Jamaican Creole in the diaspora: Linguistic variation among Caribbeans in North America
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1. Introduction

This study examines variation in the language of Jamaican-Canadians. Given a bicultural identity and the diverse linguistic influences of a highly multicultural metropolis such as Toronto, Jamaican Canadians have an unusually large number of distinct varieties of English at their disposal. For example, a typical linguistic profile of a second-generation—i.e., Canadian-born—Jamaican-Canadian will include Canadian English (CanE) as a native language; a form of Jamaican Creole (JamC), usually acquired during adolescence; forms of non-Creole Jamaican English; and African-American Vernacular English, a strong cross-cultural linguistic influence on the language of African-descended Canadians.[1]

The project pursues this research question: given a diverse set of distinct linguistic resources, how do speakers determine their choices among these different resources? When and why do Jamaican Canadians choose one code over the other in their linguistic interactions?

Video and audio data for this project were collected from a total of twenty-nine informants during fieldwork in Toronto from November 2006 to June 2007. Currently a subsection of this corpus is being transcribed and analyzed to enable the sociolinguistic analysis of variation in the data.

In June and July 2008 I will write an analytical chapter presenting results from this first study, which models the language use of one individual based on ca. twelve hours of recordings of Carrie Mullings,[2] a Jamaican-Canadian reggae show host and manager. It will be one of six chapters of the book about this project.

Upon completion of this chapter, in August 2008, I will formally propose this book for publication in a sociolinguistic book series.

2. Background and significance

To date, a large part of the scholarly interest in the Caribbean diaspora in Toronto has come out of the social sciences. Important publications emerging from these fields include Henry (1994), Ley & Smith (1997), Duval (2004), Yon (2000) and James & Shadd (2004). Such work has frequently investigated the migratory patterns, economic behavior, and classroom performance of diasporic Caribbeans in Canada. Where language use was an object of analysis, it was analyzed as a way to negotiate identities defined as marginal to the economic and racial mainstream of Canadian society (Edwards and Redfern 1992; Boatswain and Lalonde 2000; James and Shadd 2004).

My study attends to the language of Caribbean Canadians as a highly dynamic site of multi-faceted identity management, without defining it a priori as a social problem. While my research clearly shows

[1] The real picture is necessarily more complex than this summary in the form of a simple enumeration of codes. Complication arises from two factors: (i) The portion of the code inventory described here as CanE will show significant amounts of variation: it can be marked by features that identify speakers as Black Canadians, without sounding Caribbean, mostly through borrowings of some of the phonological features of AAVE. Also, speakers may choose to speak CanE that actually ‘sounds Canadian’ (most importantly by using features such as the raising/fronting of the diphthong in the MOUTH and PRICE lexical sets, Boberg 2004), or simply use a form of North American English without any saliently Canadian features. (ii) The different codes, though distinct in meaning, can arguably be modeled as relating to each other in a linguistic continuum that transcends the well-known (post-)creole continuum, such as it is found in the Caribbean (DeCamp 1971; Rickford 1987), and incorporates North American forms of English as an even more formal, even less marked level on the upper end of the continuum (see Patrick 2004, who makes this argument for British Creole).

[2] Real name used with permission.

the experience of racism, including its trail of political and economic disadvantages, to be central to the identity of most black Canadians—the majority of my Jamaican informants are African-descended—its interest lies in showing how a complex cultural background, in combination with a multiplicity of linguistic resources, translates into creativity in linguistic identity management. As such, this project is concerned with the linguistic aspects of cultural diversity in the metropolis, one of the defining social phenomena of late modernity.

While qualitative methods of discourse analysis are suitable in an interpretative approach to the data—cf. Hinrichs (2006) in which I apply qualitative methods to online communication among Jamaicans—the major methodological concern of this project is the application of a qualitatively grounded, quantitative (statistical) methodology to variation in the data. It is a combination of the subjective, interpretative perspective on the data that qualitative research allows (cf. Gilbert 2001) with the accountability and clarity that the adoption of statistical methods has introduced to sociolinguistic research (Bailey 2002: 135).

In the field of sociolinguistics, the combination of qualitative, especially ethnographic, methodology with statistical variationist analysis is generally attributed to Penelope Eckert (cf. 2000), who coined the phrase 'Third Wave Variation Studies' to describe it (e.g. 2005). The first phase of this project was conducted in 2006/07 during a postdoctoral visit at Stanford University (with extended stays in Toronto for data collection) where I consulted with the sociolinguistic faculty.

