

## **Objectivity and commitment in linguistic science: The case of the Black English trial in Ann Arbor\***

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### ABSTRACT

Though many linguists have shown a strong concern for social issues, there is an apparent contradiction between the principles of objectivity needed for scientific work and commitment to social action. The Black English trial in Ann Arbor showed one way in which this contradiction could be resolved. The first decade of research on Black English was marked by violent differences between creolists and dialectologists on the structure and origin of the dialect. The possibility of a joint point of view first appeared in the general reaction of linguists against the view that blacks were linguistically and genetically inferior. The entrance of black linguists into the field was a critical factor in the further development of the creole hypothesis and the recognition of the distinctive features of the tense and aspect system. At the trial, linguists were able to present effective testimony in the form of a unified view on the origins and structural characteristics of the Black English Vernacular and argue for its validity as an alternate to standard English. (Black English, language and the law.)

### SOME GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT LINGUISTICS

There are two questions that are put to linguists whenever they deal with the public: what is linguistics about? and what is it good for?<sup>1</sup> None of us can avoid answering those questions altogether: even those who stay away from introductory courses and never give public lectures have to respond sooner or later to the concerns of their family and the curiosity of their friends.

One set of answers given by formal linguists begins with the idea that linguistics is about the structure of the human mind, as reflected in the innate language faculty. Linguistics is said to be basic research that will give us more knowledge about mankind – but has no immediate application to the problems that most people are worried about. When the question of social value is put in a more challenging form – who is linguistics good for? – it can be said that linguistics is good for present-day linguists, who are given an interesting way to earn their

living, and for future generations of linguists, who will enjoy testing the hypotheses that we generate today.

A distinctly different view is that linguistics is the study of an instrument of communication that is used in everyday life, an instrument that has evolved as a part of our social and biological history. This is the point of view that lies behind my own research. This approach isn't totally opposed to the other view, but it leads to different answers to the second question – what is linguistics good for? I would argue that linguistic research applies to a good many of the questions facing contemporary society: how to reverse educational failure in the inner cities; how to resolve conflicts and paradoxes that center around bilingual education; how to implement the responsibility of the law to communicate to the public.

However, the application of linguistic research to social issues isn't carried out in the value-free atmosphere that is best for scientific work. Research on inner city problems brings us into confrontation with psychologists who say that the language of black children has none of the means necessary for logical thought (Labov 1969a). Research on bilingual education frequently involves the researcher in public debates where the use of one language or another is as much a political goal as an educational strategy. Testimony on the objectivity and clarity of legal language involves the linguist in the adversary procedures of the courtroom, where the ultimate issues have nothing to do with the forms of language used. This kind of engagement may be far removed from the dispassionate approach to verification and disproof that's essential for good scientific work. The confrontation of linguistic research with social controversy has created a serious problem for those who believe that linguistics *can* be applied to social issues, that it *should* be applied – but that if linguists try to do so, they'll be losing the scholarly and scientific detachment that they need to do good research.

The case against partisan activity was put most eloquently by the great jurist Learned Hand, who wrote fifty years ago: “You cannot raise the standards against oppression, or leap into the breach to relieve injustice, and still keep an open ear to the cold voice of doubt. I am satisfied that a scholar who tries to combine these parts sells his birthright for a mess of potage: that, when the final count is made, it will be found that the impairment of his powers far outweighs any possible contribution to the causes he has espoused.” (Hand 1939: 139)<sup>2</sup>

This calm and detached point of view is a comfortable one for many scholars. But for others, the position of Learned Hand cannot be adopted without great cost. It yields for them a sharp conflict between scientific conscience and social conscience. To relieve that conflict, linguists often make appeal to the irreducible values of basic research. There's no doubt that we can and should defend those values; but what we're doing now is basic only relative to something else that we're doing now. Our passion for “basic” linguistic research shouldn't blind us to the painful realization that there's only a small chance that linguists will be building on our results several hundred years from now. If we can answer

the needs of the present without compromising that possibility, we may be able to resolve the conflict between the social being and the linguistic analyst. We'll also have a much better chance of getting research support from our fellow citizens. And we may get a satisfactory answer to our own final question as to whether or not we have wasted our time on earth.

This paper is about the resolution of the conflict between objectivity and commitment. I will put forward some principles of objectivity that I think will get general agreement from linguists and from scholars and scientists in general. By following these principles in our scientific work we have the best chance of controlling our personal drive to prove a point. I'll also present principles of commitment that I think will receive the endorsement of the great majority of linguists. Finally, I'll try to show that these two sets of principles can be reconciled. The discussion will center around one case where such a resolution can be seen: the Black English trial in Ann Arbor.

#### THE CONSEQUENCES OF SCATTERED SITE HOUSING

In the 1960s, the city of Ann Arbor took a decision to locate low-income housing in scattered sites throughout the city, rather than concentrate them in a single downtown area. A project was built on Green Road in an outlying section of the city. The apartments are right on the main road: they are neat and workman-like, with clapboard, brick, and shingle siding. Across the street is an assembly of Colonial-style brick apartments that extend across a number of blocks, screened by evergreens and birches. Down the road are streets that wind through the woods to Elizabethan manors, 12-bedroom homes with stone fronts and wide lawns, modern houses in pine and cedar.

The children in the Green Road project go to the Martin Luther King Elementary School nearby. It is a one-story building surrounded by small trees, approached by a road that curves up across an enormous green lawn. The front entrance is a contemporary design with glass panels between solid red and blue sections. It looks like a nice school to go to. The racial balance is 80% white, 13% black, 7% Asian and Latino. A minority of these black children come from Green Road: they are the children that the case was about.

After a number of years on Green Road, the mothers of these children found that they were doing very badly in school. The school recognized this fact officially: the children were given all the labels that go with educational failure: learning disabled, behavior problems, emotionally disturbed, and the like. But their mothers believed that they were healthy, normal children, and they became increasingly angry with a school system that declared the reverse. Four of the mothers made contact with the Student Advocacy Center, headed by Ruth Zweifler, and then with Michigan Legal Services [MLS], a public-interest law firm. MLS contributed Kenneth Lewis, a black lawyer who had come to Detroit from Baltimore several years before, and Gabriel Kaimowitz, who, among other

things, had successfully established the rights of mental patients to reject psychosurgery. On July 28, 1977, they brought suit in Federal court against the King School, the Ann Arbor School District, and the Michigan Board of Education on behalf of fifteen children for the authorities' failure to take into account the cultural, social, and economic factors that would prevent them from making normal progress in the school.<sup>3</sup>

The plaintiffs argued that the School District had failed to do a number of things that would have helped solve the problem: to provide instructional alternatives based on the unique needs of the children; to inform staff of the racial and linguistic characteristics of the Green Road children; to provide reading programs that would diagnose the problems; to involve the Green Road parents in an active role in the reading program. The full force of the complaint is best understood by considering what the School District *had* done for the children. It had:

- a. placed or threatened to place five children in classes for the mentally handicapped.
- b. placed or threatened to place two of them in classes and programs for learning disabled children.
- c. suspended or threatened to suspend two others from classes.
- d. retained or threatened to retain in grade two others.
- e. tracked three other children at lower levels of group instruction.
- f. graduated two others to junior high school without preparing them to read, write, and do basic arithmetic at the level required.
- g. accepted labels and reports derogatory to two preschoolers.<sup>4</sup>

All this had been done, according to the plaintiffs, "without regard to plaintiffs' racial and linguistic backgrounds." The school record shows that the staff was puzzled but didn't have the knowledge to evaluate what their tests showed:

Mrs. G. questioned how it had been determined that M. was certified learning disabled. Dr. K. said there was evidence of perceptual handicaps, a difference in his visual and auditory processes, and the pattern of scores showed extreme strengths and extreme weaknesses. It was a very irregular pattern.

Another case showed that the staff was handicapped by their inadequate knowledge of the children's characteristics and the biased nature of the tests that they were using:

The Wepman test was given to see if R. could discriminate sounds. He was attending well to the task, but he had extreme difficulty. This might contribute to his spelling problem. Mr. M. mentioned that this is a pattern in R.'s speech. He actually doesn't seem to hear sound differences.

The speech therapists weren't aware that the Wepman test included a number of oppositions that are mergers in the Black English Vernacular: *pin* vs. *pen*, *sheaf*

vs. *sheath*, *clothe* vs. *clove*, and so forth. These facts and the consequent misreporting of the hearing abilities of normal black children have been made available since 1965. Yet tests such as these continue to be used with consequent misreporting of the hearing abilities of normal black children.<sup>5</sup>

#### LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Judge Joiner's first major action in the King case was to consider the motions of the defendants to dismiss the complaints against them (Memorandum Opinion and Order of May 17, 1978). For the purposes of this motion, he presumed that the allegations of the plaintiffs were in fact true – that the Green Road children were in fact culturally, socially, and economically deprived, and that they had been labelled “learning disabled” and “emotionally impaired” without due consideration of their cultural and racial background. He dismissed all these as causes of action and the claim that the case fell under the “equal protection” clauses of the Constitution:

No law or clause of the Constitution of the United States explicitly secures the rights of plaintiff to special educational services to overcome unsatisfactory academic performance based on cultural, social or economic background.

The judge did retain one of the causes of action – that the defendants had failed to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers, in violation of Title 20 of the U.S. Code, Section 1703(f):

No state shall deny equal educational opportunity to an individual on account of his or her race, color, sex or national origin by . . .

(f) the failure by an educational agency to take appropriate action to overcome linguistic barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs.

The plaintiffs had argued that the Green Road children spoke “a vernacular known as ‘Black English’” which was so different from the common language spoken in school as to constitute such a barrier. The judge found nothing in the previous history of legislation that specified such barriers must involve foreign languages. He quoted President Nixon's 1972 message to Congress:

School authorities must take appropriate action to overcome *whatever* language barriers exist. . . . This would establish, in effect, an educational bill of rights for Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Indians and others who start under language handicaps . . . [Judge Joiner's emphasis]

The judge argued that the list of language types given here was only illustrative and “could well include students whose ‘language barrier’ results from the use of some type of nonstandard English.” Therefore, a language barrier due to dialect differences between black and white children might reasonably be a cause

for action under 1703(f), if it could be shown that these differences were brought about through a history of racial segregation. He concluded that the allegations in the King School case must be examined to determine the seriousness of the language barriers. In a later opinion (December 29, 1978) he insisted that all reference to cultural characteristics of the plaintiffs be removed, and the description of the barriers be confined to linguistic matters. He also asked for a more specific demonstration of the connection between the neglect of these barriers and race. In the *Lau vs. Nichols* and later decisions, the Supreme Court had made it plain that there need not be any intent to discriminate: it is enough to show that the handicap is due to the effects of past discrimination. But the plaintiffs had to show that the school had neglected to overcome *language* barriers rather than the alleged economic and cultural barriers that were declared “irrelevant” to the case.

