THE INSIGHTS OF THE MESOLECT[1]

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Introduction. The question of whether modern-day American Black English[2] is derived from some earlier creole has been a source of controversy for some time now (McDavid and McDavid 1951; B. Bailey 1965; Stewart 1967, 1968; Davis 1971; Dillard 1968, 1972). However despite the number of papers which have been devoted to arguing vehemently the pros or cons of this issue, very little in the way of detailed original evidence has emerged from either side in recent years, and the issue remains almost as stalemated now as it was two decades ago.

A major reason for the failure to make any progress in this area, as in so many other areas in 'creole studies' as a whole, has been the traditional tendency to view a 'creole' as a fixed invariant system, maximally different from its lexically related standard language, and a concomitant practice of ignoring any variants between these polar lects. Even though the concepts of a 'continuum' and of 'decreolization' were introduced as early as the 1930's (Reinecke and Tokimasa 1934; Bloomfield 1933:374), and became even more popular with the detailed presentation of DeCamp (1971), the situation has not changed that much. There is a more general awareness now than perhaps a decade or so ago that creole continua are the norm rather than the exception in such places as Jamaica, Antigua, Guyana, Hawaii, to name only a few. There is an awareness that such continua 'challenge conventional modes of linguistic description' (Hymes 1971:299) and are of central importance to variation theory (B. Bailey 1971; Labov 1971; Bickerton 1971).

Even in the midst of all this concern with descriptive adequacy, however, the simpler level of observational adequacy has hardly

begun to be reached. Our knowledge of what is contained in any single creole continuum--what range of variants exists for the different grammatical features, for instance--is far from complete.[3]

As a result, it is the 'basilectal' variety of creole, with all its well-known features perfectly intact, that continues to dominate activity in the field. When scholars introduce the term 'creole' into their discussions--of such things as the 'creole' basis of Black English (BE), for instance--it is still this to which they refer. The old data, the old misconceptions and half-truths remain in active circulation, and not surprisingly, the old problems remain unresolved.

In this paper I wish to argue that the most significant opportunities for reversing this trend lie in an approach to creoles that goes beyond the basilect into the 'mesolect'--a term coined by Bickerton (1973b) to refer to those varieties intermediate between the basilect and the acrolect. New data from mesolectal varieties of Sea Island Creole (SIC) and several Caribbean areas will be brought to bear on the issue with which this paper started out--the creole origin of BE. I hope to demonstrate in this paper the way in which the mesolect not only offers new insights into old questions like this one, but raises several interesting new questions of its own.

General relation of SIC to BE

Among Black American English dialects, one variety--the 'Gullah' of the the Sea Islands and in certain mainland areas of South Carolina and Georgia--has been universally accepted as being a creole, at least since the pioneering work of Turner (1949). Even those who most vigorously challenge the 'creolist position' on BE agree on this (cf. McDavid 1950:323; Davis 1971:91).

In view of this, the relation of Gullah to the other varieties of American Black speech has always been 'crucial to the argument of the origin of Black dialect' (Wolfram 1971:159). The parallels between Gullah and other Caribbean and West African creoles were made clear by Turner (1949) and others. On the other hand, some of the very same creole features which have been used to demonstrate the relationship of Gullah to other creoles--the use of lexical items like nyam and unu, the preverbal markers da and de, etc.--seem to militate against arguments for a relationship between Gullah and BE, inasmuch as the latter clearly lacks such features.

If the term 'Gullah' is taken, as it usually is, to refer to some 'pure' basilectal variety of creole, its relationship to BE will probably appear very tenuous. However, if one considers the more mesolectal forms in SIC today, the relationship of the two becomes much more self-evident. The crucial data on such forms has never come to light because the belief is still held, and perpetuated[4] that there

is a 'pure' entity called 'Gullah' in general existence on the Sea Islands today.

My own fieldwork on the Sea Islands, carried out over a period of almost six months in 1970 and 1972, under very favorable conditions, convinced me that this was a myth. It is possible to extract from the data enough isolated examples from isolated informants to prove that the old Gullah (as in Smith 1926 or Gonzales 1922) is still very much alive and well. My data includes several examples of the older basilectal forms:[5]

Continuative/habitual da:

(1) She must be da hunt husban. (7-31-72)
'She must be hunting for a husband'

Locative de:

(2) I done de de. (7-21-72)
'I am already there'

Se as complementizer:

(3) I ain't know se y'all bin gone. (8-7-72)
'I didn't know that you all had gone'

Bin as marker of past tense or anterior aspect:

(4) Last week Wednesday she bin come home. (14-2-245)
'Last week Wednesday she came home'

But for each of these features, and many others which have not been cited, there exist variant forms which are used as often if not more by the same speakers, and which are in any case more representative of the general speech of the Sea Islands.

What is most widely spoken on the Sea Islands today is best described as a 'decreolized' or mesolectal variety of Gullah. In fact, I would prefer to abandon the term 'Gullah' entirely, because its associations with some 'pure' basilectal variety are already too firmly entrenched. So far I have been using as an alternative 'Sea-Island Creole', first suggested by Cunningham (1970), but for different reasons.[6] It seems more flexible and useful, provided we are willing to recognize the existence of different levels of 'creole' in the present situation.[7]

Proponents of the 'creolist' position have traditionally used data drawn from basilectal varieties of SIC and other creoles. Thus

Stewart (1968) tried to show direct similarities between Gullah basilect (GUL) and Negro Non-standard basilect (NNS) by using examples which reveal that they share a rule of Conjunction Reduction found in other creoles like Sranan and Krio, but not in Standard English (SE) and White Non-Standard (WNS). The rule does not permit the deletion of a shared subject pronoun in the second of two conjoined sentences:

(5) SE: We were eating--and drinking too.
WNS: We was eatin'--an' drinkin' too.
NNS: We was eatin'--an' we drinkin' too.
GUL: We bin duh nyam--en' we duh drink too.

