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ABSTRACT

The standard view of language attitudes in a creole continuum is that the creole is considered bad and the standard language is considered good. This standard view fits with the theory of decreolization by which such continua are thought to have come about. A study was carried out in Guyana in an effort to overcome the perceived limitations of the standard view. A matched guise experiment, along with other means of eliciting language attitudes in a systematic way, was conducted. The respondents were 24 persons whose speech had been sampled extensively and who represented equally the two major social classes in the community: the Estate Class, whose members worked in the fields, and the Non-Estate Class, or white collar workers. The evidence indicated that there are social class differences in language attitudes; in particular, that while the Estate Class respondents agree with the Non-Estate Class respondents in the positive evaluation of English on one dimension, the job scale, they reveal a diametrically opposed endorsement of creole norms on other dimensions. It is suggested that the most accurate picture of language attitudes, linguistic variation, and linguistic change in creole continua is one in which it is recognized that there are ambivalent attractions to creole and English norms present in the various social classes in varying proportions.
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LANGUAGE ATTITUDES IN A CREOLE CONTINUUM*

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OBJECTIVES:

- (i) To introduce the standard view of language attitudes in a creole continuum (creole considered bad, standard language good), and to indicate some of its weaknesses.
- (ii) To report on the results of a Matched Guise Experiment and other evidence from the Guyanese Creole continuum indicating that there are social class differences in language attitudes; in particular, that while the Estate class (=Working Class) respondents agree with the Non-Estate Class (=Lower Middle Class) respondents in the positive evaluation of English on one dimension, they reveal a diametrically opposed endorsement of Creole norms on other dimensions.
- (iii) To suggest that the most accurate and revealing picture of language attitudes, linguistic variation, and linguistic change in creole continua is one in which we recognize that there are ambivalent attractions to Creole and English norms present in the various social classes in varying proportions.

This paper was presented at the Annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America in San Antonio, Texas, December 29, 1980. Comments are welcome. Please write me c/o: Dept. of Linguistics, Stanford University, Stanford, California 94305. Thank you. J.R.R.

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INTRODUCTION

In any situation where there is active linguistic variation, the language attitudes of the native speakers involved should be of tremendous interest to the linguist, for they may provide the crucial keys to an understanding of why speakers vary as they do, and where linguistic change is heading (if in fact it can be perceived as taking place at all). Situations involving decreolization, second language acquisition, multilingualism and language death frequently involve linguistic variation to an exceptionally high degree, and it is in these contexts that language attitudes are likely to be of the greatest potential significance. In this paper, I will focus on the language attitudes in one such context: in the creole continuum, where decreolization produces a spectrum of intermediate varieties between a creole (basilectal) and standard (acrolectal) language poles (DeCamp 1971).

The standard or orthodox view of language attitudes in such continua is that the creole is considered bad, and the standard language good. Examples of this view can be found everywhere. Writing about Jamaica, for instance, DeCamp (1971:26) reported that:

(1) "The creole is inseparably associated with poverty, ignorance, and lack of moral character." :136,139
And, describing the situation in Antigua, Reisman (1970) noted that English was regarded as dominant there, and the local Creole was negatively defined as "brokop" or "bad" language. The following anecdote which he narrated seemed to be typical of the general attitude there:

(2) "I was bouncing a five-year old child on my knee and talking to her, using Creole forms, when she turned to me and said, 'You talk bad', and proceeded to turn my remarks into English."

From my native experience in Guyana, I am familiar with this standard view as reflected in the statements of dozens of teachers and newspaper columnists (among others). But I prefer to exemplify it today with the remarks of Oxford, a Non-Estate Class (or Lower-Middle Class) member of the village of Cane Walk.¹ Speaking in relation to Guyanese Creole, he had this to say:

(3) "It don' take you nowhere. It don' do good to a person. (J.R.R.: "It ain't got--yuh ain' tink it got no good at all?") No, no, no. Dere is no good in it at all, whatsoever. It don' carry you nowhere. If--if one can pick up, yuh know, good English, yuh know, yuh see, he can spread it among his children dem. When yuh call, yuh know, yuh say, well, yuh know, yuh gon try your best to discipline dem. But if yuh start wid de different

kind of Creolese language on dem, yuh know, yuh'll make dem go out in de wrong side. (J.R.R.: "Wuh, yuh--yuh don' tink dey gon get job an' so?") No, dey'll never. Well, dey might get, yuh know, de bottom job. Dey will get, yuh know, bottom job--but not top job!"

