

CREOLE ENGLISH IN SAMANÁ

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The town of Samaná, located in the northeastern extreme of the Dominican Republic on the Samaná peninsula, is home to a group of descendants of free African-Americans who migrated to Hispaniola in 1824 when the entire island was under the control of Haitian revolutionary forces (see Hostink 1962; DeBose 1983; Poplack and Sankoff 1987; Holm 1988 for details of the history of the Samaná immigrants).

The evidence of creole English presented in this paper was collected during the Summer of 1992 in the Dominican Republic as part of a pilot study of the language situation in Samaná. It consists of natural conversation as well as oral testimony which suggests that the creole English was brought to Hispaniola by the original settlers. Before we look directly at that evidence, let us consider the general criteria that may be applied to the classification of a variety of English as creole.

1. Creole English

The Englishes of the world include a number of pidgin-creole varieties such as Gullah, Jamaican Creole, and Tok Pisin; as well as semi-creoles such as African-American Vernacular (AAV); and non-creole varieties such as Mainstream American English. Using characteristic features of acknowledged creole Englishes as a point of reference, newly-discovered varieties such as Samaná English (SME) may be classified as creole, semi-creole, or non-creole.

The Creole and semi-creole Englishes spoken on both sides of the Atlantic, primarily by persons of African descent, have a large number of features in common, and may be considered a genetic family on the basis of comparative evidence (Hancock 1970, 1993; Alleyne 1980). These creoles are commonly known as English-based Afro-American (Alleyne 1980), or the Atlantic Creoles (Hancock 1970).

One of the most pervasive features of Afro-American varieties is the use of isolated tense/mood/aspect (TMA) morphemes preposed to an isolated verb stem. In Gullah, for instance, the TMA markers include *gwine* 'FUTURE/IRREALIS,' *bin* 'ANTERIOR,' *da* 'NONCOMPLETIVE,' and *done* 'COMPLETIVE.' In contrast to non-creole English varieties which require the feature [TENSE] to attach to the first concrete member of the verb phrase; Gullah and other Afro-American creoles employ a system of relative tense (Mufwene 1983) in which aspect/tense is inferred from the value of stativity attached to predicates.

Minimally-marked predicates may occur in Afro-American without any overt TMA marker. If such predicates are nonstative, they are interpreted as having completive aspect and past tense, unless there are context clues to the contrary, e.g: the Gullah sentence

1. i go Edisto '(s)he went to Edisto.'

In a particular context, (1) might have a noncompletive/ progressive interpretation, such as 'She goes/is going to Edisto,' and that interpretation could be more explicitly marked by selection of the Gullah noncompletive marker da as in (2):

2. i da go Edisto. 'she goes/is going to Edisto.'

The completive aspect interpretation could also be made explicit by selection of the completive marker done, e.g:

3. i done go Edisto. 'she went/has gone to Edisto.'

If a predicate is stative, the event may be interpreted as having noncompletive aspect and present tense, again unless there are contrary contextual clues, e.g:

4. i hongri '(s)he is(was) hungry.'

The ANTERIOR interpretation of (4) represented by the gloss 'was' can be overtly marked in Gullah by the particle bin, e.g:

5. i bin hongri 'She was hungry.'

In the varieties in question, many words classified as adjectives in non-creole English are classified as stative verbs, e.g: hongri, and that is supported by their syntactic patterning. For instance, the markers da and done may occur before such stative verbs, just as they occur before nonstative verbs such as go, e.g:

6. i da hongri 'She is getting hungry.'
7. i done hongri 'She got hungry.'

The relative tense system characteristic of Afro-American varieties is one of several ways in which they contrast markedly with non-creole varieties. Another such contrast is the essentially invariant word order of Afro-American, reflected in, among other things, the formation of questions. Whereas non-creole question formation may involve inversion of the auxiliary and the subject, no such movement occurs in Afro-American varieties. Yes/no questions have the same word order as statements, as in the following Gullah example from Turner.

8. yu no wat dem pe fo bin? 'Do you know what they pay for beans?' (Turner 1949:265)

Gullah Wh- questions are marked by the occurrence of a WH word at the beginning of an utterance, e.g:

9. tu baskit wat it kam tu? 'Two baskets, what does it come to?' (Turner 1949:260)

Some other commonly observed contrasts between Afro-American creoles and non-creole English involve the use of distinctive forms of complementizers and

pronouns as illustrated by the forms fo and wi in example (10).

10. dem bakra sen fid ye fo fid wi. 'Those whites sent food here to feed us. (Turner 1949:265).