The “King School case” was thus transformed into the “Black English” case. When the case was first filed, Lewis and Kaimowitz approached it only in terms of legal, political, and economic issues. But shortly thereafter, Lewis heard Geneva Smitherman talk about Black English on television, and he asked her to join the case. In reviewing the school records, Smitherman found the linguistic problems in the tests used and located the quotations given above where educators singled out features of Black English without being aware of what they were doing. This eventually became the strongest evidence that the schools had failed to take into account the nature of Black English in teaching children to read. Lewis and Kaimowitz thus found themselves centrally involved in the language question that had originally been a peripheral issue for them. They explained, before and after the case was over, that they felt the economic and social problems were still central. Yet it was not an accident of legal terminology that introduced Black English into the case, but the combination of a lawyer who intuitively felt that language was deeply involved in black people’s experience, and a linguist who could prove that it was.

Smitherman, director of the Center for Black Studies at Wayne State in Detroit, now took on the main responsibility for assembling the evidence and testimony on Black English. She had made recordings of the spontaneous speech of all the Green Road children involved, and presented a long list of quotations from these recordings to illustrate the nature of the language barrier for the amended complaint.<sup>6</sup> Those familiar with inner city black vernacular will note that these quotations strongly suggest that we are dealing with a language system very close to it. Gerard B., in the second grade, said:

My momma name is Annie, and my Daddy name is James.

which illustrates the characteristic full form of the copula among young speakers of Black English Vernacular (BEV)<sup>7</sup> and the zero form of the possessive in prenominal position. Jacqueline D., also in the second grade, uses habitual *be* freely along with the special BEV form of the first person future:

When school is out this time, I'ma be going to summer school and I a still be going to school.

Tito R., in kindergarten, was also a strong user of habitual *be*:

When it be raining, I be taking it to school.

When Tito heard the tape played back he said:

It don't sound like me, do it?

showing the absence of 3rd singular /s/ that is to be expected in spite of some surface insertions as in this quotation from Michael B., in the sixth grade:

The reason why he bes smart is the reward he gets.

The similarity of the grammar of the Green Road children to the vernacular described in the inner cities was a major point of the plaintiffs' case. Green Road was a scattered site but it was also a small ghetto: the children played only with each other and transmitted the black vernacular with minimal interference from other dialects.

Smitherman provided 184 extracts from the tapes to illustrate the character of the home language. A comparison of these with the recorded speech of black children in Harlem, Detroit, Los Angeles, Washington, and elsewhere showed close agreement in phonology, morphology, syntax, and the main features of the tense and aspect system. There were enough examples of the copula to allow a quantitative comparison with other studies. Table 1 shows the numbers of full, contracted, and deleted forms for the Green Road children and for the spontaneous speech of 14 second-graders in Harlem studied by Torrey (1971).<sup>8</sup>

The two patterns are remarkably similar: full and zero forms predominate for *is* with less contraction, and the zero form predominates for *are*. It is evident that the Green Road children use the same BEV grammar that has been found in the major centers of the black population of the north.

Among Smitherman's most extraordinary achievements was the publicity generated about Black English in the months preceding the trial. News stories about the trial, particularly in the Detroit Free Press, presented an unusually favorable view of the case – and the only informed and accurate accounts of Black English that have appeared in the press so far.<sup>9</sup> But her major task was to mobilize a team

TABLE 1. *Copula variation of Green Road and Harlem children*

|            | Green Road children |            | Harlem 2nd graders |            |
|------------|---------------------|------------|--------------------|------------|
|            | <i>is</i>           | <i>are</i> | <i>is</i>          | <i>are</i> |
| full       | 6                   | 1          | 18                 | 2          |
| contracted | 2                   | 1          | 14                 | 1          |
| zero       | 7                   | 5          | 34                 | 15         |



of experts to testify at the trial. These included psychologists and educators such as Gary Simpkins, who is the coauthor of a transitional reading program which has been very successful in dealing with the use of Black English in schools.<sup>10</sup> Among the linguists to testify were a number of black scholars who had entered the field in the early 1970s: Smitherman herself, Jerrie Scott, and Milford Jeremiah. Among the white allies of the black community, Richard W. Bailey played a major role from the outset. His tape-recordings of the Green Road children – playing, singing, and arguing with each other – demonstrated that they did indeed speak a radically different dialect of English when they were at home, though in court they appeared to the judge to speak ‘‘just like my granddaughters.’’ He was also able to show that the King School teachers had no clear knowledge of Black English, but projected instead negative stereotypes in response to the children’s language. J. L. Dillard provided testimony on the Creole history of Black English, an essential element in the plaintiffs’ argument that the language differences involved were the result of racial segregation.

One of the trips that Smitherman made around the country was to Philadelphia, where she asked me to testify on the plaintiffs’ side. At this point I became committed to their position, and the rest of this report will present the case from that point of view. The testimony and issues that I will discuss are not necessarily the most significant part of the legal case. My aim here is to show how linguistic analysis can be applied to an important issue, and then to resolve if I can the contradiction that was presented at the outset: between the objectivity needed for linguistic research and commitment to a social position in an adversary situation.

#### SOME PRINCIPLES OF COMMITMENT

Among the principles that would motivate linguists to take social action, one is likely to command the most general agreement. We may call it the *principle of error correction*:

A scientist who becomes aware of a widespread idea or social practice with important consequences that is invalidated by his own data is obligated to bring this error to the attention of the widest possible audience.

This principle may lead people to compose letters, attend meetings, or write books,<sup>11</sup> but it may not be enough to motivate a scholar to take the stand and testify in an adversary situation. Technically, expert testimony is not a partisan matter. Witnesses in any case are encouraged to avoid any obvious show of bias, and commitment to a point of view does not imply distortion of the data or suppression of facts. But a witness for a given side must be prepared to be attacked for defects in his or her training, intelligence, or honesty.<sup>12</sup> Testifying may also demand the commitment of a great deal of time and effort. This can be



profitable when the client has means, but MLS was in no position to pay its witnesses.

There is a second principle of commitment that can be recognized here, one that I believe is endorsed by the great majority of linguists. Many of the witnesses who were called on had done linguistic research in the black community, and responded to an obligation toward that community. They were aware that their books and articles on Black English had contributed to their own prestige and promotion in the academic world. But black youth in 1979 suffered from the same educational failure and unemployment, the same sense of disillusionment and despair, as in 1964 when research on these problems had begun. A debt had been incurred, but it had not been repaid.

It isn't easy to formulate the general principle of obligation that is operating here. As I first stated it, a linguist who has gathered data in a speech community has an obligation to act in the interests of members of that community, when they have need of it. But many linguists gather data from the rich and powerful, rather than the poor and oppressed. I was asked, are these linguists obliged to protect the privileges of the upper classes, if those privileges are menaced? Many linguists work in countries where the political situation has confused the question of who speaks for the people's needs. How are they to apply such a principle? One way of simplifying these problems is to focus on the data that the linguist has collected, and what is to be done with it.<sup>13</sup> We can then formulate a *principle of the debt incurred* that might receive very general support:

An investigator who has obtained linguistic data from members of a speech community has an obligation to make knowledge of that data available to the community, when it has need of it.

This principle would not be so easy to endorse if we were dealing with a broader range of social or political data. It is not always so clear who has rights to such information. Linguists, like other researchers, must be fiercely committed to the privacy of their sources. But the knowledge that springs from linguistic analysis is, by definition, the general property of the speech community. And it is no one's interest for it to remain buried in the linguist's field notes or unpublished papers.

One can formulate a more active statement of this principle, which still might be endorsed by a large number of linguists who have gathered data of this kind:

An investigator who has obtained linguistic data from members of a speech community has an obligation to use the knowledge based on that data for benefit of the community, when it has need of it.

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and Kaimowitz drew their panel of experts from those who had already committed themselves, by one means or another, to action on behalf of the black community. They were also committed to an intellectual position in support of the idea that there was a well-formed grammar of Black English, that it reflected a long history of separate development, and that it formed a system distinct from other English dialects. Furthermore, they had all engaged in the struggle for the recognition of Black English as an object of linguistic study. In short, they were committed individuals. In what way then could their testimony be considered impartial evidence on a matter of scientific fact?

The answer to that question requires a review of the academic and political controversies that had developed over Black English in the decade and a half before the trial.

#### THE HISTORY OF BLACK ENGLISH AS A PUBLIC ISSUE

The linguistic system that was the center of the Ann Arbor case is a remarkably uniform grammar that is used by black children throughout the United States and by most black adults in intimate or vernacular settings.<sup>14</sup> Judge Joiner used the term “Black English,” but I will continue the current linguistic practice of referring to this grammar as the *Black English Vernacular* or BEV. The term “Black English” will be reserved as a cover term for all forms of English used by black people in the United States, including Standard Black English.<sup>15</sup> As the result of a special series of historical events, we probably know more about BEV than any other vernacular dialect in the world. Its phonology, syntax, tense and aspect system, and lexical semantics have been reported in even more detail than New York City English, Parisian French, or the Portuguese of Rio de Janeiro.<sup>16</sup> Yet it was not even recognized as a distinct form of English until the mid-1960s.

It may seem strange that BEV had to be “discovered,” as if it were an ancient script buried in a mound or an argot spoken by a secret society. It is spoken by about twenty million people, can be heard on street corners, playgrounds, and front porches in all parts of the United States, and continues a linguistic tradition that dates back three centuries. Under the name of “Negro dialect” it is mimicked and caricatured with various degrees of accuracy in songs, minstrel shows, films, and jokes. Yet its existence has been vigorously denied by black and white scholars since the beginning of the twentieth century.

