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THE STATUS OF NATIVE SPEAKER INTUITIONS IN A POLYLECTAL GRAMMAR
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Throughout the history of linguistics, various points of view have prevailed as to how one goes about writing a grammar, and what the grammar is supposed to represent. Traditional grammars purport to represent the norms of correct usage upheld by educated and upper class speakers. The technique of introspection is employed by traditional grammarians skilled at parsing sentences of their native language into their component parts and neatly displaying the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships with textbook precision. For Saussure, a grammar represents <u>langue</u>, a static and homogeneous set of signs, shared by the community of speakers of the language. Langue is supraindividual in nature and only imperfectly realized in the speaking or <u>parole</u> of individuals. To the structuralist, a grammar is the artifice of the linguist who extracts the structural elements of the language from a corpus of primary linguistic data through the application of rigorous "discovery procedures." For Chomsky and his followers, however, it doesn't matter what "discovery procedures" are employed. The only thing that matters is whether or not the rules of the grammar will generate sentences which are acceptable to mature native speakers. A transformational grammar is supposed to represent the internalized <u>competence</u> of an ideal speaker of the language which is said to be reflected indirectly and imperfectly in performance. Labov and his disciples have recently criticized the lack of accountability inherent in the traditional separation of langue or competence from parole or speaking. The linguist working within such a framework cannot be held strictly accountable for discrepancies between the predictions of his grammar and the way people actually speak. He can always claim that the discrepant data represent mistakes or dialect differences. For Labov, an adequate grammar should represent a set of <u>linguistic variables</u> which reflect the heterogeneity of real speaking. Such a grammar includes rules which apply with varying frequencies on the basis of variably weighted conditioning factors in the linguistic and sociolinguistic environment. The identification of the conditioning factors is done by means of frequency counts of variable phenomena in empirical samples of vernacular speech.

Polylectal grammar. The term polylectal grammar will be used loosely in this paper to include Labov's conception of a language as a system of variable rules as well as other models which treat a language as a continuum, or finely graded series of lects (Bailey 1972, 1975; Bickerton 1973: DeCamp 1971) representing successive stages in its evolution and spread. Within speech communities where two or more divergent lects of a language coexist, patterns of variation may be observed which imply a ranking of the varieties along an attitudinal continuum based upon the relative frequency of occurrence of prestige or stigmatized forms. The ideal variety representing the maximal cooccurrence of prestige variants is known as the acrolect, and the opposite pole, where stigmatized forms are most heavily concentrated is known as the basilect. There is often a positive correlation between attitudinal and historical grading of linguistic variables, with archaic tending to imply high prestige and innovative tending to imply low prestige, although there are numerous exceptions. In New York City, for example, the presence of r before a consonant or word boundary marks prestige and is frequent in formal registers. In British Received Pronunciation, however, innovative forms without r carry prestige while the more archaic forms with r are stigmatized.

The area of the continuum intermediate between the basilect and acrolect is known as the mesolect. From the perspective of polylectal grammar, all languages at all stages of their histories are mesolectal, although the dominant tendency of descriptive linguistics has been to ignore the mesolect or relegate it to the neglected domain of parole or performance. Polylectal grammars represent a distinct opportunity for descriptive linguistics to finally live up to its promise of describing the way that people actually speak a language. Descriptive linguistics continues, for the present, to be dominated by a static, synchronic model, however, although, polylectal grammars have been effectively employed to describe language situations in areas like Jamaica, Guyana and Hawaii where English-based pidgins or creoles have undergone considerable decreolization or convergence toward the local variety of standard English (DeCamp 1971; Bickerton 1973; Day 1974). The varieties of English spoken by black Americans have also been subjected to polylectal analysis, and massive amounts of empirical data have been collected and analysed. The main syntactic, phonological and lexical features of Black

English (BE) have been well documented although varying
opinions prevail as to the nature of the phenomena
underlying the data. Such opinions make claims not
only about the underlying rules of BE but also about
its relationship to other varieties of American English.
    This writer is a black American who has spent most
of his life immersed in what Labov calls the Black
English Vernacular (1972 b). The language situation
in black America, as the author sees it, may be grossly
characterized as a situation of diglossia involving
Standard English and Black English, although a more
accurate model would be a post-creole continuum. The
BE basilect (BBE) is much closer to acrolectal American
English, however, than basilectal Jamaican English is
to standard Jamaican English.
    The author has very clear intuitions about the
grammatical structure of BBE although he never con-
sistently speaks it (nor do any other real black
Americans). To account for mesolectal forms found in
empirical data the grammar not only generates basilectal
forms, but also includes rules which variably operate
upon stigmatized basilectal forms and replace them with
acrolectal equivalents. Such a grammar is polylectal
in the sense that it describes a continuum rather than
a single point in linguistic time, although it was
developed through the seemingly unempirical "discovery
procedure" of introspection characteristic of tradi-
tional and transformational grammars. Having its origin
in the intuitions of a single native speaker, how can
such a grammar fulfill Labov's principle of accounta-
bility, and how accurately can the intuitions of an
individual speaker reflect the phylogenic, or supra-
individual linguistic system that a polylectal grammar
purports to represent?
    In the following pages it is argued that native
speakers of a language have intuitions about static
synchronic entities although the data of their speaking
is variable and panchronic. In the case of post-creole
continua, the intuitions are of two discrete static
synchronic entities in a diglossic relationship to one
another; a basilect and an acrolect. To adequately
fulfill Labov's principle of accountability, it doesn't
seem to matter how one goes about writing a grammar as
long as the rules accurately predict mesolectal varia-
tion as well as the static synchronic polar lects of
the continuum. A brief sketch of BBE syntax based
upon the authors native speaker intuitions is presented
in the following section. Certain discrepancies
between the ideal basilectal forms and frequently
observed mesolectal forms are then accounted for by
"standardization" rules which predict the kinds of

