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# ETHNICITY AS A SOCIOLINGUISTIC BOUNDARY

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**D**ESPITE THE FLOOD OF RESEARCH on Vernacular Black English (VBE) beginning in the 1960s, it is fair to say that American sociolinguistics has made less progress in understanding the role of ethnicity as a sociolinguistic boundary than it has in understanding other social variables like socioeconomic status and sex or gender. In part this is because more work on VBE has been devoted to fine-tuning the description of its phonological and grammatical features than to exploring the social and linguistic relations between neighboring black and white speakers.

One result of this limited progress is that positions on the issue of black-white speech relationships in the United States remained stalemated for a long time, one group of linguists insisting that the ethnic differences are merely regional patterns which disappear when geography and social class are held constant, and the other group asserting that the ethnic differences are more intractable. (See Davis 1983, Dillard 1972, Fasold 1981, Wolfram 1974, and Wolfram and Clarke 1971 for statements and summaries of these positions.) Another is that the investigation of this issue has neither benefitted sufficiently from, nor contributed sufficiently to, more general discussions of the relationship between language and ethnic identity (Fishman 1977, Giles 1979), or the role of social contact in linguistic convergence (Weinreich 1953).

More recently, however, there have been encouraging signs of change. Quantitative studies of Southern white speech communities have begun to appear (Wolfram 1974, Feagin 1979), as have comparisons of contiguous black and white communities in the rural South (Nichols 1983, and several papers in Montgomery and Bailey 1985, including those by Bailey and Bassett, Butters and Nix, Dorrill, and Nichols). At the same time, detailed investigations of black-white contact and linguistic diffusion in urban Northern neighborhoods have been undertaken (Ash and Myhill 1983, Hatala 1976, Labov 1984), these studies, like the preceding ones, involving quantitative analysis of specific phonological and grammatical features based on data recorded within the speech community. The work of Gumperz (1982), Heath (1983), and Michaels (1981) has also made novel contributions to our understanding of black-white speech relationships, but at the level of discourse patterns and ways of speaking rather than individual grammatical features.

This paper has been written in the spirit of this emerging tradition. It deals with the language of one black and one white speaker of comparable social status who, at the time they were recorded, had spent virtually all their lives in the same isolated South Carolina community. As it turns out, these speakers differ in some fundamental grammatical respects, and before examining possible explanations, we will consider other evidence of contact and diffusion between American blacks and whites and between other ethnic groups elsewhere.

#### A SEA ISLAND EXAMPLE: MRS. QUEEN AND MR. KING

The individuals whose speech we will compare in this section are both from one of the Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia. As a group, these islands are famous as the home of Gullah or Sea Island Creole (Gonzales 1922, Turner 1949, Cunningham 1970, Nichòs 1976, Jones-Jackson 1978), and for other distinctive features of Afro-American history and culture (Jackson et al. 1974). The island on which Mrs. Queen and Mr. King lived (the names are pseudonyms) is off the coast of South Carolina. No bridge connects it to the mainland. The approximately one hundred people who live there travel by boat to Bluffton, South Carolina or Savannah, Georgia, for grocery shopping, medical attention, and so on.

At eighty-four, Mrs. Queen was the oldest resident of the island when I tape-recorded her at her home in 1970, in a sociolinguistic interview lasting over an hour and eliciting considerable casual or spontaneous speech. As I have noted in Rickford (1985), it would be inappropriate to apply multi-index scales of social stratification designed for urban communities to this isolated island community, but on scales of this type, Mrs. Queen would probably rank fairly low. Like many of the residents on the island, she shucked oysters in the local oyster factory until it was closed down by pollution of the coastal waters from industries in Savannah, and, like others, she depended for subsistence on the fish she caught, the poultry and cattle she raised, and the vegetables she grew. Growing up at a time when every hand in the family was needed at harvest time, she was not given the opportunity to go beyond third grade in elementary school:

Da's it. I stop right dey. . . . I had to go on de fa'm, go to wo'k an' he'p to make a livin.

However, her training and long years of service as a midwife, her active participation in the island's church and burial society, and her popularity with local and visiting whites gave her a higher-than-average social status compared with other blacks on the island.

Mr. King was eighty-one years old when I interviewed him at his home in 1981. A white man born in Bluffton, South Carolina, he was brought over to the island at the age of two. He couldn't remember for sure how far he'd managed to go in school, but since his account of his school days matches Mrs. Queen's own so closely, it is doubtful whether he got any further than she did:

I don' know what grade I did finish complete. Because, dem days, de olda chi'ren had to he'p raise de younga ones. . . . I'd go to school maybe a week an den have to be put in de fiel'to wo'k bout two weeks an—time you got back to school an got interested in it an caught up wid de odda chi'ren . . . you was outa school again to go back in de fiel'. Da's de way I wen'to school. I come up ha'd, son.

Like some of the men on the island (blacks and whites included), he was fortunate to get a job on the dredges which used to ply the coastal waterways to keep the channels open. The work was hard ("Sometimes you stay out in de ma'sh like a pig in de pen. It was a terrible life, I tell you") but Mr. King, with more doors open to him than the average black Sea Islander, gradually worked his way up the ladder:

Sta'ted at de bottom. I was just a extra man aroun de engine room. Den I got to be an oila, an I was an oila fuh—fuh yea's. An den I got to be a head oila. . . . But I finally got promoted to third assistant engineer. An dat—da's de bigges' money I ever made. Dat was one hundred an twenty dolla's a mont on board. Dat was big money den.

Despite the fact that he held this relatively good job for a while, Mr. King, the son of a farmer who raised cows for sale, supplemented his income with subsistence farming and fishing. His reference (above) to having to catch up with "de odda chi'ren" suggests that he was less privileged than other white children (no blacks were in the class) on the island. His more privileged classmates went to school all year and undoubtedly went further than he did, finding more lucrative occupations in Southern cities on the mainland. Even today, when there are only a handful of whites on the island, Mr. King does not live close to the other whites, and his is the only home surrounded by black families.

In all the preceding respects, Mr. King and Mrs. Queen's socioeconomic backgrounds are more nearly comparable than those of almost any black/white pair of individuals on the island.<sup>1</sup> They are also generally respected on account of their age and well-liked on account of their geniality. And since they both seem to have had above-average frequency of contact with members of the other race, one would expect that—other things being equal—their speech would show the effects of mutual linguistic influence and diffusion across ethnic lines. Mr. King's speech, in particular, had always struck me, impressionistically, as more nonstand-

ard and Gullah-like than that of other local whites. And I was delighted at the opportunity to record him in 1981, believing that careful analysis would confirm my prior subjective impression.

