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HISTORICAL AND STRUCTURAL ASPECTS OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIATION:
THE COPULA IN BLACK ENGLISH

Carol Pfaff

ABSTRACT

Sociolinguistic variation in the copula system of Black English was studied in the light of the linguistic history of the dialect and universal constraints on possible grammars. An attempt was made to identify sociological factors which account for the fact that the grammar of American Black English does not exhibit evidence for a creole stage in its development while Jamaican and other creoles do exhibit such evidence. The structural implications of variation in the realization of one form of the copula in Black English--is-- were considered for phonetically full, contracted or zero forms.

Contents

HISTORICAL AND STRUCTURAL ASPECTS OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIATION: THE COPULA IN BLACK ENGLISH[1]

Carol Pfaff

The sociolinguistic characteristics of present day Black English
(Labov et al., 1968; Shuy, Wolfram, and Riley, 1967; Wolfram, 1969a,
1969b; Legum et al., 1971) reflect the historical development of the
dialect and its synchronic structural organization as well as the
cultural patterns which determine its usage. This paper considers
the implications of those determinants for ascertaining the optimal
underlying representation of Black English.

The central issue is whether it is preferable to regard Black
English as having the same underlying structure as standard Anglo
English or a different underlying structure. Each of these positions
has current proponents among linguists concerned with the description
of Black English. From an historical perspective, there is the ques-
tion of whether African influence or creolization has resulted in an
underlying structure for Black English which diverges sharply from
that of Anglo English. Two schools of thought on this matter can be
distinguished: the creolist and the transformationalist. Members of
the former claim there is a different underlying structure for Black
English as a result of creolization, while members of the latter posit
underlying identity with Anglo English.

The theoretical assumptions, methods, and evidence of these two
approaches were evaluated. On the structural side, the purely linguistic
constraints on variation of the realization of the copula were investi-
gated, and the behavior of the copula, in particular the form $\underline{is}$, was
compared to that of other grammatical entities represented by similar
phonological form.

The Los Angeles data cited in this investigation were collected
from young Black Los Angeles school children as a part of the pilot
sociolinguistic study carried out by the Southwest Regional Laboratory
(Legum et al., 1971).[2]

Several different names and abbreviations are used to designate
the varieties of English spoken by Blacks in the continental United
States. The most frequently used is Black English (BE), contrasted

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[1]Portions of this paper were presented at the Conference on the
English Language in California, Riverside, California, January 23, 1971.

[2]The methodology employed in this study is documented by Williams
and Legum (1970).

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with standard Anglo English (SAE) in the United States. American Black English is used when the larger framework of Black English dialects and creoles is being considered. Nonstandard Negro English (NNE) is used in quotations from Labov et al., (1968).

Part I

Historical Aspects of Variation in Black English

Transformationalist and Creolist Views of BE

Within linguistic theory, there are at present two, widely differing approaches to the grammatical description of Black English--the transformationalist and the creolist. The first approach, exemplified by Labov (et al., 1968), stresses the similarities between Black and standard English, and ascribes these similarities to the identity of the underlying grammatical structure, transformational rules, and shallow structure of the two dialects. Differences are derived in two ways. First, lexical entries may be marked as occurring in just one of these dialects, or as having slightly different transformational potentials or meanings in the two dialects. Secondly, low-level phonological rules may be posited, most of which simply delete phonological elements; and such rules may operate in BE but not in SAE, or operate in SAE to a lesser extent.

The transformationalist approach has succeeded in deriving different structures of BE and SAE, but not in explaining why those lexical and phonological differences exist nor in justifying the posited underlying identity. Consider the assumptions implicit in the following transformationalist statement:

> In the background of the issues raised by the creole
> hypothesis are broader theoretical questions as to the
> extent and nature of dialect differences in general,
> and indeed of differences between languages. Generative
> grammar tends to minimize such differences, and to
> emphasize the similarity of phrase structure and high
> level transformations among languages which are super-
> ficially quite dissimilar. In one of the early Project
> Literacy conferences, Chomsky suggested that the under-
> lying forms of English are remarkably resistant to
> change, and that most dialect differences are therefore
> relatively superficial. A natural consequence of the
> generative viewpoint is that NNE (and even Jamaican
> Creole) would be expected to differ from SE chiefly in
> its surface representation and this point was strongly
> argued by Rosenbaum at the same conference in opposition
> to the creolist viewpoint of Bailey. (Labov et al.,
> 1968, pp. 7-8).

The key phrase in the above quotation is that underlying forms are remarkably resistant to change and that therefore dialect differences are superficial. This can be true only if the dialects in question do not have a radically different history from the language in general, including the standard form. But in the case of the creoles and BE, the relevant cultural factor is known; English was adopted only in

recent historical time by Black speakers. Labov ignores the possibility that the similarity of these dialects may be due to convergence. There is no reason to assume that the original learners internalized the under-lying forms which native speakers have; to the contrary, it is true almost by definition that restructuring is a consequence of pidginization and creolization. Even within transformational theory, the resistance of underlying forms to change is countered by much restructuring of the grammar in the process of language acquisition even for speakers with no history of interference from creolization (cf., Kiparsky, 1968).

The second of the currently popular approaches to the description of BE is the creolist, represented by the work of Stewart (1969) and Dillard (1967), among others. The emphasis here is on the differences between BE and AE. The claim that the history of BE includes a creolized stage, is viewed as the explanation of these differences.

> If it is the case that the speech of American Negroes never was identical to that of American whites, and that, in fact, the two diverge more and more as one goes back through time, then it stands to reason that the Chomskian assumption that different dialects which derive from a single source will differ primarily in trivial surface features, while possibly valid for white dialects of American English, may not necessarily apply to the differences between Negro dialects and white dialects...Furthermore, the assumption that superficially similar linguistic phenomena in Negro and white speech are caused by the same factors may lead to conclusions about Negro behavior which are far more unfair than assumptions about linguistic and cultural differences...a reevaluation of early literary records of American Negro speech should prove helpful in settling disputed or unclear points about the processes by which Negro dialect forms are produced or have come about. Until synchronic studies of American Negro speech face up to and explain the many striking similarities between it and attested forms of creole English used by colonial Negroes, present-day Caribbean creole English, and West African forms of English, the results may be more appropriate as white-assimilationist propaganda than as the scientific study of the American Negro. (Stewart, 1969)

Dillard (1967), posits that BE syntax differs from that of AE and that such differences support the notion that BE has developed from a creole. "Creolists have long been aware that English-based creole lan-guages often differ from the standard language primarily in syntactic properties (more basic matters from the point of view of the linguist) rather than in local idiosyncrasies of pronunciation and vocabulary."

