DECREOLIZATION PATHS FOR GUYANESE SINGULAR PRONOUNS

John R. Rickford

1. INTRODUCTION

Among the richest sites for students of language contact are creole continuum communities, in which one finds not only a creole language and its lexically related standard (the basilect and acrolect respectively), but also a range of intermediate varieties (mesolects) in between. According to DeCamp (1971), for bilingual creole/standard situations to be converted into (post) creole continua, two conditions must be present: (1) "the dominant official language of the community must be the standard language corresponding to the creole" (i.e., it must be lexically related, allowing for the creole to be seen as an inferior version of the standard);[1] (2) "there must be sufficient social mobility to motivate large numbers of creole speakers to modify their speech in the direction of the standard, and there must be a sufficient program of education and other acculturative activities to exert effective pressures from the standard language on the creole."

Although DeCamp's model of the creole continuum and the decreolization process which produces it has provided the basis for virtually all studies of creole continua over the past ten years, it is very much in need of modification and elaboration, and a number of alternatives have recently been proposed (Rickford 1983). But in addition to revising the general model, we need to have specific descriptions of decreolization in real-life communities. Only with such descriptions can the larger theoretical implications of creole continua for the study of language contact and linguistic variation be properly explored.

One of the most active scholars in the description of decreolization is Derek Bickerton, who, in a series of publications (1971, 1973, 1975), used the implicational or dynamic framework to characterize the paths by which decreolization spreads throughout the infinitival complementizers, the singular personal pronouns, and the system of tense-aspect and negation markers in the Guyanese Creole/English continuum. In this paper I will report on my attempt to replicate his (1973) analysis of decreolization in the personal pronouns, making use of data which, like his, is drawn from the Guyanese Creole continuum.

2. BICKERTON'S IMPLICATIONAL ANALYSIS OF GUYANESE SINGULAR PRONOUNS

Bickerton's (1973) analysis is based on the forms used by fifty-nine individuals in recordings made by a Guyanese (Arnold Persuad) and by Bickerton himself. Bickerton found that the outputs of these individuals could be classified as belonging to one of twenty-one isolects (minimally different minisystems) which could be hierarchically arranged from the most basilectal or Creole (lect A) to the most acrolectal or English (lect U) as in Table 1.

TABLE 1

BICKERTON'S IMPLICATIONAL SCALE FOR GUYANESE SINGULAR PRONOUNS

ISOLECT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	3M Pos	1 Pos	1 Sub	3N sub	3F Pos	3M Obj	3F Obj	3N Obj	3F Sub
	1=i 2=iz	1=i 2=mi 3=ai	1=mi 2=a 3=ai	1=i 2=it	1=i 2=shi 3=or	1=am 2=i 3=im	1=am 2=i 3=shi 4=or	1=am 2=it	1=i 2=shi
A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
B	1	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	12
C	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
D	1	1	1	1	-	1	-	2	2
E	1	1	(123)	1	1	(23)	12	12	(12)
F	1	1	1	1	-	12	2	12	12
G	-	1	1	1	12	-	2	2	2
H	1	1	1	12	2	(1)	3	2	(12)
I	1	1	12	-	2	-	3	-	-
J	1	-	13	-	1	2	3	-	-
K	-	1	123	(12)	1	2	2	2	2
L	1	1	123	2	1	2	2	2	2
M	-	12	23	(12)	2	2	3	2	2
N	-	(1)	23	(12)	2	(23)	2	2	(12)
O	-	12	23	2	2	2	3	2	2
P	2	12	23	2	-	3	4	2	2
Q	2	12	23	2	-	3	-	4	2
R	(12)	2	23	2	-	(23)	2	2	2
S	2	2	23	-	-	(23)	3	2	2
T	2	2	23	-	-	2	-	-	-
U	2	2	3	-	-	3	-	-	-

SOURCE: Bickerton (1973:661) [Scalability = 88.03%; Filled Cells = 74.6%].
NOTE: The twenty-one isolects in the leftmost column represent the outputs of fifty-nine speakers. Within each subcategory column, the index 1 represents the basilectal or Creole variant, while 2, 3, and 4 represent the nonbasilectal variants which replace it in the course of decreolization. Circled indices are deviances, tokens which break the implicational ordering; for instance the 123 in column 4, lect E, is deviant because of the presence of similar indices in all columns to the left. The transcription system is semiphonemic, a modified version of the one in Cassidy's Jamaica Talk.

