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Variation in the Jamaican Creole Copula and its Relation to the Genesis of AAVE

New Data and Analysis

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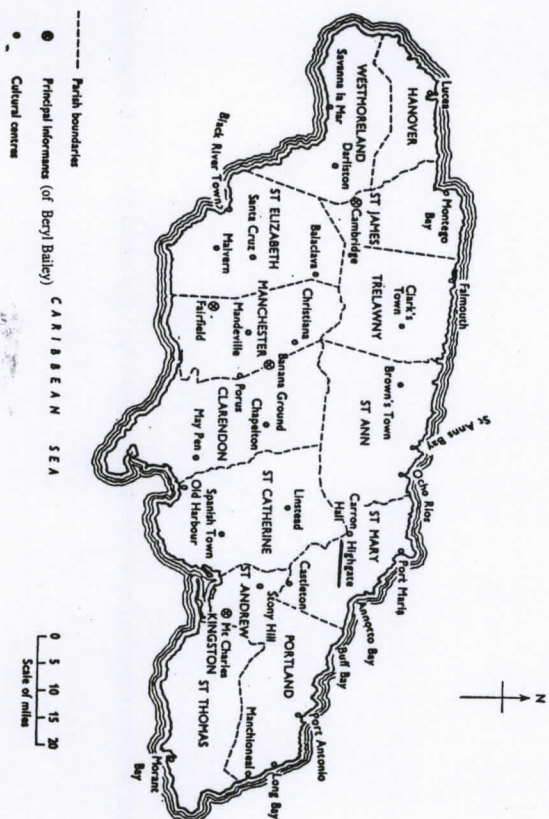
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1. Introduction

As Hazen (1998: 1) observes, "Copula absence has been the hallmark sociolinguistic variable of the past thirty years." It has certainly been pivotal in the study of African American Vernacular English [AAVE] — both as a demonstration of the regularity and complexity of synchronic sociolinguistic variation in this variety (beginning with Labov et al 1968 and Labov 1969), and as a counter in diachronic arguments about the origins of AAVE and its ongoing development (see Rickford 1998). In controversies about the creole origins of AAVE, in particular, analyses of copula absence have played a central role. But while quantitative sociolinguistic studies of the AAVE copula abound, comparable studies of the copula in English-based creoles of the Caribbean and elsewhere — critical for evaluating whether copula absence follows similar patterns in AAVE and the creoles — are much rarer.

One creole data set which has been especially influential in discussions of the genesis of AAVE are the texts of Emmanuel 'Baba' Rowe, the Jamaican in his seventies whose stories were published by De Camp (1960). Those texts and their 300-odd copula tokens have been at the center of discussions of Caribbean/American copula connections over the past two decades — see Holm (1976, 1984), Baugh (1979, 1980), Labov (1982), Poplack and Sankoff (1987), Rickford and Blake (1990) and Rickford (1996). Useful though the Baba Rowe data set is — and having gone through each of its copula tokens for the reanalysis in Rickford (1996) I certainly do appreciate its value — it is important to see if other Jamaican Creole [JC] speakers exhibit similar patterns of copula variability.

The JC copula data I'll discuss in this paper are the fruits of fieldwork I conducted in Jamaica in 1991 in an attempt to go beyond the Baba Rowe texts.¹ They derive from an interview I did with Jack and Gertrude Harris — pseudonyms for two retired Jamaicans in their seventies (comparable in age to Baba Rowe) who live off the land in the rural and relatively isolated northeastern village of Woodside, near the town of Highgate in the parish of St. Mary, between Ocho Rios and Kingston (see map 1). This interview yielded nearly four hundred tokens of the copula and auxiliary forms which are usually discussed together as the 'copula,' broadly conceived. In the rest of this paper I'll discuss the procedures I followed in analyzing these tokens, and the results and implications of my analysis.



