

Can We Get That In Writing? Black English Features in the Writing of Young Children

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Senior Paper/Black Studies Thesis

Abstract: A compendium of factors point to a need for both academic and professional attention to Black English in early writing. First, recent trends in literacy education emphasize writing as an integral part of emergent literacy. Children are doing much more writing much earlier than was previously the case. These programs are based heavily on the interdependence of oral and written language and thus encourage reliance on natural speech as a means of developing literacy. In so doing, they stimulate the writing of Black English as never before. Second, young Black English speaking children, still in the early stages of literacy, have often had little exposure to conventional written dialects and the forces which support them. As a result, they may be more likely to include Black English in their writing. Third, the Black English with which children are operating may, in some respects, be more different from Conventional Classroom English than it has previously been. Finally, research suggests that teacher knowledge of and attitudes toward Black English has a significant impact on students in many ways. This may extend to their facilitation of literacy acquisition among Black English speaking children. Educators who elicit writing from early elementary school students will encounter unprecedented levels of Black English influence. The information and training provided for those confronting dialect issues is of great importance.

Acknowledgements

I thank all of the people who have helped me through this work, both academically and personally: Diane Anderson, Virginia Brennan, R.H., Mika Hoffman, K.C., Maghan Keita, William Labov, S.M., Peter Schmidt, Lisa Smulyan, the 1993 Black Studies Capstone Seminar group, my cooperating teacher, my third graders, my friends, and my family. Special thanks to Virginia Brennan, Donna Jo Napoli, and Eva Travers.

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Introduction

Although researchers and practitioners have been working on the question for centuries, it is still not known how human beings acquire literacy. In modern times, most attention has been focused on the process of learning to read and the refinement of writing skills. Only recently are academic and applied communities beginning to undertake a substantial examination of the early development of writing ability. Increasingly, the unique processes involved in learning to write are being recognized.

One clear distinction between reading and writing is that is that reading involves comprehension of another's words, while writing involves the production of one's own language. Insofar as children's oral language differs from that accepted in print, learning to write involves learning to produce a new kind of language. For children who come to school speaking dialects which differ markedly from those represented in writing, this presents particular challenges.

It is incumbent upon those involved in education to understand the challenges facing children as they learn to write. They must determine how the ability to write develops and how this development is best facilitated. Their work must consider the oral language and culture with which children come to the acquisition of writing.

This paper considers the development of writing among children who come to school speaking Black English. It examines how these children's writing is affected by their oral language and argues for greater academic and professional attention to this process.

The paper is divided into five chapters. In the first, Black English is defined. The information presented provides an essential common ground on which the remainder the discussion is built. The second chapter presents the thesis of the paper by justifying attention to Black English in early writing. The third chapter is a transgression from the topic at hand. More strictly linguistic in nature, this section describes tense and aspect marking in Black English. This background is necessary to understand the rest of the paper. The fourth chapter is a case study designed to support the thesis of this work. It provides a qualitative analysis of the writing of Black English speaking third graders. In the fifth chapter of this paper recommendations are presented for academic and professional facilitation of writing development among young Black English speakers.

Chapter I: Black English Defined

The following constitutes a comprehensive definition of Black English. It includes a critique of terminology related to the dialect, a description of its features, and a discussion of its history and future.

Terminology

Much of the terminology associated with the issues discussed in this paper is highly problematic. Whether referring to the language itself, its linguistic status (dialect, language, etc.), or the dialects to which it is compared, the terms available seem less than ideal. The following section discusses some difficulties with the use of various terms and explains the labels that will be employed in this paper.

The first widespread term used to refer to “Black English” is nonstandard English (often Negro Nonstandard English.) In its use by linguists, this term is innocent enough. It comes from a long tradition of referring to the academic and professional version of a language as “standard” and referring to all other versions as “nonstandard.” This was not intended to imply that there is any greater value or validity to the standard variety over those that are nonstandard -- linguistically speaking such a notion is nonsensical. Unfortunately, however, many outside the linguistic community have taken these terms to mean exactly that. It has been their interpretation that there is something inherently more usual, intelligent, and meaningful about the “standard” variety of English. The fact of the matter is that there is nothing atypical, deficient, or otherwise lesser about “nonstandard” dialects. In other words, *nonstandard is not substandard*.

The misguided interpretations and uses of the term “nonstandard” have driven many (myself included) away from using it. As will be discussed later, however, the use of the term “standard” in discussion of Black English has remained. It is not clear why this is the case.

A second set of terms used to describe “Black English” focus attention on the language itself rather than the language in relationship to other (particularly culturally dominant) varieties. These terms include: Black English, Black American English¹, Black English Vernacular, Black Vernacular English, Vernacular Black English, African-American English, Afro-American Dialect,

¹ That this is an the English only of Black Americans and not of Black English speakers, Black Brits for example, is admittedly an important point. For the purposes of this paper this should be assumed.

and Ebonics². While preferable to terms which might suggest inferiority, these terms are misleading in other ways. First, they imply that the use of "Black English" is limited to African-American people. This is not in fact the case. While the majority of Black English speakers are in fact African-American, not all are of African descent. Extensive use of Black English forms by a variety of ethnic groups including Latinos and whites has been documented (see e.g. Poplack, 1978; Wolfram, 1974). Indeed, as Burling (1992) points out, "... there is probably no feature of BEV [Black English Vernacular] which is not used by some whites" (p. 291). Similarly, designating a linguistic system by the race of its speakers may also suggest, to the layperson at least, that those speakers use that particular system exclusively. Again, we know this is not the case. People of African descent are represented in the speech populations of nearly every language on earth. Some African-Americans do not speak "Black English" of any kind and most African-Americans are speakers of both Black English and at least one other distinct dialect (for example, Conventional Classroom English.)

The above objections noted, the term "Black" will be used in this paper as a label for the language under discussion. The use of this term is linguistically sound and is reasonably descriptive (with the exception of the cases discussed above.)³

As for the second portion of the label, there are three possibilities currently in use: English, English Vernacular, and English dialect. There is nothing objectionable in the first, but it may lose something in descriptiveness. The second two terms are generally considered denotatively equivalent.⁴ Connotatively, however, there is an important distinction. Vernacular necessarily refers to *spoken* language.⁵ Dialect, however, can refer to both spoken language and that which is written, as in "literary dialect" for example. For the purposes of this paper, use of the term

² This term was explained by Robert L. Williams in 1975 to refer to "the linguistic and paralinguistic feature which on a concentric continuum represents the communicative competence of the West African Caribbean, and United States slave descendants of African origin. It includes the various idioms, patois, argots, ideolects, and social dialects of black people..." (Williams, 1975, p. vi). Although the term is appropriate for his purposes, I do not believe it is suitable for the purposes of this paper. It is at the same time too inclusive, referring to the language of Africana people in general and all over, and too exclusive, focusing only on the unique elements of the communication of Africana people.

³ I acknowledge that the term "African-American English" is more accurate. Indeed, if I were the first to label this speech, I would use that term. However, I am not the first, and it is my desire to associate my concept of the language with the work of those who have used the term *Black English*.

⁴ They were identified as terminological equivalents by Judge Charles W. Joiner in the King case (Civil Action 7-71861, Ann Arbor, Michigan).

⁵ See, for example, Webster's II New Riverside Dictionary. Berkeley Books: New York. 1984.

“vernacular” would be inappropriate, for the work in fact focuses on the appearance of Black English *in writing*. Dialect is not problematic on these grounds but there are other reasons to avoid it. Namely, the term dialect often takes on negative (and erroneous) connotations. To many it raises political and social “red flags” which, although linguistically unwarranted, might as well be avoided. Therefore, the language under discussion will be referred to only as Black English. Whether or not it is appropriate to classify Black English as a dialect will be discussed below.

In the European tradition of scholarship, whether or not a linguistic system was called a language depended on whether or not it had its own literature (Tagliavini, 1972). If it did, it was called a language. If it did not, it was called a dialect. This system of classifying language solely on the basis of political and economic factors, the “a language is a dialect with an army and a navy” phenomenon⁶, has lost favor in recent years, particularly among American linguists. This is no doubt encouraged by the tremendous range of language varieties (including Black English) which are now represented in print. This trend renders the literature distinction relatively meaningless. In addition, it can lead to blatant misclassification of language forms that are obviously autonomous but have only an oral tradition. Presently, the typical distinction made between dialects and languages is that the former are mutually intelligible while the latter are not. Of course, this raises difficulties in that one person’s intelligibility may be another person’s incomprehensibility. Furthermore, even when distinctions do appear fairly clear, they may not be observed in the labeling process. Consider the illustrations provided by Richard Bailey (1983),

Communities of speakers may assert that two individuals speak the “same language” even when the language varieties they use are not mutually intelligible: Cantonese and Mandarin, for instance, are both regarded as varieties of “Chinese” even though speakers of one cannot understand or be understood by speakers of the other. Different communities, on the other hand, may regard quite similar varieties, ones that do not impede communication, as “different languages.” Yiddish and German spoken in Berlin presented such a case before the former language was virtually exterminated in that area between 1933 and 1945.

(Bailey, 1983, p. 13)

Political and social factors still influence what is already a blurry linguistic distinction.

In the case of Black English, there is no question that vast majority of forms at all levels of the discourse are the same as, and mutually intelligible with, those of other forms of English. However, the basis of this paper is the fact that there are *some* differences and that these

⁶ I have not been able to find the original source of this expression.

differences can in fact lead to incomprehensibility or misunderstanding in some cases. Nonetheless, calling Black English a separate language would be misguided. It would reflect preoccupation with a few forms and ignorance of the bulk of data. Thus, Black English will be considered a dialect of English.⁷

The use of a single term to apply to the speech of a large number of people can itself be misleading. Calling something Black English does not mean that it is the same in all features and subsystems as anything else called Black English.

A language (English, for example) is not in reality one nonvarying system which all speakers share and all children for whom it is a native language learn. Although the vast majority of the rules are shared by all speakers of English, there are also systematic differences in rules for various dialects of English. Within dialects, each speaker has an orderly set of rules which accounts for the language he or she produces. However, that particular set of rules is not shared by all speakers of English, or even all speakers of the same dialect.

(Farr and Daniels, 1986, p. 13)

To summarize, the use of the term Black English DOES NOT imply any of the following:

1. that Black English is less sophisticated or developed than other forms of English.
2. that Black English is linguistically nonstandard, unusual, or atypical.
3. that Black English is spoken only by African-Americans.
4. that all African-Americans speak Black English.
5. that speakers of Black English speak only Black English.
6. that all Black English is the same with respect to all features and subsystems.

The section "A Definition of Black English" will detail what the term *does* imply.

The next terminological difficulty comes with what to call the language with which Black English is most often contrasted. How does one refer to the English of doctors, lawyers, teachers, and newscasters, for example, in their professional settings? Again, the first proposal was to call this "standard English." Unlike the use of "nonstandard English" to refer to Black English, this term is still used by many linguists and educators. Unfortunately, the mistruths it may encourage (see previous discussion) are still a danger. In an attempt to avoid spurring such notions, however unintentional, a number of alternatives to the term have been explored. One obvious possibility is "white English," but this is far too underdetermined to be of any use. The newscaster-like dialect

⁷ One more point of clarification -- all dialects are languages and any form of a language is a dialect. There is no such thing as a dialectless form of a language. Thus, "standard English" is just as much a dialect as Black English and both are fully functioning forms of the English language.

to which we refer is by no means owned by whites nor do most whites even speak it. In fact, there exist dialects spoken by whites which are more different from “newscaster English” than is Black English (for example, the dialect of Tangier Island, Virginia.) There is a great lack of specificity in this and other terms considered. Defining this dialect on the basis of the race or social class of its speakers is not only inadequate, it is erroneous.

Avoiding the above pitfalls altogether, I have chosen to turn to social *context* as a means of identifying the dialect to which I wish to refer. For the purposes of this paper, and many others addressing issues of Black English, the language contrasted with Black English is that which is conventionally spoken and accepted in the classroom. Thus, I will label the dialect as just that -- Conventional Classroom English.

A Definition of Black English

Terminology is useless unless well defined. As previous discussion should have indicated, it is not accurate to define Black English solely by the ethnicity of those who speak it (i.e. “Black English is the English spoken by Black people”). Furthermore, such a definition could be dangerous in the hands of educators and others. Based on it, one may automatically assume that all African-American students speak and understand Black English. Accompanied by little knowledge of Black English features an educator may attribute reading, writing, or other difficulties to the child’s dialect rather than to more accurate and informative sources. In addition, she may not consider the possibility of Black English influence in the reading, writing, and other work of students who are not African-American.

A more accurate approach to defining Black English is to identify it by its linguistic features and systems. *When a person, regardless of race, social-class status, or even social context, is using the majority of these features and systems in her/his speech, she/he can be said to be speaking Black English.*

*Features of Black English:*⁸

Phonology⁹ :

1. Retraction of stress of some typically final-stressed words:

e.g. POlice, DEfine (Baugh, 1983)

⁸ This list does not include nonverbal or intonational aspects of Black English due to the scarcity of information and agreement on the topic. See Cooke (1978) for further information.

⁹ *Phonology* refers to the sound system of language.

2. Consonant cluster simplification
e.g. specific --> pacific, its --> is (Lourie, 1978)
3. Change in articulation of interdental fricatives¹⁰
e.g. they --> dey, think --> tink, three --> free, nothin --> nofin, month --> monf

(Language Files, 1988)

4. Deletion of /t/ and /d/ in word final position
e.g. walkt --> walk, stared --> stare (Dillard, 1972)
5. Absence of postvocalic /r/ and /l/
e.g. guard --> guad¹¹, help --> hep, toll --> toe, four --> foe (Lourie, 1978)
6. Metathesis of ask
ask --> aks (undocumented)¹²
7. Collapse of certain vowel contrasts
e.g. tin = ten, fear = fair (Lourie, 1978)
8. /ay/ and /aw/ to monophthongs in certain contexts
e.g. naw --> na (now), taym --> tam (time) (Language Files, 1988)

Morphology¹³ /Syntax¹⁴ : (* indicates that the form will be described in detail later in paper).

1. Absence of possessive marking
e.g. William_ mother, they mother (Lourie, 1978)
2. Absence of plural marking
e.g. five_ cent (Baratz, 1969)
- * 3. Absence of past tense marker¹⁵
e.g. She talk_ in class yesterday. (Lourie, 1978)
- * 4. Absence of agreement marking on verbs.

¹⁰ This is quite common in a number of Romance-American dialects, Spanish excluded.

¹¹ Note that here the /d/ is not deleted. This suggests the existence of some rule that says, in effect, "only so much of a single word can be deleted."

¹² I have seen this phenomenon transcribed in bodies of data but I have not come across a discussion of it. Based on my observations it is extremely common and so I include it here, with the caveat that it is without quantificational support at this time.

¹³ *Morphology* refers to the system of word-forming elements and processes in language.

¹⁴ *Syntax* refers to the way words are put together to form meaningful units like phrases or clauses.

¹⁵ This is the result of the phonological rule listed number 4.

- e.g. He run_ home. (Baratz, 1969), The office be closed on weekends. (Baugh, 1983)
- * 5. Habitual be?¹⁶
e.g. She be freakin'. ≠ She is freakin'. (Duke)
- * 6. Occasional presence of third person singular agreement marking in other persons and numbers
e.g. I cleans_ it. (Duke)¹⁷, You loves_... (Dillard, 1972)
- * 7. Alternative expression of the future with first person singular?¹⁸
e.g. I ma go home. (Baratz, 1969)
8. Existential it
e.g. It wasn't nothing to do. (Lourie, 1978)
9. Double expression of subject¹⁹
e.g. John he live in New York. (Baratz, 1969)
10. Multiple negation
e.g. It ain't no cat can't get it in no coop. We don't ever see none of them guys.²⁰ (Labov, 1972)
11. Inversion of first auxiliary in embedded questions
e.g. I asked her could I go. (Lourie, 1978) Why she ain' over here? (Dillard, 1972)
- * 12. Perfective done
e.g. He done busted his lip. I'll be done bought my own CB waitin on him to buy me one. (Baugh, 1983)
- * 13. Remote time been
e.g. I been know it. (Lourie, 1978)
- * 14. Steady to mark intense progressive action

¹⁶ The refers to recent work suggesting that be may be taking on the role as habitual aspect marker in Black English. See later discussion.

¹⁷ Utterances which I have heard in spontaneous speech are marked with my name only, as they have not been published.

¹⁸ This is questionable and there is little discussion of it in the literature.

¹⁹ This may be a specific example of left dislocation. I am not aware of it occurring in Black English with other grammatical roles such as direct object or indirect object.

²⁰ This is an interesting example in which one nonnegative form is used (ever) within an otherwise entirely negative utterance. I have heard similar examples in which anybody is found within an utterance with multiple negation.

e.g. Your mind is steady workin'. She be steady dancin'. (Baugh, 1983)

* 15. Copula and auxiliary deletion

e.g. He_ going. (He's going.) He_ miss you. (He'll miss you.) I_ got it. (I've got it.)

(Language Files, 1988)

Before leaving this definition, a word should be said about the what it includes. In language, there are two kinds of rules (things that hold true) -- obligatory rules and variable rules. Obligatory rules are those which absolutely apply to a language *at all times*. For example, in all dialects of English flap formation after a stressed vowel before a syllabic element is obligatory -- it always happens. Variable rules, on the other hand, are those which apply only under certain conditions. These conditions include, but are not limited to, phonological environment, grammatical environment, age, audience, location, geographic area, gender, and level of education.

The rules which define Black English are primarily variable rules. They apply sometimes, but not all the time, as dictated by particular conditions. It is rarely possible to predict whether or not a rule will operate, producing a particular feature. Thus, linguists study variable rules and their resulting features quantificationally. They study the likelihood that a particular feature will be found under a particular condition or set of conditions. It is on this basis that a feature is described.

The above discussion alludes to a final point that is central to understanding Black English and dialectology in general. That is, dialects do not exist in complete separation from one another. It is not as though a language stream is *either* Conventional Classroom English *or* Black English. Rather, language exists on a continuum guided by linguistic, social, and other conditions.

With a linguistic definition of Black English in place, understanding of Black English will be enriched by consideration where the language has come from and where it might be going.

Origin Theories

Four distinct theories of the origin of Black English have had substantial following: the physiological differences theory, the deficit theory, the Anglicist hypothesis and the Creolist hypothesis.²¹

The physiological differences theory was the earliest approach to explaining the origin of

²¹ Some scholars have suggested that determination of the origins of Black English may indicate whether the features discussed above reflect Deep Structure or Surface Structure differences.

Black English. It ascribed differences in the English of blacks to physiological differences between blacks and whites. More specifically, the theory held that blacks were unable to speak the same kinds of English as whites because of their “thick lips and lazy tongues” (reported by Fasold, 1987; Dillard, 1975; et. al.). This approach was perpetuated mostly as folk mythology and was not widely discussed among academics.²² It is unclear how widespread or long-lasting these beliefs were. Undoubtedly, as whites were exposed to increasing numbers of blacks who spoke Conventional Classroom English, the theory became increasingly difficult to support. Nonetheless, it was influential in beginning a long line of explanations for Black English predicated on the idea that characteristics of the black race render it *incapable* of speaking Conventional Classroom English and relegate it to speaking simplified and corrupted versions of the language.

A second model of Black English derivation was based on the notion that blacks are *cognitively* incapable of utilizing complexities of Conventional Classroom English. According to this account, Black English is a crippled form of English reflecting the mental deficiencies of its speakers. Again, this theory was perpetuated mostly by laypeople. It did not gain academic prominence until the 1960’s. At this time a number of psychologists and educators endorsed the theory as a means for explaining the poor academic performance of lower-class, particularly lower-class black children. Millard Black (1965) lists a range of linguistic characteristics of “culturally disadvantaged” children:

Culturally disadvantaged children...use fewer words with less variety to express themselves...learn less from what they hear...use a significantly smaller proportion of mature sentence structures...[and] are frequently crippled in language development because they do not perceive the concept that objects have names, and that the same objects may have different names...