(Spontaneous Interview #30)

This standard view of language attitudes in a creole continuum fits in very nicely with the theory of decreolization by which such continua are thought to have come about (DeCamp 1971, Bickerton 1975). The places which now have creole continua are usually assumed to have been essentially bilingual situations, involving the creole and standard languages only, at some earlier point in the past. Then, with the breakdown of social barriers between the creole and the standard language speakers, and with increased opportunities for socio-economic mobility, the creole speakers are assumed to have had increased opportunity and motivation to modify their speech in the direction of the standard language. Without something like the standard view of language attitudes in a creole setting, it would be difficult to see why this kind of decreolization should have been started at all.

Although this standard view of language attitudes in a creole continuum is theoretically useful, and undoubtedly has some basis in reality, it is a limited view, for the following reasons:

- (4a) Typically, the social class and language use of the people whose attitudes are reported are not taken into account. These may in themselves be significant variables.
- (4b) This view is invariably based on anecdotal rather than systematically assembled evidence.
- (4b) This view leaves us with the paradox: if everyone agrees that the creole is bad and the standard language good, then why has decreolization NOT gone to completion (i.e., why hasn't the creole disappeared) in those communities like Guyana where it may be assumed to have been taking place for a hundred and fifty years or more?

MATCHED GUISE EVIDENCE FROM GUYANA

In an effort to overcome the preceding limitations of the standard view, I used a Matched Guise experiment and other means of eliciting language attitudes in a systematic way in recent research in the Guyanese creole continuum (cf. Rickford 1979). The respondents in the Matched Guise experiment were twenty-four members of the Cane-Walk community whose speech I had sampled extensively in two prior years of fieldwork involving spontaneous interviews, peer-group recordings, and participant observation. The Matched Guise experiment was part of a formal interview involving questions about language attitudes and linguistic competence which I conducted after all of the spontaneous interviews and recordings had been completed. The respondents themselves represented equally (twelve in each group) the two major social classes in the community: the Estate Class, whose members worked

as cane-cutters, weeders, and in other field-work capacities on the sugar estate around which the community was organized, and the Non-Estate Class, whose members held jobs as clerks, contractors, bookkeepers, shopowners--the unifying characteristic being that they had escaped the backbreaking labour and low socio-economic status of being a field-labourer on the sugar estate. (This is an ethnographic, community-based distinction, but it may be thought of in broader sociological terms as roughly equivalent to the working and lower middle classes respectively of metropolitan societies.)

The Matched Guise experiment which I used, consisted, like the original experiments of Lambert (1967) and his colleagues, of samples of speech from the same speaker recurring in the guise of different language varieties. The respondents hearing the samples believe that they are hearing different speakers, and are asked to evaluate each 'speaker' on a number of dimensions. In my experiment, I used the guise of a basilectal or creole speaker, a mesolectal or mixed creole-English speaker, and an acrolectal or English speaker, each telling a narrative about how he had met his wife (a question which the respondents themselves had been asked in their own interviews, and so found quite natural and familiar). I will share with you the opening lines of each narrative to give you an idea of what the Matched Guise samples were like:

(5) Matched Guise Speaker 1 (Basilectal):

" . . . Well hear how de ting, de ting bin happen. Me frien' dem did passin' me house wan Saturday aftanoon. Me an' me lil brudda--awe bin deh upstairs by de window. Well, dem call awe fuh come out an ta--tek wan walk wid dem."

(6) Matched Guise Speaker 2 (Mesolectal):

"Well, actually, how uh meet me wife is like dis: Yuh see, my mudda had a good frien' who used to come an' visit she regular. An' my mudda used to go around by de, you know, by de odda one steady too. Dey was frien's from long, you know."