Map 1: Jamaica (Adapted from Bailey 1966)

2. Don't count cases

In any variation study it is vital to begin by setting aside categories of the grammar in which all of the variants do not occur or in which the conditioning is categorical or nearly so (causing one variant to occur always or never), since tokens from such categories might skew our analysis of constraints on the main body of variation (see Blake 1997a). It is also important to set aside occurrences of the variable which are acoustically unclear, or whose analysis is indeterminate. Table 1 shows the "Don't Count" [DC] types which I was forced to set aside in doing this study. They are substantially the same as those recognized in my (1996) study of Baba Rowe's JC texts, and account for about a fourth of all the copula tokens produced by Jack and Gertrude Harris. The "Don't Count" types in Table 1 — about a fourth of all copula tokens in my JC data set — fall into this category.

Topping the list are highlighting or cleft structures [HI] like *a tell me a tell yu* and *iz God du dat fi dem* (see Table 1 for glosses and more examples) which Bailey (1966: 85ff.) described as the "inverted structure type." These topicalizing structures occur almost categorically with a full form of the copula (*a* or *iz*). The cases of no overt subject [NS] as in *pus a push an [NS] a draa back* also show nearly categorical copula presence (specifically *a*), even where Standard English would require a gerundial form of the verb with no copula, as in *Brida guot de pan Rockstore a wach i*. In this latter sentence, the continuative *a wach i* is the JC equivalent of the SE gerundial "watching him."²

Existential sentences [ES] like *der iz tuu young fela* categorically block copula absence in JC, as noted also for AAVE by Blake (1997a: 65). However, as Bailey (1971: 344) pointed out, the relevant existential form is sometimes not *iz* or *ar* or any inflected form of *be*, but *hav*, as in *de hav tuu up puos ruod*. *Gat* is yet another alternative. The eleven "clause-final" [CF] cases exemplified in Table 1 work as they do in Standard English and AAVE (see Labov 1969; Holm 1984; Blake 1997a: 61) — blocking either contraction or deletion. Note however, that there are once again creole alternatives to conjugated or inflected *be*: *tan* (*a so mi tan*) and *sit* (*mek mi sit how it sit*).

In a sense, the non-finites [NF] could have been glossed over, because while they are definitely treated as "Don't Count" cases in all prior research on the AAVE or Caribbean English Creole copula, they are almost never mentioned (Labov 1968 is one exception). But note their occasional realization as zero rather than *be* before adjectives in JC: e.g. *dat mos [Ø] big*,³ and also their occasional realization by tensed forms, as in *wi hav tu bin livin in fier*. Finally, Table 1 includes two other DC categories, unclear [UN] or indeterminate

Table 1: "Don't Count" Types in 1991 JC Data: Examples and Frequencies

"Don't Count" type	Examples	Frequency
Highlighter/ cleft (HI)	<i>a tel mi a tel yu</i> "Telling you—that's what I'm doing" (J 2-296); <i>iz Gad du dai fi dem</i> "It is God that did that for them" (G 3-203); <i>a chriti broda i gai</i> "He has THREE brothers" (G 3-252)	43
No overt subject (NS)	<i>pus a push an</i> [NS] <i>a draa bak</i> "Puss was pushing and drawing back" (J 3-407); <i>mi sidoun siemwie</i> [NS] <i>a siti</i> <i>di man</i> "I sat down in the same way, seeing the man" (J 2-314)	20
Existential sentence (ES)	<i>der iz tuu yong fela</i> "there are two young fellows" (J 2-197); <i>der waz no karn</i> "there was no corn" [G 3-434]; <i>de hav tuu op puos ruod</i> "They have two up Post Road." [G 2-362]	10
Clause final (CF)	<i>ov kuors it iz</i> "Of course it is!" [J 2500]; <i>a so mi ian</i> "That's how I am" [2-304]; <i>ton auf di lair, L, mek mi siti</i> <i>hou it site</i> "Turn off the light, L, let me see what it's like" [G 3-507]	11
Non-Finites (NF)	<i>mosii fat; dar</i> [liedii] <i>mos Ø big</i> "She must be fat; that lady must be big" [J 2-357, 358]; <i>wi hav tu bin livin in</i> <i>fier</i> "We have to be living in fear" [J 2-232]; <i>it wil bii</i> <i>hel</i> "It will be hell" [G 3-427]	18
Unclear cases (UN)	<i>di gon a ishuu</i> "The gun is an issue" or "The gun is being issued" [J 2-268; ambiguous between Noun/Verb readings]	2
Other (OT)	<i>ai had woz tu se</i> "I had to say" [J 2-427]; <i>if yu fa taak</i> <i>su, dem Ø veks wid yu</i> "If you talked like that, they would be angry with you" [G 2-440]	4
TOTAL, ALL DC TYPES		108

