

Representativeness and Reliability of the
Ex-Slave Narrative Materials, With Special Reference to
Wallace Quarterman's Recording and Transcript

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Introduction

The news of the existence of the ex-slave recordings transcribed in this book sent a ripple of excitement through the ranks of students of Afro-American language and culture, particularly among those of us interested in the debate about the creole ancestry of Vernacular Black English (VBE). Many of us are sociolinguists and dialectologists for whom tape-recorded samples of informal conversation represent ideal data, and the opportunity to hear the voices of men and women born nearly a century and a half ago promised to provide more decisive evidence on the nature of the Afro-American linguistic past than the written texts from earlier periods on which we had previously depended.

Listening to these tapes is, in many cases, a spine-tingling experience. But after listening to them, reading the first draft of the transcripts, and seeing the preliminary versions of some of the papers prepared for this volume, I find it necessary to temper our excitement and our desire for closure on the origins issue by sounding some cautions about the representativeness and reliability of these data.

On the face of it, these data are potentially more *reliable* -- in the sense of providing a trustworthy record of what was actually said -- than the texts of slave speech and ex-slave speech from earlier centuries which Stewart (1970), Dillard (1972), and other champions of the creolist

position had considered. Both in North America and the Caribbean, such texts were typically set down in writing by outsiders and newcomers to the community, and they may fail to represent relevant phonological and grammatical features while including mishearings, misinterpretations, and conventionalizations which are difficult for us to identify (as noted by Jeremiah 1977, and Rickford 1987a:82 and in press). As a matter of fact, the oral recordings and transcripts of the ex-slaves also pose problems of reliability -- as I will show later in this paper -- but for now let us accept the assumption that they are potentially more reliable and go on to ask about their *representativeness* as a record of VBE in earlier times.

Representativeness

The first point to be made in this regard is that these ex-slave data are relatively *late* in terms of the African presence in North America.¹ As Figure 1 reminds us, they take us back, at best, only to the mid-19th century, fully two centuries after Africans had begun to arrive in America, and a century and a half after their numbers had surpassed the white population in places like South Carolina (Rickford 1986a:255), providing the limited access to the native norm in which pidginization and creolization would very likely have taken place.²

Figure 1:
*Location of Ex-slave Recordings in Relation to the Total
Length of Time African Peoples Have Been in America*

1630	1680	1730	1780	1830	1880	1930	1980
17th century		18th century		19th century		20th century	
Ex-slave narratives							

By the mid-19th century, with the slave trade abolished half a century earlier, the proportion of English speakers increased by white immigration, and the population of locally-born slaves outnumbering the

foreign-born, more slaves could have been expected to be able to shift "upwards" when necessary than a century or so earlier.

The second point to be made in this regard is that the speech of the ex-slaves whose texts appear in this volume -- recorded at various times between 1935 and 1975 -- can only be taken as representative of mid-19th century Vernacular Black English under the assumption that their grammars had changed little or not at all in the intervening 90 to 130 years. Although sociolinguists typically assume that the recorded spontaneous speech of adults reveals the vernacular system which they learned during their formative years, recent evidence indicates that this is truer for phonetic variables than grammatical ones, especially in creole situations where adults and children may participate equally in syntactic innovations (Labov 1982a:67-69, drawing on Tok Pisin research by G. Sankoff). Since these ex-slaves had all led less parochial lives in the post-Emanicipation than in the pre-Emanicipation period, it is reasonable to assume that their linguistic repertoires would have expanded towards rather than away from standard English after Emanicipation.³

Note too that the typical situation represented in these recordings is that of an ex-slave talking to an interested outsider, the kind of context in which one would shift "up" rather than "down." (Mufwene also makes this point in this volume). In one or two cases this outsider is black and/or previously known to the interviewee, but in no case do we have the excited spontaneous interaction between peers or insiders in which the vernacular can really come to the fore.⁴ There is considerable evidence in previously published work that interaction with an insider -- especially a family member or close friend who can produce and/or speak the interviewee's vernacular -- can produce dramatically different linguistic results than interrogation by an outsider (Labov 1972a:89-90; Bickerton 1975:192; Rickford 1983:308-9; Rickford 1987b:153-4). Another recent example occurs in a 1987 recording of a Barbadian speaker, made in Barbados by an American student, Renee Blake (Rickford and Blake 1990). Both interviewer and interviewee are black, and the interviewer does a good job of establishing rapport. However, in between talking to her, the interviewee makes excited comments to his fellow Barbadians about a cricket match they are watching, and the relative frequency of copula absence shifts from 9 percent in his speech to the interviewer to 89 percent

in his speech to his peers! Note that if we did not have access to the fortuitously recorded peer-group interaction, we would have mistakenly assumed that his vernacular was less basilectal than it actually is. Sociolinguists should always assume that interviewees have a more vernacular variety than anything we elicit in an interview, but there is a tendency among us (discussed in Rickford 1987b) to assume that what one nets in a "spontaneous interview" is the totality of an individual's repertoire, or at least its vernacular component, and that quantitative counts of feature occurrences will be valid and representative of that vernacular. Unless we are recording speakers with an exceptionally limited range of social experiences and styles (such speakers, though rare, do exist -- see Rickford 1987b:165), nothing could be further from the truth, particularly in the case of adults. Our reification of tape-recorded "spontaneous speech" data has caused us to develop a serious blind spot on this issue, but we should remove it firmly when considering the speakers in these ex-slave recordings. That they drew for their interviews on more standard-like registers acquired in the course of their long and varied experiences is very likely; that they had more vernacular, less standard registers than the ones they employed in these interviews is almost unquestionable.