There are undoubtedly other examples of direct parallels between features of basilectal SIC and features of BE which, like this one, have gone unnoticed in the huge literature on both. And it is clearly important to continue to draw such parallels where they exist. However, the Sea Islands provide a far richer opportunity for testing the BE origin hypothesis.

It lies precisely in the possibility first suggested by Stewart himself (1968:fn. 38)--that in ongoing decreolization of SIC we might witness a repeat of the very process which gave rise to BE.

It has never been pointed out before, for instance, that in decreolized varieties of SIC today we can find constructions which are completely absent from earlier descriptions of 'Gullah' but are matched exactly in many inner-city varieties of BE. Compare the following examples (BE data was collected in Philadelphia):

Stressed BIN as remote-phase marker:

(6) SIC: I BIN had that. I had that since the days of moonshine whiskey. (6-28-72)
'I've had that for a long time. I've had that since the days of moonshine whiskey'

(7) BE: I BIN had that plant. (P10-17-71)
'I've had that plant for a long time'

Ain't + V as negative of simple past (=English didn't):

(8) SIC: I ain't know what the people bin going so fool about. (9-1-162)
'I didn't know why the people were acting so foolishly'

(9) BE: He ain't go no further than third or fourth grade. (P1-5-158)

Invariant be as habitual aspect marker:

(10) SIC: You be looking, so don't say nothing. (15-1-655)
'You're usually looking, so don't say anything'

(11) BE: Boy, we be jumping Saturday nights. (P2-17-72)
'Boy, we're usually "jumping" Saturday nights'

It is possible to argue that the SIC examples represent direct 'dialect mixture' with BE rather than convergence through a similar process of decreolization. However, this type of argument is repudiated by evidence for the various stages of the process by which older, more 'basilectal' forms evolved into the newer 'mesolectal' ones cited above.

In a moment I shall take up in detail the evidence which exists for the development of be as a habitual marker. Before turning to this, however, I must deal briefly with one other matter. Since he has been criticized above for selecting evidence from the basilect alone, it should be mentioned here that Stewart is the only one who has used the various stages of the decreolization process in SIC to explain a synchronic feature of BE. In Stewart (1969:244) he attempted to account for the statistical distribution of copula deletion in BE discovered by Labov (1969). He argued that this distribution reflected differences in the order and manner in which an older creole marker, da, originally used for both Noun-Phrase and Verbal predication, gave way to more Standard English (SE) equivalents. Bickerton (1973a) independently discovered an almost identical series of stages in the decreolization of Guyana Creole (GC). His account of this process not only supports Stewart's general argument, but expands and enriches it at several points. (The reader is referred to both papers for further details.)

Invariant be in Black English

No single feature of BE has received as much attention in the literature as the use of 'Invariant be' (Bailey 1965; Stewart 1965, 1969; Dillard 1972; Labov et al. 1968; Fasold 1969, 1972; Loflin 1970; Wolfram 1969, and others too numerous to mention). It is not my intention here to provide a complete synchronic analysis, but only to discuss a few key points about the form relevant to this paper.

Since it is the most detailed and comprehensive treatment to date, I shall use Fasold (1972) as my primary resource.

Invariant be occurs in the same environments in which conjugated forms of the copula (am, is, are, etc.) are also found. Unlike the conjugated forms, however, be cannot be used with punctilinear meaning. The semantic opposition between the two types is neatly captured in the following example from the Philadelphia data:

(12) Everytime I be late. And now I'm early, he's late.
(Said by a twenty-year-old Black woman waiting for her dentist to come in)

The primary function of be, demonstrated with a wide variety of evidence in Fasold (1972) is that of indicating habitual or iterative aspect. Fasold stresses the importance of distinguishing occurrences of invariant be in this function, which he calls 'distributive', from occurrences which are also found in SE: be in imperatives (Be quiet!), subjunctives (If this be treason . . .), and after modal auxiliaries (can, may, should, etc.). It is particularly important to distinguish cases of habitual be from cases in which an underlying will or would has been deleted, but can be reconstructed from other evidence:

(13) What would I do? I be so happy, I don't know what I'd do. (Fasold)

As Fasold has pointed out, many of the analyses which have attempted to claim non-habitual functions for be have been vitiated by a failure to observe this distinction. In addition to the cases he discusses, note that Bailey's (1965:175) analysis of be as a future is based on examples of just this type:

(14) 'You be back.' Priest say looking at me. 'I know you be back man'. (Quoted by Bailey from The Cool World by Warren Miller, p. 9)

While in all that has been said so far I am clearly in agreement with Fasold, there are differences in our analysis, some of which have relevance to this paper. One is his description of be as tenseless. Apart from the syntactic economy which this description allows for (the invariance of habitual be is accounted for in the same way as cases of be after modals etc.), Fasold seems to feel that there is something semantically tenseless or timeless about distribute or iterative meanings:

> Since the action is repeated with some degree of regularity, it cannot be specified as taking place specifically in the past or specifically not in the past. (1972:178)

This is true only insofar as we take 'past' and 'present' to refer to very narrow, almost indivisible points. For it is certainly possible to refer to habitual or iterative actions as being past or non-past if these terms are understood to refer to extended periods. Thus He used to go there is clearly both habitual and past. The point is perhaps better expressed by the notion of 'completed' or 'incompleted'. At the moment of speaking, an action may be specified as still (incompleted) or no longer (completed) generally true. Whether it happens to be actually in progress at the moment of speaking remains irrelevant.