**PHONOLOGY.** With respect to phonological features, this impression was largely confirmed. As the orthography of the preceding quotation suggests, both speakers have voiced dental stops rather than interdental fricatives in word-initial position (/ðɪs/ 'this'), the vocalization or deletion of postvocalic /r/ and /l/ (/we/ 'where', /ɔraɪt/ 'allright'), and the simplification of word-final consonant clusters (/faɪn/ 'find', /keɪp/ 'kept'). In both speakers these nonstandard features—which Fasold (1981, 167) regards as common in both black and white speech, particularly in the South—were categorical or nearly so, occurring eighty percent of the time or more.

Mr. King and Mrs. Queen also shared the variable realization of other phonological features which are perhaps more unique to the Sea Island or coastal Carolina area, and which have striking parallels in the Caribbean English creoles. These include the realization of *can't* as /kja:n/—with palatalization of the velar consonant before /a/ and the negation signalled by a combination of vowel length and pitch (see Allsopp 1972, Carter 1983); the occasional affrication of /tr/ sequences (/tʃrʌt/ '[in] truth'); the variable laxing of open-syllable vowels in the personal pronouns and other high-frequency function words (/di/ 'they', /tu/ 'to, on, at'—see Rickford 1979); the production of *here* as /je/, /jɛ/, and /jə/; and the occasional deletion of the initial dental in *dem*, *dat* and a few other function words. A major element in the Gullah quality of Mr. King's speech is undoubtedly the distinctive intonation and other prosodic features which he appears to share with black Sea Islanders. (See Turner 1949, 249–53.) One of the few respects in which Mr. King seems phonologically different from Mrs. Queen is in his use of a more rounded vowel in the realization of words with *ar* sequences in standard English, so that he pronounces *parking* as [pɑ:kɪn] or [pɔ:kɪn] where she would more typically say [pɑ:kɪn]. In many other respects, however, he sounds like a black Sea Islander; one West Indian overhearing his recording even wondered whether he was a fellow West Indian.

**MORPHOSYNTAX.** When we turn from phonology to morphosyntax, the similarities between Mr. King and Mrs. Queen evaporate. This can be seen clearly by comparing their patterns with respect to plural formation and the marking of the passive.

The three primary realizations of semantically plural nouns which we have to consider are the following:

1. *Noun##dem*, as in *de masa dem*.<sup>2</sup> This is the system found in many

creoles when no plural numeral or quantifier accompanies the noun (Alleyne 1980, Dijkhoff 1982) and a definite article or possessive precedes (Mufwene 1984), although it should be noted that these syntactic restrictions keep the relative frequency of this type low—less than twenty per cent—even among the most basilectal creole speakers (Rickford 1985).

2. *Noun#Ø* as in *dey raise hog* or *sixty cent*. This is the basic creole system when the noun is nonspecific, indefinite, or generic in reference, or where it is specific in reference but preceded by a plural numeral, plural quantifier, or plural deictic/demonstrative modifier (Alleyne 1980, 100–1; Bickerton 1981, Dijkhoff 1982, Mufwene 1984). As noted in Rickford (1985), morphologically unmarked plurals have also been reported for non-creole English dialects, especially where nouns of measure are concerned, and when preceded by a plural cardinal number (McDavid 1972, 268; Wright 1905, 263).

3. *Noun#s* as in *the oysters*.<sup>3</sup> This is, of course, the standard English system for plural individuated or count nouns (Mufwene 1981), approximated if not exactly followed by many English dialects. Note that the instances of *s* tabulated below include only the regular or weak nouns (*cats, dogs, roses*), but data on plural marking in the irregular or strong nouns (*mice, feet*, and so on) will also be considered.

TABLE I  
Plural Formation in the Speech of Two Sea Islanders

Speaker	Noun ## dem	Noun#Ø	Noun#s
Mrs. Queen (n = 128)	.01	.76	.23
Mr. King (n = 114)	.00	.06	.94

The relative frequency of these types in the recorded speech of Mrs. Queen and Mr. King is indicated in table I. Clearly, Mrs. Queen and Mr. King are quite different where plural formation is concerned. The vast majority of her semantically plural nouns are morphologically unmarked and in this respect creole-like, while virtually all of his are marked with *-s*, approximating the standard English ideal. I had hypothesized at first that Mrs. Queen's variation between *Ø* and *-s* might be subject to the same constraints that govern the choice between *Ø* and post nominal *dem* in the ideal creole system outlined above. On the basis of individual examples like the following, this would certainly seem to be the case:

I got two bruddaØ. [Ø after plural numeral]

TingØ change. [Ø where nonspecific; here equivalent to 'Things have changed']

We had jus' finish buyin' de tings fuh de weddin. [-s where creole postnominal *dem* is possible]

But one can also locate individual counterexamples:

My mudda had . . . five girls and three boys. [-s with a preceding plural numeral, where  $\emptyset$  would be expected]

The only way to determine what is really going on is to code every realization of plural -s or  $\emptyset$  according to the hypothesized constraints and do a quantitative, multivariate analysis. I did this for Mrs. Queen's data, using a recent logistic version of the variable rule computer program designed by David Sankoff, and the results indicated that the primary constraints were not semantic or syntactic, but phonological.<sup>4</sup> The single most powerful constraint was whether the immediately following segment was a vowel (favoring -s) or a consonant or pause (disfavoring -s).<sup>5</sup>

Mrs. Queen's variation between -s and  $\emptyset$  may not be governed by the subtle creole semantic/syntactic factors which one might have expected or hoped to find, but it still differs from Mr. King's variation between these alternatives, which is not subject to the same phonological conditioning. For Mr. King, -s absence is nonexistent (that is, the suffix was present in all forty-five instances) in his sample before a consonant—precisely where we would expect it to be highest (i.e., where we would expect the least -s).<sup>6</sup> Before a vowel or pause, Mr. King deleted -s ten percent of the time (seven of sixty-nine instances).