(Black, 1965, pp. 466-7)

Martin Deutsch (1963) suggests a more narrow scope of deficiency:

... a major focus of deficit in the children’s language development is syntactical organization and subject continuity.

(Deutsch, 1963, p. 175)

It is not clear, in many cases, whether researchers such as Black and Deutsch attributed these (supposed) characteristics to innate aspects of the child or to the social and linguistic

²² Other than Fasold, Dillard, and others who simply recount the theory in examining the history of perceptions of Black English. It is unfortunate that little primary source support is offered.

environment to which the child is exposed.²³ Deutsch speculates,

...we might conclude that the language variables we are dealing with here are by-products of social experience rather than indices of basic ability or intellectual level.
(Deutsch, 1963, p,175)

No studies during this era sought to pit race *against* socioeconomic status to determine if one or the other factor more greatly contributed to linguistic deficiency.²⁴ The academic community appeared satisfied that being poor and black, for whatever reasons, leads to the development of a distorted form of English inadequate for full linguistic expression.

These attitudes are no longer found, overtly at least, in the literature. This is due to two developments. First, vehement refutation of the theory among linguists (Baratz and Shuy, 1969, Labov, 1969, et. al.). Second, the rise of the "difference model" of school performance. This, primarily a creation of educational theorists, contends that lower class and minority children's comparatively weak performance in school is not the result of *deficiencies* in their environment, but rather of *differences*. Such a tack rendered unnecessary the continuing assertion that the *depravity* of black language must be responsible for black students' difficulty in school.

As psychologists and educationists were addressing Black English origin only insofar as it might result from present-day factors, a synchronic approach, linguists were looking for more historically rooted explanations for the derivation of the dialect, a diachronic approach. Two major theories, the Anglicist hypothesis and the Creolist hypothesis, have arisen from their scholarship.²⁵

The Anglicist Hypothesis contends that the distinctive features of Black English are the result of the influence of British and other European regional features. Charles S. Johnson (1943) was an early advocate of the position:

... Negro dialect turns out to be a repository for the early seventeenth-century speech of the first English colonizers.

(Johnson, 1943, p. 132)

²³ One explanation for this lack of clarity may be the reappropriation of class language theories to explain (perceived) racial language differences. The most prominent example of the practice occurs in borrowings of the work of British social theorist Basil Bernstein. It was Bernstein's contention that working-class children have access to a much more restricted linguistic "code" than do other children (who use "elaborated codes.") This disparity serves to reinforce social stratification, so that lower forms of language lead to lower-class status and social reproduction. This theory was used by a number of American Educators to explain the difficulty of lower-class, particularly minority children.

²⁴ One researcher (John, 1963) did find that *among "Negroes"* class differences do affect language skills.

²⁵ Other terms have been used to refer to these theories. Most notably, the Anglicist hypothesis is also sometimes called the "Dialect Difference Hypothesis."

These colonizers spoke a variety of dialects including East Anglian, Anglo-Irish, Northern British and Southern British. Most slaves were exposed to these dialects through their overseers,

They [slaves] learned their English in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries from the white people they were most closely associated with, largely, illiterate and semiliterate overseers.

(Eliason, 1956, p. 108)

These overseers held very low positions on the southern social ladder, and tended to be among the most recent immigrants to America. As a result, it is likely that slaves were exposed to particularly strong forms of European regional dialects.

Anglicists did not argue that the influence of contemporary European dialects was limited to blacks:

So grammatical forms widely distributed in England became identified in the New World with the south and were used by southerners both Negro and white. In the south, moreover, the same cultural differentials which operated on the region generally operated to preserve these forms among a greater proportion of Negroes than whites.

(McDavid, 1969, p. 87)

As the argument goes, these European dialect features were retained in southern black speech and then spread to the rest of the country during the waves of Black migration that began during Reconstruction.

As the dates of the above quotations evidence, the Anglicist hypothesis has had a long history of support. Even today there are some who posit the theory as the explanation for most of distinctive features of Black English (although their statement of such is not in so strong a form.)

Edgar Schneider is perhaps the most prominent member of this camp. He states,

The linguistic character of Earlier Black English and, subsequently, of present-day Black English is predominantly determined by its descent from nonstandard British and American English of the colonial period. A vast majority of its forms and structures can be identified as and traced back to diachronically older elements of such dialects, some of which have died out by now in standard English. In particular, some forms and variables provide explicit confirmation for the hypothesis that because of socially selective mechanisms black speakers have preserved such speech elements to a greater extent than whites.²⁶

(Schneider, 1989, pp. 277-8)²⁷

During the explosion of work on Black English in the 1960's some linguists began to

²⁶ It is beyond the scope of this paper to address the individual arguments in favor of and contrary to this position. Such accounts are given by many of the authors referred to in this section.

²⁷ This work was first published in German in 1981 under the title *Morphologische und Syntaktische Variablen in Amerikanischen Early Black English*.

question the assumptions of the Anglicist theory. One alternative possibility was afforded widespread attention in 1972 with the publication of J. L. Dillard's Black English: Its History and Usage in the United States. This work, perhaps the strongest indictment of the Anglicist approach to Black English history decries,

Attempts to trace the feature of Black English to British regional dialects have been carried to absurd lengths. ...This lopsided interest in tracing American regional dialects to British regional dialects has damaged research on the speech of all American social groups, but research on the dialects of Black Americans has suffered most.

(Dillard, 1972, p. 7)

The counterproposal has come to be known as the Creolist or Creole Substratum Hypothesis. Stewart summarizes the basic assumptions of the theory:

Of those Africans who fell victim to the Atlantic slave trade and were brought to the New World, many found it necessary to learn some kind of English. With very few exceptions, the form of English which they acquired was a pidginized one, and this kind of English became so well established as the principal medium of communication between Negro slaves in the British colonies that it was passed on as a creole language to succeeding generations of the New World Negroes, for whom it was their native tongue.²⁸

(Stewart, 1967, p. 226)

After the Civil War, with the abolition of slavery, the breakdown of the plantation system, and the steady increase in education for poor as well as affluent Negroes, the older field-hand creole English began to lose many of its creole characteristics, and take on more and more of the features of the local white dialects and of the written language.

(Stewart, 1967, p. 230)

In contrasting such an approach with that of the Anglicists, one must recognize that the Anglicist Hypothesis does not preclude the development of a West African influenced slave creole early in African-American history. However, it does insist that this creole was lost comparatively early and can account for only a few, if any, of the distinctive characteristics of present-day Black English. The Creolists, on the other hand, claim that this early creole is in fact responsible for most of the unique forms of Black English. They posit that Black English is, in effect, still decreolizing and exists as a mesolect of the English-based, West African influenced creole.

The final explanation proposed for the origin of Black English is known as the Creolist Hypothesis. According to this theory, Black English is derived from a plantation Creole of English

²⁸ Schneider points out that the terms pidgin and creole, when used by linguists, are not intended to hold the derogatory connotations associated with the popular use of these terms.

and West African languages which, although it has gone through extensive decreolization over the last several centuries, accounts for the distinctive elements of Black English.

There are four major bodies of evidence from which support for the Creolist Hypothesis is drawn: the social conditions under which black American Language developed, the creole features found in Black English, West African influence found in Black English, and similarities between Black English and known West African-influenced creoles. While none of these alone is sufficient to support the hypothesis, taken as a composite they provide a well-constructed picture of the history of Black English.

One reason to look for creolization in Early Black English were the social conditions under which slaves' communicative systems developed, for these conditions mirror closely those which typically engender the development of creole languages.

During the time of the slave trade it is estimated that 9.5 million slaves arrived in America (Curtin, 1969). The vast majority of these slaves came from the West and West-Central Coasts of Africa. Although literally hundreds of languages are spoken in this region, they fall into a select number of language families. Furthermore, although there is a widely acknowledged lack of specifics on which language groups came over, it is probable that slaves were drawn heavily from only three of these families: Kwa, Mande, and Ibo (also called Igbo) and even between these families there is some relatedness (see Appendix A, map 1). Thus, slaves taken to America can be said to share a common linguistic substratum.

In nearly every region from which slaves were taken, a concerted effort was made to strip the slaves of their native language(s). This process began in slave capture and transport, as Captain William Smith explains in *A Voyage to New Guinea*, 1744,

But the safest way [of transporting slaves without revolt] is to trade with the different Nations, on either side of the river... having some of every sort of board, there will be no more chance of their succeeding than of finishing the Tower of Babel.

Such practices were continued throughout enslavement. It was rare for more than a few slaves on a plantation to speak any one language.²⁹ Often, if such communication did occur, slaves were severely punished. With such forces at work, to keep an African language alive for even one

²⁹ There were some exceptions to this, particularly in regions outside the United States. For example, in Cuba and Brazil there were large pockets of Yoruba-speaking peoples. As would be expected, the Yoruba language was reported to survive much longer in these regions than elsewhere.

generation was extremely difficult.

Essentially, slaves were thrust into a situation in which there was no common language with which to communicate. The only language to which the slaves had any sort of consistent exposure was the colonial language, in the case of the U.S., English. However, there were some slaves (e.g. field slaves) had little contact even with English-speakers and others who heard widely different varieties of the language (as discussed in regard to the Anglicist hypothesis). In addition, new, non-English speaking slaves were infused into the communities all the time. This continued the need for a common language and reinforced the influence of African languages. Conditions such as this typically lead to the development of a *pidgin*. A pidgin is a simple, needs-oriented means of communication. By definition, pidgins are native to no one, but include elements of the languages that are native to the pidgin's speakers. Burling explains,

A few useful words from African languages generally found their way into the pidgin, but the largest part of the vocabulary was drawn from whatever European language was spoken in the area. Portuguese, Spanish, French, Dutch, or English provided most of the words for these communities, but the urgent need to communicate ran far ahead of any language. Thus it was in phonology and in syntax that the influence of the speaker's native language was strongest. People whose main concern was to make themselves understood carried older habits into their new language, and it was inevitable that both the pronunciation and grammatical patterns of African languages would deeply affect the pidgin. The result was the invention of a medium of communication that drew most of its vocabulary from a colonial language, but whose pronunciation might conform more closely to African habits and whose words were joined together in ways that were remote from any European standard.

(Burling, 1992, 324)

The language(s) which contribute mainly lexical elements to the pidgin are referred to as the *superstrate* language(s). The language(s) which contribute more syntactic elements are said to provide the pidgin's *substratum*. Essentially, pidgins are an amalgam of features deriving from the superstrate, substratum, and communicative needs of the speakers.

When a generation of children grow up speaking a pidgin as their native language, the pidgin becomes a *creole*. The language is given a new classification because it has become substantively different from a pidgin. Specifically, because a creole is acquired as a first language, it is used to meet all of the purposes of a language. It is spoken with a fluency not found in pidgins, and includes a complete and systematic grammar like that associated with all native languages.

Because they have been created in the same way, creoles, regardless of the languages which influence them, have some universal features. As Burling explains,

Some linguists believe that, in their syntax, creoles resemble each other more closely than they resemble either their superstrate languages or the substrate languages that have influenced them.

(Burling, 1992, 329)

The following is a basic list of features often found in pidgins, and, by extension, creoles:

- (1) simplification of some phonemes
- (2) reduction of consonant clusters
- (3) preference for CV syllable types
- (4) simpler inflectional morphology
- (5) rapidly increasing vocabulary
- (6) extensions a single words to have a number of different meanings (e.g. the word stick to mean anything long and skinny)
- (7) compound meanings (e.g. gras bilong head = hair, Korean Bamboo English)
- (8) extensions of syntactic categories
- (9) preference for SVO word order
- (10) few if any subordinate clauses (and preference for compound sentences)
- (11) little use of articles
- (12) extensive use of double negatives and double comparatives
- (13) aspect preferred over tense

If Black English is derived from this creole, it should be expected to have some of these features, or at least traces thereof. Indeed, several features listed above are found in Black English. According to the list of features given in the definition of Black English provided earlier, Black English exhibits clear evidence of (1), (2), (4), (12), and (13).³⁰ Some linguists have structured arguments in which these and other correspondences are presented as evidence for the creole origin of Black English. For example, one of the manifestations of characteristic (4) above, (simpler inflectional morphology), is the lack of a phonologically realized morpheme to indicate possession. In Nicaraguan English, clearly a creole, the genitive is unmarked:

- (14) the lagoon edge (O'Neil, 1990)

³⁰ Characteristic (10) may also be true of Black English. See later discussion of serial verbs.

(15) the woman baby (O'Neil, 1990)

(16) the little boy name (O'Neil, 1990)

In Black English the genitive is also often unmarked, even in pronouns.

(17) William_ mother (Lourie, 1978)

(18) they mother³¹ (Lourie, 1978)

Because possession is overtly marked in most if not all other American vernaculars, and because it is found in West African languages as well, it is likely that the lack of genitive marking in Black English can be attributed to creole influence. This kind of argumentation explains many features of Black English. While this type of evidence alone is not sufficient to give a complete picture of Black English origin, it certainly contributes to that end.

Another type of support for the Creolist hypothesis comes from evidence of West African influence on the language. If Black English is truly derived from a slave creole, it must contain characteristics, or traces of characteristics, from its substrata as well as its superstrata language(s). A body of work has demonstrated influence from both individual and groups of West African languages (see Schneider, 1989, for a preliminary review.)

Two kinds of approaches are taken to tracing influence from West African languages.³² One tack is to find correlates of distinctly West African features in Black English. The second is to trace distinctive features of Black English to West African sources.³³ In both cases, the essential endeavor is to show similarity between Black English and the West African substrata which cannot be explained except through a connection between these two entities. To give some flavor of how this works, an example of each approach is given below.

One of the, if not the, most often discussed West African language feature is the use of serial verb constructions. This feature, not found in European languages, involves the use of two matrix verbs in the same sentence, either side by side or with intervening material. For example,

³¹ This pattern of genitive marking is found in Conventional Classroom English in the case of the pronoun her, which can serve a direct or indirect object as well as a possessive form.

³² Actually, there is what could be considered a third approach in which experimental linguistics uncovers parallels between West African languages and Black English. The work of Clifford Hill is illustrative of this approach. Hill has conducted experiments which show that African-American and European-American students differ in their use of deictic imagery. The patterns shown by African-American students are highly similar to those found among Africans (Hill, 1993). A causal link is likely.

³³ Theoretically, this could be one in the same task, but in practice it is normally one or the other entity's distinctive feature which drives the research.

- (19) ʼodè siká nó màà mè (Twi) (Bamgbose, 1970)
 he take money gave me
 'he gave me money'
- (20) ó mú iwé wá (Yoruba) (Bamgbose, 1970)
 he took book come
 'he brought a book'

The feature is found in known West African-influenced Creoles. For example, in Nicaraguan English the construction is used in purpose constructions

- (21) He send call the husband again. (O'Neil, 1990)
 'She/he sent someone to call the husband again.'
- (22) You no want go look after you baby. (O'Neil, 1990)
 'You do not want to go to look after your baby.'

Asante, a strong proponent of West African influence on African-American communication, argues that this phenomenon is also found in Black English spoken in the middle part of this century.

- (23) I hear tell you went home.³⁴ (Asante, 1985)³⁵
- (24) I made do with what I had.³⁶ (Asante, 1985)
- (25) I took consideration an j'ined de lawd. (Asante, 1985)
- (26) I'll take and switch and beat you good. (Asante, 1985)

Further, it is his contention that the general "dissecting" quality of this construction, breaking a complex action into two or more component actions, survives as a tendency in contemporary Black English (although no recent utterances are given.) Although qualitatively these examples are reminiscent of serial constructions, quantitative data is also needed to solidify the evidence. It must be shown either that these utterances are unique to *Black* English (which they are not) or that they occur *more often* in Black English. This work has not been undertaken.

A second method to establishing a link between West African languages and Black English is to trace features unique to Black English (among American dialects) to West African influence.

³⁴ "Tell" could be acting as a noun here.

³⁵ These examples were collected by the Works Project Administration's Federal Writer's Project. They come from narratives of former slaves born between 1844 and 1861 and interviewed mainly between 1940 and 1942.

³⁶ This expression is found in many dialects. The presumption, then, would be that it originated in Early Black English.

This approach is more common than that discussed above and has produced more evidence. A poignant example is found in the system of verbal morphology in Black English. This system, as will be explained in detail in the tense and aspect marking section of this paper, includes morphological marking of a tense not found in Conventional Classroom English.³⁷ Specifically, systematic signification of remote time occurs in Black English but not in Conventional Classroom English.³⁸ A sentence such as

(27) I *been* know your name.³⁹ (Labov, 1972)

means in Black English ‘not only do I know your name but I have known it for a long time and,’ connotatively, ‘it is absurd for you to think I do not know it or just learned it.’ This carries a substantially different meaning from “I have known your name.” Thus, explanation for its origin must come from outside English. Investigation of West African languages reveals that the “remote past” is a commonly used tense distinct from the “near past” (Long, 1969, p. 6). There is good reason to posit that Black English *been*, unique to the dialect, is derived from West African influence.

A final body of evidence drawn upon to support the Creolist Hypothesis involves study of known West African-influenced creoles. Similarities between these languages and Black English are best explained by the Creolist Hypothesis for Black English origin. An example of this argumentation is found in work on *say* and *se*. Use of *say* and *se* is found in several West African influenced creoles including San Andrés Island Creole (28-30), Jamaican Creole (31), Nicaraguan English (32-34), and Guyanese Creole⁴⁰ (see Appendix A, map 2).

(28) Me hear the talk *say* you gwain. (Frajzyngier, 1984)

(29) An the news meet him lang di road, *say* in dead. (Frajzyngier, 1984)

(30) Dey claim *say* he kill himsel. (Frajzyngier, 1984)

(31) Ruoz-dem tel im *se* a Klaris mash di pat. (Bailey, 1966)

‘Rose and others told her that it was Claris (who) broke the pot.’

³⁷ Justification for calling this a tense will be provided in the section on tense and aspect marking.

³⁸ There are some forms that may show remote time in Conventional Classroom English: *spilt*, *leapt*, *swept*, *crept*, *wept*, *learnt*, *burnt*, *built*, and *burst*. However, most of these are archaic and do not have the full flavor of remote time in Black English.

³⁹ Italics indicate stress.

⁴⁰ All of these creoles are English-based. Uncovering similarities between West African-influenced creoles with different bases (e.g. French and English) and Black English provides even more powerful evidence for it assures that the similarities are not simply the result of the manner in which English creolizes.

- (32) Him believe se I no coming back. (O'Neil, 1990)
- (33) She said to me se you know I like to hear some Nancy story. (O'Neil, 1990)
- (34) I wouldn't know se Elba get the children-dem sick again. (O'Neil, 1990)

These forms are also found in Gullah, a language spoken on the South Carolina Sea Islands which many linguists believe is much like very early Black English.⁴¹

- (35) I hear say... (Dillard, 1972)
- (39) I think say... (Dillard, 1972)
- (40) I know say... (Dillard, 1972)

They are also found, although relatively less frequently, in Black English.⁴²

- (41) They told me say they couldn't get it. (Rickford, 1977)

These forms function as complementizers, roughly equivalent to 'that.' They are not found in any other dialects of English nor are they found in English-based creoles with different languages of influence.⁴³ The only plausible explanation, then, is that these forms represent a common manifestation of the West African substratum.

The compilation of these different types of evidence provides strong support for the Creolist Hypothesis and has led it to be the theory most widely accepted by linguists. Nonetheless, there remains a fair amount of debate on the topic, both from inside and outside of the theory's supporters. While it is unlikely that these matters will ever be completely resolved, they continue to make valuable contributions to the field, for in order to fully understand the nature of Black English, it is necessary to take into account all the forces which have gone into its creation.

Divergence

Regardless of what origin theory one espouses, there can be no question that for the last several hundred years Black English has been without exposure to some of the forces that went into creating it. This, combined with increased exposure to many other English dialects has driven the assumption that Black English is becoming increasingly like the English of most other

⁴¹ The importance of Gullah in the debate over Black English origin cannot be overstated.

