In Linda Thornburg and Janet M. Fuller, eds., Studies in Contact Linguistics: Essays in Honor of Glenn G. Gilbert. Bern/New York: Peter Lang. 2006: 27-43

The Anglicist / creolist quest for the roots of AAVE: Historical overview and new evidence from the copula

John R. Rickford
Stanford University

1. Introduction

The historical controversies within linguistics involving African American Vernacular English (AAVE) both antedate and postdate the two *educational* firestorms that have captured the attention of the public in recent decades—the first, fuelled by the 1979 Ann Arbor, Michigan, court ruling (Smitherman 1981), and the second, by the 1996 Oakland Ebonics resolutions (Rickford & Rickford 2000). The older and more enduring *linguistic* controversy, dating back to the early 1900s and resurfacing repeatedly in creole studies, is about the *roots* of AAVE.

The Anglicist or dialectologist position is that AAVE's features come primarily or entirely from regional dialects spoken by white indentured servants and other English settlers whom Africans encountered when they came to America. The opposed, creolist position is that AAVE reflects substrate African influences and the simplifying, restructuring processes associated with pidginization and/or creolization.

2. History of the roots controversy

The roots controversy has captivated linguists for about eighty years, in three main phases. The *first phase* begins in the early 1900s and extends to the 1950s. It is a relatively mild phase, not only in the sense that contributions to either side of the debate are brief and scattered, but also in the sense that they recognize and to some extent incorporate opposing points of view. For instance Krapp (1924: 190–191) asserted that:

> The Negroes, indeed, in acquiring English have done their work so thoroughly that they have retained not a trace of any native African speech. Neither have they transferred anything of importance from their native tongues to the general language. [...] Generalizations are always dangerous, but it is reasonably safe to say that not a single detail of Negro pronunciation or Negro syntax can be proved to have any other than an English origin.

However, this strong claim is ameliorated by a subsequent statement that the English of the earliest African arrivals must have shown some of the simplification associated with pidginization, and that 200 years earlier, "all the Negroes in America must have spoken a language very similar to Gullah" (193). The closest thing to an extremist stand in this phase involved the sub-issue of whether Gullah, the African American creole spoken on the South Carolina and Georgia coast, was entirely English or contained African elements. On this point, Anglicist Mason Crum (1940: 111) waxed eloquent:

> In any discussion of Gullah speech the question of its origin immediately arises. Is it African or English? The answer is very positive: it is almost wholly English—peasant English of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with perhaps a score of African words remaining. Very early the slaves picked up the dialect of the illiterate indentured servants of the Colonies, the "uneducated English."

The debate about Gullah was settled by Turner's (1949) groundbreaking book, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect,* which not only showed that Gullah had many more African elements than Anglicists such as Crum had suggested, but also that it bore more affinities to the creole Englishes of the Caribbean and West Africa. However, Bloomfield (1933: 474) had made the creole argument for AAVE more directly and more generally: "[...] the various types of 'Negro dialect' [...] in the United States show us some of the last stages of [...] leveling [from a creolized language]." And, as Schneider (1989: 25) has pointed out, the Anglicists McDavid and McDavid (1951) also acknowledged the possibility that "slaves imported to the US originally spoke a pidginized and possibly later creolized form of English, which, however, disappeared comparatively soon."

The *second phase* of the roots controversy extends from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. It focuses much more resolutely on urban African American English varieties in cities like New York, Detroit, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles, where new research was being conducted. The issue first surged to prominence at a summer 1964 conference on Social Dialects and Language Learning held at Bloomington, Indiana. Stewart (1970: 351–352) describes the conference standoff in these terms:

> Although the topic does not appear in the published papers from that [1964] conference (Shuy 1965), there was considerable disagreement among participants as to the facts of Negro dialect history [...]. Beryl L. Bailey and the author took the position that American Negro dialects probably derived from a creolized form of English, once spoken on American plantations by Negro slaves and seemingly related to creolized forms of English which are still spoken [...] in Jamaica and other parts of the Caribbean. [...] [But] some of the participants had already come to a quite different set of conclusions concerning the history of American Negro speech. In their view, there never was any pidgin or creole stage through which the English spoken by early American Negro slaves might have passed. Instead, the acquisition of colonial English by Negro slaves on the early North American plantations was believed to have been both rapid and successful, so that within one or two generations American Negro speech evidenced the same inventory of structural features as white speech.