The difference between the grammars of Mrs. Queen and Mr. King looms even larger when we consider their means of passive formation. We will restrict our attention here to sentences which meet the commonly accepted definition of the passive as a construction in which "the grammatical subject is typically the recipient or 'goal' of the action denoted by the verb" (Crystal 1980, 259).<sup>7</sup> The three primary types which we have to consider here are these:

1. Unmarked Passives. This is the classic creole type. The passive relation between the surface subject and a transitive verb is not overtly signalled (by the presence of *be V + en* and/or an agent phrase), but must be semantically inferred from the fact that the grammatical or surface subject is not a possible agent or feasible subject of the action denoted by the verb and must therefore be the deep structure object or theme (Allsopp 1983, 153). The clearest and most common examples involve inanimate surface subjects with transitive verbs which subcategorize for animate or human agents, as in Mrs. Queen's: *Dis house  $\emptyset$  build since I married*. The agent is rarely if ever expressed in passives of this type, and in this respect they are like truncated *be* or *get* passives.<sup>8</sup>

TABLE 2  
Passives in the Speech of Two Sea Islanders

<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Unmarked Passives</i>	<i>Get Passives</i>	<i>Be Passives</i>
Mrs. Queen (n = 17)	.71	.23	.06
Mr. King (n = 11)	.00	.36	.64

2. *Get* Passives. This type, involving inflected forms of *get V + en*, is common in colloquial English (see Feagin 1979), especially where the active involvement of the surface subject in the event referred to by the verb is implied (Lakoff 1971): *He got arrested to test the law*. In Guyanese and other English creoles, it is commonest with human subjects, with both *get* and the main verb uninflected: *i get lik dong* 'He was knocked down' (Bickerton 1971, 479).

3. *Be* Passives. This is, of course, the basic modern English type, involving inflected forms of *be V + en*, as in Mr. King's example: *A lot o' dis lan' on dis islan' is bein' sold fuh taxes*. Mrs. Queen's single example of this type occurs in the following dialogue:

- JRR*: Who leave . . . de lan dat dey use fuh de cemetery . . . ? Who lan dat was?  
*Mrs. Queen*: Dat was bought.  
*JRR*: By de—?  
*Mrs. Queen*: By de people o' de islan.

In five subsequent references to this same event within the next minute, she uses corresponding active forms instead ("de people bought dat"). The relative frequency of these various kinds of passive in the recorded speech of Mrs. Queen and Mr. King is shown in table 2. Although both speakers use the *get* passive to a limited extent, they differ sharply in their usage of the other subcategories. The unmarked creole passives are Mrs. Queen's primary type, but they are completely absent from the speech of Mr. King. The standard English *be* passives are Mr. King's primary type, but Mrs. Queen uses only one such example.

#### BLACK-WHITE SPEECH DIFFERENCES IN OTHER STUDIES

We have seen that Mrs. Queen and Mr. King are similar with respect to phonological features, but different with respect to morphosyntactic ones. In this section we will review the findings of other studies of the English of blacks and whites in the USA, beginning with those which focus, like ours, on coastal South Carolina.

Stewart's (1974) black-white comparisons are based on textual evidence



from earlier periods rather than tape recordings of present-day speech, but they are valuable nonetheless. One of his key points was that “in those areas in which the whites were greatly outnumbered by the Negroes, there is ample evidence that they acquired creole English (usually in childhood) and used it habitually with their slaves. In fact, there is anecdotal evidence that whites in some places actually used creole English with each other as well” (16). He gives two examples from coastal South Carolinian (Gullah) territory in support of this claim, one of them including this piece of dialogue between two whites (Heyward 1937, 162–63; Stewart’s translations appear in square brackets):

“My Lawd, Boss,” she exclaimed, “how oonuh know dat? Pa dead too long!” [How do you know that? Father has been dead for a very long time.]

Replying in her own Gullah dialect, I said, “Gal, enty you favor yo’pa? Enty you en him all-two stan’ same fashi’n?” [Girl, don’t your resemble your father? Don’t you and he both have the same looks?]

This is a striking indication of the extent to which some whites acquired some of the features of the Gullah speech native to black Carolinians on the coast. But the acquisition was most marked with respect to lexical and phonological features. Stewart notes subsequently (25) that while “whites were implicated along with Negroes in the establishment and maintenance of pidgin and creole forms of English, both in Africa and the New World,” their varieties were generally not STRUCTURALLY identical. For instance, where West Africans would distinguish between *I get book* (with nonspecific reference, and therefore zero article) and *I get one book* (with indefinite but specific reference, therefore accompanied by the article *one*), whites might merge these into *I get one book*, equating *one* semantically with the English indefinite article.<sup>9</sup> Stewart argued that “there must always have been ‘racial’ dialects” like these, “the product of the fact that virtually all the whites were also fluent speakers of European English, while some of the Negroes were native speakers of African languages.”

Nichols (1983), in a study of neighboring black and white communities with comparable socioeconomic characteristics in coastal South Carolina, found that there was a major difference between them with respect to pronominal usage. While both groups used *it* as neuter subject and object at least some of the time, “The nonstandard pronoun forms used by the black community are *ee* in subject position, for most black speakers, and *um* in object position. The nonstandard forms for the white community are *hit* in subject position and sometimes in object position” (206). The only area of convergence between the two communities was represented by a subgroup of younger persons who used the standard variant *it* cat-

egorically both as subject and object. To the extent that speakers retained vernacular, nonstandard forms, black-white differences persisted.

In earlier studies, Nichols found other morpho-lexical and morpho-syntactic differences between these two communities: in tense-marking of strong verbs, in their use of expletive *there*, and in their use of the locative prepositions *at* and *to*. (See Nichols 1983, 213, for references.) On the whole, she attributes the synchronic differences to the retention of features of an older northern British dialect within the white community. Although both groups appear to be increasing their use of standard English forms in response to a number of external forces (decreased isolation, increased education, tourism, and so on), she finds little diffusion of vernacular features across ethnic lines.

Wolfram (1974) compared the tape-recorded speech of whites in rural Franklin county, Mississippi with conventional descriptions of northern Vernacular Black English, and found both similarities and differences. The whites didn't use the distinctive distributive or habitual *be* of VBE at all, although they did have some instances of *be* which seemed to be derivable from the deletion of an underlying *will* or *would*. The whites showed a high frequency of *are*-deletion, comparable to that reported for VBE: 64.2 percent overall in a sample of thirty-three speakers (but varying according to socioeconomic status and linguistic environment). With respect to *is*-deletion, however, the whites were further from VBE norms. Most speakers (thirty out of forty-five) had no *is*-deletion at all; the others did show some *is*-deletion, but at a somewhat lower frequency than normally reported for northern VBE: 14.6 percent among the fifteen white deleters, compared with 17 percent and 37 percent respectively for upper and lower working-class black speakers in Detroit (Wolfram 1969, 174).<sup>10</sup>

Wolfram concludes that VBE is a decreolized variety, with copula deletion and the use of distributive *be* among blacks reflecting the influence of an earlier creole. He suggests that the whites of Franklin county show selective rather than full assimilation of black features because of structural factors. Assimilation of copula deletion at an earlier stage in which syntactic rather than phonological constraints were dominant would have involved "rather serious *syntactical* modifications of the grammar," and the integration of distributive *be* with the rest of the VBE tense-aspect system "may have made the price tag of assimilation too costly."<sup>11</sup>