A final consideration is whether the speakers in these eleven recordings are representative of the ex-slave population in the Southern states from which they came. In the statistical sense of having been selected by random sampling, they are clearly NOT representative, but probably no less so than in most sociolinguistic surveys (which make a virtue of having vaguely defined "judgment" samples). But do they represent, albeit non-statistically, the range of social types and experiences in the ex-slave population? If anything, we may assume that these speakers, several of them claiming close pre-Emancipation relationships with white masters and mistresses, and all just happening to have been selected for (and agreeable to) these interviews, had better than average contact with and exposure to white language and culture.

The net result of these representativeness issues is that we would NOT expect these ex-slave recordings to represent the kind of deep plantation creole which Stewart (1967) had hypothesized, and it is therefore not surprising that they do not. Bearing this in mind, we should

certainly not use these interviews as decisive evidence that a deep creole did not exist in parts of the South in earlier times, as some contributors already appear to do and as others will undoubtedly do once the volume appears. Interesting and valuable though these data are, and important though it is to squeeze them for every historical, sociocultural and linguistic insight they possess, it would be a mistake to take them as conclusive evidence of the nature of *vernacular* speech among Afro-Americans in earlier *centuries* (note the emphasized elements).

Reliability

Turning now to reliability, let us separately consider the tapes and transcripts. The tapes are the closest we can come to ultimate reliability, since we can listen and relisten, count and recount, note the specific points on which investigators seem to disagree and attempt to resolve them. But it is important to remember that the recording equipment was not ideal to begin with, and that cassette copies (several generations removed from the original and limited in fidelity) are inferior to the reel-to-reel recordings and simply not trustworthy for determining what these interviewees are saying. I discovered this only after a summer in which several of my students had checked the first draft of the transcripts accompanying a set of cassette recordings and systematically tabulated the occurrences of past-tense *-ed*, third present, plural and possessive *-s*, and other features therein. When I received copies of the reel-to-reel tapes and began checking the students' transcripts and tabulations against the tapes, mistakes occurred so frequently that I was forced to abandon the exercise.

Instead, I concentrated on checking against the reel-to-reel recordings the first drafts of the transcripts which Bailey and his colleagues had kindly made available when they sent us the ex-slave material. It is the reliability of *these* drafts (which some contributors seem to have assumed despite Guy Bailey's admonitions to regard the *recordings* as the basic data) which I now wish to discuss. I have concentrated on the first-draft transcripts for Fountain Hughes, Charlie Smith, and Wallace Quaterman. Overwhelmingly, these transcripts, made by a standard speaker, underrepresent the proportion of non-standard features in these

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interviewees' speech, and this is in line with the explicit statement of the editors in their introductory letter that they would opt for standard-like interpretations whenever they were in doubt. For instance, Fountain Hughes' draft transcript had ten cases in which I heard an uninflected verb stem (e.g., *call*, *choose* where the original transcript had a past inflected verb; and in the case of the first 205 lines of Charlie Smith's interview, I replaced five cases of plural -s and four of third-singular present tense -s with zero (e.g., *house*, *get*).

The Quarterman Transcript

In the case of Wallace Quarterman -- a Sea Island speaker from an area in which I've done extensive fieldwork and one whose language is similar in a number of respects to my native Guyanese Creole -- repeated listening and relistening to the tape produced extensive changes in the transcript, many of them making the content of Quarterman's narrative more coherent and interesting, and its language more basilectal and revealing. I will now go over the main changes which my retranscription produced. The first draft of the transcript and my revisions (indicated by underlinings) appear in the appendix.

Changes That Make a Qualitative Difference

The first set of changes I'll discuss are ones which affect only a few sentences in the transcript -- sometimes just one sentence -- but which make a significant *qualitative difference* in our comprehension of Quarterman's content and in our linguistic impression of his speech. (The line numbers here refer to those in the appendix to this paper).

Of these, the one that stands out most clearly is the change in lines 53 and 54, where what was originally transcribed as "the people danced the way they all dance [unintelligible]" becomes "the people them throw 'way they hoe them. They throw away they hoe, . . ." Not only does this correction modify the picture of the slaves' initial reaction to the news of the emancipation, but it furnishes, along with other changes in lines 52 and

84e, four examples of pluralization with postnominal/prenominal *dem*, a creole feature (see Alleyne 1980; Rickford 1986b; Mufwene 1986b) which would otherwise have gone unattested.

