



Contemporary Source Comparison as a Critical Window on the Afro-American Linguistic Past

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1. INTRODUCTION

The use of written texts as a window on the linguistic past is common in historical linguistics, but for a long time, debate on fundamental sociohistorical issues in the study of creoles and Vernacular Black English (VBE) was relatively uninformed by such texts, the feeling being that textual evidence on primarily oral languages like these was limited and/or unreliable (see Handler and Lange 1978:3; Lawton 1984). Over the past twenty years, however, and particularly over the past decade, the situation has been changing, as researchers have located many more texts from earlier periods, have gathered them together in anthologies and appendices for the benefit of other researchers, and have used them to address some of the thorny but intriguing issues in the historical development of the Caribbean creoles and VBE. Works in this general category include Stewart (1968), Dillard (1972), Brewer (1974), Jeremiah (1977), Lalla (1979), Brasch (1981), Abrahams and Szwed (1983), Schneider (1983), Holton (1984), Lalla and D'Costa (1984), Winer (1984), Rickford (1986, 1987), and Maynor (1987).

One of the challenges involved in the use of such texts is, of course, the problem of assessing their reliability and validity. This is always a problem in historical linguistics (cf. Bloomfield 1933:294-96), and whenever tape-recorded samples are unavailable,¹ but it looms particularly large in the case of citations of early African or Afro-American speech because hardly any of the citations (for some colonies, none) are

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from Africans or Afro-Americans themselves, or from people who had an extended or intimate familiarity with their language and culture. The typical source of information on Caribbean varieties in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, for instance, is a European visitor who was in the region for only one or two years, whose citations are of slaves speaking to him or her but rarely to each other (text 9 in Section 5 is a valuable exception), and who may have missed (or misrepresented) critical parts of what he or she heard. Bronkhorst (1883:221) cites the case of a magistrate who misheard *haag* in testimony as "hawk" instead of "hog," and observed more generally that "Sometimes the Creole *patois*, as spoken by the people can scarcely be understood by strangers, and even by those who have been long residents in the colony."

However, given the importance of recovering the Afro-American linguistic past and the unbridled speculation that scholars have frequently adopted as an alternative to the use of written records, we cannot afford to ignore these early records of Afro-American speech; we need to study them for all they can reveal, while refining our techniques for assessing their worth and interpreting their evidence.

In a recent article (Rickford 1986), I discussed four approaches that I had found helpful in assessing and interpreting the evidence of early pidgin-creole documents:

1. gathering as much information about the author(s) as possible, including where they were from, how old they were when they were in the territory, how long they were there, and what opportunities they had for observing local speech in everyday contexts;²
2. gathering as much information about the document and its circumstances of production as possible, including whether it was based on a daily diary or journal, whether it was copy-edited by persons besides the author, and whether successive editions were emended or not;³
3. observing the principle of sociolinguistic accountability (Labov 1982:34-38), according to which occurrences of features are analyzed in relation to the total set of contexts in which they might have occurred, with due regard to alternative variants, and with attention to possible internal and external constraints;
4. comparing the evidence of the texts with the evidence of current usage, particularly with regard to co-occurrence restrictions or covariation patterns, in line with the predictions of the uniformitarian principle (Labov 1972:101) that current patterns are similar to those that operated in the past.

In Rickford (1987), I drew on these approaches in analyzing citations of early Guyanese speech from eight different sources, and I argued that they illuminated a number of unresolved issues about the development of Guyanese Creole English (GCE).

In this paper I will draw on citations from three of the sources I used in the latter work, but this time I will follow the sociolinguistic accountability principle even more faithfully by basing my discussion of specific features on *all* citations in each source rather than on a subset thereof. In order to illustrate specific points, and to allow interested readers to do their own analysis of the same or different features, I will include several of these citations in Section 5 of this paper, along with introductory notes. But it should be remembered that these represent less than a third (twelve out of thirty-seven) of the citations in the three sources used for the statistics and inferences in this paper.

In addition to illustrating the principles sketched above, the selection and use of sources for this essay were done in accord with another method that I have used only minimally before: contemporary source comparison. This method involves the quantitative tabulation and analysis of specific features as they occur in different contemporary sources that are no more than a generation apart.⁴

As it turns out, there are neat sets of contemporary sources on GCE from the early, mid, and late nineteenth century. The late-nineteenth-century set, including sources like McTurk (1899), is the richest of all; samples are reprinted and analyzed in Rickford (1987). The mid-nineteenth-century set, including sources like Premium (1850), looks very promising, but it has not been systematically analyzed by any linguists to date. The early-nineteenth-century set, including Pinckard (1806), Bolingbroke (1807), and St. Clair (1834), each reporting on experiences in the Guiana colonies during one- to six-year visits between 1796 and 1808, is also sampled and analyzed in Rickford (1987). It is this last set that will be examined in this paper.

