Variation Theory: a View from Creole Continua

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ABSTRACT

Practictioners of the area of linguistic investigation referred to as 'quantitative' or 'variationist' sociolinguistics generally see their objective as being to uncover and account for the systematicity underlying variation in speech behavior. To this end, they have employed a variety of methods as well as analytic models aimed at incorporating variability into linguistic description. Among the approaches are Labov's 'variable rule' model, and Bickerton S 'implicational' model. The present paper examines the relevance of these models of variation to Caribbean English creole continua and concludes that neither is well suited to providing a satisfactory account of the sociolinguistic heterogeneity characteristic of such situations. Like other speech communities, Caribbean creole continua manifest patterns of social and stylistic differentiation of linguistic choices. But, unlike typical dialect situations, they display slzarp internal differences in linguistic repertoires and relationships which cannot be subsumed under a single grammar. The failure of variationist theory to adequately describe the orderly heterogeneity of such continuo has to do first, with the architecture of the proposed models, and second, with its tendency to treat sociolinguistic phenomena as though they could be translated directly into grammars. Because of this, the social correlates of variation have tended to play a subordinate role ro the main goal of variation theory, which is to construct grammars. The result is that many descriptions of variation play only lip service to .social explanation, or are indeed a-social in character. As long as variation theory continues to see its main objective as being to incorporate variability into current models of grammar, its contribution to a unified theory of the imbrication of language and socio-cultural organization will remain limited. (Keywords: quantitative sociolinguistics, models of variation. Caribbean creole continua. (morpho-)syntactic variation. sociolinguistic theory).

RESUMEN

Los practicantes del área de investigación lingüística llamada sociolingüística 'cuantitativa' o 'variacionista' entienden que su objetivo es sacar a la luz la sistematicidad subyacente a la

variación del comportamiento lingüístico y dar cuenta de ella. Para este fin han utilizado diversos métodos así como de modelos analíticos cuyo propósito es la incorporación de la variabilidad en la descripción lingüística. Entre las distintas aproximaciones están el modelo de 'regla variable' de Labov y el modelo 'implicativo' de Bickerton. El presente artículo examina la relevancia de estos modelos de variación en los continuos del inglés caribeño y concluye que ninguno es lo suficientemente adecuado para ofrecer una explicación satistactoria de la heterogeneidad sociolingüística característica de tales situaciones. Como otras comunidades de habla, los continuos criollos caribeños exhiben modelos de diferenciación social y estilística en sus opciones lingüísticas. Sin embargo, a diferencia de las situaciones dialectales habituales, muestran marcadas diferencias internas en sus repertorios y relaciones lingüísticas que no pueden subsumirse bajo una única gramática. La incapacidad de la teoría variacionista para describir adecuadamente la heterogeneidad metódica de dichos continuos tiene que ver, en primer lugar, con la arquitectura de los modelos propuestos y, en segundo lugar, con su tendencia a tratar los fenómenos sociolingüísticos como si pudieran ser transferidos directamente a las gramáticas. Por este motivo, los correlatos sociales de la variación han tendido a jugar un papel subordinado con respecto al objetivo principal de la teoría de la variación, que es el de desarrollar gramáticas. El resultado es que muchas descripciones de la variación son explicaciones aparentemente sociales, ya que en realidad son de naturaleza asocial. Mientras continúe la teoría de la variación asumiendo la incorporación de la variabilidad en los modelos actuales de gramática como su principal objetivo, será muy limitada su contribución a una teoría unificada de las imbricaciones riel lenguaje y la organización sociocultural. (Palabras Clave: sociolingüística cuantitativa. modelos de variación. continuos criollos caribeños, variación (morfo-)sintáctica. teoría sociolingüística),

INTRODUCTION

Practictioners of the area of linguistic investigation referred to as "quantitative" or "variationist" sociolinguistics generally see their objective as being to uncover and account for the systematicity underlying variation in speech behavior. To this end, they have employed a variety of methods as well as analytic models aimed at incorporating variahility into linguistic description. Aniong the approaches are Lahov's "variable rule" model, and Bickerton's "implicational" model. The present paper examines the relevance of these models of variation to Carihbean English creole continua and concludes that neither is well suited to providing a satisfactory account of the sociolinguistic heterogerieity characteristic of such situations.

During the early period of variationist studies in the 1960's and 1970's. scholars dealing with quite different linguistic situations generally agreed that their primary aini was to demonstrate that variation was an integral part of linguistic structure. Hence they attempted. in one way or another. to integrate variahility into niodels of linguistic description. Thus was born the program of studies often referred to as "variation theory". The aini of writing grammars of variation united scholars as differerit in their approaches and interests as Labov 1969 (African American Vernacular English |AAVE|). G. Sankoff 1973 (Tok Pisin and Montréal French). Bickerton 1971. 1973a. 1973h (Guyanese creole), Rickford 1975 (Gullah and AAVE). Woolford 1983 (hilingual code-switching) aiid others. The main thrust of the new ways of analyzing variation came from Lahov's work on AAVE. and Bickerton's work on the Guyanese creole continuum. Despite the differences in their assumptions and methods. there

was a surprising degree of similarity in the manifestos they adopted for the study of variatioii. Hence Labov declared: "Our general aim is to write the grammar of the speech community. with all of its internal variation. style-shifting. change in progress" (1975: 108). And Bickerton (1973a: 642) pointed out:

> The new metatheory takes linguistic variation as the center rather than the periphery of language study. We thus assume. until the contrary caii be proved. that all variation is rule-governed. consequently the linguist's task is to find the rules. however niuch these may conflict with theoretical preconceptions. rather than to "sacrifice" inconvenient data.