In general, Dillard's view is that:

> One must take into account creole lingua franca forms which are rather well attested to as having been current among the plantation field hand population. [Although] there is no

more reason to read pidginization into everything said by
Negroes than there is to find Africanisms behind every
cotton plant. Clear archaisms like ax for ask, even though
they are found in Trinidad, Jamaica, and St. Thomas, as well
as among Negroes in the Northern ghettos and in the rural
South, should probably be attributed to survivals from
earlier stages of English. The lack of distinction between
pairs of words such as pen and pin is also widespread enough
among white English dialects to make it unlikely as an
"African" importation. But there remains the very strong
possibility that even the speech of American whites...has
been influenced by the speech of the Negro to a greater
degree than historians of the language have been willing
to admit.

The syntactic features of BE for which Dillard claims creole origin
are:

1. Dominance of aspect over tense in the verb system. He there
    vs. he be there, where the crucial differrence signaled is not
    one of past or present action but of duration of the action.

2. Lack of gender distinction in third person singular pronoun.
    This is a feature of Caribbean creoles, Wes Kos Pidgin English
    and some West African languages.

3. Use of undifferentiated forms of the pronoun as possessive,
    e.g., he brother, she book.

The underlying structure of BE is thus taken to be different from that
of SAE, reflecting this historical development.

Creolists do not deny that many of the occurring surface forms of
BE are identical to those of standard English, however, they attribute
these forms to socially conditioned dialect borrowing, that is, conscious
or unconscious imitation of the prestige forms by individuals who have
become exposed to them through school, job, mass media, or other social
contact. Such dialect borrowing is assumed to be characteristic of a
post-creole continuum as described by DeCamp (1968). Dillard (1967)
cites evidence for this view in the age-grading sociolinguistic varia-
tion in BE. He claims that differences in syntax between BE and SAE
which he considers characteristic of creoli tion are greater in child
language than in adult language. For example, he suggests that the
lack of gender distinction in BE is characteristic of speakers five
to six years old only, and the use of the "undifferentiated" forms of
the pronoun in possessives disappears somewhere between the ages of 9
and 14. He cites no evidence of such linguistic age-grading from
empirical studies, however, but gives a few constructed examples from
Loban (1966). On the strength of these claims, Dillard stresses the
value of future studies of age-grading in language variation and poses
the question, "Is it a general linguistic condition or perhaps a special
characteristic of Negro dialect that archaic forms are preserved longer
in the speech of children than elsewhere?"

The Copula System of Black English

The problems and potentials of the two approaches to grammatical description can be clarified by considering the copula system of American Black English. The realization of the copula in BE has long been recognized as one of the most striking features of this dialect. Further, this variable has great importance for linguistic theory development, both transformationalists and creolists use the forms of the copula as evidence for their views. Two facets of the realization of the copula characteristic of BE are:

1) lack (zero realization) of a finite form of to be in constructions in which it is present in standard English, e.g., John tired rather than John is tired.

2) presence of an invariant, infinitive, form be in constructions in which finite forms would occur in standard English, e.g., Hobo Kelly be on there.

Transformationalists regard these features as consonant with the view that the copula system of BE is basically the same as that of standard English, while creolists accept them as strong evidence that they are entirely different—that BE has a verbal aspect system rather than the tense system of SAE. Both approaches take account of the actual variability found in the copula, which includes a high frequency of standard forms as well as the marked features. Labov et al., (1968), representing the transformationalists, treats variability as an integral part of the system. Creolists, on the other hand explain variability in terms of dialect borrowing.

Labov derives copula constructions in BE from the same underlying and shallow structures posited for standard English. His justification is that (1) the deletion of the copula in BE is variable, full and contracted forms frequently occur as well as zero realizations; and (2) the deletion of the copula in BE occurs in just those environments where contraction of the copula is permitted in standard English. That is, structurally conditioned inherent variability as well as socially conditioned variability characterize BE.

Labov describes the invariant be construction of American Black English as follows:

> There is one feature of the NNE verb system which seems
> to be unique to the NNE system, and is not shared by any
> WNS [white nonstandard] dialect or by SE, and that is the
> use of the invariant verb be with a meaning of 'habitual'
> or 'general'...
>
> In addition to the various forms am, is, are, and zero
> which correspond to the SE finite forms of be, there is

> an invariant form be which NNE speakers use...in the
> syntactic environment...where SE would use am, is,
> and are. (Labov, et al., 1968, p. 228)

Although Labov recognizes the grammatical nature of invariant be as evidenced by its high frequency (3 to 10%) of the environments in which finite be_1 can occur are actually filled by this invariant be_2 in his data), semantic vagueness, and overlap with the clearly grammatical be_1, he does not therefore give up his analysis of the BE copula system as basically identical to that of standard English. He suggests, with reservation, that invariant be is simply an additional lexical item, marked to occur only in BE.

> Formally, the word be behaves just like any other main
> verb. It does not behave like a member of the auxiliary;
> it does not follow the flip-flop rules for questions, and
> it does not combine with the negative. The support of do
> is required with the negative, as in (166) and do can be
> used optionally for emphasis, as in (167).
>
> (166) So you know it all don't be on her; it be half on
>   me and half on her.
>
> (167) When he do be around here...
>
> There are, of course English dialects which use be as a
> member of the auxiliary, and develop such contractions
> as be'n't, but the NNE be has no auxiliary features at
> all. We have no data on tag questions with be_2 but it
> seems unlikely that be would appear in a tag. [2] (Labov,
> et al., 1968, p. 229)

The creolist view, on the other hand, contends that the existence of invariant be in American Black English is evidence of its having a radically different grammatical and functional principle from standard English underlying its copula system--and verb system in general--an aspect system as opposed to a tense system.

A choice between these two approaches on the point of invariant be_2 rests on the meaning and function of that item in BE copula system. The creolist view, as we have seen, depends strongly on its use as an aspect marker which has the meaning of habitual or continuous action as opposed functionally to be_1 (zero realization) as the tenseless representation of the particular or instantaneous aspect.

Before turning to an investigation of the function and meaning of invariant be_2 based on observational studies, we must be prepared to exclude instances of apparent be_2 sentences which may result from the operation of phonological reduction and deletion of the preceding modals will and would, by the processes of contraction and final consonant deletion. Contraction operates in both BE and AE, while deletion of final single consonants operates variably in BE only.

a.   He will be going → he'll be going → he be going.

By contraction and l-vocalization or deletion, which operates more generally in BE for example as in school → [sku].

b.   He would be angry → he'd be angry → he be angry.

By contraction and final dental stop deletion, which applies, for example in cold → [kol].

These phonological processes are themselves variables and instances of apparent be_2 which are to be attributed to reduction and deletion of will and would can often be identified by the occurrences within the utterance of a parallel sentence fragment containing either the full or reduced form of one of these modals.

Semantics of Invariant and Variant be

The suggested aspectual meaning of variant and invariant be are:

be_1 (variant) 'instantaneous, particular'

be_2 (invariant) 'habitual, continuous'

These meanings are found not to be categorically appropriate. For example, the following counterexamples in both directions occur in the Los Angeles data.[3]

a.   See Ejuan always messing with something.   (06301.2116)

This sentence has habitual meaning but be_1 form.

b.   My sister always crying about Lucy.   (14404.0411)

Has habitual meaning, but be_1 form.

c.   I don't like Lucy she too stupid. But I looked at it (and then she), she be stupid.   (14404.0613)

These last two sentences display variation of be_1 and be_2 within a single utterance, and in this case be_1 and be_2 have apparently opposite meanings from those which have been proposed, i.e., be_2 'particular', be_1 'habitual' here.