Fasold (1981) is an invaluable survey of earlier studies of black-white differences, some of which, in consequence, need not be resummarized here. It also includes some experimental data from Fasold's work in Washington, D.C., which indicate that black adolescents and children there often do not use possessive *-s*. In response to test items requiring the use of

possessive forms, many of them produce unmarked possessives like *Jack Johnson car* and *mouse cheese*. These data agree with earlier tape-recorded data from Labov et al. (1968, 169) indicating that Black peer-group members in New York City omitted possessive *-s* 62.3 percent of the time in attributive position, as in *people houses* (from a fourteen-year-old member of the Jets). Fasold has no comparable experimental data for northern white speakers, but cites Southern (Augusta and Atlanta, Georgia) data from Miller (1977) and Sommer and Trammell (1980) indicating a sharp disjunction between the blacks and whites studied, with the blacks using zero possessives commonly (52.2 percent in the lower-class blacks studied by Sommer and Trammell), and the whites always having the possessive *-s* intact.

A similar disjunction shows up—even more dramatically—in comparisons of our Sea Island pair on this feature. It is questionable whether Mrs. Queen's grammar includes possessive *-s* as an underlying category at all. Out of twenty-five possible nominal possessives in her recorded speech, twenty-two, or eighty-eight percent, were unmarked, and the three cases with possessive *-s* could all be regarded as formulaic, including two instances of the place-name *Benjie's Point* and one of *Oyster's Union Society*.<sup>12</sup> By contrast, only one of Mr. King's seven nominal possessives, or 14.2 percent, is unmarked; the others all have *-s*.

The most detailed comparative work on the speech of blacks and whites in the North is that being done by Labov and his associates in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Camden, New Jersey. Labov reports that "In general, the black community of Philadelphia does not participate in any of the phonological or grammatical processes that define the white vernacular, nor share the norms of interpretation" (1980, 373–74). The features in question—shared by virtually all whites who were born and grew up in Philadelphia or moved there before the age of eight—include: the use and interpretation of positive *anymore* to mean 'nowadays', the use of *be* as a present perfect auxiliary with *done* and *finished* (*When can you be done five shirts?*), and the fronting of /uw/ and /ow/. At the same time, the black vernacular of Philadelphia includes forms like stressed *been*, *steady* and *be done V-ed* which are found across the nation, but are either not used by whites, or interpreted differently (Rickford 1975, Baugh 1984). Labov refers to this linguistic divergence between blacks and whites as a "cleavage" (374), one which is bridged only when the members of each group shift towards the national network standard rather than the local vernacular. This latter finding agrees precisely with that of Nichols' study (1983) of South Carolina, summarized above.

In the same paper, Labov reports on the intriguing case of a thirteen-

year-old white girl, Carla, in a black neighborhood of Camden, New Jersey. Carla, originally described in Hatala (1976), had assimilated much of the surrounding black culture (dancing, verbal skills, and so on), was apparently accepted and liked by black youth, and sounded black to both white and black listeners. However, when her recorded speech was examined in detail, according to Labov, it was found to contain only a "selected subset of syntactic, lexical and prosodic features" of the black vernacular, and to include features which are generally absent from the VBE tense-aspect system, such as the copula/auxiliary *be* and third singular present tense *-s*. As Labov (379) notes, this case highlights the difference between the social or symbolic definition of the notion SPEAKS BLACK ENGLISH and the linguistic definition. From the viewpoint of the social/symbolic definition (still poorly understood), Carla appears to share the norms of the black speech community, but from the viewpoint of Labov's linguistic definition—in which priority is given to "central" grammatical features—it appears she does not.

Ash and Myhill (1983) have further increased our understanding of the relation between black-white speech differences and contact by studying the relative values of several linguistic variables in the speech of four groups of Philadelphians. The variables included (but were not limited to) the following features commonly associated with VBE: the monophthongization of /ay/, the nasalization of preceding vowel and loss of final /n/, absence of the copula, and absence of third singular and possessive *-s*. The groups studied were: blacks with little contact with whites, blacks with considerable contact with whites, whites with considerable contact with blacks, and whites with little contact with blacks.<sup>13</sup> Their results, summarized in Labov (1984), indicate that whites generally show less effect of interracial contact than blacks; whites with considerable black contact are differentiated from the sole white with little black contact only with regard to knowledge of twenty-four lexical items and use of some of the phonological variables (such as /ay/). With respect to the grammatical variables, the whites are undifferentiated, bunched up against the white vernacular and standard English norm (the two are identical on these variables). On the other hand, not only do the blacks with considerable white contact show a greater general effect of interracial contact, but the effect is most dramatic for the grammatical variables, with respect to which "the blacks with little contact are at the extreme end of the scale, and all others are closest to white dialect position, with minimal use of the BEV features." Labov suggests both internal and external reasons for the increased approximation of white speech which blacks show on the grammatical variables. We will refer to them in the next section, when we survey

the possible explanations for black-white speech differences more critically, and attempt to reach a more general understanding of the nature of ethnicity as a sociolinguistic boundary.

#### IN SEARCH OF EXPLANATIONS

In an attempt to understand the divergence between the grammars of Mrs. Queen and Mr. King and the patterns of black-white speech differences revealed in the studies summarized above, we will explore a number of potential explanations in this section.

**ANATOMY, GEOGRAPHY, SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS.** These are all non-starters. Claims about the linguistic effect of anatomical or genetic differences—Gonzales' (1922) references to the "clumsy tongues," "flat noses and thick lips" of "Gullahs" learning English provide the stock example—have long been regarded as racist and/or uninformed. The family background experiments conducted by Labov and his colleagues in New York City (Labov et al. 1968, 2:266-85, summarized in Trudgill 1983, 51-52) have further discredited them.

It has also been suggested, more rationally, that black-white differences might reflect urban-rural or regional differences, or differences in socioeconomic status or education rather than ethnicity (Kurath 1949, McDavid and McDavid 1951, Davis 1969). It is easy to imagine cases in which this might be true, and some of the ethnic differences reported in the literature may well mask possible effects from these variables.<sup>14</sup> But the data from Mr. King and Mrs. Queen, the data from Nichols' studies in coastal South Carolina, and the Philadelphia data from Labov and his colleagues all indicate that major black-white differences persist even when socioeconomic status, education, and geography are relatively well-controlled.