To achieve his aim, Labov proposed the mechanism **of** variable rules and outlined the following research agenda for variation theory:

> 1. What is the niost general form of the linguistic rule. and what constraints may be placed on it?
> 2. What are the underlying forms on which rules operate. and how can they he determined accurately in any given case?
> **3.** How are rules combined into systems. and how are they ordered within these systenis'?
> 4. How are systenis related to each other in bilingual and polysystemic situations?
> **5.** How do rules and rule systenis change? What is the niechanism of the fundamental processes of language acquisition. or how do rules change in the larger course of linguistic evolution?

For his part, Bickerton proposed the methodology of implicational analysis. and the associated formalisni of "polylectal" grammars, to be discussed further below. Behind the differences in niethodology and models of description lie fundamentally opposed views about the nature of grammars as models of conipetence. and about the relationship between individual and community norms as objects of description. These differences. as yet unresolved. are behind much of the uiicertainty that hangs over the practice of variationist analysis today. The uncertainly revolves around the following issues:

> a) The question of the proper object of description for grammars or models of variation.
> **b)** The question of the major objective of variation theory. Is it to write grammars pure and simple. or to elucidate sociolinguistic structures and the language/society relationship?

These issues are reflected in the questions posed by Guy (1980) in response to Bickerton's (1971) criticism of the variable rules model. First. he asks: "What exactly should be the subject niatter of a linguistic description? Are we to write grammars of the speech of an individual. or ot' the language of a community of speakers?" (1980: 1). In response. Guy provides evidence from the the phenomenon of variable deletion of final /-t. -d/ in consonant clusters, using an impressive array of data and statistical analysis. He demonstrates that there is in fact isomorphism between individual and community usage of this feature. which suggests

that they share a single grammar, consisting of the same rule with variable output, constrained by identical linguistic environments. Hence, Guy concludes, the subject niatter of a linguistic description is both individual and group grammars, since they are identical. Secondly, Guy asks: "Is variation in the speech community the result of the diversity of the group, reflecting the organization of society into a number of discrete lects within which variation is at a minimum? Or is this variation present with identical uniforni structures in the speech of every individual?" (ibid.). Again, the evidence of /-t,-d/ deletion points to shared norms of use across the community, with frequency distrihutions correlating neatly wirh social arid stylistic constraints. This explains why rarly formulations of variahle rules attempted to incorporate hoth linguistic and extra-linguistic constraints on the operation of the rules.

The twin assumptions of underlyinp structural identity across individual aiid group grammars, and shared norms of usage and evaluation across the community proved niuch easier to accept for communities of the type that Guy, Lahov and others had studied back in the 1960's and 1970's. Roinaine (1981) referred to such communities as "prototypical variahle rule communities", contrasting them with other situations which posed serious prohlems for Labov's conception of the variahle rule. When the methodology of the quantitive paradigm was extended to include more heterogeneous speech communities such as Belfast (Milroy 1980, Harris 1984), Trinidad (Winford 1972, 1980), Guyana (Bickerton 1971, 1973a, 1973b; Rickford 1979), Norwich (Trudgill 1974), Glasgow (Macaulay 1977) etc., it became apparent that assuniptions of isomorphism between individuals aiid groups, either in underlying granimars or in shared norms of behavior and evaluation, could not be niaintained. As Harris (1984: 304) explained:

> As the body of research on nonstandard syntax increases, it is becoming more and more evident that a good deal of dialect diversity at this level cannot simply be attributed to low-level differences. Rather it points to the conclusion that deep-seated structural divergences exist between varieties which are intuitively felt to he dialects of the same languape.