Stewart and Bailey were joined by Dillard (1972) in a spirited advocacy of the creolist position that was based on textual attestations from earlier centuries and comparisons with creole varieties of the Caribbean. Dillard, especially, was strident enough in his advocacy of the creolist position to provoke angry reactions from Anglicists like D'Eloia (1973). But the *real* advances in this period, following the emergence of sociolinguistics and Labov's (1966, 1969) development of the quantitative framework for the study of variation and change, came from the introduction of quantitative evidence of constraint effects on variable rules. For instance, the relative frequency of copula absence (of *is* and *are*) in AAVE in the following grammatical environments:

(1) a. John ø da man [__Noun Phrase]
b. She ø at home [__Locative]
c. He ø happy [__Adjective]
d. The girls ø walkin home [__Verb+*ing*]
f. They ø gon(na) do well [__*gon(na)*]

was shown to pattern similarly to copula absence in Gullah and Caribbean English-based creoles, i.e., with a following Adjective and *gonna* favoring copula absence most highly, and a following Noun Phrase instead favoring the retention of *is* and *are* (Holm 1976, 1984; Baugh 1979, 1980). So compelling was the evidence for parallelism, that James Sledd (cited in Labov 1982: 198) is said to have called this "the first serious evidence for the creole hypothesis." Labov, who had been skeptical about Stewart's hypotheses, voiced a consensus among linguists that the creolist position was correct (192): "It [AAVE] shows evidence of derivation from an earlier creole that was closer to the present-day creoles of the Caribbean."

The *third phase* of the roots controversy runs from the mid-1980s to the present. Its starting point is probably the publication of Poplack and Sankoff (1987), a paper that had been presented at several conferences in the early 1980s, and had been published in Spanish as Poplack and Sankoff (1984). Drawing on a new kind of evidence—recordings with the English-speaking descendants of African Americans who emigrated in the early nineteenth

century to the Samaná peninsula in the Dominican Republic—Poplack and Sankoff (1987: 310) reached a strong anti-creolist conclusion:

> There have undoubtedly been some purely internal developments and innovations, but it seems most likely that this variety of English is a lineal descendant of the language as spoken by many blacks in the United States in the early 1800s. If we are right, then that language was no more creolized than modern ABE [American Black English=AAVE], and, at least insofar as its copula usage is concerned, it bore no more resemblance to English-based West Indian Creoles than modern ABE, and indeed less. We reached this conclusion by comparing rates and conditioning of copula usage among Samaná and quantitatively studied adult ABE speakers in Harlem, Detroit, and rural Texas, and finding not only overall rates, but significantly, the constraint ranking, similar to those attested for those varieties, while quite different from the few creoles that have been studied quantitatively.

Studies of other diaspora communities followed. Singler (1989, 1991) considered the English of African Americans who settled in Liberia and generally found their usage supportive of the creolist hypothesis. But Poplack, Tagliamonte, and others reported on an enclave African American community in Nova Scotia, Canada, and in a series of articles and two books (e.g. Poplack 2000a, Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991, 2001), they argued that African Nova Scotia English (or ANSE), Samaná English and the Ex-Slave Recordings offered a window on "Early African American English" through which the creolist hypothesis appeared to be dead and the Anglicist hypothesis the only one still kicking.

Other new data sources and theoretical studies emerged in this period, to be sure. They include recordings with ex-slaves made in the 1930s, transcribed and analyzed in detail in Bailey, Maynor, and Cukor-Avila (1991), detailed analysis of the numerous ex-slave narratives, transcribed by hand, but not electronically recorded (Brewer 1974, Schneider 1989, Kautzsch 2002), and quantitative, variable rule analyses of Gullah (Weldon 2003). Other new kinds of data from this period are interviews with 1,605 African Americans concerning "hoodoo" (Hyatt 1970–1978, Viereck 1988, Ewers 1996), letters from African Americans and others written in the nineteenth century (Montgomery, Fuller, & DeMarse 1993, Montgomery & Fuller 1996, and Kautzsch 2002), and new evidence on the sociohistorical conditions within which AAVE developed (Rickford 1997, Winford 1997, Mufwene 2000). Finally, Wolfram (2003) and Wolfram and Thomas (2002) used recordings with three or more generations of speakers from different parts of North Carolina to assess the degree of convergence or divergence between the English of blacks and whites over the past 100 years.