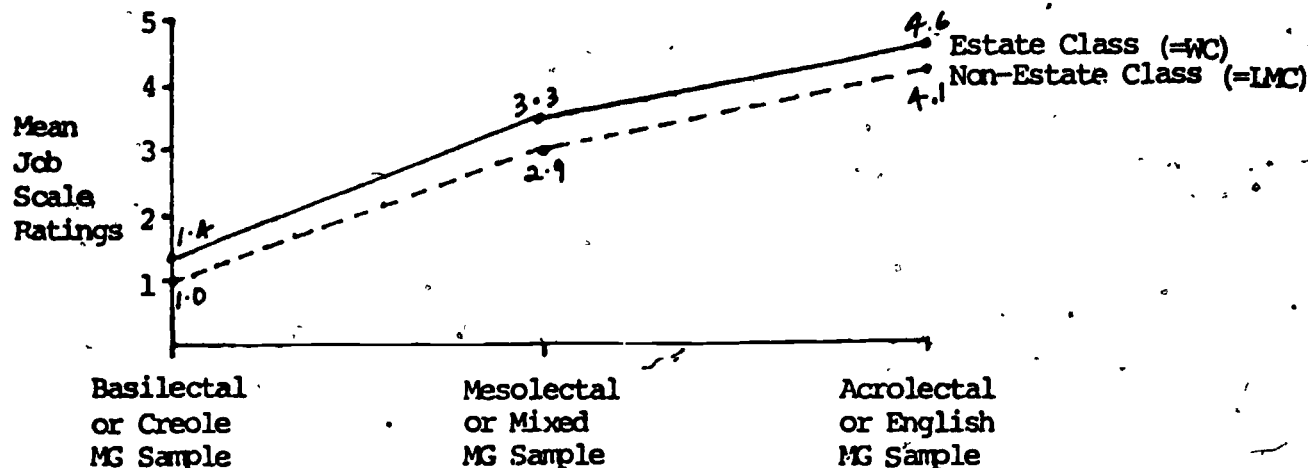
(7) Matched Guise Speaker 3 (Acrolectal):

" . . . I'm a pretty shy type by nature, and I never had much to do with girls. But one day, my friends invited me to go with them to a party, and I went along, you know, just fot the fun of it."

After hearing each of these samples in their entirety, the respondents were asked to rate the 'speaker' in terms of the kind of job he probably held, and how likely he would be to fit in with the respondent's own circle of friends.

The results on the job scale are indicated in figure 1. While there is a consistent (but slight) difference between the absolute ratings of the Estate-Class and Non-Estate Class respondents, the most striking feature of this display is the remarkable parallelism in their relative ratings of the three Matched Guise samples. They agree perfectly in associating basilectal or Creole speech with jobs of lower socio-economic status, and acrolectal or English speech with jobs of higher socio-economic status, just as the standard view of language attitudes in a creole continuum would have predicted.

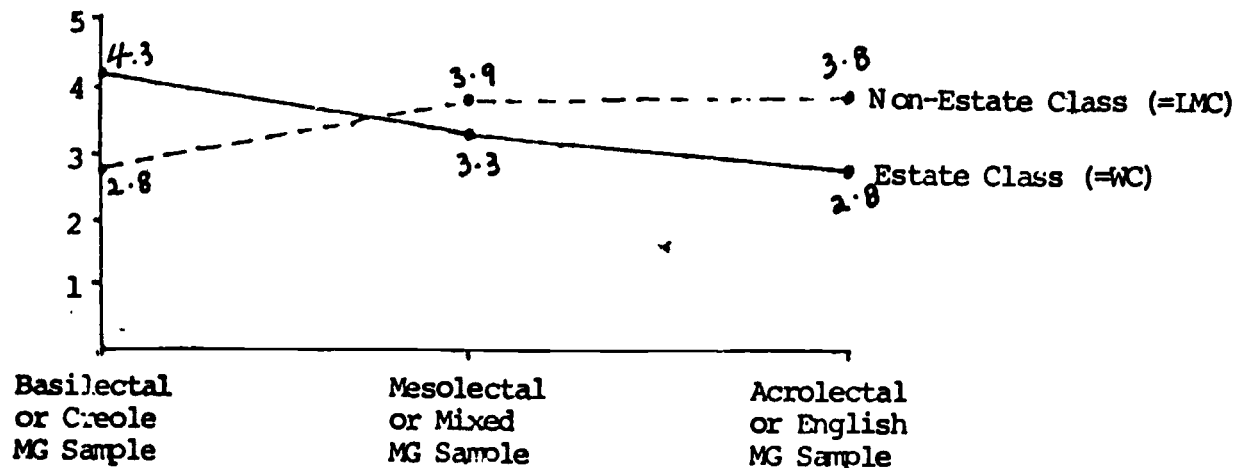
FIGURE 1
MEAN RATINGS OF THE MATCHED-GUISE (MG) SAMPLES, JOB SCALE



Note: 5=Field Manager/Headmaster; 4=Field Foreman/Book-keeper; 3=Shop Owner; 2=Security Guard; 1=Cane-cutter. (Highest to lowest socioeconomic status.)