Variationist models employing strict versions of variahle mles have never come to terms with the kinds of heterogeneity characteristic of these "divergent dialect" situations. This led researchers like Rousseau & Sankoff (1978) to suggest that group analysis is legitimate if groups are identified in linguistic rather than social terms -a position that Bickerton (1971) had in fact advocated. The consequences of this for writing community-based grammars of the sort Labov had proposed are not clear, since grouping individuals together on the basis of shared linguistic behavior leaves open the question of how many groups can be established in the community, and how their grammars relate to onr another. Bur one clear effect of this approach was to rule out social factors as constraints on the operation of linguistic rules (as opposed to differences in linguistic behavior across individuals and groups). In other words, if individuals grouped together on this basis share identical mles, then social factors need not he huilt in to the fornialisni of rules for group grammars, since there is no variation within the group to be accounted for in the first place. This, interestingly, was the same conclusion that Bickerton (1971) had arrived ar. In addition to the problem of integraring extra-linguistic constraints into the rules, there were criticisms levelled against the very idea of a variable rule as a legitimate part of a grammar. Scholars like Bickerton (1971) and Romaine (1981) argued that variable mles were idealizations that have no objective reality for individual speakers.

because such rules were based on group behaviors and therefore could not be internalized by individuals, since they would place excessive demands on the mind and memory (Luelsdorff 1989). The response of variationists was to retreat from their earlier claims about variable rules as true reflections of linguistic competence. Hence Sankoff & Labov declared: "The theory that we are constructing is not a new form of rnodel-building. and we do not make the error of confusing the set of rules we write with the grammatical processes that people use" (1979: 217). Moreover. the issue of how extralinguistic constraints could he factoi-ed into the formulation of rules of grammar was left hanging in the balance.

Ironically, although adherents of the "polylectal" grammar approach articulated the strongest argurnents against the variable rule model. their own model failed to provide any solution to the problems they had identified. Like Labov. Bickerton's goal was to write the grammar of the entire speech community, and his work provided us with two such "polylectal" grammars for the Guyanese speech community: a grammar of the copula system (1973a. 1973b) and a partial grammar of the tense/aspect system (1975). However. unlike Labov. Bickerton explicitly rejected the notion that extra-linguistic factors could he incorporated into grammars. As a result. we find in his work very little concern with investigating the social correlates of variation in the Guyanese community. The grammar of variation becomes an end in itself. devoid of any social meaning. In general. then. the stated aims of variation theory -to write the grammar of the speech community. and to incorporate social explanation into the grammar- have not been realized by either the variable rules model or the "polylectal" grammar model. It may well be that neither goal is realistic. or ihat both may be misconceived. These are the issues I would like now to explore further in relation to creole continua.

I. MODELS OF VARIATION IN CREOLE CONTINUA

There were several sociolinguistic studies of Caribbean creole continua in the 1970's and 1980's which employed the early quantitative framework introduced hy Labov (1966). They included studies of Trinidad (Winford 1972. 1980). Guyana (Rickford 1979: Edwards 1975). and Belize (Young 1973). It was intriguing to tind that these speech communities revealed quite similar patterns of class and style stratification similar to those that Labov. Trudgill, Cedergren and others were discovering in more conventional dialect continua. This led scholars to ask. for creole continua. the same kinds of questions that have long occupied the attention of variationists. that is:

> **a)** Can creole continua be analyzed synchronically as "seamless wholes" or single systems which represent a "conmunal grammar" similar to that postulated for more typical dialect situations?
> b) What do creole continua tell us about the relationship between individual and community. hetween linguistic and social phenomena?

The first of these questions has been the subject of long debate between scholars who espouse a "single system" view of creole continua and those who argue that they involve contact hetween co-existent systenis. The former position is articulated most strongly by DeCamp (1961. 1971). who explicitly rejected the idea that there are two discrete systems in the Jamaican continuum in the following well-known pronouncement:

> There is no sharp cleavage between creole and standard. Rather there is a linguistic continuum. a continuous spectrum of speech varieties ranging from "hush talk" or "hroken language" [...] to the most educated standard. Many speakers persist in the myth that there are only two varieties, the patois and the standard. But one speaker's attempt at the hroad patois may he closer to the standard end of the continuum than is another's atteinpt at the standard.
>
> DeCamp (1971: 350)

It must he noted that DeCamp bases his claim about a continuum on patterns of social and stylistic variation in the community which he does not describe in any explicit detail. It is of course true that such patterns of variation do exist. and that they do form a continuum of varieties of speaking. All creole continua are characterized ht complex patterns of variation conditioned by social and situational factors. arid the houndaries between varieties are often difficult to estahlish. But such patterns of variatioii are purely a mattei- of the sociolinguistic distrihution of styles of speaking in the community. and cannot he translated readily into a single grammar. The confusion hetween sociolinguistic patterns and rules of grammar is evident in DeCamp's (1964: 231) attempt to construct a grammatical model for convertiiig the structures of standard English into those of the creole:

> Complex as such a set of conversion rules would be, they would he considerably simpler than an entire new grammar developed froni scratch. And the result could he a grammar not of one. hut of all varieties of Jamaican creole.