[J=Jack Harris; G=Gertrude Harris; #'s in parentheses = tape and counter # of example]

examples like *di gon a ishuu* and other structures [OT] like *ai had woz tu se* (more stereotypically associated with Trinidadian Creole English), where the *had* functions as a modal of obligation and *woz* supplies the tense.

Table 2 shows the relative frequency with which the main copula variants occurred in the DC subcategories, allowing researchers to gauge what the effects of including

Table 2: "Don't Count" Types in 1991 JC Data: Copula & Auxiliary Variants

"Don't Count" type	Ø	a	de	be	hav	stan/sie	Frequency
Highlighter/cleft (HI)	2	24	17				43
No overt subject (NS)	3	17					20
Existential sentence (ES)			7	3			10
Clause final (CF)			2			9	11
Non-Finites (NF)	4		1	13			18
Unclear cases (UN)		2					2
Other (OT)	2		1			1	4
TOTAL, ALL DC types	11	43	1	40	3	10	108

one or more of these "Don't Count" categories in the main analysis might be.

It should be emphasized before moving on to the quantitative analysis of the "Count" tokens that the "Don't Count" cases, although specially treated and set aside because they show less variability, are nevertheless an integral part of the description of the copula and auxiliary in Jamaica.

3. Copula Variability in the "Count" Cases

We come now to the "Count" tokens of the copula in Jack and Gertrude Harris' corpus, exemplified in Table 3, and quantified by following environment in Table 4. Unlike the case in AAVE, "Count" tokens of the copula include past tense (*waz*, *wor*) and first person singular present tense (*am*, *'m*) tokens, where zero is a real possibility, as it is elsewhere in the Caribbean (see Rickford and Blake 1990).⁴ We will discuss the results for each of the following environments in turn.

Although Bailey (1966: 32) identified *a* as the creole equating copula with a nominal predicate, as in *mi a big uman*, only three cases in the corpus (6%) involved nominal *a*. However, the principal alternative to *a* is not zero, but inflected or conjugated *be*, as in *wen shiiz a bieb* and *mi dali woz a hefti trang man*. To some extent Bailey (1966) was aware of this, for she lists *iz* alongside *da* as a morpheme variant of equative *a* (page 139). The frequency of zero copula in Jack and Gertrude Harris's corpus (4%) is much lower than in the Baba Rowe corpus (22% in Holm 1984, 28% in Rickford 1996),⁵ and in most studies of AAVE (where percentages in the twenties and thirties are most common). But it is comparable to the very low percentages and/or feature weights for nominal copula absence reported for Barbados (.08 in Rickford and Blake 1990, .07 in Rickford 1992) and Trinidad (1% in Winford 1992), and

Table 3: "Count" Copulas in 1991 JC Data: Examples of Variants by Following Grammatical Environment

