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AUTHOR Spears, Arthur K.
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ABSTRACT

In Black English (BE), in addition to the motion verb "come," there exists a modal-like "come" which expresses speaker indignation. This "come" is comparable to other modal-like forms, identical to motion verbs, which occur in Black and non-Black varieties of English, and which signal various degrees of disapproval. However, this usage of "come" occurs in BE only. It is of special interest that it occurs even in acrolectal varieties of BE, thus showing that the post-creole continuum in the United States differs from that in Guyana as described by Bickerton, who states that forms identical to forms in the base-language but which are functionally distinct do not occur in acrolectal varieties. The case for the grammaticalization of the mood, indignation, by usage of "come" is elaborated as is its relation to "gone," which is used to express disapproval. (Author/AMH)

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Arthur K. Spears

University of California
Santa Cruz

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Arthur K. Spears

University of California, Santa Cruz

In Black English (BE), in addition to the motion verb come, there exists a modal-like come which expresses speaker indignation. This come is comparable to other modal-like forms, identical to motion verbs, which occur in Black and nonBlack varieties of English and which signal various degrees of disapproval; however, it occurs in BE only. It is of special interest that it occurs even in acrolectal varieties of BE, thus showing that the post-creole continuum in the U.S. differs from that in Guyana as described by Bickerton (1975), who states that forms identical to ones in the base-language but which are functionally distinct do not occur in acrolectal varieties.

Introduction

The primary concern of this paper is to demonstrate that there exists in Black English (BE)[1] a modal-like form come which can be distinguished from the formally identical motion verb come. Even though there is a substantial body of literature on BE, no prudent linguist would assume that all of the features which set it off from other English dialects have been catalogued. Indeed, it is common knowledge that no language has been completely described, even those that have benefited from centuries of scholarly investigation. Thus, from one point of view it is not entirely surprising that a second come, which is functionally unrelated to the motion verb come, should have gone undiscussed in the literature and apparently unrecognized as existing.

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[redacted] of attention to a modal-like come, which expresses speaker [redacted], may also be due in part to the existence in creole and pu- [redacted]-creole languages such as BE of what may be termed camouflaged [redacted] which are phonologically similar or identical to forms in the [redacted] (that language which is the source of most of the lexical [redacted] which are used with different semantic values. An example [redacted] form in BE would be distributive be (e.g., He always be talki[redacted]h, unlike Standard English be, is used specifically to expres[redacted]ive aspect.[2]

Camou[redacted]ed forms are important for the study of creole and post-creole continua since the degree of their functional similarity to counterpart ba[redacted] language forms should be able to serve as an important indicator of the [redacted]e of decreolization of a language and, as they become increasingly understood, shed some light on the process of decreolization itself.

Of particular interest in the case of the come is that it appears in a wide range of BE varieties, even the most acrolectal ones. This is contrary to what one might expect in view of Bickerton's (1975) discussion of the Guyanese creole continuum. Bickerton's position is that the underlying representation of the verbal system in acrolectal Guyanese English is substantively identical with that of speakers whose English is not creole-influenced. The modal-like come in BE argues in favor of the position that even in the furthest reaches of an acrolect, full camouflage, involving complete unrelatedness of function, may exist, whether or not such is actually the case in the Guyanese continuum.

The existence of camouflage and its importance for the study of decreolization raises the existence of the modal-like come to a level of significance it might not have if it were to be discussed merely as another dialect difference. The significance of the modal-like come is also heightened by the fact that it does not represent merely a lexical difference between BE and other varieties of English but a grammatical one. The following discussion indicates that the modal-like come is one of the several elements which make the verbal system of BE unique.

It is also noteworthy that come grammaticalizes the notion of indignation. If indignation is to be classified as a mood notion, as is argued below, the fact that come grammaticalizes indignation would be of significance for any theory of mood. Since it appears that the grammaticalization of indignation has not been posited for any language, the grammatical meaning alone of come is of interest for grammatical theory in general, regardless of whether indignation is accepted as a mood notion.