As Stewart (1965) has pointed out, this denial is part of an egalitarian reaction to the statements of writers who assumed the inferiority of blacks. The underlying assumption of educational psychologists in the 1960s was that any differences observed between black and white children were marks of black inferiority. They believed that such differences could be eliminated by compensatory education. Accordingly, psychologists searched for explanations of educational failure in the early environment of the child – bad nutrition, female-dominated households, inadequate cultural stimulation, noisy surround-

ings (Deutsch, Katz, & Jensen 1968). On the language front, the search for the sources of cultural deprivation led to the notion of verbal deprivation. The deficit hypothesis was firmly built into the language of legislation, so that the complaints submitted by MLS necessarily dealt with the schools' neglect of the deprivation suffered by the children, not directly with the failure of the teaching methods themselves.

Linguists and anthropologists disagreed with both positions: that blacks were inferior, and that they were suffering from cultural deprivation. They advanced a "difference" theory: that there were important and persistent differences between blacks and whites, but that these were not marks of black inferiority. To solve the educational problems of the inner city, teachers would have to take these differences into account rather than treat black children as if they were identical with whites (Baratz & Baratz 1969, Labov 1969a).

Dialectologists were as firmly opposed to the deficit theory as other linguists. They had always contended that vernacular dialects were as logically consistent as the language of the schoolroom (McDavid 1979). Southern dialectologists in particular would align themselves with Sledd in his fierce attacks against the imposition of a northern standard and the whole notion of "bidialectalism" (1969, 1972). But dialectologists certainly did not agree that black speech forms formed a separate and distinct system from white dialects. Krapp (1924) stated that ". . . the Negro speaks English of the same-kind, and class for class, of the same degree, as the English of the most authentic descendants of the first settlers and Jamestown and Plymouth" (190). Kurath came to the same conclusion on the basis of the Atlas data: "By and large the Southern Negro speaks the language of the white man of his locality or area and of his level of education" (1949:6).

Black scholars were among the first to challenge this point of view. Lorenzo Turner's 1949 study of *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* is now generally regarded as an essential demonstration of the persistence of African traits in the speech of mainland blacks, though it was largely ignored in his lifetime. Beryl Bailey (1965) pointed out the resemblances between the grammatical forms that she heard from blacks in New York City and the Jamaican Creole syntax that she had described in major research (1966). A "Creolist" position developed, articulated most forcefully by Stewart (1967), which underlined the importance of the parallels between BEV and the Creole grammars of the Caribbean, within the general typological framework of West African languages that characterized those grammars. Though Gullah is the only living example of such a Creole on the mainland, the case for a more widespread Creole grammar in the 18th and 19th centuries was reinforced by evidence from various historical sources. Dillard was among the most active in assembling this evidence, and his book *Black English* (1972) was important in establishing the term and the dialect as a social fact for the general public.

The Creolists developed their position with a sharp polemic against the posi-

tion of the dialectologists. Dillard and Stewart were particularly strong in their criticisms. For example, Dillard (1972) characterizes McDavid as a “pundit of dialectology” (119) who “pontificated” (218) “the absurd requirement of tracing words of African origins only to areas populated predominantly by Negroes” (120). McDavid’s notes to the 1963 abridgment of Mencken’s *American Language* are said to “carry research on Negro dialect to an all-time low,” in suggesting that some features of the Negro dialect may be exaggerated for the benefit of white listeners (8). This kind of writing contributed to the popular success of Dillard’s book, but it did not encourage the kind of communication that would resolve the controversy. It isn’t easy for an outsider to understand the reason for this kind of polemic, since the quoted remarks seem eminently reasonable, and the original text shows that McDavid was talking about the verbal aspects of “‘tommin’,” not the black vernacular itself. McDavid’s early position on the origins of the dialect spoken by black Americans (McDavid & McDavid 1951a) takes a balanced view of the information then available; his reappraisal 21 years later (McDavid 1972) shows a clear awareness of the contributions of Creolists, and calls for more historical research on the question of Creole origins.<sup>17</sup> But other dialectologists were not as judicious or restrained, and the argument became increasingly intemperate over the next few years.

In 1965, I began a study of BEV in Harlem with a team of black and white investigators, a project supported by the Office of Education with the aim of finding out whether differences in the language used by black children and the language of the classroom could help explain the failure of the inner city schools to teach reading (Labov, Cohen, Robins, & Lewis 1968). We tried to take an objective position on the developing controversy between Creolists and dialectologists, with the aim of resolving that issue with quantitative studies of language in vernacular settings. In fact, we were inevitably biased by our previous history. The Harlem project broke new ground in quantitative methods of analysis and field work, combining the earlier interview techniques of the New York City study (Labov 1966) with the group sessions and ethnographic approach of Gumperz (1964). Yet we paid more attention to those phonological and grammatical features that could be quantified than to the tense and aspect markers that proved to be of great importance in tracing the Creole origins of BEV.

One of the reasons that we did not appreciate the full force of the Creolists is that we were prejudiced against their descriptions of the grammar of BEV. The Creolist practice was to note examples of forms that were similar to the grammars of Caribbean Creoles, and set aside any forms that resembled white dialects as borrowings. This procedure would lead us to the conclusion that vernacular speakers switch codes many times in every sentence. The resulting basilectal grammar did not resemble any language that we had studied, since it had very few options and none of the inherent variation that we found to be typical of all living languages.

The Creolist descriptions of BEV are exemplified in Dillard's Chapter II (1972), which brings together his own observations and those made by Stewart, Bailey, and others. Dillard reports (61–62) that BEV does not use the plural inflection when it is redundant, so that we have *a whole lotta song* but *the songs*. We found no such tendency towards a "nonredundant" plural, but rather a generalization of the plural inflection with zero forms like *sheeps* and *deers*; the zero form is largely confined to nouns of measure, where BEV is less consistent than many white dialects.<sup>18</sup> It is said that BEV does not have an obligatory past tense (41–42). Yet we found that much of BEV syntax is organized around the tense marker, like other English dialects;<sup>19</sup> that clusters that are formed by the regular past tense are retained more often than other clusters; and that the past tense of strong verbs is used more consistently than in white dialects (Labov 1965). It is stated that when *didn't* is used to negate past sentences, as in *He didn't go*, it indicates an optional tense marker; but that when *ain't* occurs, as in *He ain't go*, it represents not tense but a "point-action" aspect (42). We studied the intimate alternation of *didn't* and *ain't* as closely as we could, but found no evidence of semantic differences. Our results were confirmed by empirical studies of BEV in other cities (for Detroit, Wolfram [1969]; for Washington, Fasold [1972a]; for Berkeley, Mitchell-Kernan [1969]; for Los Angeles, Legum et al. [1972]). We therefore came to the conclusion that many statements made by Creolists about BEV grammar were wide of the mark; and that some of them might actually limit the value of research for educators, since teachers might very well not recognize the speech of the children in their classroom as Black English from these descriptions.

As far as the dialectologists were concerned, we noted their claims that everything found in BEV so far could be found in Southern white speech. Sledd, perhaps the most competent and accurate observer of the Southern linguistic scene, seemed to agree (1972). Our own explorations of a few Southern speakers' formal reactions seemed to indicate that this was so for most syntactic features (Labov, Cohen, Robins, & Lewis 1968:260–61). Yet there were a fair number of morphological patterns and aspect markers of BEV that were not reported for Southern speech, like the use of *ain't* for *didn't* and remote present perfect *been*. The systematic and reliable data of the Atlas records didn't cover features like these. When American dialectologists did discuss variable patterns like consonant cluster simplification, or the more categorical absence of underlying subject–verb agreement, their treatment of the details seemed less linguistically oriented than the Creolists'.

In response to the research on Black English of the 1960s, some dialectologists simply reaffirmed their earlier position with renewed vigor: that there was no such thing. In 1971, Juanita Williamson wrote that the features used to identify Black English are "neither black nor white, but American" (1971:173). This was no longer an academic discussion. Williamson's paper was inserted into a

series of violent attacks against the “myth” of Black English in *The Crisis*, the official organ of the NAACP. The editor, Henry Lee Moon, denounced a linguistic project for improving standard English writing by the contrastive analysis of Black English patterns as a conspiracy to teach imperfect English, and so impose a “relic of Slavery” on black children, “subverting their aspirations for excellence” (1971).<sup>20</sup> This campaign was supported by Roy Wilkins, Kenneth Clark, and many prominent black leaders of the time. Bayard Rustin wrote that “‘Black English’, after all, has nothing to do with blackness but derives from the conditions of lowerclass life in the South (poor Southern whites also speak ‘Black English’)” (1971). In 1972, Dillard and I gave papers about Black English before the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Ernest McKinney circulated a letter to all recognized black leaders, calling for an end to this type of research:

what is being promulgated as “Black English” is really a phenomenon out of the heads of a few white middle-class “liberals” who have decided to organize Negro life and build up a body of pseudo-scholarship, sometimes bordering on shysterism with the help of a few participating Negroes (1972).

Given the polemical character of the academic study of Black English, and a public debate of this kind, it seems very unlikely that testimony could have been given in a calm and objective spirit at the 1979 trial in Ann Arbor. It wouldn’t seem hard for the defendants to find expert witnesses who would nullify any testimony that the linguists would bring forward. One could expect the defense to put on the stand educational psychologists who would state that black children’s language was a “restricted code” or a product of verbal deprivation. Failing that, they could summon a black academic figure to testify that the alleged language barrier, the so-called “Black English,” was a myth, an invention of white liberals. Most effective of all would be the appearance on the stand of a linguist who would explain that the speech of blacks was simply equivalent to the geographic dialect of the region of the South they had come from. Any of these positions would undercut the plaintiffs’ contention that the Green Road children spoke a black dialect used throughout the United States, which had developed over centuries of slavery and segregation.

It doesn’t seem likely that Judge Joiner could have decided which of these conflicting testimonies was right. If one group of linguists weren’t able to convince their academic colleagues about the nature of Black English, how could they hope to convince someone completely outside the field? Given the state of the issues in the early 1970s, it would seem that linguists’ argumentative habits had permanently cancelled any effectiveness they might have in the public forum.

But something quite different happened. Linguists did not nullify each others’ position. By 1979, the field which had been so divided and contentious just a few

years earlier had reached a consensus about the nature and origin of Black English.