**DIACHRONIC PROVENIENCE.** The most common explanation for black-white speech differences—at least among those who recognize such differences—is that the linguistic systems used by each group have different diachronic origins: a creole, perhaps influenced by West African linguistic patterns in the case of blacks, and British or colonial white American dialects in the case of whites. This is one of the primary explanations advanced by Stewart (1974), Wolfram (1974), Fasold (1981), and Nichols (1983) for the black-white speech differences identified in their studies, and the grammatical comparison of Mrs. Queen and Mr. King leads us naturally to similar considerations. The respects in which these two speakers differ are respects in which creoles and their lexically related standards differ

in many parts of the world. Mrs. Queen shows some degree of decreolization or movement away from basilectal Gullah norms, notably in her use of phonologically conditioned plural *-s* (albeit at a relatively low frequency level), and in her use of a single *be* passive. But her *Noun#dem* plural and her unmarked passives and possessives are clear Gullah features, and in an area long associated with Gullah speech, it would be foolhardy not to regard them as such. On the other hand, Mr. King's plurals, passives, and possessives are clearly in accord with the system of standard English, with occasional exceptions of a sort commonly encountered in white dialects of English both in Britain and the United States.

But if we think about it carefully, this appeal to diachronic provenience refines our understanding of the NATURE of the black-white speech differences (the dependent variable) without EXPLAINING why or how they persist (the independent variable). There is no inherent reason why an individual from a creole-speaking tradition must acquire that creole or be restricted to it, and dozens of counterexamples militate against any assumption of this kind.

For instance, Giles (1979, 261), drawing on earlier research by Giles and Bourhis (1976) and Bourhis and Giles (1977), found that many second and third generation West Indians in Cardiff, Wales, "had assimilated to such an extent that tape recordings of their speech were labelled as 'White.'" Giles contrasts this explicitly with the United States, where blacks have resided for many more generations but can still be ethnically identified from speech eighty percent of the time. Another example is provided by Katherine, a fourteen-year-old Indo-Guyanese girl from a rural village whose case I described in Rickford (1983a, 306-7). Her mother and father are both strong creole speakers, but on the basis of repeated tape recordings, participant observation, and overt elicitation, I concluded, "Katherine, who goes to school at one of the country's best secondary schools in the capital city of Georgetown, speaks an almost (grammatically) flawless acrolect, and . . . seems INCAPABLE of using the basilectal and lower mesolectal varieties of creole that her parents can use."

There is also no inherent reason why virtually flawless acquisition of creole speech should be restricted to blacks, even if it is true, along the Atlantic seaboard, that creoles developed earliest and were spoken most extensively by black populations. Katherine's parents and other creole-speaking East Indians in Guyana furnish a case in point. Their grandparents and great-grandparents came to Guyana as indentured servants in successive waves beginning in the 1830s, after the emancipation of African slaves deprived sugar plantations of their captive labor force. By 1917, when the indenture system itself came to an end, thousands and

thousands of East Indians resident in the (then) colony had essentially acquired the creole speech of Afro-Guyanese. Today, the basilectal English creole of rural Indo-Guyanese shows little if any influence from Bhojpuri or the languages native to the early indentured immigrants (Gambhir 1981) and provides an excellent index to nineteenth century Afro-Guyanese usage.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Holm (1980, 59–63) found that whites in the Bahamas had acquired some of the tense-aspect features of black speech, including durative *be*, and Warantz (1983, 74) reported that, on the Bay Islands off the coast of Honduras, in the southwestern Caribbean “Bay Islanders do not attribute differences in BIE [Bay Island English] speech styles to membership in different racial groups. In the words of one islander, ‘Black and white, we all speaks the same.’”<sup>16</sup>

In order to demonstrate that substratal influence or inherited linguistic tradition is not sufficient to explain the persistence of inter-ethnic differences, we could also refer to the acquisition of English by Norwegian and other immigrants (Haugen 1956) or other instances of second-language acquisition world-wide. But the creole-based examples furnished above serve to illustrate particularly well that other factors must be taken into account. The examples themselves suggest that these other factors should include opportunity (contact) and motivation for language learning or linguistic diffusion across ethnic lines. We will get to these, but in the tradition of Weinreich (1953), let us first consider potential internal or structural constraints.

STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS. Although he considered their judgments premature, Weinreich (1953, 67) noted that many writers before him had expressed opinions on the susceptibility of the different domains of language to borrowing. The writers he cites—Whitney (1881), Dauzat (1927), Pritzwald (1938)—all list vocabulary as the first and most easily diffused domain. This accords with our data on diffusion across ethnic lines (Stewart 1974, Labov 1980, Ash and Myhill 1983), and might be attributed in part to the relative independence of lexical elements, especially open-class items which are not intimately involved in the grammatical subsystems of the language. However, there is internal disagreement among the writers cited by Weinreich with respect to the likelihood of diffusion or mixture in the other domains, with Dauzat and Pritzwald opposed to Whitney in ranking phonology before morphosyntax, but disagreeing among themselves on the relative ordering of morphology and syntax.

In any case, the data on Mr. King and Mrs. Queen, together with some of the data from the other studies summarized above, suggest that non-standard phonological features diffuse more readily across ethnic lines

than nonstandard grammatical features do.<sup>17</sup> We will return to this point below, but one initial explanation for the more limited diffusion of grammatical elements might be that they are more tightly imbricated in semantic oppositions and morphosyntactic relationships in each language. As noted above, Wolfram (1974) has suggested that “the syntactical nature of copula absence at earlier stages in the decreolization of Vernacular Black English may have made wholesale assimilation [by whites] very difficult at that point.” We could make a similar argument with regard to the assimilation of *be*-passives by Mrs. Queen, suggesting that these would not become more productive until the English copula had rooted more firmly in her grammar.

Important though internal considerations like these might be, it is clear that they do not always work as predicted and cannot by themselves tell the whole story. Again, Wolfram’s argument (1974) that the assimilation of distributive *be* might have been structurally difficult for whites in the South is less persuasive in the light of Bailey and Bassett’s evidence (1985) that some southern whites do use distributive *be*. Labov (1984, 20–21) has noted that blacks with considerable contact with whites show mastery of third singular -s although “the structural apparatus needed to acquire it—the existence of subject-verb agreement—is almost missing from the [VBE] grammar.” Gumperz and Wilson’s study (1971) of language mixing in Kupwar is even more revealing, for the local varieties of Urdu, Marathi, Kannada and Telugu—their speakers in contact, code-switching, and borrowing among themselves in this village over four hundred years—have actually diverged from their respective standards and converged to each other in semantic distinctions and morphosyntax. Bynon (1977, 253–56), noting that the non-Bantu Mbugu language in Tanzania “has acquired the complex nominal and verbal morphology of the surrounding Bantu languages,” has concluded that “given a certain intensity and duration of language contact, there is nothing that may not be diffused across language boundaries.” Thomason (1981) reaches exactly this conclusion on the evidence of several other language-contact situations. And so we turn, quite naturally, to contact—to opportunities for the acquisition or diffusion of linguistic features across ethnic boundaries.