I need to explain the significance of the numbers in Table 1 at this point: 1 is an index for the basilectal or Creole variant within each of the pronoun subcategories at the top of the table (for instance, for i in the third person masculine possessive subcategory in column 1, for mi in the first person possessive subcategory in column 2, and so on), and 2, 3, and 4 are indices for nonbasilectal or non-Creole replacement forms (for i in the third person possessive subcategory in column 1, iz in the first person possessive subcategory in column 2, and so on). The highest numbered index in each column represents the acrolectal or Standard English variant: index 2 in columns 1, 2, 4, 8, and 9; index 3 in columns 3, 5, and 6; index 4 in column 7.

It may not be obvious at first glance why Table 1 represents an implicational scale. The reason is that the patterns of pronoun usage which are attested in the outputs represented are not random and unsystematic, but follow an implicational order which Bickerton summarized (1973:646) as follows:

> deviances apart, the presence of a basilectal index alone in a given column implies the presence of similar indices in all columns to the left; while the presence of a non-basilectal index, alone or otherwise, implies the presence of similar indices, alone or otherwise, in all columns to the right.

The reader may verify the existence of this pattern in Table 1 by looking at it closely. The steplike line running diagonally across the table represents the basic division between basilectal and nonbasilectal areas. The circled indices represent basilectal indices in a basilectal area (e.g., $\frac{23}{1}$ in column 6, column 6, lect E), or basilectal indices in a nonbasilectal area (e.g., $\frac{1}{1}$ in column 6, lect H), or other cases which violate the implicational order. The scalability figure at the bottom of this table--88.03 percent--represents the percentage of nondeviant cells in the table out of the total number of filled cells. Guttman (1944) had suggested that 85 percent was a reasonable figure for indicating how well any actual set of data met the predictions of the scaling model in sociology, and since linguists have generally adopted the same cut-off point, we conclude that the data in Table 1 scale adequately. (But see Rickford 1975:179 for possible difficulties with a straight-forward acceptance of the 85 percent threshold.)

Moving beyond explanations of the technical aspects of Table 1, let me briefly describe the kinds of synchronic and diachronic interpretations we would read from it in the dynamic or implicational framework. In synchronic terms, we have already made the most important interpretation: Variation in the Guyanese singular pronouns is not random, but follows the implicational order which I summarized just now (a basilectal or Creole form occurring by itself implies the occurrence of similar forms in all columns to the left, etc.). But a central aspect of the dynamic/implicational framework is that synchronic variation is merely the mirror of diachronic change, and, by referring to the "more=earlier, less=later" principles of C. J. Bailey (1973), we can interpret Table 1 as synchronic evidence of a diachronic change spreading throughout the singular pronoun subcategories and the various lects of the community. The change, in this instance, is decreolization--

movement away from the Creole and toward the Standard. We infer, from the distribution of basilectal and nonbasilectal indices in this scale (for instance, the fact, that the nonbasilectal forms span the most lects in column 9, and the least in column 1), that the decreolization process begins in the third person feminine subcategory (column 9) and spreads through the other subcategories in order going from right to left until it reaches, last of all, the third person masculine possessive subcategory (column 1). Only when an individual has begun to decreolize in all the other singular pronoun subcategories does he or she, according to this model, begin to vary between a basilectal and nonbasilectal form in the third person masculine possessive.

The path of decreolization through different sections of the community can also be inferred from Table 1. The people whose outputs fall in lect U, at the bottom of the table, have carried the replacement of basilectal pronoun variants the furthest. The people whose outputs fall in lect A, at the other extreme, have not yet begun to decreolize in the pronoun subsystem at all, for they show unvarying basilectal variants in every pronoun subcategory. Over-all, variation in the singular pronouns is represented in this scale as the result of decreolizing waves spreading in a fairly regular and orderly fashion to new pronoun subcategories and lects in the orders represented by their right-to-left and top-to-bottom arrangement, respectively.

