

Some Principles for the Study of Black and White Speech in the South

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1a *Lg. Variety in the South* ed. Michael B. Montgomery & Guy Bailey. 1986. (U. Alabama Press)

This paper is organized in the following way. I will share a few personal reminiscences about my first fieldwork experiences in South Carolina. Then I will present four principles which need to be followed whenever two or more language varieties are compared, but particularly in the case of black and white speech in the South, because these principles seem to be frequently neglected in this area. Then I will apply these principles to plural formation in Sea Island Creole, demonstrating that their application results in a different and richer view than would otherwise be obtained.

My reminiscences are from the first time I arrived in Savannah, Georgia, after a long bus ride from California, and then went over to Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. I will never forget how amazed I was to step on a fishing boat belonging to the Hilton Head Fishing Co-op and hear Americans who sounded strikingly like Guyanese. I had read about Gullah, or Sea Island Creole, in the works of Turner and other people, but it was quite a different experience to hear the speech, to hear people who sounded so strikingly like "back home." The variety I was hearing was not basilectal Gullah, but it was like music to my ears.

I have had two opportunities to hear this music again. The first was when I took down the dusty Sea Island Creole tapes which I had recorded in 1970 and 1972 and started to go through them to prepare this paper. The second was when I visited the Sea Islands in September 1981, using the opportunity to renew my friendships with the people who were still living (many, unfortunately, had died)¹ and to make some new recordings, including an important interview with a white Sea Islander ("Mr. King").

Turning now from personal to professional concerns, I was reminded, when I was on the Sea Islands, that it was there I first heard the work *juk* being used in the U.S.A. The word, which I was quite familiar with from my native Guyanese environment, means

"pierce" or "poke at," and the context in which I first heard it on the Sea Islands was when a mother turned to her child, who was sitting on a verandah idly kicking at the meshed enclosure, and said something like:

1. Mind you don' *juk* yuh foot through dat mesh.
"Take care not to poke a hole through that mesh with your foot."

The professional question I want to ask is whether whites also use the form. However, I need to apologize for asking this question, because such a question can lead one up the garden path. Experience reminds me that too often we approach the comparison of black and white speech by asking overly simple questions. This model, "Blacks use form *x*; do whites also use *x*?" is used again and again when discussions of black/white speech differences arise. But this model provides an accurate view of neither black nor white speech, and thus it provides an inadequate basis for comparison.

Four Principles for the Study of Black and White Speech

Instead of this single, simplistic question, I propose four principles which need to be considered when we compare a feature in one language variety to a similar or equivalent feature in another. The principles are not original (the first and the second should be basic to all linguistic description), and they certainly have more general application, but they are not always followed in American dialect research, especially where comparisons of black and white speech are concerned. The four methodological principles will be stated, therefore, in terms of things we need to "remember" to do:

1. We need to attend carefully to the form and meaning of the feature. Someone who answers my question about *juk* by saying that he or she has heard it as [juk] instead of [jvk] is obeying this principle, as is someone who notes the occurrence of a similar (identical) form in juke-box.
2. We need to specify the linguistic environment in which the feature occurs. This is perhaps less critical for an isolated lexical item like *juk*, but it can be critical for the phonological and grammatical features with which we are often concerned.
3. We need to tabulate the frequency with which the feature occurs. It is of course in sociolinguistic work, of the type exemplified by Labov, Wolfram, and Fasold, that this principle has been most carefully followed. These scholars (and others) have demonstrated the importance of considering not only what occurs

and where, but how often.

4. We need to consider the interrelation of the feature with other features in the grammar. This principle is articulated throughout Weinreich's classic 1953 monograph on languages in contact, and was rearticulated by his student Labov, in his 1971 discussion of what constitutes a "system." More than thirty years after the former and more than a decade after the latter, this remains one of the most neglected areas of dialect research.

With regard to the first principle, the need to attend carefully to the form and meaning of the feature, much of the literature on black English remote BIN seems to have suffered from a confusion of the stressed and unstressed versions of this form. In research I have done in the South Carolina Sea Islands and in Philadelphia (Rickford 1975), it is clear that the remote interpretation resides only in the stressed form, as in "She BIN married." Sometimes there is even implosive force to the initial b. The unstressed form, as in "He bin married," does not carry the remote interpretation, but simply describes a perfective or sometimes anterior state or event. Furthermore, in investigations we have conducted with black and white subjects on the meaning of stressed BIN (Labov 1972a, Rickford 1975), blacks regularly differ from whites in recognizing both the remote reference of BIN and the fact that the state to which it refers is still in effect at the moment of speaking, when it is used with a stative predicate. In a sentence like "She BIN married," for example, twenty-three of the twenty-five black respondents in one experiment (Rickford 1975:173) perceived the subject as still married, while only eight of the twenty-five white respondents did.²

With respect to the second principle, the importance of specifying the context(s) in which the feature occurs, we can again look at the case of stressed BIN versus unstressed bin. The latter can occur with time adverbials, as in "She bin married for twelve years," but the former cannot. A sentence like *"She BIN married for twelve years" is ungrammatical in black English--unless, of course, there is a pause after "married," in which case the pause represents an elliptical unstressed bin in a full sentence which might read: "She BIN married! (She bin married) for twelve years."

As a second example of how principle 2 might be important in the study of black or white speech, it is instructive to consider "He be miner," which McDavid (1973b:269) introduces with the observation that this use of an invariant be form "still flourishes in the west counties of England." In a paper urging us to "go slow in ethnic attributions," the implication seems to be that the much heralded invariant be of American black English is not as unique as has been previously supposed. But the precise meaning of the McDavid example is not specified, and the prenominal environment in which the be in this example occurs is not one in which the

iterative or distributive be of black English usually occurs. Context, as well as meaning, will have to be carefully considered before this example can be accepted as a valid challenge to the uniqueness of invariant be in black English. (Contrast the more persuasive challenge posed in this volume by Bailey and Bassett's data on white Southern use of invariant be).