⁴² Dillard (1972) claims that say is used as a complementizer only by older speakers of Black English but Rickford (1977) reports its use with speakers as young as twenty.

⁴³ The actual origin of these forms has been contested. Most convincing is Frajzyngier's analysis that they are the result of a lexical rule common to many West African languages that the complementizer is derived from the verb meaning 'say' (pe in Yoruba, be in Ewe, etc.). In English-based creoles, then, the complementizer is say.

Americans. There has been, as Ronald Butters reports, a “widely acknowledged historical trend toward linguistic convergence” (Butters, 1989, p. 1). Indeed, linguists using a variety of methods, including study of slave narratives, agree that at least until recently Black English has been gradually becoming more like white vernaculars (see any relevant literature written before 1985.)⁴⁴

The solidity of convergence evidence drawn from the era of slavery into the twentieth century has well entrenched the notion of convergence. Quite possibly this is reinforced by the more general perception among many that black and white *cultures* are increasingly convergent and “integrated.”⁴⁵ In recent years, however, as this assumption has been reevaluated, questions have arisen about the direction of the relationship between black and white dialects.

The last seventy-five years have seen tremendous demographic shifts in the African-American population. While the earlier part of this shift may indeed have led to increased interracial exposure, the latter portion has seen definitive isolation of large numbers of blacks. Bailey and Maynor explain,

The effects of the Great Migration, then, are a drastic relocation of the black population into homogeneous and relatively permanent ghettos characterized by spatial segregation and economic stagnation.

(Bailey and Maynor, 1987, p. 467)

Urban demographics can now be characterized by pockets of African-Americans with little or no contact with other races (the exception in some cases being Latino and Asian populations). These areas are not only predominantly black, but also predominantly poor. Working and middle class African-American families, particularly in the last twenty-five years, have moved out of the mixed-class neighborhoods where they had previously lived (Wilson, 1991). An increasingly small

⁴⁴ An important, but often neglected qualification should be made about the direction of this movement. To say that Black English is “moving toward” many white vernaculars is not to say that white vernaculars are somehow stagnant as Black English alone changes to meet them. Instead, both dialects are changing, but in such a way as to eventually converge to a single dialect. This assessment relies on two phenomena: First, the influence of both dialects on each other and second, regional and other language change affecting both black and white vernaculars concurrently.

⁴⁵ The assumption of convergence was driven by other considerations as well. Perhaps most significantly, the rising educational level of African-Americans, and the accompanying augmentation of exposure to Conventional Classroom English. Another consideration worth noting is the effect of mass media. Some may suggest that exposure to mass media, presenting almost exclusively in white vernaculars and Conventional Classroom English, would serve to homogenize the Americans’ speech. However, there is some reason to think that this is not the case. In fact, Labov reports that many linguists consider local accents in general to be becoming more distinct from one another in recent years.

number of middle class African-Americans live or have extensive contact with African-Americans of the lower classes.

The newly emerging social conditions of lower-class African-Americans have a number of potential cultural implications including many in the domain of language. Driven by the nature of these conditions, which they saw as largely consistent with the environment normally responsible for linguistic divergence, several linguists have begun to investigate the possibility that convergence of black and white vernaculars has ceased, and that the dialects are now actually diverging, or independently becoming more distinct from one another.

As explained, until recently the convergence of black and white vernaculars was a notion heavily grounded in the assumptions of both linguists and the public at large. As a result, it was clear from the beginning that the burden of proof for divergence would be great, and would rest squarely with the proponents of the theory. Heeding the call, two major groups of linguists, one in Philadelphia and one in Texas, worked concurrently but independently to produce data suggesting divergence. The most extensive research project on the topic was commissioned to William Labov of the University of Pennsylvania by the National Science Foundation. In the spring of 1985, after three years of research, the project's report, "The Influence of Urban Minorities on Linguistic Change," was published. Among the major findings:

The results of our analyses show a Black English vernacular that is more remote from other dialects than has been reported before...We also believe that Philadelphia reflects a national trend in the Black community toward continued linguistic divergence. The differences appear to us to be increasing...There is evident that, far from getting more similar, the Black vernacular is going its own way.

(Labov, quoted by Stevens, 1985)

Following the lead of reporter William Stevens of the *New York Times*, the project's findings were disseminated not only to the academic community, but to the public at large. The work was published in over 157 domestic and foreign newspapers and was the subject of a number of television programs (Labov, 1986).

As could be expected when the mass media obtains a story on a topic as complex and volatile as this, there was a great deal of journalistic oversimplification and sensationalism. A number of papers drew conclusions from the findings far more extreme than was warranted. The *San Juan Star*, for example, reported that,

A new study by a University of Pennsylvania linguist concludes that English spoken by black and whites in this country is diverging so rapidly that it may lead

to 'a permanent division' between the races.⁴⁶

(*San Juan Star*, May 19, 1985)

The underlying tone of reporting can only be described as alarmist. The headline for a Washington Post article read, "Black-White Schism in Speech Seen Widening: Linguist Reports Dangerous Drift" (April 2, 1985).

This manner of reporting and the initial public reaction to it were disturbing to a number of linguists. While they did not necessarily dispute the actual findings of Labov and others, they questioned the conclusions drawn from them and more significantly, the presentation of these conclusions to the public at large. Fay Vaughn-Cooke, a leader in the group who rejects the divergence hypothesis, deemed such presentation premature and irresponsible:

Given the important social implications of Labov's claims, the enormously powerful medium used to disseminate them, and the alarming questions they provoke, Labov should have recognized that he had a special responsibility to present impenetrable and irrefutable evidence to support them.

(Vaughn-Cooke, 1987, p. 14)

Others have focused on the dangerous misrepresentation to which such material is subject in the press and the larger public arena:

We should not lose sight of the implications of how the media can use data, whether correct or incorrect, to play in the hands of other, larger agendas... I would suggest that the recent media accounts provide all the evidence that one would need to say, 'Let's cut programs that will support education for black and poor children.'

(Taylor, 1986)⁴⁷

The presumption was that the government and the public would take such findings to mean that despite significant improvements in the education and economic conditions of African-Americans in the last century, they are actually "talking worse" than before.⁴⁸

Ronald Butters, whose seminal work The Death of Black English provides an extensive chronicling of the divergence controversy, puts the above objects into perspective where linguistics proper is concerned,

...the alarmist nature of the arguments and the misguided popular conclusions that

⁴⁶ Labov actually said, "Our results can be seen *as signals of* the dangerous drift of our society toward a permanent division between black and white..." (Labov, 1985, p. 3, emphasis added).

⁴⁷ Panel Discussion at the Fifteenth Annual Howard University Communications Conference. February, 1986. Washington D.C.

⁴⁸ Not all those who have questioned divergence hold Labov responsible, "I do not mean to hold Labov (and the other framers of the divergence hypothesis) responsible for the conclusions that amateurs... might come to" (Butters, 1989, p. 192).

have been drawn from them should not obscure the importance of the actual linguistic research that has been done in pursuit of the divergence controversy and in studies of variation in general which have centered upon the research teams in Texas and Philadelphia with which the divergence hypothesis is most frequently associated.

(Butters, 1989, pp. 192-3)

Indeed, linguistic evidence in support of divergence derives from several interesting bases:⁴⁹

First, some studies suggest a failure of Black English to participate in phonological regional changes affecting white speech (Graff, Labov, and Harris, 1986; Labov, 1966; et al). Second, there is work documenting the reanalysis or redefinition of certain items in Black English (see e.g. Myhill and Harris, 1983). Third, particular forms unique to Black English are reported to be used with greater frequency in recent years (see e.g. Bailey and Maynor, 1987). Fourth, psycholinguistic data has been collected suggesting an increasing ability among Americans to distinguish between black and white speakers in listening tasks (see e.g. Graff, Labov, and Harris, 1983).

After the explosion of attention to divergence in 1985, formidable criticisms have been waged against nearly all of the studies in the framework described above. Fay Boyd Vaughn-Cooke provides the strongest indictment,

I've argued that the divergence hypothesis advanced by Labov and his colleagues is uninformed and simplistic, and that it cannot provide a coherent account of language change in Black English. Moreover, the data presented as evidence for this hypothesis are inappropriate. They lack time depth and are thus incapable of revealing facts about the details of linguistic change.

(Vaughn-Cooke, 1987, p. 32)⁵⁰

Vaughn-Cooke has been joined, although perhaps with less vehemence, by several other linguists in questioning the hypothesis (see e.g. Rickford, 1987, Wolfram 1987, and Butters, 1989.)

Indeed, persuasive arguments have been provided by researchers on both sides of the controversy.

As the heat of the mid 1980's debate has subsided, compromise positions have arisen from the seemingly unmovable dialectic between theories of divergence and convergence. Ronald Butters represents such a compromise,

⁴⁹ Bailey and Maynor have, on several occasions, pointed out some things that the divergence theory *does not* hold. Two are particularly worth noting. First, the existence of divergence does not mean that black-white relations were somehow better in the past. Second, it does not mean that more blacks (i. e. and increased percentage) use Black English now than did in the past. There is no way for linguists to determine whether or not that is the case.

⁵⁰ This statement was actually made in 1985 at the N.W.A.V.E. XIV Panel Discussion, October 24, 1985, Georgetown University. It was reported in *American Speech* in 1987.

...in general, the history of American Black-White speech relations, at least since the Civil War, shows a continuing history of BOTH divergence and convergence.
(Butters, 1989, p. 4)

John Myhill elaborates,

If I were forced to take a guess now as to what the actual situation is, I would say that probably black and white vernaculars are diverging in some ways and converging in others, and the extent of divergence/convergence varies widely, depending upon who we take as representing typical speakers of BEV [Black English Vernacular].

(Myhill, 1988, p. 320)

Myhill's position grows out of the important complication, largely left out of the initial reporting of the debate, that only the speech of those African-Americans who have little personal contact with whites seems to be exhibiting divergence. The speech of some groups may be diverging while the speech of other groups may not.

John Baugh extends this notion of diversity within Black English down to the individual level. He suggests that the unique social circumstances of African-Americans encourage different strategies of linguistic accommodation and thus, different speech patterns,

The competing linguistic norms [those of the "vernacular community" and those of the society at large] that are evident among adult blacks reflect the growing complexity of the speech community, which defies any theory of unidirectional linguistic change. As long as racism and poverty persist we will find a broad range of personal linguistic strategies employed by various black Americans.

(Baugh, 1988, p. 185)

Some of this diversity will consist of linguistic changes toward the standard, while other changes will serve to reinforce the independent vitality of the street vernacular.

(Baugh, 1988, p. 176)

The new tradition of divergence/convergence work shows a definite movement away from a dogmatic and myopic presentation of a monolithic theory of the direction of change in Black English.⁵¹ Baugh's notion of a "linguistic continuum" is far more realistic than the previous dialectic found in the field. While more difficult and complex, this new approach will surely yield more accurate, and ultimately more useful, information about where Black English is and where it is going.

⁵¹ Even some of those at the extreme ends of the original controversy have softened their positions somewhat. In a 1989 paper, for example, Bailey and Maynor state, "To suggest that black and white vernaculars are diverging, however, is not to suggest that they are diverging with respect to every feature and subsystem" (Bailey and Maynor, 1989).

Chapter II: Justification for Attention to Black English in Early Writing

Black English, as it has been defined in the previous section, differs in marked ways from Conventional Classroom English. The purpose of this section is to identify some of the implications of this difference for the early acquisition of literacy, specifically writing skills, among Black English speaking children.

Discussion will begin with an overview of the role of writing in various early literacy programs. A trend toward the integration of writing into these programs will be identified. Reasons that Black English might be expected at unprecedented levels in this early writing will be explained in the section following. Finally, discussion will turn to reasons that presence of these forms may have a significant effect on early literacy education.

Writing in Early Literacy Programs⁵²

In the last decade there has been a tremendous upsurge in the amount of writing done by young children in American schools. Literacy programs which emphasize the importance of writing in early literacy acquisition are gaining popularity and repute in both academic and professional communities. If this trend continues, students can expect to begin writing much earlier and do more writing than has previously been the case.

Many of these literacy programs stress the interconnections between reading and writing and the importance of oral language in informing both of these processes. Programs which rely on the interdependence of oral and written language will have special implications for speakers of Black English and other dialects which differ markedly from Conventional Classroom English.

The Nature of Young Children's Language

Little is known about the early development of writing generally, and there has been no substantial work on the early writing of Black English speaking children. Most likely, this can be attributed not only to a general neglect of early writing and early writing research, but also to a particular inattention to learning processes of African-American children. Furthermore, literacy movements encouraging extensive free writing among young children have been piloted, proliferated, and then researched primarily in suburban areas where Black English speakers are relatively rare.

A fundamental question in the study of the presence of Black English features in writing is

⁵² "Early" refers to kindergarten through third grade.

how their frequency compares to that found in speech. Those who have sought to respond to this question have concentrated primarily on post-elementary school students.⁵³ Their overwhelming consensus has been that features of Black English are significantly more common in oral language than in language that is written. Examining the writing of six college freshmen, Briggs (1969) found that “deviations from standard English” were more prevalent in speech than in writing. This finding was supported by Heard and Stokes (1975) who, also working with six college freshman, found few Black English features in writing but many such features in speech. These data were echoed by other researchers working with college students (Funkhouser, 1976; Terrebone and Terrebone, 1976). The few studies which have looked at the writing of younger students have yielded similar results. Working with fifth graders, DeStefano concluded that “because a nonstandard feature is found in speech does not necessarily mean it will also be found in the same student’s written work” (DeStefano, 1972, 557). Rayburn, studying a small sample of third and fifth graders, found that their writing resembled “standard English” more than did their speech (1974). It can be reported with confidence that, at least from third grade on, Black English features are more prevalent in speech than in writing. Children have already developed some knowledge of the dialect of writing and the ways that it differs from their native dialect.

A second question to which researchers have addressed themselves is whether or not the frequency of Black English features in writing decreases with years of schooling. This decrease is found in oral language. Loban (1966) followed a substantial number of students from kindergarten through ninth grade and found that the number of “deviations” from Conventional Classroom English decreased with age. In the first study to examine this question with regard to writing, Briggs (1969) identified the use of progressively fewer Black English features by ninth, tenth, and eleventh graders.⁵⁴ In Rayburn’s (1974) study less evidence of dialect was found in the writing of fifth graders than in that of third graders. Working with seventh and eighth graders, White (1985) concluded as others, that as years of schooling increases use of “nonstandard forms” decreases.⁵⁵

⁵³ Studies have not carefully separated age from grade level from years of schooling, despite the fact that these do not always overlap. Such a distinction in the future may prove to be informative.

⁵⁴ There were a few features whose use did not decrease substantially.

⁵⁵ Other studies have looked solely at Black English effects on spelling. Cronnell (1979) identified these effects and Groff (1978) showed that they decrease with age, at least in the middle school grades.

What factors influence or correlate with the presence or absence of Black English features in writing is , for the most part, unknown. As White reports,

Few of these studies [on the subject of Black English in writing], however, have made any attempt to connect the appearance of dialect characteristics to other linguistic and extra-linguistic factors.

(White, 1985, 31)

White himself only scratched the surface of this question. The occurrence of some features was found to correlate with the occurrence of others. Connections were found between the appearance of one or more Black English features and grade level, intelligence, syntactic maturity, and reading achievement. Yet there is much to learn about how these and other variables interact. Of particular interest may be how particular literacy programs and teacher characteristics (to be discussed later in this paper) influence the presence of Black English features in writing.

The above review of literature is representative of what is available.⁵⁶ Thus, to discuss what might be expected from the writing of early elementary school students can only be conjectured. The research presented above finds progressively fewer Black English features in the writing of older students. The corollary of this work suggests that the younger the student, the more Black English forms in her/his writing. Although the reasons for the ebbing of Black English features with age is unknown, it seems natural that young children would employ more Black English forms in writing. Younger children have had less exposure to Conventional Classroom English and the array of forces (e.g. teachers, attitudes, etc.) that support it. Young children are unaware of the alternatives and the consequences of using Black English features in their writing. This is not to say that there is ever as much Black English in children's writing as in their speech. Work by Troike (1972) among others suggests that from a very early age, far from that at which writing could be undertaken, children develop awareness of different dialects and registers of speech as well as the environments in which each are deemed appropriate. Nonetheless, it can be said with certainty that teachers which elicit writing from early elementary school students will encounter more Black English influence than those who work with older children.

⁵⁶ That is, the research which is available about syntactic, phonological, and morphological features of Black English speaking children's writing. Much work has considered style and content-oriented aspects of the writing of these children. The hope is that when educators can understand and look beyond surface features of Black English this research will receive wider attention.

Divergence Effects?

Increasingly frequent use of Black English is expected in the writing of children as they are younger. There is also some reason to predict the use of increasingly *different* Black English. This possibility rests on the divergence hypothesis described earlier in this paper. The claim of this theory is that Black English, at least in some communities and with respect to some features and subsystems, is becoming more different from other vernaculars and Conventional Classroom English than has previously been the case. If this is true, then the language which teachers' encounter in their students' writing (as well as in other domains) may be unprecedentedly unfamiliar and may lead to increased misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Such a possibility is only conjecture and will most likely remain so for decades, as the divergence hypothesis is far from proven. Nonetheless, this a consideration worth retaining as study of Black English and Education continues.

Teacher Knowledge Of Black English

The above discussion asserts that distinctly Black English features should be expected in unprecedented volume in the writing of young children. The following section contains predictions of how teachers might react to these forms and how such reactions might color children's early writing experiences.

Much research has described teachers' knowledge of and attitudes toward Black English. A review of this work will be useful in considering teachers' likely response to the dialect in written language.

The consensus of studies on this subject indicate that many teachers have little accurate knowledge about the nature of origin of Black English. Indeed, as McCullough explains, the notion that Black English is depraved has been quite widespread and there is no reason to think that teachers have been untouched by this thinking.

These results [of her study of teacher knowledge of and attitudes toward Black English] suggest that the doctrine of equality of all dialects espoused by linguists has not fully penetrated the value systems of teachers.

(McCullough, 1981, 67)

In a 1967 survey of thirty urban teachers, Roger Shuy uncovered a startling dearth of understanding of Black English. One teacher indicated that Black children have difficulty with pronunciation because they do not use their teeth, tongue, and lips. Johnson (1971) found that

many teachers believed that Black English is the result or cause of deficient cognitive development. Black English was identified by many as a simplified version of standard English reflecting "sloppy" "nonverbal" speech. "Incomplete" is another term commonly used by urban teachers to characterize Black English. In a 1973 study Blodgett and Cooper found that fully 20% of African-American teachers and 17% of white teachers described the dialect as such.⁵⁷

Data are not available on how many teachers have working knowledge of individual features of Black English. Those studies which have measured teacher knowledge, such as *The Test of Black English for Teachers of Bidialectal Students* (Hoover, Lewis, Ford, Knox, Hicks, Williams, and Politzer, 1979), have used them only in relative terms (e.g. to divide teachers into two groups -- one with relatively little knowledge of Black English and one with relatively more knowledge of the dialect.) What is known is that typical teacher education programs do not include training in the linguistics of Black English. In an ethnographic study of one teacher education program Rist (1973) reports a lack of training in "black linguistics." He concludes,

...when black children come to the public schools, they face a teacher, curriculum, and cultural system that deprecates the language they speak as "ghetto English" or "street talk"... The training of teachers reinforces the notion that there is really only one "correct" way to speak and that this is to use the "standard" dialect of the schools.

(Rist, 1973, 43)

A lack of knowledge of the features of Black English can lead to misunderstanding and misevaluation by teachers. An example of this phenomenon occurs in the case study portion of this paper and will not be given here. It is seconded, however, with quantificational research indicating that ignorance of Black English can lead to misdiagnosis of reading difficulties (Tovey, 1979; McCullough, 1981) and other errors in practice. While no studies have looked at ill-conceived writing miscue analysis, it is certainly predicted on the basis of research on other aspects of teacher practice.