In addition to the emergence of new kinds of data, one other characteristic of this period is the extent to which creolists ameliorated (Rickford 1998, Winford 1998) or reversed (Holm 1991, 2000) their earlier positions, and the resurgence, even stridency, of the New Anglicist position.[1] There are strong endorsements of the creole position, to be sure (e.g. Winford 1992, Rickford 1998), but they are crowded out by the neo-Anglicists. The editor and contributors in Poplack (2000a) especially, reprising what Dillard (1972) did for the creolist position, took a non-conciliatory approach in advocating for the "English history" of African American English. And, Labov (2001: xvi), in a preface to Poplack and Tagliamonte (2001), urged us to a consensus very different from the one he had hailed in 1982:

> I would like to think that this clear demonstration of the similarities among the three diaspora dialects and the White benchmark dialects, combined with their differences from creole grammars, would close at least one chapter in the history of the creole controversies.

However, I think that the move to close off debate on the roots of AAVE is premature, since some of the sociohistorical argumentation and evidence on which the New Anglicists have based their conclusions is open to question. This is equally if not more true of the quantitative analyses of linguistic features in Poplack (2000a). For the rest of this paper I will concentrate on one of these, the "prosodic" analysis of the copula in "Early" African American English presented in Walker (2000a).

3. Copula absence: Walker's prosodic analysis

Walker (2000a) focuses on copula contraction and absence (or zero), a variable repeatedly studied in AAVE, and one with parallels and potential origins in English-based creoles. Walker has two main goals: (1) to show that "there has been an unjustified focus on following grammatical category" and an unjustified neglect of preceding grammatical category (i.e., subject type) in studies of the copula in AAVE and English-based creoles (EBCs); and (2) to argue that a previously unexplored constraint—prosodic phrasing—is as significant as following grammatical category, and offers "a more meaningful linguistic explanation" for copula variability (36).

The first goal is addressed primarily in the first part (section 2.2) of his chapter, in which the literature on zero copula and the creole-origins controversy is reviewed. If we go through each of the data sets referred to there, comparing the *range* between the values of the factors most favorable

and least favorable to copula absence within the following grammatical category and subject type factor groups, as in Table 1 below, we find that, in more than two thirds of all cases (13 out of 19), the range for following grammatical category is greater than for subject type.[2] The relative ranges within two factor groups is a common measure of their relative significance, and the data in Table 1 therefore provide no basis for the claim that the greater focus on the following grammatical category in the literature is unjustified. It should be added that new data in Walker and Meyerhoff's (2004) paper on copula absence in Bequia, St. Vincent, also point in this direction: The ranges for zero copula in the following grammatical category are .91 and .80 for third person singular and "other" persons, respectively, while the corresponding ranges for subject type + preceding segment are .26 and .01.

Table 1. Comparisons of VARBRUL factor weight *ranges* for Subject Type vs. Following Grammatical category in copula contraction and absence studies surveyed in Walker (2000a). In highlighted cases, Subject Type range exceeds Following Grammatical environment range.*

Study	W's Table#	Variety	CONTRACTION SubjT		FollGr	ABSENCE SubjT		FollGr
Baugh 1980	2.2	AAVE/Cobras	.85	<	.88	.71	<	1.00
P & S 1987	2.3	Samaná	**.85**	**>**	**.66**	**.84**	**>**	**.76**
Hannah 1997	2.3	Samaná	.78	<	.85	**.85**	**>**	**.81**
P & T 1991	2.3	ANSE	**.76**	**>**	**.63**	**.75**	**>**	**.33**
Singler 1991	2.4	LSE/Carolina	33%	<	56%	50%	<	72%
	2.4	LSE/Al&Slim	**.98**	**>**	**.87**	.67	<	.87
Winford 1992	2.6	Trinidadian	.53	<	.77	.25	<	.88
R & B 1990	2.8	Barbadian	.63	<	.75	.65	<	.69
Weldon 1996	2.8	Gullah	.46	<	.64	.22	<	.73
Rickford 1996	2.8	Jamaican				.47	<	.56