Environment	Examples
—NP	<i>wen in dai 1930, mi a likl bwai</i> "When he died in 1930, I was a little boy" [J 2-479]; <i>wen shiz a beeb</i> "When she was a baby" [G3-231]
—Loc	<i>it de di nart kuos ... it Ø at—at nart kuos</i> "It is at the north coast" [J 3-319-2(0)]; <i>E. woz hier</i> "E. was here" [G3-142]
—Adj	<i>im Ø taal</i> "He is tall" [J2-199]; <i>tinggz waz raiyal chiip</i> "things were very cheap" [J2-519]; <i>a Ø glad</i> "I am glad" [G3-051]
—V(ed)	<i>mi daata E. Ø ded an gaan</i> "My daughter E is dead and gone" [J3-368]; <i>no chrash Ø kot</i> "No trash was cut" [J2-346]; <i>wi Ø neva fraikn</i> "we were never frightened (afraid)" [G3-130]; <i>a duon nuo if di pipi dem did fraikn</i> "I don't know if those people were frightened (afraid)" [G3-156]; <i>ai waz barn in seent ilizobet</i> "I was born in St. Elizabeth" [G2-379]
—V+in	<i>in wat wie dem Ø livin</i> "how they are living" [J2-451]; <i>die ar livin a brutalitii laif</i> "they are living a life of brutality" [J2-444]; <i>wat unu Ø seyin</i> "What you-all are saying" [G3-091]
—V (continuative)	<i>pipi a kil wan anado</i> "People are killing each other" [J2-281]; <i>shi a waak, yu nuo</i> "She was walking, you know" [G3-149]
—gwin (tu) V	<i>dem Ø gwin chrail fi let go</i> "they are going to try to let go" [J2-243]; <i>yu Ø gwin go in di jua</i> "You are going to go in the dew" [G3-067]
—go V6	<i>shi a go kyari mii</i> "she is going to carry me" [J2-125]; <i>laika dem a go ded</i> "as though they are going to die" [G3-308]

[J=Jack Harris; G=Gertrude Harris; #s in parentheses = tape and counter # of example]

dramatizes the contrast between the copula-demanding nominal environments and the copula-eschewing adjectival and verbal environments.

For *locative* complements, Bailey (p. 33) specified the creole locating verb *de*, and this occurs in our corpus about a third of the time (31%). However, zero occurs almost as often (28%) — the *de* and *Ø* variants following on the heels of each other at one point in Jack's transcript (*it de di nart kuos ... it Ø at—at nart kuos* — see Table 3) — and inflected *be* (as in *E. woz hier*) occurs slightly more often than either of these variants (38%). One observation which occurred to me while doing the analysis was that the presence of a locative preposition in the

Table 4: "Count" Copula Tokens in 1991 JC Data: Relative Frequency of Variants by Following Grammatical Environment (n=286)

Variant	—NP	—Loc	—Adj	—V(ed)	—V+in	V(cont.)	—gwin V	—go V
	n=48	n=32	n=57	n=20	n=43	n=68	n=14	n=4
Ø	4%	28%	60%	80%	58%	2%	93%	
<i>abina</i>	6%	31%		5%	2%	99%		100%
<i>de</i>	90%	38%	30%	10%	37%	1%		
<i>bin/did</i>		3%	10%	5%	2%		7%	

[*be* includes conjugated/inflected forms, present and past: *ami'm*, *it/z*, *ari'r*, *waz*, *wor*]

complement seemed to favor *Ø* over *de*. However, as I discovered later, Bailey (1966) had anticipated me, providing (pp. 82-83) for the optional deletion of *de* when a locative preposition follows. The extent to which this is a regular constraint (i.e. whether locative complements with prepositions favor zero more than locative complements like "home" or "here" without prepositions) is worth investigating more generally, with bigger corpora and in other varieties besides JC.

With respect to **adjectives**, Bailey (1966: 146) had noted that "The creole adjective, like the verb, predicates without use of a copula," as in *im Ø taal* and *a Ø glad*. This was one of her nine "principal differences between Jamaican Creole and English Syntax." But Bailey herself (pp. 42-43) identified several respects in which Jamaican adjectives were distinguished from verbs, including the fact that they co-occur with intensifiers like *so*. And although Jack and Gertrude's data certainly do show the "High Adj" pattern of copula absence which Holm (1984), Poplack and Sankoff (1987) and others treated as the trade mark of creole copula distributions, it is notable that adjectives occur with inflected *be* as in *tinggz woz raiyal chiip* 31% of the time in the new JC corpus. The fact that adjectival copula absence is markedly higher than locative copula absence both in Jack and Gertrude's 1991 corpus (60% vs. 28%) and in Baba Rowe's 1960 corpus (81% vs. 18%) suggests that the distinction might be quite robust in Jamaica. But it should not be taken as a universal creole pattern, since Trinidadian data (Winford 1992) and at least one set of Barbadian data (Rickford and Blake 1990) show us the reverse relationship, and there is lots of evidence (see Rickford et al 1991; Rickford 1996: 190) that the relative ordering of adjectival and locative is variable and tenuous at best, for reasons that we do not yet fully understand, although the tenacity of creole *de* appears to play a role.