In this category too is the decipherment of the song in lines 84a-e. Contrary to the sympathetic reaction to their individual master's demise in the Civil War period presented by Quarterman, Hughes and others, this song caricatures the deposed plantation owners and depicts a new social order in which the roles are reversed: the *masters* run away while the freed *slaves* enjoy the coming of the kingdom and the hour of Jubilee.⁵ By following up some leads in encyclopedia articles on the Civil War, I have been able to track Quarterman's song to its source, the chorus and part of the second verse of a song entitled "Kingdom Coming" or "The year of Jubilo," composed in dialect in 1861 by Henry Clay Work (Word nd:162-4).⁶ Quarterman's melody follows Work's sheet music almost exactly, and the wording is clearly related too:

From Verse 2: He six foot one way, two feet tudder,
 An' he weigh tree hundred pound,
 His coat so big, he couldn't pay de tailor,
 An' it won't go half way round . . .

Chorus: De massa run? Ha, ha!
 De darkey stay? Ho, ho!
 It mus' be now de kingdom comin',
 An' de year ob Jubilo.

Work was a Northern abolitionist whose family home had served as an "underground railway" for Southern slaves seeking freedom and whose father was eventually imprisoned for his role in "the liberation of several thousand slaves" (Ewen 1970:41). This contact with the slaves contributed to the younger Work's sentiments as well as his ability to write in dialect (Work nd:5). "Kingdom Coming" is regarded as his "unquestioned masterpiece" (Spaeth 1958:156), a song which was tremendously popular during the Civil War period and for years thereafter, being sung by black union troops as they marched into the South (Ewen 1970:42). It inspired so many popular imitations and variants that its individual authorship was often forgotten and it came to be regarded as a folk song (White 1928:170-

71).⁷ The following variant, reported from Auburn, Alabama (MS of J. S. Creel cited in White 1928:170-71), was verse two of a song described as a "Negro war song during Civil War."⁸ Its wording is even more similar to Quarterman's than Work's original is:

Old Massa he runned away
When he looked up the ribber where dem gun boars lay.
It must be now dat de kingdom am a coming
In de year of Jubilee.

Note in particular the identity of line 3 here with Quarterman's line 84g, both of them attesting the *a*-prefixing construction which is common in Appalachian and other English dialects (Wolfram and Christian 1976:69-76).⁹

Turning away from this intriguing song, we need to note the four new tokens of *bin* (pronounced [br̩n], with a lax vowel, as in Atlantic English basilectal creole) in lines 61, 62 ("bin po"), 140 ("bin like"), and 143 ("bin understand"). The draft transcript included only two instances of *bin* (90 100), both of which were main verb preadverbial or prepositional uses. The two "auxiliary" preverbal instances of *bin* in the revised transcript (140, 143) make a qualitative difference because they are the only attestations of this type in the recording and they place Quarterman's speech at a more basilectal level of the continuum. (Main verb uses of *bin* continue higher both in the Caribbean and U.S. mesolects than do [noncontinuative] auxiliary uses). Significantly enough, they both occur before stative verbs, where they would be required for past marking in the creole basilect; non-stative stem forms represent past on their own, and consequently occur with *bin* less often than stative verbs do in Guyanese and other English-based creoles (Bickerton 1975:35).¹⁰

Changes That Make a Quantitative Difference

A number of grammatical variables familiar from discussions of creoles and Vernacular Black English -- such as the absence of morphological marking for number, case, and tense distinctions encoded in standard

English -- are attested frequently in Quarterman's speech. But because they are variable rather than categorical features, their analysis requires counting, and the counts one gets from my revised transcript differ strikingly in some cases from those one gets from the first draft.

For instance, the relative frequency of so-called "zero plural" -- the proportion of unmarked plural nouns out of all nouns that could have been marked with [-s] -- is 46 percent (11/24) in the draft transcript, but 79 percent (19/24) in mine. As with other statistics given in this section, these counts exclude dialogue from the interviewers or anyone besides Quarterman himself, and they also exclude indeterminate tokens (like "the Yankee say" in line 57, where the word after the plural noun begins with a sibilant), and nouns preceded or followed by *dem*. Quarterman's amended zero plural count is comparable to the 76 percent reported in Rickford (1985:103) for Mrs. Queen, a lower-mesolectal Gullah speaker from the South Carolina Sea Islands, and it is considerably higher than the peak figures of 5.8 percent to 13 percent reported for BEV speakers in New York City and Detroit (Labov et al 1968:I:161-62; Wolfram 1969:143).

Similarly, with respect to "zero past marking" on *say*, which tends to behave differently than other verbs, the draft transcript reveals only one unmarked token out of seven occurrences (or 13 percent), while the revised transcript shows many more (5/10, or 50 percent). Incidentally, one of the unmarked tokens -- "They tol' them, *say* now you . . ." (68) is precisely of the serial verb quotation-introducing type which Mufwene (in this volume) describes as "quite common in today's Gullah."¹¹ So this is also a case where the changes make a qualitatively significant difference.