*Abbreviations: P & S = Poplack & Sankoff, P & T = Poplack & Tagliamonte, R & B = Rickford & Blake, W = Walker (1980), SubjT = Subject type, FollGr = Following Grammatical (category)

Walker's argument that the following grammatical category has been over attended to is not made on the basis of data like these (whose existence and implications go unnoticed), but rather on the basis of the charge that its effects are "notoriously inconsistent" (2000a: 49). He tries to establish this primarily by showing that the relative orderings of a following Locative and Adjective are often reversed.

But AAVE/creole zero copula studies show a remarkable consistency in ranking these factors intermediate between a highly favoring __*gonna* and

__V+*ing* and a disfavoring __NP environment, a point that Walker himself concedes in reporting similar findings in his Samaná and ANSE data (64): "*As in previous studies*, V+*ing* and *gonna* favor both contraction and zero, while NP disfavors and ADJ and LOC have intermediate effects" (emphasis added). Sharma and Rickford (to appear) show that this ordering holds true quite remarkably for eight different groups of AAVE speakers, and seven different groups of creole speakers.

Walker *is* right that the fluctuation in __Adj/__Loc orderings, like some other aspects of the hierarchy of factors in the following grammatical category, is not adequately explained by any existing hypothesis or decreolization model. But that point has been made before (Mufwene 1992, Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991: 322–323, Rickford 1998: 181–183) and Walker comes no closer to explaining this fluctuation either. His chapter certainly does *not* demonstrate that the following grammatical factor's effects are "epiphenomena of constraints dictated by prosody," as Poplack (2000b: 21) claims. I will return to this point below.

Before moving on to the prosodic part of the chapter, one additional point remains to be made. In discussing his Table 2.3, Walker (2000a: 41) argues that it shows "more similarities than differences" between the Samaná English zero copula results of Hannah (1997) and Poplack and Sankoff (1987). However, I see more differences than similarities; for instance, in the hierarchy of following grammatical elements, and in the fact that preceding phonological environment is significant in Hannah's study but not in Poplack and Sankoff's, while the reverse is true of following phonological environment. And the claim (ibid.) that style "can affect the overall rate of zero without affecting the factors conditioning its variability"—attributed to Rickford and McNair-Knox (1994)—is one I now have to revise in the light of East Palo Alto data discussed in Alim (2004).

In the final sections (2.3–2.6), Walker (2000a) addresses what is really new and quite exciting about his paper—the claim that *prosodic structure* provides a better explanation for copula contraction and absence than any of the traditional constraints.[3] By prosodic structure, Walker means the framework developed by Nespor and Vogel (1986) and others in which speech is perceived as occurring in "hierarchically arranged chunks" from the phonological utterance (U) at the top, to the syllable (σ) at the bottom (2000a: 1). The units most relevant to Walker are the prosodic word (ω)—"the right edge of a lexical category (N, V, or A)" and the phonological phrase (ϕ)—"the right edge of its maximal projection" (50). In the following sentence from Inkelas and Zec (1993: 218), reprinted in Walker (51), *Tom*, as both a noun and a Noun Phrase, is both a prosodic word (ω) and a

phonological phrase (ϕ), but since auxiliary /ɪz/ is an unstressed function word, it is not a prosodic word by itself and has to be grouped with the prosodic word *complaining* to form the phonological phrase that constitutes the VP:

(2) [(Tom)$_{\omega}$]$_{\phi}$ [ɪz (complaining)$_{\omega}$]$_{\phi}$

Walker's hypothesis is that the probability of contraction and deletion of auxiliary/copula *is* (as we will see below, he excludes *are* from analysis) is conditioned by the prosodic structure of preceding and following constituents. In particular, he makes two strong predictions (2000a: 56):

> The first prediction [...] is that preceding elements which are prosodically simple (i.e., nonbranching: proclitics and simple Phonological Phrases [ϕ]) favor contraction more than those which are prosodically complex (complex Phonological Phrases, Intonational Phrases). [... t]he second prediction is that [...] complex preceding and following prosodic constituents favor zero more than simple ones.