Although the early-nineteenth-century set is more limited in volume and variety than the late-nineteenth-century set, and was produced by observers who were much more clearly outsiders, it is an important and fruitful set to consider for at least two reasons. In the first place, it was during this period that the British took over the Guiana colonies from the Dutch, who had controlled them since the 1620s, and began to make English the primary medium of communication in the colonies (see Bolingbroke 1807:64 and other contemporary citations in Robertson 1974). Attested varieties of GCE from this period therefore represent virtually

the earliest varieties of English in use in the Guiana colonies. Of course, these varieties were not necessarily being created *de novo* in the Guiana colonies; some undoubtedly were, but others were being brought in by slaves previously resident in Barbados and other West Indian points, beginning in the mid-eighteenth century. A second reason for the importance of the early-nineteenth-century set of materials is the fact that the British public was particularly interested in colonial travel, life, and development at the time, their interest fired in part by debates about the possible abolition of the slave trade, by the loss of the American colonies, and by competition with European countries for colonial territories in Africa, the West Indies, and the East. This interest yielded the three 'travel' books on the Guiana colonies (Pinckard's, Bolingbroke's, and St. Clair's) that I will consider in this paper, as well as several other contemporary accounts from other parts of the Caribbean, including Beckford (1790) and Moreton (1790).⁵ These latter works provide valuable material for contemporary pan-Caribbean comparison, although I will restrict my interest in this paper to the Guyanese material.

2. PHONOLOGICAL FEATURES

Although my primary focus will be on grammatical features, in line with the theme of this volume, it is instructive to consider the representation in the texts of several phonological features characteristically found in creole or Afro-American vernacular speech. (All references to features in this essay concern occurrences in the dialogue of African or Afro-American speakers.) Data on four such features are provided in Table 1; for convenience—and without implying any larger theoretical claims—the features are represented as the output of rules modifying standard English forms.

Table 1 *Creole/Vernacular Phonological Features in the Texts*

Feature	Pinckard	Bolingbroke	St. Clair
v → b (<i>ebery</i>)	50% (16)	23% (13)	33% (6)
θ, d → t, d (<i>ting</i>)	82% (28)	19% (31)	59% (22)
Ø → i/V/C#— (<i>wifec</i>)	0% (2)	17% (6)	71% (14)
t, d → Ø/C_# (<i>sen</i>)	0% (17)	0% (13)	0% (12)

In relation to the first two features, Table 1 indicates that Pinckard's citations contain the highest frequency of the creole phonological variant and Bolingbroke's the least, while St. Clair's are intermediate. This pattern may have been a function of differences in the social status and language-use patterns of the people whose speech they happened to cite, but this doesn't really appear to have been the case; that is, Bolingbroke's speakers don't appear to have been of higher status or to have had more contact with standard speakers than Pinckard's and St. Clair's. What the pattern seems to illustrate instead is these authors' varying decisions about which features to represent in their texts and the variation of consistency with which they succeeded in representing them (or remembered to represent them). The impression that we are dealing with conventionalized representations rather than verbatim records of reality is increased by the fact that *have* is categorically represented as *had* by all three authors—accounting, in fact, for all the applications of the first feature in Table 1 in the texts of Bolingbroke and St. Clair.⁶

Further evidence that the texts offer conventionalizations is the way in which the third feature—enclitic vowels—is represented. In relation to this feature, the pattern established by the first features changes. St. Clair now recording the highest frequency and Pinckard the least (0%), with Bolingbroke in between. Of course, Pinckard has only one potential site for this feature and Bolingbroke only six, but the change in pattern here is not merely a function of limited data. By coincidence, Bolingbroke and St. Clair both describe what appears to be the same incident, with a slave uttering the same words; St. Clair's includes enclitic vowels (*wifee, workee*) while Bolingbroke's does not:

- 1 a. No, massa, me no want wife for handsome, me want him for do me good, and for work for massa as well as me. (Bolingbroke 1807:102)
- b. No, no, Massa, me no want wifee for handsome; me want him for workee for massa and workee for me. (St. Clair 1834, 1:222–23)

Although Bolingbroke's version is putatively set in Demerara and St. Clair's in Berbice, it is highly unlikely that we are dealing here with verbatim accounts of two separate incidents, only coincidentally alike in content and form. One possibility is that the story both recorded was nothing more than a myth, the kind of thing that might have been popular along the cocktail circuit of the time. Another is that St. Clair "borrowed" the account (whether real or contrived) from Bolingbroke, whose book had been in print twenty-seven years before his own, and

added enclitic vowels to make it sound more "authentic." In either case, it is clear that the authors have adopted different conventionalizations with respect to the representation of this feature: St. Clair deciding to include enclitic vowels, and Bolingbroke not. It is tempting to regard Bolingbroke's version as closer to reality, because earlier, but given Bolingbroke's general tendency to underrepresent creole phonological features—perhaps because of a general concern by him or his editor(s) that the work remain readable for the British public—we can't presume that it is an accurate version of what was actually said, even assuming that the story had a basis in reality.⁷