#### OBJECTIVITY IN THE STUDY OF THE VERB *TO BE*

One of the most striking variables of BEV is the copula, that is, the various finite forms of *be* as main verb and progressive auxiliary. Where other dialects show two forms, BEV shows four:

- |                                 |                     |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| (1) a. He is always doing that. | b. He is tired out. |
| (2) a. He's always doing that.  | b. He's tired out.  |
| (3) a. He always doing that.    | b. He tired out.    |
| (4) a. He be always doing that. | b. He be tired out. |

In the remainder of this paper, I will use the analysis of the BEV copula to illustrate the way that principles of objectivity and commitment operated to produce the final consensus on the nature and origin of BEV. The analysis of the past tense, or the negative might also be used for this purpose, but the copula is the most complex and far-ranging problem, has produced the most dramatic results, and leads us directly into the issue of BEV aspect. Sentence type (4) is, in fact, a part of the distinct aspect system, and will be dealt with in the next section (Steps Towards Consensus).

This section will review the problem of the alternation of the finite forms (1-3). The question is whether 1(a,b) and 2(a,b) are the result of variable morphological insertion of forms from a superposed dialect, or whether 2(a,b) and 3(a,b) are the result of the variable reduction of an underlying form 1(a,b). Bailey (1965) pointed out the resemblance between 3(b) and Jamaican basilectal *di tiicha guud*: following this idea, BEV would be closer to the post-Creole continuum in Jamaica than other English dialects. The second solution would show BEV as a dialect that differs from others by an additional rule of auxiliary deletion.

The approach that we used in attacking this problem followed three principles of objectivity that appear to be held in common by all those who try to do serious scientific work.

The value of data for confirming a theory is inversely related to:

1. the degree of control over the data by the investigator
2. the lapse of time between observation and recording
3. the similarity in the sources of error in the confirming work and the work that is being confirmed.

These are three aspects of the more general scientific principle of doubt: that errors are to be suspected and searched for everywhere. The three points might be summed up more simply as three kinds of doubt: to doubt our selves, to doubt



our memories, and to doubt our methods. In the first case, we try to put the self in a situation where it can do no harm; in the second case, we try to limit the tricks that memory can play on us as much as possible; in the third case, we try to shift our methods as often as possible to undercut the tendency to keep proving ourselves right by making the same mistake over and over again.

Those who follow the first principle carefully will construct double blind experiments where even the investigator does not know the difference between dependent variable and control. An obvious corollary is that no data entirely controlled by the theorist can be used to prove his or her own theory. This does not of course rule out introspection as a resource for making guesses and forming theories: the principles only concern the value of data for *confirming* a theory, and so arriving at the consensus we are looking for.

Though there are plenty of linguists who disregard these principles entirely, those who have worked on BEV have not. None of the linguists who have contributed to the analysis of BEV have relied on their introspections. They were also wary of the formal elicitations that draw on the introspections of others. This might seem obvious in the case of the dialectologists, or mainland Creolists working in the Caribbean, but it also held true when black American linguists began work on BEV. (For why this should be so, see Baugh [1980].) The data base for the objective study of BEV included recordings of unmonitored conversation,<sup>21</sup> recorded interviews and group sessions, experiments in the field and in schools, rapid and anonymous surveys, the field notes of ethnographic observation, and a wide variety of historical documents.

Our base for the analysis of the BEV copula included recordings of interviews and group sessions with 57 black speakers and 8 whites, repetition tests, and psycholinguistic experiments carried out by Jane Torrey in the Harlem schools. The solution to the analytical problem that we arrived at is given in Labov (1969b). It is the second alternative outlined above: that Black English has an underlying copula in the present tense as in the past, that some of these forms are contracted, and that from the pool of contracted forms some show deletion of the remaining consonant. We came to this answer through the following steps.

a. A qualitative distributional analysis showed that where other dialects of English can contract, BEV can delete or contract the copula; but where other dialects cannot contract, BEV cannot delete or contract. The implications of this observation led to an analysis of the conditions for English auxiliary contraction in general, which had not been studied until that time. Our findings were that this contraction is the deletion of a shwa in words of the shape V(C), where the vowel is lax and unstressed, and in most dialects, only where the abstract tense marker is present.<sup>22</sup> The application of contraction to *will*, *has*, etc., is dependent on a prior process of initial glide deletion.

b. Auxiliary contraction and deletion can then be integrated into the general phonology of English of Chomsky and Halle (1968), in the following sequence of ordered rules:

Stress assignment

- stress reduction governed by constituent structure
- vowel reduction (obligatory)
  - glide deletion (does not apply to *is*)
  - auxiliary contraction (optional)
    - assibilation (see below)
    - auxiliary deletion (optional)

c. As Stewart (1967) argued, other solutions are possible if one gives up the idea of writing the simplest possible rules. BEV could be said to have a negative marker *ain't*, a question marker *is*, a past tense marker *was*, a nonfinite form *be* and automatic *is*-support in exposed position for sentences like *That's what he is*. These various forms might have only an accidental relationship to the finite forms of the copula in other dialects. Qualitative arguments on underlying forms can be persuasive but not convincing to Creolists who prefer to believe that a grammar is possible psychological construction.

Quantitative analysis is then necessary for an objective demonstration of how contraction and deletion are embedded in the rule systems of BEV. Our data base for this work included recordings of interviews and group sessions for 57 black speakers, who represent all the named groups in the area from 110th to 118th Street and a sample of adults from that area, along with 8 white speakers from two control groups in upper Manhattan. Figure 1 shows the pattern for the preadolescent Thunderbirds, the adolescent Jets and Cobras, the young adult Oscar Brothers, a sample of individual adults, and the Inwood adolescent control group. For all groups (and for all individuals in each group) we find that more full forms are used in individual interviews, and that deletion is used more often

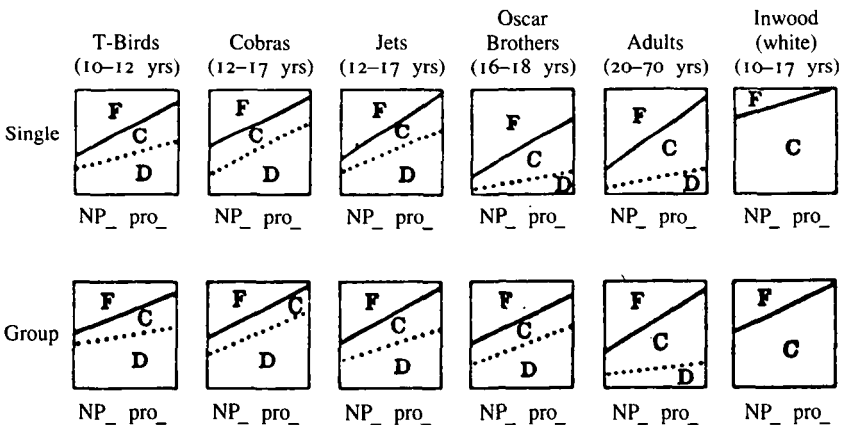
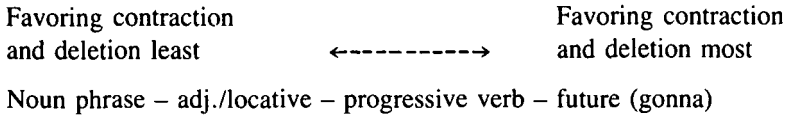


Figure 1. Percentages of full, contracted, and deleted forms of *is* with pronoun subject vs. other noun-phrase subject for six groups in single and group (casual) style (from Labov 1972: 85).

in less formal contexts and styles. The pattern of environmental constraints was also uniform. Figure 1 shows the effect of the preceding subject: pronouns strongly favor both contraction and deletion.

d. The effect of the following grammatical environment is more complex and turned out to be more important in the final analysis. The general pattern is the same for contraction and deletion:



Since the first analyses did not show a clear differentiation of predicate adjective and locative, these two were combined in most of the tables that followed.

e. The direction of the constraints was the same for both contraction and deletion, but the size of the effects was greater for deletion. This implied that contraction and deletion were similar but distinct variable rules with the same pattern of environmental constraints. Sentences that showed deletion appear to have been subject to the effect of both rules, sharpening the differences between noun phrase on the one hand and *gonna* on the other. That they are distinct rules is shown by the fact that assibilation of /t/ in *it's*, *that's*, and *what's* must be ordered after contraction, bringing the sibilant into contact with the /t/, but before deletion of the /s/.

f. This pattern of results was replicated in studies of the BEV copula in other areas, as shown in Table 2. This gave us confidence in the analysis of the copula, and also demonstrated the remarkable geographic unity of BEV grammar.

g. Wolfram's work in Mississippi (1974) demonstrated in addition that *are* must be included in the copula deletion rule with the same pattern of constraints as *is*, contrary to the proposal of Labov et al. (1968) and Labov (1969b). Our earlier assumption that whites did not delete *is* was shown to be wrong: Wolfram found a regular but low-level pattern of deletion among white school children, which he argues is best explained on the basis of the influence of black speech on white.

TABLE 2. *Percentage deletion of the copula by following grammatical environment for four groups of BEV speakers*

|   | NP | ADJ | LOC | VERB | FUTURE |
|---|----|-----|-----|------|--------|
| NYC: Thunderbirds                                 | 23 | 48  | 36  | 66   | 88     |
| NYC: Jets   | 32 | 36  | 52  | 74   | 93     |
| Detroit: working class<br>(Wolfram 1969)          | 58 | 44  | 46  | 61   | 97     |
| Berkeley: working class<br>(Mitchell-Kernan 1969) | 09 | 03  | 14  | 71   | 75     |

*h.* Torrey's work among second graders in Harlem has already been cited (*Language barriers* above) to show that the full form of *is* is predominant among BEV speakers at this age. She also demonstrated that the copula was highly adaptable to a program of instruction. Table 3 shows the results of an experiment with 27 black school second-graders in Harlem (1971). The spontaneous production of the copula is intermediate between verbal and possessive /s/ (which we believe to be absent from the basic grammar), and plural /s/ (which is regularly present). This fits in with the notion that there are regular rules for contraction and deletion of the copula. The second row of the table shows the level of success in a test for comprehension of the meaning of the inflections. Comprehension of the contracted copula, for example, is tested by the ability to distinguish a picture designated by "He's cut" from one appropriate for "He cut." The copula score is quite low, almost as low as the comprehension of the use of verbal /s/ to differentiate singular "The cat sleeps" from plural "The cats sleep". The third line shows results one week after a single ten-minute training program to increase recognition of the various inflections. The singular use of verbal /s/ showed no improvement at all, but success with the copula jumped from .4 to 1.3, the most significant gain of all the inflections. These results are consistent with the view that BEV has an underlying copula that is easily brought to awareness, but that there is no subject-verb agreement rule.