CONTACT: OPPORTUNITY FOR LINGUISTIC DIFFUSION. Of all the factors we have considered so far, contact is clearly the most important one for explaining inter-ethnic differences. The most common explanation for REGIONAL differences in language is that physical or geographical barriers (distance, mountains, rivers) keep regional populations separate, and “it is axiomatic in dialectology that the isolation of peoples breeds lin-



guistic development along different lines" (Davis 1983, 4). Trudgill has suggested (1983, 35, 54) that social class and ethnic differentiation in language might be partly like regional differentiation, maintained by social distance and barriers to interaction almost as palpable in effect as geographical ones. That this might indeed be the case is shown by Ash and Myhill's finding (1983) that the blacks who had little contact with whites were the best exemplars of VBE and showed little acquisition of white vernacular or SE norms.

Contrariwise, when conventional barriers to inter-ethnic interaction are eroded, the linguistic differences between ethnic groups are often minimized. Ash and Myhill also found that blacks with considerable white contact had converged towards white linguistic norms, particularly in grammar. Wolfram (1974) reported, "For Puerto Ricans with extensive black peer contact, we found that virtually all the features of Vernacular Black English were adopted, but for those with restricted black contacts, we found that only certain ones were assimilated." And Frederick Douglass' autobiography (1881)—cited in Stewart (1974, 5)—revealed that close association between Douglass and Daniel Lloyd, the son of his white master, was responsible for his control of white dialect: "I have often been asked during the earlier part of my life in the North how I happened to have so little of the slave accent in my speech. The mystery is in some measure explained by my association with Daniel Lloyd, the youngest son of Col. Edward Lloyd" (33). In an earlier version of his autobiography, as Stewart pointed out, Douglass also asserted that the convergent effects of Daniels' contact with the slaves worked the other way too: "Even 'Mas' Daniel, by his association with his father's slaves, had measurably adopted their dialect" (1855, 77).

Further evidence of the significance of contact for interethnic convergence is provided by the situations noted above: the linguistically convergent ethnic groups in Kupwar have been in close contact for several hundred years; the East Indians who came to Guyana essentially learned their creole English from the blacks among whom they worked daily in the fields (but see Rickford [forthcoming] for relevant questions about this contact); Katherine's mastery of the Guyanese English acrolect is to be attributed in part to extensive contact with acrolect-speaking friends and teachers in school; the second and third generation West Indians in Cardiff are in Cardiff, not the West Indies, and have been thoroughly exposed to Cardiff dialect patterns from birth.

In the context of these examples, the persistent grammatical differences between Mr. King and Mrs. Queen at first seem paradoxical. At the time they were recorded, they had both been in continuous residence on

this isolated island for more than eighty years. In the first two decades of this century, when they were acquiring their respective vernaculars, the island "was lousy wid people," in the words of Mr. King, with more than five hundred people on an island about nine miles long and five miles wide. There was the same disproportionate number of blacks to whites as there is now, but the fact that the raw numbers were considerably greater means that Mr. King might have had even more opportunity to be exposed to the speech of blacks, and Mrs. Queen to the speech of whites, than they do now.

However, strict racial segregation—recall that they went to separate schools—would have seriously limited their exposure to and acquisition of each other's speech patterns, particularly where subtle grammatical conditioning or semantic distinctions were concerned. The intimate association of blacks and whites as playmates which Douglass experienced, and which led white children to "imbibe" the "manners and broken speech" of the blacks (in the words of an eighteenth century observer cited in Read 1933, 329 and Stewart 1974, 17), did not seem to have been the norm when Mr. King and Mrs. Queen were growing up, and they are still not the norm today. The handful of white children now resident on the island do go to school with black children, but they don't hang out with them after school or join them for deer-hunting expeditions at night. Adults of both races exchange greetings and small talk when they pass on the road or meet at the dock, but rarely if ever do they meet for religious worship, socializing at home, or drinking and relaxation at the local clubhouse. As a result, while there is ample opportunity for hearing each others' speech, there is little for intimate interaction of the kind which encourages dialect diffusion.<sup>18</sup>

But it is not clear that increased interaction would necessarily have led to greater convergence. What close contact and interaction provide is good input—models—for language learning. Whether INPUT will become INTAKE, or be reflected in OUTPUT, depends in part on the attitudes of the groups in contact, as Schumann (1978, 372) has noted: "Even when there is sufficient social contact for second language acquisition to take place, for attitudinal and affective reasons there may be such psychological distance that 'input' generated in the contact situation never becomes 'intake' for the learner." Whinnom (1971, 92–93), recognizing the import of attitude, described it as the "ethological or emotional" barrier to linguistic convergence, distinguishing it from the "ecological" barrier of contact. It is the role of this ethological barrier to inter-ethnic convergence on the Sea Islands and elsewhere that we will finally consider.

MOTIVATION, IDENTITY. The nonlinguistic boundary between blacks and whites is relatively hard, in the sense of being "so overt and consensually distinctive of the social category that interethnic mobility is physically impossible" (Giles 1979, 275, drawing on Banton 1978). Given the salience of this particular ethnic boundary in the United States in general and along the South Carolina seaboard in particular, it is only natural that diachronically inherited differences of language should have come to serve as part of the identifying or identity-reinforcing characteristics of ethnic difference (Trudgill 1983, 54–55). As Fishman (1977, 21) has noted, "Language is commonly among the conscious 'do' and 'don'ts' as well as among the unconscious ones: that is, it is among the evaluated dimensions of ethnicity membership (whether consciously or not)." More specifically, Stewart (1974, 19), arguing against the common assumption that "greater opportunities for acculturation to European norms offered by the presence of greater numbers of whites would naturally be taken advantage of to the maximum possible degree by New World Negroes," points out that "other acculturative mechanisms might have operated to modify this outcome. . . . One would be the organization of whites and Negroes into separate classes or castes, with the possible retention of European and African cultural differences (together with later innovations within either group) consequently acquiring the status of 'appropriate' behaviors for members of each group." The claim that differences originally derived from divergent substrata or diachronic provenience might be perpetuated not only by lack of contact but also by socially generated expectations that this is how blacks SHOULD talk, and this is how whites SHOULD talk, is quite compelling. On the Sea Islands, blacks and whites, for all their lack of intimate interaction, are aware that each group follows different norms, and SHOULD. Talking Gullah is part of black identity, not white, as is RAPPING or TELLING LIES on Saturday night (Rickford 1973) and FOLK-PRAYING on Sunday morning (Jones-Jackson 1983, Rickford 1972). Approximation to or adoption of the other group's linguistic norms may be negatively viewed as CROSSING-OVER; frequent inter-ethnic rather than intra-ethnic communication may itself be viewed as CROSSING-OVER and regarded with suspicion or hostility (Fishman 1977, 21). The linguistic acts of identity (Le Page [forthcoming]) which black and white Sea Islanders make are usually with respect to members of their own ethnic group; there is little motivation for either to adopt the vernacular norms of the other. The strong desire of West Indians in Cardiff for cultural assimilation, which is reflected in the attenuation of their ethnic speech markers (Giles and Bourhis 1976), is not present on either side of the ethnic divide on the Sea Islands.