In relation to the third principle, concerning the frequencies with which the feature occurs, note that while both B. Bailey 1965 and Williamson 1970 pay attention to the following environments in which the inflected copula is absent in the speech of blacks and whites (respectively), neither gives us information about the frequency of this phenomenon in these environments. Labov 1969 first demonstrated that the copula was absent most often before gonna and Verb + -ing, less often before adjectives and locatives, and least often before noun phrases. The quantitative distribution of the copula in this study was in turn given a hypothetical explanation by Stewart 1970a and Bickerton 1973 in terms of differences in the order and ways in which predication in nominal, verbal, and other environments might have evolved in the course of the decreolization of black English, given comparable developments in Sea Island Creole (Gullah) and Guyanese Creole. Dennis and Scott 1975 have also suggested a diachronic explanation for the varying frequencies of copula absence in different environments, pointing to differences in the ways in which the copula is realized in equivalent environments in various West African languages. My interest here is not in assessing the plausibility of these hypotheses; it is in pointing out that they have been made possible by attention to frequencies in the first place and that, in the process, our actual and potential understanding of black speech has been considerably enriched.

I do not want to leave discussion of this principle without pointing to the fact that Wolfram 1974 has looked at the frequencies of are and is deletion in the speech of Mississippi whites and found the latter feature to be far less frequent than the former. This is a significant quantitative difference from the patterns of black English speakers, among whom is deletion is very high, as indicated in the research of Labov 1969 in New York City and Wolfram 1969 in Detroit.

The grammatical interrelations which principle 4 refers to are of two kinds. The first are the paradigmatic relations which a form has with alternatives which are available within the grammar. To the extent that one follows Labov's "principle of accountability" (1969) in adhering to principle 3--that is, reporting the number of occurrences of a feature out of the total number of cases in which it could have occurred--principle 4 will be satisfied, at least in part. For instance, in looking at copula absence, we also have to count cases of copula presence, as Labov 1969 and others have done for black English.

To take another example, not quantitative in approach, note

that in his analysis of the copula in Guyanese Creole, Bickerton 1973 considers the conventional English forms (*waz*, *iz*, etc.), as well as the creole locative and aspect markers ("He *de* home," "Me *a* waak"), as well as zero ("He \emptyset sick"). The point is that in an accountable approach we cannot simply look at isolated forms, but must consider them in relation to the larger semantic or syntactic functions they mark and to the alternatives which are available for the expression of equivalent meanings or functions. We should not simply look at plural *-Z*, for instance, but at plural formation.

In considering the first kind of interrelations, we hold meaning or function constant and look for alternative forms, but in considering the second kind, we hold form constant and look at its behavior with different meanings or functions. Often this involves the search for a more general phonological process affecting a particular grammatical form. For instance, in looking at *is* deletion in black English, Labov 1969 is led to a more general examination of vowel reduction to account for the disappearance of the remaining vowel once contraction has occurred. And in looking at *are* deletion among Mississippi whites, Wolfram considers *r* desulcalization (or deletion) as a general process, not only as it affects the *r* in *are*, but as it affects the *r*'s in noncopula forms like *bear* and *mother*. Looking at these kinds of interrelations may involve more than looking at the interaction of phonological and grammatical rules, however. For instance, Washabaugh 1975, attempting to replicate Bickerton's 1971 analysis of variation between Guyanese Creole *fu* and *tu* as infinitival complementizers, finds that replacement of the equivalent basilectal complementizer (*fi*) in Providence Island Creole correlates with replacement of a similar form that serves as both genitive and dative preposition. The following PIC sentences show the grammatically different but phonologically identical *fi* forms:

2. Complementizer: ai mek *fi* stan op, "I tried to stand up."

Genitive Preposition: ai put *fi* mi haan pan it, "I put my hand on it."

Dative Preposition: de de luk *fi* mi wid gon, "They are looking for me with a gun."

One could of course continue to discuss these principles with other examples from the literature; instead, we will examine plural formation in Sea Island Creole, beginning with the Sea Island data base.

Sea Island Data Base

Sea Island Creole (or Gullah), spoken on the South Carolina and Georgia Sea Islands,³ is the one variety of black American speech which everyone recognizes as creole or creole-derived (Davis 1969), and it is natural to expect significant differences between the Sea Island Creole speech of blacks and the southern speech of whites in the area. It is also natural to turn to African languages and other Atlantic creoles (Turner 1949) to look for analogues, although some scholars have also sought parallels in earlier varieties of British English (Johnson 1930). In either case, it is important to recognize that Gullah or Sea Island Creole is undergoing decreolization, a process in which the proportion of basilectal creole speakers is decreasing and the language is developing intermediate varieties closer to standard English.⁴ As I have suggested elsewhere (Rickford 1974), this should not lead us to wring our hands in despair, but instead to follow the decreolization process carefully for insights into the way in which existing varieties of mainland Vernacular Black English might have evolved.

The data in this paper are drawn primarily from a black woman from one of the South Carolina Sea Islands (not Hilton Head), whom I will refer to as Mrs. Queen. She was eighty-four years old when I recorded her in 1970, in the course of a sociolinguistic interview lasting more than an hour, designed to elicit conversational and casual speech (Labov 1972b). She was the oldest resident on the island at the time, and although her speech contained several of the classic basilectal creole features, its decreolized or mesolectal features were particularly revealing. It is not easy to place Mrs. Queen on existing multi-index scales of social stratification (Warner et al. 1960; Hollingshead and Redlich 1958), which seem to be better adapted to towns and cities than to the small, rustic island community where she lived. On these "objective" scales, she would undoubtedly rank at the bottom, since her main occupation had been subsistence farming, fishing, and shucking oysters in the local oyster factory, and since her education went no further than third grade:

3. Dat's it. I stop right dey . . . I had to go on de farm, go to work an' help to make a living.

But "objective" sociological classification might omit several relevant ethnographic details, like the fact that she served as one of a handful of midwives on the island for many years, delivering over one hundred babies in her time, while her husband served as undertaker (in addition to working as a farmer and fur trapper). In times of crisis, it was to the Queens' home that many an islander would turn for help, and this helped establish their status as a cut above the ordinary. Furthermore, like most of the blacks on the island, she owned the land she lived on and the house she lived in,

and--unlike the average lower-class urban dweller--by no means considered herself downtrodden. On the contrary, she thrived on the life of fishing and farming and went to the cities on the mainland only when she had to shop or visit relatives. She had been active in the church and burial society for many years and was popular among the residents of the island, including the handful of whites.⁵