On the friend scale, however, as shown in figure 2, the results are quite different, with the Non-Estate Class behaving in accord with the standard view in rating the basilectal or Creole sample most negatively, and the others more positively, while the Estate Class respondents do the exact opposite, rating the basilectal or Creole speaker most likely to fit in with their circle of friends, and the others speakers less so. The ratings of the Estate Class respondents on this scale are quite different from what the standard view of language attitudes in a creole continuum would predict.

FIGURE 2
MEAN RATINGS OF THE MATCHED-GUISE (MG) SAMPLES, FRIEND SCALE



Note: 5=Would definitely fit in with my circle of friends; 4=Maybe yes; 3=Uncertain; 2= Maybe not; 1= Definitely not.

In the only other study (to my knowledge) to have elicited Matched Guise ratings on both a job scale and a friend scale, Labov et al. (1968) obtained similar results: agreement among respondents from all social groups in rating the standard language speaker higher on the job scale than the vernacular speaker, but a difference between one group of Northern Black adults and the other groups insofar as the Northern Black group rated the vernacular speaker most likely to become a friend. Labov et al. suggested that the difference between the ratings of respondents on the two scales might be attributed to the fact that the job scale was eliciting the dominant societal norms about language and the social order, while the friend scale was eliciting more covert attitudes to language having to do with values such as identity, solidarity, and community.

This interpretation can be applied to our results in the Guyanese continuum too, but it is possible to go beyond the methodology and analysis of Labov et al's seminal study in two important respects.

In the first place, we can take advantage of the samples of our respondents' speech which we had even before they took part in the experiment, to relate their reflected attitudes to their actual production. Figure 3 provides only a hint, from two personal pronoun subcategories, of a fact that is abundantly clear from all of our data: that the Estate Class respondents tend to be closer to the basilect and lower mesolect in their everyday language use, while the Non-Estate Class respondents tend to be closer to the acrolect and upper mesolect. Note, for instance, that in the first person subject subcategory, the Estate Class respondents use the basilectal or Creole variant (*mi*) with the same high frequency (89%) that the Non-Estate Class respondents use the acrolectal or English variant. From this evidence, the sense in which the groups' ratings on the friend scale represent values of identity or solidarity can be made clearer: each group is essentially warming most to the Matched Guise 'speaker' who sounds most like themselves.

FIGURE 3
RELATIVE FREQUENCIES OF MORPHOLOGICAL VARIANTS IN TWO PRONOUN
SUBCATEGORIES BY SOCIAL CLASS (DATA FROM CANE WALK, GUYANA)

	First sg. sub.			Third sg. feminine poss.			
	(n=)	Bas. <i>mi</i>	Acr. <i>aI</i>	(n=)	Bas. <i>hi</i>	Mes. <i>Si</i>	Acr. <i>har</i>
EC: (2309)		.89	.11	(170)	.46	.53	.01
NEC: (3012)		.11	.89	(142)	.04	.38	.58

We can also go beyond the analysis of Labov et al (1968) by drawing on the evidence of our respondents' statements elsewhere in the formal interview and on other occasions over the two-year fieldwork period, which indicate that the endorsement of Creole speech shown by the Estate Class respondents on the friend scale is only part of a larger process in which they seem to be reacting against the dominant middle class norms of the society, and rewriting the traditionally negative evaluations of themselves in more positive terms.

For instance, in response to a question about whether they felt that speaking "good English" would help one to get a better job and get ahead, eleven of the twelve Non-Estate Class respondents (92%) said yes, but only five of the twelve Estate Class respondents (42%) agreed. This might seem surprising in view of the apparent evidence of figure 1 that the EC and NEC members agree that there is an association between occupational status and level of language use. What the two groups disagree on here is the nature of the association, with the EC members seeing language use as reflecting occupation and class status, while the NEC members see language use as contributing to or helping to bring about an individual's occupational and social class level. For the EC members, for whom occupational and social mobility is still quite sharply limited (Seymour, an NEC member, once described the EC fieldworkers as "marking time . . . One spot, and they can't move. . ."), the economic and sociopolitical cards are seen as being too firmly stacked against them for them to get ahead by using "good English".