These considerations, taken together with relative absence of interac-

tion and inherited/diachronic differences, would explain why black and white speech on the Sea Islands is different, but not why these differences are more marked at the level of morphosyntax than at the level of phonology. However, there is considerable precedent from other Caribbean communities for sharp social differentiation with respect to morphosyntax but gradual or very little social differentiation with respect to phonology. Both in Guyana (Rickford [forthcoming]) and Belize (Escure 1981), decreolization is primarily reflected in morphosyntax, with socially prominent individuals who consider themselves to be speakers of acrolectal or so-called good English evincing nonstandard creole phonological features—like consonant cluster simplification and the pronunciation of *town* as /tʌŋ/—in their speech. A similar situation exists in Surinam, where the prestige local norm involves Dutch syntax but Sranan phonology (Eersel 1971). In all of these cases the nonstandard phonological norms are either unconsciously accepted or taken as representative of regional or national norms, and the notion of speaking creole, with its attendant social connotations, is reflected primarily in morphosyntax. The South Carolina Sea Islands appear to be similar in this respect. Nonstandard phonological features are part of a regional Sea Island identity in which both blacks and whites participate, but nonstandard morphosyntactic features are more heavily marked as creole and serve as ethnic markers.

At the same time, standard morphosyntactic features are also prestigious, and while there is little evidence of white speakers increasingly moving in the direction of creole grammar, there is evidence of both blacks and whites moving in the direction of standard English with increasing education and exposure. Nichols' study (1983) of two South Carolina speech communities shows this most clearly, with black/white pronominal differences disappearing as young educated blacks and whites adopt standard forms. Mr. King and Mrs. Queen, both older, more isolated, less educated and less upwardly mobile than Nichols' young subjects, are different, but one can note in Mrs. Queen's phonologically conditioned use of plural *-s* and in other respects (see n. 12) some degree of decreolization—movement away from creole norms and towards standard English.<sup>19</sup> From this point of view I would not agree with Labov's (1984) rejection of differential prestige as an explanation for grammatical convergence between blacks and whites on standard norms, although his interpretation of standard grammatical variables as "claims to generalized rights and privileges" could probably be equated with differential prestige in the context of the Sea Islands, if not in Philadelphia.<sup>20</sup>

## SUMMARY

In line with a relatively new tradition, we have compared the speech of one black and one white speaker on an isolated South Carolina Sea Island and found that they are similar phonologically, but different with respect to three grammatical variables: plural formation, passivization, and the marking of nominal possessives. After a survey of earlier data-based studies of black-white speech differences in the United States, we have considered individually a number of possible explanations for their persistence. Anatomy, geography, and socioeconomic status are less significant than they often have been alleged to be. Diachronic provenience and structural considerations are relevant, but not in themselves explanatory. Contact and social identity—or the limited availability of opportunity and motivation for adopting the patterns of other ethnic groups besides one's own—loom largest in the maintenance of inter-ethnic linguistic differences, but, in accord with a pattern which shows up in other creole communities, the social differentiation is marked primarily at the morphosyntactic level.

It would be useful to refine our understanding of ethnicity as a sociolinguistic boundary by comparing variation in intra-ethnic communication contexts with variation in inter-ethnic ones (see Escure 1982).<sup>21</sup> But on the basis of available evidence from the Sea Islands and elsewhere, ethnicity appears to be like regional or social class boundaries insofar as it involves social DISTANCE, and like the boundary of sex or gender (Trudgill 1983, 88) insofar as it reflects DIFFERENCE in socially expected norms.

## NOTES

1. Although Mrs. Queen is now deceased, I will use the present tense for convenience.

I am grateful to Michael Montgomery and the funding agencies of the 1981 University of South Carolina conference on language variety in the South for the grant which facilitated my attendance at that conference and my return visit to the Sea Islands. (See Montgomery and Bailey 1985 for a number of the conference papers.) It is also a pleasure to acknowledge the helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper which I received from Ron Butters, Salikoko Mufwene, and Angela Rickford.

2. ## = word boundary, # = morpheme boundary.

3. I have chosen to use -s to indicate the plural morpheme in this paper although I used -z in Rickford 1985. In both cases, the symbol includes morphophonemic variation between /z/, /s/ and /əz/.

4. The program uses maximum likelihood methods to assign a probability coefficient to each factor representing its INDEPENDENT contribution to the overall probability of rule application. It is important to have some means of measuring the independent effects of each factor, for the apparent regularity of one factor—

for instance, preceding quantifiers—might mask or be masked by the effect of another—for instance, the following phonological environment. In my earlier and more detailed study of Mrs. Queen's plural marking (Rickford 1985, n. 19), I provided the probability coefficients for all of the four factor groups investigated, even though the program indicated that the phonological factor groups accounted adequately for the variance in the data and that the inclusion of the syntactic factor groups did not significantly enhance our ability to predict or regenerate the data. Not only were the syntactic factor groups less significant, overall, than the phonological ones, but the ordering of individual factors within the syntactic factor groups was not what I had predicted. For instance, a preceding plural quantifier favored the omission of plural *-s* very slightly, but a preceding *dem*—also inherently plural—had the opposite effect, contrary to expectation. Readers who wish to review the detailed coefficients in the earlier paper should be reminded that probabilities above .5 favor *-s* absence, and those below .5 disfavor *-s* absence.

5. In Rickford (1985), I opted for assuming an underlying plural *-s* for Mrs. Queen, removed by a phonological deletion rule. But this was only after considerable discussion, taking into account the limited evidence of her strong plurals and the difficulty of incorporating a phonologically constrained grammatical insertion rule in currently available grammatical models, almost all of which treat phonology as interpretive and post-syntactic. Nevertheless, I expressed even then reservations about the fact that Mrs. Queen had three times more cases of *-s* presence, and although Mufwene (1984) does not do justice to the quantitative evidence and theoretical argument which had led me to posit a phonologically constrained deletion rule, and I still differ from him on certain points, I am persuaded enough by his discussion of the often-singular reference of *children* and similar cases to discount the evidence of the strong plurals. Once we can adopt a model in which grammatical insertion can be phonologically conditioned (Kiparsky's lexical phonology is a possible candidate), I would be happy to accept a plural *-s* insertion rule for Mrs. Queen. This would have the additional advantage of matching the diachronic development of Mrs. Queen's grammar (and that of Gullah as a whole) more accurately.