On the basis of all the examples I have seen, and some discussion with BE informants on this subject, it seems that be is most frequently used of habitual events which are non-past or incompleted. The form makes no assumption about how long ago the event began to occur repeatedly, but only that it has been occurring repeatedly, and still does so. As in mesolectal varieties of SIC and other creoles, habitual actions which are clearly past or completed are usually expressed instead by would (often contracted or deleted: note) or useta.[8] The latter is frequently found in cooccurrence with did,[9] especially in questions and negatives:

(15) I useta didn't believe her. (Phila: 3-13-72)

(16) It's like that now. But it didn't useta be that way. (SI: 7-2-72)

(17) Did you useta work to Tybee? (SI: 5-4-70)

While I feel that most occurrences of habitual be today have non-past or incompleted reference, the existence of examples with clear past reference is less disarming to me than they appear to be to Fasold. Cunningham (1970:70) claims that be is used as a habitual marker in her SIC data regardless of whether the context is present or past, and the mesolectal creole form from which be seems to be most immediately derived--doz--has only recently come to imply non-past reference. In GC as in SIC it was apparently widely used in earlier times regardless of past or present reference. Note the following GC example in McTurk 'Quow' (1899:90):

(18) Ah bin see how Tomas does watch dem duck, hungry fashion.

'I saw how Thomas used to watch those ducks, in a hungry fashion'

Among speakers just making the transition from basilect to mesolect, the use of doz in contexts that are clearly past can still be found today in both SIC and GC:

(19) I doz carry a truck load of people on Edisto every morning. (Cunningham 1970:63)
'I carried a truck load of people on Edisto every morning'

(20) lang taim . . . awi das gatu plau wid kau (Bickerton to appear)
'In the old days . . . we used to have to plough with oxen'

Finally note the following false start in my SIC data:

(21) We doz am . . . we useta take a lot of medicine onetime. (9-2-172)

In view of all this, I would consider the few examples of be with past reference as simply relics of this earlier stage.[10]

Given that be is not found in SE nor in any White dialects, even those in the South (cf. Wolfram 1971, 1973), its origin has often puzzled researchers. No satisfactory explanations have yet appeared. There are frequent 'footnote' references to possible influence from the Irish (Stewart 1969:246; Davis 1971:93; Wolfram 1971:60), but the details have never been filled in. (We shall return to this later.) There is, however, a great deal of evidence for the origin of be in the Sea Islands today: the role of doz there and in other creoles is particularly crucial.

Doz as a habitual marker in SIC and other mesolectal creoles

The use of be in SIC, as in example (10) above, and in:

(22) He be so quiet (8-2-803)
'He's usually so quiet'

is found mainly among middle-aged and younger speakers. The older speakers (over sixty) use be occasionally, but doz and doz bi more frequently:

(23) But I doz go to see people when they sick. (12-2-055)
'But I usually go to see people when they're sick'

(24) You bury that, and then the ground doz draw um just as hard . . . (9-2-808)
'You bury that, and then the ground draws it just as hard . . .'

(25) I'll miss C-, cause she doz be here and write letter for me sometimes. (9-1-707)
'I'll miss C-, because she is usually here to help me write letters'

(26) He doz be up and cut wood sometimes . . . (9-1-279)
'He generally gets up and cuts wood sometimes'

Unlike SE does, the doz in sentences like those above occurs with very weak stress, and is clearly not an emphatic, but a habitual marker. Doz also occurs in mesolectal varieties of GC. As a native speaker, I had been using the form for most of my life, but never became consciously aware of its function, nor of how this differed from SE does until I began transcribing and analyzing my SIC data in 1972.

What is striking is that up until this time, the habitual use of doz had never been mentioned before in all the existing literature on Gullah. Cunningham (1970) was the only one to have even noticed the form, but she missed its function and meaning entirely. She saw it as an essentially 'empty' form of do, 'a regular optional member of AUX'. However, all but one of her examples have the invariant form doz, and illustrate quite clearly its habitual function. Note the adverbial specification in (19) above, and in:

(27) She doz always be gone sometimes. (1970:63)
'She goes away frequently'

In the literature on the Caribbean Creoles, Collymore (1965), Solomon (1966), and Bickerton (1973) provided the earliest evidence that the form existed in Barbados, Trinidad, and Guyana respectively. At first Solomon erroneously maintained that it was simply a marked present tense (cf. Labov 1971:456). But he himself describes it in a more recent paper (1972:14) as having 'repeated' meaning. And since Bickerton (1972) has already presented most of the arguments I was willing to offer against Solomon's earlier treatment, it is no longer necessary to defend at length the claim that doz is primarily a habitual marker, and its non-past marking altogether secondary. As pointed out above, this is also true of Black English be.