This paper will not deal with questions concerning the process of modalization, i.e., the process whereby main verbs become modals. If one hypothesizes, however, that the modal-like come has become modal-like as a result of an original metaphorical extension or some other mechanism of linguistic change, then come would clearly be of interest for the study of modalization.

The Come of Indignation and the Motion Verb Come

The modal-like come of indignation typically occurs in contexts shared with the motion verb come. However, close scrutiny of the broader range of contexts in which the former occurs furnishes evidence that it is indeed distinguishable from the motion verb.

It occurs in sentences such as the following:[3]

(1) He come walking in here like he owned the damn place.

The motion verb come also occurs in this context, and if such a sentence were heard or read in a transcript by someone who is not a speaker of BE, he/she would have no reason not to assume that the motion verb is involved.

A sentence such as 2, which does not have a complement verb of motion, such as walking, might also easily be taken as containing the motion verb come, since reference to motion is entirely appropriate given the meaning of the remainder of the sentence:

(2) He come trying to hit on me.

With a sentence such as 3, however, problems in interpreting come as a verb of motion begin to emerge:

(3) We sitting there talking, and he come hitting on me for some money. [He is included in the referent of we.]

Clearly, if both parties are sitting while talking, it is difficult to account for any motion that come might refer to.

With a sentence such as 4, it becomes clearer that a formally identical but semantically distinct item is being dealt with:

(4) She come going in my room--didn't knock or nothing.

If come as well as going were interpreted as motion verbs, the sentence would be anomalous since come going implies simultaneous movements with different orientations. The sentence is not anomalous, however, because

come is not a motion verb in this instance.

The existence of sentences such as 5 leaves little doubt that two verbs come are to be distinguished.

(5) He come coming in here raising all kind of hell.

In 5, there are two instances of come, the first is the come of indignation, and the second is the motion verb, which the speaker would have no reason to utter twice, not being a stutterer and not having made a false start.

It was noted above that the other come expresses the speaker's attitude of strong disapproval or indignation. In the discussion above, phonetics was not taken into account, but it is important since sentences with this other come are (with no exceptions noted) uttered with the intonation and force of indignation, as well as an appropriate constellation of nonverbal behaviors.

Typically, as can be seen from examples 1-5, the complement of the come of indignation expresses an action that is presumptuous, antisocial, or grossly inappropriate, and it is that action toward which indignation is directed.

There are sentences, which upon first consideration, might seem to invalidate the analysis of come as expressing speaker indignation. Consider example 6:

(6) He come telling me how fine I was.

In the case of 6, the social context must be taken into consideration. Example 6 was uttered by a woman who was the object of a recently met married man's amorous attention. In uttering the sentence, the woman was clearly pleased by the man's compliment concerning her attractiveness but sought to indicate the inappropriateness of the man's comments and the expectation, in that particular social context, for her to be taken aback--even though she was not--by her use of the come of indignation. Example 6, then, constitutes an instance of mock indignation, stemming not from the complement's content per se, but rather from the speaker's perceived obligation to interpret the compliment negatively in view of the social context in which it was spoken.

Thus, although indignation can be posited as the basic meaning of come, there is evidence indicating that there are extended uses which do not actually express sincerely felt indignation on the part of the speaker. It is not difficult, however, to argue that such extended uses are a function of come's basic meaning, just as, for example, certain extended uses of sentences which are formally questions are a function of the basic "request for information" meaning of questions. This is not to imply that the relationship between basic and extended meanings is a simple or direct one, but solely that the relationship is a principled one.

The come of indignation, then, expresses indignation which may result from several factors. Any complement of come which expresses something perceived as an extremely negative fashion and which causes indignation on the part of the speaker serves as the justification for its use.