I won't say much about the **stative** —V(ED) predicates, as in *no chrash Ø kot* or *ai waz barn*, which come next in Tables 3 and 4. Bailey (1966: 81) called

the passivized subtypes adjectivized verbs, and since they pattern conceptually and quantitatively with the adjectives, most researchers include them with adjectives in copula analyses. I do the same in this paper, collapsing them with the *Adj* category in Table 6.

The next two categories in Tables 3 and 4, *__V+IN* and *__V (continuative)*, are, as I argued in Rickford and Blake (1990) and Rickford (1996), critical to distinguish, as are the final two categories, *__GWAIN* (TO) *V [=GOING TO V]* and *__GO V*. The continuative verb stem and the *go+Verb* futures occur categorically with continuative *a* or *bin* (see Table 4), as in *piupl a kil wan anado* and *shii a go kyari mii*, while the *V+in* and *gwain V* futures virtually never do.⁶ The sole exception is a single instance of "Brudda Anansi a fishin," and the exception is more apparent than real, since *fishin* is arguably the verb stem.⁷ Failure to separate *__V+in* from *__V(continuative)*; and *__gwain V* from progressive *__go V* is a shortcoming of Holm's (1984) analysis of DeCamp's Baba Rowe data set, and the principal reason why a following *__Verb(+in)* and *__gonna (=gwain)* seem to lead to reduced frequencies of copula absence, as in Figure 1. Table 5 and Figure 2 show what happened when the *__V+in* and *__gwain V* categories in DeCamp's Baba Rowe data were appropriately reanalyzed in Rickford (1996).⁸ the Jamaican pattern of copula absence by following grammatical environment turned out to be much more similar to that of AAVE, lending further weight to the hypothesis that AAVE may have been derived from or influenced by a creole typologically similar to JC.

Table 5: *Copula Variants by Following Grammatical Environment in JC Texts of Decamp (1960), as Reanalyzed in Rickford 1996 (n = 236)*

Variant	<i>__NP</i> n=68	<i>__Loc</i> n=40	<i>__Adj</i> n=82	<i>__V+in</i> n=21	<i>__Gwain V</i> n=25
Ø	28% [18%] ⁴	18%	79%	86%	100%
a	18%		1%		
de		65%		5%	
be	54%	18%	18%	9%	

[Note: *__Adj* includes *__V(ed)*; *__V+in* excludes *__V(cont)*; *__Gwain V* excludes *__go V*]

Figure 3 adds in the 1991 data from Jack and Gertrude Harris, using the relative frequencies shown in Table 6.⁹ Although copula absence with *__Verb+in* shows a slight decline from the level set by *__Adjective* (from 65% to 58%), the overall pattern is decidedly similar to that of the Jamaican 1960 data and the NYC and

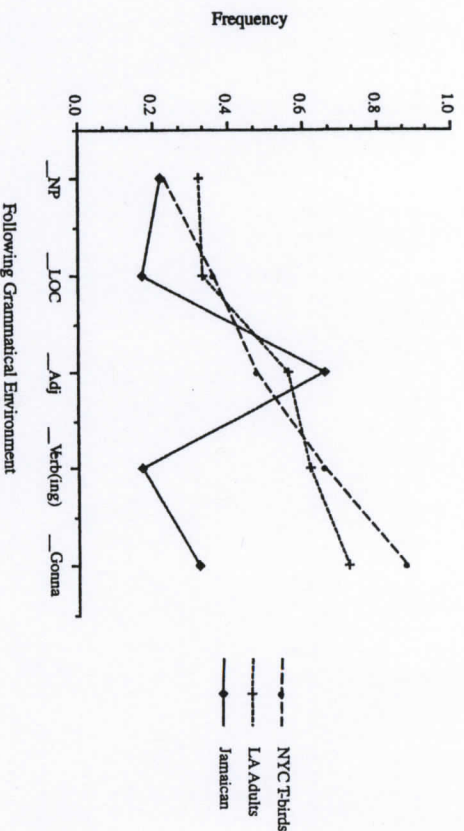


Figure 1: *Copula Absence in 3 African American Dialects, with JC Data from Texts in Decamp (1960) as Originally Analyzed by Holm (1984)*