I have since been able to document the common use of the form with habitual meaning in various other places in the Caribbean: Antigua, St. Kitts, Nevis, Belize, and even the Bay Islands in the Caribbean Southwest.[11]

The question still remains--how could such a widespread form have gone unnoticed for so long? One of the clearest reasons is of course the non-basilectal nature of the form, and the traditional tendency, mentioned in the introduction, of concentrating on the basilect to the exclusion of everything else. Related to this is the fact that doz is deceptively SE in form, if not in function (see also Conclusion 2 below). Finally, there is the effect of the tremendous morphophonemic condensation to which doz is subject: often it appears as [əz] or just [z]. It is ironic that it is this very reduction which may have helped the form to escape earlier notice. For it provides the final link in a rather involved process by which be comes to function as a habitual marker in and of itself. I will try to reconstruct the successive stages of this process in SIC as closely as possible, drawing on comparable data from other creoles like GC where gaps in the SIC data are apparent.

History of habitual markers in SIC

It seems that the Atlantic creoles, as a group, may have differed from SE since their inception in having a pre-verbal marker of habitual aspect. The need for such a marker in the first place was probably inherited from the native languages of early slaves to the New World. Many West African languages appear to have some means of signalling the same habitual aspect marked by BE be today. Stewart (1969:fn. 6), cites the use of blan in both Krio and an older variety of Gullah, and the use of di in Wolof.

However, the shape of this habitual marker changed considerably over the centuries, representing in microcosm the larger process by which the creole languages accommodated to pressures to become more like the Standard languages with which they were in contact.

It is uncertain what the earliest habitual marker in SIC was. At some time there was the marker blan/blaŋ referred to above. Hancock (1969:21) includes an example of this in earlier Gullah:

(27) be gɛ́də blaŋ kʌm ɑ́wtn di riβə ɸə sʌ́n isɛɸ.
'Brer Alligator usually comes out of the river to sun himself'.

I found no trace of this marker in the Sea Islands today, however. It is not known how widespread it was to begin with, nor in what period it experienced its most widespread use.

Blan may have coexisted from the inception of SIC with da, the oldest habitual marker which can still be found in basilectal varieties today. In all probability this form, like its equivalent a in Guyana, was originally ambiguous in function between continuative and habitual aspect. Later it was split: da ~ a being retained for continuative aspect, and doz introduced to signal habitual aspect alone. These developments have been traced in detail for GC by Bickerton (1972 and to appear). He includes examples which document the close alternation between a and doz which occurs before the changeover just discussed is complete:

(28) dem a mash it wid kau an i get saaf an den awi a plant it. wi das plant . . .
'They broke it (the ground) up with oxen and it got soft and then we planted it. We planted it . . .'

Actually, as Bickerton (to appear) also points out, by the time doz is being used as the exclusive marker of habitual aspect, a+V has itself been replaced by V+in for continuative aspect, and the creole as a whole has moved that much closer to SE.

We can infer the operation of similar processes in SIC by virtue of the fact that while doz is far more frequent as a habitual marker now, da is occasionally used for the same function:

(29) I ain't know he bin a beat he wife. (6-19-72)
'I didn't know he used to beat his wife'

Da in turn is more frequent as a continuative than as a habitual marker, suggesting, for those speakers who do use the form, a late stage of the a/doz split described above.

It may be convenient to follow the stages from this point on with a simplified paradigm. When doz first replaced da it must have occurred directly before verbs and adjectives, but before de in locative, existential, and certain other environments (like comitative phrases: 'with X'). The paradigm at this stage would have been exactly that of many lower-mesolectal speakers in Guyana and Trinidad today:

(30) He doz work
He doz quiet
He doz de in the club

Under continuing pressure from SE, however, an invariant form of the English copula was apparently later introduced into these environments, probably at the same time that it began to appear after modals like mus and useta. Invariant be was almost certainly

introduced after doz first in locative environments, because of the influence of the earlier de in this position, and only later spread to the others. In my SIC data, most of the examples of doz bi occur before following locatives (cf. (25) and (26) above). And in GC, depending on the level involved, one can find either He doz de in the club or He doz be in the club, but not *He doz in the club.

Be then spread to adjectival environments, and became obligatory before V+ing[12] where both habitual and continuative aspect were being expressed at once (as earlier da could have done alone). Our diachronic paradigm after this stage would have looked like this:

(31) He doz be working
He doz be quiet
He doz be in the club

In the final stage, the preceding doz is removed altogether, and be, which was originally introduced as an 'empty' copulative element, assumes the function of marking habitual aspect. The disappearance of doz may have resulted from at least two factors: (1) The realization of its non-standard character, made increasingly clearer to upper mesolectal speakers as they moved closer to SE and began to understand and adopt the use of 'support' do therein. (2) A process of phonological reduction in which doz so frequently occurs in highly reduced forms that it finally becomes irrecoverable to younger speakers.

It is difficult to say which of these had a greater effect in eliminating doz altogether in earlier varieties of BE. It was probably a combination of both. It is hard to document the operation of the first factor except by reference to its effect, and by an understanding that it is this kind of conscious modification of linguistic habits which is involved in the process of decreolization. However, the operation of the second factor, phonological reduction, can be more completely documented. Recently I have been trying to formulate in finer detail the nature of the processes involved (Rickford MS). The work is incomplete, but it may be useful to summarize what has already been discovered.