Bickerton was the first to take up DeCamp's suggesting. by attempting a "polylectal" grammar of the Guyanese creole continuum. This portrayed the Guyanrse continuum as a range of "lects" which could he related to one another hy a single set of rules. Winford (1990) provides evidence that Bickerton's (1973a and 1973b) polylectal grammar of copula variatiori across the Guyanese continuum is seriously flawed. particularly in its failure to account for significant differences in grammatical rules hetween the basilectal. mesolectal and acrolectal systems. In general. polylectal grammars. like the "panlectal" grammars which Harris rejected for divergent dialect situations. suffer from several fatal shortcomings. First. they wrongly assume that a single set of phrase structure rules can form the hasis for linking grammars which are quite distinct in their semantic arid syntactic organization. Second. they provide no clear hasis for claiming equivalence of meaning or function across the systems involved. Moreover. there are serious prohlems with the architecture of such polylectal granmars. They are hased on the "lects" constructed in implicational scales which sort the variation found in specitic suhareas such as the copula and pronominal systems. Such lects. however. are artefacts of the method of sorting the data. and though they may reflect the particular array of features chosen by speakers in a given interaction. they do not correspond to any of the rules that make up the grammars of such speakers. Finally. the "rules" of a polylectal grammar. as Bickerton (1973h: 21) specitically points out. are actually attempts to relate one grammar or system of rules to another via "rules" which "will in effect be rewritings and re-rewritings of 'earlier' rules". Such rules have no more psychological validity than variable rules. They have no precedents in synchronic linguistic description. and no rationale is offered for thrm in relation to any linguistic theory. Luelsdorff (1986) perhaps describes them hest as helonging to the

realm of "meta-grammars", that is. frameworks for relating one grammar to another. They cannot he conceived of as models ot' individual competence. It is therefore not surprising that polylectal grammars achieved no greater success than variable rules in their attempt ro integrate variability into the core of linguistic theory and models of grammatical competence.

In summary. then. attempts to treat variation in creole continua as falling within the scope of a single community grammar proved just as misguided as attempts to treat variability in dialect situations in terms of variable rules shared by all members of the speech community. Moreover. such inodels of variation in grammatical systems were essentially "asocial" iii character. focussing on the purely linguistic aspects of variation. and relegating the task of explaining the social and situational correlates of linguistic choice to separate fields of enquiry. niuch as "mainstream" structural linguistics has always consigned the study of variability itself to the periphery. It is ironic that. despite all the promise of the early variationist paradigm. ir has consistently t'ailed to achieve the goals of integrating variahility into grammars. and of relating variability itself to its social meaning. To rernedy these shortcomings requires us to revise some of our key assumptions ahout the nature of variability and its relation to grammars. and to rethink our approach to explaining the interaction hetween linguistic hehavior and extralinguistic factors.

II. VARIATION AND CO-EXISTENT SYSTEMS IN CREOLE CONTINUA

The obvious alternative to the DeCamp/Bickertonian view of creole continua is to acknowledge that they involve co-existent grammatical systems. The latter position was taken by Bailey (1971) for Jamaica and Tsuzaki (1971) for Hawaii. Most objections to this view seem to he based on the argurnent that the systems in contact in such situations are not discrete (see Bickerton 1973a: 641). This is quite true. There is substantial overlap between systems. perhaps more so in phonology than in rnorphosyntax and syntax. But the notion of co-existent systems was riever intended to exclude such overlap. The fact that two systems may share certain categories and rules does not rule out the fact that each constitues a coherent system of rules and relationships in its own right. that is internalized as a distinct grammar for those individuals who acquire it. This applies not just to creole situations. hut to cases of divergent dialects such as AAVE. Hiberno-English and others. In each of these cases. it is the peculiar conihination of overlap and mismatch across the systems that produces the effect of a continuous spectrum of variation.

Evidence from sociolinguistic studies supports the view that the continuum of variation in creole situations like Jamaica. Hawaii. Trinidad. Guyana. etc. arises from precisely the kind of inter-systernic interaction that Bailey and Tsuzaki had in mind. Contra Bickerton's (ibid.) unsupported assertion that such interaction must he "random". it has proven to be highly constraiiied and systematic. Moreover. it follows very similar patterns to those found in other situations involving contact hetween divergent dialects. Some illustration from the Trinidadian continuuni would be useful at this point.

Winford (1980) reported on the patterns of variability in the use of several tenselaspect categories in the competing vernacular (Trinidadian creole. henceforth TC) and standard (henceforth SE) varieties used by Srinidadians. These parterns reflect differences across social classes as well as situational contexts of use. hoth of which correlate with different frequencies of TC vs SE forrns. By way of background. a brief overview of the tense/aspect system of TC

is provided in Table 1.

Tense		
<u>Relative Past</u>	Predictive Future	<u>Prospective Future</u>
did	*go*	*goin to*

Aspect				
Unmarked	Pres. Hab.	Past Hab.	Progressive	Completive Perfect
ø	*does*	*use to*	*-in*	*done*

Table 1: Tense/aspect categories of Trinidadian Creole

Some of the variables investigated by Winford (1980) are shown in Table 2. They include:

a. Alternation between TC ø (the unmarked verb) and SE {-ed} to express simple past (with non-stative verbs).
b. Alternation between TC *does* and SE simple present (ø/-s) to express the sense of present habitual.
c. Alternation between TC ø and SE auxiliary *he* preceding present progressive verb forms (V-*ing*).
d. Alteration between TC *go* and SE *will* to express future time reference.