In addition to such grammatical features as relative tense, invariant word order, and distinctive grammatical forms for complementizers and pronouns; the Afro-American creoles have many common lexical items which differ from non-creole varieties in meaning, pronunciation, or both; and in distinctive syntactic patterns such as serial verb constructions.

Hancock (1970) lists 570 common lexical items of the English-based Atlantic Creoles. These include Africanisms such as bakra 'White man,' in the above example; and words which systematically contrast with non-creoles in restricting certain phonotactic patterns such as post-vocalic /r/; and final consonant clusters, e.g: Gullah ye 'here,' po 'poor,' hol 'hold,' jes, 'just.'

2. Creole features of Samaná English

Previous linguistic studies of the situation in Samaná (DeBose 1983, 1988, 1992; Poplack and Sankoff 1987) suggest that Samaná English (SME) contains relatively few creole features. By various accounts SME is either non-creole (Poplack and Sankoff 1987), post-creole (DeBose 1983) or semi-creole (Holm 1988). The classification of Post-creole implies an earlier creole stage from which the variety in question has evolved. The concept semi-creole makes no assumptions about prior creolization, however.

DeBose 1983 calls attention to several features that SME shares with AAV. Some of those features also commonly occur in creoles. Some of the recurring features of SME are common to previously reported varieties and the newly discovered rural varieties, and may be considered pan-dialectal features. A frequently noticed pan-dialectal feature is the pronunciation of here as /ye/ or /he/ or /hi/. The pronunciation /ye/ is one of several features of SME which are remarkably similar to Gullah and other Atlantic creoles. Another such feature is invariant word order in statements and questions. The following examples are extracted from the corpus of the 1992 pilot study.

11. What you say?
12. What you wanna sing?
13. Since when you here?
14. You done been up there?
15. Why I didn't see you?
16. Where you was?

Another feature of SME which is notably similar to Gullah is the use of what as a relative pronoun, e.g:

17. He want to find these funny houses what they built.

One feature of SME which contrasts markedly with both AAV and non-creole English is the use of they have with the sense of 'there is/are', e.g:

18. They have plenty of the Clarks here. 'There are lots of

Clarks here'

19. They have eight of us 'There are eight of us'.

The 1992 corpus contains a number of lexical features which are distinctively SME. They include the frequent occurrence of plenty and rare occurrence of many, or lots of. Other such pan-dialectal lexical features of SME are the use of reach as an intransitive verb meaning 'arrive', and hunt used where modern American English would use a different term such as seek or look for. Another frequently occurring pan-dialectal lexical form is the future marker qwine, e.g:

20. I suppose you qwine sweat.

All of the above-mentioned pan-dialectal features occur in the previously-reported SME data, and support the claim that SME is more divergent than modern AAV from standard English (DeBose 1983). The reader may gain a sense of how the three Englishes differ by comparing the following contrived examples (21a-c).

21a. (Standard English) There are many people here who speak English.

21b. (African American English) It's a lotta people here who speak English.

21c. (Samaná English) They have plenty people ye what speaks English.

The examples contrast three of the pan-dialectal SME features discussed above with their AAV and SE equivalents. Although they support the claim that SME diverges more than AAV from SE, the features in question are typical of the varieties of SME that are most similar to AAV and SE. The 1992 corpus contains samples of rural varieties of SME which are clearly more divergent than AAV from SE.

3. Rural Samaná English

The 1992 trip included several excursions into the rural communities of Los Algarobos, Honduras, Noroeste, and Clará- located in the hills to the west and East of the town of Samaná, with a guide who is a descendant of the African-American immigrants. The speakers in the data sample indicate by their surnames that they are descendants of the American immigrants.

There are thirty-three English surnames known to have survived among the descendants (Willmore ms) including: Anderson, Barrett, Buck, Clark, Coats, Copeland, Dishmeyer, Green, Hamilton, James, Jones, Jackson, Johnson, Kelly, King, Miller, Nooney, Paul, Redmond, Rodney, Shepherd, Willmore, and Vanderhorst. The informants for the pilot study invariably included one or more of those names in their genealogies. Frequently the same names were cited for both sides of the family confirming reports that the immigrants attempted to maintain cohesiveness by encouraging marriage within the group. Some of them intermarried with Hispanics, however, as reported by Lorencita Redmond, a resident of Los Algarobos:

L.R: My father was marry wit a Spanish woman. But then I had like the

English more. He yusa tell us not to Speak the English, but we yusa speaks English while he... twasn't in the house. But time he come we had to speak Spanish.

Many English speakers were found, and their language was found to contain many strikingly creole features.