So far I have concentrated on the process by which the initial stop of doz is removed. One reason for this is that the removal of initial stops seems to be an extremely rare phenomenon in English, limited to cases like this, that, then, there in which an underlying [ð] becomes [dð] or [d] before finally being removed, if it is not assimilated to the preceding element before (Cofer 1973). This alone adds to the theoretical importance of studying the removal of initial d in doz.

The data I have looked at so far consists of sixty sentences containing doz--forty-one from extracts of interviews with fourteen

Guyanese speakers (kindly made available by Derek Bickerton) and nineteen drawn from two interviews with Sea Island speakers. Even with this relatively small sample, certain salient patterns emerge:

TABLE 1. Frequency of initial d-absence in sixty doz tokens for GC and SIC speakers. (Relative frequencies in parentheses).

	Pause__	Vowel__	Nasal__	Liquid__	Fric.__	Total
GC	0/2 (0.0)	3/25 (.12)	9/12 (.75)	1/2 (.5)	-	12/41 (.29)
SIC	-	4/13 (.31)	2/2 (1.0)	3/3 (1.0)	1/1 (1.0)	10/19 (.53)

As Table 1 indicates, the overall relative frequency of #d-absence is greater for SIC speakers (.53) than for GC speakers (.29). This is in keeping with the fact that SIC is in a more advanced stage of decreolization than GC. Secondly, #d is absent more often after nasals, liquids, and fricatives than after vowels or pause. Since we are concerned with the removal of a consonant, this pattern is exactly what we would expect. Note, however, that the constraining effect of a preceding vowel is weaker in the SIC than in the GC sample, foreshadowing a final stage in which nothing can hold back the removal of initial d.

In the case of preceding nasals, there is enough data to allow us to discover that the removal of initial d does not result from a single deletion rule, but involves the successive application of the following optional rules:

(32) Nasal assimilation to point of articulation of following stop

$$[+\text{nasal}](\rightarrow)[+\text{coronal}] / \_\_\_ \#\# \begin{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} +\text{coronal} \\ +\text{anterior} \\ -\text{continuant} \\ +\text{voice} \end{bmatrix} \text{VC} \\ +\text{Aux} \\ +\text{Habit.} \end{bmatrix}$$

(33) Assimilation of stop to preceding nasal

$$[-\text{continuant}](\rightarrow) \begin{bmatrix} +\text{nasal} \\ \alpha\text{coronal} \\ +\text{anterior} \end{bmatrix} / \begin{bmatrix} +\text{nasal} \\ \alpha\text{coronal} \\ +\text{anterior} \end{bmatrix} \#\# \begin{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \_\_\_ \\ \text{voice} \end{bmatrix} \text{VC} \\ +\text{Aux} \\ +\text{Habit.} \end{bmatrix}$$

(34) Simplification of geminates

$$[+\text{nasal}](\rightarrow)[-\text{segment}] / [+\text{nasal}] \#\# \begin{bmatrix} [\_\_\_] \text{VC} \\ +\text{Aux} \\ +\text{Habit.} \end{bmatrix}$$

Here are some sample derivations for dem##dəz (as in [dem dəz bi faitin] 'They're usually fighting') which can go two possible routes, and for lan##dəz (as in [di lan dəz haad] 'The land is usually hard'):

(35)	dem##dəz	dem##dəz	lan##dəz
By (32)	No applic.	den##dəz	Vacuous application
By (33)	dem##məz	den##nəz	lan##nəz
By (34)	dem##əz	den##əz	lan##əz

Similar processes may be involved in the removal of initial d in the other preceding environments, but the present data does not include any of the intermediate forms necessary to establish this as fact.

So far there is not enough data to formulate the rules by which the remaining əz is removed. We would need more examples such as:

(38) Sometimes juu^{z} bi in the bed . . . (15-1-219)
'Sometimes you're in the bed . . .'

But these are quite rare. It may well be that final [əz] or [ɨz] (the surface phonetic realizations of underlying doz) are removed by rules similar to those summarized by Labov (1969) for the contraction and deletion of is (though without necessarily the same syntactic constraints). If the SIC speakers, like the BE speakers in Labov's study, frequently carried out complete deletion without stopping at the 'contraction' stage, this would explain the low frequency of examples like (38). All this seems very likely, but verification will have to wait on the analysis of additional data which is now being carried out.

Whatever may be the final form of the rules by which the remaining vowel and sibilant are removed, it is clear that they can be and frequently are removed by the older SIC speakers, who are the heaviest doz-users. Eventually the form doz becomes irrecoverable to younger speakers who interpret the remaining be as the sole marker of habitual aspect, and begin to use it in this way. With this development, the diachronic SIC paradigm becomes exactly that of BE:

(37) He be working
He be sick
He be in the club

From my own association with GC, SIC, and BE, sensing always the striking equivalences between the different forms doz, doz be, and be, and in fact frequently hearing one as the other (I originally missed the z in (38) and filed it as an example of habitual be), the possibility that Black English be was derived in this way seems very strong indeed. It is always difficult to convey in a paper the force of data one has recorded or been exposed to daily in the field. However, I hope to have presented enough of it to make this possibility worth serious consideration and perhaps stimulate further research.