Teacher Attitudes Toward Black English

Few studies have sought a link between teacher knowledge of Black English and their attitudes toward the dialect. Such a relationship is not unexpected, however, and has been confirmed in work by McCullough,

The findings further imply that teachers who have received some information or

⁵⁷ The research reviewed in this paragraph is, admittedly, relatively old. It could very well be that teachers of today are more knowledgeable about Black English. However, no studies are available to confirm this.

special training relative to English grammar and linguistics and/or nonstandard dialects have more positive regard for children who speak Black Nonstandard English and their dialect than those who have not had the benefit of such training.
(McCullough, 1981, 91)

Similarly, Piestrup (1973) found that teachers with greater knowledge of the culture, interests, and language structure of Black English speaking students yielded greater language achievement scores from the students than did other teachers. The scarcity of teacher knowledge of Black English, then, results in negative attitudes toward the dialect and ultimately, lower student achievement.⁵⁸

Teacher attitudes toward Black English speakers have been measured in a range of domains.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, studies are often unclear about what constitutes a Black English speaker as opposed to a speaker of another dialect or dialects. Several studies have used race alone as the determinant of a student's linguistic usage. In many urban classrooms this is probably not terribly inaccurate but, as discussion in the "Terminology" section of this paper explains, there are many difficulties with identifying a speaker of Black English solely on the basis of race. Many studies have compared attitudes toward Black English speakers with attitudes toward white speakers. Again, this is theoretically unsound for it confounds the issue of linguistic usage with that of race and often, social class as well. Practically speaking, however, obtaining a sample which controls for all variables except for dialect used is extremely difficult. Furthermore, such work might be deemed artificial, for undoubtedly attitudes about race and class are *intrinsically* linked to attitudes toward Black English.

Teachers' perceptions of students' linguistic abilities are affected by whether or not the student is a speaker of Black English. Williams and Whitehead (1973) found that teachers were less confident of Black English speaking students' present and potential linguistic abilities than those of the "standard English" speaking students with which they were compared. In a study by Crowl and MacGinitie (1974) teachers rated the quality of oral answers provided by Black English speakers significantly lower than for "standard English" speakers despite no difference in the number of correct responses provided by both groups. Teachers in a study by Woodsworth and

⁵⁸ This is not intended to imply that simply educating teachers about Black English would be enough to eradicate negative attitudes toward the dialect. It would, however, be a promising beginning.

⁵⁹ The following review of literature does not include information about the age of the students studied. It is not known whether or not this correlates with teacher attitudes. In addition, the review does not include descriptions of the teachers with regard to race or social class. There are a number of studies which have sought attitudinal differences along these lines, but no comprehensive conclusion can be stated. There seems to be a complex interaction between a teachers' race, social class, school environment, and other factors.

Salzer (1971) rated white males significantly higher than black males presenting oral reports of the same content, syntax, and lexicon. In terms of overall language performance teachers were similarly prejudiced, rating black students (dialect not accounted for) lower than white in oral language performance (Naremore, 1971). Correspondingly, teachers (79% of white and 37% of black) reported that “language subjects (such as spelling, composition, and reading) seem to be more difficult for dialect-speaking than for non-dialect speaking children” (Blodgett and Cooper, 1973).⁶⁰ Overall, teachers’ hold more negative impressions of the linguistic abilities of speakers of Black English.

Teachers’ derogatory attitudes toward Black English speakers extend far beyond the realm of language. In work by Williams and Whitehead, teachers considered Black English speakers less confident and enthusiastic than white “standard English” speakers. Hewett (1971) found that prospective teachers rated “nonstandard speakers,” both black and white, lower on scales of personality traits and socioeconomic success. In Blodgett and Cooper’s 1973 study teachers rated Black English speakers lower in intelligence than white students (dialect not accounted for) possessing similar intelligence scores. Harber and Beatty (1978) and Calfee and Drum (1978) found that teachers rated Black English speakers lower than comparable white students not only in social class and intelligence, but also in likelihood of excelling academically. In another study, blacks, whites, and Mexican Americans whose speech was judged by teachers to be more “nonstandard” were expected to perform worse academically than those with “more standard” speech (Williams et. al., 1972)

Negative teacher evaluations of and expectations for Black English speakers are potentially devastating to Black English speaking students. The level of teacher expectations for students has been identified as perhaps the single most important teacher characteristic influencing students’ success in school. Not only is the child’s achievement in school affected, but also her/his self-concept beyond academic settings. With regard to language, a long line of research suggests that students internalize negative attitudes and project them onto their whole selves (Tucker et. al., 1969; Labov, 1964; et. al.). Such a process can easily be imagined given ethnographic accounts of teachers’ behavior toward Black English speaking students. Rist’s 1973 work tells of a teacher

⁶⁰ There is no such thing as a “non dialect-speaking” child, for everyone speaks a dialect (or several). It is assumed that the authors were referring with this term to children who do not speak Black English.

who repeatedly told several kindergarten students “not to open their mouths until they learn[ed] to talk right” (Rist, 1973, 80). It is not difficult to understand how a Black English speaking child’s academic and personal life is adversely affected by teacher’s attitudes toward their language.

Chapter III: Verbal Morphology

The aim of this section is to describe tense and aspect marking in Black English.⁶¹ The description will serve as a basis on which to analyze the writing samples discussed later in the paper.

Methodology

The methods used to research material presented in this section have two basic components. First, a review of literature on the relevant subsystems was undertaken. Priority was given to research conducted on Philadelphian speakers when it was available. In addition, every effort was made to use or at least confirm data from sources written within the last decade. A second aspect of the methodology was designed to clarify information presented in the literature and to investigate particular characteristics of forms used in the Philadelphia area, Chester in particular. For these purposes, three informants were employed. All three were college-aged and native speakers of Black English. Each was a fluent speaker of Conventional Classroom English as well. One was born and raised in Northwest Philadelphia, the Germantown area. One lived part of her life in Chester (late adolescence on) and part of her life in another, nearby area in Metropolitan Philadelphia. The final informant was born and raised in Chester.

The informants were asked for judgments and general intuitions about meaning. The first informant also helped to develop example sentences when they were in need of improvement.

As further discussion will demonstrate, several pieces of information gathered from informants well enriched the material drawn from the literature. Several findings merit further investigation. This type of work may have a significant contribution to make toward understanding Black English.

The reasons for the novelty of information provided by the informants was the methodology used in working with them. Most, if not all, research on Black English since the beginning of study of the dialect has employed a quantificational approach.⁶² Through interviews, taped speech, and participant observation, *spontaneous* productions have been recorded, quantified, and statistically analyzed. This informs linguistic description and analysis by indicating

⁶¹ *Tense* refers to the time of the action of the verb, for example, whether the action takes place in the past or present. *Aspect* refers to the manner of action of the verb, for example, its duration, repetition, or the extent of its completion.

⁶² John Holm (1984) provides an insightful discussion of the current preoccupation with quantificational methods (although his discussion looks at different issues than this one.)

what is actually said, in what contexts it is said, and how often it is said. Given good field research techniques this holds true even for highly stigmatized forms. However, contrary to the impression given in the literature, there are also disadvantages to this approach. Most notably, it does not allow for the establishment of grammatical margins for Black English. What is *not* grammatical? What is questionably grammatical? Such information is highly valuable to linguists examining Conventional Classroom English, but it seems to be lost on linguists who examine the grammar of nondominant dialects. A second drawback of this methodology is that it forces the determination of meaning through induction. Induction, in fact, reasoned by researchers who often cannot rely on their own judgments (as linguists of Conventional Classroom English often do). Much may be missed by the absence of a metalinguistic component of the description of Black English.

The forms under discussion will be treated within a fairly conventional framework of verbal morphology, with two major delineations -- tense marking and aspect marking. There will be subdelineations of present, past, and remote times, perfective, progressive, and habitual aspects.

At the close of each section there is an appraisal of the depth of difference between the Black English subsystem discussed and that of Conventional Classroom English. These appraisals are set on a theoretical continuum representing linguistic distance between the two dialects. They are intended to provide a perspective that may be useful in considering the features with regard to acquisitional implications.

Justification for Choosing this Subsystem

The decision to focus on tense and aspect marking in particular was a deliberate one. It was driven by five major points: First, Black English forms falling under the rubric of verbal morphology are among the most common observed in the writing samples which have been studied (i.e. of fifth graders and above.) DeStefano found that "nonstandard" verb forms accounted for 72% of all nonstandard forms in speech and 58% of all nonstandard forms in writing (DeStefano, 1972, 554).⁶³ Second, this area of syntax includes forms unquestionably unique to Black English. Consider the comments of William Labov,

I think that the critical areas in syntax revolve around the sentences with be, been, be done, been done. In other areas, there is no perceivable difference between the

⁶³ A hypothesis which may explain this discrepancy will be proposed later in this paper.

syntax of BEV and other southern dialects.⁶⁴

(Labov, 1992, personal communication)

Third and relatedly, verb forms can lead to true misunderstanding between speakers of Black English and others (e.g. teachers). Consider

(1) I *been* done my homework. (Duke)⁶⁵

A teacher unfamiliar with Black English may not understand the meaning of this utterance -- 'not only is my homework done but it has been done for a long time' (and connotatively, 'it is unreasonable for you to even think that I just finished it.')

Fourth, Black English's verbal morphology is one area which could be misleading to uninformed teachers, even in such a way as to engender negative attitudes. Consider the absence of /t/ or /d/ to mark the past tense. Some teachers might take such a phenomenon to mean that Black English speakers have no concept of past tense although this is inarguably not the case (as will be explained in the tense section.)

Finally, some of the critical divergence data focuses on tense and aspect marking, particularly use of *be* as a marker of the habitual aspect and the use of the -s morpheme to mark the historical present.

I. Description of Tense Marking

Conventional Classroom English has two morphological tenses, present and past.⁶⁶ Black English also has these two tenses, although its morphological marking of them differs. Additionally, Black English has a construction referred to as "remote time". It is unclear whether this construction should be considered a tense or an aspect. At present I believe tense is the best, but perhaps not ideal, category for the construction so it too will be discussed in the tense section of the paper.

A. Present Tense

The verbal paradigm for present tense in Conventional Classroom English reads as follows:

	Singular	Plural
1st person	-Ø	-Ø
2nd person	-Ø	-Ø

⁶⁴ I do not completely agree, but this extreme only strengthens the selection of tense and aspect marking for examination.

⁶⁵ Utterances which I have heard in spontaneous speech are marked with my name only, as they have not been published.

⁶⁶ In English future time is indicated by modals. Thus it will not be discussed in this section of the paper.

3rd person -s -Ø

At an earlier time in the history of English there was a more complex present tense inflectional system including such forms as goest (2nd person singular). Now, however, only 3rd person singular has an overt marker in the present tense. Because the only basis for the usage of this morpheme is the person and number of the verb's subject, it can be referred to as a *verbal agreement* or *concord* marker.

The paradigm for the present tense in Black English looks like this, where “/” means alternating with:⁶⁷

	Singular	Plural
1st person	-Ø/-s	-Ø/-s
2nd person	-Ø/-s	-Ø/-s
3rd person	-Ø/-s	-Ø/-s

As it stands this paradigm is not as descriptively informative as might be desired. Thus the nature of the alternation between -Ø and -s will be explored.

There are some general tendencies in the conditioning of -Ø and -s worth noting. The phonologically realized morpheme (-s) is more likely to appear in the 3rd persons than elsewhere. Also, one is more likely to hear this morpheme used on verbs whose subjects are singular (Baugh, 1983).

Based on my own observations in Chester, I propose another possible tendency relating to the use of -s. That is, it seems that some verbs have a particular affinity for -s. Both say and got, according to my informal and undocumented exposure to Black English, take -s far more often than other verbs in all persons and numbers.⁶⁸ Confirmingly, when informants were asked about the sentence

(1) I says he crazy.

all three reported that says is not only acceptable but the preferred or “normal” form.⁶⁹ Another

⁶⁷ Be is sometimes used to indicate simple present as in “He be here” (Baratz and Shuy, 1969). This will be discussed in the section on be.

⁶⁸ I recently came across a curious phrase from Walt Wolfram, “the relative nonuse of -s with the verb say in VBE [Vernacular Black English]” (1990, p. 129). I have no idea on what this is based, so I cannot investigate it although I would like to given the ubiquitous production of -s on say which I have witnessed.

⁶⁹ This may be the result of the inherently narrative nature of this type of utterance. (See later discussion for the relevance of narrative contexts to -s.)

verb which seems to have this affinity for -s is got. One informant, RH, reported that gots everywhere is “in vogue”. Interestingly, this affinity seems to apply to got lexically and not semantically.⁷⁰ Both the got that means possess as in

(2) I gots me a new car. (Duke, approved)⁷¹

and the got that expresses necessity as in

(3) I gots to get there [to a party]. (Duke)

appear with -s.

Aside from these inclinations, however, whether -Ø or -s is used is relatively unpredictable. Working on a corpus of Southern data from the 1930's, Poplack and Tagliamonte (1991) get variability in all persons and numbers (except for 2nd person plural where they have no data.) They also find -s on verb contexts which typically do not show inflection at all such as

(4) I don't hardly walks out.” (Poplack and Tagliamonte, 1991)

They report variation on the same verb even within an individual's speech:

(5) When I pray, I pray for everybody who's in danger. I prays for the people.

(Poplack and Tagliamonte, 1991)

Without exception (that I am aware of) those working on more recent Black English has found similarly strong variability.

Even without a spontaneously generated data base variability was found. Consider that at least two out of three of the informants were comfortable with the following:

(6) I plays it all the time.

I goes out nearly every day.

You plays that shit too loud.

You learns fast.

She go to the store every morning.

She talk a lot.

(of course, none of these forms are obligatory -- they could say play, go, play, learn, goes, and talks respectively.) However, the corollary was not be true. There were some cases in which the informants could only get the -Ø manifestation:

⁷⁰ *Semantics* refers to the meaning of words and phrases.

⁷¹ This indicates that the sentence was composed and deemed acceptable by native informants.

(7) * You knows who she is, don't you?

* We celebrates every time they win.

I have not found any other work on this element of Black English which claims that or explains why certain uses of -s are considered ungrammatical. This is probably due to the fact that most research on -s relies on spontaneous productions rather than speaker judgments on constructed examples. The findings here only deepen the question which other researchers have been asking - what conditions the use of one form (-s) over the other (-Ø) in the present tense verbal paradigm of Black English?

There have been several distinct approaches to explaining the behavior of the present tense -s morpheme:⁷²

The first approach and perhaps the most obvious, is to account for the presence or absence of -s on phonological grounds⁷³. This is certainly appealing given that Black English sometimes deletes word final -s in two other major constructions -- plural marking and possessive marking.

(8) three books --> three book_s

(9) my brother's book --> my brother_s book

Unfortunately, the approach loses its attractiveness quickly for there is no phonological environment which unquestionably conditions the presence or absence of -s in any of these three constructions. Some researchers have identified slight tendencies, but nothing worthy of being the sole analysis for the behavior of -s.

A second approach is commonly referred to as *hypercorrection*. Bickerton defines this as "tacking on a morpheme which [a speaker] knows is characteristic of the standard language but which he has not yet learnt to use correctly" (Bickerton, 1975, p. 134). If true, this analysis would explain the use of the -s morpheme in persons and numbers other than 3rd singular (as well as in nonfinite contexts). However, it is predicated on two questionable assumptions. First, it depends on the notion that a user of -s is not aware of the person and number with which the morpheme is used in most vernaculars. This is probably not true of many Black English speakers, particularly those (most, I imagine) who are proficient in one or more of these vernaculars (in

⁷² I am indebted to Poplack and Tagliamonte (1991) for the basic framework used to characterize most of these approaches.

⁷³ There has also been at least one attempt (Fasold, 1972) to account for the variation on nonphonological grounds such as collective vs. noncollective subject of the verb. He found no significant effects.

addition to Black English.) Second, for hypercorrection to be an adequate analysis, -s must occur primarily in contexts that encourage hypercorrection. Thus, one must expect to find it more often in formal and unfamiliar situations. However, data has not borne this out. Baugh (1983) finds that -s is slightly more likely among unfamiliar but not completely limited thereto. Labov (1969) found greater use of -s, in persons and numbers other than third singular, in informal situations than Fasold (1972) did in informal contexts. Thus, the hypercorrection is, at best, problematic.

As a complement to synchronic approaches, a number of linguists have turned to the origins and history of Black English to explore -s usage. Some interesting theories have arisen from this work. One comes from Schneider (1983). He suggests that -s variability is the result of the linguistic models to which slaves were exposed. This argument is based on the fact that the dialects represented by (the often newly-settled) whites varied in their concord systems. For example, in Northern British -s obtained throughout the verbal paradigm -- in Southern British -Ø dominated. The slaves, Schneider claims, learned the system to which they were exposed. Then, as standardization set in, the decline (or increase?) of -s would proceed according to the situation in that particular region. In support of this theory, the rates of -s usage in Early Black English did vary greatly according to region. With the tremendous passage of time and movement of African-Americans, however, it seems impossible to productively trace these variations to any present day tendencies.

Other theories stemming from a diachronic approach to -s consider a creole derivation of the form. Bickerton (1975) proposes that a creole preverbal aspectual marker, *doz*, was reduced and then, encouraged by the placement of -s in many white vernaculars, transferred to post-verbal position.⁷⁴ However, rather than taking on the grammatical function of verbal -s in English, the morpheme remained an aspectual marker signaling an event which is [-punctual]. Pitts (1981) argues against an aspectual function of Black English -s. Instead he contends that the morpheme is partially an emphatic marker. According to Pitts its use is favored by three factors:

When the durative aspect, phonological need to break clusters, and intensity converge, the conditions for variable -z suffix [what I call “-s”] appearance are optimal.⁷⁵

(Pitts, 1981, 309)

⁷⁴ This would be unusual for English, who tends to like linear attachment.

⁷⁵ *Durative* refers to an action which occurs over and over for a period of time.

While it seems premature to accept any single proposal for the history of -s̥ in Black English, there is an important point to be drawn from this research as a whole. Namely that -s̥ may be a single surface form with multiple meanings and functions resulting from influence beyond simply that of other vernaculars.

Beyond aspectual or emphatic functions, a third meaning for -s̥ has been proposed. This comes from Myhill and Harris' (1986) work on the behavior of -s̥ in the speech of five Philadelphian Black English speakers. Quantificational analysis of their corpus revealed a significant discourse context for -s̥ usage. It seems that -s̥ is strongly associated with narrative contexts. Furthermore, it is almost never found referring to the actual present. Myhill and Harris propose that this morpheme which formerly had no clear grammatical role has taken on the new function of indicating the Historical Present. Interestingly, one of the informants I worked with (KC from Northwest Philadelphia) reported that -s̥'s are "easy to get" [liable to be produced (grammatically)] in stories. Indeed, this theory is intuitively appealing on many grounds. However, even in the small number of speaker judgments obtained it is clear that it does not account for all of -s̥'s behavior. For example,

(7) You plays that shit too loud.

is not in the historical present, nor is

(8) Everytime I cook I sets the house on fire.

yet both were acceptable to informants. Several spontaneously generated sentences also do not occur in narrative contexts. Thus, while Myhill and Harris' findings are promising, again they reflect only a tendency, the strength of which will be determined by future research.

Discussion of analyses of this enigmatic morpheme can be concluded in no better way than with the (slightly exaggerated?) words of Poplack and Tagliamonte,

...two decades of research have not led to a consensus about the nature, let alone existence, of such a function [of the morpheme -s̥], nor of its origin. ...Indeed, to our knowledge, no single aspect of linguistic variation has been so widely studied with so little progress toward reaching a consensus

(Poplack and Tagliamonte, 1991, 276, 283).