---

[3]Identification numbers (e.g., 06105.0621) are interpreted as follows: the first digit (0 or 1) denotes the absence (0) or presence (1) of an interviewer; the four digits preceding the decimal point (6105 in this example) denote the tape number listed in Table 4; the four digits after the decimal point denote the page and line of the transcript.

We now consider Dillard's claim that "creole" features are most characteristic of the speech of young children in the light of data on the copula system from several observational studies of the BE spoken by children, adolescents, and adults. The results of these studies show that to the extent to which these syntactic features are characteristic of BE at all, the most extreme forms occur in the speech of older children and adolescents rather than in the speech of very young children. A possible explanation for this phenomenon will be taken up below in the section on sociological factors in creoles and nonstandard dialects.

The speech of young Black children (kindergarten through third grade) in Los Angeles shows clearly that, rather than differing radically from standard English, the norm is toward agreement with the standard in 76% of the cases.

By contrast, the adolescent peer group members in New York consistently use about 30% to 40% zero realization of the copula is. (Labov et al., 1968, p. 192).

Table 1

Aspect vs. Tense in Copula Sentences
Used by Young Los Angeles Black Children

	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Zero realization of copula	128	17
Full, reduced, or contracted (standard) realization of the copula	585	76
Invariant be	58	7
Total	771	100

In view of the intrinsic interest and specificity of Dillard's claim about the creolization of child BE, it seems pertinent to consider the other areas of grammar he cites in addition to the copula. As with the copula system, the pattern of child BE predicted by Dillard

is not found to hold for another of the "creole features", the occurrence of "undifferentiated" pronouns forms in the possessive. Data from Los Angeles five- to nine-year-old children show that the form of possessive pronouns in BE is typically the same as in SAE. This is clear in cases in which the phonological shape of the possessive differs sharply from that of either subject or object pronoun, i.e.,

my vs. I or me   his vs. he or him

our vs. we or us   her vs. she

It also seems to be the case for your and their vs. you and they respectively, but there is the possibility of final r-vocalization, as occurs regularly in BE. As shown in Tables 2 and 3, the so-called creole forms do not occur to any significant extent in the speech of these children, while the regular possessive forms occur quite frequently.

There is also one occurrence of an object pronoun for the possessive: Two Leticias in us class. (11405.1317)   This example is from a kindergarten girl who also regularly uses the form her as a subject, e.g., Her go to school.

The Copula Systems of American Black English and Black English Creoles

The question of whether American Black English is derived historically from a creole or post-creole language can be approached from two directions, the linguistic and the sociological. In each case, it must first be determined that there are significant similarities between BE and the creoles to support the creolist claim that American Black English is more similar to creoles than to standard English.

From the linguistic perspective, the structure of American Black English may be compared to that of languages generally agreed to be Black English creoles. These include West Indian English, the creole English of Mosquitia, Surinam Negro English, Creolese of British Guiana, Bush Negro Trade Jargon, Gullah, West African Pidgin English, and Krio, an offshoot of Jamaican Creole spoken by a group of Negroes who were repatriated in the 19th century from Jamaica to Sierra Leone.

In particular, considered here in some detail is the structure of the copula systems of Jamaican Creole and Gullah, the language of Negroes inhabiting the sea islands and coastal districts of South Carolina, Georgia, and a small part of northeastern Florida. In addition, data on copula structures in several West African languages are given.

The copula system of Jamaican Creole may be summarized as follows:

1.   "The English verb 'be' bifurcates in the Creole into an equating verb and a locating verb, with no reflex for adjectival predication."

Table 2

Number of Occurrences of Subject Pronouns (Nominatives)
as Possessive Pronouns Used by Young Los Angeles Black Children

Kindergarten	she	0	I	0	
	he	0	you	0	
			we	0	
			they	0	
First Grade	she	0	I	0	My little brother <u>he</u> name is Charles.
	he	3	you	0	My big brother <u>he</u> name is Leonard,
			we	0	My other brother <u>he</u> name is Larry.
			they	0	14404.0115, 0117, 0118
Second Grade	she	0	I	0	
	he	0	you	0	
			we	0	<u>They</u> legs be cold.
			they	1	14404.1306
Third Grade	she	0	I	0	
	he	0	you	0	
			we	0	
			they	0	

Table 3

Number of Occurrences of Regular Possessive
Pronouns (From Word KWIC of Los Angeles Study)

	my	mine	mines	your	yours	his	her	hers	our	ours	their	theirs
Kindergarten	121	3	3	36	3	12	15	0	9	0	2	0
First Grade	23	0	0	1	0	8	4	0	5	0	0	0
Second Grade	18	1	1	8	4	2	1	2	1	0	0	0
Third Grade	31	25	1	13	3	17	3	0	1	0	0	0

17

2. "The Creole adjective, like the verb, predicates without the use of a copula." (Bailey, 1966, p. 146)

Specifically, there are four types of verb phrase (A through D below) which correspond to standard English uses of the copula.

A. "Equating verb phrase, which minimally consists of the equating verb a followed by a nominal or a possessive fi phrase." (Bailey, 1966, 63-64)

samuel a tiela	'Samuel is a Taylor.'
dat a plom	'That is [a] plum.'
disya buk a fi mieri	'This book is Mary's.'

a analyzed as a verb here, is phonologically identical with the standard English indefinite article, a fact which would make such sentences candidates for reinterpretation by standard English-speaking hearers, who might interpret them as having zero copula realization.

However, the following occurrence with the definite article di shows that a is not an article in Jamaican Creole.

dis a di llida	'This is the leader.'

B. Locating verb phrase consisting minimally of the locating verb de followed by a locative phrase.

di tob de ina kichin	'The tub is in the kitchen.'

C. Naming verb phrase, consisting minimally of the naming verb phrase niem, followed by a proper noun or its substitute.

di biebi niem rabat	'The baby's name is Robert.'

D. Predicating verb phrase consisting minimally of predicator which may be either a verb (other than a, de, or niem) or an adjective.

di kaafi a kuol	'The coffee is getting cold.'
di kaffi kuol	'The coffee is cold.'
jan a ron	'John is ran.'
jan ron	'John ran.'
im sing swiit	'She sings sweetly.'
im sik bad	'She is very sick.'

The predicator is the only verbal form which may be preceded by the progressive particle, a, the copula equating locating and naming verbs (a, de, niem) may not occur with the progressive particle.

> *di biebi a de huon
>
> *jan a a bucha
>
> *di biebi a niem jan

A fifth type of structure which is equivalent to standard English copula is seen in emphatic sentences.