Table 6: *Copula Variants in 1991 JC Data by Following Grammatical Environment, Using Categories as in Table 5 (n=239)*

Variant	<i>__NP</i> n=48	<i>__Loc</i> n=32	<i>__Adj</i> n=77	<i>__V+in</i> n=68	<i>__Gwain V</i> n=14
Ø	4%	28%	65%	58%	93%
a	6%		1%	2%	
de		31%			
be	90%	38%	25%	37%	7%
ben/did		3%	9%	2%	

[Note: *__Adj* includes *__V(ed)*; *__V+in* excludes *__V(cont)*; *__Gwain V* excludes *__go V*]

LA data, further reinforcing the validity of the creole hypothesis, especially in the light of comparable quantitative data from Trinidad (Winford 1992) and Barbados (Rickford and Blake 1990; Blake 1997b).¹⁰

4. Other Constraints

In an attempt to explore the full range of constraints on copula absence in JC, I coded the 1991 data for a variety of other factors besides following grammatical

Table 7: Constraints on Copula Absence (\emptyset Variant) in 1991 JC Data, as Analyzed by Variable Rule (Varbrul) Program

Input: .59	Following Grammatical environment	Tense	Person of Subject (not selected*)
	—Gwain V	Present	.70 3rd sing.
	—Adj	Past	.30 2nd & plural
	—V+in		1st sing. .50
	—Loc		.46
	[—NP		.00]

[Note: *Person of subject was not selected as significant by the regression (step-up/step-down) routine of the Variable rule program. Other factors coded in data but not analyzed for this particular variable rule run are: Preceding and Following phonological environment, Speaker (Jack vs. Gertrude) and Subject type (pronoun vs noun phrase).]

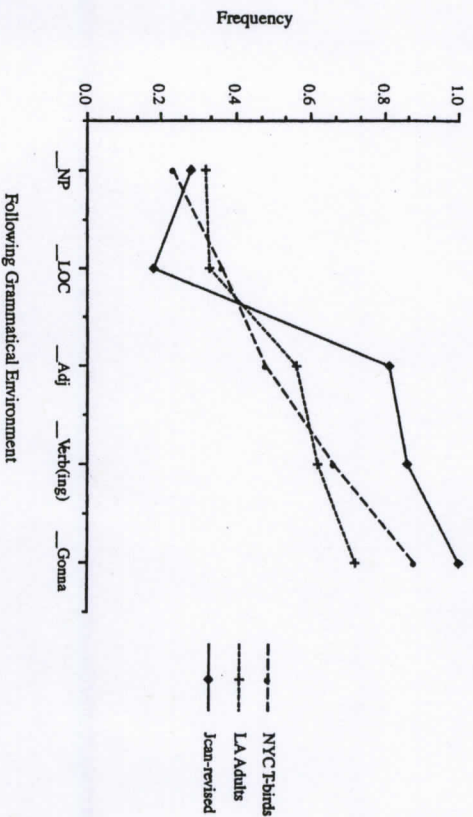


Figure 2: Copula Absence in 3 African American Dialects, with JC Data from Texts in Decamp (1960) as Reanalyzed by Rickford (1996)

environment and did two variable rule (VARBRUL) runs. In the first analysis, not reported here, Jack Harris was shown to favor zero over inflected *be* much more than his wife Gertrude, who tended to talk "up" more than he did; the difference between pronominal and Noun Phrase subjects also appeared to be insignificant. In the second variable rule analysis, the results of which are shown