In relation to past marking on other verbs, the quantitative differences are smaller. For instance, zero past marking on non-syllabic weak verbs (cases like *ask* which would take an [-ed] suffix in standard English without adding a syllable) is 62 percent in the draft transcript (8/13, with 10 indeterminate cases followed by /t/ or /d/) and 79 percent in my revised version (11/14, with 12 indeterminate cases). The proportion of zero past marking on syllabic weak verbs (cases like *nominate* in which the past suffix is realized as /ɹd/ or /ɹd/) is identical in both versions (100 percent, 4/4), and virtually the same for strong verbs (e.g., *think*) other than *say* (54 percent, 13/24 with 13 indeterminates in the draft, 57 percent, 20/35 with 14 indeterminates in the revised version). And insofar as

inflected forms of *be* are concerned (the use of zero past-marked *is* and *are* instead of *was* or *were*), the draft is in fact more non-standard than the revised version (44 percent, 4/9 versus 27 percent, 3/11). But although the quantitative results are scarcely different from one transcript to another in these cases, the list of past-marked and unmarked verbs does differ, and this could affect the identification of constraints and other aspects of the analysis.

My overall point in relation to the Quarterman draft transcript -- and by extension, other transcripts of the ex-slave recordings -- is that its reliability is not to be taken at face value, but established on the basis of careful listening and relistening, preferably with the help of people familiar with the dialect. This same caution, of course, goes for the use of modern recordings of Caribbean and other creole speakers made by linguists from outside the area. Where linguists have played or provided tapes of Caribbean speech transcribed in their conference handouts and publications (this is not generally the case), I have sometimes seen potentially significant mistranscriptions and missed transcriptions. Scholarly etiquette constrains us from challenging each other's data (sociolinguists are really no more ready to breach this etiquette than generativists are), but I confess to having doubts about the empirical validity of some of our theories and claims.

Summary and Conclusion

Intriguing though these ex-slave narratives are, I have argued in this paper against deifying them, treating them as *the* litmus test of the creolist hypothesis just because they happen to come in the format (tapes and transcripts) which many of us like best. Even under the questionable assumption that the recorded speech of these ex-slaves in the 20th century is representative of their speech in the mid-19th century, this is relatively late in the history of African people in North America. Furthermore, the non-randomly selected interviewees probably included those with more white contacts rather than less, and the recording situation was likely to elicit the standard rather than vernacular portions of their linguistic repertoire. Finally, the tapes and transcripts of these recordings may not

be as reliable as they at first appear. In the case of Quarterman's sample and the others (Hughes, Charlie Smith) that I've listened to carefully, the result of my revisions in virtually every case is to place these texts further away from the standard end of the continuum than the rough drafts did and towards the creole pole. (As with older written texts, errors tend to be of omission rather than commission; see Rickford, in press). This is not to say that these ex-slaves now emerge as speakers of basilectal creole; as noted in our discussion of the representativeness issues above, such an outcome would be unlikely. But their speech is closer to creole than most of my co-commentators have concluded and, fascinating though these materials are, they provide no resolution on the creolist issue. On the contrary, they indicate that we cannot abandon the alternative sources of evidence, such as contemporary recordings and analyses of VBE, comparisons with Caribbean and West African material and written texts from earlier periods. We must continue to gather more such evidence, and develop new ways of sifting through their complementary strengths and weaknesses to derive a more reliable and representative view of Afro-American English in times past.

NOTES

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1. This is a point which Bill Stewart (personal communication) has made in relation to the written ex-slave narrative materials used by Schneider and others.

2. Baker and Corne (1986:165-68) identify the point at which the slave population outnumbered the ruling-class as "Event 1" -- a crucial element in the development of pidgin and creole varieties in a plantation environment. Prior to this point, "locally-born slaves had both the motivation to acquire the language of the ruling class and sufficient degree of access to enable them to succeed . . ." (Baker and Corne 1986:167). Other important phases in their hypothesis are Event 2, when *locally-born* slaves outnumber the ruling class, and Event 3, when the regular supply of slave immigrants ends. See their pioneering article for more discussion.

3. As argued in Rickford (1983), in decreolizing situations of this type, speakers typically add more standard lexis to their repertoire rather than abandoning their non-standard lexis altogether (extension, not replacement). True loss of "lower" lexis occurs primarily across generations, through children who learn only "higher" lexis.

4. Note the following remarks about the Gullahs by Turner (1949:12), who interviewed Quarterman himself: "When talking to strangers the Gullah Negro is likely to use speech that is essentially English in vocabulary. When he talks to his friends, however, or to members of his family, his language is different."

5. The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides the following as its primary entry for *Jubilee*:

1. *Jewish Hist.* more fully, *year of Jubilee*. A year of emancipation and restoration, which according to the institution in Lev. xxv was to be kept every fifty years, and to be proclaimed by a blast of trumpets throughout the land: during it the fields were to be left uncultivated, Hebrew slaves were to be set free . . .