Mrs. Queen's status as the oldest resident also made her something of the matriarch of the island, one of the key individuals to whom visitors (researchers, reporters, tourists, educational and other administrators from the mainland) would be directed. I have never heard of her being anything other than welcoming to these visitors, and she seemed to have developed a polite and amiable style of sharing her reminiscences with strangers.⁶

I mention these details to establish that, contrary to what classification of Mrs. Queen as "lower class" might suggest, her education and primary occupation were no lower than those of 99 percent of her generation on the island, and her community status was more elevated than average because of her professional expertise and other factors. These details will facilitate comparisons between Mrs. Queen and other Sea Islanders, black and white, in terms of socioeconomic status and other potentially significant factors. In this paper, I will concentrate on her data alone because I wish to demonstrate how application of the four principles (outlined above) affects our perception of what her speech (or decreolizing Sea Island Creole, more generally) is like. This paves the way for future linguistic and sociodemographic comparisons.

Plural Formation (Mrs. Queen)

On the basis of what has been written about Gullah or Sea Island Creole (Turner 1949, Cunningham 1970) and other creoles (Alleyne 1980, Dijkhoff 1982), we expect to find two basic types of plural in the speech of Mrs. Queen, and we do:

4. Noun # \emptyset (i.e., no overt marking), especially when the noun is preceded by a plural numeral or quantifier, as in "I got two brother whole, y'know."⁷
5. Three varieties of Noun, preceded or followed by dem (a form identical with the creole third person plural pronoun; cf. nan in Papiamentu):
 - a. Dem ## Noun, as in "It bin cheap in dem day."
 - b. Proper Noun ## dem, as in "Da's where Viola dem live."
 - c. Common Noun ## dem, as in "Yeah, buy it from de masa dem."

If we were to ignore the four principles (as is customary), we might proceed at once to comparisons with other language varieties and speculations about possible diachronic sources (as is customary).

The unmarked plural (type 4 above) is found to some extent in a number of English dialects. As noted by Wright (1905:263),

Nouns expressing time, space, weight, measure, and number when immediately preceded by a cardinal number gen. remain unchanged in the plural in the dialects of Sc.[otland] and Eng.[land].

More recently, in relation to the United States, McDavid (1973b: 268) notes that:

Even the uninflected plurals of nouns of measure (forty bushel, ten mile, five ton, and the like) are not solely identified with the South, for they occur widely in other regions.

That unmarked plurals were even more general in the English of earlier times is suggested also by the following words from an anthem written by King Henry VIII (1491-1547):

6. O Lorde, the maker of al thing, / We pray Thee nowe in this evening / Us to defende, through Thy mercy, / From all deceite of our en'my. / Let neither us deluded be, / Good Lorde, with dreame or phantasy, / Oure hearte wakyng in Thee Thou kepe . . .

On the other hand, we might note, as Turner 1949 did, that several West African languages have no formal distinction between singular and plural in some of their noun classes. For example, in Tshiluba the class 3 noun n{ila} can be either singular or plural ("path" or "paths"). So this type of plural could have entered the creole from either an English or a West African source.

With respect to the plurals with dem, I have been informed that type 5a, in which the pronoun precedes the noun, is found in Somerset, England (Elizabeth Traugott, personal communication). Even though Turner 1949 provides comparable examples from Ibo and Yoruba (e.g., Ibo nwo₃ke₂, "man"; n₂di₃ nwo₃ke₂, "men"--the prefixed form, n₂di₃, meaning "these" or "people"), the question of an English or African etymology would again probably be moot. However, with respect to types 5b and 5c, which to my knowledge have no English parallels but do have parallels in some West African languages (e.g., from Westermann 1930, quoted in Alleyne (1980:151): Ewe ame, "man"; ame-wo, "men," where wo is the third person plural pronoun), the case for a distinct African (via creole) origin is stronger.⁸

Note that we have moved from the differences between black and white dialects to their origins--a mixing of issues which Wolfram 1974, Feagin 1979, and Fasold 1981 note is prevalent in the literature, but which they urge us to avoid. Instead of continuing with the preceding lines of discussion, let us therefore re-examine Mrs. Queen's plurals in the light of our four principles.

Following the principle of careful attention to form and meaning, we are forced, on reexamination, to deny separate status to the 5a type cases and to merge them with those of type 4. The reason is that the dem in "dem day" (type 5a) does not indicate only plurality, as it does in "de masa dem" (type 5c), but also deixis.⁹ In all cases in which it occurs before the noun, dem is a plural distal demonstrative, equivalent to "those" (which doesn't seem to occur in Mrs. Queen's data), and in contrast with dese, "these" (as in "Oh dese chi'ren now, dey livin!"). We would therefore be no more justified in considering as a separate category of plural formation those cases in which the noun is preceded by dem than cases in which the noun is preceded by dese or any other modifier whose meaning includes, but is not limited to, plurality (e.g., three, some, many). That the prenominal dem belongs with these other modifiers, and not with the postnominal dem, is also suggested by the fact that like the former, but not the latter, it can be separated from the modified noun by one or more adjectival modifiers (as in "Some o' dem odda one" and "dem big old tree").

It is of course frequently asserted (e.g., by Bickerton 1981:24, Dijkhoff 1982:29) that, in creole systems, plural marking on the noun is rendered unnecessary when it is preceded by a plural numeral or any other modifier including the semantic feature of plurality. This is a hypothesis which we will pursue below, but its pursuit requires a grouping of prenominal dem with plural numerals and quantifiers and a merging of the unmarked nouns following dem with the category of unmarked nouns in general. As it turns out, some of the nouns following dem are marked with -Z (z ~ ɜz ~ s), as in "dem cars," "dem lil babies," and these will be merged with the Noun #Z category which has to be opened once we apply principle 3.¹⁰

The other category which is affected by close attention to meaning is type 5b plurals, which we have to set aside on the grounds that they do not mean "more than one" entity of the kind referred to in the noun, but the specific entity (usually a person) referred to in association with unspecified others. The distinctive character of these "associative" plurals is revealed more clearly in decreolized varieties in which they show up in the form Proper Noun and dem (e.g., "John and dem").