The material in Table 2 helps clarify and exemplify what counts as prosodically "simple" or "complex," according to whether the elements precede or follow the copula or auxiliary.

Table 2. Prosodically SIMPLE & COMPLEX elements preceding and following *is*, based on Walker's (2000a) account

SIMPLE:	
Preceding:	proclitics (unstressed pronouns), e.g., *He*'s complaining.
or	simple (non-branching/one word) ϕ, e.g., *John*'s complaining.
Following:	simple (non-branching/one word) ϕ, e.g., He's *coming*.
COMPLEX:	
Preceding:	complex (branching) ϕ, e.g., *The old man* is coming.
or	intonational phrase, e.g., The answer—*you know*—is right.
Following:	complex ϕ, function word after *is*, e.g., He's *gonna* come.
or	clause-final function words, e.g., The place where John *is*.
or	intonational phrase, e.g., The guy is—*I think*—coming.

The first problem Walker encounters in testing his hypothesis is a series of overlaps between the factor groups whose independent effects he is trying to isolate and compare. For instance, preceding "personal pronouns" (in the subject type factor group) are almost all "proclitics" (in the prosodic factor group) and end in vowels (in the preceding phonological factor group). When overlaps of this type exceed 95%, the VARBRUL program simply cannot

disentangle independent factor group effects reliably (Guy 1988: 131). Some of the overlaps in Walker's data are 99% and 100% (see the cross-tabulations in his Tables 2.12–2.14) and to eliminate them, he is forced to collapse factor groups, ending up with mega groups like "Preceding Prosodic/grammatical context and phonological segment" whose individual factors include "Proclitic Personal Pronouns ending in a vowel or r." But mega factors like these represent a mishmash of elements from different levels of the grammar and have no theoretical status. They also produce recurrent data gaps and make it difficult to extricate the effects of phonological, prosodic, and grammatical constraints in the analysis.

To see this, consider Table 3, which reproduces the results for contraction and deletion of *is* that Walker found in his ANSE and SamE data.[4] Looking first only at contraction and at preceding elements, Walker reports (2000a: 61) that "Prosodically complex elements tend to disfavor the contracted form: a preceding IP disfavors contraction highly, while proclitic personal pronouns favor contraction almost categorically, and all other categories disfavor." This seems true enough at first glance, since the probabilities for prosodically "complex" factors (boxed) in the "contracted" columns of Table 3 are all considerably below .50, which, in VARBRUL results, indicates disfavoring effects.

However, in the 16 (unboxed) cells for "simple" preceding elements in the "contracted" columns of Table 3,[5] only three values (in boldface) show the expected favoring effect, and the high values for "Proclitic personal pronouns ending in a vowel or r" (.97, .91) could be attributed to the pronominal or phonological effect rather than the prosodic one. The values in the other eight simple/unboxed cells for which there *is* data (five have "no data") are not only all below .50, and therefore *disfavoring* to contraction (contrary to Walker's first prediction quoted beneath example (2) above), but they also vary widely, from .04 to .48, suggesting that the non-prosodic factors are playing key roles. When we concentrate only on the cells that allow us to isolate the effect of prosodic factors, we get mixed results. For instance, in ANSE, the contraction probability for "'Simple' ϕ, Noun ending in V/r" is .42, more favorable to contraction than the .22 weight for "'Complex' ϕ, (Noun) ending in V/r," and thus interpretable as supporting Walker's hypothesis (although the .42 figure should ideally be over .50). But the ANSE contraction probability for "'Simple' ϕ, Noun ending in C" is .04, *lower* than the corresponding .12 weight for "'Complex' ϕ, Noun ending in C," the opposite of what Walker's hypothesis leads us to expect.