There are also parallel restitutive years in the Roman Catholic Church, and 19th century slaves were clearly familiar with the concept of the Jubilee as a time of remission and release, as evidenced by the many references to it in their songs (see Hatfield 1840).

6. For its potential interest, here is the first verse as well:

7. Say, darkeys, hab you seen de massa,
Wid de mufftash on his face,
Go long de road some time dis mornin',
like he gwine to leab de place?
He seen a smoke, way up de ribber,
Whar de Linkum gunboats [Lincoln gunboats] lay;
He took his hat, an' lef berry sudden,
An' I spec he's run away!
[Chorus]

8. Although it seems unlikely on the basis of what I have read about Henry Clay Work (see Work, nd:6), it is not entirely impossible that "Kingdom Coming" or something similar to it might have been first heard by Work from the slaves rather than vice versa.

9. Here is the first verse of this version. Note the reference to the firing of the big gun in line 2, which parallels Quarterman's narrative in line 28 (in the appendix to this paper):

In eighteen hundred and sixty-one
Dem dar Yankess fired dat great big gun;
It looked mighty sispicious; somethin's gwine ter happen
Fer de way dem white folks done.

There was some ambiguity about whether Quarterman's *a comin'* shouldn't have been transcribed instead as *a come*, with the following /r/n/ interpreted as a preposition beginning the next line. This is not grammatically or phonologically impossible, for continuative/habitual *da* alternates with *a* in Gullah, especially after nasals, and it would not be surprising to find a basilectal creole feature like *a - Verb* preserved in a popular or folk song. In Rickford (1987a:251) I discuss the parallel case of a mesolectal Guyanese speaker using the archaic basilectal copula *da* (*skin, da mi!* "Skin, it's me!" in a piece of folklore. However, the junctural patterns in the last two lines of Quarterman's song favor the *a-comin'* transcription.

Appendix

10. In addition to *bin*, there is one possible occurrence of *done Verb+ed* ("done told") in line 37, but the identity of its subject is unclear.

11. Although the full quotation is missing from line 68, the deictic orientation of the two words that remain ("Now, you . . .") is sufficient to establish that they're a quotation from direct speech.

First Draft and Revised Transcripts of Wallace Quaterman Interview

(WQ was born in 1844 in Frederica, GA. Original recordings done in 1935. Library of Congress numbers: AFS 342 A1, 342 A2, 342 A3, 342 B1)

CONVENTIONS: The first draft transcript, with the original line numbers, is represented in ordinary text. My revised transcript, in italics, usually follows under each original line, and is enclosed in braces () with revisions underlined. When the original line appears without any revised transcript underneath it, this means that I agree completely with the original transcript.

Square brackets are used, as in the first draft, for transcriber's "stage directions" and other comments; where speech is completely unintelligible, it is described as such [unintelligible], but guesses and half-certainties are indicated in square brackets with a preceding and following question mark, for example: [?went home?]. Transcribed text not in square brackets is material about whose accuracy I am completely certain, or virtually (75 percent or more) so. As in the first draft, lines which consist entirely of square bracketed material are not included in the line numbering count. Parentheses are used to enclose fieldworker's speech which was not included in the first draft, without adding a new line, as in in line (25). Note that in addition to FW, the primary fieldworker (Zora Neal Hurston?), there is a second one, FW2 (Alan Lomax), and a third FW3 (Mary Elizabeth Barnicle?).

INF: [Seems to be quoting from a religious text]

Lord be with [unintelligible] my grace with thee

[The Lord built the holy earth, my grace with thee].

Well indeed I trus' [dog barking in the background]

[Tell them he that trus' [dog barking in the background]]

[unintelligible] with faith. But he that once

[my word he shall be saved. But he that won't]

believeest [unintelligible]. I make his Great

[believe, he shall [?cui down?]. I make Him Great]