The exploration of the links between social categories and language use is at the heart of one of the defining debates of present-day sociolinguistics. Classical, 'Labovian' sociolinguistics has been invested in showing that social categories correlate with the use of dialect features—e.g., higher indeces of postvocalic /r/-realization in New York City statistically coincide with higher social status, income, and levels of education (Labov 1966). More recent approaches, with Third Wave studies at the forefront, have endeavoured to make the nature of this link between use/non-use of socially marked linguistic forms more transparent. Individual identity and communication in small groups (communities of practice) have been introduced as intermediate analytical units in order to show how linguistic variables create manifest meaning in everyday contexts, rather than simply being seen as a consequence of social status.

The specific nature of my study, with an interest in both the macro level of the larger speech community of 'Caribbeans in Toronto,' and the micro level, i.e. the language use of individuals or very small groups of speakers, is an ideal testing ground for claims made about the validity of either strand of sociolinguistic investigation.

3. Relationship to long-term research plans

During the grant period, June and July of 2008, I will write one of the analytical chapters of the book about this research project, chapter 5. The outline of the book is as follows:

1 Introduction

2 Methodological considerations

3 Are Caribbeans in Toronto a 'speech community'? Exploring 'Black Canadian English'

4 Locally relevant social categories: informal conversations among Jamaican Canadians at a dominantly Caribbean community radio

station in Toronto

5 **Variation between Jamaican and Canadian English forms in the speech of a mixed-race Canadian reggae presenter**

6 Variation between Jamaican Creole, Jamaican English, and African American Vernacular English in the speech of a black Jamaican-Canadian university student

7 Conclusions

Currently, twelve hours of speech recordings of one individual (interviews and observations) that were obtained in fieldwork are being analyzed for variation in the variables *th* (i.e. stopping of the interdental fricative in words like *thought, this* to /t, d/) and *ey* (i.e. monophthongization of the diphthong in words such as *great, place, shake* in the /e:/-position). The analytical work, i.e. transcription of recordings, auditory analysis and production of code sets, is being carried out by an undergraduate research assistant, financed through my startup research fund, and myself.

An 'activity-based' markup scheme[3] (cf. analyses in Eckert 2000; Mendoza-Denton 2007) will be applied to the codes, and statistical analysis will in a final step seek to highlight which independent variables, including activities, influence choice of Caribbean over Canadian variables.[4]

The data from the informant on whom chapter 5 will be based is extraordinarily rich, and its analysis, as well as the results, promises to plastically demonstrate some of the core phenomena that lie at the heart of the book's interest. This impression was confirmed when a partial preliminary, qualitative analysis of this informant's recordings was performed in July 2007 and presented in a sociolinguistic workshop on style in language during the Linguistic Society of American summer institute 2007 at Stanford University. Therefore, I will submit a formal book proposal for the project upon completion of the Summer Research Assignment.

Parallel to the data analysis I am planning a popular online presentation of some aspects of this research. The material is excellently suited to demonstrate to laypeople and beginning students of sociolinguistics the concepts of linguistic style and variation, due to the distinctness of the several different codes that Jamaican Canadians draw on. I will apply for a 'Digital Startup Grant' from the National Endowment for the Humanities in order to implement this teaching website, which will provide an interactive, video-based introduction to variation in speech.

[3] That is to say, for each token of the variable in the subject's speech, a line of code will be recorded noting among other items: the value of the variable i.e.'0' fort the standard, fricative realization of *th* and '1' for the nonstandard, stopped variant; the activity context, e.g. 'argument', 'narrative', 'dispute', 'ordering food', etc., but also language-internal factors such as phonological environment of the variable, etc.

[4] At present, the choice of variables has not been finalized. It is likely to exceed those mentioned here as examples, and to also include multinomial variables such as the FACE and GOAT vowels, which have at least three possible values each for Jamaican Canadian speakers, /ei/, /e:/, and /ie:/. Similarly, the morphsyntactic variable 'progressive aspect' has three values: *John is cooking, John cooking, Jan a kuk*). Depending on the choice of variables, the most suitable statistical model will be selected from viable models such as binary logistic regression, multinomial logistic regression, or Varbrul, an application that implements log-linear regression for linguistic purposes and is considered the methodological standard in quantitative sociolinguistics (Paolillo 2001; Bailey 2002).

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