If we leave aside principle 2 for the moment and apply principles 3 and 4 simultaneously, reporting the frequencies of all means of expressing the plural for regular nouns in Mrs. Queen's speech which remain after principle 1 has been applied, we obtain

the results in table 1.¹¹

Table 1
Plurals of a Black Sea Islander (Mrs. Queen)

| Total Sample Size (n) | Noun (#Z)## dem "De boy(s) dem" | Noun #Ø "De boy" | Noun #Z "De boys" |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 128 | 1% | 76% | 23% |

The first striking thing about table 1 is the infrequency of the Noun (#Z) ## dem type, based on one example: "de masa dem."¹² Before applying our principles, we were attracted to this 5c type of plural in Mrs. Queen's speech because of its unusual character. Now, however, it appears to be a marginal part of Mrs. Queen's grammar. But there are two qualifications in this assumption. First, despite its infrequency, this type may represent the residue of a system in which white speakers participated very little, if at all. I have seen no reports of white Southerners using this type of plural (as against types 5a or 5b). Second, although this type has clear creole roots (Alleyne 1980, Dijkhoff 1982), table 2, showing the distribution of plurals in eight speakers in the Guyanese Creole continuum, shows that its frequency remains low even for the most basilectal or least decreolized speakers, like Irene and

Table 2 Plurals of Eight Speakers
in the Guyanese Creole Continuum

| Name | Sample Size (n) | Noun (#Z)## dem "De boy(s) dem" | Noun #Ø "De boy" | Noun #Z "De boys" |
|-----------|--------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Irene | 179 | 18% | 73% | 9% |
| Reefer | 205 | 13% | 68% | 19% |
| Derek | 80 | 9% | 82% | 9% |
| Nani | 148 | 9% | 74% | 17% |
| Kishore | 275 | 2% | 42% | 56% |
| Seymore | 299 | 2% | 6% | 92% |
| Bonnette | 163 | 1% | 3% | 96% |
| Katherine | 150 | 0% | 6% | 94% |

Reefer.¹³ The highest frequency for this type in the subsample from the overall sample of 24 speakers (see Rickford 1979) is 20 percent.¹⁴ Speakers like Nani, Kishore, and Bonnette chart the progressive diminution of this type which accompanies decreolization, its eventual demise being marked in the speech of Katherine.

To explain the low frequency of this type even among less decreolized speakers, we need to turn to principle 2, for plural *dem* does not co-occur with preceding plural numerals or quantifiers, with indefinites, and—at least in Sea Island Creole (Cunningham 1970), although not in Guyanese Creole—it is restricted to cases in which the noun is [+human]. This restricted set of potential environments accounts, to a large extent, for the low frequency of this type in tables 1 and 2.

With respect to the unmarked (Noun #Ø) plurals, it is striking that this type accounts for fully three-quarters of Mrs. Queen's plurals, making her comparable to the most basilectal Guyanese speakers in table 2. (Her overall pattern is most similar to that of Nani.) That her speech is considerably less decreolized than that of Northern speakers of the Black English Vernacular (BEV) is clear from the fact that the mean frequency of plural absence reported among BEV speakers in New York City does not exceed 13 percent (Labov et al. 1968:161-62),¹⁵ and in Detroit does not exceed 5.8 percent (Wolfram 1969:143).¹⁶ McDavid 1973b reports some cases of plural absence in southern white English, and Wolfram and Christian (1975:169ff) report similar cases for white Appalachian English, but in neither case are details about their frequency provided. Both sets of authors describe plural absence as primarily limited to nouns of weight and measure, however, indicating that the phenomenon is highly restricted in these dialects.

By contrast, only seven of Mrs. Queen's table 1 plurals are with nouns of weight and measure (all with the lexical item *acre*, four marked by *Z* and three without). Plural absence is, for her, a much more widespread and differently conditioned phenomenon (as we will see below).

Given the distribution of Noun +Ø and Noun +Z cases in Mrs. Queen's data, two questions inevitably arise: whether the variation between these cases is phonologically or syntactically conditioned, and whether it should be treated in terms of the variable insertion or deletion of plural *-Z*. To investigate these questions, I looked first at Mrs. Queen's strong nouns (those with plurals involving a vowel change, like *mouse/mice* and *man/men*), hoping that they would provide some indication of whether the inflected standard English plural is an underlying part of her grammar. There are twenty-seven occurrences of a plural strong noun in Mrs. Queen's data, all duly inflected, but since they all involve a single lexical item, *children*, the evidence is less than decisive. Turner (1949:223) in fact listed this item as one of two exceptions to his general observation that "practically all Gullah nouns have the same form in the plural as in the singular":

Among the few exceptions are 'čılən "children" and manz "men"; but the singular form of each of these is also used as a plural [p. 3].

It is true, however, that I have found no occurrences of the *child* and *man* plurals which Turner found over thirty years ago, and this, together with one hypercorrect reference to a "twenty-feet boat," might be taken as a weak, preliminary indication that Mrs. Queen's grammar might include a morphologically marked plural category. (Note that the syntactically marked case, "de masa dem," already establishes the existence of "plural" as an underlying grammatical category.)

Returning to the weak nouns represented in table 1 (i.e., those which require suffixation of *-Z*--phonemically /z/ or /s/ or /ɪz/--in standard English, as in *boys*, *weeks*, and *places*), I have coded each semantically plural noun (regardless of whether *-Z* was present or absent) according to the following potential conditioning factors. The first two are syntactically/semantically motivated and associated with creole languages; the latter two are phonologically motivated and associated with nonstandard dialects of English:

- 7a. Whether the Noun Phrase (NP) in which the noun occurs is existentially presupposed (typically associated with the occurrence of a definite article in creole languages, as in Guyanese Creole [GC] *di buk*, Papiamentu [P] *e buki*, "the book"), existentially asserted (typically associated with an indefinite article, as in GC *wan buk*, P *un buki*, "a book"), or existentially hypothesized (typically associated with zero, the creole "generic" and/or "nonspecific" article, as in GC *buk*, P *buki*, "a book/books"). These Noun Phrase categories, originally proposed by Bickerton 1975, 1981, have been argued by Dijkhoff 1982 to be intimately bound up with plural-marking in Papiamentu, the creole of Curaçao, Aruba, and Bonaire. Following Dijkhoff, I hypothesized that to the extent this "creole" system was carried over to *-Z* plural marking, *-Z* absence would be most likely with the existentially hypothesized NPs (which never take the pluralizing *nan* in P or *dem* in GC), less likely with the existentially asserted NPs (which are followed by the pluralizing *nan* in P only when "one cannot deduce from the context that a plural is meant"), and least likely with the existentially presupposed NPs (which are generally followed by *nan* in P).¹⁷
- 7b. Whether there is a plural quantifier (including numerals), a *dem* demonstrative, or neither of these plural modifiers preceding the noun. My hypothesis is that this syntactic factor group will show a strong favoring of *-Z* absence when either of the first two plural factors is present, since *-Z* marking in these cases is redundant.

