d. Duration is marked by the preverbal continuative morpheme *de* or by Ø:

(8) *B. ina fi im bonk de slip*
'B. was in his bunk sleeping' /B. in his bunk Cont-sleep/

(9) *Dat da we dei me de du riper pan, we dei neva du gud*
'That that(is) what they-Past-Cont-do repair on, which they never do good/

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Sociolinguistic variation in Cane Walk: a quantitative case study

JOHN R. RICKFORD

Introduction

Cane Walk is a pseudonym for a Guyanese village within half an hour's drive of Georgetown, the capital. In the mid 1970s, when the data for this study were collected, approximately 3,650 people lived there. About 97 per cent of these were East Indian, descendants of indentured labourers brought from India between 1838 and 1917 to replace and supplement Africans (emancipated in 1838) as the sugar industry's labour force. The Cane Walk community was created by the nearby LBI (La Bonne Intention)/Ogle Sugar estate in the 1950s to provide alternative housing for its workers, after the barrack-like 'logies' in which they had housed them, on the estate itself, were condemned. The community's stratification into two classes, which we will refer to as 'Estate Class' (EC) and 'Non-Estate Class' (NEC), reflects in part a sugar industry distinction between 'labourers' and 'junior class' employees (see Jayawardena 1963: 28–52). Most EC members work as cane-cutters, weeders and in other labouring capacities in the canefields behind the village. Some NEC members are junior supervisors on the estate, but most work as shopowners, contractors, clerks and in similar 'lower middle class' jobs off the estate, some in Georgetown.

Data

In this paper, I will summarise some of the key findings about sociolinguistic variation in this community, drawing on an earlier study of pronominal usage in a judgement sample of 24 Cane Walkers (Rickford 1979). We have about 70 hours of recorded speech from these individuals, most of it in 'spontaneous' interviews, but some in controlled interviews in which intuitions were elicited (Rickford 1987). Our linguistic variable will be

Table 40.1. *Characteristics of the Cane Walk sample*

1. Derek EC Male <18 (575)	13. Mark NEC Male <18 (305)
2. James EC Male <18 (445)	14. Magda NEC Female <18 (458)
3. Florine EC Female <18 (236)	15. Katherine NEC Female <18 (488)
4. Reefer EC Male 18–55 (344)	16. Kishore NEC Male 18–55 (645)
5. Sultan EC Male 18–55 (446)	17. Sheik NEC Male 18–55 (445)
6. Raj EC Male 18–55 (292)	18. Seymour NEC Male 18–55 (650)
7. Irene EC Female 18–55 (812)	19. Radika NEC Female 18–55 (208)
8. Rose EC Female 18–55 (433)	20. Claire NEC Female 18–55 (273)
9. Sari EC Female 18–55 (269)	21. Bonnette NEC Female 18–55 (805)
10. Ajah EC Male >55 (405)	22. Ustad NEC Male>55 (885)
11. Darling EC Female >55 (478)	23. Oxford NEC Male >55 (562)
12. Nani EC Female >55 (498)	24. Granny NEC Female >55 (466)

morphological variation between basilectal (deep Creole) and non-basilectal variants of singular personal pronouns, which alternatively encode or neutralise various case and gender distinctions (Bickerton 1973: 657–60; Rickford 1979: 336–41). Nine pronoun subcategories have such variants, three with mesolectal (intermediate) variants as well as acrolectal or standard English ones:[1]

	BAS	ACR		BAS	ACR		BAS	MES	ACR
1 Subject	mi	ai	3 Feminine Subject	hi	ʃi	3 Masculine Object	am	hi	hɪm
1 Possessive	mi	mai	3 Neuter Subject	i	ɪt	3 Feminine Object	am	ʃi	hʌr
3 Masculine Possessive	hi	ɪz	3 Neuter Object	am	ɪt	3 Feminine Possessive	hi	ʃi	hʌr

Table 40.1 provides, for each of the 24 individuals in the sample, information about their social class, sex and age-group, and the number of pronoun tokens recorded from them in spontaneous speech (i.e., excluding elicited forms) across all nine subcategories.