These results helped to establish the recognition that BEV has well-formed rules of its own, and forms a distinct linguistic system. The analysis of the copula was particularly important in the developing field of variation theory, since it was used to introduce the concept of variable rules. When Cedergren and Sankoff (1974) rationalized that practice in the light of probability theory, they used the copula data from Harlem to demonstrate the independence of variable constraints. Yet the copula data did not bear directly on the question of the historical origins of BEV: it only demonstrated one way in which BEV was closely aligned with other dialects. The Creolists recognized some of the qualitative arguments concerning the copula, and responded to them, but they did not deal at all with the quantitative data of (*d*)-(*h*) above.<sup>23</sup> For my part, I was not very much alert to the evidence for the Creole and pidgin origins of BEV at the

TABLE 3. *Learnability of inflections by BEV speakers as shown by production and comprehension before and after training*

|  | Plural | Verb            | Possessive    | Copula |
|--|--------|-----------------|---------------|--------|
| Speech (% realized)                      | 90     | 40              | 50            | 70     |
| Understood & named correctly (max = 2.0) |        | <u>Singular</u> | <u>Plural</u> |        |
| Before training                          | 1.7    | .1              | 1.1           | 1.3    |
| After training                           | 1.8    | .1              | 1.6           | 1.8    |

time, and received a vigorous letter of protest from Stewart about the statement in our final report that “the evidence for a general Creole in the United States is not strong” (Labov et al. 1968:6).<sup>24</sup> The first two principles of objectivity had carried us to some interesting insights into the structure of BEV, but they hadn’t produced consensus on the wider issues surrounding Black English.

#### STEPS TOWARDS CONSENSUS

No single chronological account will give a clear picture of the development of the view of Black English that was presented in Judge Joiner’s courtroom in the summer of 1979. There are many strands of social and intellectual events that influenced the linguists and their views: the delineation of the Creole continuum and the process of decreolization; the joint commitment of linguists to the defense of black people and their language; the entrance of black linguists into the scene; the application of new analytical and experimental techniques to the data; the refinement of field methods; and deeper knowledge of the aspect system of BEV. In this section I will try to disengage these developments in sequence without losing sight of their interconnections. Again, the focus of the linguistic argument will be the various forms of the verb *to be* and the variability of the copula, since the development of consensus was most dramatically demonstrated in this area of BEV grammar.

*Decreolization.* Throughout the earlier discussion of the possible Creole origins of BEV, it was assumed that a process of “decreolization” had taken place over the last century that brought the grammar and the lexicon closer to other dialects and further away from a Caribbean-type, basilectal model. This notion began to take much clearer shape when Creole studies advanced rapidly after the Mona conference of 1968. The first observation relevant to the BEV copula was made by Ferguson at that conference (1971). First he pointed out that languages could be divided into two types from the point of view of present tense predications: those with a copula (type A: English, Greek . . .) and without (type B: Hebrew, Russian . . .). Type B languages supply from various sources a verb of existence or copula in the exposed positions discussed in our qualitative analysis of contraction and deletion (*Yes, he is; God is; He is today; That’s what he is;* etc.). Ferguson then showed that the absence of the copula is a common feature of simplification of type A languages, found in baby talk and foreigner talk as well as pidgins and Creoles with a lexical base drawn from these languages. A student of BEV might then infer that a zero copula in BEV was the result of simplification of a type A grammar, leaving stressed elements in place, or a remodeling according to type B principles.

In a still-unpublished paper, Anshen (1970) pointed out that the association of the absence of the copula with Creoles was not well motivated by the structure of Creole grammars. A review of a number of Creoles indicated that Creoles were in fact copula-rich languages, with a variety of verbs for predicating with noun

phrases, locatives, progressives, and so on. Bickerton's large-scale analysis of the Guyanese Creole continuum (1972) demonstrated that the absence of a copula was characteristically a mesolectal form. In the pattern of the implicational scale for the copula, the durative or habitual use of *a* plus verb shifts to zero, and zero is then replaced by finite forms of *be*. The pattern of the mesolect shows partial resemblances to the mainland BEV variations, though the Caribbean pattern does not match the profile of Table 2, as we will see.

Fasold (1972b) put forward the clearest statement of the emerging view that, in the course of decreolization, variable rules for inserting morphemes give way to obligatory morphological rules followed by variable phonological reduction. The irregular pattern of forms cited by Stewart (1968) and Dillard (1972) from earlier records, with *am* in the third singular and *is* in the first singular, shows the same irregular distribution that we now find for verbal /s/, which is still governed by such a variable insertion rule. On the other hand, subject–verb agreement is well established in the copula for our younger Harlem speakers, and adults show increasing phonological conditioning of the deletion rule.

*Commitment and consensus.* As linguists were beginning to converge on theoretical matters, they were also drawn together in the social arena. The first issue that drew general attention was the extreme position taken by some of the educational psychologists: that the verbal deprivation of black children was so great that they were best treated as if they had no language at all. Joan and Steven Baratz called my attention to the work of Bereiter and Engelmann (1966) who developed a teaching method based on the premise that black children had to be taught an entirely new language before they could learn anything else, since their home language was a kind of “restricted code” that lacked any of the means necessary for learning concepts. Creolists, dialectologists, and analysts of variation all agreed that something had to be done about educators who insisted that the only logical answer to the question, “Where is the squirrel?” is “The squirrel is in the tree,” and that children who answered “On the tree” did not show the capacity for logical thought. The linguistic response (Labov 1969a; Baratz & Baratz 1969) was strong enough to arouse considerable support in the field of education.

One of the educational psychologists who had been involved in the verbal deprivation theory then shifted to the traditional competing position: that blacks were genetically inferior. Arthur Jensen argued in the *Harvard Educational Review* of 1969 that compensatory education had failed even though vast sums had been spent on it; that there were sharp limits on what could be done to improve the school performance of lower-class black children, since most of them were genetically incapable of forming concepts freely; that the only solutions to the educational problems of the inner city were to train black children for lower-skilled jobs by associational methods, and to limit their numbers in the population.

Most linguists realized that their knowledge of the logical structure of languages was relevant to both of these issues. On December 29, 1971, a resolution was proposed to the Linguistic Society of America which called to public attention the linguistic evidence against Jensen's point of view, stating that no natural language has been shown to be superior to another for the expression of logical thought. A referendum on the resolution passed by a wide margin; the only disagreement expressed was about whether the Society should take positions at all. It was endorsed again at the annual meeting two years later.

The adoption of a general position by linguists was not simply a reflection of the personal commitment of some individuals under the two principles formulated above. There appeared to be broader principles of commitment operating in linguists' responses to questions of public policy on language and education. One may be termed the *principle of linguistic democracy*, which I would formulate in this way:

Linguists support the use of a standard dialect in so far as it is an instrument of wider communication for the general population, but oppose its use as a barrier to social mobility.

Linguists tend to be against educational methods that issue a general prohibition against the use of vernaculars in the schoolroom. This is not because they are against the use of a standard, but because they believe that these methods will in the long run prevent children from acquiring the use of the standard and from learning how to read and write. At the same time, this principle appears to be under reserve to a broader one that may be called the *principle of linguistic autonomy*:

The choice of what language or dialect is to be used in a given domain of a speech community is reserved to members of that community.

It is of course always hard to say who speaks for the community, and finding out the choice of a community forms another whole domain of research. But for linguists who are studying a speech community that is not their own, like those white linguists who were engaged with the black community, the principle has a clear application. They don't claim for themselves the right to speak for the community or make the decision on what forms of language should be used. The entire problem takes on a different form with the next turn of events in the history of research on Black English.

*The entrance of blacks into the field.* In response to public pressure to open up higher education to minorities, graduate fellowships were made available to American blacks during the early 1970s. The public controversy on Jensenism and the response of linguists were partly responsible for a growing interest in linguistics among black students. A number of black students began graduate study with an expressed interest in contributing to the study of Black English as



well as Creoles and pidgins in general. At the same time, black linguists from the Caribbean entered the field, and some did field work on Black English in the United States.

All of the black linguists used ethnographic techniques to study the use of language in the speech community and at the same time investigated features of internal structure. Mitchell-Kernan dealt with the use of language in the Berkeley community (1969) and provided important evidence on the copula (see Table 2). Smitherman's *Talkin' and Testifyin'* (1977) also deals with discourse but includes valuable descriptions of the tense and aspect system. John and Angela Rickford (1976) studied the gestures "cut-eye" and "suck-tooth" in the American and Caribbean black community; John Rickford studied the development of *be* in the Sea Islands (1974), the semantics of *been* in Philadelphia (1975), and the pronominal system of Guyana (1979). Baugh contributed to the study of gestures in the black community (1977), though his main work is in the grammatical structure of BEV, including the copula, in New York (1980) and Los Angeles (1979). Spears added a new dimension to the study of the tense and aspect system of BEV with his discussion of the camouflaged marker *come* (1980).

Several black scholars have developed our knowledge of the process of decreolization in the community to the point that it is no longer a matter of indirect inference. Vaughn-Cooke (1976) gave a detailed view of the restoration of initial syllables across generations in Mississippi. Rickford demonstrated decreolization in progress in Guyana (1979). Hopkins indicated counter-movements in the Sea Islands (1979).

I will be drawing on a number of these results in the discussion of the further analysis of the verb *to be* in BEV, and its relation to the Creole hypothesis.

*The reanalysis of the copula by the variable rule program.* The original analysis of the BEV copula used arithmetic methods that didn't allow more than two or three dimensions to be examined at any one time. When sentences with noun phrase subjects were separated from those with pronoun subjects, and divisions made between preceding and following grammatical factors for each group, there were very few items in any one cell. Some distinctions had to be collapsed. One such combination that was made early in the New York City analysis and preserved, was to put together a following predicate adjective with a following locative. These fluctuated considerably, but generally showed more contraction and deletion than a predicate nominal and less than a progressive verb.