If consideration of the first three features in Table 1 undermines our confidence in interpreting these texts as accurate phonological records of the past, considering the fourth undermines it even further. For despite the unanimity with which the three authors represent word-final consonant clusters as intact—there is not a single simplified cluster in the forty-two possible cases in their collective dialogues of black speech—consonant cluster simplification is too well-attested in modern creole and even colloquial standard English to have been completely absent from early-nineteenth-century black speech. This is also true of "r-lessness" (the absence of postvocalic *r*-constriction) in unstressed final syllables, a feature that is plentifully attested in later nineteenth-century sources as well as modern GC (cf. *fadho* "father"), but is unrecorded in a total of thirty-four possible cases in the works of these three authors. The unitarian principle leads us to the same conclusion that we reached on independent grounds before: at least as far as phonological features are concerned, these early-nineteenth-century texts are conventionalized representations rather than verbatim records of contemporary speech.

Despite the negative conclusions to which we have thus far been led in this section, two positive points about the value of these texts as evidence of the phonological characteristics of early GC should be made. The first is that their authors seem to have been guilty of sins of omission rather than commission—underrepresenting or nonrepresenting contemporary creole features rather than inserting features that could not possibly have been in use at the time. This is true even of the enclitic vowels in 1b: although probably not a verbatim record of what one slave said on one occasion, they were plausibly a feature of some slave speech in the Guiana colonies of the time (contrasting, in this respect, with modern GC) rather than an artificial invention of St. Clair's.⁸ Secondly, there are a number of sociolinguistically interesting—and plausible—patterns in the phonological variation these authors record: for instance,

the only black speaker in Pinckard's texts who does not follow features 1 and 2 in Table 1 is Doctor Bob, the resident physician at the black hospital. In short, these authors might have been conventionalizing, but they seem to have been doing so in line with plausible contemporary realities.

3. GRAMMATICAL FEATURES

In general, we would expect distinctive grammatical features of slave speech—especially those involving free morphemes—to have been more readily noticed and accurately recorded by early observers than phonological ones, because they're more salient and easier to represent.⁹ And the slave speech cited by Pinckard, Bolingbroke, and St. Clair certainly contains more (and a richer variety of) nonstandard grammatical features than nonstandard phonological ones. The list includes *me* as first person subject pronoun (P:8/11, *I* in the other 3; B: 9/9; S: 9/9),¹⁰ *one* as indefinite article (P: 5/5; B: 6/6; S: 0/4, *a* in one case and zero in the remaining 3); (*d/lem* as plural demonstrative adjective or definite article (P: 2/3, *de* in the remaining one; B: 4/4; S: 1/1); *no* as preverbal negator (P: 6/6; B: 2/2; S: 3/3); *-s* absence in the third-person present (P: 4/4; B: 4/4; S: 1/1); *for* as infinitival complementizer (P: 9/14, *to* in 3 instances and zero in the remaining 2; B: 5/5; S: 1/2, *to* in the other case); zero copula with present-tense reference (P: 11/11; B: 9/11, uninflected *be* in two instances; S: 12/15, contracted *is* in two instances, uninflected *be* in one); and some interesting data on anterior and irrealis marking that I'll consider in more detail below.

One observation that needs to be made about these nonstandard features is that although many of them are represented as being invariably used by the local population (for instance, *no* as preverbal negator, not a single instance of preverbal *ain't*, *don't*, or *doesn't* being recorded), and although this fits comfortably with the widespread assumption that we will encounter invariant usage of nonstandard or basilectal forms if we go back far enough in time, we have to be careful about taking this evidence at face value. On the one hand, the authors might have been conventionally structuring their representations of grammatical usage, too, and conventionalizations of grammar are sometimes harder to detect than those of phonology, in part because some of the forms are no longer in use and we cannot make use of the uniformitarian principle. And although there is a valid reason to expect more consistent basilectal or nonstandard usage from the early nineteenth century than from the

present day—social mobility and contact with standard speech having been more restricted then than now (see Alleyne 1980a:194–95)—at least some individuals would have had more standard repertoires, and variation might have been in existence from the very beginnings of African/European contact in the New World (see Alleyne 1971:179–82). Attested invariance should therefore be taken, at best, as evidence of very frequent but not necessarily categorical usage.