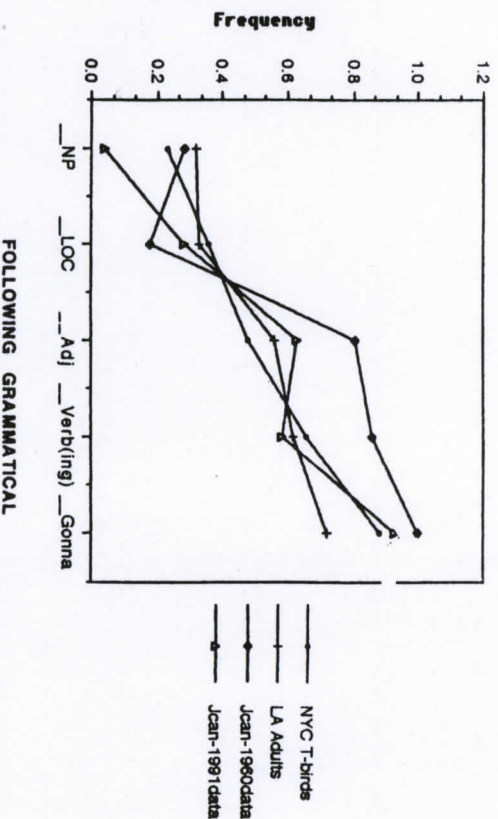


Figure 3: Copula Absence in 4 African American Dialects, Including 1991 JC Data From Table 6

in Table 7, following grammatical environment was selected as the most significant constraint on copula absence, but tense was also selected (present tense contexts more favorable to zero than past, somewhat as in AAVE). However, the person of the subject — whether the form to be deleted or inserted is *is*, *are* or *am* — was not found to be significant. Coded, but still to be analyzed, is the effect of the preceding and following phonological environment. Partly because of the presence of creole copula/auxiliaries like *de*, *a* and *bin/did* in the data, phonological conditioning is likely to be irrelevant, and in any case different from the way it is in AAVE.

5. Summary and conclusion

New data from the Jamaican Creole continuum, from interviews with Jack and Gertrude Harris conducted in 1991, analyzed with the categories and counting procedures established in Rickford (1996), essentially replicate the patterning of copula absence by following grammatical environment which was found in Decamp's (1960) JC data set from Baba Rowe, with —Gwain/Gonna V most

favorable, __Adj fairly high, and __NP and __Loc least favorable. The parallelism between the zero copula patterning in these JC data sets and in AAVE argues in favor of creole influences in the history of this latter dialect. The fact that zero is also favored in present over past copula contexts also makes JC parallel to the other mesolectal Caribbean creole English varieties which have been analyzed to date. Although quantitative (including variable rule) analyses of copula variability in the Caribbean are much rarer than similar analyses of AAVE, their number is growing, and virtually every such analysis reinforces the sense that there is a typological and possible historical/genetic relationship (see Rickford (1997) between them.

Notes

1. This is a revised version of a paper originally presented at the American Anthropological Association meeting in Chicago in 1991. My fieldwork in Jamaica (also in 1991) was facilitated by Dr. Velma Pollard (School of Education, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica), her sister Erna Brodber (writer and sociologist, also in Jamaica), and the latter's research assistant, Jennifer Thomas. It is a pleasure to thank them — along with Angela Rickford and Hilary Jones, who helped with the preparation of this paper — while absolving them of responsibility for the data or their analysis.
2. Compare on this point Rickford (1987: 175), referring to Guyanese Creole English: "In the case of line 772 (*wii dee in de — a JRI/NGK*, with the complement capitalized), deletion of the underlying subject of the second clause, by identity with the subject of the first clause, is obligatory (**wii dee in de WII A JRI/NGK* is ungrammatical). And though the line contains an aspect (*not* tense) marker, this is merely the basilectal equivalent of the continuative "ing" complementizer that English has in comparable constructions ..."
3. As noted in Rickford (1987: 89), the absence of non-finite *be* before adjectives (which are more verb-like in the creoles than in AAVE) is attested both diachronically and synchronically in Guyanese Creole, and it may be one reason why *be* does not emerge as an independent habitual marker (after the deletion of habitual *does* in *does (be)* structures) in the Caribbean varieties while this is a possible historical derivation in AAVE and Gullah (see Rickford 1980).
4. Note that "copula absence" and "zero copula" in the case of JC and similar creole data refer not only to the absence of inflected forms of *be*, but also to the absence of creole copula variants like *de*, *a*, *bin* and *bina*.
5. Although the percentage of zero with nominal predicates in Baba Rowe's corpus is reported as 28% in Table 3 and Figures 1 and 2 of Rickford (1996) — reprinted below as Tables 5 and Figures 1 and 2 — I noted there (p. 364) that almost half of the zero copula tokens involve *niem*, as in *an mi Ø niem andro*, which could either be nominal ("And my name is Andrew") or as verbal, as an instance of the special naming verb recognized by Bailey 1966 ("And I am named Andrew"). As I concluded (*ibid.*), "If ... they were removed from the NP pool (as I now think they should be), the relative frequency of zero copula before __NP would drop from 28% (19/68) to 18% (11/60), a figure even lower than Holm's [22%]."
6. The *a* + Verb construction — *piipl a kil* — is after all, the basilectal equivalent of mesolectal