Table 3. Factors contributing to *is*-contraction and absence ("zero") in African Nova Scotian English (ANSE) and Samaná English (SamE)*

	Contracted		*Zero*	
	ANSE	SamE	ANSE	SamE
Input:	.874	.564	.241	.166
Total N:	465	556	334	287
FACTOR GROUPS *and Factors*				
PRECEDING PROSODIC/GRAMMATICAL CONTEXT AND PHONOLOGICAL SEGMENT				
Proclitic Personal Pron. ending in V/r	**.97**	**.91**	.33	.39
Proclitic Personal Pron. ending in C	*no data*	*no data*	*no data*	*no data*
Proclitic, Other Pron. ending in V/r	*no data*	.45	*no data*	0%
Proclitic, Other Pron. ending in C	.04	.21	**.94**	**.97**
'Simple' ϕ, Other Pron. ending in V/r	**100%**	.48	.24	**.93**
'Simple' ϕ, Other Pron. ending in C	*no data*	*no data*	*no data*	*no data*
'Simple' ϕ, Noun ending in V/r	.42	.41	**.66**	**.64**
'Simple' ϕ, Noun ending in C	.04	.10	**.68**	**.78**
'Complex' ϕ, (Noun) ending in V/r	.22	.21	**.63**	**.73**
'Complex' ϕ, (Noun) ending in C	.12	.07	**.85**	**.88**
Intonational Phrase	.01	0%	—	*no data*
FOLLOWING PROSODIC/ GRAMMATICAL CONTEXT				
gonna *in a 'Simple' ϕ*	*no data*	*no data*	*no data*	*no data*
Verb+ing *in a 'Simple' ϕ*	.76	**.83**	**.75**	**.92**
Adjective in a 'Simple' ϕ	.41	.54	**.67**	**.65**
Participle in a 'Simple' ϕ	.28	.33	.19	**.81**
Locative in a 'Simple' ϕ	.38	**.66**	0%	.45
NP in a 'Simple' ϕ	.27	.36	.35	.21
gonna *in a 'Complex' ϕ*	**.94**	**.97**	**.64**	**.94**
Verb+ing *in a 'Complex' ϕ*	100%	**.89**	**.94**	**.90**
Adjective in a 'Complex' ϕ	.44	.20	.24	.45
Participle in a 'Complex' ϕ	.43	.42	0%	.54
Locative in a 'Complex' ϕ	.70	.46	.51	.23
NP in a 'Complex' ϕ	.62	.47	.30	.53
Intonational Phrase	.05	0%/KO	*no data*	*no data*
FOLLOWING PHON. SEGMENT				
Consonant	[ ]	**.62**	[ ]	*excluded*
Vowel	[ ]	.45	[ ]	*excluded*

*Source: Walker 2000a: 62–63, Tables 2.15–2.16, as adapted in Sweetland, Rickford, & Hsu (2000). Computational methods: Labov Contraction (C+D/F+C+D) and Labov Deletion (D/C+D); C = Contractions, D = Deletions, and F = Full Forms.[6] Probabilities in bold (over .50) favor rule application. Square brackets indicate statistically insignificant effects. "Excluded" is where "following phonological segment interacted so much with the other two factors that it was impossible to obtain a valid result" (63).

Other portions of Table 3 show similar problems. With respect to the "preceding prosodic/grammatical" element results, Walker notes that "those categories that favor contraction disfavor zero, and vice versa" (61). This is generally true, but the fundamental hypothesis that prosodically complex elements favor zero more than simple ones (Walker's second prediction) is not upheld, since there are zero-favoring values (above .50, in boldface) throughout the prosodically simple cells (unboxed) as well. In fact, of the eleven "zero" copula cells for which we have data from ANSE and SamE, *seven* are above .50, indicating that they favor deletion or zero, and three of those do so at almost categorical rates (.94, .97, .93).