To their credit, the early-nineteenth-century sources do not depict the members of the local population as speaking all alike, at least not in grammatical terms. Pinckard's "Doctor Bob," Bolingbroke's "Gentleman," and St. Clair's "Old Yan" are all closer to the standard than other cited speakers in one or more grammatical respects, the differences between them and the others being attributable to differences in their contact histories or social status. And these sources sometimes depict inherent variability where we might otherwise expect invariance, for instance with respect to variation between *for* and *to* as infinitival complementizers. The latter occurs in only four out of twenty-one possible cases in these three sources, but often enough (unless we are to chalk them all up to errors in conventional representation) to challenge Bickerton's (1971: 481) speculation that "there was a time, perhaps in the early years of last century, when F [*fu*, "for"] was universal."

Hancock (personal communication) has raised the question of how we are to interpret the absence of evidence in these texts for features that are well attested in later periods, for instance, serial verbs, *se* "say" complementizers, and topicalizations with (*d/da* or *is*). If there are no possible sites for the occurrence of such features in the texts (this is sometimes admittedly hard to determine), their absence is clearly of no significance. But if there are clear potential sites for unattested features (for instance, postnominal *dem* as pluralizer), I think we should seriously consider the possibility that such forms might have been later developments, or at least that there were valid speech varieties in existence at the time in which they did not occur. The total amount of slave speech documented in these texts is probably too limited to support the stronger interpretation, but sufficient to lead us to entertain the weaker one.

There is also the opposite (and rarer) case, in which these sources include forms which are otherwise unattested, either from later periods or other Caribbean territories. In this category, I include the use of *him* as a definite article, which Pinckard's Doctor Bob uses (see extract 1 in Section 5).¹¹ Tentatively, I suggest that these be regarded as artificial inventions of the author (an exceptional error of commission rather than

omission). At the same time, the discovery of unusual features of this sort should lead us to search for parallels in other data sets to determine their possible authenticity.

The grammatical feature in these sources on which I wish to focus most heavily is the absence of preverbal tense-aspect markers—specifically, irrealis (futures and conditionals) and anterior (past or past before the past) markers—where they occur regularly in basilectal varieties of late-nineteenth-century and modern GC (see Bickerton 1975; Gibson 1982; Rickford 1987). The absence of irrealis markers is illustrated in the texts provided in Section 5 in lines 28, 31, 37, 105, 135, where *sa*, *go*, or *gon* would be used in later GC to mark the future or conditional. Pinckard's texts include a total of fourteen potential irrealis sites (all but one of them conditionals rather than straight futures),¹² and twelve of these (86%) have no irrealis form. The two exceptions are Doctor Bob's *shall* in line 7, and one instance of *sall* in the protasis clause in another text (note that the apodosis has zero): *If I sall do dat, me Ø go to hell* (Pinckard 1806, 3:256). The zero-irrealis pattern also shows up twice in St. Clair's texts: *me Ø take him dis night* (line 135, Section 5), and *me Ø soon do dat, massa* (2:208–9). The other two irrealis sites in St. Clair's texts are marked with *will*—both occurring in a very high-falutin noncreole piece of dialogue (see text 12 below) attributed to Old Yan, an old colored Boviander (mixture of black and Amerindian) living in the interior forests away from the coast where most of the local population lived.

What of Bolingbroke? His texts do include one zero-marked irrealis (line 105, Section 5), but five other cases (in lines 76, 77, 79, and 100) are marked with *shall*. The striking thing about Bolingbroke's *shalls* is that even though they are used by individuals who are a few cuts above the ordinary field-slave—one a schooner captain, the other a faithful and honest servant named "Gentleman"—they occur in speech which is highly basilectal, and in which one would definitely expect *sa*, *go*, or *gon* in later GC. It may be that these were actually *sa* expanded to *shall* by Bolingbroke, but the complete absence of anything resembling irrealis *go* or *gon* in these texts is noteworthy.

Let us look next for the anterior markers *bin/been* (basilectal) and *did* (mesolectal). St. Clair's texts contain no potential anterior sites. Pinckard's texts contain six possible sites for the occurrence of such markers—five stative (where anterior would mean simply past), and one nonstative (where anterior would be past before the past)—and none of them contains either *bin* or *did*. Examples include: *when Massa Ø at*

Mahaica (3:266) and *we Ø 'fraid 'em tell lies upon us* (line 9, Section 5). Since Pinckard gives us little detail about the slaves whose speech he quotes, we don't know if they were imported directly from Africa or had been brought to the Guianese colonies by English planters from Barbados. But as I've suggested elsewhere (1987), their speech may represent a hitherto undiscovered Guyanese "pidgin," which, like early Tok Pisin and Hawaiian Pidgin, lacked preverbal tense-aspect markers. If this preliminary evidence can be corroborated, it would dispute Alleyne's (1980b:127ff.) claim that the later development of *bai* and *wen* in these Pacific varieties had no parallels in the Caribbean English creoles, and, more generally, that there is "no clear evidence that modern Caribbean creoles represent 'expansions' of some earlier 'pidgins.'"

