ON THE PHONOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF EARLY WRITTEN RECORDS OF ENGLISH-BASED PIDGINS AND CREOLES

by

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The relevance of textual attestations of earlier stages of pidgins and creoles for the historical study of these languages has been, of late, repeatedly emphasized by a number of linguists. The sources of documentary evidence discussed in the literature include diaries and travel books (Rickford 1987 and 1991, Rickford and Handler 1994), letters (Winer and Gilbert 1987), newspapers (Winer 1984), novels (Winer and Rimmer 1994), lyrics and dialogues (Baker and Bruyn 1999).

The analysis of the orthography of the pidgin and creole forms in such textual attestations is important since it may provide insights into the phonology of pidgins and creoles in their earlier stages. In what follows I first discuss some of the caveats, mentioned in the literature, which have to be generally taken into consideration in the analysis of early written records of pidgins and creoles. In particular, I address some of the issues arising in the phonological interpretation of the transcription of spoken data in such texts. Finally, I briefly outline some of the types of analyses that can be carried out, of inferences that can be made and of the conclusions that can be reached.

Hancock (1977) is probably among the first to discuss some of the problems associated with textual attestations of earlier stages of pidgins and creoles. Hancock deplores, for instance, the absence of samples of the so-called nautical jargons. Early documentation being often scant, it could only provide, at best “tantalizing but inconclusive evidence for hypotheses that must still remain unproven” (Hancock 1977, p. 279). Since pidgins have not been adequately and extensively recorded throughout their development and given thus the absence of a comprehensive diachronic picture, Hancock (1977, p. 279) concludes that “the historical rather than the linguistic evidence must

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1 I am grateful to Francis Katamba, Gerry Knowles and Mark Sebba whose suggestions and comments on an earlier version of this paper have led to substantial improvement. The usual disclaimers apply.
2 Such as e.g. Arends (1993), Baker (1995a, b).
3 See, however, the more recent paper by Bailey and Ross (1988).
provide the principal leads”, even though he duly acknowledges work based on the techniques of comparative linguistics.

While Hancock (1977) outlines some of the uses and limitations of documentary evidence in pidgin and creole studies, it is Rickford who has been systematically discussing them in a series of works (Rickford 1986, 1987 and 1991).

Rickford (1986) stresses the significance and use of textual attestations for a number of important and controversial issues in pidgin and creole linguistics. While believing that such issues can be addressed, in principle, by comparative methods or internal reconstruction starting from present-day forms, Rickford (1986, p. 159) states that “our discussion must remain at the level of clever inference or speculation until we have clearer evidence on the language used by those involved in the relevant contact situations in earlier times”. He mentions as the best, if not the only available, documentary evidence references to and citations of pidgin or creole in diaries and travel books.

Rickford (1986, pp. 160-163) outlines four possible approaches in assessing and interpreting early pidgin and creole documents. One such approach is gathering as much information as possible about the author(s), such as where they were from, how old they were when they were in the pidgin or creole speaking territory, how long they were there, what opportunities they had for observing local speech in everyday context, their attitude towards such forms of local speech. A second approach would consist in gathering as much information as possible about the document and its circumstances of production: e.g. whether it was based on letters or a diary, whether it was copy-edited by other parties, whether successive editions were emended or not. A third approach is observing Labov’s (sociolinguistic) accountability principle. According to this principle, the occurrence of a feature should be reported against and analysed in relation to the total set of contexts in which it might have appeared, with due regard to alternative variants and to possible internal and external constraints. Rickford (1986, p. 161) notes that in “pidgin-

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4 See also Rickford and Handler (1994).
5 See also Rickford (1991, p. 303).
6 Bearing in mind that negative attitudes do not necessarily lead to distortions of the data recorded. For such cases, see for instance Rickford (1986, p. 160), Rickford (1987, pp. 109-110) and Baker and Winer (1999, pp. 106-108).
creole studies, particularly in documentary work [...] the norm is to cite individual features in isolation”. In addition to sociolinguistic accountability, Rickford (1986, p. 162) also mentions three other specific aspects of accountability: how long the author had been in the pidgin and creole speaking territory when the forms were recorded, whether these were written down verbatim or recollected afterwards and, in the latter case, how long afterwards. The fourth approach advocated by Rickford (1986, p. 162) is the feedback from current usage, i.e. comparing the textual attestations with the evidence of present-day forms, particularly with regard to both co-occurrence restrictions and covariation patterns, on the assumption that current patterns are similar to those that operated in the early stages of pidgins and creoles.