Perspective:

In Conventional Classroom English, without a doubt, -s̥ serves the sole purpose of agreeing in person and number with a subject. This function is nonessential, as many systems in

languages are, because word order and the mandatory presence of a subject in English insure that the person and number of the subject of a verb will be known regardless of the presence of the agreement morpheme. This is illustrated by the fact that every person and number besides 3rd singular does not have an overt agreement marker. In fact, Joan Bybee (1985) reports that agreement is zero-marked 63% of the time in the large body of languages she studied.

In Black English the presence or absence of verbal $-\underline{s}$ is again unessential. While there are suggestions of aspectual or semantic functions of the morpheme, nothing is well-established enough to require or predict its use. Naturally, however, it will be important to continue to study the function of the morpheme in Black English in case it becomes (or already is) a unique and meaningful form in comparison to Conventional Classroom English.

B. Past Tense

Unlike the situation in the present tense, past tense inflection in Black English is relatively easy to describe and account for.

In Conventional Classroom English the past tense is marked for regular verbs with the suffix /t/ or /d/. Every indication is that Black English uses this same system and that only its surface realization differs (often differs, not always) due to phonological rules. Black English applies a rule of /t/, /d/ deletion which is not found to operate on past tense verbs in Conventional Classroom English. In its basic form the rule looks like this:⁷⁶

$$(9) \quad /t, d/ \rightarrow \emptyset / C _$$

(where preceding sibilants or stops and following consonants are most likely to condition the deletion of \underline{t} and/or \underline{d} .) Clearly, such a rule has a significant impact on the surface manifestation of the past tense. Indeed, Labov reports that “-ed in the past can be dropped as often as 90% of the time” (1972, p. 47).⁷⁷ The results look like this:

(10) He [w a k t] home. -- > He [w a k] home. (Baugh, 1983)

(11) Yesterday he [p l e d]. -- > Yesterday he [p l e]. (Language Files, 1988)

While these utterances and such a high deletion rate may lead some to the conclusion that Black English grammar does not have a past tense, several forms of evidence indicate that this is

⁷⁶ See Labov (1972) or Guy (1977) for a more thorough analysis.

⁷⁷ I have no idea how Labov arrived this figure or from what region's speech he drew it. Baugh (1983) found a probability of .353 that the form will be dropped in past tense contexts. In any case we can at least operate on the assumption that it is dropped more often than not.

not the case. First, some verbs, keep the /d/ morpheme with an -id pronunciation (e.g. wantid (wanted), wadid (waded)). Second, Black English has past tense forms (distinct from present tense forms) for a number of irregular verbs. Lost, kept, and did, for example, are all reportedly found in Black English.⁷⁸ This is strengthened by judgments of the informants I worked with that these sentences are ungrammatical with present tense forms:

- (12) * Yesterday I keep the radio on all night.
(√ Yesterday I kept the radio on all night.)
- (13) * Yesterday I lose the station.
(√ Yesterday I lost/los the station.)

Third, Black English productively applies the /t/ or /d/ morpheme to some verbs which do not take it in Conventional Classroom English (but which take an irregular form instead.) For example,

- (14) I *been* knowed it.⁷⁹ (Duke)

was acceptable to two of three informants asked and was spontaneously produced by a speaker of Black English in Chester, Pennsylvania.

Clearly, Black English *does* have a past tense, but one which is overtly realized only some of the time. It is most likely the case that the past tense marker is being generated (somewhere before surface structure) and then deleted.⁸⁰ Support for this analysis is drawn not only from the existence of past tense marking in the cases discussed above, but also from the fact that certain phonological environments are more likely to result in the deletion of the past tense morpheme than others. (And conversely, certain environments are less likely to engender deletion.)

Before leaving past tense marking, there is one additional comment worth noting. Unlike some other features of Black English (e.g. presence or absence of -s), /t/ and /d/ deletion does not seem to be affected by social context. A speaker is not significantly more likely to delete /t/ or /d/ with well acquainted members of the "vernacular black culture" than they are with unfamiliar interlocutors unfamiliar with this culture (Baugh, 1983, p. 98). Data such as these may be significant with regard to children's ease in adapting Conventional Classroom English forms.

⁷⁸ A noteworthy aside: Conventional Classroom English has a few verbs which are the same in the present and the past, for example hit and put. Black English follows the same pattern with these verbs. Furthermore, it has at least one additional verb which fits this paradigm -- say. Two of three informants accepts "Yesterday he say I ugly."

⁷⁹ Italics indicate stress.

⁸⁰ It is worthwhile to note that these rules are in no way obscure but common in English as well as other languages.

Perspective:

The difference between past tense marking in Black English and past tense marking in Conventional Classroom English exists mainly at the level of phonology. There are no semantic or grammatical implications of the difference. In this way it can be said to be relatively superficial and fall on the conservative end of the continuum of distance from Conventional Classroom English.

C. Remote Time Construction

The use of been in Black English has been referred to by at least six different terms: remote time been (Fasold and Wolfram), remote present perfect been (Labov), completive perfect been (Stewart), remote perfective been (Dillard), perfect phase been (Fickett), and stressed been (Baugh). Although these terms are by no means mutually exclusive, their variety is reflective of the range of disagreement over the nature and function of been. Two major issues are in question: stress (or lack of stress) on been and perfective meaning (or lack of perfective meaning) for been.

Without question been is found both stressed and unstressed in BEV. The point of debate is whether stress (or absence of it) has semantic implications. Fasold and Wolfram (1970) suggest that stress on been serves only to give emphatic meaning to that which is already denoted by the unstressed form. Dillard (1972), on the other hand, proposes that in at least one system in Black English, stress is used to distinguish between two beens -- one stressed, meaning remote time and another unstressed, with perfective meaning. In a second system, Dillard goes on, been means the same thing, remote time, whether it is stressed or unstressed (with no perfective aspect either way).⁸¹ It is important to note, as Baugh does (1983), that if Black English does use the single dimension of stress to determine completely different semantic content, it is alone among English dialects in so doing.

My work with Philadelphia informants has been far more clear-cut than past controversy over been would suggest it might be. Furthermore, it is supported by Rickford's (1975) work on been in West Philadelphia. There are two possible explanations for the relative clarity of these findings. First, if Dillard's suggestion that there are two systems is correct, perhaps Philadelphia simply sits on the extreme of one system rather than in the gray area between the two. Second, as asserted by Labov (1972) in comparison to New York City, been is more common in Philadelphia than in some other regions. In addition, Rickford, speaking of West Philadelphia and the South

⁸¹ If there are in fact two systems then some of the confusion over this form is explained.

Carolinan Sea Islands, reported, "I was able to draw on a wide range of conversational encounters in which *been*,⁸² supposedly rare, was frequently used" (Rickford, 1975, p. 165). Perhaps a larger data base has made tendencies in the use of *been* more obvious.

In Philadelphia stress on *been* is indeed phonemic. Stressed *been* indicates remote time, unstressed *been* does not (unless, that is, accompanied by adverbials or other modifiers which suggest relative temporal distance⁸³.) Furthermore, it appears that time adverbials are actually restricted from occurring with stressed *been* in a "single sentence intonation pattern" (Rickford, 1975). This fits nicely with the fact that my informants used time adverbials to gloss *been*:

(15) I *been* knowed it. gloss: "known it for a long time"

(16) I *been* liftin. gloss: "the liftin's been going on for a period of time, like months"

Such modifiers would have been redundant, or at least overkill, if included in the sentence with *been*, hence the restriction against them.

In examining the issue of perfectiveness in *been*, another important distinction arises between the stressed and unstressed forms. With unstressed *been* the implication is that the action has been completed. While this is also often the case with stressed *been*, as many researchers' terms for the item suggest, when stressed *been* appears with stative verbs or progressives of any kind there is no perfective meaning involved. Rickford illustrates this beautifully with the following minimal pair:

(17) She *been* married.

means to speakers of Black English that she has been married for a relatively long time and *is still married*. In the sentence

(18) She *been* married.

on the other hand, the interpretation is that she was married but *is no longer* (unless a specifier of some kind suggests differently.) The assertion that stressed *been* indicates *completed* action in remote time is true only for "a subset" of occurrences of the form (Rickford, 1975, 171).

The meaning of *been* without stress is also worth examining. The majority of the time unstressed *been* seems to indicate present perfect status. Two facts make this analysis highly

⁸² Italics indicate stress.

⁸³ Interestingly, working on spontaneously generated Black English, Rickford often found these types of signals with unstressed *been*. Perhaps this was another factor leading to researchers' confusion.

plausible. First, Black English can and very often does delete auxiliaries. The rule governing this deletion, as identified by Labov in 1969, is that whatever Standard English can contract, Black English can delete.⁸⁴ Therefore, an utterance like

(19) He has/He's been a teacher for fifteen years.

becomes

(20) He been a teacher for fifteen years.

where the been remains unstressed in both cases. In such contexts been in Black English is really no different from that of Conventional Classroom English. It only appears to have more prominence due to the absence of the auxiliary marking perfective aspect.⁸⁵ A second fact which makes the present perfect suggestion attractive is that when have is not deleted and appears with been, it has the same (low) level of stress.

(21) Cause I've been through it, I've been through them changes. (Rickford, 1975)

It seems reasonable to suggest that unstressed been in Black English is no different than the been of Conventional Classroom English.

There is an exceptional case worth discussing. In the Sea Island data Rickford claimed to found instances in which been stood where he claimed Conventional Classroom English would put was.

(22) I don't know if that snake been coil, or either was stretch out or what. (Rickford, 1975)

Unfortunately, this is the only example Rickford gives⁸⁶ and in this case was is not the only possible interpretation for been. Perhaps the speaker was saying the equivalent of:

(23) I don't know if that snake had been coiled or was stretched out or what.

The matter will have to be suspended until such time as more data is found. If it is indeed the case that unstressed been can occur in was-contexts then there is in fact a difference between it and the

⁸⁴ By implication, was and were are not deleted because they cannot be contracted. Phrases such as "How beautiful you are" also do not undergo deletion (cf. *How beautiful you're. *How beautiful you. (*Language Files*, 1988, 361.)

⁸⁵ Note that the same situation arises with the deletion of had, the past perfect marker. It too can be deleted leaving only been in the past perfect. This appears to happen much less often, in part, I suspect, because the past perfect is simply less common.

⁸⁶ Actually he does give one other. In it been is used with continuative a in a supposed was-context. At this point, however, understanding (mine and I think others') of the grammar of continuative a constructions is so fuzzy that they are probably not worth looking at for other phenomena.

unstressed been of Standard English.

At this point it can safely be said that Philadelphian Black English has two distinct beens -- one signaling remote time and one functioning like the been of Conventional Classroom English. The former constitutes a verbal dynamic currently not found in Conventional Classroom English or any other English dialects.⁸⁷

It is unclear whether researchers who have worked on the stressed been of Black English consider it an indicator of tense or aspect (mostly they circumvent the issue by calling it a 'construction'). Naturally, the answer to this question would depend on one's analysis of the meaning and function of the form. If, as some have suggested, it indicates completive or perfective meaning, there is good reason to call it an aspect marker. If, on the other hand, been talks solely about time, then tense seems the most logical delineation for the form.⁸⁸

Perspective:

Unlike the other forms considered thus far in this section, Black English been unquestionably constitutes a meaningful grammatical difference from Conventional Classroom English. It systematically indicates meaning which can only be suggested phrasally in Conventional Classroom English. This kind of feature is on the other end of a continuum from a feature such as /t/ and /d/ deletion in past tense making, which is less substantial.

II. Description of Aspect Marking

A. Perfective Aspect

1. Present and Past Tense Perfective Aspect

Conventional Classroom English has two markers for the perfective aspect. In the present tense the auxiliary have (has in 3rd person singular) is the perfective marker and indicates that the subject is currently in the state of having verbed in the past. The past tense perfective marker, had, is a level removed, indicating that there was a time in the past when the present perfect was true.

Black English uses both of these markers. They appear to be semantically and syntactically identical to those in Conventional Classroom English. Phonological processes, however, sometimes affect the surface realization of these forms.

⁸⁷ As noted earlier in this paper, there may be some parallels with forms such as spilt, lept, swept, crept, wept, learnt, burnt, built, and burst but I am not able to define them.

⁸⁸ I work from Joan Bybee's distinctions between tense and aspect. Briefly, "Aspect refers to the way in which the internal temporal constituency of the situation is viewed... Tense places the situation in time with respect to an established point in time either the moment of speech or some other point in time" (Bybee, 1985, 28).

As discussed in the previous section in regard to the remote time construction, Black English can and very often does delete auxiliaries, including have and had. Again, the general rule identified by Labov in 1969 is that whatever standard English (Labov's term) can contract, Black English can delete. Thus, the following utterances may be considered equivalent:

- (1) I have got it.
- (2) I've got it.
- (3) I_ got it. (Language Files, 1988)

This is not to say that one never finds these forms, either in full or contracted, in Black English. Rather, that both their (phonological) presence or absence is acceptable in the dialect.

Beyond have and had, Black English has another marker of the perfective aspect -- done. The word appears preverbally where Conventional Classroom English would have a perfective auxiliary.

- (4) You done spent up all your money, that's why! (Baugh, 1983)
- (5) I done forgot to turn off the stove. (Baugh, 1983)
- (6) They done sold all the Smokey Robinson tapes. (Baugh, 1983)
- (7) We done told him bout these pipes already. (Baugh, 1983)

It is ambiguous, from the data presented so far, whether done marks the perfective aspect for the present or the past tense. To determine whether or not this means that the form is appropriate for both present or past times, speaker judgments were elicited. Consider this scenario... A mother has just caught her child jumping on the bed. She has told him before not to do that. She says,

- (8) "I done tole you about that!"

Such an utterance is completely acceptable to speakers of Black English interviewed. Note that a comparable response in Conventional Classroom English would be

- (9) I have told you about that.

but not

- (10) * I had told you about that.

Now consider another scenario in which a speaker is telling a story...

- (11) "Dad shoulda been mad, he done tole me about that [before]."

This is acceptable to Black English speakers. An equivalent response in Conventional Classroom

English might read:

(12) Dad shoulda been mad, he had told me about that [before].

While have is possible here for some speakers, it is not preferred. This example also permits only the past perfect interpretation:

(13) So he went to where she was and got the nerve to lie to me... talkin' 'bout he done went to work. (Baugh, 1983)⁸⁹

Thus in Black English done can serve as a perfective marker in both the present and past tenses.

Beyond its function as a perfective marker, some linguists have suggested that done has an intensive meaning (e.g. Labov, 1972, 53). If this is the case, the “intensiveness” is certainly difficult to define. Informants I have talked with have no requirement for the *number* of times something must happen in order to employ done. In other words,

(14) She done tole' you about that.

Can mean she told him/her about that many times or just once. Furthermore, the informants did not suggest any emotive restrictions (e.g. only used in anger or frustration). Productions recorded by Baugh (1983) and others seem to run the gamut of feelings, purposes, and contexts. While there may well be some semantic connotations which tend to be *associated* with done, no large-scale analysis of productions has been able to pinpoint them.

2. Future Time Perfective Aspect

In Conventional Classroom English, the future perfect is formed periphrastically with a modal, will (present) or would (past) and a perfective marker, have (has in 3rd person singular.)

Black English also forms the future perfect in this way, although again the surface manifestation of the form may differ due to the deletion of will or would in contexts which allow contraction.

In addition, Black English can indicate the perfect aspect in future time with the use of done. In this construction the preceding element is be.

(15) I'll be done killed that motherfucker if he lays a hand on my child again.⁹⁰ (Baugh, 1983)

(16) They be done spent all my money before I even get a look at it. (Baugh, 1983)

⁸⁹ There are others as well.

⁹⁰ Note in this example that the 'll of will remains. There is a doubling of markers.

Again, emotive conveyances have been suggested,

It [be done] seems to be an analogue of the standard English future perfect construction with some specialized emotive connotations.

(Wolfram, 1990, 129)

Whether or not these connotations are restrictive (i.e. must be present in order for be done to occur) or predictive (i.e. mandate the occurrence of be done) is not settled.

Done lies somewhere in the middle of the continuum of distinctiveness of Black English features. Black English systematically marks an aspect that is also marked in Conventional Classroom English, but does so differently in some cases. It is not analogous to been, which indicates something not systematically indicated in Conventional Classroom English, nor is it simply a phonologically-determined difference in the way that past tense marking is.

A Note on Usage:

Although the literature suggests that use of done is common in Black English, its inclusion in this paper may be somewhat misleading. To the best of my knowledge done is not productive, at least among younger generations, in Chester. In three years of contact with children in Chester, including contact outside of the classroom context (e.g. on the playground) I have not heard done used by a single child. In addition, I have not found the form even once in writing. All of my informants, without provocation, suggested to me that they associate done with the speech of their grandmothers and not with people their own age or even their parents' age. Thus, for Chester at least, there is evidence to suggest that done is dying out or otherwise age-graded.

B. Progressive Aspect

In the progressive aspect the suffix -ing is found in both Conventional Classroom English and Black English.⁹¹ Both white and black vernaculars often delete the engma to produce -in' in progressive contexts and no vernaculars delete the -ing altogether. Thus, in regard to this marker of the progressive aspect there is no difference between black and white vernaculars and little difference between these dialects and Conventional Classroom English.

Another aspect marker, steady, although not precisely indicating the progressive aspect, best fits into the rubric of this discussion. This feature, unique to Black English, is not given a great deal of treatment in the literature as a whole. However, Baugh provides a lengthy description

⁹¹ Cases in which be is found before the verb and -ing to expressive the progressive aspect will be discussed in the be section of this paper.

and analysis of the form. According to Baugh, steady is a “predicate adverb with unique aspectual function of indicating that the action of a particular verb is conducted in an intense, consistent, and continuous manner” (Baugh, 1983, 87). It is normally found preceding a verb and -ing. It must occur with a subject noun phrase that is both animate and definite. In addition, it does not occur with verbs that are clearly stative.

Baugh reports that steady is only used in very familiar contexts with very familiar interlocutors. This may help explain why I have not heard the form at all among early elementary students in Chester. It is also possible, however, that the children do not produce the form, for I have not heard it on the playground either, where the children use many informal and/or stigmatized forms. I did hear the form used by an adult in Chester. On the telephone, a mother was recounting to me a nearby school’s policy of passing students (including her child) inconsiderate of their skills (or lack thereof).

(17) They were steady passin’ these children. (Duke)

(18) My son’s not gettin’ it and they steady passin’ ‘im. (Duke)

This speaker used steady in two utterances and did so in a manner consistent with that described by Baugh.

Regardless of the current status of steady in Chester, at which I can only conjecture, it is certainly the case that the form does not appear in the writing of third graders in the community. The construction will not be discussed further in this paper.

C. Be

The layout of this section will be quite different from that of the other tense and aspect sections. This inconsistency is unfortunate, but necessary for this particular topic.

Linguists have traditionally differentiated between two types of be. The first, so-called be₁, is no different from the be of Conventional Classroom English. It only appears to be different due to the deletion of elements prior to it. So, for example, the sentence

(19) I be there soon.

only appears to use be in a way unlike Conventional Classroom English. However, on closer analysis it is not be which is different but the preceding material:

(20) I will be there soon --> I’ll be there soon --> I_ be there soon.

(21) I would be there soon --> I’d be there soon --> I_ be there soon

These elements are sometimes deleted by the auxiliary deletion rule referred to at several points earlier in this paper. It leaves be to stand alone and appear to have greater prominence or an entirely different function.