3. MY REPLICATION OF BICKERTON'S ANALYSIS

My (1979) analysis of variation in Guyanese singular personal pronouns included an attempt to replicate Bickerton's implicational analysis. My data were drawn from the Cane Walk area (a pseudonym) whom I recorded in a variety of contexts over the course of two years. The pronominal outputs of these individuals (also given pseudonyms) are shown in Table 2, and the thirteen broad isolects into which they fall are indicated in the leftmost column by capital letters (A, B, C, etc.). The implicational ordering for this table is the same as was given above for Table 1. We may note at the out-set that while all the cells in table 2 are filled, compared with only three-quarters of those in table 1, both tables achieve an equally high scalability index--88 percent. There are some minor differences between Tables 1 and 2 in the number of variants we recognize within each subcategory, and how we choose to represent them. For instance, I recognize only two variants in the first person subject subcategory, classifying a as a phonological variant of ai, while Bickerton recognizes three, but these are not of any great significance, and and we can turn now to the larger comparisons.

The most striking point of comparison between Tables 1 and 2 is the fact that the order of the subcategory columns is identical in both tables except for the reversal of the third masculine object and third feminine object columns, which are respectively numbered 6 and 7 in Bickerton's scale, but VII and VI in mine. The significance of this reversal is reduced by the fact that it is based on the output of a single speaker (Reefer), whose data in the third feminine object subcategory is limited to eight tokens.[2]

TABLE 2

IMPLICATIONAL SCALE FOR MORPHOLOGICAL VARIATION IN GUYANESE CREOLE SINGULAR PRONOUNS (J. R. R.'S CANE WALK DATA)

LECTS	Speaker's No. Name	I 3M Pos 1=hi 2=hiz	II 1 Pos 1=mi 2=mai	III 1 Sub 1=mai 2=ai	IV 3N Sub 1=i 2=it	V 3F Pos 1=hi 2=ʃi 3=har	VI 3F Obj 1=am 2=ʃi 3=har	VII 3M Obj 1=am 2=hi 3=hm	VIII 3N Obj 1=am 2=it	IX 3F Sub 1=am 2=ʃi
A	4. Reefer	1	1	1	1	1	1	12	12	12
B	11. Darling	1	1	1	1	1	1	12	12	12
C	7. Irene	1	1	1	1	12	12	12	12	12
D	12. Nani	1	1	1	1	12	12	12	12	12
	8. Rose	1	1	1	1	12	12	12	12	12
E	1. Derek	1	1	1	12	2	(1)	(2)	12	12
	10. Ajah	1	1	12	12	2	2	2	12	12
	2. James	1	1	12	12	2	2	2	12	12
	9. Sari	1	1	12	12	2	23	23	12	12
F	6. Raj	1	12	12	12	2	23	123	12	12
	5. Sultan	1	12	12	12	2	23	123	12	12
G	3. Florine	1	12	12	12	2	23	123	12	12
H	24. Granny	1	12	12	12	2	23	23	12	12
I	14. Magda	1	12	12	2	2	23	23	12	12
J	13. Mark	12	12	12	(12)	(123)	(123)	(123)	12	12
	22. Ustad	12	12	12	2	(123)	(123)	(123)	12	12
	17. Sheik	12	12	12	2	23	23	23	12	12
	23. Oxford	12	12	12	2	23	23	23	12	12
	16. Kishore	12	12	12	2	(2)	(2)	23	(12)	2
	20. Claire	12	12	12	2	23	23	23	(12)	2
	19. Radika	12	12	2	2	23	23	23	(12)	(12)
K	18. Seymour	12	12	2	2	23	23	123	(12)	(12)
L	21. Bonnette	2	2	2	2	3	3	23	3	(12)
M	15. Katherine	2	2	(12)	2	3	3	23	3	2

SOURCE: Rickford (1979:384) [Filled Cells = 100% (216/216); Scalability = 88% (192/216)].
NOTE: Deviances circled (all 123s; cases of 1 if they occur in 12 territory; cases of 2 if they occur in 23 territory, etc.). Meaning of numerical indices given at top of table. Implicational ordering as for Table 1. Transcription system is phonetic (symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet).

Furthermore, Bickerton himself (1973:662) had made allowances for just this possibility:

It is possible—indeed likely—that for some individuals or groups the stages are reordered, but such reordering is likely to be minimal, e.g., a reversal of the ordering of immediately adjacent stages. [Emphasis added.]