7c. Whether the noun ends in a nonsibilant consonant (e.g., shed), a sibilant consonant (e.g., box), or a vowel (e.g., tree). My hypothesis is that to the extent this phonological factor group has any systematic effect, -Z absence will be favored after nouns that end in consonants, since consonant clusters (disfavored in many nonstandard dialects of English) are avoided in the process.

7d. Whether the noun is followed by a word beginning with a consonant or pause (e.g., tree fall or tree . . .) or by a word beginning with a vowel (e.g., tree off). My expectation with this phonological factor group is that if it has any systematic effect, -Z absence will be favored by a following consonant or pause and disfavored by a following vowel (cf. Labov 1972c:44-45).

To assess the independent effect on plural -Z absence of these factors, I used the multivariate analysis provided by the variable-rule computer program (VARBRUL) developed at the University of Montreal by Sankoff and his associates (see Cedergren and Sankoff 1974, Rousseau and Sankoff 1978). The program uses maximum likelihood methods to calculate an input probability (P_0), representing the tendency for the rule to apply regardless of individual factors, and a probability coefficient for each of the factors ($p_1, p_2 \dots p_n$), representing its independent contribution to the probability of rule application in any given environment (p). The variable rule model used in processing Mrs. Queen's data is the logistic one:¹⁸

$$8. \frac{p}{1-p} = \frac{P_0}{1-P_0} \times \frac{P_1}{1-P_1} \times \dots \times \frac{P_n}{1-P_n}$$

In this model, probabilities above .5 favor rule application; those below .5 disfavor rule application; and those just around this central figure have no effect either way. By comparing the probability coefficients calculated for individual factors, we can assess their relative effects. The program also selects the factor groups which are most significant by comparing the log-likelihood figures which result when each factor group is used by itself to predict the variability in the data, in combination with two other factor groups, in combination with three other factor groups, and so on--up to the maximum number of factor groups available. Application of this multiple regression procedure in our case results in selection of the two phonological factor groups as significant and rejection of the two syntactic/semantic factor groups as insignificant.¹⁹ The favored two-factor group analysis is shown in

table 3.

Table 3
Probability Coefficients of Individual Factors in Favored
Two-Factor Group Analysis of Mrs. Queen's Plurals (see end)

Preceding Phonological Segment Following Phonological Segment

| | | | |
|-----------------------|--------|--------------------------------|--------|
| Nonsibilant Consonant | : .654 | Consonant Consonant | : .609 |
| Sibilant Consonant | : .587 | Pause | : .604 |
| Vowel | : .271 | Vowel | : .297 |

Note: Input probability = .78, log. likelihood = -58.409,
significance = .032.

The effects of the following phonological segment, represented by the probability coefficients in table 3, are neatly illustrated in the following sample from Mrs. Queen, in which we find acre (phonetically [ekə], without final r) before a consonant or pause, but acres before a following vowel (note that the second was is phonetically [əz], without initial w):

9. See, da's de way it was. An den five acre (pause), ten acres was over here, on dis side, and dat ten acre divide up to two--five acres a piece!

They also agree with the findings of Labov et al. (1968:I:160-64) on plural -Z absence among black teenagers and adults (for instance, the T-Birds show 13% -Z absence before consonant or pause, 9% before vowels in casual speech, while the Cobras show 30% and 0% in comparable environments),²⁰ and with Labov et al.'s findings on the deletion of final t and d in consonant clusters, which is also disfavored by a following vowel. It should be noted that Wolfram (1969:61) suggests that the major effect of the following segment on simplification of consonant clusters in BEV in Detroit is consonantal versus nonconsonantal; that is, that a following pause patterns with a vowel rather than with a consonant. But Fasold (1972:67), providing separate statistics on each of the three environments (something neither Labov et al. nor Wolfram does), finds that his Washington, D.C., BEV data support Labov et al. rather than Wolfram: a following pause patterns with a following consonant (favoring 73% and 76.2% simplification of bimorphic consonant clusters respectively), while a following vowel is alone in disfavoring cluster simplification (28.7%).

Our results for the following factor group are in line, therefore, with previous studies. But beyond statistics there is a need for linguistic explanation (Bickerton 1971, Washabaugh 1975:109,

Fasold 1975a:37), and no one, to my knowledge, has attempted to explain why a following pause should pattern with a following consonant in favoring consonant cluster simplification and/or plural -Z absence. If the distinction is between consonantal/nonconsonantal environments, this can be explained as part of a general tendency to avoid consonant clusters, but this clearly will not work for a vocalic/nonvocalic distinction.

One possible reason for a following vowel favoring the presence of a preceding consonantal segment is the fact that the vowel may serve as a cliticizing environment for the consonant, the consonant becoming the onset of the following syllable rather than the coda of the preceding one. In the case of a preceding consonant cluster, the result would be to split the cluster between two syllables, which is productively/perceptually simpler than if the cluster remains in one (e.g., *\$pas\$us\$* rather than *\$past\$us\$* for "past us" or "passed us"). In the case of a consonant preceded by a vowel, this would have the effect of converting a (C)VC syllable into a (C)V syllable, or of preventing the creation of a (C)VC one (e.g., *\$de\$z\$ə\$* rather than *\$dez\$ə\$* for "days of . . ."). If C)V syllables are accepted as "simpler" than (C)VC ones (and they certainly are commoner in baby talk and in pidgins and creoles), this might also be a productive/perceptual ease explanation. Since neither a following consonant nor pause can serve as a cliticizing environment for a word-final consonant, neither would offer the "simplification" which cliticization provides, and both would serve as disfavoring environments.