6. In view of the fact that Mr. King had so few unmarked plurals, it was neither possible nor necessary to replicate the four-factor multivariate analysis which we did on Mrs. Queen's data; the data represent simple relative frequencies. It is difficult to locate any persuasive constraint on Mr. King's use of plural  $\emptyset$ . The only constraint which seems to have a (weak) systematic effect is occurrence in a partitive construction, as in *all kind* $\emptyset$  *o' stuff* and *all sort* $\emptyset$  *o' stuff*. The absence of plural marking on the head noun of the following idiomatic expression may be related: *dem son* $\emptyset$  *of a guns*.

7. This excludes active sentences with generalized indefinite subjects like *Dey used to call de big oystas de selec's* (Mr. King) and *You could catch dem anytime den* (Mrs. Queen), which are treated as variants of the agentless passive by Weiner and Labov (1982). Compare the possible but nonoccurrent *De big oystas used to be called de selec's* and *Dey could be caught anytime den*.

8. See Alleyne (1980, 97–100), Allsopp (1983), and Markey and Fodale (1983) for further discussion of the creole passive, and Traugott (1972, 14) for discussion of similar examples involving the present participle in Early Modern English.

9. Stewart's (1974) formulation of this distinction is the earliest I know of in the literature, even though the subsequent discussions of Bickerton (1981) and Dijkhoff (1982) are more detailed. In this, as in many other respects, Stewart's paper has received less citation and commendation in the literature than it deserves.

10. As Fasold (1981) has noted, Feagin's study (1979) of whites in Anniston, Alabama agrees substantially with Wolfram's findings. Her rural working class subjects have 56.3 percent *are*-deletion and 6.8 percent *is*-deletion.

11. The structural explanation is less persuasive in the face of Bailey and Bassett's evidence (1985) of white distributive *be* use.

12. She does mark suppletive pronominal possessives, however: *my* instead of *me* (seventeen out of seventeen cases), *our* instead of *we* (one case out of two), *his* instead of *he* (four times out of seven). Labov et al. (1968, 170) report similar data for black peer group members in New York City, who use *my*, *her*, and *our* categorically in possessive position.

13. In the Ash and Myhill study, degree of contact was determined according to four variables: "the racial composition of the speaker's present neighborhoods, the racial composition of the speaker's high school, the number of friends the speaker has from the opposite group, and the number of spouses and/or lovers of the other ethnic group that the speaker had had" (Labov 1984, 16). For some reservations about Labov's conclusions about Carla, see Butters (1984).

14. Devonish (1978) has argued, quite persuasively, that the differences which Bickerton (1973) claimed were ethnic (Indo-Guyanese vs. Afro-Guyanese) were really primarily urban/rural differences.

15. Cruickshank (1905) includes several turn-of-the-century texts of Indo-Guyanese usage which illustrate this point, but they also include one or two features (like a transitivizing or object agreement marker *am/um*) which were not present in Afro-Guyanese speech and may reflect Indic influence. See Devonish (1978), Gambhir (1981), and Rickford (forthcoming) for further discussion.

16. Warantz also mentions that they don't consider their language a creole, reserving that term for the "unintelligible" speech of Jamaicans and Belizeans. Her texts reveal a mesolectal variety, close to standard English in some ways, but also containing distinctive creole features.

17. Of course, some phonetic features do not diffuse, as evidenced by the findings of Dorrell (1982) and Labov (1984); the latter suggests that there may be structural reasons why the fronting of /aw/ has not spread to Philadelphia VBE.

18. Labov (1984, 14) notes that exposure to television, even four to eight hours a day, does not appear to have any effect on the VBE of isolated black speakers in Philadelphia. The kind of contact which he considers relevant includes: "face-to-face interactions of speakers who know each other; who have something to gain or lose from the contact; and are not so different in power that the symmetrical use of language is impeded."

19. The situation is complex, both on the Sea Islands and in the Caribbean, for creole speech does have solidarity-reaffirming values of its own, and synchronically there are forces which impel speakers in different situations both forwards to the acrolect and backwards to the basilect. In overall diachronic terms, however, the gradual tendency is a decreolizing one, not that the basilectal variants have disappeared, but that the relative numbers who use it are diminishing, and the

numbers using mesolectal or acrolectal features are increasing. See Rickford (1983a, 1983b).

20. Labov's reason for rejecting a general appeal to "differential prestige" is that while blacks with extensive white contacts adopted standard grammatical variables used by whites, they didn't adopt sound changes characteristic of Philadelphia white speech which might also be considered prestigious insofar as they were used by the local upper middle class. In place of a general appeal to prestige, Labov proposes instead that sound changes are associated with local identity and serve as symbolic claims to "local rights and privileges," including "access to local jobs, to renting or buying houses in closely held areas, obtaining variances from local political bodies, obtaining the use of public space for play, streets, parades, markets and ceremonies," etc. Grammatical variables, by contrast, serve as claims to "generalized rights and privileges," including "those goods that are available by social convention to any individual who can satisfy general regulations for access to them set by social convention, irrespective of membership in particular subgroups. Such generalized resources include money, ownership of goods sold on the open market, education, and legal, financial and technical knowledge." The distinction may be useful but can be handled equally well by distinguishing between LOCAL and GENERALIZED PRESTIGE, given the common definition of *prestige* as "standing or estimation in the eyes of people" (*Webster's Third International Dictionary*) and Weinreich's more particular definition of it with respect to lanaguage as "value in social advance" (1953, 79). We also have to be cautious about automatically equating *local* with *phonological* and *generalized* with *grammatical*, since some phonological variables like /ð/ > [d], /θ/ > [t], -ing > in' (perhaps precisely because of their relative stability) do have generalized prestige, while, on Labov's own showing (1980), grammatical features like positive *anymore* or perfect *be* have local (Philadelphian) but not generalized prestige, and do not diffuse to the black community.

21. Giles (1979, 278) has predicted that the combination of a hard nonlinguistic and a relatively soft linguistic boundary will lead to the accentuated use of ethnic speech markers by subordinate ethnic groups in inter-ethnic communication. This is obviously relevant to us and worth investigation.

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