In Rickford (1991) a fifth approach is illustrated, which the author calls contemporary source comparison. This method, as defined by Rickford (1991, p. 304), consists in “the quantitative tabulation and an analysis of specific features as they occur in different contemporary sources that are no more than a generation apart”. Consider the application of this method to three samples of early 19th century Guyanese Creole English with a view to establishing the distribution of four selected phonological features (Rickford 1991, pp. 305-308):

| Table 1 |
|---|---|---|
| **Feature** | 1806 | 1807 | 1834 |
| v → b (ebery) | 50 % (16) | 23 % (13) | 33 % (6) |
| θ, δ → t, d (ting) | 82 % (28) | 19 % (31) | 59 % (22) |
| Ø → i/VC# (wifee) | 0 % (2) | 17 % (6) | 71 % (14) |
| t, d → Oi/C_# (sen’) | 0 % (17) | 0 % (13) | 0 % (12) |

A careful analysis, drawing on the approaches outlined in Rickford (1986), leads the author to the conclusion that the textual attestations at issue are not verbatim records but rather conventionalized representations and as such are not accurate phonological records of early 19th century Guyanese Creole English. Rickford (1991, p. 307) notes,

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7 In Rickford (1991, p. 303) this is formulated in terms of Labov’s uniformitarian principle.
8 Also used in Rickford (1987).
9 Adapted from Rickford (1991, p. 305): percentages of the total number of contexts (n= 100 %), indicated in brackets, in which a feature might have appeared.
11 This is not surprising since dialect representation in e.g. English literary texts is also, in most cases, a conventionalized one, using standard English spelling, with some attempts at rendering the pronunciation.
for instance, that there is no example, in any of the three sources, of the otherwise well attested reduction of word-final consonant clusters\textsuperscript{12}. Such authors of early records of pidgins and creoles are thus frequently guilty of what Rickford (1991, p. 307) calls “sins of omission rather than commission”, i.e. of under- or nonrepresenting phonological features rather than inventing unlikely ones.

Similar and additional sets of criteria, both external and internal, have been suggested by other linguists. Thus, for Winer (1984, pp. 192 and 194), one such external criterion pointing to the authenticity of the language in the textual attestations is “whether the intended audience could be expected to understand it”. Winer (1984, p. 194) also lists other external criteria: whether the features in her (newspapers) texts are consistent\textsuperscript{13} with other known contemporary texts, with other related language varieties, with the modern creole and with what is known about the historical development of the respective creole and related languages. She thus notices (Winer 1984, p. 195), on the basis of the orthography, a number of features of the phonology of early Trinidadian Creole, attested both in the two texts analysed and in those adduced as corroborative evidence. These features include the following: the voiced interdental fricative /ð/ is replaced by the voiced alveolar stop /d/, the voiced labiodental fricative /v/ is replaced by the voiced bilabial stop /b/ and the consonant cluster /sp/ is reduced to /p/ in onset position\textsuperscript{14}. Winer (1984, p. 195) also mentions an internal test of authenticity: consistency within the text\textsuperscript{15}. She thus notes that in the two texts she analyses the spelling is remarkably consistent, with only a few exceptions such as dey and de “there”, been and bin for [bin], de and da “the”. She consequently concludes that the phonology of early Trinidadian Creole is fairly accurately represented: lack of /θ/ and /ð/, reduction of onset consonant clusters, e.g. kin “skin”, pye-glass “spy-glass”, tory “story”, reduction of word-final consonant

\begin{itemize}
  \item This may be due to a factor not taken into account by Rickford: if the authors of these samples were themselves speakers of a variety in which word-final cluster reduction was the norm, they would not have marked it (Mark Sebba, personal communication).
  \item Consistency should be construed as the existence of features in common (Gerry Knowles, personal communication).
  \item Other instances, not mentioned by Winer (1984), occurring both in her control texts and in those she analyses are: /θ/–/ð/ (sumting “something” and ting “thing” respectively), /sk/–/ʃ/ (cool “school” and kin “skin”).
  \item This may be too strong a criterion since speakers are not always consistent (Gerry Knowles, personal communication).
\end{itemize}
clusters, e.g. *kine* “kind”, replacement of intervocalic or final post-vocalic */v/* by */b/*, e.g. *lib* “live”, *eber* “ever”\(^{16}\).