Bolingbroke, however, offers us a different perspective, as much with preverbal *been* (which occurs in four of five potential environments in his texts—all in text 5) as with *shall*. Although the authenticity of his *shall* tokens might be disputed because they seem so out of place with their surrounding text, this is not the case with Bolingbroke's *been* tokens. The safest conclusion we might reach is that Bolingbroke and Pinckard were simply documenting two different varieties that existed simultaneously, one a pidgin variety without *been* and one a more developed variety with *been*.

More speculatively, we might note that Bolingbroke's prolific *been* user in text 5 is a Mandingo who had only been in the colony for two years, so he should have been a prime candidate for a pidgin or early acculturation variety lacking *been*. However, we might attribute the Mandingo slave's use of *been* to his familiarity with a variety of Guinea Coast Creole English (see Hancock 1980) that used *been*, but we would have to be sure that that GCCE really did include *been* around this period, and we would also have to wonder how Bolingbroke chanced to meet GCCE speaking slaves while Pinckard and St. Clair did not. Alternatively, we might infer that Bolingbroke stereotypically inserted *been* into the dialogue of his Guyanese slaves on the basis of his familiarity with the much older creole varieties in Suriname. Text 8 in Section 5 contains a sample of this Surinamese "talkee-talkee" that Bolingbroke encountered during a brief visit to Suriname during his stay in the Guiana colonies. (He may have culled it from the Moravian grammar that he mentions on p. 340.) Although the sample includes no environments for or instances of *been*, it includes other forms—such as continuative *de* and copula *da*—that are not attested in any early-nineteenth-century Guyanese samples.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The theme of this paper has been that comparative analysis of contemporary sources from earlier periods can provide a useful window on the Afro-American linguistic past. The view is rarely crystal clear, to be sure. The observers of the past who make it possible were neither linguists nor members of the Afro-American speech community. But they were *there*—exposed to at least some of the linguistic varieties in use in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries—and it is this fundamental asset that makes their work of potential interest to us. In assessing the reliability and validity of their texts as records of the language of their day, we need to compare them with each other and with still other contemporary sources. To get that, we'll have to do more archival and library research than has been customary in creolistics and the study of VBE to date. We also need, of course, to track down further biographical information on the people from whom the contemporary texts come, for use in assessing the authenticity of their observations or writings. Another need is to develop a better theoretical understanding of the relation between everyday speech varieties and the ways in which these are reported and represented by travelers, dramatists, novelists, cartoonists, newspaper writers, and other nonlinguists, using the insights gained to interpret written records of the past (cf. Labov 1972:102). Some scholars are already devoting attention to the representation of dialect in literature (Traugott 1981; Braithwaite 1984; D'Costa 1983; Haynes 1984), but the extension to historical records still remains to be made.

We need as well to consider the evidence of modern usage, and to follow the accountability and uniformitarian principles. The promise of learning more about specific phonological and grammatical features of Afro-American language in earlier times, and of resolving larger questions about its uniformity and development in the process, makes the analytical and interpretive effort worthwhile.

5. EARLY-NINETEENTH-CENTURY GC CITATIONS, WITH INTRODUCTIONS

The following represent about one third of the citations of black speech in Pinckard (1806), Bolingbroke (1807), and St. Clair (1834). Volume and page numbers given in parentheses refer to the original edi-

tions, but corresponding page numbers in the twentieth-century Guiana editions, where available, are provided in brackets. Citations preceded by an asterisk (three of the twelve reprinted here) also appear, with discussion, in Rickford (1987).

5.1 CITATIONS OF BLACK SPEECH IN PINCKARD (1806)

Pinckard, an Englishman, was twenty-seven years old when he set out for the West Indies in December 1795. He lived in Barbados for a few months before going to Guiana on a "secret" invasion mission to seize colonies from the Dutch. He remained in the colonies as a doctor with the British armed forces from April 1796 to May 1797. Pinckard's book, *Notes on the West Indies*, is based on letters written daily to a friend in England. Extracted here are citations from volumes two and three of the work, dealing with the Guiana colonies Demerara and Berbice.

(1) Speech of "'Doctor Bob,' the resident Negro physician at the black hospital," with whom Pinckard "often holds long conversations." Mahaica, Demerara, 22 August 1796.