The Come of Indignation, Mood, and Modals

Given that the come of indignation is speaker-oriented--it expresses indignation on the part of the speaker only--there is some reason for classifying it as a marker of mood, following the characterization of mood in its most general sense as expressing speaker attitude. One problem stemming from the classification of come as a mood marker, however, is that traditionally, in its widest application, the term "mood" is associated with imperativity, interrogativity, wish or intention, deontic notions such as obligation and permission, and epistemic ones such as certainty, doubt, and probability. Come does not fit into any of these categories, but mood is clearly the most appropriate of the traditional semantic notions for its classification. The fact that BE has a form through which indignation is grammaticalized is in itself noteworthy since there appear to be no other languages which do so. Given that the most natural classification of come from a semantic standpoint is as a mood-marker, any theory of mood would seem obligated to deal with the notion of indignation.

The statement that indignation is grammaticalized in BE by means of come is in need of some elaboration, since grammaticalization in natural language is not always clear cut but rather a matter of degree. A grammaticalized form is one of a closed, i.e., small in number and resistant to accepting new members, set of elements which exhausts a semantic domain. The smaller the closed set of forms to which a particular form belongs, the more grammaticalized it is. Connected with the notion of grammaticalization is that of obligatoriness. To the extent that a set of elements is grammaticalized in a language, the speaker is forced to choose among the set's members in constructing sentences. Tense, for example, is grammaticalized in English, and the marking of tense in the English sentence is obligatory. The relevant domain in BE appears to be one

involving types and degrees of disapproval and would include minimally come and gone (see below). A detailing of the precise constraints on the use of forms in this domain must await further research. The discussion of the semantics of come presented herein can only be taken as preliminary given the larger questions relating to the interaction of all disapproval forms.

In one important respect, come behaves as modals. It is speaker-oriented as are modals, i.e., it expresses speaker-attitude only, regardless of what the overt subject of the (simple) sentence is, unlike, for example, verbs such as believe or doubt whose subject is the overt marker of the attitude-holder, who may or may not be the speaker.

The data from actual speech are insufficient for a full-scale comparison of the syntactic behavior of the come of indignation with modals. Those few relevant data that have been gathered show no syntactic similarity between come and modals. Thus, come may well have nothing or little at all in common with modals from a nonsemantic viewpoint, although it does semantically since it marks mood (accepting indignation as a mood notion) as do modals (in their mood-signalling functions). Unlike modals, come requires Do Support in questions:

(7) Did he come hitting you again?[5]

Also, come can occur in infinitival clauses, unlike modals:

(8) I didn't want him to come talking to me, cussing and carrying on.

Come has not, however, been observed in gerundive clauses, but this fact may owe to come's taking a gerundive complement itself, thereby producing a doubl-ing construction, come itself being gerundive. Therefore, come's absence from gerundive clauses may well result from general constraints on doubl-ing constructions.[6] The facts are not clear with respect to an additional property of modals, which is subject-verb agreement. In some BE varieties, subject-verb agreement is either not present or sporadic.[7]

This brief discussion of the syntactic properties of the come of indignation has focused on comparing come's syntactic behavior with that of the nonmarginal modals, e.g., may, should, must, etc. The marginal modals, e.g., ought to, need, dare, have to, be to (as in he is to leave tomorrow), and used to, have been labeled variously, e.g., as marginal modals, semi-modals, semi-auxiliaries, etc., and their syntactic behavior is to varying extents more like that of the come of indignation and main verbs. Given the lack of precision and the inconsistent usage of the terms available for marginal modals, there is no principled basis for selecting any one of such terms for referring to the come of indignation. Suffice it to state

that there is a continuum of modalhood with the come of indignation being situated close to the main-verb end, nonmarginal modals being situated at the modal end, and the various other marginal modals situated in between.

Gone

Another BE form, mentioned above, which marks a type of disapproval is gone.[8] It can be classified as a mood-marker on the same basis as the come of indignation. Gone occurs in sentences such as the following:

(9) Why she gone act a fool like that?

(10) Now he gone come in here raising hell and then wonder why they wanted to put him out.

Gone will not be examined in detail, but a few remarks can be made in passing. It should be observed that gone in 9 and 10 marks neither future nor future in the past, as one would expect based on be going to, with which gone might be equated. Both examples are past (and realized). Context determines the tense of 9, and the simple past form wanted makes it clear that 10 is in the past tense.