The speech of several informants contain creole-like pre-verbal tense-aspect markers, e.g:

22. ...he had want we to speak the Spanish... but we had like the English more. 'He wanted us to speak Spanish but we liked English more.'

The form had before the bare verb stems want and like is functioning here as a marker of ANTERIOR aspect.

Several instances were recorded of the use of been as a marker of ANTERIOR aspect.

23. Where we been, in the blue house with the lady what talk to you. 'Where we were, in the blue house with the lady that spoke to you.'

24. The family Kelly they been from Atlanta. 'The Kelly family was from Atlanta.'

Other creole features in the 1992 corpus are the use of fo to introduce clausal complements, and the occurrence of pronouns without the case distinctions of standard English. The following sentences contains examples of both features:

25. he want fo us fo tell him a what fambyly we is? 'Does he want us to tell him what family we are?'

26. Us mother and father die. They went away. Pero, I mean to say, us grandmother was from Philadelphia.

Example 26, also contains a SME word borrowed from Spanish, pero.

Some of the most striking examples of creole language in the 1992 corpus come from a session recorded on the dock in the town of Samaná in which a group of young men demonstrate their English competence and explain how they acquired it. Sentence 27 was uttered by one of them as an example of the English they "picked up in the country" from their parents.

27. Pick up some manyó go bring up ye fo wi da make em sell them some of them down town go eat some, you know.

It is interesting to note that sentence 27 contains, in addition to the above-mentioned features, what appears to be the pre-verbal TMA marker da, and several serial verb constructions.

The following examples are also from the session with the young men on the dock.

28. Le go daun da riva go beyv. Le go kach krab daun da riva.
'Let's go down to the river and bathe. Let's go catch crabs down at the river.'
29. We kyan go daun de bai wi sel. 'We can't go down there by ourselves.'
30. Yu sheym o hy? 'Are you ashamed, or what?'
31. Wi qaDa go kot sam rays an dray it fo wi da bit rays, man. 'We have to go and cut some rice and dry it so that we can remove the husks from the rice, man.'

Analysis of the data is continuing, but the implications are already abundantly clear for the creolist hypothesis of the origin of African-American English.

4. The Creolist Hypothesis

The observation of some of the common features of Afro-American creoles in African-American English generated much of the controversy around the nature and origin of Black English. Some AAV sentences, for instance, show no evidence of the AUX element [TENSE], and to that extent they resemble Afro-American creoles, e.g:

32. he stop smokin 'He stopped smoking.'
33. she hongry 'She's hungry.'

More exhaustive analysis of the AAV TMA system (Mufwene 1983; DeBose and Faraclas 1994) reveals a system that closely resembles the Afro-American creole relative tense system, although the markers include verb suffixes as well as pre-verbal forms, e.g: gon, FUTURE/IRREALIS; was/had, been, ANTERIOR; do/ -s, be, NONCOMPLETIVE; done, -ed, COMPLETIVE.

AAV questions sometimes resemble creoles in their word order, e.g:

34. where you done put the rice? 'Where have you put the rice?'
35. how much she gon charge you? 'How much is she gonna charge you?'

and AAV lexical items have the same kinds of phonotactic constraints on /r/ and consonant clusters as those mentioned above for creoles.

While AAV has a number of creole features, most of them occur variably, in alternation with non-creole features such as the -s and -ed verb suffixes; contracted copula forms; subject-auxiliary inversion in questions; and words with post-vocalic /r/, and final-consonant clusters. The classification of AAV as a semi-creole (Holm 1988; Mufwene 1987) is supported by the manner in which creole and non-creole features co-occur in AAV data. Some scholars, however, insist that AAV is a non-creole variety which differs only slightly from other dialects in ways that can be expressed through "low-level" rules such as deletion of the -ed suffix, and the copula (Labov 1969; Fasold 1969).

Most linguists, whether or not they consider AAV to be a semi-creole agree that sociohistorical factors and linguistic evidence support the view that there was "prior creolization" (Rickford 1977) in the history of AAV.

Previously presented evidence in support of the creolist hypothesis, however, is far from definitive. Although the kinds of comparative evidence just discussed support the theory that African-American Vernacular English came into being through a process of pidginization, creolization, and decreolization of English, there is little direct evidence of the language spoken by Black Americans in earlier times.

One type of evidence of earlier Black English, which Dillard (1972) explores at length, is taken from written texts from earlier periods, such as travellers accounts of the language of Black persons containing similarities to pidgin-creole language; and language attributed to Black characters by fiction writers.