On finding that his sick list had increased in almost as great a degree as my own, I asked Dr. Bob how this happened, when he replied—"It always so, Massa, at this time o' year, because him weather change from wet to dry." Seeing a negro boy, at the same moment, in a high paroxysm of fever, his case became the subject of our conversation, in the course of which this sable doctor made the following remark—"Him fever shall go, when him water come low,—him always come hot, when him tide high." (3:82[189])

(2) "'Five negroes belonging to Mr. Kendall, and three (two men and a boy) belonging to Mr. Green,'" reporting on why they had killed four French sailors who had captured them in Mr. Green's "plantation" boat and attempted to carry them to Trinidad. Plantation Hope, Mahaica, 21 October 1796.

"Ah massa," said they, "we 'fraid 'em tell lies upon us, and him people always believe Backra man sooner as Negro . . . so we tink it best for kill 'em all." (3:158[224])

*3) Conversation with unidentified slave woman, representative of Pinckard's conversation with "different negroes, both men and women" (p. 252). Demerara, 11 February 1797.

I give you the following conversation, literally as it passed; from which you will be able to form a more correct judgment of the sentiments which dictated the replies.

Would you not like to go to England?

No! Backra country no good! In Neger country they

no flog 'em, and dat better dan Backra country.

Should you not wish to be free?

O yes! O yes!

And if you were free, where would you live, and what would you do?

Live wid dem dat buy me free.

Well! and would you not go with them to England?

No! me 'fraid to go where 'em all Backra. Me love for see

Neger here and dere; me 'fraid for see all Backra.

But if those, who bought you free, should go away and leave you?

Den me live wid one Backra man, and hab one slave for work for me.

And if this Backra man should die?

Den me live wid one other Backra man . . .

It was a very common reply from many of them to the question, —What would you do were you free?—Live with de Backra man dat buy me free, wash him linen, and keep him clean!

Another very frequent answer, both from the men and women, to the question,—Would you not like to be free? was—If me free—

who gib me food—who gib me clothes—who send me a doctor when me sick! (3:253–55 [261; the last few lines are not found in the modern edition])

(4) Demerara, 18 March 1797.

I should not omit noting to you that, on my later return, I was almost stifled with the greetings of a fat old negro woman of the house, who, at the moment I appeared in her sight, ran to me in loud shoutings of joy, and, seizing me in her arms, squeezed me until I had scarcely power to speak; at the same time calling out to one of her sable companions—"Come and help Jenny hug Massa, for me no savez hug Massa enough, for tell him how glad Jenny for see Massa again." (3:346–47)

5.2 CITATIONS OF BLACK SPEECH IN BOLINGBROKE (1807)

Bolingbroke, an Englishman, was only thirteen or fourteen years old when he was engaged as an articled clerk to a business establishment in Stabroek (later renamed Georgetown). He set out from Liverpool in December 1798 and remained in the Guiana colonies from 1799 to 1805. His book, *A Voyage to the Demerary*, is the documentary source most often referred to in discussions of the early development of GCE and Guyanese Creole Dutch.

*(5) Demerara.

I discovered in a singular manner that one of the sailor negroes attached to our establishment, and who had been in Demerary about two years, had seen Mungo Park, in his travels in the interior of Africa. I was going down to Essequibo in the schooner, and, as was my custom, I had put three or four books into my portmanteau. Mungo Park's *Travels* was among the number; in looking over the vocabulary of the Mandingo tongue, I called Peter, a negro of that nation, and asked him a question in his own language. "Kie! massa, you sabbe talk me country," was the exclamation. I had now an opportunity of proving Mungo Park's correctness, and desired Peter to turn the question I had put to him into English, which he did, with several others, and from their agreeing with the translation, he convinced me that the travels in Africa deserved credit and confidence. However, to prove further, I told Peter what I was reading, when he replied with energy, "massa, me been see that white man in me country, in de town where me live, he been come dere one night for sleep, one blacksmith countryman for me been with him, me been give him rice for he supper, and soon, soon, in the morning he been go towards the moor's country." (105[70–71])

(6) Essequibo. The captain is probably free and certainly has higher status than the average field slave. He is portrayed as belonging to a class of West Indian-born blacks who had no loyalty to or political solidarity with the Dutch. It would be interesting to compare the samples of black Barbadian speech in volume one of Pinckard (1806) and other sources. Bolingbroke claims to be using "his own language" in this extract—and he may well have written it down soon after it was uttered, because the sentiments were precisely the type he would have been anxious to communicate to Englishmen back home.