Possibility of Irish influence

The only other source for BE be which has ever been suggested involves, as mentioned before, possible influence from the Irish. I attempted to follow up this possibility by consulting some grammars of Irish or 'Gaelic' (O'Donovan 1845, Christian Brothers 1910) and Irish English (VanHamel 1912, Taniguchi 1956) and with the help of a native informant (Dan Boyle of the University of Michigan, whose assistance it is a pleasure to acknowledge). As it turns out, far from providing counter-arguments to the hypothesis suggested in this paper, the possibility of Irish influence fits in quite well with it. Before revealing how this might be, we should first ask what contact there might conceivably have been between native Irishmen and people of African descent in the New World.

Most of the evidence for such contact which I have been able to gather so far is for the West Indies in the 17th and 18th centuries. In such careful historical works as Burns (1965) and Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh (1972) we find frequent reference to the presence of large groups of Irish 'bond-servants' in the West Indies. As Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh (1972:14) explain:

> The merchants could never procure enough servants from East Anglia and the South and West of England and consequently turned to other countries for them. Ireland became the principal supplier of white merchants to the English planters in the West Indies.

Among the bond-servants were peasants who volunteered in order to escape poverty and famine, and to avoid religious, political, and social persecution at the hands of Oliver Cromwell. Others, however, were 'kidnapped', or, like several hundred soldiers in 1649,

'exiled' to the West Indies. The upshot of all this was that by the middle of the 17th century, the Irish had become the biggest sector of the white population in the British West Indies (Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh 1972:17).

In addition, the Irish servants seem to have been the only white group which had close social contact with the slaves:

> Coming out of service, former white indentured Englishmen did not wish to work in the cotton or cane-fields alongside Blacks; far more numerous Irish freedmen took such jobs because they had no alternative. (Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh 1972:298)

Finally, the Irish, like the slaves, shared a relation of mutual dislike with the English, and in Burns (1965:396) we find reference to at least one occasion in which they joined with the slaves in a 'conspiracy' against their English 'masters'.

I have not yet been able to investigate the settlement patterns of the Irish in the United States. However, Diane Larsen at the University of Michigan is currently working on this very area, and informs me that evidence for extensive Irish settlement in the United States is very strong. The only evidence presented by those who have been attracted by the possibility of Irish influence on be is in Davis (1971:98): 'Many early Irish settlers were overseers on large plantations in the South'. This may well be true, but this kind of sociological relation would have been far less conducive to mutual linguistic influence than the kind documented above for the West Indies. Assuming however that similar contact did exist in the United States, we might go on to ask how, in linguistic terms, the Irish could possibly have influenced the development of habitual be.

Irish has always had distinct conjugations for expressing the difference between habitual and non-habitual actions in both the present and the past (cf. O'Donovan 1845:150-261; and Christian Brothers 1910:98-152). Thus, for the copula be we find:

(38) taím agól
'I am drinking'

(39) bhíor agól
'I was drinking'

but:

(40) bím agól
'I am habitually drinking'

(41) bhínn agól
'I was habitually drinking'

However, these Irish forms are probably less significant than their counterparts in Irish-English, [13] which maintain the same distinction. For (40) and (41) the Irish-English equivalents are:

(42) I do be drinking.

(43) I did be drinking.

These constructions with forms of do be[14] or do (before V alone) are a well-known, almost stereotypical characteristic of Irish-English, extremely frequent in the works of such prominent Irish writers as William Yeats, James Joyce, and J. M. Synge:

(44) 'They do be cheering when the horses take the water well.' (Yeats: Cathleen ni Houhilan:38)

(45) 'He is wearing himself out about something he is writing. Up half the night he does be.' (Joyce: Exiles I:31)

(46) 'For it's a raw beastly day we do have each day.' (Synge: The Well of the Saints:40)

The Irish English use of do and do be is strikingly similar to the creole use of doz and doz be for habitual aspect. The creole speakers may have borrowed the use of do for this function from Irish-English speakers with whom they were in contact. The Irish in turn may have borrowed it from the periphrastic use of weak do in early Modern English in non-emphatic, affirmative sentences, as in:

(47) 'I do pity the case in which I do see they are.' (1615: W. Bedwell Mohammedis Imposturae Sec. 120)

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (1933:s.v. do, 25a) this construction, which was originally simply equivalent to the simple tenses, is 'found in OE, frequent in ME, very frequent 1500-1700, dying out in normal prose in the 18th century' (emphasis mine).[15]

There is also the possibility that the creole speakers quite independently borrowed the same forms of periphrastic do from English to express habitual aspect.[16] But even if this turns out to be true, speakers of Irish English may still have played a role in reinforcing this usage.