Sociolinguistic variation

Social class

Figure 40.1, which shows the relative frequency of basilectal (Creole) forms across all nine subcategories by individual and social class, provides a dramatic demonstration of the saliency of class membership as a sociolinguistic constraint in this community. Except for Florine and Granny, EC and NEC members occupy different areas of the scale

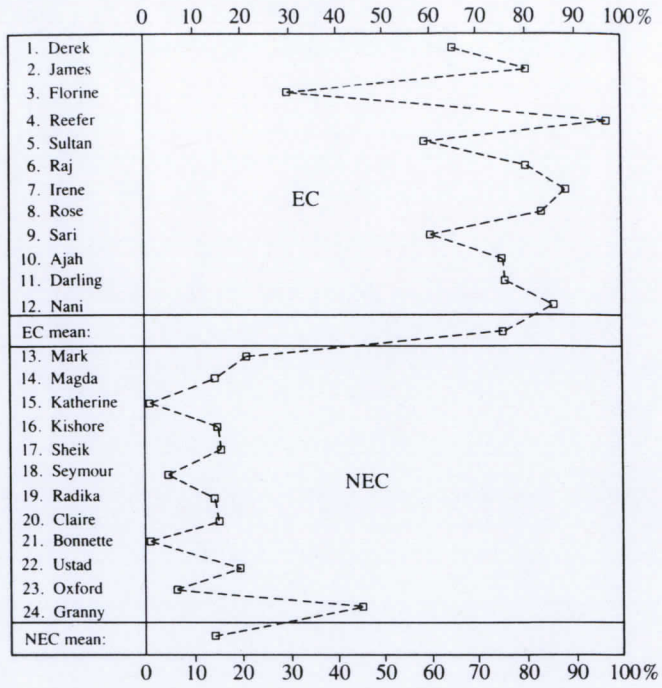

Figure 40.1 Basilectal singular pronoun usage by individual and class.

altogether, the former overwhelmingly favouring basilectal pronoun forms (using them, on average, 75 per cent of the time), the latter overwhelmingly disfavouring such variants (using them only 13 per cent of the time). Other variables – plural marking, negation, pronominal vowel laxing – provide similar evidence that the EC speakers tend to stick closer to the basilectal or Creole end of the continuum than the NEC speakers do.

Why should this be so? When the indentured predecessors of the current Cane Walk population came into Guyana, what they learned was not standard English, but the basilectal Creole of the African labourers among whom they lived and worked. EC members, like their forefathers, continued to work as estate labourers, in the company of other fieldworkers, and consequently had little opportunity or motivation to modify their creole speech in the direction of the standard. NEC members, however, found jobs and social contacts off the estate, particularly in Georgetown, went further in school, and had increased opportunity and motivation to acquire the mesolectal and acrolectal varieties of English spoken by teachers and other high-status individuals.

Note that both opportunity and motivation are involved. It would be wrong to assume, as the functionalist models predominant in the sociolinguistic literature (see Cheshire, this volume) might encourage us to do, that the EC members share the same values about language as the NEC members do, and would use more non-basilectal forms if they could. Although formal elicitation reveals that some EC individuals really do not have productive control over some acrolectal variants, and that some NEC individuals equally lack control of some basilectal variants (see Rickford 1987), the recorded/everyday performance of individual Cane Walkers in general represents a selective deployment of their competence in line with their conceptions of the social order and the role of language variants within it. NEC members, who are already upwardly mobile, tend to have the functionalist orientation that standard English helps you to get ahead, while Creole, in Oxford's words, 'don't take you nowhere.' EC members, for whom movement off the sugar estate or up its occupational hierarchy is extremely difficult, tend to be anti-establishment and Marxist in their orientation to language and the social order, using Creole to assert that it is the social order itself which must change, and that the use of standard English would not take them ahead anyway. This is particularly true of militant cane cutters such as Reefer, who leads the field workers in labour disputes with estate management. For EC members, then, a conflict model (see Rickford 1986) is more appropriate.