- (5) Commission [unintelligible] Lord that he is preach

- (10) FW: O.K.
 {*Commission, know that he is preach*}
 my gospel through, by all the work that you can do,
 all the wonder I will do. You must teach
 {*ide all the wonder I will do. You must teach*}
 all nations my command I am [unintelligible] worl'.
 {*call nation my command, I am with you until the worl' shall end*}.
 Well I think that's enough, bye. [dog continues barking . . .]
 {*Well I think that's enough [unintelligible; dog barking]*}
- (15) INF: O.K. [brief pause in the tape; then INF starts to sing]
 Oh let me come in, I surrender, and open the door,
 oh let me come in.
 Yeah, let me come in, oh let me come in. I
 surrender, yes open the door, an' let me come
 in.
 I said baby don't you cry mothers an' father are
 born to die.
 I surrender [recording gets stuck].
 Let me come in, I surrender and open the door and
 let me come in. [singing stops]
 {*then let me come in. [singing stops]*}
 Can't sing much. [brief pause in the tape]. Born in
 {*[Coughs]. I can't sing much. [brief pause in the tape]. . . . born in]*
 1844.
- (20) FW: What's your name?
 INF: Huh? (Q repeated) My name is Wallace Quarterman in and through
 the state of Georgia.
 [brief pause in the tape] [begins in middle of conversation]
 Morning I was cooking the breakfast in the house. An'
 {*...morning I was totting in breakfast in the house. (FW: Yes.) An'*}
 the, an' the, the big gun shot, supposed to have. The
 {*the, an' the, the big gun shot, to Port Royal (FW: Yeah.) The*}
 big gun shot so I [unintelligible] the breakfast in the
 {*big gun shot, so I, by I carry in the breakfast in the*}
 house. The overseer ask me what is that, if that is
- (25) FW: What's your name?
 INF: Huh? (Q repeated) My name is Wallace Quarterman in and through
 the state of Georgia.
 [brief pause in the tape] [begins in middle of conversation]
 Morning I was cooking the breakfast in the house. An'
 {*...morning I was totting in breakfast in the house. (FW: Yes.) An'*}
 the, an' the, the big gun shot, supposed to have. The
 {*the, an' the, the big gun shot, to Port Royal (FW: Yeah.) The*}
 big gun shot so I [unintelligible] the breakfast in the
 {*big gun shot, so I, by I carry in the breakfast in the*}
 house. The overseer ask me what is that, if that is
- (30) FW: What's your name?
 INF: Huh? (Q repeated) My name is Wallace Quarterman in and through
 the state of Georgia.
 [brief pause in the tape] [begins in middle of conversation]
 Morning I was cooking the breakfast in the house. An'
 {*...morning I was totting in breakfast in the house. (FW: Yes.) An'*}
 the, an' the, the big gun shot, supposed to have. The
 {*the, an' the, the big gun shot, to Port Royal (FW: Yeah.) The*}
 big gun shot so I [unintelligible] the breakfast in the
 {*big gun shot, so I, by I carry in the breakfast in the*}
 house. The overseer ask me what is that, if that is
- (35) FW: What's your name?
 INF: Huh? (Q repeated) My name is Wallace Quarterman in and through
 the state of Georgia.
 [brief pause in the tape] [begins in middle of conversation]
 Morning I was cooking the breakfast in the house. An'
 {*...morning I was totting in breakfast in the house. (FW: Yes.) An'*}
 the, an' the, the big gun shot, supposed to have. The
 {*the, an' the, the big gun shot, to Port Royal (FW: Yeah.) The*}
 big gun shot so I [unintelligible] the breakfast in the
 {*big gun shot, so I, by I carry in the breakfast in the*}
 house. The overseer ask me what is that, if that is
- (40) FW2: And who had seen them?
 {*And who was Peter?*}
 INF: The driver. And so he said that, uh, Wallace is lying
 {*The driver. And so he said, that, uh, Wallace was lying*}
 to me, he said so, then he said so, then the Yankee be
 {*if he said so, when he said so, then the Yankee be*}
 to the landing, they drunk. You understand: [starts to recite]
 Way down south getting mighty poor.
 {*Way down south, getting mighty po',*}
 They use to drink coffee but now they drinking
 {*Cause they use to drink coffee but now they drinking*}
 rye.
 If they lef' [unintelligible] to make the rebel
 {*if they lef' [?to wave the union banner?], make the rebel*}
 understan'
 To leave our lan' for the sake of Uncle Sam.
 Way down south getting mighty poor, shot at the
 [unintelligible] to see the rebel run.
 {*[?wildcat?] an' they see the rebel run.]*}
- (45) FW2: And who had seen them?
 {*And who was Peter?*}
 INF: The driver. And so he said that, uh, Wallace is lying
 {*The driver. And so he said, that, uh, Wallace was lying*}
 to me, he said so, then he said so, then the Yankee be
 {*if he said so, when he said so, then the Yankee be*}
 to the landing, they drunk. You understand: [starts to recite]
 Way down south getting mighty poor.
 {*Way down south, getting mighty po',*}
 They use to drink coffee but now they drinking
 {*Cause they use to drink coffee but now they drinking*}
 rye.
 If they lef' [unintelligible] to make the rebel
 {*if they lef' [?to wave the union banner?], make the rebel*}
 understan'
 To leave our lan' for the sake of Uncle Sam.
 Way down south getting mighty poor, shot at the
 [unintelligible] to see the rebel run.
 {*[?wildcat?] an' they see the rebel run.]*}
- (50) FW2: And who had seen them?
 {*And who was Peter?*}
 INF: The driver. And so he said that, uh, Wallace is lying
 {*The driver. And so he said, that, uh, Wallace was lying*}
 to me, he said so, then he said so, then the Yankee be
 {*if he said so, when he said so, then the Yankee be*}
 to the landing, they drunk. You understand: [starts to recite]
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 {*if they lef' [?to wave the union banner?], make the rebel*}
 understan'
 To leave our lan' for the sake of Uncle Sam.
 Way down south getting mighty poor, shot at the
 [unintelligible] to see the rebel run.
 {*[?wildcat?] an' they see the rebel run.]*}