> Any of the following constituents of an utterance: nominal, predicator, locative, time or manner, may be given prominence by inverting the sentence, and bringing this constituent into fronted position. Inversion is accomplished by an introductory a (equivalent to English 'it is' or French c'est and possibly identical with the equating verb) which is immediately followed by the prominent item. (Bailey, 1966, p. 85)

> wi a taak bout jan   ⟶   a jan wi a taak bout
>   'We are talking about John'
>
> mieri waan di buk   ⟶   a mieri waan di buk
>   or
>   a di buk mieri waan
>   'Mary wants the book.'
>
> jan tiif di manggo   ⟶   a tiif jan tiif di manggo
>   'John stole the mango.'
>
> 'samuel is sick'   ⟶   a sik samwel sik
>   'Samuel is sick.'
>
> mi a go de nou   ⟶   a de mi a go nou
>   or
>   a nou mi a go de
>   'I am going there now.'

In equative sentences, the original equative verb a does not occur in the inverted form (Bailey deletes it transformationally).

> dat a plom   ⟶   a plom dat
>   'That is (a) plum.'
>
> dis a di liida   ⟶   a di liida dis
>   'This is the leader.'

Questions are formed with inverted sentences, introduced by a, which Bailey optionally deletes to account for semantic equivalents without a. Bailey suggests (p. 90) that the deletion of introductory a is probably the result of the competing standard English forms. The question is also marked by intonation, a falling terminal contour.

a-huu put i de ~ huu put i de[4]
    'Who put it there?'

a-wa anti sen fi mi ~ wa anti sen fi mi
    'What has Auntie sent from me?'

a-hon dem mek machiz ~ hou dem mek machiz
    'How do they make matches?'

a-we unu pudong unu klouz ~ we unu pudong unu klouz
    'Where have you (pl.) put your clothes?'

a-wen boti lef ya ~ wen boti lef ya
    'When did Bertie leave here?'

a-homoch kuoknat im gat ~ homoch kuoknat im gat
    'How many coconuts does she have?'

a-wa briiz bluo yu ya ~ wa briiz bluo yu ya
    'What breeze has blown you here?'

a-wich buk yu gi im ~ wich buk yu gi im
    'Which book did you give her?'

Turning now to Gullah, we find the following potential evidence of creole parallels to invariant be_2 in American Black English.

Gullah "də, as a verb of incomplete predication."

> The verb də 'to be' is used in a present, past or even future sense, dependent on the context. Most often it can be rendered in English by a present or past tense and the action to which it refers may or may not be continuous. When de is used in a future sense, it is often followed by the progressive form of some other verb. (Turner, 1949, p. 213)

These examples show that like invariant be_2 in American Black English, də is not inflected or suppleted for person or number.[5]

_____

[4] "~" signifies optional variants.

[5] Example numbers refer to Turner (1949).

First Person Singular

6. ɒɪ <u>də</u> (s) te dɛ   'I am staying there.'

16. mí <u>də</u> gwɒɪn gɒn   'I am going to go.'

Second Person Singular

17. dɛn yu <u>də</u> brag   'Then you will brag.'

Third Person Singular

1. wɛn <u>də</u> delɔt, ɒɪ mɛk mɪ lo kʌcɪ
       'When it is daylight I make my low curtsey.'

2. <u>də</u> gɒd wʌk   'It is God's work.'

3. dat <u>də</u> dɛbl we de də ǰi you dɒu
       'That is the devils way they are giving you now.'

8. sʌpm <u>də</u> kʌmɪn   'Something is coming.'

9. dɪ kɒtn <u>də</u> drɒp blɒsm   'The cotton was dropping its
                                       blossom.'

10. hɪm bɒɪ <u>də</u> fiks fə dɪ solǰə   'This boy was fixing for the
                                       soldiers.'

11. ən <u>də</u> hɪm sew mɪ   'And it was he who saved me.'

Third Person Singular

3. dat də dɛbl we de <u>də</u> ǰi you dɒu
               'That is the devils way they are giving you now.'

Turner cites parallel forms in West African languages: ɛwe <u>də</u>, ɪbo, <u>de</u>.

Gullah also shows some potential parallels to "copula deletion" in American Black English in sentences which have no overt copula before predicate adjectives. These are described as "verbal adjectives" by Turner (p. 216):

> Employment of the verbal adjective results in a type of sentence in which the predicate complement is placed next to the subject without any sign of predication.

Gullah

i <u>mín</u> tɪd dat   'He was mean to do that.'

i tɔ   'He is tall.'

ɒdɪ sətifɒɪ wɒt gōd dʌn fə mi
        (I'm satisfied [with] what God has done for me.)   In
        this last example, deletion occurs also with first
        person singular am, which is not paralleled in American
        Black English.

Note that in the Gullah examples there has not been a merger in
the form of subject and object pronouns as Dillard has claimed is
characteristic of creoles. For first person singular there are the
two forms ɒɪ and mi, for third singular, the two forms i and hɪm.
There is, however, some overlapping in usage of these forms in subject
and object function.

West African Languages

ɛwɛ

a_1ti_3 la_3 $kɔ_3$ 'The tree is high.' literally 'tree the high.'

$xə_1vi_3$ la_3 ɲo_3 'The bird is pretty,' literally, 'bird the pretty.'

Fante   #### Yoruba

hwa$_3$ 'To be white.'   dũ$_1$ 'To be sweet.'

dɔ$_3$ 'To be deep.'   du$_3$ 'To be black.'

bir$_3$ 'To be black.'   fũ$_3$ 'To be white.'

Mandinka   #### Kikongo

kidi   'To be lonely.'   kiadi   'It sad,' i.e., 'it is sad.'

toɲa   'To be true.'   kiaki nɛne   'It great,' i.e., 'it is great.'

                                  lɛbɛlɛbɛ   'To be flexible.'

Kimbundu

ene makamba   'They friends,' i.e., 'they are friends.'

kusukuka   'To be red,' i.e., 'become red.'

kuberta   'To be wet.'

Further examples of zero copula occur in WH questions.

> In Gullah the pronoun and noun used in the predicate frequently
> are placed immediately after the subject without the verb to
> be. (Turner, 1949, pp. 217-218)

Gullah

hu hi?	'Who is he?'
hu dat?	'Who is that?'
wɒt it?	'What is it.'
hu ǰan?	'Who is John?'

Ɛwe

$a_1da_3ka_1e_3$	'A box it,' i.e., 'it is a box.'
nu_3kae_1?	'What it?' i.e., 'what is it?'
$a_1me_1kae_1$?	'Who it?' i.e., 'who is it?'
ga_1e_3?	'It money,' i.e., 'it is money.'

Thus, there is unquestionably evidence of parallels to the non-standard copula forms of American Black English to be found in the Black English creoles and their potential West African sources. It does not immediately follow, however, that the creolist hypothesis is confirmed. For one reason, the collectors of the data on the Black English creoles, Bailey and Turner, report only those forms which differ from standard English as characteristic of the languages they investigated, and, like the other creolists, ascribe standard forms to dialect borrowing (DeCamp, 1969). Secondly, as Anshen points out, zero forms of the copula in the structures reported for the creoles are too common universally in languages unrelated either to English or West African languages to be crucial evidence for the genetic affiliation of BE (Anshen, 1970). In any case, these are the very forms in which standard English can contract the copula, as Labov has shown.