A comment on the two individuals who do not typify their class patterns in figure 40.1 – Florine and Granny – is in order. Florine is exceptional among EC members insofar as her closest friends at the time were NEC members, specifically Mark and Magda, her neighbours. She was often at their home (she was even recorded there), and her lower than usual basilectal pronoun use reflects that association, since it is closer to their more standard-like language use. Granny, on the other hand, runs a rum shop at the back of the village which is frequented by estate labourers, has little contact with higher status Georgetown types, and seems quite uninterested in mimicking their language or behaviour. Her higher than usual basilectal pronoun use reflects these NEC-atypical associations and orientations.

Sex

Figure 40.2 indicates that while basilectal pronoun usage in Cane Walk is strongly correlated with social class, it is almost completely unaffected by sex membership. NEC men and women use basilectal pronoun variants equally often (mean = 0.13), while EC women use them only slightly more often (mean = 0.77) than EC men do (mean = 0.74).

Although this particular variable shows no male-female differentiation, other variables might confirm the general impression one derives from

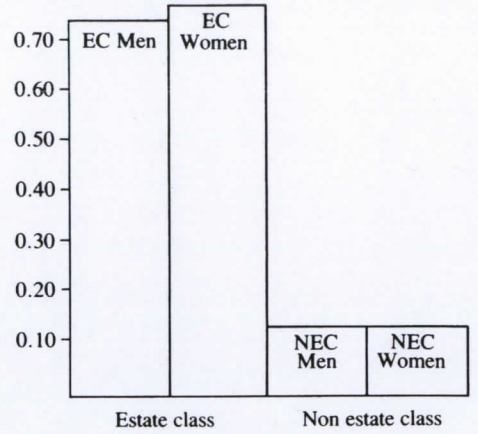

Figure 40.2 Basilectal singular pronoun usage by class and sex.

talking to husband-wife pairs that middle-aged and older women are more comfortable at the basilectal/Creole end of the continuum, while their husbands can operate equally comfortably in the mesolectal to acrolectal range. This may be partly because older men have generally gone further in school than older women, and have had more contacts with standard English speakers outside of the home and village than older women have.

Age

Figure 40.3 shows the relative frequencies of basilectal singular pronoun variants by social class and age. The age levels themselves were chosen to represent the primary distinctions which community members consider significant, the under-18 group representing 'young people' who cannot vote and are generally in school, the 18–55 group representing 'big people' who constitute the bulk of the labour force and enjoy political and social adult privileges, and the over-55 group representing 'old people,' many of them retired (since 55 was, until recently, the retirement age for the average estate field worker). Between the oldest and youngest age-levels in each social class, there is a noticeable decrease in basilectal pronoun use, equal to 0.16 in the EC, and 0.12 in the NEC. This distribution closely matches Labov's (1966) model of 'a Stigmatised language feature (showing) change in progress.' As Labov (1966: 325) suggests, a distribution of this type is symptomatic of a recent increase in the social stigmatisation of the variable, so that 'older speakers will show greater use of the newly stigmatised feature, and the younger groups less.'

The position of the intermediate age group differs, however, for each

Table 40.2. *Mean education levels by social class and age*

	Over 55	18–55	Under 18
EC	Elementary	Elementary	Secondary
NEC	Elementary	Secondary	Secondary

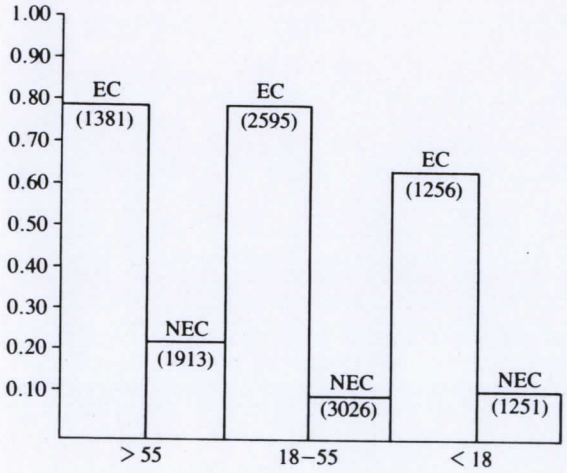

Figure 40.3 Basilectal singular pronoun usage by class and age. Note: N's in parentheses.

social class. It is on par with the oldest group within the EC, but on par with the youngest group within the NEC. This suggests that the increase in the social stigmatisation of basilect forms comes earlier for NEC members than for EC members because of some other factor. Table 40.2 suggests that this factor is the level of education which the various age groups within each social class were able to obtain.[2] It is only the youngest EC group which has had access to secondary or high school education, while the intermediate and youngest NEC age-groups have both had some secondary education. There is no class-independent correlation between education and basilectal usage, but a secondary education (usually acquired outside the village) seems to lead both EC and NEC members to lower their basilectal usage below the level characteristic of older members of their class, whatever that level may be.