There are some wrinkles to be ironed out with this hypothesis (for instance, do following vowels have this cliticizing effect on the final consonant of a preceding word everywhere, or only in fast speech, or primarily when the final consonant represents a bound morpheme?).²¹ Also, we would probably want to do some instrumental measurement, and perhaps some perception testing, to verify the impressionistic cliticizing effect, but this hypothesis at least takes us one step beyond the solid, replicable set of observations that we already have.

With respect to the effect of a preceding nonsibilant consonant, it is no surprise that this would favor -Z absence most strongly, because a consonant cluster would be prevented in the process (e.g., *cats*, *dogs*). The slightly favoring effect of a preceding sibilant is at first problematic, however. Since the shape of -Z after sibilants is *-əz*, no consonant cluster would be created by its presence. If, however, the vowel of *-əz* is generated by vowel insertion and the derivation of *all* plural suffixes begins with the suffixation of a sibilant (*s* in the example provided by Elgin 1981: 375),²² then a consonant cluster would be created at this first stage in the case of word-final sibilant and nonsibilant consonants alike, and their almost identical favoring effect on -Z absence would be explained.

Up to this point we have shown that the primary constraints on -Z absence in Mrs. Queen's speech are phonological rather than syntactic/semantic, and we have attempted to provide linguistic explanations for the statistical effects observed. What we have not done, however, is make a decision to treat -Z absence as the result of a deletion rule operating on an underlying suffix, or as an insertion rule creating a plural suffix. It is to this issue that we now turn.²³

The tendency in the literature on BEV is to treat the discovery of regular phonological constraints on the presence or absence of a grammatical variable as evidence in favor of the variable's being present in underlying structure and subject to a deletion rule in the course of derivation (cf. the standard variation treatments of the BEV copula and final *t*, *d* deletion). The rationale for this is never spelled out, but since the phonological component in a generative grammar is interpretive, operating on the output of the syntactic component, it can be argued that while phonological processes can take grammatical information into account, the reverse is either theoretically more difficult or impossible. By this argument, we would have to presume an underlying grammatical -Z suffix for Mrs. Queen, deleted by a phonologically conditioned rule which applies in the majority of cases, once the phonological component is reached.

Of course, it is precisely this last fact--the preponderance of -Z absent forms in Mrs. Queen's speech--which makes us uncomfortable about suggesting that the suffix is underlying.²⁴ There is a tendency in the variationist literature to regard the statistically more frequent form as underlying. For instance, Wolfram's first reason for suggesting that third-present -Z might not be underlying in BEV is the fact that it was "much more frequently absent than present" (1969:137) in the speech of his Detroit informants. The same argument had been given by Labov et al. (1968:l:164) for their New York City data. The explicit rationale for this approach is again not usually given, but it is presumably based on "economy" arguments: it is "cheaper" to account for the occasional occurrences of a feature by the application of a grammatical rule inserting it than to account for the nonoccurrences by the prior application of grammatical rule insertion, followed by the application of a phonological rule which has the effect of wiping out the newly inserted feature more often than not.

The only alternative to a phonological -Z deletion rule, however, is a grammatical -Z insertion rule with phonological constraints, and it is difficult to see how this is possible in any framework in which the phonological component is interpretive and subsequent to the grammatical one. For instance, one way of handling English plurals in a generative grammar is by means of a segment transformation which introduces a [-singular] affix segment following a [-singular] noun (see Jacobs and Rosenbaum 1968:89 for an early treatment). The rules in the subsequent

Table 4
Final Sibilant Absence in Three Other Categories (Mrs. Queen)

| | Before Vowel No. % | Before Consonant No. % | Before Pause No. % | Total No. % |
|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| a. Possessive | 3 67 | 21 90 | No Data | 24 88 |
| b. Adverbials | 2 50 | 8 75 | 3 67 | 13 69 |
| c. Monomorphemic Forms | 3 0 | 8 12 | 12 0 | 23 4 |

Note: No. = Sample Size

Even though categories a and b show a conditioning effect of vocalic versus nonvocalic following segments similar to that observed with plural *-Z*, they do not appear to be governed by a similar deletion rule operating on a grammatically underlying segment. In the possessives, the three instances of *-Z* presence all involve proper names; one the name of an island organization ("Oyster's Union Society") and two the name of a point on the island ("Benjie's Point"). These could well have been learned as unanalyzed wholes, and once removed from the data pool, all we are left with is twenty noun possessives which show no possessive suffix whatsoever and no evidence of phonological conditioning, but which involve the process of syntactic juxtaposition which is common in creole systems. The adverbials, in turn, appear to show lexical rather than phonological conditioning, with *oversea* and *sometime* always without a final sibilant (1 and 5 cases respectively), and *afterwards* and *a long ways* always occurring with a final sibilant (1 case each). The only item with word-final variation is *someway(s)* (2 tokens with the final sibilant and 3 without).²⁹

In the third category in table 4, the monomorphemic forms ending in a sibilant, the evidence is clear: the sibilant is present in the underlying form, and is not subject to the phonologically constrained deletion processes which plural *-Z* undergoes. This is true even when the final sibilant is part of a consonant cluster (as in *box*, *six*, *grits*, *else*). There are fifteen such cases in the data, and in only one of them—an occurrence of the proper name Haynes before a consonant ("Hayne die")—is the final sibilant absent. This clearly shows that whatever disfavoring effect preceding or following vowels have on processes that remove a word-final sibilant, it applies only when the sibilant represents plural *-Z* or a gramma-

tical inflection (cf. footnotes 21 and 29).³⁰

Having applied all four of our guiding principles, I hope I have demonstrated how different (and richer, more complex) our view of pluralization in Mrs. Queen's speech is as a result. The associative plurals and the pronominal demonstratives with *dem* have been set aside on semantic grounds, and it has been demonstrated that although one example still remains of the postnominal creole construction in which the third person plural pronoun serves as a pluralizer, the function *dem* as a third person pronoun has itself been weakened with its increasing replacement in subject position by *dey*. The plural *-Z* suffix has been shown to be absent, rather than present, in the majority of cases in Mrs. Queen's speech—a vast quantitative difference from the BEV speakers in the large Northern cities. But though syntactic as well as phonological constraints are carefully attended to, Mrs. Queen's plural absence appears to be qualitatively similar to that of Northern BEV speakers, insofar as it is best described as a deletion rule with phonological constraints. The fact that she is far less advanced on a decreolization trajectory, however, is clear from the fact that she appears to have no corresponding possessive *-Z* in her grammar, and that the phonological processes which affect the plural *-Z* do not appear to apply to all final sibilants, but are grammatically constrained. Elsewhere (Rickford 1980), I have shown that phonological and grammatical processes work closely together to facilitate decreolization. The examples in this paper constitute additional examples, although of a different sort.