Sociological Comparison of BE with Black English Creoles

To account for the socially stratified variability which characterizes American Black English, the creolists suggest that BE, no longer a true creole, has developed into a post-creole continuum by means of extensive dialect borrowing from standard English. The conditions specified as prerequisite for the development of a post-creole continuum from a true creole/standard diglossic state are (1) equivalence of standard language

and creole vocabulary base, (2) social mobility, and (3) corrective pressure from above, (DeCamp, 1968). All are present for BE in the United States today.

The crucial prior question, however, has not yet been answered: Was BE in the United States ever a creole? Reinecke, who suggests a negative answer for sociological reasons, poses the question this way:

> On what grounds can Gullah be separated from the other varieties of very broken English spoken by many rural Southern Negroes? Why did not a general creole dialect of English, or several creole dialects, arise in a country distinguished by plantation agriculture and the presence of a great number of African slaves? Or is the speech of the Southern Negro perhaps creolized without being recognized as such? (Reinecke, 1937, p. 480).

A shift of languages spoken by a given population with the inevitable language contact and some degree of bilingualism does not necessarily imply that the language acquired passes through a creole stage. Welmers discusses a few of the alternative outcomes of language contact:

> It should first be noted that by no means all language substitution is of the same type. When an individual moves into a new linguistic community and begins to adopt its language in place of his own, he may for years and even decades speak the new language imperfectly, with recognizable characteristics of his first language, especially in pronunciation. But his own children, born in the new community, will probably not learn his first language at all, and in their use of the new language they will conform almost perfectly to the community around them. They actually enter into the unbroken continuum of the languages of the community, and for purposes of linguistic history their father's language did not exist. There is no noticeable impact of the first language of one individual on that of the community into which he moves, nor even on the language of his children--or least grandchildren. (Emphasis added. Welmers, 1970, p. 5)

> Suppose, however, that a community that adopts a new language is isolated from its native speakers before it is perfectly acquired. Would the result not be the perpetuation of something comparable to the heavily accented broken English of a young immigrant community? The answer would appear to be negative. Not only is it impossible to think of a clear example of such a situation, but the linguistic realities would seem to prevent

> it. While the second language is still so imperfectly
> learned, the first language is still retained. If contact
> with the second language is then lost, the community would
> and undoubtedly does--revert to its first language, with
> hardly a trace of the second language except possibly
> a number of adopted words. (Welmers, 1970, p. 6)

Turning to a consideration of the type of language contact which results
in the formation of a creole language such as Krio, Welmers proposes that
a restricted configuration of social circumstances is a necessary pre-
requisite, to creolization and he contrasts these circumstances with
the other possibilities.

> The origin of Krio is not comparable to the cases of
> language substitution which have already been discussed.
> In those, the circumstances were of a homogeneous group,
> speakers of a single language, adopting a new language
> in place of their own. During the early stages of the
> substitution process, they would use the new language
> only in communication with native speakers of it;
> among themselves they would continue to use their
> first language. In the New World native speakers
> of a wide variety of African languages, who were thrown
> into each other's social milieu. They were forced, or
> found it profitable, to communicate not only with native
> speakers of English, but also with each other. They had
> no common native language to fall back on. Insofar as
> they communicated with native speakers of English, the
> usual pressures to conform to English pronunciation and
> grammar were present. But when they communicated with
> each other, those pressures were absent. Under such
> circumstances, habits of imperfect pronunciation and
> usage were reinforced. English lexical items could
> safely be used in a pronunciation, and in grammatical
> constructions, that did not seriously violate the
> patterns of most of the African languages spoken
> natively by members of the community. And in time,
> native speakers of English, in communicating with
> them, found it easier to conform to their newly-
> developing intertribal code than to impose on them
> the finer points of English pronunciation and grammar.
> To the extent that that happen, they no longer had a
> model of real English to conform to, and the patterns
> of their pronunciation and grammar become stabilized.
> (Welmers, 1970, p. 6)

Thus, the necessary conditions for creolization of a second language
which emerge from Welmers' characterization are (1) presence in the
speech community of speakers of a variety of mutually unintelligible
languages in addition to native speakers of the language which becomes

creolized, (2) social pressure for the speakers of these several languages
to communicate among themselves, and (3) native speakers acceptance of
the nonstandard variety spoken by the non-native speech community.

The first and third of these conditions for creolization were
certainly met by the Black slave and White Southern populations in the
United States (Herskovits, 1958, 1966). That there was social reason
for these members of the slave community to communicate among themselves
also cannot be doubted. The question is whether there was sufficient
opportunity for them to communicate during the crucial early years of
contact. In addition to the presence of pressure to communicate with-
in the slave community, Reinecke suggests that the community must
comprise a majority of the total population in the areas, have a
relatively stable residence pattern, and be somewhat culturally
isolated. That is, the community must be able to develop a fair sense
of solidarity and cultural identity.

The history of the slave population in the United States shows that
the slave owners took great care to prevent internal communication and
fostering of feelings of solidarity due to their fear of slave uprising.
Slave families and friends were continually split and shifted from place
to place in order to reduce opportunities for communication and to balance
the labor supply. From this, one may conclude that the necessary con-
ditions for creolization were not met in the United States, and that
American Black English therefore was never a creole. On the sugar
cane plantations in the Caribbean, on the other hand, social stability
and cohesiveness did develop in the original slave population, resulting
in the development of Jamaican Creole, Haitian Creole, etc. The factors
accounting for creolization in the Caribbean plantation communities but
not in the Southern United States plantation communities are to be found
in the social differences within those communities in the New World, and
not to any differences of the African populations.

> When the Negro slave was landed in the South, his condition
> was almost precisely the same as that of his brother in the
> West Indies. But, as the Negroes often came to work beside
> whites and were moved higher and higher either through sale
> or by the removal of a restless master, they escaped much
> of the social isolation, the hardening of social and lin-
> guistic traditions, which obtained on the snug little
> Caribbean and Mascarene islands. Consequently their speech
> has continually improved, even under slavery. (Reinecke,
> 1937, pp. 482-483)

Yet this certainly is not the whole story. American Black English
is not identical with standard English, and in spite of the existence of
pressure to assimilate culturally and linguistically, there has been a
countervailing opposite pressure not to mix, fostered by racial discrim-
ination in all areas of culture--work, residence, marriage, and educa-
tion. However, after the abolition of slavery, the White community was

no longer able to prohibit cultural identification and communication among the Black population by moving it around at will. In fact, identification and communication were facilitated by isolation in urban ghettos. Thus the Black in the United States came to be a "marginal man."