Table 2: **Some examples of alternation in tense/aspect marking**	
1. Past	*I come/came here last night*
2. Pres. Hab.	*He does come/come/comes here everyday*
3. Progressive	*She('s) eatin' right now*
4. Future	*We go/ will do it tomorrow*

The results of a quantitative study of some 75 subjects drawn for an urban and rural conimunity showed clear patterns of social and stylistic differentiation in the use of TC vs SE forms. quite similar to the patterns found in more typical dialect situations. Table 3 summarizes these results. As can be seen. the social classes are clearly distinguished by the frequency with which they use creole as opposed to standard forms. Moreover. the incidence of creole forms increases sharply across "styles" ranging from more formal interview speech (style "A") to spontaneous peer-group interaction (style "C"). Only working class subjects provided data for the latter style. This array seems to reflect the typical spectruni of continuous variation characteristic of creole continua in general. But what should interest us most is the

sharp differences between the more "formal" interview style of the working class. and their vernacular style. which shows a near categorical use of creole features. Moreover. there are two clearly distinct polar varieties represented here: the careful style of the middle classes. which approaches the SE norni. and the casual style of the working class. which approxiniates a creole norni.

Table 3: % distribution of TC variants in the tense/aspect system of TE (Winford 1980)					
		Social Class			
form	**styles**	**UMC**	**LMC**	**UWC**	**LWC**
ED	Style A	19	15	37	63
	Style B	36	26	49	79
	Style C	-	-	88	97
DOES	Style A	00	02	04	02
	Style B	06	00	10	36
	Style C	-	-	50	84
V-ING	Style A	30	37	51	61
	Style B	67	68	80	95
	Style C	-	-	94	100
GO	Style A	00	13	15	39
	Style B	00	21	18	15
	Style C	-	-	55	80
Note:	Style A = More careful interview style Style B = More casual interview style Style C = Spontaneous peer-group speech UMC = Upper middle class LMC = Lower middle class UWC = Upper working class LWC = Lower working class				

It is clear that the variation found here is the result of interaction between these two co-existent systems. Similar interaction can be traced in more detail at the micro-level. by examining patterns of variation for specific variables such as (Past) (Kang 1994). (Perfect) (Winford 1995) and others. Kang. for instance. demonstrates that working class speakers employ a quite different grammar of past time reference in their vernacular usage than do middle class speakers in interview situations. Apart from differences in frequencies of creole fornis. working class speakers are diametrically opposed to middle class speakers in the pattern of phonological constraints on realization of SE past marking in regular verbs whose past forms end in a consonant cluster with final /-t. -d/. This of course is quite different from the pattern Guy (1980) found for American English. It means that the "classic" variable rule of final 1-t.-di deletion applies to niiddle class Trinidadian usage. but not to the worhing class. This is obviously strong evidence of distinct grammars in contact. Similar conclusions are reached by Winford (1993) for the differences between the creole vernacular and the standard variety in their rules for expressing meanings associated with the SE category of Perfect *have*. In this case. while middle class speakers display near-categorical use of *have* in interview situations. working class speakers practically never use *have*. preferring instead TC forms like ø (the unmarked verb). progressive *-in* and Completive-Perfect done to express similar meanings. Again. no single grammar underlies this variation. which cuts across four areas of semantic

space. several distinct categories of the TMA systeni of TC. and several corresponding categories of the SE system. In short. the variation involves interaction between rules from two distinct rammars.

Tlie Trinidadian data point to the fact that there were two distinct grammatical systems available to memhers ot'the speech comrriunity and that interaction hetween these systems was the source of the variahility. This meant that it was possible for two distinct granimars to interact in a pattern of orderly heterogeneity which correlated systematically with external factors such as class and style. In other words. speakers in creole continua display a significant degree of hi-systemic (perhaps bilingual) competence which allows theiii to shift from one variety to another in response to different situations. interlocutors and other aspects of the broader context of interaction. There is clearly no question of attempting to incorporate this kind of variability into a singe community grammar.

Much of the confusion arising from previous attempts to treat creole continua as "seamless wholes" disappears once we acknowledge that we are dealing with a relatively straightforward case of contact betweeii systems. Each system constitutes a coherent set of rules for its own community of speakers. However. this is not to say that these systenis are entirely discrete: there is sonie overlap between them at every level of structure. As Devonish (1989) points out in reference to the Guyanese situation: "What marks off a continuum situation from that involving discrete language varieties is the existence of shared or overlapping variants across the language varieties". One consequence ot'this is that. in style shifting. speakers can make small adjustments to their output. which gives the impression of a continuous spectrum of variation. This is because speakers 'switch' to immediately adjacent varieties on the continuum. We find empirical support for this in studies of the Guyanese continuuin such as Rickford (1979) and Edwards (1975). Both show that. in adjusting their styles. speakers selectively incorporate specitic variants from adjacent systems. Moreover. as Devonish notes. the differential ahility of certain variants to straddle more thaii one system produces the effect of a gradual shading off of one variety into another. as one moves froni one end of the continuum to the other. This is why variation in creole continua is amenable to treatment via both the linguistic variable and implicational scaling, as Rickford 1979 demonstrates. Despite the heterogeneity of speakers' outputs. however. the integrity of the systems in contact is preserved in various ways. for instance:

a. hy the overall organizations of the oppositions within each systeni:
b. by the restriction ofcertain forms to exclusive use within one system:
c. by sheer preponderance of usage of one or another system in certain situations. for instance the use of the creole vernacular in spontaneous peergroup interaction. as demonstrated earlier for Trinidadian English:
d. by co-occurrence restrictions on certain combinations of forms from different systems:

Above all. the preservation of boundaries between systems is motivated by various social factors related to the "rules ot'speaking" in the community. By way of illustration. we can hriefly compare and contrast the co-occurrence restrictions on combinations of Past and Progressive niarkers in Jamaica vs Guyana as described by Devonish. As he notes. there are alternative ways of expressing the notions 'past' and 'progressive' in hoth communities. In Guyana. the variants used for 'past' include (hasilectal) hin. (mesolectal) *did* and (acrolectal)

was, while the variants for 'progressive' include (basilectal) preverbal *a* and (mesolectal) suffixal *-in*. The respective variants are practically identical in Jamaica, *(b)en*, *did* and *was* for 'past', *a* and *-in* for 'progressive'. Combinations of basilectal variants for 'past' and 'progressive' are allowed in both communities, as are combinations of mesolectal variants. Also, combinations of acrolectal *was* and basilectal *a* are not allowed in either community. However, the combination of basilectal *bin* and mesolectal *-in* is allowed only in Guyana, while the combination of mesolectal *did* and *a* is allowed only in Jamaica.

Thus:

	GC		JC
	Di man bin a raak		*Di man (b)en a taak*
	*Di man did u taak		*Di man did a taak*
	Di man bin taakin		**Di man bin taakin*
	Di man did taakin		*Di man did raakiti*
	*Di man was a taak		**Di man was a raak*
	Di man was raakiti		*Di man was raakiti*

How then do we explain the differences in co-occurrence restrictions, given the fact that the varieties in each continuum are so similar, and the categories themselves are identical? If the restrictions were motivated by linguistic factors, we would expect them to be the same in both situations. Instead, as Devonish suggests, the explanation must lie in social rather than linguistic factors. He suggests that, in Jamaica, *(b)en* is a strong social diagnostic of "basilectal" creole usage, and is therefore restricted to occurring only with the most basilectal 'progressive' marker, *a*. On the other hand, the more English-like past markers, *did* and *iins*, can occur with the more English-like progressive marker *-in*. In Guyana, however, 'progressive' *a* is a strong diagnostic of rural basilectal creole and is confined to that system. By contrast, *bin* is not as strong a diagnostic, hence it straddles the rural and urban systems. In short, the differences in the co-occurrence restrictions cannot be explained in purely linguistic terms. This, incidentally, points to the conclusion that there is no "universal" process of "decreolization" in creole continua, as Bickerton (1973a) suggested. Each continuum is in its own way unique, the result of a particular conglomeration of linguistic and sociohistorical developments. Hence, to explain the differences between Jamaica and Guyana, we must look to the differences in social function and social value that each community assigns to modes of speech and alternative choices of various kinds. As Devonish reminds us, members of different speech communities form stereotypes about their defining linguistic characteristics as well as the social evaluation attached to them. Such stereotypes form part of the ideological basis for preserving distinctions and expressing social identity and group loyalty through language choices. This aspect of creole continua remains virtually unexplored, though some research has recently been done (e.g. Sidnell 1997). Devonish presents a direct challenge to creolists to remedy these shortcomings. By ignoring these aspects of creole continua, are variationists not missing the very point on which they should be focussing? Shouldn't the focus of our attention be to identify the ways of speaking to which different social values are assigned by the speech community?

111. VARIATION THEORY IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIOLINGUISTICS

The main conclusion to he drawn from the discussion so far is that the kinds of variability we encounter in creole continua. and perhaps many dialect situations as well, cannot be accounted for by attempting to modify an existing grammatical model so as to allow for variable output, in the way that the variable rule model was once envisaged. The fact that some such approach may he possible in more "typical" dialect situations represents a strong contrast to creole and other continua characterized by significant dialectal divergence. On the other hand, the linguistic differences between the two kinds of situation are in stai-k contrast to the similarities they show in social and stylistic differentiation. The same principles and the sanie kinds of social and contextual factors intluence language choice in hoth cases.