In discussing the results for *following* prosodic/grammatical context, Walker says first that it was "also selected as significant in both ANSE and SamE" (61). But in fact, from the bigger ranges reported for this factor group compared with the preceding factor group in three of the four cases in Tables 2.15 and 2.16 (.75 vs. .70 for zero in ANSE, .77 vs. .71 for contraction in SamE, .73 vs. .58 for zero in SamE), the following prosodic/grammatical context is *more* significant, contrary to Walker's complaint about the relative attention paid to subject type versus following grammatical environment, and in line with the indications of earlier studies, shown in Table 1. Walker goes on to admit, in a refreshingly honest way, that "an interpretation of the results is not immediately apparent" (64). Even so, he still attempts to discredit the validity of the following grammatical category by arguing (ibid.) that the fluctuations in the relative orderings of a following locative and adjective are systematically related to their prosodic complexity. This is true for the ANSE contraction data, as we can see from Table 3 (Adj .41 > Loc .38 for simple ϕ, but Adj .44 < Loc .70 for complex ϕ). But this is *not* true for the SamE data (Adj < Loc for both simple (.54 < .66) and complex (.20 < .46) ϕ in contraction, and Adj > Loc for both simple (.65 > .45) and complex (.45 > .23) ϕ with respect to zero copula).

What Walker does *not* say (56)—and the omission is striking—is that his prosodic hypotheses fail badly for the following grammatical/prosodic context. Contraction is *not* favored by simple over complex phonological phrases when the grammatical category is held constant. In fact, for ANSE, the *reverse* is true for *all* of the five categories for which we have comparable data (e.g., .62 for __NP in a complex ϕ vs. .27 in a simple ϕ), and this is also the case for three of the five categories in SamE. Similarly zero is favored by complex over simple phrases in only four of the ten comparable categories for which we have data in ANSE and SamE. In fact, the only following category effect that is consistent and in line with predictions previously established in the literature is the following

grammatical one, which Walker summarizes as "V-*ing* and *gonna* favor both contraction and zero, while NP disfavors and ADJ and LOC have intermediate effects" (64). Contra Poplack's (2000b: 19) claim, there is *no* evidence here for the following grammatical effect being an "epiphenomenon" of the prosodic constraint.[7]

In his conclusion (section 2.6), Walker suggests that the consistent favoring of contraction and zero by __V-*ing* and __*gonna*, and its disfavoring by __NP "in every study" (66) might reflect the basic distinction between the auxiliary and copula, and he calls for further study of the semantic, syntactic, and prosodic correlates of this distinction. On this point, I would concur. The distinction itself is one that has been long noted, and we have begun to investigate it more closely in recent work (Sharma & Rickford, to appear).

Walker also suggests that the following grammatical category is not a well-defined factor, repeats the (unsupported, as noted above) claim that "many of the purported grammatical effects are due to prosody" (67), and proposes that we extend our study of copula variability beyond AAVE and English-based creoles to include other dialects of English (e.g. Canadian English, as studied by Walker and Meechan 1999). In the final sentence of his chapter, he concludes that this extension "could form the basis of a truly comparative approach, one that might provide reliable evidence for the origins of zero copula in AAVE." I am not opposed to studying copula variability in other dialects of English and welcome the proposal for all its potential insights. But the single-mindedness with which Walker advances the proposal that we look only to English varieties for insight is symptomatic of the fundamental limitation of the New Anglicist's orientation. One reason for our initial interest in following grammatical environment is the indisputable evidence that the form and absence of the auxiliary and copula were crucially determined by this factor in the African languages spoken by the ancestors of today's AAVE and English-based creole speakers and in the creole varieties themselves (Holm 1976, 1984). Given the evidence that L1 language transfer *does* influence second language acquisition (Odlin 1989), why would we look only to English dialects and not to further study of the West African languages that were the primary first languages of African American and Caribbean slaves? This one-sided research strategy is all the more incomprehensible because, as Walker himself notes (ibid.), the feature in question—copula absence—is *not* attested as a productive process in the history of English. This preference for tracing AAVE phenomena to English even when English provides no clear historical models for it is also manifested in other analyses of the New Anglicists.