Be₂ is not like the be of Conventional Classroom English.⁹² Rather, this form is used where Conventional Classroom English would have inflected forms of be. Be₂ is found with a range of following environments. It is found before a predicate adjective as in

(22) The coffee be cold. (Language Files, 1988)

before a predicate locative as in

(23) He be here. (Baratz and Shuy, 1969)

before a noun phrase as in

(24) They be the real troublemakers. (Baugh, 1983)

before a verb and -ing as in

(25) The teachers don't be knowing the problems like the parent do. (Baugh, 1983)

In the quantificational work that has been conducted on be thus far, the form has been shown to be relatively uncommon in the first three contexts identified above. According to work by Bailey and Maynor (1987) the form occurs in less than 20% of the time in these environments. The final context (preceding a verb and -ing), is more favorable toward use of be₂ for some speakers. Specifically, use of be in this environment seems to be substantially more common among younger generations of Black English speakers. Bailey and Maynor found that Texas children used be₂ in 42% of [___ verb + -ing] contexts whereas adults of the same community and educational level used the form in only 6% of these contexts. This disparity, at least in part, may be explained by age-grading. As Baugh (1988) points out, youth tend to be the most active users of the vernacular. However, it seems unlikely that this could account for the entirety of the difference, given that the children and adults used be₂ with equal frequency in other contexts.⁹³ Be₂ must be taking on a new role in the string with a verb and -ing.

That be₂ may be acquiring some novel syntactic or semantic characteristics is a possibility explored by many researchers. The most popular suggestion is that be is taking on the role of

⁹² There is some interesting work on the origin of this form and its relationship to features in several West African influenced pidgins and creoles. See for example Traugott (1979).

⁹³ Criticism of Bailey and Maynor's findings has been extensive but their work has certainly not gone unsupported. Several researchers, among them Sommers (1986), Myhill (1988), and Bailey and Bassett (1986) have produced data to support their claims. Divergence, at least to some extent, is likely at work here.

marker of the habitual aspect, where habitual is defined by Myhill as “an action which is done by the same subject more than once” (Myhill, 1988, 307). The following are examples sentences with be and a habitual context:

- (26) The office be closed on weekends. (Baugh, 1983)
- (27) He be eatin’ up my food sittin’ aroun’ gitten’ like a big fat rat. (Myhill, 1988)
- (28) Why I challenge her? ‘Cause she be makin’ me mad. (Myhill, 1988)
- (29) Whenever she be tired she be cross. (Language Files, 1988)

In Bailey and Maynor’s work, 77% of the uses of be(₂) with a verb and -ing were habitual in meaning. In Myhill’s (1991) study, 50% of the be + verb + -ing constructions conveyed habitual meaning. Adult rural Black English speakers in Bailey and Maynor’s study used be in only 6% of habitual utterances, employing inflected forms of the copula in the other 94%. The children in the study, in contrast, used be a full 77% of the time habitual meaning was involved. Myhill’s data on Philadelphian speakers also shows a high degree of be use in habitual contexts (50%). While be certainly occurs often in contexts which are not habitual, these data suggest an increasing association between the form and habitual meaning in some speakers’ Black English.

As this research was examined, a question arose about the preferred reading for a be sentence when that sentence was ambiguously habitual. In order to investigate this, sentence pairs such as the following were created...

- (30) She is freakin’. OR She freakin’.
- (31) She be freakin’.

Informants were presented with the sentences (e.g. 30 versus 31) and then asked, “Do these mean the same thing?” If they answered, “No”, which all three informants did, they were asked, “What is different about them?” All informants indicated that sentences like (30) mean she is doing it right now and sentences like (31) mean she is a person who does that regularly/on occasion. In the specific sentences above, (31) was said to describe a person who has a tendency to freak (but is not constantly freakin’).⁹⁴ These findings, if confirmed with a larger pool of informants and a variety of presentational methods, could point to a much stronger relationship between be and

⁹⁴ This fits nicely with Traugott’s (1979) claim that a sentence like “She be my mother” cannot refer to someone’s real mother because that person is *always* her mother. Rather, it can only refer to a person who *acts* as a mother on repeated occasions. (Although one can imagine its use when a real mother on acts like a mother only on occasion.)

habitual meaning than quantitative studies to this point have uncovered.⁹⁵ The assertion that be is simply an uninflected version of is/am/are with no semantic uniqueness would be decidedly debunked.

Perspective:

It is difficult at this point to tell where be₂ fits into the continuum of distance from Conventional Classroom English. If it does in fact systematically mark habitual meaning, it is significantly different from Conventional Classroom English. If not, it simply constitutes an alternative paradigm for inflection (or lack of inflection).

III. Description of Inflected Be

A. Absence of Inflected Be

As referred to several times in this paper, William Labov in 1969 proposed a general rule for absence of inflected be in Black English. Namely, that anything white vernaculars can contract, Black English can delete.⁹⁶ Thus, am, is, are, have, and had can all be absent given the appropriate context.⁹⁷

Like the others discussed in the paper, this rule activates variably. Some linguists have sought to identify particular contexts which favor or disfavor its operation. Baugh looked at such environments in his "Reexamination of the Black English Copula." He concluded that deletion of the copula is favored (but not required) by:

1. A following consonant.
2. A preceding pronoun (first suggested by Labov, 1972).
3. A following determiner and noun phrase (but not a noun phrase without a determiner.)

While figures are not available for all forms of inflected be, data collected by Baugh (1983) reveals a deletion rate for is and are near 50%.

Perspective:

⁹⁵ Traugott (1979) refers to the pair "He_ crying" versus "He be crying" and describes a semantic difference similar to this. However, she does not indicate on what data/methodology this is based.

⁹⁶ "Delete" is the term Labov uses. It implies that the form was generated and then affected by a phonological rule which deleted it. It is beyond the scope of this paper to determine whether this is the way the grammar operates for these forms. Thus, the noncommittal term "absence of inflected be" will be used.

⁹⁷ An example of an inappropriate context is "How beautiful you are." This does not allow contraction *"How beautiful you're." nor does it allow deletion in Black English (Language Files, 1988).

Deletion of inflected be presents an interesting problem for characterization on a continuum of distance from Conventional Classroom English. On the one hand, the feature is primarily the result of phonological processes and conditions. On the other hand, the result of these processes, the absences of an auxiliary or main verb, is syntactic.

B. Use of Is and Are, Was and Were

In about half of the cases in which they are possible, is and are, and probably other forms of inflected be, are absent. The other half of the time the items *are present*, either in full or contracted form. However, they may not appear in the persons and numbers in which they would be expected in Conventional Classroom English. As in the present tense paradigm for regular verbs, Black English does not have the same agreement marking system as does Conventional Classroom English. In Conventional Classroom English the following is the paradigm for inflected be in the present tense:

	Singular	Plural
1st person	<u>am</u>	<u>are</u>
2nd person	<u>are</u>	<u>are</u>
3rd person	<u>is</u>	<u>are</u>

Black English is not unvarying in this way. Specifically, Black English seems to be able to use both the paradigm above and another paradigm in which is is present in all persons and numbers.⁹⁸

In the past tense, inflected be in Conventional Classroom English abides by the following paradigm:

	Singular	Plural
1st person	<u>was</u>	<u>were</u>
2nd person	<u>were</u>	<u>were</u>
3rd person	<u>was</u>	<u>were</u>

Again, in Black English this paradigm is not required. Instead, speakers seem to be able to use was in any person or number.⁹⁹

Perspective:

This difference is not well-researched and is difficult to comment on. It appears that Black

⁹⁸ "Seems," that is, according to my observations. I have come across nothing in the literature that has presented this argument in this way.

⁹⁹ Again, based on my observations.

English simply has a different paradigm for what is, in effect, an already irregular verb. This does not constitute a semantic or significant grammatical difference.

IV. Description of Irregular Verbs

There is a scarcity of information on this topic. In arguing against any claim that Black English does not have a past tense, much has been made of the fact that Black English observes many irregular past tense verb forms in the same way as does Conventional Classroom English, for example, kept and told. Beyond this, however, little has been written. This may be because linguists have found that Black English is not distinct from Conventional Classroom English in these paradigms. It may also be the case that linguists have simply not investigated the subject. Samples found in the case study do show unConventional forms of some irregular verbs. However, there are a number of explanations for this which do not necessarily point to distinctiveness in Black English. This will be discussed in the case study.

Perspective:

Because there is so little information about irregular verbs in Black English, and because what is discovered will no doubt apply to a limited number of forms, this difference is to be considered unsubstantial, if at all.

Exhaustiveness

The above description of features should by no means be considered to be exhaustive. It does not include a review of everything that has been reported about Black English tense and aspect marking and certainly does not reflect everything that is distinctive about these subsystems in Black English. Arthur Spears states this well in an article looking at a newly discovered semi-auxiliary form, come:

Even though a substantial body of literature exists on Black English (BE), no prudent linguist would assume that all the features which set it off from other English dialects have been catalogued. Indeed, it is common knowledge that no language has been completely described, even those that have benefited from centuries of scholarly investigation.

(Spears, 1982, 850)

Scholars will continue to uncover new forms in Black English, and the use of already described forms will continue to evolve.

Chapter IV: Case Study

What follows from here is essentially a case study. Its intent is to demonstrate the kinds and extent of the Black English features a teacher might encounter in the free writing of early elementary school students.

Case Study Setting

This research was conducted in Chester, Pennsylvania. Chester is the oldest city in the state. It is located 30 minutes southwest of Philadelphia and as of 1990 had a population of 41,856 (R. Harris, 1991). Almost seventy-five percent of Chester's population is African-American. A significant additional percentage (unknown) is Latino.

Chester's African-American population emerged in much the same way as that in most Northern urban areas. It was first established (though on a small scale) by some of the early Great Migrations after the Civil War. Then, in an industrial boom shortly after World War II, large numbers of African-Americans settled in the area. African-American churches, lodges, schools, and businesses coexisted with those of the white, largely Eastern European population.

In the 1960's, the white flight phenomenon had a great effect on the racial composition of the city. Combined with a "baby boom" among the African-American population, this led to the establishment of Chester as a decidedly African-American area.

As the racial makeup of the city was changing, so too was its economic identity. The defense industry and other economic mainstays of the community were shut down or relocated. Chester quickly became a predominately poor, largely jobless area plagued by the same problems as those affecting the inner city of nearby Philadelphia and other major metropoli.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a comprehensive account of language use in Chester. Anecdotally, it appears that Black English is the primary language of communication in the city. Futhermore, given that the social conditions in Chester mirror those in Philadelphia and other major cities, it might be speculated that the Black English spoken in Chester is in fact diverging from white vernaculars in at least some respects. Thus, it may be the case that the educational implications of divergence discussed above are at work in Chester.

The writing which will be analyzed comes from a third grade class in one of Chester's elementary schools. The school itself, which will be termed "School X," is one of the smallest in Chester. It is considered among the "best" (public elementary schools) in the city. This reputation

is based on attendance, test scores, socioeconomic background of the students, and other factors.

The class with which I was involved began the year with thirty-nine students. Shifting of the students in mid-October led to a decrease in the class size to between thirty-two and thirty-four students, fluctuating with the gain or loss of students through moving, etc. A significant number of the students had been retained at least once. All but five of the students were African-American. Of the remainder, two were white (one a recent immigrant from Germany) and three were at least partly Latino. Well over half of the class received "free lunch." Much of the class can be classified as low income.

It would be appropriate, at this time, to characterize the teachers at School X, particularly their knowledge of and attitudes toward black English. Unfortunately, such a description is beyond what could be accomplished for this paper. Therefore, it can only be suggested that the findings reported earlier might be extended to account for Chester teachers. I can recount anecdotally that I have witnessed several teachers "correcting" their students' oral language in a demeaning way. I have also heard their language referred to by some School X teachers as "street talk" and "bad English." With the exception of my cooperating teacher, I saw no evidence that the teachers' attitudes were informed by an (accurate) understanding of Black English. No teacher inservice on Black English has been held in Chester that I am aware of. More than half of the teachers in School X have been teaching for over twenty years.

My contact with School X during the period of the research occurred through a student teaching placement. I spent thirteen weeks with the children full-time, beginning on the first day of school. Some writing samples were also collected in December and January of that same school year.

In Chester, the early elementary school language arts curriculum consists of a basal reading book system, extensive phonics instruction (dittoes and a workbook), and weekly spelling units. It is my impression that free writing is not any measureable part of the curriculum. Any prominence it does have is only the result of an individual teacher's personal efforts. Free writing can be at best "extra" to the regular language arts curriculum.

Before I go on, I should note that while describing the language arts curriculum as such is accurate, it undermines some of the subtle changes occurring in Chester. It is in fact the case that a number of teachers are doing more to incorporate free writing into their curricula (although not

usually in any substantial way). In the fall of 1992 a teacher inservice session was held in which some "language experience" methods were suggested. Although on a minor way, some of the recent trends in literacy education are making their way into the Chester schools. There is cause to think that Chester students may be doing more free writing in years to come.

Throughout my teaching experience I made every attempt to "add" free writing to the students' daily activities. Although I fulfilled the obligatory requirements of the textbooks, my language arts instruction fell mostly into what I would call a Whole Language curriculum. Regular activities included oral reading of trade books, partner reading of trade books, extensive contact with other reading materials including magazines, newspapers, product labels, and so on, prediction and fill-in activities, poetry reading, chanting, singing, rapping, and all kinds of process writing. In terms of writing, in a typical week the children might produce two journal entries (topics included such things as: "If you were an insect, what would the world look like to you?" "Why do people drop out of school?"), a set of sentences using their spelling words, and a complete writing project. A writing project normally involved the production of a 'publishable' book or set of stories. For example, one week the students wrote "How To..." 'books.' The students created a 'book' explaining how to perform a particular task. They did brainstorming, outlining, rough draft-writing, revising, correcting, and then wrote and illustrated a final copy. Another week the children went through a similar procedure to make their own illustrated children's book.

Over the course of the semester the children produced a substantial amount of writing. Although I read all of this writing, only a small proportion of it is specifically included in the following discussion. Periodically (and relatively at random), I kept the writing I collected from the children and examined it specifically for the features which I will discuss. Samples collected include sets of spelling sentences, sets of stories, and sets of journal entries. Only in a few cases are examples cited which did not come from one of the collected sets.

My methodology in examining the writing samples can be characterized as more anecdotal than statistical. I did not attempt an analysis of the samples such as those described in which occurrences of particular forms counted and compared to the number of possible contexts for the forms. Instead, my work tells a story, in a sense, of what a teacher might encounter as she employs a free writing curriculum with young Black English speaking students.

Case Study of Tense and Aspect Marking

In the excerpt from writing samples included in this section, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and syntax has been kept true to the students' productions. Handwriting errors, however, have been corrected. Thus, for example, if a student wrote a cursive "n" but intended an "m" in my estimation, the "m" has been recorded.

When part of a sample may be unclear to the reader, my interpretation of the writing is given in brackets.

I. Tense Marking in Writing

A. Present Tense

Absence of -s on third person singular verbs was found in a number of writing samples.

Occasionally, samples are ambiguous in terms of whether or not Ø marking is occurring.

Consider this sentence:

- (1) My friend trick_ me. KH

This could be interpreted as either

- (2) My friend tricks me.

on the basis of the absence of agreement marking rule or

- (3) My friend tricked me.

on the basis of the /t/ and /d/ deletion rule. A parallel example is

- (4) The wild boy love_ the prize. AJ

where either

- (5) The wild boy loves the prize.

or

- (6) The wild boy loved the prize.

could be the Conventional Classroom English version of the utterance. Other ambiguous sentences include:

- (7) the peclie [pencil?] broke and it itch_. LW

- (8) A duck quack_ JB

- (9) She kick_ the ball. KC₂

- (10) My sister snore_ in bed. EF

- (11) He snore_ in bed. BT

(12) She score_ a point. BT

Without informing context it is not possible to know which interpretation, present or past tense, was intended.¹⁰⁰

The sentences which follow are more clearly examples of -s absence on third person singular verbs.

(13) Do_ November come in fall? SS

(14) and what make_ a good childrens book win... SS

(15) praktes make_ perfect TG

(16) my 14 sisert like_ boy and... LD

(17) my tow year old sisert like_ a Dahw lan shop [?] LD

(18) I world have to ask miss. T. if she say_ yes then we mete [might] have it. JH

(19) It till_ me that the back and wathte [black and white] sold get along to be happy. JH

(20) I always kick a bee and it sting_ me. SA

(21) What time do_ it say on the clock. JB

(22) My Dad now_ [know] tricks. TH

(23) And it make_ me smile to. TH

(24) Beasea is [it] make_ [me] fall [feel] happy. TH

(25) ...and win my brother grow_ up... MM

(26) It make_ me feel good that I know that I am lear [learning] about African American people. KC

(27) It make_ me feels_ sad.¹⁰¹ JS

(28) li make_ me feel sad A_

(29) it make_ me feel sad Because people talk aBout our color. JB

(30) it make_ me sad BT

(31) He wind_ His toy. BT

(32) He drive_ His mom car.

(33) He like_ to be bad and He like_ to jumed in suf [and stuff] and He like_ to mas

¹⁰⁰ Another type of ambiguity occurs in the sentence "Win the wild thing_ go_ high. [student thought this was a complete sentence]" TD. It is not possible to know whether When the wild things_ go high or When the wild thing go_ high is the Conventional Classroom English version of the phrase.

¹⁰¹ "Feels_" will be discussed later in this section.

[mess] wuf suf. BT

(34) Sant claus live_ in north pole. BT

(35) My grandgather clock ring_ its bell TH₂

As the identification of writers indicates, some children supplied many examples of -s absence. In the work of BT, in fact, not a single instance of overtly marked agreement in 3rd person singular was found. Nineteen children in all evidenced this absence (in some cases ambiguously) in their writing. Of the four children in the class who are not African-American, and, in my estimation, are not speakers of Black English, three of them never exhibited absence of -s.¹⁰² The one who did, KC₂, lives with his stepfather, who is African-American. I do not know whether or not his stepfather is a speaker of Black English.

In terms of -s occurring in persons and numbers other than 3rd singular a surprising result was obtained. The expectation was that many examples would be found in which -s appeared in unConventional environments.¹⁰³ This was predicted for two reasons. First, because substantial evidence of this phenomenon was observed in the children's speech and second, because the hypercorrection explanation for -s usage in persons and numbers other than 3rd singular would predict extensive use of the morpheme in a relatively formal context such as classroom writing. Despite these factors, only three examples of -s used in unConventional environments were found.

(36) He is big and I likes_ Has stroy [his story] is funny... BT

(37) It makes me feels_ sad. JS

(38) It's funny and it got_ good pictures NC

Interestingly, BT is the last student from whom hypercorrection would be expected. As other examples will show, BT shows less awareness or knowledge of Conventional Classroom English than any other child in the class. Although only one example, this certainly argues against hypercorrection as the explanation or even a component of the explanation for the phenomenon of -s in unConventional contexts. Also arguing against this the hypercorrection hypothesis is the overall scarcity of -s usage in a context as formal as classroom writing.

B. Past Tense

Of the features of Black English tense and aspect marking sought in writing samples,

¹⁰² Four are mentioned rather than five because only four provided a substantial amount of data.

¹⁰³ "UnConventional" is to be considered equivalent to "unlike Conventional Classroom English."

absence of -ed was among the most prevalent. This may be due to the large number of *potential* occurrences of the feature (only a statistical analysis can elucidate that.) It may also be the case that absence of the -ed marker is to some extent characteristic of the writing of all children, as has been suggested to me by some (in personal communication). It may also be the result of a strong resistance of the feature to context. This latter possibility is supported by Baugh's data that -ed absence (more accurately /t/ and /d/ deletion in general, is not sensitive to social context (Baugh, 1983, 98).¹⁰⁴ As demonstrated in examples (1) - (12) of the section on present tense marking, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether it is -ed or -s that is "missing." The examples I have included below are either disambiguated by context, as in normally the case in actual speech, or overwhelmingly likely to be past tense in my estimation.