The fact that speech communities can display such sharp differences in linguistic repertoire and relationships. and at the same time manifest strong similarities in the socio-cultural organization of linguistic choices poses a continuing dilemma for sociolinguistics. Reconciliation of the linguistic with the socio-cultural aspects of speech economies has proven much more prohlematic than anticipated. It may explain, indeed. why the field has increasingly split into two broad camps. one concerned primarily with linguistic issues. the other primarily with matters of socio-cultural organization of linguistic means. The area of sociolinguistics I have referred to as "variation theory" belongs essentially in the former camp. It concerns itself with a set of essentially linguistic questions about the quantitative and qualitative relationships between the varieties that make up the repertoire of the community. These are essentially the questions formulated by Labov (1969). discussed earlier. These are of course highly important issues. with significant implications for linguistic theory. Their exploration has led to valuable insight into the relationship between variability and the structure of grammars. Scholars like Guy (1994. 1997). Hinskens & van Hout (1994). Hinskens et al. (1997). Kiparsky (1 994) and others have explored how phonological variation can be handled within current phonological theory. Researchers like Henry (1995) have attempted to show how syntactic variation in "divergent" dialect situations like Belfast can he accounted for in terms of principles and parameter theory

Research of this type should of course he encouraged. and perhaps extended in scope. As it stands, variation theory has a well-developed and well-tested framework for describing both internally and externally-conditioned variatioii in language, via the instruments of linguistic variables (seen here as purely heuristic devices) and VARBRUL or other statistical analysis. However. if its scope is to be extended beyond its traditional concern with intra-systemic dialectal variatioii. it must come to terms with the kinds of inter-systemic variation that characterise creole and other divergent dialect continua. To account for the latter. we need to liberate the linguistic variable once and for all from the straightjacket of variable rules narrowly conceived of as part of a single grammar. with all the assumptions attendant on that connection (intra-systemicity. underlying identity of structure. etc.). Let us apply this powerful tool to investigation of a more diverse set of situations. including not just divergent dialect situations and creole continua. but also bilingual continua. code-switching. etc. This is the kind of synthesis that Labov (1969) seems to have had in mind. in outlining the major research questions for the field.

But the greatest need in variation theory remains the need for a more clearly articulated set of procedures and hypotheses for investigating and explaining the social significance of variation. While studies such as Labov (1969) and Henry (1995) have provided valuable

insights into the linguistic constraints that govern phonological as well as syntactic variation, they have tended to treat the variability as though it existed in a social vacuum. or as though it were an abstraction similar to the idealized behavior of an ideal speaker/hearer. This may well be a necessary condition for attempting such analyses in the first place, as Bickerton (1971) argued. In his view, the task of linguistic analysis should have priority. with social explanation coming as an afterthought. This seems to be precisely the approach taken. for example. by Henry (1995) and Wilson & Henry (1998) in their treatment of syntactic variation in Belfast English. Henry (1995) shows that certain syntactic features of this dialect such as inversion in imperatives (Read *you that*) and singular concord with plural subjects (The *doors is closed*) can be explained in terms of different settings for the relevant parameters in Belfast English as distinct from SE. As Wilson & Henry (1998: 8) suggest. "by considering the interaction of parameter setting within sociolinguistic variation, we may be able better to understand language variation and change as they are driven by social factors but constrained (at one level) by the nature of possible internal grammars". However, they are careful to point out, first, that there are other types of variation -syntactic, lexical and phonological- in Belfast English that may not be explicable in terms of parameter settings (1998: 15). and second. that parameters are only ONE part of the explanation for the systematic variation in this dialect. A significant role is also played by social factors (p. 8). However. the analysis itself is completely a-social, devoid of any attempt to describe the social and contextual correlates of the variation. or provide empirical justification for the central claim that the variation belongs to a single system, in which certain functional elements are differentially "strong" or "weak". The argument presented. though couched in more formal terms. is surprisingly reminiscent of the claims made by DeCamp, Bickerton and others, for creole continua. Thus we read:

> The only option to this would be to claim that Belfast speakers are bi-dialectal, sometimes using one set of parameter settings and sometimes another, but there is no evidence of this. The varying elements occur alongside one another throughout conversations where there is no noticeable shift of style or topic, to a much greater extent than the normal code-mixing and code-switching which occurs among bilingual speakers.
>
> <div align="right">Henry (1995: 137)</div>

Once more, it seems, a variationist study has managed to confuse a sociolinguistic phenomenon with a linguistic construct. To make maners worse. this is all based, apparently. on impression. No quantitative or other empirical evidence is presented which might give us some idea of the social and stylistic distribution of the variant choices. The impression one gets is that. for the purposes of the analysis presented, such data would be irrelevant, or would make little difference to the purely formal concerns of the model. The limitations of such a-social approaches to variation are obvious. It seems we can write grammars of variation based on intuition and impression, without reference to social explanation. And this of course is true. The study is an excellent illustration of the separation between linguistic and socio-cultural description that characterizes variation theory. It seems clear that no purely linguistic model can account for the patterns of variation we find in the speech community. A full account would require us to incorporate social and contextual factors into our descriptions. Yet this integration continues to escape us. It would seem then that we hope in vain for the integration of linguistic and social variability into a model of grammar.