- I ain't going [unintelligible] again. I've been to war
 {*[Lwen--I ain't going over them thing them. I have been to war]*
 already. Yeah, yeah. An' that, the people danced the
 {*[Lagrain?]* (FW: Right. Right.) Yes. Yes. An' that, the people them throwl
 way they all dance. [unintelligible] they call we all
 {*way they hoe them. They throw away they hoe, an' then they call we all]*
 up you know an', an' give we all freedom 'cause we are
 jus' as much as free as them. Now you understand. But
 the Yankess saying he's go back to the south here.
 {*[the Yankess say we mus' go back to the south, they'll help we.]*
 Everywhere, they didn', of course it was so much doubt,
 {*[Well, they didn'. Of course there was so much doubt],*
 and seems to me that they would have done more, but it
 {*[and [unintelligible] in the way. They would have done mo', but it's]*
 so much doubt in the way. They couldn' because {you--} the
 colored people sure went for, and some white people
 {*[colored people sure bin poor [po:], and some white people]*
 sure went for it too. You understan' that
 {*[sure bin poor [po:] too. You understan', an' they]*
 [unintelligible]. I had it twice so far, for the Lord
 {*[rather help them, than to help we. [Begins prayer/versel: I had it twice so*
far, for the Lord]
 has done for me, I come through, through the all, the,
 {*[has done for me, I come through, through all, he's]*
 been ups an' downs through the [unintelligible].
 {*[been up an' down an' through the [?Maliki?]]]*
 FW: Well tell me about how they went to Hawkinsville and
 drove the sword down in the ground.
 {*[threwed [lho:wed] the sword down on the ground.]*
 INF: They tol' them, said now you [conversation ends].
 {*[They tol' them, say now you [FW2 talks; unclear; cut off--]]]*
 [brief pause in the tape as new recording begins]
 FW: After they said you could go free, then what did you
 {*[After they said you were free, then what did you]*
 do? Did you run on off the plantation that day? Did
 you leave the plantation that day after they told you

- to go free?
 INF: Well the master had promised to, to give we forty
 {*[Well the master had promise to, to give we forty]*
 dollars a month in cash. Well lots silly boys say
 {*[dollars a month in [?peds?] Well lots o' the boys say]*
 they ain't want it. They rather go free you know.
 {*[they ain't want it. They rather go free, you know.]*
 Well of course why I up there, you understan' I get
 {*[Well of course by I up there, you understan', I get]*
 along with them you know. [unintelligible] the big
 {*[along with him you know. Eat right out the big]*
 boss you know. An' uh after they, after this they
 {*[But you know. An' uh after they, after this they]*
 throwed down, throwed down, they just make them throwed
 down, an' they just get on the sword an' squash them
 down. You go in Hawkinsville an' you see all the
 swords down in the groun'. An' after they throwed
 {*[swords down, now, in the groun'. An' after they throwed]*
 us down, the tension in the South, tension. And after
 {*[these down, say "tention!" an' then, "South, 'tention." An' after]*
 the [unintelligible] they they play, yeah, play.
 {*[the South 'tention, then they play. Yeah, play the.]*
 [begins to sing while playing the washub base--song is difficult to
 understand and not transcribed].
 {*[begins to sing while playing the washub base]. Text:]*
 (184a) "One foot one way, one foot the other way."
 (184b) One foot all around."
 (184c) So big that he couldn't cut [?a figure?]
 (184d) An' he couldn't go a half way round."
 (184e) "Ole master, run away, and set them darky free"
 (184f) For you mus' be think
 (184g) Thy kingdom a-comin'
 (184h) The hour of Jubilee."
 FW: So we had a big breaking up right there, you know,
 after it, that's right.
 FW: What about afterward, you know when, when the colored

[Well, what about afterward, you know when the, when the colored] people had to go and everything? Tell us
[people had the banner and everything? Tell us] about that.

(90) INF: Yes, we, everything been in we hands, but they couldn't

[Yes, we, everything been in we hands, but they couldn't] control the colored people. They do so much mischief until we have to go on back and, to the white people we [until we have to go on back and, to the white people, we who] had no education.. You know when a man ain' got [had education. You know when a man ain' got no] education he ain' got no sense. All we try to 'sure [education he ain' got no sense. All we try to 'sure] them they wouldn't, they'd just kill one another, an' so [them, they wouldn't take just kill one another, an' goin'] on. So we had to nominate Democrats over their heads. [on. So we had to nominate Democrat over their heads.] They didn't like it, though many got kill by nominate [They didn't like it. It's a many got kill by nominate] the Democrats but we couldn't help it, to stop them so [the Democrat, but we couldn't help it, to stop them so] much killing, you understand. So we nominate the Democrat, and, we had a big time from that till now. The time ain't bad like, uh it been then, because a man think nothing [of] killing a man and taking a drink of water. But since we nominate the Democrat we have more 'surance you understand. The law come in protecting them, you know, they wouldn't [unintelligible] the [them, you know, they wouldn't yell at the] colored people, at all ma'am, at all. Yep, that's the [colored people, (FW: Yeah) 'tall ma'am, at all. (FW: Mm-hm) Yep, so that's the] way they come in protect them, but we had we own lawyers, judge and everything but they just would run [lawyer, judge and everything but they just was-run] everything in the dust you know, kill everything,

(110) couldn't stan' it, no.