Gone is used to express the disapproval of the speaker, but that disapproval is of a weaker sort than the indignation expressed by come. Additionally, unlike come, gone expresses also unexpectedness, unexplainability and/or doubt. This observation is particularly important in view of sentences such as 11:

(11) He gone come telling me he had to shut off my electricity.

In the case of 11, pragmatic considerations rule out a reading expressing both disapproval (of a weaker sort than indignation) by gone and indignation by come. Sentence 15 was uttered by a beautician who was dismayed that her electricity was being shut off during business hours. She was indignant due to the inconvenience caused her customers, particularly those under the electric hair-dryers at the time the electricity was shut off. The shut-off of her electricity was also unexpected and unexplainable: she had been told beforehand that her electricity would not be shut off during business hours; furthermore, there was no reason to shut off her electricity because her wiring was separate from that of the rest of the building, and only the wiring for the rest of the building was to be worked on. Clearly then, she also had reason to doubt that the electrician "had to shut off" her electricity. Thus, in 11, gone expresses unexpectedness, unexplainability and doubt.

The Case for Come

One might wish to argue that the come of indignation should be taken as a metaphoric extension of the verb of motion rather than establishing two come's. Any attempt to support such a view, however, encounters insurmountable obstacles.

In the first place, if the metaphoric extension view is to be supported, there should be some explanation of the basis for the metaphoric extension and ideally some idea of its origin. Although the come of indignation may well be the result of an original metaphoric extension, the original metaphor must be considered dead since it is synchronically unrecoverable. Furthermore, it must be noted that the question of metaphor in the origin, evolution, and present status of come is one which is distinct from the question of whether two come's must be established on the basis of synchronic syntactic and semantic factors. The preceding discussion of the syntax and semantics of the two come's is by itself sufficient for establishing the existence of the two.

The metaphoric extension view of the come of indignation is made even more difficult to support because the semantic value of the modal-like come is not what one might expect based on previous studies of the semantic extensions of deictic phenomena linked to the motion verbs come and go.

Clark (1974), for example, offers an interesting hypothesis on the evaluative uses of go and come in idioms, e.g.:

(12) He came through a good deal last year.

(13) He went through a good deal last year.

She suggests that two classes of idioms, one with go and one with come, are related to other types of deixis, all of which derive from the basic deictic contrast between ego and non-ego. The evaluative uses of come and go "... related to normal-state idioms in that the evaluative use of come implies that the person or event described has ended up in some speaker-approved or public-approved state. The evaluative use of go, however, is either neutral or negative in connotation ..." (p. 317). Although a deixis-based explanation of meaning phenomena connected with the come and go idioms that she treats appears viable, such an explanation is not feasible for the modal-like come since, contrary to what one would expect given a deixis-based explanation, come is evaluatively negative.

Go and the Origin of the Come of Indignation

Even though a full understanding of the origin and development of the come of indignation will have to come primarily from future research, at this point several relevant observations can be presented.

Although the use of motion verb forms in the tense-aspect systems of English and other languages of European origin (notably Portuguese) that may have been involved in BE's presured creole past is well known (e.g., English go and Portuguese ir "to go," both used as future tense markers),[9] there appear to be no cases of forms formally identical or similar to motion verbs which are used specifically to express indignation. Furthermore, our present knowledge of these languages indicates that none have grammaticalized in any way the mood notion of indignation.

However, in varieties of English other than BE, disapproval is grammaticalized. Go marks disapproval, as in the following examples:

(14) Don't go acting crazy again.

(15) Don't go going around ringing people's doorbells.

(16) Whenever I let him cook, he goes burning everything.

There are several bases on which the go of disapproval can be distinguished from go the motion verb. Note first that there are contexts where no motion interpretation for go is possible:

(17) [Your] sitting there now is OK, but if you go sitting there past midnight, you're going to get picked up by the police.

Secondly, as happens with the come of indignation, go can take itself as a complement, as in 15 above.