Baker and Winer (1999, p. 103) emphasize some of the hazards of the use of old texts in historical studies of pidgins and creoles: the existence of texts invented by people without first-hand knowledge of the language concerned, plagiarism and the language of one territory being attributed to another. They suggest a number of procedures to eliminate those data which are definitely false. These procedures are internal and external checks likely to be instrumental in assessing the reliability, representativeness and value of the data. External checks are those on “the experience, competence, attitudes and motivation of their authors”\(^{17}\). The key internal check is consistency with earlier and later texts\(^{18}\) or of the samples within the same text.

Huber (1999, p. 365) mentions two other “indicators of reliability”: whether or not the author had travelled to more than one creolophone area and the length of the creole corpus. The former is significant since “perhaps the more creoles of a common lexical base a writer came in contact with, the more likely he was to confuse them, especially when the visits were few, short and/or in rapid succession”\(^{19}\). The relevance of the latter derives from the assumption that “the longer the corpus, the easier it is to spot an author’s errors or misprints and to determine if an item was well established […] or to conclude that variation in the corpus reflects variability in the spoken data”\(^{20}\).

To the best of my knowledge, it is Lalla (1986) and especially Lalla and D’Costa (1990) who represent the most detailed discussions to date of issues in the phonological interpretation of the transcription of spoken data from early stages of pidgins and creoles, in their attempt to reconstruct the phonology of early Jamaican Creole. This may stem from the authors’ conviction that “the phonological structure of early Jamaican Creole can be inferred only after detailed orthographical analysis” (Lalla and D’Costa 1990, p. 16  For similar examples see also Winer and Rimmer (1994, pp. 236-237).

\(^{16}\) For similar examples see also Winer and Rimmer (1994, pp. 236-237).

\(^{17}\) Note that this is only a subset of the criteria in Rickford (1986, 1987 and 1991).

\(^{18}\) Rather confusingly, as this was considered to be an external criterion in Winer (1984, p. 194).

\(^{19}\) Although this does necessarily follow (Gerry Knowles, personal communication).

\(^{20}\) Surprisingly, Huber (1999) does not mention Rickford (1986, 1987 or 19991). Not surprisingly, two of his four “indicators of reliability” (length of the author’s residence in the area and the time elapsed between hearing the creole and writing it down) coincide with two of Rickford’s “approaches”.
In what follows, I summarize the main issues identified in Lalla (1986) and especially in Lalla and D’Costa (1990). Their remarks apply, *ceteris paribus*, to written records of early stages of other English-based pidgins and creoles as well.

Early texts indicate the different attempts of the various authors at transcribing the creole. These authors were monolinguals, native bilinguals or nonnative bilinguals and, accordingly, their transcription strategies reflect the orthographical problems that may be accounted for in terms of their language backgrounds. The transcription of spoken data must have also been influenced by factors such as regional or class origin.

English spelling allowed (many) alternative transcriptions of presumably one and the same sound. Consider thus the widely divergent transcriptions of the early Jamaican Creole equivalent of English “negro” in 18th and 19th century texts: *nega, neger, negar, negur, neegar, neaga, nigger, nigga, niggah, naga, naygar, nagur*. These forms raise, as far as I can see, at least four problems: the nature of the first vowel, i.e. *[e]*, *[i]*, *[i:]* or *[ie]*; the nature of the last vowel, probably *[a]*; the retention or not of postvocalic */t/; the possibility of interspeaker variation.

Lalla and D’Costa (1990, p. 48) notice “inexplicable shifts” occurring within the work of one and the same author. Some authors, however, do attempt to represent “consonant changes like *[θ]* > *[t]* and *[v]* > *[b]*” or “details of vocalic pronunciation in *weaste* and *soart*”, whereas “others appear to make arbitrary and rather inconsistent choices”.

Lalla and D’Costa (1990, p. 48) also write that the use of (at least some of the) English orthographic conventions was unavoidable, in the 18th and 19th century records, since any attempts to the contrary “could only have alienated [...] readers”.

Generally, English spelling is used when the pronunciation of the creole forms and of their English counterparts is (essentially) identical, e.g. *night*. “Limited but obvious differences” (Lalla and D’Costa 1990, p. 49) are usually indicated in that part of

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21 Cf. Lalla (1986, p. 118): “a study of the written records of creole speech provides us with what appears to be, at present, the most direct route available to the archaic phonological system”. While admitting “this does not make it a satisfactory route”, she says this is “simply the best we can take at present”.