Baugh undertook to reanalyze the Harlem data with the variable rule program (Cedergren & Sankoff 1974), which allows all factors to be considered at once. He recoded all 26 recordings of the Cobras made by Lewis and Robins, and obtained 587 tokens of the copula. Several new distinctions were included: the most important one for our present concerns is the separation of predicate adjec-

TABLE 4. *VARBRUL I probabilities of contraction and deletion for following grammatical factors for NYC Cobras*

|             | NP  | ADJ  | LOC  | VERB | FUTURE |
|-------------|-----|------|------|------|--------|
| Contraction | .00 | .12  | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00   |
| Deletion    | .00 | 1.00 | .68  | .40  | .60    |

Source: from Baugh 1980:95–100.

tive and locative. In general, the analysis confirmed the earlier results, with contraction and deletion showing similar grammatical constraints. There was one major exception, shown in Table 4. The locative was among the strongest factors in favoring contraction,<sup>25</sup> while the adjective strongly disfavored the contraction rule. For deletion, the relation was reversed: predicate adjectives strongly favor deletion, much more so than locatives.

There is no obvious synchronic explanation for this exception, but a historical explanation leaps to mind the moment we compare Caribbean Creoles with BEV. As Bailey showed in her study of *Jamaican Creole Syntax* (1966), locatives are regularly accompanied with a locative verb *de*. Adjectives never show a copula, since they are basically intransitive stative verbs in JCS. The present-day pattern of constraints on deletion of the copula apparently reflects the Creole origin of the dialect. There is no communicative function to this pattern of frequencies: it is purely and simply a residue of an historical process.

Baugh replicated this analysis in his major study of Pacoima, a suburb of Los Angeles (1979). Here he was dealing with adults from a very distant geographic area, recorded in the most intimate vernacular settings and in semi-formal interviews. The output of the variable rule program for the following grammatical environment is shown in Table 5. VARBRUL II is used here: probabilities over .5 favor the rule, and under .5 disfavor it. The pattern is identical to the New York City analysis. Predicate nominals disfavor both contraction and deletion, progressive verb and future are the most favoring. In the middle range, locatives favor contraction almost as much as verbs, but disfavor deletion as much as noun phrases. Predicate adjectives show the opposite: they disfavor contraction more than nominals, and promote deletion almost as much as verbs.

TABLE 5. *VARBRUL II probabilities of contraction and deletion for following grammatical factors for Pacoima adults*

|             | NP  | ADJ | LOC | VERB | FUTURE |
|-------------|-----|-----|-----|------|--------|
| Contraction | .36 | .33 | .58 | .66  | .67    |
| Deletion    | .32 | .56 | .29 | .66  | .69    |

Source: from Baugh 1979:181.

Thus adults in Los Angeles show the same quantitative profile as adolescents in New York City, three thousand miles away. It would be hard to imagine a stronger demonstration of the uniformity of BEV grammar throughout the United States.

Baugh then made a comparison with the available data on the behavior of the copula in Creole grammars. He drew on a paper by Holm (1975) that examines a Jamaican Creole text published by Cassidy and the Gullah texts given in Turner (1949). Table 6 shows comparable percentage figures for deletion for the Harlem Cobras, the Los Angeles adults, Gullah, and Jamaican Creole English. In every case, the percentage of deletion with predicate locatives is low compared to predicate adjectives. The overall profile of the Gullah data is quite close to the Harlem and Los Angeles figures, with noun phrase the least likely to follow a zero copula, and progressive verbs and future *gonna* the most likely. The Jamaican data are quite different, and reflect more directly the basilectal pattern outlined in Bailey (1966). The greatest percentage of zero copula is found with the adjective, which never has a copula in the basilect. Predicate nominals show the equative *a* in JCS, and progressive verbs the auxiliary *a* or *de* like the locative. All three show low percentages of copula in the texts, and the future is close to the progressive verb, as elsewhere.

This result is a striking demonstration of the convergence of the various approaches to the structure and history of BEV. Scholars who remained skeptical about the Creole origins of Black English up to this point will concede that here is objective evidence for the gradual development of the current dialect from a Creole history.<sup>26</sup> It also demonstrates the importance of the third principle of objectivity: that the value of a confirmation is inversely related to the diversity in sources of error.

If we use the same methods over and over again, we are likely to gain confidence in our own theories without seeing their limitations. The methods of dialect geography will demonstrate repeatedly that blacks use the same vowel system and lexical choices as whites in each region. Repeated observations of the syntax of interrogative and negative sentences will demonstrate an identity of Southern and BEV syntax. Repeated observations of the absence of inflections and the presence of aspect markers will convince the observer of the structural identity of BEV and Caribbean Creoles. In this way, linguists with opposing

TABLE 6. *Percentage deletion of IS for four black dialects*

|                                | NP | ADJ | LOC | VERB | FUTURE |
|--------------------------------|----|-----|-----|------|--------|
| NYC: Cobras                    | 14 | 72  | 31  | 59   | 78     |
| Los Angeles: adults            | 32 | 56  | 33  | 62   | 72     |
| Gullah (Turner 1949)           | 11 | 52  | 22  | 52   | 88     |
| Jamaica (LePage & DeCamp 1960) | 22 | 66  | 17  | 17   | 32     |

Source: from Baugh 1979:180-1, and Holm 1975.

points of view may each gain confidence that they are right through the repeated use of data gathered by objective and reliable methods.

There were also repeated confirmations of our earlier findings on the parallelism of deletion and contraction. These confirmations shared some of the same sources of error: they used arithmetic methods that didn't compensate for uneven distribution of the factors involved; they didn't have enough data to distinguish reliably the two critical factors, predicate adjective and locative; and they had no time depth. Three steps were needed to go further: the introduction of the variable rule program; the restoration of the distinction between predicate adjective and locative; and the addition of data from the nearest related Creole grammars.

*The aspect system of BEV.* One of the consequences of the entrance of black linguists into the study of BEV was a great advance in our knowledge of its aspect system. We had early descriptions by Stewart (1965), more detailed examinations by Fasold (1969, 1972a), and a number of important observations by Fickett (1970). But research into the aspect system advances more slowly than the study of variables of high frequency like the copula. It may take years to collect the crucial sentences through participant observation or to design the critical experiments that reveal the underlying differences in interpretation. Though we had collected a number of examples of the use of *be*, *done*, and *been*, the black students who came to Pennsylvania in the early 1970s were able to show me that we had missed many important features of the aspect system of BEV, and badly underestimated the extent of the semantic differences between BEV and other dialects.

In my testimony at the Ann Arbor trial, I was able to draw on a number of studies of aspect by black linguists that illustrate the unique character of BEV grammar and semantics. This included Baugh's research on the aspect marker *steady* which indicates "persistent, consistent, and continuous" behavior (1979), and Spears' discovery of the *come* of moral indignation (1980). Here I would like to focus on those aspect markers that intersect formally with forms of the verb *to be*.

Invariant *be* was cited as the fourth alternate form of the copula in the "The history of Black English as a public issue" section. It's usually considered to carry the meaning of "habitual" or "repeated" action, independent of any time reference.<sup>27</sup> As Stewart (1967) has pointed out, it can be indistinguishable from the infinitive *be* as it is used in every dialect: *I like to be doing that*. As a preverbal aspect marker, it resembles the typological pattern of Caribbean Creoles, though like most BEV aspects, we don't find the same combination of form and meaning in the Caribbean. Rickford (1974, 1975) throws light on the origin of this feature of BEV. One line of thinking is to derive it from Anglo-Irish model *do be...ing* with what seem to be the same semantics, derived from Celtic "consuetudinal be"; there was in fact extensive contact between black slaves

and Irish overseers and laborers in Jamaica. But Rickford demonstrates a more immediate source in the Gullah community, where the mesolectal form of the progressive is *does be...ing*. He traces the gradual reduction to *be...ing* across generations, under the pressure of social stigma exerted against the marked form *does*.

Stressed *been* in BEV carries a complex set of semantic features: ‘‘remote,’’ ‘‘relevant to the present,’’ and ‘‘presently true.’’ In sentences like *I BEEN know your name*, it is not easily mistaken for any other dialect. White speakers who hear and notice it<sup>28</sup> are not apt to get the interpretation, ‘‘I learned your name some time ago and I still remember it (so you don’t have to introduce yourself to me).’’ But sentences like

(5) *She been married.*

are heard by white speakers as reduced forms of *She’s been married*. It is a peculiarity of the English present perfect that without an adverb of time it implies that the statement is no longer true. Rickford (1975) reports a series of experiments that demonstrate radical inversion of semantic interpretation of sentences like (5) between black and white subjects. When asked ‘‘Do you get the idea that she’s married now?’’ 23 of 25 black subjects said ‘‘yes,’’ but only 8 of 25 whites; 19 of 25 blacks gave consistent ‘‘remote’’ interpretations to three such sentences, but only 1 white subject did so.

The BEV form *be done* can generally be interpreted as equivalent to the future perfect of other dialects, and is often heard in the form *’ll be done*. In our Harlem work we found<sup>29</sup>

(6) ‘Cause I’ll be done put – stuck so many holes in him he’ll wish he wouldna said it.

and Baugh observed in Pacoima among many other examples:

(7) We be done washed all the cars by the time JoJo gets back with the cigarettes (said at a church-sponsored car wash) (1979:151).

Here *be done* does the typical work of the future perfect and may be rendered in other dialects by ‘‘will have.’’ It is placed in the predication of some future event that has relevance to some other event even further in the future. But Baugh was present at an interaction in the community where *be done* was used in the opposite way. A white guard at the pool was insulted by a black teenager, and the guard threw him in the pool and dunked him several times. The boy’s father came to the pool ready for a violent confrontation. At the height of anger he said,

(8) I’ll be done killed that motherfucker if he tries to lay a hand on my kid again (1979:154).

This sentence cannot be translated by the future perfect ‘‘I will have killed . . .’’ It places the *be done* not on the first future event but on the second. There it functions as a true future perfective, rather than a ‘‘future relevant’’

form. There is no one-to-one translation with other English dialects. The general meaning that we have to attribute to BEV *be done* is that it signals the perfect completion of the action rather than its relation to the state or event that follows.