FW: Well did you ever have a office, did you, would you

ever, did you ever hold a office?

INF: I wouldn't want an office.

FW: Oh.

(115) INF: No ma'am, a man, I wouldn't want an office, why an

[No ma'am, I'm a man, I wouldn't want an office, why an] office is [unintelligible] kind of thing. You

[office is [?an ordinarist?] kind of thing. (FW: Mm-hm) You]

understand. You got to go and please the, that fellow [understand. (FW: Yes) You got to go and please the, that fellow] you know. You got to stop do what God tell you and go

please that fellow and the white giving you that vote.

[please that fellow and the white giving you that vote.]

[Well what, what's become of your old master?]

[Well what, what's become of your old master?]

(120) FW: Old master? He died in the yellow fever. He was a

nice man to me.

[nice man to me. (FW: Yeah)]

FW: Yes.

INF: I wouldn't take anything for him

[I wouldn't take anything from him.]

FW: What was his name?

INF: Colonel Fred Wearing.

FW: Fred Wearing?

INF: Yes, he was a colonel. I wouldn't take anything, well

[Yes, he was a colonel. I wouldn't take anything, why]

me and him was just like one, you know.

[me and he was just like one, you know.]

FW: Yes.

INF: Yes ma'am.

FW: Well where was his plantation?

INF: His plantation on, on. Savannah River, you know, C.

[His plantation on, on, Savannah River, you know, Skidaway]

Island, and you know Chatham County, you know Savannah.

[Island, an' you ain't know Chatham County, you know Savannah?]

- (135) FW: Yes.
 INF: On C. Island. Yes ma'am. I wouldn't take nothing for
{On Skidaway Island. Yes ma'am. I wouldn't take nothing from}
him.
- FW3: Well did the white folks like it when, when you were,
 all were in power?
- (140) INF: Oh they liked me. They would like me all the way
{Oh they liked me. They bin like me all the way}
'cause I protect them you know. I protect them, I
[unintelligible] Yankee myself an' they jus' destroyed
{go in with Yankee myself an' they didn' destroy}
 them you know. You see I just didn' understand how to
{them you know. You see I jus' bin understand how to}
 speak you know.
- (145) FW: Yes.
 INF: Tell [unintelligible] you know.
{Till now, you know.}
- FW: Uh huh.
 INF: I see a man go do a wrong thing I sure stop him. I
{I see a man gon do a wrong thing I sure stop him. [ill]
 stop him.
{stop him. Why--}
- (150) FW: Well did the white people, did your master and all them like to see the
 Negroes be the judge and the jailer and everything?
 INF: Oh, you see, according to law you know. They don't
{Naa, you see, according to law, you know. They don't}
 mind you be that if, we, you know what you doing.
{mind you be that a way if, you know what you doing.}
- (155) Don't you see?
 FW: Yes.
{Yeah.}
 INF: We, we you see they, they don't know what they doing.
{Yeah, we, you see they, they don't know what they doing.}
{FW. Yeah.}
 And they prove that they don't know.
{Ah' they prove that they don't know. {FW. Uh-huh. Yes. Yes.}}

Is Gullah Decreolizing? A Comparison of a Speech Sample of the 1930s With a Sample of the 1980s

Salikoko S. Mufwene

1. Introduction

Since DeCamp (1971) and Whinnom (1971), *decreolization*, as the diachronic process whereby the system of creole which co-exists with its lexifier moves closer and closer to that of the latter, has figured conspicuously in the literature on Atlantic creoles. Since especially DeCamp (1971) the chief evidence invoked for postulating the process in any creole community has been synchronic variation from speaker to speaker, context to context, and/or region to region (albeit creole community to creole community). At least at the level of working assumptions, this approach may be witnessed in other seminal works such as Bickerton (1973 and 1975) and Alleyne (1980). Recently, in the specific case of Gullah, papers such as Cassidy (1986), Hancock (1986), Jones-Jackson (1986, very much related to Jones-Jackson 1984, where decreolization is discussed in relation to the claim that Gullah is allegedly dying), Nichols (1986), and Rickford (1986b) also assume this diachronic process on the basis of variation. This chapter compares, in the absence of older texts reproducing accurately the speech of native speakers (see below), Gullah speech samples separated by about fifty years (two generations) to determine whether there are any signs of decreolization.

Mufwene (1986b) deplores the fact that claims for the decreolization of Gullah (as of other creoles of the Atlantic) have been based, at least implicitly, on literary texts such as Jones (1888), Gonzales (1922), and