This entire area demands further investigation. But the tentative conclusion to which I have been drawn from my own research is this: If there was any Irish influence on the development of habitual be in BE it was indirect, primarily affecting the choice of doz and doz be as habitual markers at an earlier stage in the decreolization process. Thus what at first seems like a counter-argument to the hypothesis advanced in this paper turns out to be not a counterargument at all, but a source of additional support and insight.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this paper, I suggested that the mesolect might provide new insights into old questions and raise new questions of its own. The bulk of this paper has been devoted to showing how one mesolectal feature, doz, provides new evidence for the origin of Black English be, and by extension, the origin of BE itself. Quite apart from this, several other 'minor' questions have emerged in the course of presenting this evidence, many of them requiring more discussion than has been given, and all inviting further research. There were other scattered insights and issues which emerged from the research on doz but had to be omitted because they did not seem to fit in smoothly with the preceding discussion. It would be unfair to conclude, however, without referring briefly to three of these which seem particularly significant:

(1) In working out the rules for the removal of initial d in doz I discovered that this was only one instance of a very general process which seems to operate in the English creoles and in BE (additional evidence that the latter is related). The process involves the loss of initial voiced stops in verbal auxiliaries marked for tense or aspect. I shall do no more here than list the following alternations (more detailed discussion is contained in Rickford (MS), itself in process of revision):

(a) da ~ a (SIC, JC)
(b) ben ~ en (JC. Note also men, wen as additional variants Bailey (1966:140), suggesting nasalization and lenition to a glide as intermediate stages in the removal of initial b. Cf. also Antigua min, H. C. wen)
(c) go ~ o (Sranan)
(d) mos bi ~ mosi (=SE 'must be', GC and SIC)
(e) didn't ~ ain't (BE)
(f) don't ~ [õ] [ɔ̃] (BE)
(g) I'm gonna ~ I'ma (BE)

(2) Doz, whether borrowed from Irish English, or early Modern English, clearly represents a form of 'calquing' on a grammatical/semantic category that existed previously. It adds to a growing store of knowledge that calquing--both lexical and grammatical--plays an important role in all the major transition periods of a creole's 'life history': pidginization and creolization (Hancock 1971, Dalby 1972) and decreolization (Solomon 1972). Since calques and other cases of convergence involve the clothing of creole functions in Standard English dress, they are more likely to survive than more obvious 'creole' forms, and by the same token, more likely to escape the attention of the linguist (cf. Rickford and Rickford, to appear). These remarks together should be enough to illustrate their theoretical, historical, and methodological significance, and the kinds of challenges they pose to all those who have any interest in 'creole studies', language contact, or language change.

(3) Finally, we have noted above that doz occurs in the mesolectal creoles of widely separate areas: Antigua, Guyana, the Bay Islands, the Sea Islands, etc. Nor is it an isolated example: did + V as past or anterior marker; never as a past-tense negative (= SE didn't) are only some of the other mesolectal forms which span the geographical gaps of the Caribbean. How are we to explain such similarities? Mesolectal similarities, unlike basilectal ones, seem less open to explanation by reference to the influence of some 'proto-creole' or the retention of West African forms, for they are further away from the latter in linguistic shape, and also, presumably, in time.

The remaining old theories can now be put to the test with new data. Do doz, did, never, and so on emerge in the different mesolectal creoles by a 'universal' process of decreolization, similar to the universal processes of pidginization and creolization suggested by Kay and Sankoff, among others? (See their paper in this volume, p. 61.) Or do they represent the influence of earlier English dialects, or that equally unpopular monster--'stimulus diffusion'? Whichever one of these we choose to pursue, the process will clearly involve far more rummaging in the mesolectal topsoil, and far more careful attention to historical and demographic detail than has been the practice up till now.

NOTES

[1]I should like to thank C. J. Bailey, Derek Bickerton, William Labov, and William Wang for their comments on isolated sections of an earlier draft; Bill Stewart for his helpful discussion of data from my first visit to the Sea Islands; and my wife Angela for informed linguistic discussion and encouragement. Since none of these but my wife has seen this paper in its present form, they should not be held liable for anything it contains.

[2]As always, the definition of Black English remains a problem. It is clear that there are structurally different varieties of English spoken by American Blacks, both inter- and intra-individually. The term Black English (BE) should really refer to a continuum of such varieties, ranging from the most basilectal level to those acrolectal levels which have recently been described by both Taylor (1972) and Hoover (1972) as 'Standard Black English'. Since it would be invidious to refer to the other end as 'Non-Standard Black English', it may be best to adopt the same kind of usage which I suggest for the term 'creole': use BE alone and modify it with basilectal, mesolectal, and acrolectal where necessary. In this paper I shall omit such modification, although the features cited occur primarily in basilectal varieties of BE. Since I am concerned with the relation of BE to the 'creoles' and since the relation of basilectal to acrolectal BE can be easily demonstrated, this usage will not, I hope, be found problematic. When I say that a feature X is 'in BE' I mean only that it can be found at some level. I also use the particular diachronic perspective of this paper as justification for excluding Gullah from the reference of BE. Without this the kinds of comparison I need to make in this paper would be much more difficult.

[3]DeCamp (1971) and Bickerton (1973a, 1973b, and to appear) have been pioneers in the effort to dispel the tremendous ignorance which exists in this area. This ignorance is evidenced by the fact that it is still possible to 'discover' new grammatical forms and functions in creoles that have been 'worked on' for decades.

[4]Cunningham (1972), in the most recent and complete description of Gullah to date, succumbs to the traditional pressures. Fully aware of the 'linguistic complexity' of the present situation, she states quite emphatically (1972:3) that 'no attempt has been made to weed out of the data that which is exclusively creole'. However, she explains (1972:14) that it was necessary to 'normalize the data', choosing the more clearly 'creole' variants to represent particular grammatical categories, and relegating (sic) many of the others to a minor section on morphological variants. Fortunately, some of the key mesolectal forms escape this fate, and are treated in the main sections of her book. We shall draw on her data for do and be later in this paper.

