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SHORT NOTE

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This note concerns the significance and use of documentary pidgin-creole texts. As Alleyne (1980:5) has observed, issues about the genesis and early development of pidgins and creoles occupy a central place in pidgin-creole studies. Part of the reason these issues attract such interest and argument is that they are not just about what happened at particular times in particular places, but have more general implications for our models of pidginization, creolization, and decreolization, and their relation to other kinds of language change. Although they can be addressed to a certain extent by comparative methods or internal reconstruction based on current usage, much of our discussion must remain at the level of clever inference or speculation until we have clearer evidence on the language used by those involved in the relevant contact situations in earlier times. Some of the best available evidence of this type--sometimes the only available evidence--is the references to, and citations of contemporary speech in journals, travel books, and other documents produced in earlier times.

Hancock (1977) discusses some of the uses and limitations of such documentary evidence, insofar as pidgins and creoles are concerned, and identifies some of the major document-based studies in our field up to that time. Since then, interest in the study of documentary records has increased, but most of us come inadequately prepared for the task. Academic programs in linguistics nowadays do not include training in philology or textual criticism, and much of the latter is, in any case, irrelevant to the problems which we face in attempting to interpret pidgin and creole citations in contemporary records. In this brief note what I wish to do is share with colleagues some of the questions and considerations which have occurred to me as I have read document-based research of my own on early Guyanese speech (see Rickford, in press, chapter 3):

1. *The Author*

We need to find out everything we can about the authors of the documents under study, using *The Dictionary of National Biography* and similar sources. Relevant questions include: where the authors were from; how old they were when they arrived in the pidgin/creole speaking territory (for instance, Henry Bolingbroke--author of the much cited 1806 *Voyage to the Demerary*--was only thirteen when he set sail from England in 1795); how long they stayed in the territory; and what opportunities they had for observing the speech of slaves or workers in everyday contexts. One factor which turns many researchers off to documentary records--the fact that their authors often reveal patronizing or racist attitudes towards slaves or other laboring populations--may well be relevant to assessments of reliability; but as Stewart's (1968) remarks on Ambrose E. Gonzales demonstrate, we need to be wary about pre-judging the accuracy of the linguistic record on the basis of the author's sociopolitical attitudes.

2. *The Document*

We need to find out as much as we can about the document under study. If it is a travel book, was it based on letters sent to relatives and friends back home (do we know their identity), or on a journal maintained in the territory (does an original exist)? Was it copy-edited by the publisher or another party (Bolingbroke's 1807 book was edited by a W. Taylor, for instance), and is there reason to believe that this person modified the citations of local speech (to make them more understandable to a European audience, for instance, or to correspond to conventional stereotypes of the day)? If there are successive editions of the document, do they agree? For instance, the 1941 Guiana reprint of those sections of Pinckard 1806 dealing with the Guiana colonies omits two sections of the third volume of the original work--on pp. 159-67 and 346-7--which contain valuable citations of black speech; it also differs in the wording attributed to the slaves in a few instances, reading "'fraid for go" on p. 261, for example, where Pinckard 1806, vol. III, p. 253 has "fraid to go." In what larger historical context and textual tradition does the document arise? I owe this last question to an anonymous reviewer of a paper of mine based on the early nineteenth century Guianese documents. It led me to recognize that it was probably no accident that there were no less than three independent British "travel books"--Pinckard's, Bolingbroke's, and St. Clair's--on the Guiana colonies during the twelve years between 1796 and 1808. Not only was this the period in which the British were effectively wrestling these colonies from the Dutch, but it was a period in which British interest in overseas exploration and colonial consolidation--proceeding simultaneously in the Atlantic and Pacific--was generally high, providing a market for books of this type. Mungo Park's *Travels in the Interior District of Africa*, published in 1797, had been a popular success; Bolingbroke had a copy with him in Demerara, and Pinckard referred to other expatriates who were keeping journals or trying to write local travel books or histories, showing that the genre was very salient at the time. One of the values identifying a textual tradition of this type and identifying its contemporary exponents is that fruitful cross-document comparison becomes possible; for instance, Pinckard (1806) and St. Clair (1834)--but not Bolingbroke (1807)--both provide evidence of an early acculturation variety of slave speech which lacked preverbal tense-aspect markers like *bin* and *go*.

3. *Citations within the Document: Sociolinguistic Accountability*

The value of Labov's accountability principle--that occurrences of a feature should be reported against the total set of contexts in which it might have occurred--has been demonstrated repeatedly in (socio-)linguistic work, but the principle is not always followed in pidgin-creole studies, particularly in documentary work, where the norm is to cite individual features in isolation. Labov (1982:34-8) cites several recent sociolinguistic studies of historical texts in which a quantitative application of the accountability principle has yielded fruitful results; within pidgin-creole studies, Sankoff (1980) is one of the few working within this tradition. More of us need to follow their lead, to report all the citations within the documents under study and not just those which fit our conclusions, and to situate each and every citation with reference to sociolinguistic circumstances like those which Hymes (1972) has set out for our convenience: who the participants are, what are the setting, key, end in view, and so on. For instance, although the Miss Fanny cited in St. Clair (1834, 1:115) is speaking to three of her friends, in an agitated context in which we might have expected her vernacular to emerge, her speech contains a higher proportion of *s*-marked plurals than we might have expected in the vernacular creole. St. Clair's detailed description of Miss Fanny indicates, however, that she was a free woman of considerable means; her speech reflects this status and should not be taken as characteristic of slave speech of

the period. In addition to quantitative and sociolinguistic accountability, we also need to account for individual citations in relation to the author of the document; how long the author had been in the territory when the speech was recorded (some of Pinckard's later citations seem richer than his early ones); whether it was written down verbatim at the time or recollected aferwards; and if afterwards, how long after the speech act itself. Other specific aspects of accountability will suggest themselves to readers, but attention to accountability in general is one of the greatest needs in documentary pidgin-creole studies.

4. *Feedback from Studies of Current Usage*

Studies of current usage can be used to shed light on the interpretation of documentary texts in a number of respects. If we repeatedly find that advanced decreolizing speakers rarely use possessive *-s* but that eighteenth and nineteenth century observers repeatedly include such features in otherwise basilectal speech, we must either conclude that the co-occurrence or covariation principles in the speech of these early periods were either vastly different from those in the modern period, or, more likely, that observers were mishearing or misrepresenting the speech they reported. Another respect in which modern studies are useful is in seeing what aspects of spoken dialect tend to be represented in popular orthographies. Caribbean newspapers, for instance, typically represent the initial stop pronunciation in *dem* 'them' but less often represent the palatalization of the initial *k* in *kyaar* 'car'. In the light of this, the rarity with which palatalized velars are represented in earlier records should not be taken as representative of the facts of spoken usage at the time.

There is more to be discovered and said about how to derive maximum benefit from the documentary records to which scholars are turning in increasing numbers to address the many controversies in our field. And there is more to be discovered about what documents exist, where they can be found, and how authentic and valuable they appear to be. Hopefully the pages of the new *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages* will become a valuable forum--along with more informal sources like *The Carrier Pidgin* and *Gazet Sifon* newsletters--for the exchange of useful information of this type.

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