With more detailed understanding of Mrs. Queen's system of plural formation and its interrelationships with other elements in her grammar, the stage is properly set for the kinds of comparisons which are critical for an understanding of black/white speech relations in the South, in the United States, and in the New World. We need comparisons of Mrs. Queen with other decreolizing black Sea Islanders, with less decreolized speakers of West African and Caribbean Creoles, and with more decreolized Northern speakers of BEV. We also need comparisons of her with whites of equivalent and different socioeconomic and settlement histories, on the Sea Islands, in the South, in other parts of the United States and the English-speaking world. These will allow us to answer not only the narrower questions about similarities and differences, but also the larger questions about linguistic constraints on decreolization and language change and about the sociolinguistic consequences of contact (or lack thereof) between socially/ethnically/culturally different populations. These are the ultimate edifices we want to build. I hope to have demonstrated in this paper that key elements in their construction are the four principles which we need to bring to bear on our analyses.

NOTES

¹Since October 1981, two more of the elderly Sea Islanders have died, including one with whom I stayed during my last visit. As traditional exemplars pass on, traditional aspects of Sea Island language and culture are increasingly threatened.

²In a recent informal replication of this experiment with a class of Stanford students, however, a higher proportion of whites appeared to understand the meaning of stressed BIN. This might indicate diffusion of the form over the past ten years (parallel to the diffusion of black lexical items like hip and black kinesics like the multistage handshake), or an East Coast/West Coast regional difference which hadn't been detected before (only a few of my earlier informants were from the West Coast). I hope to do further investigation of these questions, including the relation of counter-negative stressed BEEN in the colloquial standard ("He's BEEN doing it" = "He HAS been doing it") to the remote BIN of the Black English Vernacular. The semantics of the two forms overlap, and in both cases the stress seems relatable to the loss of phonetic material by contraction or deletion—a process of compensatory strengthening parallel to the more familiar examples of compensatory lengthening (e.g., of a vowel following the loss of postvocalic r) in phonology.

³Hancock 1980c describes a form of Gullah extant in Texas, spoken by the descendants of Afro-Seminole scouts who migrated from Florida in the early nineteenth century.

⁴See Rickford 1983 for alternative models of decreolization as a general process.

⁵This fact, however, led her to be regarded as "white oriented" by some of the local black residents, a categorization which was mitigated only by the fact that she was old.

⁶It is quite likely that these interactions in themselves helped to increase her competence in mesolectal varieties of English. In the case of the recording I made with her, I attribute whatever success I had in getting beyond Mrs. Queen's formal transactional style (it is always difficult to gauge such success in absolute terms) to the fact that I differed from the average visitor or magazine writer who interviewed her, insofar as I had been living on the island for a while and had come to know her somewhat before the interview. Also, I came from the same ethnic background, interviewed her using a similar linguistic system (Guyanese Creole noninversion of questions and other creole features were as evident in my stretches of discourse as in hers), and got into topics which led to more involved and spontaneous speech. (For instance, her long narrative about the death of her husband led me, undesignedly, into an account of the death of my father, and was followed a little later by her narrative of the tornado which struck the island.) In these stretches of the interview, Mrs. Queen's vernacular came to the fore.

⁷The symbol # is used for an inflectional morpheme boundary. The symbol ## is used for a word boundary.

⁸That is, disregarding alternative explanations—like the possible influence of a universal bioprogram in the formation of creoles (Bickerton 1981).

⁹Alleyne (1980:100-01) suggests that dem is a plural marker in the English creoles, whether it occurs before or after the noun, and that it is only in Sierra Leone Krio and Guyanese Creole that both positions occur. The latter claim is not quite correct (Gullah is listed as having only prenominal dem, but both types are attested in this paper), and while it may be true that dem is a plural form of the definite article in the Surinam creoles (Sranan, Saramaccan), it seems clearly to have demonstrative force in GC and Gullah. Alleyne himself describes it as an "attenuated demonstrative" in Krio.

¹⁰This is a classic case of "elimination of redundancy," said to be characteristic of pidgins and creoles; but note that it is similar to what is reported for English and Scottish dialects by Wright 1905, on page 45.

¹¹Nouns referring to frequently hunted animals (e.g., mink, otter, coon) were not included in the count, because they appear to take no plural inflection in this area (like deer), as in other English dialects.

¹²There is also one example of de children dem, which is excluded from the count because this table is restricted to data on the regular or weak nouns. See the discussion of children as an exceptional form (below).

¹³It should be pointed out that Irene, Reefer, and the other speakers listed in table 2 and are Indo-Guyanese: descendants of indentured laborers from India who (from the mid-nineteenth century) have replaced African slaves as the main labor force on Guyanese sugar plantations, and who seem to have inherited the creole speech of the latter and preserved it quite faithfully.

¹⁴Note, however, that the statistics for the Guyanese speakers are based on all semantically plural noun tokens, including weak and strong nouns.

¹⁵This is the mean for the Thunderbirds and Oscar Brothers (in New York City) over all styles and environments, which I was able to calculate from the figures for the latter given by Labov et al. (1968:I:161-62). The figures for the Aces and the Jets are even lower, 5% and 6%—comparable to the 6% figure for the white Inwood group. Equivalent figures for working-class black adults range from 1% for a Northern lower-working-class group to 13% for a Southern lower-working-class group investigated by the authors.