A poor negro captain one day, who after having passed the fort and anchored in the river, hauled his Dutch colors down, was taken on board the corvette, and severely punished for not keeping them flying until the sun set. I saw the poor fellow afterwards, and he told me that his schooner should not wear any colors in the river until the English took the colonies again; that he did not care for the Dutch captain, even if he flogged him every time he came in, he would have his own way; to use his own language, "Kie! massa Hendry, them Dutch color no good, me schooner no shall wear flag in the river, tae them English buchra come again, when me shall buy one English jack; me no mind suppose that Dutch officer flog me every time me schooner come in; him no shall wear them color." To me it was highly gratifying to observe how Englishly disposed all the negro interest is: born for the most part in the West India islands, these black sailors grow up with a patriotic zeal for all who talk our language. (296-98 [202-3])

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(7) Description of "Gentleman," who served with others as guides to the combined Dutch and British forces who went into the bush in W. Demerara in 1795 to fight the bush-negroes. Bolingbroke provides more background on this slave than any other whose speech he quotes. However, Gentleman is clearly part of the establishment; it is blacks like this, rather than those more opposed to the whites—like the bush-negroes—whom whites like Bolingbroke would have gotten to know best. The bush-negro types may have used more basilectal English varieties, and more African forms, as symbols of their identity, as they did/do in Suriname. Also, note that Gentleman undoubtedly told the whites what he knew they wanted to hear; compare extract 3. Again, it would be worthwhile to compare the speech of this and other African-born blacks with that of blacks said to have been born in the West Indies.

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They were provided with several trusty negro guides, one of whom I very well knew, of the name of Gentleman: he belonged to an estate up the river, and had been purchased among other negroes out of an African cargo, at Grenada, and brought thence, by his masters, to settle on a sugar estate they possessed. This negro, from his uniform good conduct, soon gained the esteem and confidence of his owners, and from his sincere attachment to them, was looked upon as a favourite, which, however, was shewn in no other way than by trifling presents at a chance time. . . . He has always proved himself a faithful and honest negro, and except

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one failing, that of being rather too fond of rum, is free from vice. . . . I have frequently questioned him as to the nature of his own country, of which he speaks with the utmost dislike and contempt. "Buckra (white men's) country more good; here so me only one massa, in a dat country for me, every man my massa, suppose he more strong than meself. They catchee me and make me work for them king; suppose me no want for work them sall kill me: sometime them king make war and one noder somebody get me for work; them no give me victuals, them no give me rum, them no give me blanket, them no good like a buckra massa, them flog and them kill them slaves like a hell; suppose one king kickaraboo (die), they kill all the slaves too." (307-9 [209-10])

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(8) This citation is introduced by Bolingbroke as a "specimen of the negro English, or talk-ee-talk-ee . . . which is spoken by the creole ladies in preference to any other dialect." The specimen is from Suriname, not from the (British) Guiana colonies.

Da wan ieri somna—That is a free person.
No mekie bawli bawli—Don't make any noise.
Den de mekie too mooso bawli bawli—They make too much noise.
Mekie hesie—Make haste.
Loeke boen—Take care, or look good.
Tanriere—Stand still.
Loeke deaja—Look here.
Pietiemoro—A little more.
Onofo—Enough.
Oe somna die da pre?—Who's there?
Maie—A friend.
Da mie—It's me.
Da massa—It's a gentleman.
Da misse—It's a lady. (400 [270])

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5.3 CITATIONS OF BLACK SPEECH IN ST. CLAIR (1834)

St. Clair, a Scotsman, was a lieutenant-general in the British army who was stationed in the Guiana colonies between January 1806 and June 1808. The account of his stay there, *A Soldier's Recollections of the West Indies and America*, was not published until 1834. In his introduction to the 1947 Guiana edition, Roth suggests that St. Clair might have written up his Guiana memoirs long after he had left the colonies; but

there is evidence within the book itself to suggest that it was based at least in part on notes maintained while St. Clair was in the colonies. (See Rickford 1987 for further discussion.)

*(9) Conversation between three black women in Stabroek. Miss Fanny, a free colored woman, is described as a "stout impudent-looking hussy," of some wealth, and well dressed. Note that this is St. Clair's very first citation of slave speech, recorded just a few days after his arrival in the colony.

I was just in time to hear the last speech of Miss Fanny, who exclaimed, and not in the most delicate manner:

"Ante Seri, me tell you true; Miss Fanny, [this was herself] no care for buckra. She hab my tree chintz gown, my four muslin gown, my fine shawls, that cost me a 5 joe apiece, my two nigger-wenches [meaning slaves—she herself was as black as a coal—T.S.S.] my house in Tabroek, my two sows in pig, and my tree chests full of good fine clothes. Buckra, me no care for you. Me, me, me,—Miss Fanny! you tink me tand like dem cra-cra girls. Kabba, kabba, me Miss Fanny!" (1:115 [16])

(10) Near mouth of Corentyne river. Speaker is a slave from Mr. McLeod's plantation of Guedes, Berbice. June 1806.