4. Conclusion

In this paper I have depicted the Anglicist/creolist quest for the roots of AAVE as an eighty-year plus, three-phase debate. In the most recent phase, the New Anglicists have dominated the scene with their quantitative, variable rule analyses of recordings from "Early African American English," including African America Diaspora data from Samaná and Nova Scotia, and data from the Ex-Slave Recordings. However, as I have also tried to show through a detailed critique of Walker's (2000a) analysis of copula contraction and absence in Early AAVE, and as I argue in greater detail in Rickford (in press), there is much to praise but also much to question and challenge in the work of the New Anglicists. Reaching a premature and uncritical consensus does a disservice to the significant issues AAVE scholars have been trying to address for nearly a century, and to sociolinguistics and creole studies more generally.

Acknowledgment

It is a pleasure to contribute this paper (a revised version of my Collitz lecture "What happened? Waapm? The Creolist/Anglicist Quest for the Roots and Branches of AAVE" at the 2003 Linguistics Institute at Michigan State University) to this volume honoring Glenn Gilbert. Glenn has been a central figure in creole studies for more than twenty-five years, as a researcher/author, as editor of the *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*, and as compiler/editor of some of creolistics' most important volumes. Glenn, your contributions to the field are deeply appreciated.

Notes

1. I use the phrase "New Anglicist" or "neo-Anglicist" to distinguish Poplack and other members of the "Ottawa" school from older Anglicists like Krapp and the McDavids, who do not use a variable rule methodology or data from the African American diaspora.
2. In all six cases in which subject type is more significant, it derives from distinctions between *I*, *he/she*, and other kinds of subject pronouns that are not usually made in studies of the copula, and that have no theoretical significance in themselves. Moreover, as Walker himself notes, his Table 2.3 (which provides four of the instances in which subject type is more significant) includes *am* as well as *is* and *are*, a copula variant that is normally excluded from consideration since it shows very high rates of contraction and little or no zero copula.
3. The discussion in the rest of this section has benefited from collaboration with Julie Sweetland, lead author of our NWAV–29 presentation (Sweetland, Rickford, & Hsu 2000).

Julie wrote her first Stanford University linguistics qualifying paper on this subject as a graduate student (Sweetland 2001), providing a prosodic analysis of data from the East Palo Alto AAVE project that Faye McNair-Knox and I initiated in 1986.

4. Walker excluded *are* from consideration because of the fact that *are* contraction is restricted to postvocalic environments, and because of the difficulty of distinguishing *are*-deletion from /r/-deletion. However, Rickford et al. (1991) show that, notwithstanding the fact that *are* contraction is not possible after consonants (in *the men're tall* the *'re* segment is syllabic), the contraction and absence of *are* patterns similarly to the contraction and deletion of *is* in terms of most of its preceding and following constraints, phonological and grammatical. Considering *are* along with *is* allows one to state the variable constraints once instead of twice, and the expanded data pool increases the robustness of the analysis.
5. Recall from Table 2 that 'proclitics' are also "simple" prosodic elements, although not in themselves 'Simple Phonological Phrases' (ϕ).
6. Walker (2000a: 58) notes that Rickford et al. (1991: 123) erroneously formulate copula insertion as C+D/F+C+D instead of F+C/F+C+D. On this point he is absolutely right, and I am embarrassed to admit that we made this typographical slip. But to show how easy it is to make such errors, Walker makes a similar error on pp. 62–63, twice formulating Labov Contraction in the headers for Tables 2.15 and 2.16 as C/F+C+D instead of C+D/F+C+D (see Labov 1969, Rickford et al. 1991: 106).
7. In his (2000b) thesis, written after the chapter in this volume although both works have the same date, Walker attempts another method of pinpointing the prosodic effect that is more theoretically coherent, and less subject to the massive interactions between factor groups evidenced in the chapter under review here. Following Inkelas and Zec (1995), it takes into account the prosodic configuration of sentence as a whole, dividing sentences (88ff.) according to whether a Phonological Phrase boundary intervenes between the copula and the subject (Type 2) or not (Type 1). Although he does not include following grammatical category in the new analysis, Walker finds a consistent effect in ANSE and SamE in which Type 1 prosodic structures sentences favor contraction and Type 2 favor zero. But in a replication with AAVE data from East Palo Alto, California, that *did* include following grammatical environment, Sweetland et al. (2000) found that following grammatical environment was significant and Type 1/Type 2 sentence prosody was not.

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