If we take both of these considerations into account, and bear in mind that there are 362,880 possible permutations of the nine subcategory columns (9!; or 9x8x7x6x5x4x3x2x1), the fact that Bickerton's implicational ordering of the subcategories agrees so closely with mine could hardly be considered accidental.[3] Six years after his original study, and with data gathered in a different area within the Guyanese speech community, Bickerton's findings about the path which decreolization takes as it spreads throughout the singular pronouns are essentially confirmed.

I wish to take a moment to emphasize the striking character of this replication by explaining how the arrangement of columns and rows in an implicational scale is decided on. Given the outputs of individuals or isolects in rows, and the various linguistic subcategories in columns, one keeps shifting rows and columns around until the most deviance-free scale is produced (i.e., until the data is best tailored to the predictions of an implicational scale). In the case of Tables 1 and 2, there is no a priori reason to expect the pronominal subcategories to be ordered as they are, or to agree as closely as they do. Given the fact that they do agree so closely, when there are so many thousands of other possibilities, we have to treat it as significant, as indicating trends or realities in the data quite independent of the investigator.

Striking as this similarity between Tables 1 and 2 is, we can hardly fail to notice that there are also some differences between them, and these merit discussion. The major difference between Bickerton's scale and mine is the fact that mine contains considerably more variation. Split cells, in which there is variation between two or more forms, account for only 27 percent of all cells in Bickerton's scale (38/141, Table 1), but for 71 percent of the total in mine (154/216, Table 2). The average number of split cells per lect in Bickerton's scale is 1.8, with a maximum of 5 in lect N. The average number of split cells per lect in my scale is 5.5, with three individuals—Ustad, Sheik, and Oxford—displaying variation in all nine cells. Related to this difference in the frequency of split cells is the fact that my scale is more in keeping with a model in which all of the subcategory or environment cells become variable before any becomes categorical (see Bailey 1973, Fasold 1975 for discussion), while Bickerton's scale is more in keeping with a model in which variation goes to completion in one subcategory or environment before being initiated in another (see Bickerton 1971). It should, however, be noted that neither of our scales is a perfect exemplar of these respective types.

If the major difference between Tables 1 and 2 is the greater variability of the latter, what explanation may we offer for this? One reason may be the fact that my scale is based on more data per individual than Bickerton's—approximately twelve times as many pronoun tokens per individual, on the average.[4] I demonstrate

elsewhere in the study of which this replication is a part (Rickford 1979) that there is a weak tendency for morphological variation in the pronouns to increase with more plans. Another reason may be the fact that nineteen of Bickerton's speakers occupy the extreme basilect (as far as the pronominal subcategories are concerned)--and this is by definition invariant--while none of mine do. This may, in turn, be related to the fact that many of Bickerton's speakers come from Bushlot and other rural areas which are further away from the capital city of Georgetown--with its pull of Standard English-- than Cane Walk is. A final reason has been suggested by Bickerton (personal communication, April 1979), and I think this reason is the most significant:

The reason why my scales are much less variable than yours is simply that for each speaker I used only a single speech act-- as if he was a speaker produced more than one, then ... he was treated as if he was two speakers. True, ... the data was not edited in any way, and obviously no speech act is wholly homogeneous from a stylistic point of view, so there is some variation, but I am the first to agree that if I'd included a broad range of styles from each speaker, I'd have come up with scales substantially identical with yours.

Given the difference in variability between Tables 1 and 2, and the methodological differences which seem to lie behind it, the question naturally arises as to which method is right. The answer may depend on the purpose which the scaling is intended to serve, and on the perspective which it is designed to represent. For the analysis of style switching or style ranging, for instance, it may indeed be useful to represent the outputs of the same speaker on different occasions at different points on a scale, as Bickerton (1975:203) suggests and as Escure (1982) also attempts to do with data from Belize. But I would caution that this will not, in and of itself, eliminate variability. My experience with the Guyanese data has been that, once one has a good deal of data on individual speakers, a certain amount of "inherent variability" (Labov 1969) still remains, even after situational and metaphorical switching (Blom and Gumperz 1972) have both been taken into account. Furthermore, the cutting points between one "speech act" or "occasion" and another are often difficult to determine and are usually executed in a circular fashion (i.e., researchers seem to be most confident about the need to recognize a different speech act when the speaker's output seems very different).