In presenting the semantic differences between BEV and other dialects to a nonlinguistic audience, nothing is more convincing than a sentence that defies translation. Sentence (8) took 15 years to locate; now that it has been found, the same pattern can be observed in other sentences.<sup>30</sup> It demonstrates for us the critical importance of long-term participant observation and the variety of methods that are needed for the empirical analysis of grammar. It also provides the kind of convincing evidence that allows linguists to arrive at a consensus on the nature and origin of Black English;

1. The Black English Vernacular is a subsystem of English with a distinct set of phonological and syntactic rules that are now aligned in many ways with the rules of other dialects.
2. It incorporates many features of Southern phonology, morphology and syntax; blacks in turn have exerted influence on the dialects of the South where they have lived.
3. It shows evidence of derivation from an earlier Creole that was closer to the present-day Creoles of the Caribbean.
4. It has a highly developed aspect system, quite different from other dialects of English, which shows a continuing development of its semantic structure.

This is the substance of the testimony that was given by the linguists at the Ann Arbor trial.

#### THE OUTCOME OF THE TRIAL

At the presentation of the plaintiffs' case, witnesses were cross-examined with considerable vigor. In my case, defense lawyers had apparently read most of what I had written on Black English. Their major effort was to show that I was contradicting earlier statements that the structural differences between BEV and other dialects could not be great enough to explain reading failure – that the main problem was a cultural and political conflict in the classroom, not a linguistic one.<sup>31</sup> I acknowledged that that conflict was still a major problem but that we now knew much more about the structural differences, thanks to the recent work of the black linguists who had entered the field. The defense lawyer then quoted something that I had written only six months before about the importance of that cultural conflict. I couldn't imagine what it was until I realized that he was reading from unpublished galleys of the proceedings of a conference on the ethnography of communication. This was not a casual defense: these lawyers had done their homework.

In preliminary proceedings, the defense listed eleven experts that they might call to testify on their side. They included three linguists: Roger Shuy, Mary Hoover, and Juanita Williamson. I found it hard to believe that Shuy would testify for the defense,<sup>32</sup> since everything he had done until then indicated that he would take the same position I did. I telephoned him the night before I was going to testify; he told me that he had been asked three months before to testify for the defense and he had refused.<sup>33</sup> It seemed equally unlikely that Mary Hoover would testify for the defense. This suggested that the list of defense witnesses was just an empty gesture, a legal maneuver, and this turned out to be the case. After several weeks of testimony, the plaintiffs' case was completed, and it was the defense's turn. But they called no witnesses. Instead, they informed the press that the case presented by the plaintiffs was so weak that no defense was needed.

This is a remarkable fact. Linguists, who are noted for their disagreements, had arrived at a consensus as far as this case was concerned. The violent oppositions of the first decade of research would have provided both sides with plenty of ammunition, and it's not hard to imagine the legal standoff of experts that would have resulted. But by 1979, the defense was distressed to discover that these arguments had been left behind in the ongoing course of research on Black English.

Judge Joiner delivered his opinion on July 12, 1979. He found for the plaintiffs, and directed the Ann Arbor School Board to submit to him within thirty days a plan defining the exact steps to be taken to help the teachers (1) to identify children speaking Black English, and (2) to use that knowledge in teaching such students how to read standard English.

After a long debate, the Ann Arbor School Board decided by a narrow vote not to appeal the decision.<sup>34</sup> It therefore stands as a decision in this Federal District Court that may be cited in other cases where parents have reason to think that there is a language barrier between their children and the standard language of the school. At conferences held on the impact of the trial in February and June 1980,<sup>35</sup> we heard from several school districts where programs for dealing with the dialect situation had been introduced under the incentive of the decision.

In his decision, Judge Joiner expressed the view that there were no barriers to communication in the classroom. According to his observations, teachers could understand children and children could understand children. Rather, he believed that the language barrier that did exist was in the form of unconscious negative attitudes formed by teachers towards children who spoke Black English, and the reactions of children to those attitudes. The plan submitted by the School Board was for in-service training for teachers that would include twenty hours of instruction on the characteristics and history of Black English, methods for identifying speakers of the dialect, ways of distinguishing mistakes in reading



from differences in pronunciation, and strategies for helping children switch from Black English to standard English.

My own view, and the one that I expressed in testimony, is that operations on attitudes alone will not be enough to make a substantial difference to the reading of black children. What is needed is a set of additions to the day-to-day reading curriculum, in order to show the teachers how to deal with students in the classroom who have a different linguistic system than that assumed in the curriculum. No such materials exist as yet, but some linguists have been working at putting their knowledge to use in this way.<sup>36</sup>

There are many questions that can be raised about the outcome of the trial and what its effects might be.<sup>37</sup> The simple problem of communicating the facts about the trial seems hard to solve. Smitherman got accurate local coverage, but the national press managed to convey to readers the reverse of what was said and done. Many indignant letters and columns appeared in protest against the judge in Ann Arbor who had told teachers to learn Black English so that they could teach it to the children. Where the decision is understood, it isn't clear that effective ways to implement it are on hand, or whether it can make a substantial difference to the education of minority children.

These are the kinds of doubts and uncertainties that we can expect whenever a forward step is made. The step is a substantial one. The results of linguistic research over 15 years have been written into the law by a jurist who could listen to linguistic argument and restate it with extraordinary clarity. This is Judge Joiner's version of our consensus.

All of the distinguished researchers and professionals testified as to the existence of a language system, which is a part of the English language but different in significant respects from the standard English used in the school setting, the commercial world, the world of the arts and science, among the professions, and in government. It is and has been used at some time by 80 percent of the black people of this country and has as its genesis the transactional or pidgin language of the slaves, which after a generation or two became a Creole language. Since then it has constantly been refined and brought closer to the mainstream of society. It still flourishes in areas where there are concentrations of black people. It contains aspects of Southern dialect and is used largely by black people in their casual conversation and informal talk (14).

It would be hard for us to improve on that statement. Indeed, the judge deserves the last word about the trial. There remains only the answer to the question posed at the outset: how can we reconcile the objectivity we need for scientific research with the social commitment we need to apply our knowledge in the social world?

When I first started discussing this case, I thought that the answer was clear. I saw that our most valuable asset was the consensus that had been reached. Once linguists arrive at a common point of view, they can testify effectively in court and in the public forum. The strategy then seemed straightforward: follow the

principles of objectivity rigorously and if you are right you will get the evidence you need to convince your colleagues. You can then proceed to follow the principles of commitment with a good chance of success and the knowledge that you haven't biased your scientific work.

On closer examination of the record of this research, I've come to recognize that objectivity and commitment can't be partitioned as neatly as that. Commitment is needed at all stages of this research: in entering the field; in dealing with a racist society on both sides of the issue; withstanding the kinds of criticism that I have cited above. On the other hand, people being what they are, I don't think that any amount of objective evidence will get us to pay proper attention to a theory put forward by someone we don't want to believe is right.

In this case, linguists did listen to each other. I believe that this came about because they jointly engaged in the defense of black children against those who believed that they were inferior and that their language was inferior. That joint action predisposed linguists to consider each others' point of view, and led to the common point of view that we now share.

This action was also instrumental in bringing black linguists into this field of research. Although I always believed that this was an important step for the study of Black English, I now think that it was the crucial event in the developments that I have sketched. In the 1960s I would have been talking about a consensus among white linguists about black language. Now we have the possibility of black and white linguists jointly bringing their experience to bear upon the problems. That didn't come about quickly; in the early 1970s, it appeared to be impossible.<sup>38</sup> But black scholars now have the confidence of their achievements, the technical tools to bring their cultural knowledge to bear, and the ability to define the role that their white allies can play in advancing the study of Black English.

The significance of these events has to be seen in a larger context of the history of the black people in America. Members of an oppressed people have entered an academic field, taken up the tools of linguistic research, and used them for the advancement of their nation. The forerunners of this movement were isolated and ignored during their lifetimes. In Lorenzo Turner's last years, he could not find anyone to take his notes and records into safe keeping; he died believing that his work was wasted and forgotten. When Beryl Bailey died, she was bitterly aware that her research was for the most part set aside, her book out of print, her contributions ignored. This is the experience of the black scholar in the white man's world.

The Ann Arbor trial marks a turning point in this dismal history. The trial was the initiative of black people: the mothers of the Green Road children, the lawyer Kenneth Lewis, the linguist Geneva Smitherman, and many other members of the black community. The whites who have been privileged to play an auxiliary role in this affair know that they are marginal to the success that was achieved. The only permanent advance in the condition of life in any field occurs when

people take their own affairs into their own hands. I believe that this is true of the study of Black English as it is true everywhere.

## NOTES

\*One of a series of invited papers commemorating a decade of *Language in Society*.

1. Early drafts of this paper benefited from corrections and suggestions of several colleagues who were centrally involved in the events described here: I am indebted to Geneva Smitherman and Richard Bailey for their close reading, which corrected many misconceptions and errors of fact. The view of the origins of the case and the introduction of the language question is directly drawn from their observations and analysis. Dell Hymes corrected a number of faults and is responsible for some important reformulations. Vic Webb and Teresa Labov made many corrections and improvements. In the history of the linguistic analyses presented here, it will become evident that many others have corrected mistakes that spring from my own background and research history: the names of John Baugh, John Rickford, and Derek Bickerton are regularly associated with this burden. I would particularly like to acknowledge my debt to Beryl Bailey, William Stewart, and J. L. Dillard, who never stopped trying to demonstrate to me the evidence for the Creole history of Black English, even when I was not alert enough to realize its importance.

The general conception of this paper was first developed at presentations at the University of Paris VIII (Vincennes) and at the University of Toulouse-Mirail during the year of the trial. I am grateful to my colleagues there for their continued interest in the problem of integrating academic work with social action.

2. I am indebted to Provost Thomas Ehrlich of the University of Pennsylvania, for bringing this quotation to my attention in his introduction to President Hackney's inauguration. The quotation is from Hand's address on receiving a honorary degree from his own university, Harvard, in 1939.

3. The case is officially *Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children et al. v. Ann Arbor School District Board*. Citations to the four opinions in the case (with the last item containing two opinions) are given as the following page numbers to the volumes of the Federal Supplement, published by West Publishing Company: 451 F. Supp 1324 (E.D. Mich 1978); 463 F. Supp 1027 (E.D. Mich 1978); 473 F. Supp 1371 (E.D. Mich 1979).

4. The information cited here is from the Second Amended Complaint of December 29, 1978 (see below).

5. We first presented a critique of the Wepman Auditory Discrimination Test test to the staff members of the Institute for Developmental Studies in 1965. Since then there have been a number of dissertations and publications that have demonstrated its bias against normal-hearing black children.