¹⁶This is the figure reported for a lower-working-class black group. The means in Wolfram (1969:143) for other black groups are: UWC, 4.4%; LMC, 1.2%; UMC, 0.5%.

¹⁷Compare also Alleyne (1980:100): "In all the [Caribbean

English] dialects pluralization operates on definite nouns, but usually not on indefinite nouns."

¹⁸I wish to thank Shana Poplack for making a version of this program available and for discussing its novel features.

¹⁹Even though the first two factor groups were not found to have a significant effect on the observed variation, one run of the program gave probability coefficients for all four factor groups, and these are reprinted here because of their potential interest:

Input Probability = 0.743, log. likelihood = 57.363
 Existentially Presupposed NP = .685, Existentially Asserted NP = .200
 Existentially Hypothesized NP = .519
 Preceding Plural Quant. = .553, Preceding dem = .426, No Plural Modifier Preceding = .521
 Preceding Nonsibilant Consonant = .652, Preceding Sibilant Consonant = .564
 Preceding Vowel = .291
 Following Consonant = .594, Following Pause = .633,
 Following Vowel = .284

Note that neither of the hypotheses for the first two factor groups was supported.

²⁰Note, though, that Labov et al. did not give separate percentages for C versus ## and that for one group of adults (lower-class South), the reverse effect is obtained, with a following vowel favoring -Z absence (C = 10% vs. V = 14% in Style A, C = 12% vs. V = 19% in Style B).

²¹Labov et al. do not suggest the cliticizing hypothesis, but note (1968:I:132), with respect to the simplification rule for sC clusters (e.g., test), that "word boundary has little influence but inflectional boundaries do: that is, we obtain testing quite often, but the effect of a following vowel across word boundary is not great enough to give us more than a small percentage of test about what? rather than tes' about what?"

²²Elgin's sample derivation for beaches, beginning with s rather than z as the basic form of the plural, is as follows (1981: 375):

| | |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| #biych - [+PLURAL]# | Deep Structure |
| #biych + s# | Add the plural ending |
| #biych + e + s# | Apply the vowel insertion rule |
| #biych + e + z# | Apply the voicing rule |
| beaches | Surface Structure |

See also Labov et al. (1968:I:132-33) for a similar derivation beginning with -z.

²³One other alternative is to treat Mrs. Queen as a perfect bilingual or bidialectal speaker, manipulating two separate linguistic systems (English when instances of plural -Z are observed and Gullah/SIC when instances of -Z absence are observed). It is probably true that her synchronic variation represents a tran-

sition point in Mrs. Queen's acquisition of English and her movement away from a -Z-less creole system. But the strict co-occurrence restrictions which help to demarcate separate "codes" (Labov 1971, Gumperz 1967) are often missing--note the oscillation between plural absence and presence with the same lexical item and within the same sentence in example 9. Mrs. Queen is better analyzed, for this reason, as exemplifying one inherently variable linguistic system, even though this might have come about from the merger of originally distinct rule-sets. Note that Fasold (1972: 133-47) considers the interference or cosystems analysis for BEV third-present -s in some detail, and rejects it in favor of an inherent variability "variable rule" analysis (for speakers who vary almost equally between -s and \emptyset). Note too that some kind of variable deletion or insertion rule for plural -Z is also needed in other varieties of English in which no question of "mixture" with a distinct system is possible, neither as a descriptive device nor as a diachronic explanation.

²⁴Labov et al. (1968:I:164ff) use two other kinds of evidence to argue that third-present -Z is not underlying in BEV: the prevalence of hypercorrections and the absence of style shifting. Mrs. Queen shows us two hypercorrections--twenty feet boat and the thirteenth days of September--but these seem to involve knowledge of subtle restrictions on the placement of the plural suffix rather than a lack of the basic rule to insert the plural suffix in a [+plural] environment. And with respect to style shifting, note that in a typical expository stretch of the interview, where Mrs. Queen explains how she became a midwife and what the job entails, -Z absence rises to 94% (15/16). Ideally, we would want to do a multivariate analysis of style in conjunction with the other factors so far found to be significant, but preliminary indications are that it is significant.

²⁵This is what Bickerton (1975:109-10) suggests for at least some speakers' acquisition of past -ed in Guyana: "a rule which permits -ed everywhere except before a following (perhaps homorganic only stop)." Although Bickerton subsequently finds other (grammatical) factors to be more significant, note that the proposed rule would have been theoretically difficult for the same reasons discussed in this paper (i.e., the interpretive status of the phonological component).

²⁶Preliminary because it can be more formally stated in terms of features and because the possibility of collapsing this rule with other consonant-removing processes remains to be investigated.

²⁷One final potential constraint on the rule which we have not mentioned is lexical conditioning. The 127 \emptyset and -Z tokens in Mrs. Queen's data come from 51 different nouns. Many of these consist of only one token each, and only seven have at least five tokens each (which we might consider a baseline for reliability). Of these seven, four displayed categorical -Z absence (slave, boat, oyster without final r, and one) and could conceivably be lexical

exceptions to the segment transformation introducing the plural suffix. The other three nouns (thing, cent, and acre without the final r) show variable -Z absence. Interestingly enough, a white Sea Islander, comparable in social status to Mrs. Queen, appears to show no phonological conditioning, and more plausible lexical conditioning of -Z absence (which is far lower in his case than in Mrs. Queen's). His data were discussed in a follow-up paper to this one, presented at the eleventh NWAWE colloquium, held in Washington, D.C., October 21-23, 1982.

²⁸Compare the following figures for dem vs. dey as third plural subject pronouns in the Guyanese speech of Reefer: dem (115), dey (34).

²⁹There are ten apparently clear cases of third-present, however, all involving generics/habituals. Of these, only one case has a final -Z, and it is, interestingly, one of the two tokens before a vowel. The remaining preconsonantal and final cases all lack -Z, providing additional evidence for the favoring effect of a following vowel on inflected -Z.

³⁰Mrs. Queen's possessive pronouns, however, show more evidence of morphological case marking, the only exceptions being you and dey, which can be treated as cases of r-deletion: my (17) / me (0), your (0) / you (2), his (3) / he (4), her (2) / she or he (0), our (1) / we (1), der (0) / dey (3).