If, however, one's purpose is to reveal the repertoires of individuals as they participate in the process of decreolization, then it is essential to attempt to explore the limits of those repertoires as fully as possible in one's fieldwork,[5] and to represent all of the variants produced in a single line, as was done in Table 2. As that table indicates, the data do not, in the process, become unmanageable, for patterns of implicational ordering can still be found.

In general, we need to preserve the information on how much variability decreolizing speakers remain capable of, to counter the frequent assumption that they are frozen or fossilized at narrow intermediate stages of development. (See Schumann and Stauble

[1983] and Rickford [1983] for a critique of this conventional notion.) The virtue of displays like Table 2 is that they fulfill precisely this function, indicating that decreolizing speakers generally retain the capacity for continuing to talk like the people among whom they grew up, while developing the ability to approximate the speech of other groups within the society with whom they are less familiar. As I stress in my (1983) paper, decreolization appears to begin as an additive rather than replacive process. It is to be hoped that studies of other areas of the grammar--and other speech communities--will provide further empirical evidence on this and other aspects of decreolization, permitting more fruitful comparison with other kinds of language acquisition and change.

NOTES

1. This condition has been challenged by Robertson (1982), based on data from Dutch Creole in Guyana and French Creole in Trinidad, both of which seem to have been decreolizing in the face of pressure from Standard English.

2. The point is that it is only Reefer's 1 (instead of 12) pattern in the third feminine object subcategory which forces us to order column VI before column VII. Of course I still do not think we can disregard Reefer's invariance here, and this is why I have retained the ordering of column VI before VII even though it causes a reversal of Bickerton's original ordering.

3. Note, however, that the ordering of the last three columns in Table 2 is not strictly determined by the data, since all of them begin with 12 indices. These columns were ordered as they were, given the existence of a choice here, so as to increase the comparability of Tables 1 and 2.

4. The total number of pronoun tokens for the twenty-four Cane Walk speakers I recorded was 11,424 over all nine subcategories, or approximately 476 per individual. Bickerton (1973:662) notes that the data total for the fifty-nine speakers in his scale (Table 1) is "well over two thousand pronoun tokens." Assuming this to be around 2,360 tokens, this works out to an average of 40 per individual, or 11.9 times less than for the Cane Walk individuals ($476 \div 40$).

5. Sociolinguists have, in general, not succeeded in "plumbing" the linguistic competence of their consultants or informants as fully as they might, particularly in studies of creole continua. One aspect of our failure in this respect is our neglect of native-speaker intuitions, a point emphasized in Rickford (1981).

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UTTERANCE STRUCTURE IN BASILANG SPEECH

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to examine the structure of utterances in pidginized varieties of learner speech. The early stage of second-language acquisition (SLA) through which all learners pass and at which many learners fossilize is referred to as the basilang and represents early pidginization and early SLA. Givón (1979, in press) sees both pidginization and early SLA as manifestations of the presyntactic or pragmatic mode of communication which contrasts with the syntactic mode and which is more characteristically topic-comment oriented rather than subject-predicate oriented. Two European researchers, Klein (1981) and Dittmar (1982), have noted the topic-comment or theme-rheme nature of the early interlanguage of worker immigrants to Germany.

Klein, in a study of a Spanish speaker's pidginized variety of German, found that the principle on which the learner organized his utterances was: theme-break-rheme. Klein argues that the function of the theme is to introduce a background or setting and also, at times, to provide "given" information or to indicate what the message is "about." The function of the rheme is to give the specific information the speaker wants to provide. Such theme-rheme organization is illustrated in the following example:

(a) ich kind--nicht viel moneda Spanien
    I child--not much moneda Spain

(b) ich nicht komme Deutschland--Spanien immer (als) Bauer arbeite
    I not come Germany--Spain always (as) farmer work (i.e.; Before I came to Germany, I always worked as a farmer in Spain.)

(c) arbeite (für) andere Firma--obrero eventual
    work (for) other factory--obrero eventual (i.e., When you are working for other people, you are a casual laborer.)

(d) autonomo--nicht viel Geld
    autonomo--not much money (i.e., As an independent worker, you don't own very much.)

(e) fünfundsechzig Jahre--pension.
    sixty-five years--pension (Klein, 1981:83-4).

Dittmar expands Klein's position in a study of 6 additional Spanish speakers of pidginized varieties of German. Dittmar provides examples of theme-rheme structures from each of these