Other data which space prevents us from introducing here (see Rickford 1979: 371–74) indicate that the age differences depicted in figure 40.3 are most marked in the first person, third feminine and third neuter subject subcategories, which together account for two thirds of all pronoun tokens

recorded in the nine subcategories (7,526/11,424). Other subcategories reveal little or no general movement towards non-basilectal norms, or slightly different tendencies for the EC and NEC.

Pronoun subcategory

Although it is convenient and valid to combine basilectal frequencies across the nine pronoun subcategories as an index of basilectal usage overall, as we have been doing up to this point, it is worth noting that pronoun subcategory is itself a significant internal constraint. Basilectal variants are much more frequent in the third masculine possessive and first person possessive subcategories (EC means of 1.0 and 0.99, NEC means of 0.43 and 0.40 respectively, and least frequent in the third feminine subject and object subcategories (EC means of 0.34 and 0.33, NEC means of 0.04 and 0.01 respectively). One possible reason for this is that the basilectal variants in the former subcategories pose no referential or communication difficulties because the case marking offered by the acrolectal variants e.g., (*his book*, *my sister*) is redundant, the possessive relation between pronoun and noun already reflected by word order. In the latter subcategories, however, the fact that the basilectal variants do not mark referents as male or female, and that the syntax does not provide any help in this respect, offers real potential for referential confusion in a community where many speakers do morphologically encode this distinction. Interestingly enough, when we look at actual stretches of discourse, it turns out that the unmarked use and interpretation of *(h)i* by basilectal speakers is masculine, as it is with mesolectal and acrolectal speakers; *(h)i* tends to be used with feminine reference only when its feminine reference is unambiguous from the sentential or real world context (see Rickford 1979: 361–5).

Style

Finally, there is considerable evidence that basilectal pronoun usage in this community, like Creole usage in Guyana more generally, is sensitive to stylistic constraints, particularly the nature of the addressee and the occasion. To cite only one example: Reefer used the basilectal variant in the third masculine object subcategory (*am*) 100 per cent of the time (n = 8) when he was recorded in interaction with his peers, 82 per cent (n = 17) in spontaneous interviews with me, a fellow Guyanese, and only 53 per cent (n = 17) when he was reinterviewed by three expatriates (two Englishmen and an American). Similarly Ustad used the basilectal variant in the first person subject subcategory (*mi*) 26 per cent of the time (n = 74) at an informal party in his home, 13 per cent (n = 344) in spontaneous interviews with me, and not at all (n = 30) in the expatriate

reinterviews. These results are characteristic of a general tendency to use more basilectal or Creole speech in more informal, in-group contexts.

Conclusion

As we have seen from looking at morphological variants of the personal pronouns, linguistic variation in Cane Walk is jointly constrained by both internal and external factors, its structure neatly revealed by quantitative distributions of basilectal and non-basilectal forms. Similar systematic non-qualitative variation has been revealed by other linguists, using other variables and constraints, elsewhere in Guyana and the Caribbean (see Winford's overview paper in this volume). Caribbean linguistic situations, particularly those which involve creole continua, offer rich exemplifications of sociolinguisitic principles, and fertile opportunities for testing and extending sociolinguistic theory.

NOTES

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1. The *h* in *hi*, *hɪm*, *hɪz* and *hʌr* is often absent in casual speech.
2. 'Elementary school' means 'completed elementary school,' except for some of the oldest EC members, who only reached grade 3 or less. 'Secondary school' means forms 1–3; more of the youngest NEC group have gone on to forms IV–V (finishing high school) than any other group.

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