It should be noted that some instances of go taking a complement verb in -ing are not instances of the go of disapproval. The go of disapproval cannot occur in the progressive.

(18)a. He goes fishing every chance he gets.
(NONDISAPPROVAL)

b. (Nowadays) he's going fishing every chance he gets.
(NONDISAPPROVAL)

(19)a. He goes showing off every chance he gets.
(DISAPPROVAL)

b. *(Nowadays) he's going showing off every chance he gets.
(DISAPPROVAL)

In much the same manner as the come of indignation, the go of disapproval has both main verb and modal properties.[10]

The go of disapproval, unfortunately, does more in the way of raising questions than providing answers. Go can in no clear way be related to either the come of indignation or the gone of disapproval except in that all three are formally identical to motion verb forms. Indeed, an important question that go raises is why different varieties of English should employ forms identical to motion verb forms to mark types of disapproval.

Clearly, one of the most important questions relating to the origin of the come of indignation is whether it or similar forms exist in other creoles, particularly the English-based ones such as Guyanese Creole, Jamaican Creole, and Gullah.[11] Scrutiny of what are perhaps the most extensive studies of these creoles (Bailey 1966, Jamaican Creole; Cunningham 1970 and Turner 1949, Gullah; and Bickerton 1975, Guyanese Creole) does not, however, reveal forms of interest in this regard. This notwithstanding, given the high degree of camouflage that the come of indignation represents, it would be premature to assume that this form or one quite similar to it does not exist in these creoles.[12]

Conclusion

Although the existence of camouflaged forms in creole and post-creole languages has long been noted (at least implicitly), studies oriented specifically toward the delineation of and interrelationship between different types of camouflage have not been undertaken. That such studies should be on the creolist's agenda is argued for by the possibility that a typology or theory of camouflage will assist in rendering possible a full-fledged theory of decreolization, and a more accurate specification of the notion of stage of decreolization. At present, the only terms we have to refer to stages of decreolization ("basilect," "mesolect," etc.), are ones which are not satisfactorily precise.

Bickerton (1975) has taken a first step toward critical use of the notion of camouflage (though not the term) to isolate stages of decreolization. Thus, for example, he states:

> The processes that we observed in the developmental phase between basilect and mid-mesolect consisted to a large extent of introducing formatives modelled on English ones, using them (at least initially) in a quite un-English way, and only slowly and gradually shifting the underlying semantic system in the general direction of English. But at the level our description has now reached, a change in the nature of these processes occurs . . . Increasingly, from this point, [going from mesolect to acrolect], English forms are added to the grammar in pretty much their English functions, while non-English forms either drop out altogether or are crushed and distorted into patterns that become steadily closer to English ones (p.114).

In comparing the Guyanese acrolect specifically to English (that is, varieties of English which have not been creole-influenced), Bickerton comments that ". . . the underlying representation of the verbal system in the minds of acrolectal Guyanese speakers may be regarded as substantively identical with that of metropolitan speakers of English" (p. 162).

Despite the implications concerning camouflage in Guyanese Creole English that one may draw from these remarks of Bickerton's and his study in its entirety, it is clear that full camouflage, involving complete unrelatedness of function, is present in even the acrolectal varieties of BE. Even BE speakers who might well be considered to use a variety of BE more "acrolectal" than that characterized by Taylor (1971) as Standard Black English employ the come of indignation.[13]

Although tense-aspect systems have constituted a major focus in creole and BE studies, attention to mood systems has remained comparatively insubstantial. A major reason for the concern of creolists with tense-aspect systems is their similarity the world-over, which prompted Bickerton's (1974) intriguing hypothesis that they closely mirror an innate tense-aspect system--one based on human cognitive capacities. Attention to the tense-aspect system of BE stems from the fact that many of the radical differences that researchers have found between it and other kinds of English have been in the tense-aspect system.