22 In modern Jamaican Creole *[niega]* or *[nega]*.

23 To give just another example, Grant (1999, p. 128) identifies, in the texts 1, 2 and 4 in St Kitts Creole published by Baker, Bruyn, Shrimpton and Winer (1999), “at least 100 words which are not spelled identically in all three – even if one overlooks (apparent) misprints”.
the word reflecting the phonology of the creole, e.g. *Garamighty* “God Almighty”\(^{24}\). Words from substrate languages are spelled in accordance with English orthography. “Exotic” renderings also occur, e.g. *whé* “what”, *knaum* “yam”\(^{25}\).

Lalla (1986, p. 119) is one of the very few creolists explicitly stating that “by far the tidiest group of sounds to be reconstructed on the basis of textual evidence is the consonants”\(^{26}\).

Problems do however arise. For instance, in certain varieties of 18\(^{th}\) century English, velar oral stops had a palatalized allophone [*kj*] and [*gj*] respectively, occurring before front vowels. According to Patrick (1999, p. 89) “the palatal stop/glide complex […] in JC [= Jamaican Creole] today is a reflex of a sub-phonemic feature of dialectal British English”. It was first recorded in 1617. The glide pronunciation was more general in the 18\(^{th}\) century and survived the 19\(^{th}\) century but became obsolete\(^{27}\). Palatalized [*kj*] and [*gj*] were first attested in Midland speech in 1653. It is “the Midland usage [which] is the most likely source for […] Jamaica” since “Southwestern England and the lower Midlands were a significant catchment area for early immigration to Jamaica” (Patrick 1999, p. 90), i.e. in the second half of the 17\(^{th}\) century\(^{28}\). This is precisely the period which “historical demographics suggest […] was critical for the crystallization of JC” (Patrick 1999, p. 91)\(^{29}\). However, in records of 19\(^{th}\) century Jamaican Creole we find e.g. *gal/garl* “girl”, whereas 20\(^{th}\) century texts have *gyal*. Note that this is a good example illustrating one of Rickford’s approaches, “feedback from current usage” (Rickford 1986, p. 162) or its reformulation in terms of Labov’s uniformitarian principle (Rickford 1991, p. 303). Rickford (1986, p. 162) thus notices that Caribbean newspapers often fail to represent the palatalization of word-initial [k]. He concludes that “in the light of this, the rarity with which palatalized velars are represented in earlier records should not be taken as representative of the facts of spoken usage at the time”.

In early texts in Jamaican Creole, double vowel graphs do not appear to indicate differences in quantity or quality of vowels: *dee* and *de* “they”, *fee* and *fe* “for”.

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\(^{24}\) Where *r* stands for the flap [*f*].

\(^{25}\) Where *é* stands for [*a*] and *kn* for [*ny*] respectively.

\(^{26}\) As in e.g. Plag (1999). For attempts to reconstruct vowel systems, see e.g. Smith (1999).

\(^{27}\) See Lalla (1986) and Patrick (1999, p. 89).

\(^{28}\) For details, see Le Page and De Camp (1960).

\(^{29}\) For details, see Patrick (1999, p. 91).
Similarly, double consonant graphs do not reflect gemination of consonants but rather the fact that the preceding vowel is short: *libba* “liver”, *togedda* “together”\(^{30}\). In particular, since /θ/ and /ð/ are associated with the digraph *th*, their creole reflexes /t/ and /d/ are frequently represented by ’t’ and ’d’ respectively, i.e. with an apostrophe, as if signalling an omission, e.g. *Deat’* “death”.

Other uses of the apostrophe in early Jamaican Creole texts include representing aphesis, e.g. *’state* “estate”, *’member* “remember”, syncope e.g. *’s’pose* “suppose”, deletion of word-initial [h], e.g. *’andsome* “handsome”, reduction of consonant clusters *’corn* “scorn”, *’trike* “strike”, *’sen’* “send”\(^{31}\).

As for the syllable structure of early Jamaican Creole, epenthetic vowels and their nature are indicated, e.g. *sinnicky* “sneaky”, so are paragogic vowels (including possible traces of vowel harmony), e.g. *killee* “kill”\(^{32}\).