> The marginal man, as here conceived, is one whom fate has condemned to live in two societies, and in two, not merely different, but antagonistic cultures. (Park, 1937, p. iv)

The linguistic consequence of this social marginality has been the reinforcement of linguistic differences in American Black English in the casual styles, particulary of members of adolescent peer groups, concurrent with the close approximation to standard English in more formal styles, especially of those speakers who wish to succeed in the majority community ("lames" from the point of view of the peer group members). This pattern of variation is clearly evident in the recent sociolinguistic studies in urban centers. For example, in describing the social stratification of the contraction and deletion of is, Labov notes that:

> We first observe that the contraction rule operates upon is in a fairly uniform manner among the peer groups. The Thunderbirds [pre-adolescents] use quite a few full forms in group sessions--whether this is a characteristic of younger speakers or not we cannot say. The lames use the contraction rule in the same way, and so does the Inwood [White] group. The most marked difference in the use of the contraction rule is seen in the middle class speakers, who use it only half as much: it is clear that the liberal use of free forms is a mark of middle class speakers in this community. There is some variation among the working-class speakers, but none use as little contraction as the middle. In all groups, except the T-Birds, we see that there is less use of the contraction rule in group sessions or casual speech than in single style; the middle class speakers remain at the same low level in both styles.

> There is much sharper stratification in the use of the deletion rule for is. All groups show stylistic stratification here, using deletion much more in style A [group or casual style] (except for the middle class, which does not use it at all). The effect is much more marked among adults than among the youth, and here we see more regular stratification among the members of the working class adult groups: the lower sections use more deletion than the upper ones. There is no obvious difference between north and south. The use of the deletion rule clearly shows how different the lames are from the peer group members. The pre-adolescent lames use the deletion rule very little...and the adolescent lames are considerably

> below any of the peer group members. Of course the White
> Inwood groups do not use the deletion rule at all. (Labov
> et al., 1968, pp. 242-243)

At the beginning of the above quotation, Labov questions the pre-adolescent norms which seem to emerge from his data. An indication that there is age-grading in the onset and use of a maximally different casual style is found in the data collected from kindergarten through third grade school children in Los Angeles. In that study, it was found that 83% of all uses of the invariant be_2 form of the copula occurred in the speech of the third graders (Legum et al., 1971)[6]

This overt pattern of linguistic variation is paralleled by the evaluation of speech by members of the Black community. In subjective reaction tests, informants are asked to attribute personal qualities to taped speech samples. Speakers of samples containing a high degree of dialect characteristics are rated by peer group members as unlikely to have good jobs, but likely to be strong fighters and desirable friends. (Labov et al., 1968, pp. 218-22)

In conclusion, it seems that American Black English may not have included a creolized stage in its development since not all of the prerequisite social conditions for creolization were present at the time of its early history. In particular, the development of solidarity in isolated communities was prohibited by the slave owners. Later, however, when those conditions did arise, it was "too late" for creolization to occur; the language which had been adopted by the slaves and inherited by their descendents was essentially that of the White community, with some differences due to interference to be sure. The effect of the social change was limited to the emphasis of those differences, particularly vocabulary differences, in the casual speech of younger members of the Black community who did not assimilate culturally to the White community, whether by choice or necessity.

These differences are maintained and even emphasized in peer groups which do not assimilate today. It is interesting to note that the same phenomenon accentuating differences from the standard can occur in communities which speak a creolized language to begin with.

> In some areas, e.g., Sierra Leone (Jack Berry, 1961: 5
> note), a nationalist reaction against the oppressive
> corrective pressures from the standard language results
> in "hyper-creolization," an aggressive assertion of
> linguistic discreteness and superior status for creole.
> Hyper-creolization is usually limited to small groups,
> however. (DeCamp, 1969, p. 41)

Confounding of social factors in addition to age in this data, however, precludes making any strong claims.

Part II

Structural Variation of Is in Black English

Structural Correlates of Sociolinguistic Variation

Social variation is an essential characteristic of language, as it provides the speech community with overt signs of the position of its members along various social dimensions. It is this function of language which makes social variation within the speech of a single member of the community the mechanism of linguistic change. This is the view of contemporary linguists who seek to relate empirical sociolinguistics to historical linguistic theory:

> The key to a rational conception of language change—indeed, of language itself—is the possibility of describing orderly differentiation in a language serving a community. We will argue that nativelike command of heterogeneous structures is not a matter of multidialectalism or "mere" performance, but is part of unilingual linguistic competence. One of the corollaries of our approach is that in a language serving a complex (i.e., real) community, it is absence of structured heterogeneity that would be dysfunctional. (Weinreich, Labov & Herzog, 1968, p. 101)

> It is suggested that a linguistic change begins when one of the many features characteristic of speech variation spreads throughout a specific subgroup of the speech community. This linguistic feature then assumes a certain social significance symbolizing the social values associated with that group. Because the linguistic change is embedded in the linguistic structure, it is gradually generalized to other elements of the system. Such generalization is far from instantaneous, and change in the social structure of the community normally intervenes before the process is completed. New groups enter the speech community and reinterpret the on-going linguistic change in such a way that one of the secondary changes becomes primary. From such alternations of linguistic and social change proceed the extraordinary complexity of the socio- linguistic structures found in recent studies. The advance- ment of the linguistic change to completion may be accompanied by a rise in the level of social awareness of the change and the establishment of a social stereotype. Eventually, the completion of the change and the shift of the variable to the status of a consonant is accompanied by the loss of whatever social significance the feature possessed. The high degree of regularity which sound change displays is the product of such loss of significance in the alternations involved, and the selection of one of the alternants as a consonant. (Weinreich, Labov & Herzog, (pp. 186-187)

Thus, the linguistic variation which characterizes on-going change has both social and structural correlates. If one examines the social correlates, the result is insight into the social organization of the community. By examining the structural correlates of sociolinguistic variation, one might expect to gain insight into the grammatical principles of that particular language and of synchronic and diachronic language universals. This conjecture will be pursued in this final section, with an investigation of the syntactic and phonological and semantic conditioning of the realizations (full, contracted, and zero) of one of the finite forms of the copula is in American Black English.

Having identified no evidence to support different underlying structures for Black and Anglo English in Part I, we adopt the transformationalist position that the grammars of the two dialects are essentially the same, i.e., that their underlying structure is identical. Forms of the copula are thus assumed to be present initially and zero realizations are due to subsequent deletion by rule. The problem now is to locate the minor divergences in the grammars which account for the surface differences. For each point of surface difference, the grammatical divergence may be in the underlying lexical representation, in the content or sequence of the transformational rules, or in the content or sequence of the phonological rules. There is no reason to expect that the divergence lies in the same component for every surface difference. The present section examines the frequencies of surface variants of is in the contexts in which they occur in natural speech in an attempt to determine the locus of grammatical divergence.

The data used in this investigation were collected from young, Black Los Angeles school children as a part of the pilot sociolinguistic study carried out at the Southwest Regional Laboratory for Educational Research and Development and reported in Legum et al., (1971). The investigation is meant to be suggestive of the type of analysis which can be undertaken rather than conclusive about the nature of Black English in general. This is a necessary limitation due to the restriction to young informants exclusively. However, a comparison with sociolinguistic studies of adults and adolescents in New York and Detroit (Labov et al., 1968; Shuy et al., 1967) shows substantial agreement in the patterns of variation. Table 4 gives a rough indication of the characteristics of the informants and the interview situation.[7]

The pattern of variation in realization of the copula elicited from these informations is typical of Black English in that "standard" and "nonstandard" forms alternate within the speech of a single speaker. For example, one kindergarten girl in the sample produced the following copular sentences showing full, contracted, and deleted realizations of is.