We were all on deck, conversing upon various subjects, when a loud exclamation from one of the Negroes, at the head of the schooner, attracted our attention. At the same time, pointing with his finger, he sung out: "Massa! Massa! dey bigee fissi!" (1:257 [93-94])

(11) Speech of an old colored free man (here, mixture of mulatto and native Amerindian) who lived in a native/free colored (Boviander) settlement up the Essequibo River and had accompanied St. Clair and others including *white* servants) in their journey upriver as guide/boatman. Free coloreds reportedly had "frequent intercourse with the Whites of the lower settlements, with whom they carry on a certain traffic, and indulge themselves with rum and other luxuries which the poor Indians cannot obtain" (p. 49).

An old colored free man now said, "Let him [the alligator] go!—it's good—me take him dis night." (2:96 [214])

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(12) Speech of "Old Yan," who appears to be the same old free colored man quoted in 11, since it's he who sets the trap for the alligator and catches it.

"Now," said old Yan, "the force of this water will drive the poison to the bottom, where most fish generally hide themselves."

Then, showing us below the fall, where the water was shallow enough for us to see the bottom easily, with every thing passing over, "Here," said he, "you buckras will be able to see them and strike them with your darts." (107-8 [220])

NOTES

This is a revised version of a paper given at the Creole Workshop held during the 1986 Linguistic Society of America Institute in New York City. Its original title was "Nineteenth-Century Guyanese Creole: Three Views."

1. The recent discovery of recordings of ex-slave speech in the Library of Congress, and their forthcoming publication, with commentary, in Bailey et al., is generating a great deal of interest in the field because they promise increased reliability over previously available material (such as Rawick 1972), even though they offer only limited time depth (to the late 1850s, at best) and their status as representative samples of contemporary vernacular speech is questionable.

2. Three of Jeremiah's (1977:27-28) five criteria for establishing authenticity involve characteristics of the author: sociocultural identity (age, race, sex, socioeconomic status, geographical origin); motives for traveling to Antigua or the American South; and attitudes and biases toward the slaves' language and culture. While I agree that these are potentially important, I believe that information about the circumstances under which the data were collected and published (Jeremiah's remaining criteria), together with text-internal and comparative evidence, is ultimately more significant. As Stewart (1968) notes, Ambrose E. Gonzales was a racist, but an apparently accurate chronicler of early Afro-American speech.

3. Maynor (1987) has called the reliability of the WPA ex-slave narratives (Rawick 1972) into question by showing that the texts were modified after their initial transcription, sections with sensitive content being deleted subsequently, and dialect features being added.

4. Jeremiah (1977) does something similar: he doesn't provide quantitative analysis, but he does use convergence between different sources as the "strongest claim" for their reliability and validity (p. 41). As I argue below, however, different sources can be convergently inaccurate; contemporary source comparison must be carried out in conjunction with comparisons with modern usage, accountable analysis of internal and external constraints, and the other methods outlined above.

5. There was even a 1787 book by Vincensius Knox (entitled *On the Manner of Writing Voyages and Travels*) catering to the contemporary popularity of the genre.

6. It is unlikely that this rule was restricted to *have* in reality: texts from later periods (for instance McTurk 1899) concur with modern evidence in showing it applying more generally, and even Pinckard's contemporary texts show it applying to other forms (*gib*, *ebery*).
7. According to Stephen (1896:323), Bolingbroke's 1807 book "was prepared for the press by William Taylor, of Norwich, who rewrote some of the chapters." Lacking access to the original manuscript, we cannot be certain what kinds of changes Taylor introduced.
8. Bolingbroke (1807) attests one instance of *catchee* (see text 7 in Section 4), and enclitic vowels are amply attested in contemporary citations of slave speech from other parts of the New World (cf. Stewart 1968; Dillard 1972).
9. Grammatical features would have been more salient than phonological ones not only in involving bigger "chunks" of form, but also—if the early situation were similar to the modern one—in more dramatically marking out differences of social status within the speech community and more commonly serving as objects of social comment and correction.
10. In the parentheses, P, B, and S are abbreviations for Pinckard, Bolingbroke, and St. Clair; "8/11" means that the creole variant in question was used in eight out of eleven possible instances—whenever the first person subject pronoun subcategory came up in citations of slave speech.
11. Doctor Bob's *him weather, him fever and him water* forms constitute an interesting singular parallel to the use of plural *them* as demonstrative adjective or definite article, as in *them Dutch color* (extract 6, Section 4), but as far as I know, it is not attested in any other sources.
12. Potential irrealis sites do not include predicates in which irrealis markers might have been removed by conventional ellipsis rules, for instance, the conjoined *had* in line 28, or the subjectless *live* in line 33.

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