Finally, Lalla (1986) and Lalla and D’Costa (1990) note that suprasegmentals such as tone are not indicated\(^{33}\).

Let me discuss next some problems arising from the fact that the first written records of pidgins and creoles were those of speakers of languages other than the lexifier (i.e. English).

Hancock (1977, p. 278) notes that the early stages of pidgins and creoles were often recorded by speakers of languages other than the lexifier. Hancock sees in this a potential advantage of having these early texts in an orthography other than that of the lexifier, given the consistent tendency to standardize pidgin and creole forms.

In his turn, Crowley (1993, p. 210) stresses the fact that Père Pionnier, the author of a grammatical sketch of late 19\(^{th}\) century Bislama, had no “speaking knowledge of English at all” and that consequently “his description can be assumed to be substantially free of […] Anglicizing influences”. Indeed, the forms recorded, mostly in accordance with the rules of French orthography, are a valuable source for the phonology of 19\(^{th}\)

\(^{30}\) Cf. also, for St Kitts Creole, Shrimpton (1999, p. 134).

\(^{31}\) For similar uses of the apostrophe in early Bajan (= Barbadian), see Rickford and Handler (1994) and Fields (1995).

\(^{32}\) For similar examples in early Bajan, see Rickford and Handler (1994). For late 18\(^{th}\) century St Kitts Creole see Grant (1999) and Shrimpton (1999).

\(^{33}\) See however Shrimpton (1999) for an attempt to determine the lexical tone in late 18\(^{th}\) century St Kitts Creole on the basis of the orthography of the texts published by Baker, Bruyn, Shrimpton and Winer (1999).
century Bislama. They clearly indicate, among others, the occurrence of epenthetic vowels and the nature thereof, gui̲risse “grease”, sou̲poune “spoon” (Crowley 1993, p. 217), sikine “skin” (Crowley 1993, p. 220), the variable nature of voicing oppositions, ba̲i̲nap vs modern Bislama paenap(ol) “pineapple” (Crowley 1993, p. 213), the absence of the back rounded harmonizing vowel in the transitive suffix, kou̲kime vs modern Bislama kuku̲m “cook” (Crowley 1993, p. 223).

However, problems do arise. Let me illustrate only a few such instances. As noticed by Winer and Gilbert (1987, p. 240), Uh, a native speaker of German, uses a transcription of late 19th century Tobagonian Creole clearly showing influences of both German pronunciation and orthography. Examples include the following: flees “fleas” and boose “booze”, with devoicing of obstruents34 in the coda; massa, maʃa “master”, since in German intervocalic s stands for [z]35; oe for [∧], as in soeme “some”, since /∧/ does not exist in German, but is somewhat similar to German /œ/ or /ø/.

Similarly, Père Pionnier’s forms, such as sémèle “smell” show the influence of French phonological constraints and of its orthography, a fact that has gone unnoticed – or unremarked – by Crowley (1993). In French, /e/’, graphically è, occurs in closed syllables, unlike /el/. Consequently, the occurrence of the graph è cannot be taken as indicative of the existence in late 19th century Bislama of the vocalic phoneme /e/ or of an allophone [ɛ] as the phonetic realisation of /e/ in closed syllables.

A number of approaches have been suggested in the literature for the identification of those instances when variability in the transcription of spoken data in early textual attestations of pidgins and creoles does correspond to language variation.

On the basis of information on the social class, age, sex and race of the speakers, Lalla and D’Costa (1990, pp. 86-92) compare the speech of several social groups and identify, among others, three phonological basilectal features reflected in the orthography of late 18th early 19th century Jamaican Creole texts. The distribution of these features (selected samples, different speech events) is represented in Table 2.

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34 And not of any “final consonants” as put by Winer and Gilbert (1984, p. 240).
35 The spelling masa is also attested.
Table 2\textsuperscript{36}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fricative replacement</td>
<td>Consonant reduction</td>
<td>cluster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proprietor class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. adult female white</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. adult female white</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. child white</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>NA\textsuperscript{37}</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artisan class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. adult female brown</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. adult male maroon\textsuperscript{38}</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. newly arrived male</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slave</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. elderly male slave</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 represents the distribution of the same features in a single speech event.