_____

[7]The methodology employed in recording these interviews is documented by Williams & Legum, 1970.

Table

Transcripts of Black Los Angeles School Children

	Tape No.	Age	Number of Children Present	Number of Adults Present
<u>Kindergarten</u>	1-1-03	5	5	2
	1-2-01	5	4	1
	1-4-05	5	2	1
<u>First Grade</u>	4-1-03	6	5	0 & 1
	4-2-02	6	4	0 & 1
	4-4-04	6	2	1
<u>Second Grade</u>	2-1-05	7	5	2
	2-2-01	7	5	2
	3-1-01	7	5	0 & 2
<u>Third Grade</u>	6-1-05	9	5	0 & 1
	6-2-02	9	5	0 & 1
	6-3-01	9	5	0 & 1

Her name is Carolyn.   11103.0103

Is that the same thing as that one?   11103.0104

Everybody is five.   11103.0113   } full

Your mother is your girlfriend.   11103.0319

All of it is nasty.   11103.0403

My daddy is a monster.   11103.0705

That's you.   11103.0111

There's your girlfriend.   11103.0306

He's the biggest.   11103.0516

It's a quarter.   11103.0603

She's like a baby.   11103.0706   } contracted

He's a little puppy.   11103.0713

He's at the doctor.   11103.1614

My daddy's in jail.   11103.1519

She little.   11103.0515

He only just this little bitty.   11103.0712

He back already.   11103.1607   } deleted

It not funny.   11103.0217

Phonological Conditioning of Is Realization

The first step in the analysis of the structural correlates of the linguistic variation was to classify each of the 263 sentences containing some form (including zero) of is with respect to the phonological environ- ments which precede the occurrence of is. The following categories were used:

Phonological Environments

1. Sibilant consonant (s, z,   S
    š, č, ž)

2. Vowel   V

3. Non-sibilant consonant   K

4. Silence   #

Realizations of Is

1. Full [ɪz, əz]

2. Contracted [z, s]

3. Deleted (zero) [∅]

The results of the tabulation of the preceding phonological environ-
ments of is are presented in Table 5.[8]

Table 5

Copula Realization by Preceding Phonological Environment

| | n | Preceding Phonological Environment | | | |
		V	S	K	#
Full	57	9	19	28	1
Contracted	108	18	0	90	0
Deleted	72	40	6	26	0
Total	237	67	25	144	1

[8] The phonetic realizations were determined by listening to the taped
interviews, which had previously been transcribed in standard orthography.
Valerie Preston made the original transcription, the author identified
and coded instances of the linguistic variables, and Stanley Legum and
Gene Tinnie coded the phonetic realizations.

When each case summarized in Table 5 is inspected separately, some significant trends emerge.

Table 6 shows that in BE full forms of _is_ predominate after a sibilant consonant. Contraction does not occur in this environment, a phonological constraint which also holds in AE. If Labov is understood as specifying phonological as well as grammatical environments, the six deleted forms after a sibilant are counterexamples to his claim that deletion can take place in BE only in those environments in which the AE copula can contract. (Labov, 1969)

Table 6

Sibilant Consonant Precedes _Is_

Full	76%
Contracted	0%
Deleted	24%

Table 7 shows contraction highly favored in the environment of a preceding nonsibilant consonant, a process which results in the formation of consonant clusters in word-final position. Many of these contracted forms undergo the later phonological process of assibilation, which affects dental stops as in the words what's [waz], that's [ðæ], it's [ɪs].[9]

---

[9]The assibilation rule can be shown to be ordered after the contraction rule: If contraction did not occur first, there would be no sibilant consonant in the immediate environment to which the stop could assibilate. Thus, only the following derivation is possible:

that is
that's   contraction
thas   assibilation

This process reintroduces VC structure and removes the more marked VCC.

Table 7

Nonsibilant Consonant Precedes _Is_

Full	19%
Contracted	63%
Deleted	18%

Phonological conditioning would predict a preponderance of contraction of _is_ after a vowel, since the occurrence of full forms in this environment has the phonological sequence VVC, which contraction reduces to the less marked sequence VC. Table 8 indeed shows that contraction is favored over full forms after a vowel, but the high incidence of deletion which is also found is not accounted for by this phonological factor.

Table 8

Vowel Precedes _Is_

Full	14%
Contracted	27%
Deleted	59%

It may tentatively be concluded that there is evidence for phonological conditioning of the full and contracted forms of the copula _is_, but that something else is at work in the case of the copula deletions. To confirm or reject this hypothesis, it is useful to compare the phonological conditioning of _is_ realization with that of [z]'s which represent other grammatical categories: third person singular verbs, plurals, possessive and monomorphemes. Tables 9 and 10 are based on Legum et al., (1971). KZ represents an occurrence of [s] or [z] preceded by a consonant, VZ represents [s] or [z] preceded by a vowel.[10]

_____

[10]A complete explication of the coding system for phonetic realizations is presented in Pfaff (forthcoming).

Table 9

Realization of /Z/ after Consonant

		Percentage				
		Z retention			Z deletion	
	n	KZ	ØZ	?	KØ	Ø
Copula	38	37	5	0	50	8
Verb 3rd Singular	90	19	1	4	61	17
Plural	125	66	1	1	18	14
Possessive	38	74	0	0	21	5
Monomorpheme	74	62	0	3	26	9
Total	365	52	1	2	34	12

	n:*	14	2	0	19	3
		17	1	4	55	15
		83	1	1	22	18
		28	0	0	8	2
		46	0	2	19	7
		188	4	7	123	45

*These numbers have the identical content stated in terms of absolute
frequency rather than in percentage.

Table 10

Realization of /Z/ after Vowel

	n	Percentage		
		VZ	?	VØ
Copula	65	42	0	58
Verb 3rd Singular	36	22	0	78
Plural	54	83	()	17
Possessive	44	82	5	14
Monomorpheme	306	89	2	9
Total	505	77	1	22

n: 27   0   38
        8   0   28
       45   0   9
       36   2   6
      272   5   29
      ——— —— ———
      388   7   110

Inspection of these two tables reveals that instances of /Z/ which represent the third person singular verb inflection and _is_ are simplified significantly more frequently than those in which they are monomorphemic or represent plural or possessive inflection. The frequent absence of the third person inflection and of _is_ is in concord with the hypothesis of Labov et al., (1968), that the deletion of /Z/ in these two categories is grammatically rather than phonologically conditioned.