Ø/be Verb+in — *piipl Ø/ar kilin* for rendering continuatives or progressives, and the basilectal progressive future is just a special case of this *a*+Verb construction — *shii a go kyari mii = shii Ø/iz gowin tu/gwain kyari mii*. Note that non-progressive futures, e.g. *mi go tel dem* 'I will tell them' are excluded from the data count or analysis since they don't vary directly with copula/auxiliary forms.

7. Compare "to courtin," and "to fishen" for the English verbs "court" and "fish" respectively, and the progressive form *fishenin*, in Guyanese Creole at least.
8. Table 5 corrects a small error in Table 6 of Rickford 1996, where the relative frequency of *be* in the __Ving column is listed as 2% instead of 9% (the correct figure).
9. Note that Table 6.16 in Rickford (1998) lists the relative frequency of zero copula for __Adj in the 1991 JC data set as 59% instead of 65%, the correct figure depicted in Table 6.
10. Blake (1997b: 133, 146) analyzes her Barbadian present tense and past tense copula variants separately, with the following results for copula absence (provided as VARBRUL probabilities or feature weights):
Present tense: __NP .16, __Adj .67, __Loc .75, __V+ing .76, __Gonna 1.00
Past tense: __NP .26, __Adj .65, __Loc .41, __V+ing .64, __Gonna .86

Note that while __Loc is more favorable to copula absence than __Adj in the present tense, as in previous analyses of zero copula in Barbadian (Rickford and Blake 1990; Rickford 1992) and Trinidadian (Winford 1992), __Adj is more favorable than __Loc in the past tense, as in all JC data sets analyzed to date.

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Accountability in Descriptions of Creoles

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1. Introduction

This paper is largely inspired by Labov's (1972: 72) "principle of accountability," which exhorts linguists to "report values for every case where the variable element occurs in the relevant environments as we have defined them." This statement follows those in which he explains what counts as a "linguistic variable:"

The correct analysis of the linguistic variable is the most important step in sociolinguistic investigation. We want to isolate the largest homogeneous class in which all subclasses vary in the same way. If we fail to do this, and throw together invariant subclasses, high-frequency, and low-frequency subclasses, our views of sociolinguistic structures will be blurred. The regular pattern of the variable may be submerged by a large number of irregular cases — or even elements varying in a reverse direction. Once we have established this linguistic definition of the variable, we are in a position to follow the important principle of accountability (...)

Labov seems concerned here mostly with *justifying* why items that alternate with each other, for instance, the full copula, the contracted copula, and absence of the copula before nonverbal predicative elements, should be lumped together as one "variable." He is joined in this concern by Rickford (1986: 41), who characterizes the principle of accountability as a requirement to "report[...] the number of occurrences of a feature out of the total number of cases in which it could have occurred."

In this essay, I focus on the justification aspect of the principle of accountability, perhaps in ways that hard-core variationists will find diverging from Labov's but which I nonetheless consider relevant to creole linguistics. I discuss some common assumptions about creoles and how they have negatively influenced some hypotheses about these new vernaculars. I also propose ways in