Awareness of the existence of the come of indignation and the gone of disapproval in BE should be sufficient for stimulating more interest in the mood system of BE and those of creoles as well since, as Bickerton (1976) has observed, ". . . it is likely that a full and satisfactory understanding of the origin and development of Black English must await a full and satisfactory explanation of pidgins and creoles" (p. 183).

Footnotes

[1]"Black English" is used here to refer to what is actually a continuum of varieties of English in the United States spoken almost exclusively by Blacks. This continuum contains varieties ranging from the basilectal (that furthest from the standard) to what may be referred to as Standard Black English. (See Taylor, 1971, for a discussion of the notion of Standard Black English.)

[2]As the typical brief statement, this one concerning BE distributive be oversimplifies. See Fasold (1972) and Macauley (1974) for further discussion.

[3]For increased clarity unreduced forms are given in all examples since the way in which forms are reduced is irrelevant for the purposes of the present discussion.

Unless otherwise indicated, the come (and gone--see below) data are taken from notes gathered during participant observation in the San Francisco Bay Area of California. (Actually, in this case one might speak of a member observation, since the observer has routing contact, for reasons unrelated to language research, with the group of persons providing the data for this study.) Most of the data come from speech in a hair care establishment where lively, uninhibited speech prevails. Such speech is typical for beauty and barber shops in Black communities. These establishments provide especially productive opportunities for speech observation since the researcher's or anyone else's presence with or without participation in the conversations is perfectly normal.

The method of participant observation, though used rarely in linguistic studies (see, however, Rickford, 1975), is particularly useful for overcoming the limitations of tape-recording. Since normal social contexts are made use of, there are fewer constraints on when and where data can be gathered. Forms which might rarely or never at all occur in recording situations can be watched for in a range of situations in which tape-recording may be infeasible for various reasons. (See Rickford, 1975, and Wolfram and Fasold, 1974, for detailed discussions of related methodological issues.)

[4]The use of the term 'modal' in contradistinction to 'verb' does not imply support for the analysis of modals as a separate category, as in Chomsky (1957) and other analyses in the same vein, e.g., Akmajian and Wasow (1975). It is an expository convenience and is intended to be neutral with respect to the controversy over the category status of modals and other auxiliaries.

[5]In this and other written sentences where come might be ambiguous, context established that no motion was involved. The presence of the come of indignation was determined on this basis.

[6]See Ross (1972), Milsark (1972), and Pullam (1974) for discussions of constraints on sequences of forms in -ing.

[7]Present tense sentences with come in the case of speakers whose speech is for the most part standard may prove to show subject-verb agreement. Although no such sentences have been recorded, the author's intuitions indicate that present tense sentences of at least some of these speakers would show subject-verb agreement.

[8]It is phonetically realized as [gõ] of [gon].

[9]See Traugott (1976) for additional examples.

[10]This discussion of go has benefited from observations and examples provided by Susanna Cumming, Donn Seeley, Deborah Clarke, John Moore, and Dyann Paynovich.

For an interesting discussion of the go+bare infinitive construction, e.g., Go get me a beer, see Shopen (1971). He concludes that go in this construction also has both main verb and (with respect to syntax) modal properties.

[11]A similar question arises with respect to West African languages, viz. whether a motion-verb-form/disapproval-marking-function correlation occurs with sufficient frequency in these languages so as to allow one to hypothesize that they provided the model for disapproval forms in BE. It would be difficult, however, to connect disapproval forms in BE to analogous West African ones given the existence of analogous disapproval forms in nonBlack varieties of English. This is particularly true since it is not yet certain that forms in other English varieties did not serve as models for the BE disapproval forms.

[12]Lillith Haynes (personal communication), has reported that the modal-like come described in this paper is widely used in Guyana. It is not clear at this point, however, over what part of the speech continuum in Guyana this form occurs. The existence of come in Guyanese speech will require minor modifications only of discussions in this paper, but it may eventually require significant modifications in our view of the decreolization process.

[13]Taylor would consider habitual be, the meaning of which he curiously labels "continuative aspects," to be a feature of Standard Black English. Several of the informants used for this study who never use habitual be do use the come of indignation.

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