- (1) so the gril cry_ all night and day. NC
- (2) a man ask_ her a funny word CJ
- (3) he pull_ is teeth out JB
- (4) my teacher was name_ Ms./ My frend was name_ Antony/ My lunch Aed was name_¹⁰⁵ JB
- (5) one day a Boy name_ Joey can't ride a Bike JB
- (6) I got dress to go trick or treting. JM
- (7) but one day i jump_ rope in i got it. AJ
- (8) And I konw a girl that. drop_ out of school. KC
- (9) My frend wink_ his eye./ She itch_ Here eye./ My frend switch_ toy. BT
- (10) He wind_ his e [eye] at me. KS
- (11) girl name_ Kimberly KS
- (12) this landay [lady] push_ juisin [Jason] out the window./ she look out the widow and he wan't there. KS
- (13) One day a little boy could not read he try_ and try_ and he not read. EF
- (14) Fred rip_ some body heart [part?]/ Jasn rip_ some body heart [part?] out to. OF
- (15) Wen I was in Mre. class we hatch_ eggs. SA

¹⁰⁴ This is qualified by the fact that the feature is sensitive to function. When /t/ and /d/ serve no grammatical function, as in words like past or cold, they are more likely to be deleted than when it would be the only *syntactic* indicator of past tense.

¹⁰⁵ Dots replace personal or school names for the purposes of maintaining anonymity. The slash marks indicate that the strings occurred in the same sample separated by a minimal amount of text.

(16) One day my mom went to the store and a man ask_ her [a] funny word and... CJ

As explained in previous discussion of -ed absence, the feature may lead some to think that Black English does not conceive of or express past tense. This is as easily rebutted in with writing samples as it is in speech. Irregular past tenses were observed by the students within the same sentence in which -ed on regular verbs was absent. Illustrative are these sentences:

(17) I saw a bird and it wink_ his eye. SB

(18) I made a mstaky [mistake] and kick_ my dog? SB

(19) I gave them water an they splash_ it. JH₂

It seems unlikely that the students would have memorized all the past tense forms of these irregular verbs, without concern for the fact that they are past tense, and then gone on to \emptyset mark the regular verbs. Rather, the students show a written reflection of the phonological rule deleting /t/ and /d/ in certain contexts.

Further support for the phonological explanation for absence of -ed comes from the fact that verbs for which the past tense marking is syllabic were rarely missing the -ed. So, for example,

(20) My brother drop_ out of school because he wanted_ to be like the other kids. TH would be expected.

Another phenomenon which would be predicted by a phonological account of -ed behavior requires a comparative analysis. In predominantly white schools, it has been my observation, children, early in their writing, often spell words with just a "t" or "d" to indicate past tense, as in "tawkt" and "playd." These invented spellings for past tense were not found in any significant number in the writing of the Black English speaking students. This is to be expected if Black English speakers are spelling from their speech (in which /t/ and /d/ are often not pronounced.) Instead, Black English speakers would either null-mark the past tense or apply the Conventional spelling, -ed, and after it had been memorized as a rule for past tense situations.¹⁰⁶

Given that Black English speaking students are in the process of learning the rule for -ed to mark past tense, it is not surprising that they would apply the rule variably. As the examples below indicate, even within the same sample a student may overtly mark past tense for some verbs and not for others. Following sentence (19) above JH₂ wrote

¹⁰⁶ Not that this rule would necessarily have to be *explicitly* taught.

(21) Then they played thump.

Similar examples are

(22) She tickleded me and it itcheded./ She scratched me on th noise [nose]. TG

(23) You trickeded me./ Sally kicked the ball. NC

In some situations the -ed rule appears to be overapplied. For example, one student used -ed in a context that was clearly not past.¹⁰⁷

(24) I Love ScHooL I Hope I Passeded to the 4 Grade [He was just starting 3rd grade.] JB

In another case, a verb was, in effect, *doubly* marked for past tense, once phonologically and once conventionally (for writing).

(25) He [the Cat in the hat] mesteded up these little kids house..." nn¹⁰⁸

These unconventional usages suggest an overgeneralization of the -ed past tense marking rule in writing -- a rule which, due to the operation of /t/ and /d/ deletion, does not have a strong correlate in the oral language of Black English speaking children

C. Remote Time Construction

While it may be inappropriate to describe use of stressed been to indicate remote time is *common* in the speech of the students observed, it is certainly safe to say that it is *present* in most of their dialects. Thus, to the extent to which oral language is informing the writing of these students, the form would be expected, at least occasionally, in their written language.

Of the writing samples collected, not a single instance of remote time been was found. In addition, the form was not encountered (that I can recall) in any of the other writing generated by the students over the course of the semester.

The reason(s) for the total absence of this form is unknown. However, a hypothesis is presented in the concluding portion of this case study.

II. Aspect Marking in Writing

A. Perfect Aspect

1. Present and Past Tense Perfective Aspect

¹⁰⁷Although it could be the case that the child, who had been retained at least once, was confused about what grade he was in or something to that effect.

¹⁰⁸ On occasion the student did not put his/her name on the paper. In that situation a lower case "nn" will follow the sample provided.

As reported earlier in the paper, there are two ways of marking the perfective aspect in Black English. One, use of have/has (present tense) and had (past tense) is the same as that of Conventional Classroom English. It can, however, differ in its surface manifestation, as have and had can be absent in environments in which contraction is allowed. Six examples of this absence were found in the writing samples.

- (1) He_ got frends and... BT
- (2) She_ got a sharp pencil. BT
- (3) i_ got black hair BT
- (4) Just don't where it because you_ got it. RR
- (5) wild thing_ got teeth eyes¹⁰⁹ JB
- (6) I_ been a around the world. BT

There are several qualifications which should be made with regard to these examples. First, five out of the six involve the verb got. There are two likely explanations for this. First, it could be that the verb got strongly favors the deletion of have/has. This would be consistent with the fact that phonological environment has been shown to affect likelihood of auxiliary deletion. A second possibility is that got has unique properties in Black English such that it does not require a preceding have or has to indicate possession.¹¹⁰ While no such possibility has been explored in the literature (that I am aware of), it seems feasible given the data above and the general ubiquity of got without have in Black English. A second qualification involves the writership of these sentences. Four out of the six sentences come from the same student, BT. BT, as suggested by the examples throughout the case study, is probably the class' most active user of Black English in writing. Without his examples evidence of have/has deletion is significantly more scarce. Finally, it should be noted that (6) could be an example of remote time been. As discussed in the previous section, linguists have sometimes confused the remote time use of been from that discussed here. In fact, some linguists have argued that these forms are one in the same. In the analysis advocated in this paper, stress is necessary to signal use of the remote time version of been and thus, because stress cannot be expressed in writing (without the use of italics), it is not possible to know which been is

¹⁰⁹ It is possible that the student intends a plural noun phrase, wild things.

¹¹⁰ In oral utterance, I_ gots to get there [to a party], was observed. Here again either have has been deleted or the Black English got does not take a preceding auxiliary. This example is significant because it shows use of got to indicate necessity rather than possession.

intended. The best guess in this case is that this is simply an example of Conventional been. It seems unlikely that a third grader, who has traveled little, would, in his spelling sentences, wish to convey the relatively long period of time ago since he traveled around the world. Thus, the presumption stands that remote time been is not a feature in the writing of these students. With these qualifications noted, six possible examples of have/had deletion occur in the students' writing. It can be said, thus, that for these students this is a feature is prevalent only in oral language, if at all.

The second method of marking perfect aspect in Black English, the use of done preverbally, is not syntactically related to Conventional Classroom English. In fact, it is one of the morphosyntactic features which clearly distinguishes Black English from other dialects. However, as explained in the previous section, done was not observed in the oral language of Chester elementary school students. This, combined with reactions from informants, suggests that the form may be dying out or at least be age-graded. As might be expected, then, no examples of done were found in the students' writing samples.

2. Future Time Perfective Aspect

As with present and past tense systems of perfective marking, perfective marking in future time can be achieved in two ways in Black English. The first is the same as the Conventional Classroom English system, using will (present) or would (past) and have (has in 3rd person singular), although will or would, can be deleted (see discussion of inflected be.) The second method of marking the perfect aspect in future time is with the use of the term be done. As with the use of done alone, this has neither been observed in the children's speech nor in their writing.

B. Progressive Aspect

In Black English, as in many dialects, the engma of the -ing (progressive) ending is often deleted. No evidence of this process affecting writing was found. In other words, students regularly expressed the progressive marker with the full three-letter form.

In some ways this finding does not seem consistent with the evidence of phonological effects on writing found elsewhere (see previous and following sections.) On the other hand, -ing is very commonly used in early reading books and may be that the students have been overtly taught to spell the full form. In addition, it may be that the engma is not deleted very often in

speech and thus is not missing very often in writing.¹¹¹

There is no discussion in the literature of the absence of more than the *engma* sound (i.e. absence of the entire progressive marker) nor have I noticed the phenomenon (in speech).

However, five instances were found in the writing samples.

- (1) The wild thing was look_ at the sky. LT
- (2) The then [thing] is fky_ [fly_] in the sky. OF
- (3) She was play_ with Here [her] block. BF
- (4) Me and my sister were play_ and she said I quit. TH
- (5) The kids was cry_ in the night in [and] Jason Freddy was scaring the kids. AJ

This could be explained, as could many of the features discussed in this paper, at least to the extent that they occur in moderation, by simple carelessness on the part of the students. Other than that, I can think of no way to account for these sentences.

Black English also has a unique manner of indicating progressive aspect, that in which the term *steady* is used. As explained in the tense and aspect marking section, the status of *steady* in Chester is unknown. I have not heard the form in the students' speech but it has been heard in the speech of an adult. In any case, no occurrences of the form were found in writing.

C. Be

Examples of *be* in unConventional contexts were highly unusual. The few examples which follow include not only all the uses of (unConventional) *be* that appeared in the *collected* samples, but also those that occurred in the students' writing in total (two examples were added from uncollected samples.)¹¹² This can be considered reasonably thorough, for along with *done* and *been*, *be* was of particular interest as children's writing was examined.

As discussed in the *be* grammar section, there are two kinds of *be*, one identical to that of Conventional Classroom English but given prominence due to deletion of the preceding auxiliary, and the other, so-called *be*₂ which is unique to Black English, found where Conventional Classroom English would have *am*, *is*, or *are*. Two examples from the students' writing show

¹¹¹ Unfortunately, I know of no quantificational analyses of this phenomenon in Black English.

¹¹² There is one example in which *be* appears which has been left out of the following discussion, "... people should get along or it wont *be* nobody to be friends with." While at first glance this may appear to be an unConventional use of *be*, when examined more closely it becomes apparent that this is not the case. Instead, this sentence is unConventional due to the use of existential *it* as opposed to existential *there*. With *there* substituted the sentence reads, "... people should get along or *there* wont be nobody [anybody] to be friends with."

ambiguity in terms of whether they represent use of be₁ or be₂.

(1) Mrs. was a good Teach [teacher]. But if You be min [mean] She be min look [like] you. KC

(2) On thanksgiving you be with your family. nn

The first be in (1) is unquestionably be₂. The second be in (1), however, could be be₁ where the preceding auxiliary has been deleted

(3) ... But if you be mean she'll be mean like you.

In (2) the Conventional Classroom English version of the sentence could be either

(4) On Thanksgiving you'll be with your family.

or

(5) On Thanksgiving you are with your family.

In the former case be₁ has been used, in the latter, be₂.

The other two examples found in students' writing are clearly uses of be₂.

(6) If people be afraid of each other their will not be any freedom And more and more people will die. KS

(7) They do like trick, be funny and all The other things And The Things that do the tricks. JH2

Interestingly, (7) seems to me, and others questioned, to be more colloquial and less distinctly "Black English sounding" than other examples of be use. One explanation for this could be the separation of the subject, they, from the be. So that, while

(8) They be funny.

does not sound like it could be part of a nonBlack English vernacular, (7) does.

As discussed at length in the tense and aspect marking description, there has been some suggestion that the latter be, so-called be₂, may be in the process of acquiring a unique role of marking the habitual aspect. Although this is by no means the only way the form is used, recall that it is a strong tendency and may even *favor* a habitual interpretation over Conventional Classroom English interpretations of am, is, and are. Example (1) above provides an excellent illustration of the potential distinction. If be₂ is a semantically equivalent substitute for am, is, or are, that passage would read,

(9) Mrs. was a good teacher, but if you are mean, she is [or will be] mean like

you.

The preferred interpretation is, 'if you are a mean person, then she will be mean to you. In contrast, if be₂ has a preferred habitual reading, the sentence might be translated,

(10) If you are mean on occasion then on those occasions when you are mean she will be mean back to you.

If indeed the latter reading is more accurate, the implications are twofold. First, it is unlikely that a teacher without training in Black English will recognize the true meaning of the child's words. Second, it will be incumbent on the child as she/he develops proficiency in Conventional Classroom English to find another way to convey this meaning which, clearly, will be less efficient, regularized, and perhaps even exact than that conveyed by be₂ as a habitual aspect marker.¹¹³

There is a clear paucity of be examples in these third graders' writing.¹¹⁴ Interestingly, in one set of (very short) stories collected from a classroom of mid-year *second* graders (similar in background to the class under study), two examples of be₂ use were found.

(11) I be playing outside... D

(12) When I was my face it fell [feel] like I be awoke [awake]. S

That two examples of be₂ would appear in just the first set of writings collected from these second graders further argues for the the investigation of age grading effects in young children's use of Black English features in writing.

III. Inflected Be in Writing

A. Absence of Inflected Be

The basic rule governing deletion of inflected be is that anytime white vernaculars and Black English can contract, Black English can also delete. Forms of be in Black English, at least is and are and probably others, are absent from contexts in which Conventional Classroom English would have them about 50% of the time (Baugh, 1983). Furthermore, as explained earlier, certain contexts may favor absence of the form.

As discussed earlier, use of have and had in writing uncovered little evidence of deletion. Only six examples of absence of these forms were found, and these were ambiguous and

¹¹³ None of the other examples of be use are appropriate to facilitate the comparison made here. Sentences (2) and (6) are naturally habitual due to their context. Sentence (7) is too complicated to be clarifying in any way.

¹¹⁴ A hypothesis which might explain this is presented in the conclusion of the case study section.

uninformative in many ways.

As for other forms of conjugated be, again only a few examples were discovered.

- (1) They_ dancing arounded the fire.¹¹⁵ SP
- (2) And you_ smart [student used this as a spelling sentence for *smart*.] JH₂
- (3) I dont care if it_ you, ... JH
- (4) I went over to her and said you_ do it if you tri and she tried and... LT
- (5) I_ gon to be Fad [?some Halloween character perhaps?] and I is gon to screch [scratch] people and I' m gon to get some candy... BT

Examples (1) and (2) are examples of absence of are or 're. In example (3) is or 's has been deleted. Passage (4) is not as clear. It may be an example of absence of will or 'll or it may be that the student left out the word can. The latter seems more suitable in the sentence than the future modal but there is no way to be certain that this was the intended form. Example (5) is a beautiful illustration of the linguistic continuum with which Black English speaking students are operating. The student begins with complete deletion of conjugated be, such that what might be I am or I'm is simply I. In the next clause the student *does* employ a form of conjugated be, but not that which would appear in Conventional Classroom English. In the third clause, again with the same context, the student uses the form expected from other vernaculars and arguably, from Conventional Classroom English itself.¹¹⁶ This student shows influence from many dialects.

Only one example which might be considered hypercorrective was found.

- (6) im am smart SB

Here the student has included both the contracted and the full form of am. This may be a phenomenon unrelated to Black English or it may be that the student is not adequately familiar with the relatedness of am and 'm, which are often deleted in her speech, and thus uses the forms redundantly.

While some evidence of Black English influence is found, for the most part absence of inflected be is a feature found only in the *oral* language of these students.

B. Use of Is and Are, Was and Were

The other features discussed in the tense and aspect section with regard to inflected be do

¹¹⁵ The addition of -ed on around is interesting. It may be another example of overgeneralization of the morpheme.

¹¹⁶ "Arguably" because contraction is considered unacceptable in some forms of written English.

appear with frequency in the students' writing. Specifically, the students exhibited extensive use of is where Conventional Classroom English would have are and was where Conventional Classroom English would have were.

- (7) The tomatoes is ripe. BT
- (8) His teeth is on the floor. EF
- (9) eegs [eggs] is so easy to mak nn
- (10) Is you giving? TH
- (11) ...drugs is so bad... JH
- (12) ...you is not gong [to] till me to do that. JH
- (13) ...man said yaw is saying [staying] in jail yaw to is not coming back to school EF
- (14) E..... [student's name] you is smart.
- (15) ...my aiss [eyes] is back [black] and my hear [hair] is back [black]. JH
- (16) ...tineara and Shakera was fineding thar way in the camp cafaterya... DS
- (17) I wold not drop out of school cose [I] whant to lone [learn] and if i was sick i still would not. KH
- (18) Was you born June 2. EF
- (19) I remember in you first came to this school you was nice and now you are mean... SS
- (20) you was nice here be nice at your ol school to MM
- (21) and in one week wen we was playing cardes [I] won \$1.000 playing cardes. MM
- (22) thin we was rich MM
- (23) wen His Mom or the life gard was not aroud MM
- (24) ...and thay was over the nothete [mountain]. AP
- (25) And I saw Bats was in the sky and witches was to. AB
- (26) Once upon a time there was 3 witches and they was all sisters. NC
- (27) Jason Freddy was scaring the kids... ...the bats was birds... AJ
- (28) The wild thing['s] eyes was bright. TH
- (29) Witches was flying black cats where [were] with them. nn

Use of is and was in all persons and numbers [there may even be an example of 2nd person plural

in (13)] was prevalent in the students' writing.¹¹⁷ For most students this feature appeared variably. This point is made most strongly by (29) in which was and were were used in the same sentence, both with third person plural subjects. It is seconded by other cases in which students used is or was unConventionally and are or were conventionally within the same sample. TH, for example, wrote

(30) The trees wher high. TH

only two sentences after writing (28) in which a third person plural subject is followed by was. In the writing of some students are and were were not found at all.

A final note on use of forms of inflected be regards the forms have and has. As with is and are, was and were, and present tense marking on regular verbs, have and has did not always show Conventional agreement in writing.¹¹⁸ Four examples of this phenomenon were found:

(31) Potatoe have starch in it. EF

(32) Jasn have a ax. Fredy have nail. OF

(33) some masks has makeup. CJ

(34) I like the books that has the funny picher. AB

With only four examples it is difficult to draw any conclusions. However, an unConventional paradigm for have/has is certainly not surprising give the cases of -s, is/are, and was/were.

IV. Irregular Verbs

As explained in the tense and aspect marking description, there has been little written on irregular verbs (other than forms of inflected be) in Black English. This, combined with the fact that unConventional irregular forms are used by nonBlack English speaking children, makes analysis of occurrences of such forms in this case study difficult. Therefore, irregular uses will be listed here without discussion.

(1) I like when the boy drived ucrosse the water. KS

(2) He drive his boat back home. SA

(3) I had ran in to my moms room... SP

(4) My mom clock had fell on the rug./ I had drank some milk this morning. SP

(5) When mudusa got hit by the dogs It's funny... NC

¹¹⁷ In one case a student, BT, used is where was is expected: She is born in September. This is most likely ideolectal if not a random miscue.

¹¹⁸ I have not encountered reports of this phenomenon in the literature.

(6) he slide away in a boat.

Case Study Conclusion

The students' use of Black English features can be divided into two categories -- features which appear relatively frequently and features which appear relatively infrequently. The former category includes absence of -s on third person singular verbs, absence of -ed on past tense verbs, use of is in unConventional persons and numbers, and use of was in unConventional persons and numbers. The latter category, that which includes features that appear relatively infrequently, contains use of -s in persons and numbers other than third singular, use of been to signal remote time, use of unConventional be, and deletion of inflected be.¹¹⁹

The delineation corresponds to distinctions made in section three of this paper. Features of Black English were placed on a continuum of difference from Conventional Classroom English. On one end of the continuum were features that constituted relatively minor differences from Conventional Classroom English and on the other end were features that represented more substantial differences. The criterion used to determine where on the continuum a feature was placed was the level of grammar at which it differed from Conventional Classroom English. Features which differed on the basis of grammar or meaning were considered more significant, while features which differed on a more superficial level, for example on the basis of phonology, were considered less significant.