It's important to emphasize, however, that the skepticism which the majority of the EC members express about the value of speaking "good English" is not simply a defense mechanism, a way of compensating for the fact that they are themselves limited to the Creole or basilectal level. We know from the evidence of the Creole to English correction tests in the formal interview that at least some of the EC members can produce acrolectal or English variants which they rarely or never attest in their everyday speech. One such respondent is Reefer, leader of a tight and militant cane-cutters' group, who had never used a single token of subject ai as first subject pronoun in one hundred and thirty-five occurrences of this subcategory in his spontaneous interviews and recordings, but produced it as will, where appropriate, in the correction tests. For Reefer, as for the others like him, use of Creole is itself a language attitude, a matter of choice, an act of rebellion--a statement that in language as in other things, the dominant social order must be overturned:

- (8) "Yeah, dem a taak bout writin' book in de, in--Guyana. In de West Indies as a whole. . . . Well, me mean yuh gat to larn fuh larn yuh , yuh own language, yuh know. . . . Abe na waan dem Englishman teachin' an' ting da no mo, man. Dem ting da mus' done. . . . Yuh see, dem a write dem own book fuh suit deh own self, and abe mus' larn from dem and subdue 'under dem!" (Spontaneous interview #44)

CONCLUSION: A SYNTHESIS

Up to this point I have attempted to modify the standard view of language attitudes in a creole continuum by pointing out that the attitude that Creole is bad and English is good is essentially a Non-Estate or Lower Middle Class view, and that the Estate Class or Working Class members do show some positive endorsements of Creole speech, and some negative reactions against English. This would explain why the Non-Estate members appear to have decreolized considerably more than the Estate Class members.

But even this analysis is not complex enough, accurate enough, or capable of explaining the dynamic character of the creole continuum. For if we look closely, we do find among the Estate Class members some agreement about the need to use more English speech on occasion, insofar as one is capable of using it. Thus, for instance, Estate and Non-Estate Class respondents agree again on the importance of using more English-like speech. "when you meet important people dem", or "when yuh meet nice people dat talkin" proper". (And it is significant in this connection that Reefer's first evidence that he might use first person ai in unelicited speech came when he was being reinterviewed by two Englishmen and an American (all White expatriates) as part of my fieldwork design. Reefer used about seven tokens of ai spontaneously in this context, even though he had insisted, on an earlier occasion, that "Yuh talkin' na mek no difference.") And among the Non-Estate class members, we find some endorsement of the value of Creole when among friends, when at home, or when going into the shop or marketplace to buy things.

If we look closely in the literature, too, we can detect traces of the positive attitude to Creole which is usually overshadowed in the standard view. Thus, for instance, DeCamp (1971) reports that a command of the creole can be an asset to the politician in Jamaica, and Reisman (1970)¹⁴⁰ notes that:

- (9) "Creole occurs in contexts of relaxation, expressiveness, involvement, letting go. . . . Creole is intrinsically felt to be the code of the genuine."

We will need to specify the nature and intensity of these impulses in greater detail than we have hitherto, but it is clear that in an adequate view, we will have to recognize that at various times and in varying proportions, there are attractions to Creole and English norms in both social classes--factors which impell speakers forward to the acrolect and backwards to the basilect in a seemingly endless dialectic. It is in this push/pull, love/hate cauldron of allegiances--introduced in Reisman's (1970) account of linguistic and cultural ambiguity in a West Indian village, but still awaiting further exploration--that the creole continuum boils. And it is in this heat that we must forge new theories and explanations.

NOTES

This is a slightly expanded version of a paper presented at the Annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America in San Antonio, Texas, on December 29, 1980. I hope to produce a considerably expanded version of this--with more data on the nature of the Matched-Guise samples and the experiment as a whole, more data on the language use of the respondents, and a more detailed and comprehensive indication of the philosophy of re-evaluation of dominant norms which seems to be present among some members of the Estate Class--to be submitted to Language sometime in 1981. Your comments on this preliminary version would be greatly appreciated and duly acknowledged.

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¹
Cane-Walk is a pseudonym for the village, which is within a ten-mile radius of the capital city of Georgetown, Guyana.

²
In preparing the test tape, I was able to benefit from the linguistic and dramatic virtuosity of a Guyanese amateur actor, who, like the respondents themselves, was of East-Indian background, but capable of using the most standard English speech required. I prepared the three Matched Guise samples myself, creating the content, and controlling the forms carefully to represent basilectal, mesolectal, and acrolectal levels of usage. The occurrence of the forms was controlled most closely in the area of the personal pronouns, on which I was focussing, but the distribution of negatives, tense-aspect markers, and a number of central phonological variables, also happened to reflect the three levels I was attempting to approximate.

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