[5]Notation in brackets following examples represents either the date recorded, or a more complex code (tape, side, and digit number) for exactly where in a recording it occurs. For convenience, examples are represented in regular English orthography, and give no indication of their phonetic realization, but 'creole' forms to which attention is being drawn are represented phonemically. Forms

which occur in BE are cited in regular orthography (be, ain't) since this is the most frequent practice in the literature. Where more precision is required, phonetic notation is used, and enclosed in square brackets.

[6]She wished merely to avoid the derogatory connotations which the term 'Gullah' held for the Sea Islanders themselves.

[7]Extending the usage of the term 'creole' to include at least the mesolect is consonant with native-speaker intuition and practice throughout the Caribbean, at least where 'continuum-situations' exist. In Guyana, for instance, the term 'creolese' covers a wide range of varieties, perhaps stopping short only at the 'acrolectal' level.

[8]Labov (1973:180) argues on the basis of examples like 'He useta was working' that useta 'usually does not carry the tense marker' but behaves like an adverb. However, this is not entirely true. Unlike the adverb usually, useta cannot be used regardless of the tense reference of other members of the VP. Its use in non-past contexts is clearly ruled out: *He useta is working.

[9]The following two examples of be containing did are cited by Fasold as counter-examples to his analysis:

(a) When there was work, he didn't be around.
(b) Did there be silver pennies in 1943?

But these seem strangely similar to (16), as if useta has been deleted. If this is the case, they are no longer counter-examples, but examples of be following a modal.

[10]There are certain problems which remain applicable both to Fasold's analysis and to mine. The problem with the three counter-examples quoted by Fasold (1972:180) from Mrs. Lynn Kypriotaki and the four others he cited in an earlier paper (Fasold 1969:768) are for me not their 'pastness' but their apparent absence of habitual meaning. Two examples from each source:

(a) Miss Ray be gone yesterday and the door was standing open. (Fasold 1972)
(b) . . . she be walking through the hall with that on her back. (referring to one specific occasion, Fasold 1969)

These examples were among the evidence which led a research group in which I was involved last fall to conclude that 'durative' aspect would have to be included as one possible meaning of Black English be. (The other members of the group were J. Barnett, J. Baugh, L. R. Brown, P. Goings, and M. Pennington. The group was

supervised by Dr. Labov.) All the counter-examples referred to above certainly seem to carry this meaning.

More work remains to be done in this area: Is the opposition between durative and habitual meanings inherent in the 'stativity' of the following constituent, as Labov et al. (1968:231) suggest? In GC doz with verbs like stay or live can be used to refer to a single extended event rather than a series of frequently or usually repeated events. Or is it that the 'continuative' aspect inherent in V+ing has come to be extended to other following environments? Note that V+ing is the environment in which be occurs most frequently. Or do we have here the influence of earlier creole da, ambiguous between continuative and habitual aspect? Finally, is there possible confusion here between be and beĕn?

All these questions will require much further investigation before any reasonable solutions are proposed. It may eventually be necessary, as Bill Labov suggested, to provide a 'conjunctive' definition for be. Or we may have to entertain the possibility that there are even more different be's, with different sources, than is presently supposed. We could go on at length on these very interesting possibilities, but since this footnote has already exceeded respectable proportions, we must leave the issue here.

[11]I wish to thank the following native informants and linguists who helped to document the use of doz in the various Caribbean territories: Roy Cayetano (Belize), Vincent Cooper (St. Kitts), George Newton (Nevis), Norma Niles (Barbados), Karl Reisman (Antigua), and James S. Ryan (The Bay Islands). The reader is referred to Ryan (1973) for actual examples from the Bay Islands.

[12]The pattern of Irish does be (see below) may also have influenced the shift from doz to doz be in these environments, adding to the pressures from SE.

[13]The reasoning behind this statement is as follows: (1) Irishmen with whom the slaves were in contact would have been under as much pressure to speak some form of 'English'. And since models of Irish English had already been developed in Ireland itself at the beginning of the 17th century, it was probably these that they drew on to meet the demand. (2) Even if the Irish alternated between Irish and Irish-English, they would have tended to use the latter more in communicating with the slaves. The former would in any case have been unintelligible to the slaves, and far less likely to have influenced their own speech.

[14]More rarely, be or bees alone is used equivalently (cf. Taniguchi 1956:79-80, O'Donovan 1845:151):

e.g.: 'Sure, often Tippin an meself now be sitting in the dark' (Carroll J. H. Interlude)

This form seems to be not only rarer, but more syntactically restricted than the do be construction (it is apparently restricted to V+ing, while do be is not). It is thus less likely than the latter to have been directly borrowed. However, we need to know more about when the be variant came into Irish English, and whether it might have come about by the same kinds of factors that prompted the shift from doz be to be in the creoles, and whether it might not be yet another factor in the creole shift to be itself.

[15]See Visser (1969) for an excellent, more detailed account of these developments.

[16]Whether we trace the provenience of creole doz to Irish English consuetudinal do or to early Modern English periphrastic do, we shall still have to explain why doz was chosen as the invariant form, and why did was never adapted for marking habitual actions in the past. Did is used instead as a first replacement for bin, marking past tense or anterior aspect (cf. Bickerton 1972). Perhaps did was eschewed as a past habitual marker because it was not needed for this purpose: doz, like its predecessor a, not distinguishing at first between present and past.

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