motivation to suggest that there is an underlying
cluster.

With this background information in mind, we can suggest an
important speech difference between the white children and some of the Black

children. Many of the white Southern children, unlike standard English, may have the final member of a cluster absent when the following word begins with a vowel (wes' en') as well as a consonant. But they do not have its absence when followed by suffix beginning with a vowel (e.g. testing). This is unlike standard English but much like the way we have found it to operate for the vast majority of Black English speakers in studies of Northern cities (see Wolfram 1969; Labov et al. 1968). Some of the Black children in our Lexington sample, however, have no underlying cluster based on this criterion. This is unlike both Southern white and most Northern-born Blacks. The representation of the differences can be observed in the following table, in which the varieties of English are designated as they were in the previous table.

	___Cons.	___#Vo.	___-Suffix	
V_1	-	+	+	+ = permissible absence of final cluster member
V_2, V_3	-	-	+	- = absence of final cluster member not permissible
V_4	-	-	-	

	___Consonant	___#Vowel	___-Vowel
V_1	bes' kind	best apple	testing
V_2, V_3	bes' kind	bes' apple	testing
V_4	bes' kind	bes' apple	tesing

Table 3: The Reduction of Final Consonant Clusters in
Four American English Dialects

What is summarized, in the above table, is a subtle but important difference in the way that the absence of the final member of a consonant cluster operates between the white southern informants and a significant number of our Black informants from the same area.

Conclusion

One could obviously describe a number of other features which have considerable bearing on the issue of Black/white speech differences, and our final report of our Lexington will include a number of other items (e.g. question inversion, undifferentiated subject pronouns, th realizations, vowel diphthongs, etc.). This token description, however, is ample for us to make several conclusions about the issue.

We must first conclude that there are definite Black/white speech differences, despite the claims that some dialectologists make to the contrary. Furthermore, these differences can not simply be dismissed as "statistical skewing"; some of them are qualitative. If we do find differences, then, we must ask why dialectologists have not recognized them, for certainly we cannot accuse them of deliberately trying to conceal facts from us. Several apparent reasons for the failure to observe ethnic differences can be suggested. In the first place, the focus of dialect research as represented in the work of the Linguistic Atlas was on the homogeneity of geographical regions as they related to settlement history. The emphasis, therefore, was on similarities rather than differences between informants in a given locale.

A second reason can be attributed to the general design of American dialectology questionnaires, which tend to focus on vocabulary and phonological differences, the areas in which Black and white Southern speech are most similar (although, as we have seen, they are clearly not

identical). The analytical method of dialectologists also focuses on single items for the purpose of charting isoglosses rather than the elicitation of items for descriptive purposes. One can readily see how this would affect the interpretations of data. For example, if the focus of a survey is simply on the existence of copula absence among Southern white and Black, it is relatively simple to overlook the subtle but important ways in which it operates differently for whites and Blacks. Only studies which examine the consequences of surface forms in terms of a detailed and adequate description of the entire system can reveal some of these differences. And finally, the types of informants chosen by dialectologists must be considered as a contributing factor. An ideal informant, from the view of the dialect geography, is an older, lifetime resident of a particular locale. While age-grading may not be as important as Stewart and Dillard sometimes insist, it seems clear that some features unique to Black dialect are predominantly found among the children (e.g. _he_ and _she_ used as possessives, absence of underlying clusters, etc.). As Blacks and whites become older, their speech is more likely to converge.

While we conclude that there are discrete Black/white speech differences in the South, we must also point out that the extent of these differences is not nearly as great as is sometimes claimed. Most of the differences are on a surface rather than an underlying level of language organization. Claims about the drastic differences in the underlying structure of the verb phrase (e.g. Loflin 1967)simply cannot be validated on the basis of exhaustive descriptive analysis. It should be further pointed out that the inventory of differences is

far smaller than the inventory of similarities. By focusing on the differences one may tend to overlook the many areas (e.g. noun phrase structure) in which these varieties of English are quite alike. One cannot, therefore, reason that we must assume significant linguistic differences. The fccus on differences to the exclusion of similarities may lead one to unjustified descriptive conclusions.

If it seems that my conclusions about the two extremes concerning Black/white speech differences are less than dramatic or weakly conciliatory, I offer my apologies. But the serious linguist who deals with this issue must first be committed to an appraisal of the descriptive facts. When claims precede empirical data, we have left the discipline of linguistics and entered the political arena. I just so happen to prefer the secure limits of my discipline.

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