Further support for the grammatical status of the verbal instances of /Z/ deletion is shown by comparison of the figures in Tables 9 and 10 demonstrating the phonological effect of a preceding vowel vs. preceding consonant: For monomorphemic, plural and possessive instances, Z is retained somewhat more frequently when a vowel precedes, but for third singular verb inflection and copula contraction, there is no such effect. This suggests that the deletion of /Z/ in the latter cases is not merely a phonological rule.

Syntactic and Semantic Conditioning of Is Realization

As has been shown in the preceding section, phonological conditioning is not entirely sufficient to account for the frequencies of copula realization in Black English. So we turn now to the question of syntactic and semantic conditioning. It is helpful to distinguish these from two senses in which the term grammatical conditioning may be used. In the description of the variable deletion of /Z/ above it was found that the frequency of deletion of /Z/ is predictable from the grammatical category it represents. This type of grammatical conditioning could be written into a grammar as a condition of the application of the rule which refers to the category membership of the phonological element to be affected. In contrast, "grammatical conditioning" may also refer to conditioning in terms of the category membership of elements in the environment of the element to which the deletion rule applies. Discussion of this latter type of grammatical conditioning of _is_ deletion is taken up in this section.

The following categories were used to classify the grammatical contexts of sentences containing a realization of _is_.

Preceding Grammatical Environment	Abbreviation
1. Noun	N
2. Personal pronoun (he, she)	Pers Pro
3. Deictic pronoun (this, that)	Deictic
4. Impersonal pronoun (it, that)	Impers
5. Possessive pronoun (mine, yours, his, hers, theirs)	Posses

38

6. WH interrogative pronoun   WH Q-pro
    (who, what, where, how...)

7. WH relative pronoun (who,   WH Rel
    what...)

8. WH adverb   WH Adv

9. Other pronoun (e.g., somebody,
    anyone...)

10. Other (e.g., cleft sentence)

11. Sentence initial   #

Following Grammatical Environment

1. Noun   NP

2. Pronoun   NP-pro

3. Predicate adjective   Pred Adj

4. Prepositional phrase   Prep Phrase

5. Progressive verb   V-ing

6. Going to (future)   gn

7. Passive   Passive

8. Negative   Neg

9. Adverb   Adv

10. Sentence final   #

The realization of _is_ with respect to grammatical context is
summarized in Table 11. The Table refers to the immediately preceding
grammatical environment, which functions as the subject of copula.

The high frequency of contracted realizations of _is_ after impersonal
pronoun subjects--_that_ and _it_, is undoubtedly due to phonological con-
ditioning of contraction and assibilation after a dental stop (discussed
earlier). Another tendency of interest is the fairly high frequency of
deleted (zero) realization with personal pronoun subjects--_he_ and _she_.
This tendency cannot be attributed to the operation of a phonologically
conditioned rule; since personal pronouns end in vowels, the result of
deletion is frequently a presumably marked sequence of two vowels.

Table 11

Relationship Between Subject and Realization
of the Finite Third Singular Copula <u>Is</u>

	Copula-Realizations			
	Full	Contracted	Deleted	Total
Personal Pronoun Subject	3	16	29	48
Noun Subject	18	4	16	38
Possessive Pronoun	9	5	6	20
Impersonal Pronoun	9	59	3	71
Deictic Pronoun	5	13	6	24
WH Q	1	12	7	20
Other (primarily cleft sentences)	7	0	0	7
Other Pronoun	2	0	3	5
WH Rel	0	1	0	1
Total	54	110	70	234

40

Labov similarly reports that deletion of _is_ occurs more frequently after pronoun subjects than noun subjects in BE in New York. He characterizes this grammatical constraint as unexpected. (Labov et al., 1968).

Inspection of the actual sentences in which zero realization occurs after pronouns with final vowels reveals a correlation between zero realization and the immediately following grammatical category. Zero realization is more likely when the copula is followed by a noun phrase (predicate nominal) than by a prepositional phrase. For example:

She number two (94202.0409)   is $\longrightarrow$ $\emptyset$/ __NP

Somebody is in there (04103.0312)   is $\longrightarrow$ F/ __PP

A possible explanation of this can be found in the notion of functional load, that is, grammars tend to minimize structural ambiguity.

Table 12 presents a list of possible structural ambiguities which can arise from zero realization of _is_. It suggests that the high frequency of _is_ deletion after personal pronoun subjects is due to the little structural ambiguity created by such a deletion, primarily because of the impossibility of forming relative clauses with personal pronouns as head noun phrase.

This sort of grammatical conditioning has been formulated in recent literature of generative theory as output conditions on rules or derivational constraints. (Perlmutter, 1968; Lakoff, 1970.) Although the present pilot study data do not provide conclusive evidence of derivational constraints as a factor in sociolinguistic variation, this hypothesis should be investigated further.

Conclusions

The results of the investigations of child language usage and the sociological aspect of the history of American Black English in Part I do not support the creolist hypothesis that the underlying structure of BE differs from that of AE.

In Part II, the transformationalist hypothesis is adopted, with the result that BE sentences in which the copula form _is_ occurs and those in which it would occur in AE are both regarded as containing underlying instances of _is_. Analysis of the phonological syntactic and semantic environments in which full, contracted and deleted forms of _is_ occur leads to the conclusions that full and contracted forms are conditioned much as in AE by stress and phonological environment. Zero forms (Z deletions), on the other hand, are not found to be phonologically conditioned.

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Table 12

Deletability of Is before Certain Structures

NP Subject	Following Grammatical Environment	Ambiguity if Is > ∅
The boy is a liar	NP-N	No
The boy is it	NP-Pro	No
The boy is tall	PA	No
The boy is in the house	PP	Yes-Reduced Relative Clause
The boy is taking a nap	V-ing	Yes-Reduced Relative Clause Nominalization
The boy is going to kill you	gn	No
The boy is moved later	Pass	Yes-Active-if surface subject is animate
The boy is not here	Neg	No
The boy is very stupid	Adv	No
Impersonal Pronoun Subject		
That is a book	NP-N	No
That is it	NP-Pro	No
That is big	PA	Yes-Measure Phrase
That is in there	PP	Yes-Reduced Relative Clause
That is falling down	V-ing	Yes-Reduced Relative Clause
That is going to fall	gn	No
That is fixed by the janitor	Pass	No-Not animate
That is not right	Neg	No
That is where he is	Adv	No

Table 12 -- Continued

Personal Pronoun Subject	Following Grammatical Environment	Possible Ambiguity if Is → Ø
He is a liar	NP-N	No
He is it	NP-Pro	No
He is tall	PA	No
He is in the house	PP	No
He is taking a nap	V-ing	No
He is going to kill you	gn	No
He is moved later	Pass.	Yes-Active
He is not here	Neg	No
He is very stupid	Adv	No

Two types of grammatical conditioning are found to be relevant to the frequency of /Z/ deletion: (1) the grammatical category which /Z/ represents, and (2) the grammatical category of the environment in which copular /Z/ occurs. These findings suggest that derivational constraints which prevent structural ambiguity may be a factor in sociolinguistic variation.

Finally, the fact that conditioning factors become apparent when the transformationalist hypothesis is adopted provides support for the validity of this view of Black English.

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