6. The recordings themselves were played in court, and were quite effective in persuading the judge that the home language of the children was radically different from the standard language of the classroom. The judge also heard the children speak in the courtroom, and was able to observe directly the effect of a formal setting in repressing the spontaneous flow of language.

7. The predominance of the full form of the copula in the speech of young children (especially after full noun phrases) was first documented in Torrey (1971) (see Table 3). Kovac (1980) gives a much fuller demonstration of this fact, and shows that the adult form of the copula rules does not begin to emerge before the age of 7.

8. The comparison of the Green Road children's speech with other speakers of the Black English Vernacular is from a document that I prepared for the trial on the basis of the quotations in the Second Amended Complaint.

9. I am reminded by Richard Bailey that some of the most effective reporting of the case was in the *Ann Arbor News* by Katherine Greene, a former school teacher and member of the Ann Arbor black community. She provided accurate and extensive accounts of the court sessions and School Board hearings, that were certainly a factor in the positive reaction of Ann Arbor to the eventual court decision.

10. *BRIDGE*, by Gary Simpkins, Grace Holt, and Charlesetta Simpkins, published by Houghton Mifflin. This is a fully developed reading program for black children who have fallen behind in the early grades. It uses tape-recorded talks of a cultural intermediary and readings from modified forms of black folklore to help students make the transition from BEV to standard English. Simpkins

testified at the trial on the general principles behind BRIDGE in its approach to solving the cognitive and cultural conflicts between black children and the schoolroom, though the program itself is designed for students at a later educational stage than the Green Road children were at.

11. It was just this principle that motivated me to write "The Logic of Non-standard English" (1969a) as part of the general reaction of linguists against uninformed rejection of black children's language as a medium for learning (see below).

12. In a paper given before the 9th NWAWE Conference in 1980, Shuy elaborated on the risks that an expert witness runs on the stand, prompted by a number of his own experiences in testifying on the evaluation of videotaped conversations.

13. For this approach to the problem, I am indebted to Dell Hymes. The wording of both forms of the principle, as given below, are taken directly from his reformulation.

14. Baugh (1979) suggests that the most consistent form of the vernacular is used when everyone present is a vernacular speaker who spends most of their time with vernacular speakers. In his multivariate analysis, he was able to measure the effect of variation along this dimension – vernacular vs. non-vernacular group – as against personal solidarity. For most variables, the two dimensions had about an equal effect.

15. The term "Standard Black English" is now widely used by black scholars to refer to that variety of standard English used by blacks, distinct from other varieties by phonological variables but usually identical in grammar.

16. Our knowledge of BEV is of course relatively more advanced, not advanced in any absolute sense. The number of unanswered questions about that dialect is as great as for any other.

17. In his 1972 article, McDavid pointed out that new knowledge about creoles and pidgins, including the work of Turner and Bailey, has led to a serious reappraisal of the comparison of black and white speech. "Although only a generation ago it was common, even among observers trained in the social sciences, to dismiss the dialects of Negroes as combinations of archaisms and mispronunciations, only the most ignorant would make such a statement today" (82). After a number of reservations and criticisms of the Creolist position, he concludes that the claims of Creolization should not be "casually dismissed" (87). This reasonable tone was sometimes superseded by McDavid's form of whimsical polemic, with waspish remarks about the "magnates of the sociolinguistics industry" (1979:176). But in spite of Dillard's savage onslaught, McDavid was content to "concede to my more brilliant colleague James H. Sledd the role of Ralph Nader to the Black English industry" (1979:165).

18. As shown by McDavid & McDavid's study of plurals with nouns of measure in the United States (1964). In an exploratory study of the dialect of Leeds, I also found a much more consistent use of zero plural with nouns like *year* and *pound* than among BEV speakers.

19. The tense marker is an essential element in the operation of questions, negatives, tag questions, contractions, and other rules of English syntax. BEV speakers do show some differences in their use of inversion, and in their recognition of the zero tense marker in *must*, producing *must don't*, in double modals, and with third singular /s/ insertion. But on the whole these are minor issues; the Black English Vernacular sentence is organized, like other dialects of English, around the finite verb and its tense marker.

20. The program attacked here was the Language Curriculum Research Group headed by Carol Reed of Brooklyn College and supported by the Ford Foundation. Paul Cohen, a co-author of our Harlem report of 1968, was a member of the group and helped develop methods of teaching the writing of standard English by contrastive analysis with BEV. The group tried vigorously to correct the misstatements and misconceptions of their critics, but the end result was a withdrawal of the Ford Foundation from research having to do with Black English. As late as 1978, an official of the Ford Foundation told me that they were continuing the "once burned, once warned" policy on this topic.

21. These unmonitored sessions were not of course candid recordings but recordings made on outings where the effect of recording and the presence of an outside observer was greatly reduced. Some of the best records of the vernacular were made when groups were traveling in a Volkswagen camper, and the only person who wasn't a member of the group was the driver.

22. The tense marker must be present for BEV contraction and deletion, as in many other dialects, so that *They have* is affected but not the *have* in *They may have*. In some English dialects this condition is missing, so that words like *as*, *of*, and *the* are contracted and deleted.

23. Dillard (1972) says that "the child who said *My brother's sick* probably was indulging in some kind of code-switching under the influence of standard English" (54). He cites forms such as *Is*

*they sick?* and *Is I'm sick* as evidence. As far as children below the age of seven are concerned, Dillard is probably correct. Kovac (1980) shows that the alignment of the adult rules does not begin to show up in black children before that age.

24. The assessment of the Creole hypothesis in our 1968 report reads "There is much of considerable interest in this hypothesis for linguistic theory, and it is hoped that further historical evidence will be uncovered" (7). I now find this patronizing and offensive to an extreme degree.

25. The variable rule model used here is the multiplicative applications model of VARBRUL I (Cedergren & Sankoff 1974), where the most favoring element in each factor group shows the value of 1.00.

26. I was certainly pleased when James Sledd told me in the fall of 1980 that this was "the first serious evidence for the Creole hypothesis that I had heard" (personal communication).

27. The "habitual" and "iterative" meanings of *be* form the core of the semantic complex involved here. But evidence continues to mount that it can also be used for single events or permanent states when a higher degree of reality is to be signalled. For example, an older woman in a hospital said to a younger woman, in reference to God, "Her Father be your Father" (my own observation).

28. Though this *been* is stressed, it is often not noticed by outside observers. Once black students at Penn had begun to turn my attention to stressed *been*, I recorded many more examples than I had heard in New York City. When John Baugh relistened to the group sessions of the Cobras, he noted that someone was asked if he was quitting the card game, the answer was "I *been* quit." We must have missed a lot of *been* in New York.

29. Though we quoted this example in relation to *done*, we didn't recognize at that time the existence of *be done* as a regular member of the aspect paradigm.

30. In 1979, Michael Brown of Swarthmore recorded the speech of some truly bidialectal black students. In a locker room conversation, someone was challenged when he said that he wasn't going to dress up to go to a certain restaurant. He was told, "When some big old dude goes upside your head, you'll be done kiss the ass of everybody around there." Here a *when* clause provides the same prior predication as the *if* clause of sentence (8), and *be done* goes on the clause signalling the later event.

31. In his decision, Judge Joiner seems to have accepted the point of view that the cultural conflict was the primary problem. Though he had insisted that the complaint should not refer to cultural issues, in the sense of cultural deprivation, his emphasis on the formation of negative attitudes points to a cultural conflict as the ultimate source of the problem (see below).

32. Roger Shuy had been a teacher of Thomas Pietras, language arts consultant for the Ann Arbor schools. Though Pietras did not take the stand in the trial, he was present throughout and must have counseled the defense on who they might call as expert witnesses. Though I have no evidence to show this, I believe that Pietras's role in the trial was a positive one. If he had been hostile to the fundamental ideas of the plaintiffs, he might easily have brought in a battery of psychologists and educators who would do their best to ridicule the idea of Black English. But Pietras had been in favor of instruction on Black English and its history from the outset. In later talks on the subject, Pietras argued that the schools had already been doing what was asked, and that no one had provided the resources – intellectual or financial – to go further in applying our knowledge to improving reading skills.

33. I tried to get this into my testimony at the trial, but the defense lawyers properly cut me off with a prompt "Objection!" It was, after all, hearsay evidence.

34. At this point, the strenuous efforts of a number of local residents were an important factor in deciding the issue. At a closed meeting, the Board voted 5-to-4 to follow the School Superintendent's recommendation to appeal. Parents complained that this violated the state's Open Meetings Act, and an open meeting was held. This time the decision was 5-to-4 *not* to appeal. Among those who were most active in this struggle was Robbins Burling, who had not played a role in the trial up to this point.

35. Three conferences have been held to assess the outcome of the trial. The first was held by the National Institute of Education in September 1979; the papers given, basically reactions by nonparticipants in the trial, are available in Whiteman (1980). On February 21–23, 1980, a conference was organized at Wayne State University, primarily by Smitherman's Center for Black Studies; it brought together the major forces concerned with the education of Black youth and created task forces to deal with the several aspects of the problem: the law, teacher training, funding, the media, employment, and national policy. A film was made about the trial in the Open University series of the BBC,

including the principal persons in the trial and the keynote address of James Baldwin. Proceedings are published in Smitherman (1981). The third conference was held on June 2–4, 1980, sponsored by the National Institute of Education and the Ann Arbor Public Schools, and featured an equally constructive approach to assessing the results of the trial and the educational plan put forward by the board.

36. Robert Berdan of the Southwestern Regional Laboratories is one linguist who has worked to develop such materials.

37. For a review of the legal background of the case, see Bailey (1981). Bailey has called my attention to three recent legal commentaries on the trial which consider possible future courses of litigation involving Black English:

Bickert, S. D. (1980). Judicial recognition of Black English as a language barrier under the Equal Educational Opportunities Act. *Iowa Law Review* 65:1445–70.

Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children v. Michigan Board of Education (1980): extension of EEOA protection to Black-English-Speaking students. *William and Mary Law Review* 22:161–75.

Roberto, E. (1980). Constitutional law – Equal Educational Opportunity – failure to consider Black English in reading instruction. *Wayne Law Review* 26: 1091–1109.

38. Throughout the early 1970s, there was a tendency for black students in linguistics to resist cooperation with white students who wanted to work in the same community or on the same data, and to guard carefully against the possibility of others exploiting their data. Though that possibility still exists, the problem is not as severe as it was then.

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