Table 3\textsuperscript{39}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fricative replacement</td>
<td>Consonant reduction</td>
<td>cluster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landowner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. adult male educated</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>colour unknown</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. adult female unedu-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cated colour un-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>known</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. adult male unedu-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cated brown</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. adult female unedu-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cated black</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. adult male unedu-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cated black</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Computations of frequency can also be made on the basis of orthographic evidence. Consider the frequency of two phonological features in Table 4.

\textsuperscript{36} Adapted from Lalla and D’Costa (1990, p. 88).
\textsuperscript{37} Not applicable since there are no relevant contexts in the speech samples.
\textsuperscript{38} Descendant of escaped slaves.
\textsuperscript{39} Adapted from Lalla and D’Costa (1990, p. 94).
### Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fricative replacement</td>
<td>Paragogic vowel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Landowner</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. adult male educated colour unknown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. adult female uneducated colour unknown</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. adult male uneducated brown</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working class</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. adult male uneducated black</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. adult female uneducated black</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The variability in the transcription of spoken data illustrated above thus adduces evidence in support of the view (Alleyne 1980, p. 184) according to which the continuum consisting of a range of language varieties closer to or further away from the lexifier is not a recent phenomenon.41

The orthography in textual attestations can also provide hitherto unknown evidence on the phonology of a pidgin or creole in earlier stages. Thus, Aceto (1996) identifies in a 1778 manuscript Saramaccan forms both with and without complex onsets. The author of the manuscript does provide examples of alternate lexical items, with and without epenthetic vowels breaking up word-initial consonant clusters: *priwà/piriwa* “arrow”, *skada/sikâda* “step, ladder”. On the basis of such transcriptions, Aceto concludes that the author of the manuscript was aware of epenthesized forms whenever they existed. Accordingly, Aceto interprets late 18th century Saramaccan forms such as *pre* “play” and *skîn* “body” as evidence that pre-1778 Saramaccan did permit complex (CC-) onset consonant clusters. This has, potentially, a number of important consequences. It suggests that the current CV syllable structure in Saramaccan may be a (relatively) recent development. If so, the contemporary Saramaccan CV syllable structure does not represent the creole prototype, widely assumed to be a CV syllable template. Moreover, Saramaccan would also be an instance of a change from a CCV to a CVCV syllable structure, which not only is less documented in the Atlantic English

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40 Adapted from Lalla and D’Costa (1990, p. 95). Unfortunately, the scale/scoring system is not specified.

41 Construed as a post-creole continuum by De Camp (1971). For discussion, see also Rickford (1987, pp. 32-33) and Sebba (1997, pp. 213 and 218).
creoles but also disconfirms the claim that the only possible diachronic change in creole syllable structure is CVCV > CCV, occurring as a result of decreolization. Finally, it underscores the limitations of the historical-comparative method since this earlier CCV syllable structure could not have been uncovered via comparison of related varieties or by internal reconstruction.

Still another method is illustrated in Grant (1999). Grant starts from an examination of the names of the slaves in the late 18th century texts in St Kitts Creole published in Baker, Bruyn, Shrimpton and Winer (1999) in order to determine their possible L1’s. He then analyses the samples of speech of these slaves in an attempt to identify, on the basis of the transcriptions of identical lexical items such as *kill, kirry* “kill”, idiolectal characteristics that might plausibly be attributed to their different L1’s. However, he fails to establish any significant correlations between the hypothesized L1’s and the phonological features (such as reflexes of English /l/), as transcribed. Nonetheless, in one such text, he does discover, in the speech attributed to an African-born slave, positive evidence of what he calls ethnolectal variation: the transcription of the spoken data in this text includes instances of paragoge such as *noso* “nose”, since this is otherwise transcribed as *nose* (Grant 1999, p. 128). Paragoge is interpreted as being – or as having been felt by whites to be – “a typical [phonological] feature of the Kittitian acquired as a second or additional language by African-born slaves” (Grant 1999, p. 128).

At present, in pidgin and creole linguistics, meeting the strict requirements formulated in the literature is the exception rather than the rule, given the paucity not only of textual attestations of earlier stages of pidgins and creoles but also of the additional information needed for their interpretation. This notwithstanding, as shown above, a variety of methods and analytical procedures have been suggested and successfully applied making the phonological interpretation of transcriptions of spoken data in early written records of English-based pidgins and creoles a definite possibility.

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42 For instance, it has taken the conjugated efforts, over a number of years, of 23 linguists to produce the exceptional collection of studies in Baker and Bruyn (1999).
References