It appears that students are somehow sensitive to this level of difference and reflect that understanding in their writing. This contention is supported by consideration of each tense and aspect marking feature found in the speech of students in Chester. It is also supported by examination of other features of Black English in writing (see Appendix B).

Been: The use of been to signal remote time unquestionably constitutes a meaningful grammatical difference between Black English and Conventional Classroom English. It systematically indicates meaning which Conventional Classroom English can only suggest phrasally. Although students use remote time been in their speech, it is not found in their written language.

Be₂: The use of be to indicate habitual action, if this is indeed the proper analysis of this

¹¹⁹ Use of done, be done, and steady can also fall into this category, although that might be misleading in that there is no evidence that the forms are found in oral language either.

form, also constitutes a substantial distinction of the Black English dialect. There is no feature in Conventional Classroom English with a semantic function corresponding to those suggested for be. While be₂ is truly ubiquitous in students' speech, only three unquestionable occurrences of the form were found in the students' writing (with only a few additional usages that are ambiguous).

be absence: Absence of forms of inflected be is problematic in terms of placement on the continuum of difference between Black English and Conventional Classroom English. On the one hand, deletion of these forms is primarily a phonological process, operating on the same principles as contraction. However the result, the total absence of a verb, constitutes a significant grammatical difference from Conventional Classroom English. In terms of the students' writing, this feature is less ambiguous. Only a handful of examples of deletion of forms of be were found. While students are comfortable deleting these forms in their oral language, they are not willing to do so in writing.

-s: There are two features involving -s to consider. One is the absence of -s in third person singular contexts. The second is presence of -s in persons and numbers other than third singular. A large number of examples of the former were found in writing. Determining whether or not this supports the hypothesis being presented is difficult, for it depends on the analysis of the form, a subject of great debate among linguists. If the use of -s is little more than a simple variation in paradigm, with no semantic implications, then its frequency in writing is consistent with the contention that features less different from Conventional Classroom English appear more often in writing. If, on the other hand, use of -s indicates emphatic meaning, [-punctual] aspect, or the historical present, functions not assigned to the form in Conventional Classroom English, then it should not appear so frequently in the students' written language. At this point, the matter must remain unresolved. However, the fact that, in writing, -s in was found rarely in persons and numbers other than third singular may be significant. Some analyses suggest that use of -s in unConventional contexts is more suggestive of a unique grammatical function than is its varying presence and absence in third person singular, a feature confounded by norms of Conventional Classroom English. Perhaps it is for this reason that -s is variable in the children's writing in third person singular but consistent (in its absence) in other persons and numbers.

is and was: The use of is and was in unConventional contexts does not have grammatical or semantic significance. Rather, it is the result of an alternative paradigm for the

(already irregular) verb be. Use of is and was in persons and numbers where the forms are not typically found was quite common in the students' writing.

-ed: Past tense marking differs in Black English (from Conventional Classroom English) due to the operation of a phonological rule of /t/ and /d/ deletion. There is no semantic or grammatical significance associated with the presence or absence of this form in the dialect. Absence of -ed was extremely common in the students' writing. Furthermore, the form was not absent when phonological conditions did not warrant its deletion (e.g. in the case of wanted.)

Students as young as third grade understand that there are differences between the dialect found in writing and the dialect they use in their speech. They recognize (unconsciously, in all likelihood) the extent of various difference and respond accordingly in their writing. Features of their dialect which are substantially different from features in Conventional Classroom English are not produced in writing, whereas differences that are more minor are found in students' written compositions.

Chapter 5: Facilitation of Black English in Writing

Very little is known about the development of early writing, particularly as it occurs in Black English speaking children. Volumes of research are needed to address three major questions: How does writing, particularly, writing in Conventional written dialects develop, what factors affect this development, and what programs best facilitate this development? Until a body of work is created to address these questions, strategies for the facilitation of Black English in writing will be general and speculative. With this caveat in mind, some rough suggestions are offered...

Teachers should be educated about Black English. As a review of research demonstrates, teachers with better knowledge of and attitudes toward Black English yield better achievement from their students. With regard to writing, it is expected that teachers with stronger knowledge of Black English will better understand their students' writing, better identify the origin of (some of) their students' writing miscues, and better diagnose students' instructional needs. Teachers with more positive attitudes toward Black English may encourage among children greater esteem for their writing, a healthier basis of motivation for the acquisition of written language, and a more developed sense of the richness and utility of different language forms. More importantly given the findings reported earlier in this paper, this training may diminish among teachers the tendency to generalize about students on the basis of their native dialect. As James Sledd states, "We must stigmatize people who use dialects as stigmatizing" (Sledd, 1972, 456). The importance of this goal should be underscored, for teacher attitudes toward Black English and Black English speakers may present a bigger obstacle to educational equity than any strictly linguistic factor ever could.

Students should be made explicitly aware of dialect differences the validity of all forms of language. This awareness may encourage among children more esteem for their own language and a more sophisticated view of language generally. As Christian explains,

The concept of using dialect diversity and the cultural diversity that accompanies it as a resource in the curriculum presents a viewpoint very different from many traditional approaches. Instead of seeing differences as barriers to be overcome the differences provide fascinating topic for study.

(Christian, 1987)

A curriculum such as this serves to legitimate the language of all students and is in keeping with the larger goal of teaching to and about cultural diversity in the classroom.

Students should be educated about context as a determinant of language use. Language

should be presented as it is, a tool with which to negotiate the world. Use of Conventional Written English should be viewed not as an end onto itself, but as a means for access to another world -- that of literacy.

Ensuring that students *desire* access to literacy is a responsibility that rests on the shoulders not only of the educational community but also of larger society. It must be the case that the attainment of literacy will yield benefits for all children. That a child's race or social class might obscure certain benefits clearly undermines the value of literacy education. In order to be motivated to acquire literacy, children must feel as though the language and culture of literacy is available to them.

Speakers who want to participate in a particular social group will typically learn the language of that group, whereas those with no group reference or with antagonistic feeling are less likely to.

(Christian, 1987)

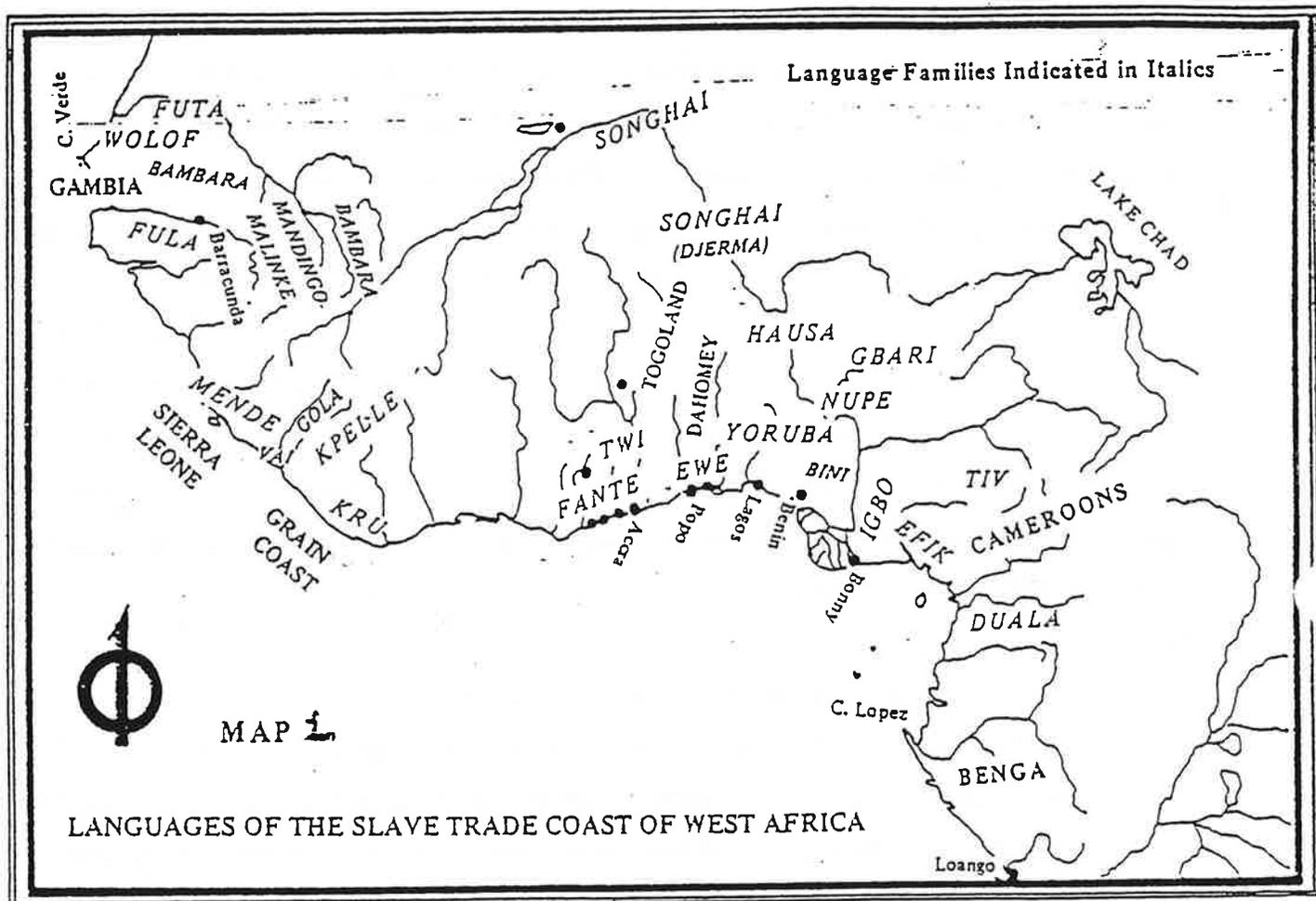
In addition, children must feel that intellectual and economic advantages will accompany literacy attainment. As Sledd concludes, "...If they value our world and what it offers, then they will take the initiative in change [-ing their language] and we can cautiously help them" (Sledd, 1972, p. 456).

Conclusion

For years, the education of low income children and children of color was framed in a deficit model. These children's background was considered an "interference" and "educational disadvantage". Eventually, the deficit model gave way to a new approach, that which emphasized difference. While this way of thinking is certainly preferable to that which it replaced, it can still be misused. Too often, rather than seeing difference as a strength to be appreciated, it is seen as a weakness to be overcome. This work argues against that perspective in many ways. First, it points out that Black English is a complex and fully communicative linguistic form. Second, it argues that it is not Black English itself, but ill-founded concepts of and attitudes toward the dialect which are primarily responsible for the educational difficulties it may present. Third, the case study in particular illustrates the tremendous linguistic competence of children who speak Black English. As early as third grade these children have recognized that there are differences between their native dialect and the dialect represented in writing. As the hypothesis presented in the conclusion of the case study suggests, their writing even reflects an awareness of the extent of particular differences between these language forms. Many of these children will go on to become active participants in the world of literacy while maintaining their native and other dialects. If this is not a strength...

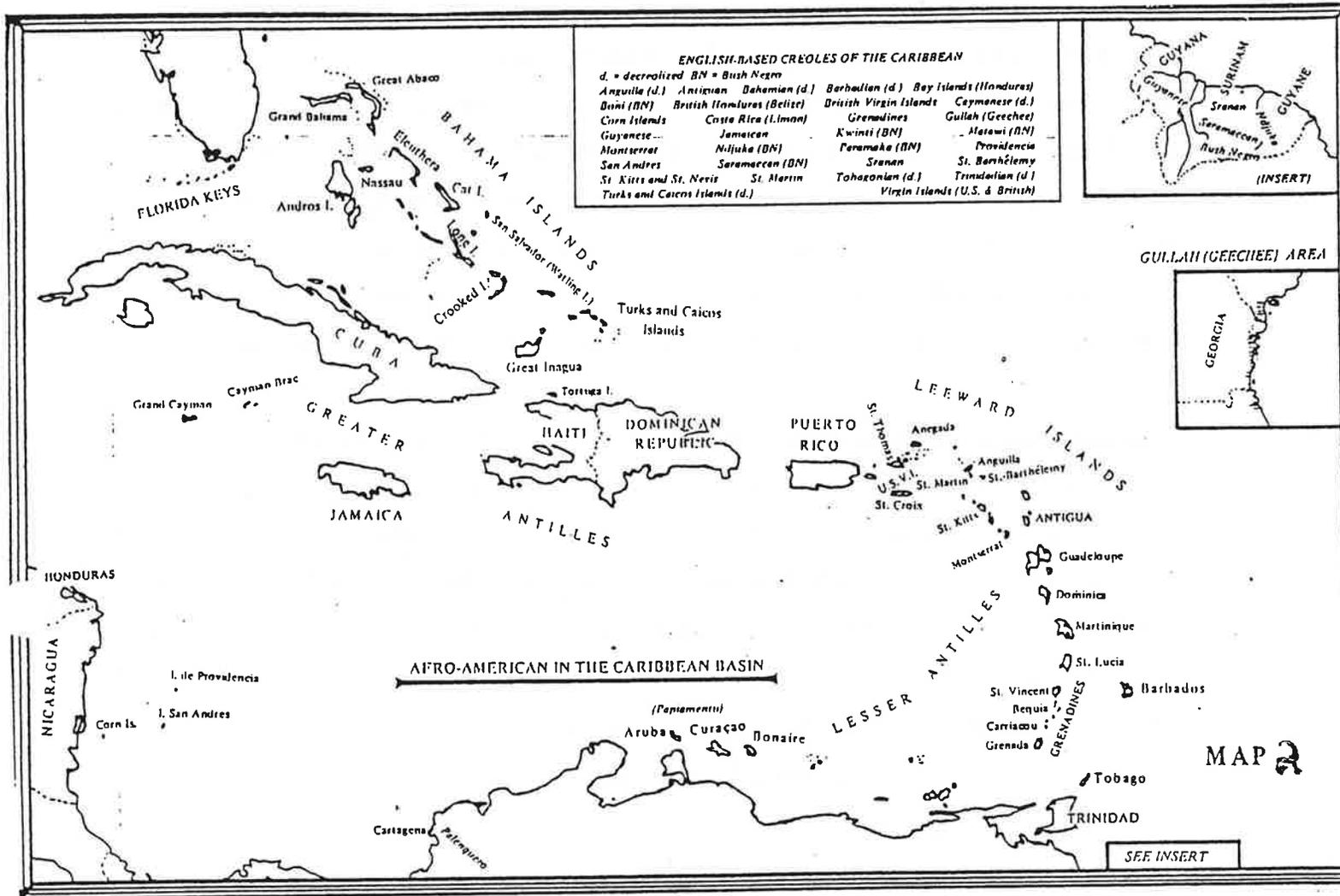
If one conclusion can be drawn from this work, it is that far too little is known about the acquisition of writing among children in general and Black English speaking children in particular. There is much research to be done on a range of questions related to this process. Similarly, there is much to be learned by the professional community about how to facilitate writing development. Ironically, the little that is known in this regard suggests that increased knowledge of Black English, combined with better informed and more positive attitudes toward the dialect, greatly enhances learning among Black English speaking students. In order to improve education, it is imperative that more is learned about literacy acquisition and that this knowledge is applied to the teaching of our children.

Appendix A



LANGUAGES OF THE SLAVE TRADE COAST OF WEST AFRICA

(Alleyne, 1980, p. 180)



(Alleyne, 1980, p. 26)

Appendix B

Other features of Black English follow the same pattern found in the examination of tense and aspect marking. Namely, Black English features that are more different from Conventional Classroom English are not produced in writing and features that are less different from Conventional Classroom English are found in written language.

Many examples of *-s* in plural and possessive contexts were found. These phenomena can best be characterized as lesser differences from Conventional Classroom English. They are phonologically affected, at least to some extent, and do not result in any significant syntactic or semantic differences from Conventional Classroom English. The other features examined were use of a double subject, multiple negation, and existential *it*. That the first two features appeared quite infrequently would be expected, given that they constitute *syntactic* differences from Conventional Classroom English. The latter feature, use of existential *it*, also appeared infrequently, but this is not predicted by the hypothesis that has been set forth. Existential *it* acts in the same way as does existential *there* in Conventional Classroom English. The use *it* over *there*, given that the two forms have exactly the same meaning and function, does not constitute a significant difference between Black English and Conventional Classroom English. Thus, use of *it* in the writing of Black English speaking children would be expected. It may be that there was little occasion for its use and indeed, that *there* is not found with great frequency either. It could also be that this feature suggests the need for some sort of revision of the hypothesis that has been given.

Absence of -s in plural contexts

- (1) I have block_. KH
- (2) Now my story is about witches, bats, ghosts, skeleton_, spiders, pumpkin_, goblin_, mummies, black cats, gints [giants]. KS
- (3) Once a little girl with jewel_ on... SS
- (4) Ocen apoud a time thir was a little grir who was 4 year old and she... TH
- (5) they take drug_ to school in bags... SA
- (6) The king of the wild thing_ is the child. LT
- (7) The thing_ where [were] 12¹/₂ feet high. AH
- (8) she kew how to brade and other thing_ and... SA

- (9) I have a lot of nice teacher_ and... SS
- (10) I am nine year_ old. KS
- (11) I have brown eye_ and. KC
- (12) I am nice to my Class at all time_ in [and] my class is nice some time at me. AJ
- (13) Do you like to do trick_?/ I like to play with block_./ I like to switch toy_. SS
- (14) I will not play block_. RR
- (15) My sitter has block_. KC
- (16) I like to trick kid_./ I like to kick kid_./ I like to kick block_. AJ
- (17) Hollon [Halloween] is a fun day you get candy and thing_. nn
- (18) And you should have word_ that little kids can understand. MD
- (19) They are pretty picher_ [pictures]. EF
- (20) the cat in the hat alway_ messed with the childrens_ [hypercorrection?] TG

Absence of Possessive Marking

- (1) The wild thing_ eyes was bright. TH
- (2) Max_ mom said you are wild! SP
- (3) My mom_ clock... SP
- (4) The Dentists is [?contraction and full form?] pulling theAligator_ tooth in the Dentist_ Office... BT
- (5) The Dentist is Take The aligator_ teeth out.
- (6) The bid Alegeter went to the dides [dentist] and the dides Tolk [took] the aegeter_ theeth. SB
- (7) The man is taking the teeth out of the allagator_ mouth./ The allagtor_ mouth is big. EF
- (8) My Teacher_ name is Mrs in grade 3. TH
- (9) be proud of other peolpe_ color.
- (10) I can drink my sitter_ warter/ I drank my sitter_ love ly Juice. KC
- (11) The ripe [?] was in he house he mom tode [told] hem to get in his room whif no foed. JH
- (12) And they call their self [?] the midnight sasiate [society].

Double Subject???

- EF
- (1) So he read the book and he's mom was so happy and dad and he was happy to...
 - (2) You Your smart. JB

Multiple Negation

- (1) I dont have no friends here. RR
- (2) ...or it [there] wont be nobody to be friends with... KS
- (3) And she dons't not say sorry. CJ
- (4) ...it was raining one day and they didn't have no one to play with. KB

Existential It

- (1) It was a storm. KC
- (2) Its a storm when im sleep [I'm sleeping or I'm asleep]. SB
- (3) It was a storm. OF
- (4) It is a storm out there. JH
- (5) ...or it wont be nobody to be friends with... KS

Miscellaneous and not necessarily Black English

- (1) ...the good is [goodest] girl in the class. JH
- (2) me and my cosoins went swimming and... AS
- (3) but you are smarter than me. NC
- (4) This world is worser than me. NC
- (5) They play ball in the park and the bale [ball] team scored very good. TH
- (6) This landay push juisin out ___ the window. KS
- (7) they locked his dad out ___ the classroom. MM
- (8) she ate dinner what was diferrant... LW
- (9) To judge people about there color TG
- (10) ...and one day onder [another] and ander bunny was looking at T.V... SP
- (11) I ma soow glad that school stared. I coud not wait. I ma soow happy that I ma in therd grad. RS
- (13) I'll take yous over the hill SB
- (14) a_ ax OF

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