SME, due to its isolation since early in the nineteenth century, provides another type of evidence which bears upon the creolist hypothesis. To the extent that SME has resisted change, SME data may be considered representative of the English spoken by African Americans in earlier times. Previous studies agree that SME has resisted change, and characterize it as archaic Black English. Poplack and Sankoff (1987) argue that SME is less divergent than modern AAV, from standard English (SE), however; whereas DeBose (1983) argues that SME is more divergent from SE than modern AAV. The abundance of creole features found in Rural SME strengthens the case for SME being more divergent.

5. Implications of the findings

The creole features in RSME are the strongest evidence yet to emerge in support of the creolist hypothesis. A skeptic might propose other sources of the creole features in present day SME than direct transmission from the original immigrants, but that is the most simple and plausible source. Furthermore, it is corroborated by the unsolicited testimony of the young men in the above-mentioned session on the dock. They confirm, by stating their names on the tape, that they are descendants of the immigrants.

My name is Alex Jones. Alexander Jones,
 Jorge Green....
 Carlos John Copeland....
 Samuel Jones Johnson..
 Pablo Mejia...

The researcher paused at the last name and asked "Pablo are you from the English group?" He answered "Yeah."

At one point in the conversation, John Copeland proceeded to explain how they "picked up" English.

J.C. Gotta 'splain how we picked up the English. The English... we picked it up from we father and mother. But we small. But we don't talk the English same like we talk now, you know...we talk it different. But when come down here in the country from the city so we picked up the English little better, you know, ...talkin' to the Merican people. And so we learn it, so we learn it to talk it little better.

J.C. elaborates on the point that the English they learned in the country is

different by providing lexical examples.

J.C. In the country we speak a different English. In the country we says, like, ...here we picked up no fada, in de country we says papá. Here we learnt mada, and the country we says mamá. We says ...like the dock, we says muelle...We don't say dock, we say we goin to where the wharf. We says different, you know. Says wharf, muelle, dock....We picked up dock here in the town, in the city... We say, we say awakado, we call awakado zavoká. The pigeon peas we says pwakongó.. The okras we say gombó. The country people say gombó. That's not correct.

S.J. continues with his own lexical examples.

S.J. Then like we say like gyal, a gyal. My girlfriend, we says my gyal, uh, like, ...You wanna know everything, right? When we say like 'fuck a girl,' you know, we say we juk a girl, you know. We juk my girl (laughter)..... You wanna know everything! Right?....

After providing a number of lexical examples of their rural English, the young men began to act out dialogues of conversation that might take place in typical situation in the country. Some excerpts of those dialogues were presented above as examples of creole features in SME. Many of the same features were recorded in spontaneous conversations among other informants in the various rural settings.

The informants' description and demonstration of creole English could not have been contrived, and their testimony that they learned it in the country from their parents is consistent with the view that creole English was transmitted directly from the original immigrants.

6. Transmission of SME to children

The testimony of the young men on the dock provides insight into one of the most puzzling aspects about the language situation in Samaná: the prevalence of persons of all ages who speak English although Spanish is almost always spoken in public. The present generation of descendants give little public indication that they speak English at all. Many indications were seen, however, that they acquire passive knowledge of English at an early age, and may or may not begin to speak it later. L.R. confirmed as much when I asked if the children in her household spoke English.

L.R: Naw. Them chillun don't speak English at all... They understand, but... Ise talk wit em they understand what I tells em. If I tell em 'Pick me up that' they'll go on and pick it up. But they don't talks nothin', can't speak nothin'.

On several occasions, children were directly observed responding to English commands. In the following passage, Thomasa Anderson orders her grandchildren outdoors. One of them gives a brief spoken response.

T.A: Go outdoors! Go outdoors! Go make noise! Outdoors children! Go! Raul!

R: What?

In the session on the dock, Samuel Johnson repeated a claim that he had earlier made about the existence of young children who speak English.

S.J. Where I live in the country. In the country where I live the little babies, some of them speak English.

DeBose: They do. Where do you live?

S.J. The country.. Los Algorobos, yeah. Baby...speak English. They don't do like, speak English well, but you can understand what they say.

7. Conclusion

The findings of the 1992 pilot study make it clear that creole English is presently spoken in rural areas in the hills outside of Samaná. The clear implication is that creole English was spoken by the original immigrants. The coexistence of RSME with the less creolized varieties of SME reported previously implies that the language situation in Black America in the early 1800's was variable and diverse; and included speakers whose English represented various degrees of creolization, or contained varying amounts of creole features. It also seems to imply that the markedly creole rural varieties of SME are typical of the English that was spoken by the masses of Black persons in the United States at the time of the migration to the Dominican Republic.

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