IV. INTEGRATING THE LINGUISTIC AND THE SOCIO-CULTURAL

It is not surprising, then. that variation theory has come under heavy attack for failing to concern itself with broader questions of the social meanings and motivations of linguistic behavior (Romaine 1981. García 1985. Cheshire 1987). lt is true, of course, that variationist studies make use of social concepts like class, gender. ethnicity, etc. to place variation in its social context. Moreover. lip service is paid to the notion of stylistic variation, which is typically presented to us as variation in choice within a single sociolinguistic interview, or at best variation between interview speech and peer-group interaction of some type. But the limitations of this approach are obvious. ln the first place, variationist studies have tended to be content with the mere facts of correlation between linguistic choices on the one hand, and social categories and "styles" on the other. Explanation of the correlations is conspicuous by its absence. The well-developed variationist frameworks for describing such correlations via the linguistic variable and VARBRUL or other statistical analyses have not been extended beyond the mere descriptive level. And the procedure itself has become static and repetitive. There is clearly need for an explanatory framework that would include a more clearly articulated set of procedures and hypotheses for investigating the social significance of variation in language choice. There have been two recent trends within the variationist paradigm to remedy these shortcomings. First, scholars like LePage & Tabouret-Keller (1985) and James and Lesley Milroy have attempted to study variation from the perspective of the individual's choices of language as "acts of identity" which relate him/her to social networks. But, as L. Milroy (1987: 46) acknowledges, the social network methodology developed for the study of linguistic variation is still a set of procedures rather than a full-set theory. To achieve that status, it must first embrace the full set of procedures and theoretical principles that characterize social network methodology in the anthropological tradition (Boissevain 1974). Murray's (1993) criticism of the shortcoming of variationist approaches to the network concept is instructive in this regard. The anthropological approach offers a far more comprehensive framework for the investigation to language and social identity, which variationists would do well to emulate. Moreover. such an approach can be tied to social identity theory and accomodation theory. as developed within social psychology by Giles and his associates (Giles & Coupland 1991). This integration can provide a better theoretical framework to explore the social motivations behind language choices in various situations (Myers-Scotton 1993). Secondly, from another perspective, scholars like Bell (1984) and Rickford & McNair-Knox (1994) have tried to direct our attention to the need for a more sophisticated framework for investigating stylistic variation. The importance of this cannot be exaggerated. since the nature of the data we use for sociolinguistic analysis and the nature of the techniques we employ to obtain it are crucial determinants of the kinds of explanation we can achieve. Moreover, the issue of "styles of speaking" cannot be divorced from the issue of the social motivations of language choice. Style is language choice. constrained by an array of socio-cultural factors which permeate the culture of the speech community (Hymes 1974. 1988). To investigate style is to investigate all aspects of the ethnography of speaking, including the role of social identities and social relationships. and the role of shared cultural knowledge of situations and the ways of speaking appropriate to them. If our goal as sociolinguists is to describe and explain the variable behavior of individuals across the community. then we must adopt the methods of linguistic anthropology to guide our data collection. By restricting itself to data obtained primarily through sociolinguistic interviews. variation theory has in effect turned its

back on social explanation, treating variability more and more as an end in itself (García 1985). It is therefore high time that variationists abandon the sociolinguistic interview as the sole or primary source of the data they collect, and substitute instead data and observations drawn from natural everyday interaction in various situational contexts.

From this perspective. the separation of the field of sociolinguistics into a variety of subdisciplines each with its own approach to the language/society relationship is unfortunate. The divorce between variation theory and conversation analysis is particularly regrettable. The interprecation of the way linguistic variation is imbricated in the social fabric will continue to be an elusive goal as long as this dichotomy prevails. After all, it is in the course of conversational interaction that individual speakers make choices related to identity, goals, topics. and so on. Hence such interaction, with its myriad component factors, constitutes the locus of all variation. To neglect it is to study only the manifestations of variation and at best its external correlated. It falls far short of explanation.

If progress is to be made in our underscanding of variation in language. we must return to our earlier committment to the integration of the social and the linguistic. As Hymes pointed out long ago, a-social linguistic explanations are just as limited as social accounts divorced from linguistic description. "There is really no way that linguistic theory can become a theory of language without encompassing social meaning, and that means becominp a part of the general study of communicative conduct and social action" (1974: 202). This places variationists in somewhat of a dilemma, since they seem to see their goal as being to revise current models of grammar so as to incorporate variability at the expense of social explanation. It is of course necessary and valuable for us to continue the task of building frameworks which can describe the relationships between the grammars used by different speakers and those used by the same speaker on different occasions. However. to account satisfactorily for variation, we need to incorporate social and contextual factors into our descriptions -a goal that no purely linguistic model has accomplished. For such reasons. it seems to me that variation theory should not confine itself to attempts at revising current models of grammar. It has its own agenda. and its own frameworks of analysis. This approach can complement that of model-theoretic linguistics, since both are necessary if we are to understand how and why variation is possible. We should at least recognize that our enterprise is not a mere extension of, or a testing ground for, abstract. a-social models of competence.

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