variation observed in existing empirical data.

A sketch of BBE syntax. The procedure utilized in this section has been to describe as accurately as possible, in traditional terms, the authors conception of some of the main syntactic features of BBE. For brevity, only simple sentences in declarative, interrogative, negative or affirmative modes are considered. Declarative sentences are considered basic, and always consist of a subject noun phrase followed by either a verb phrase construction or a predicate nominal construction.

Sentences with verb phrase constructions may be in any of the following tense/aspect categories which differ little from their acrolectal equivalects: the simple present tense, the future, and the present, past or future progressive (1-5).

1. SIMPLE PRESENT: John work in Los Angeles.
2. FUTURE: a) John will work in Los Angeles.
            b) John gon' work in Los Angeles.
3. PRESENT PROGRESSIVE: They fightin'.
4. PAST PROGRESSIVE: They was fightin'.
5. FUTURE PROGRESSIVE: They gon' be fightin'.

The basilect has a perfect construction marked by the particle done followed by either the past tense or past participle form of the verb. This construction takes the place of both the simple past and present perfect of acrolectal English. The particle done may sometimes be omitted:

6. PERFECT (with done) John done broke his leg.
7. PERFECT (without done) They gone home.

BBE also has a habitual progressive construction marked by the infinitive form of be which directly follows the subject noun phrase and contrasts with the present progressive marked by 'zero' copula:

8. HABITUAL PROGRESSIVE: They be fightin' all the time.
9. PRESENT PROGRESSIVE: They fightin' right now.

There is also a habitual perfect which contrasts with the done perfect:

10. HABITUAL PERFECT: He always be done lost his cool.
11. PERFECT: He done lost his cool again.

A future perfect is also possible as in:

12. FUTURE PERFECT: <u>I'm 'on' be done went
     upside yo head.</u>

<u>Negation</u>. Sentences in the simple present,
habitual progressive or habitual perfect are negated
by placing <u>don'</u> before the verb phrase:

13. <u>John don' live there no mo'.</u>
14. <u>They don' be fightin' all the time.</u>
15. <u>They don' be done started they routine.</u>

Modal like <u>will</u> and <u>kin</u> have their negative
equivalents <u>won'</u> and <u>kain'</u>:

16. <u>This kain' be happenin' to me!</u>
17. <u>It won' happen no mo'.</u>

Present progressive, perfect and futures with
<u>gon'</u> are negated by placing <u>ain'</u> before the verb
phrase:

18. <u>He ain' jivin'.</u>
19. <u>I ain' gon' study wa' no mo'.</u>
20. <u>You ain' seen nothin'.</u>

<u>Negative concord</u>. So-called double negatives are
acceptable in basilectal BE as sentences 13, 17, 19 and
20 above illustrate.

<u>Copula constrctions</u>. Predicate noun phrase,
adjectives and locatives directly follow the subject
noun phrase in present tense declarative sentences:

21. <u>She nice.</u>
22. <u>We on tape.</u>

Predicate nominals follow <u>was</u> in the past tense
and the infinitive <u>be</u> after modals:

23. <u>We was ten minutes late.</u>
24. <u>It's gon' be fo' mo' years of hard times.</u>

The infinite <u>be</u> in copula constructions may also
directly follow the subject and marks habitual aspect:

25. <u>He be red as a beet.</u>

Present tense zero-copula forms are negated with
<u>ain'</u> preceeding the predicate while past forms have
<u>wa'n't</u> in the place of <u>was</u>. Habitual predicates are

negated by placing <u>don'</u> before the infinitive <u>be</u>.

26. <u>He ain' no fool.</u>
27. <u>It wa'n't nobody there.</u>
28. <u>It don' be all that bad.</u>

<u>Yes/no questions</u>. Yes/no questions are formed by placing <u>do</u> before the subject noun phrase of sentences in the simple present or habitual form, and <u>is</u> or <u>was</u> before other types of sentences:

29. <u>Do dey be takin' care a bidness?</u>
30. <u>Do yo daddy live in San Francisco?</u>
31. <u>Is you done lost yo mind?</u>
32. <u>Is fat meat greasy?</u>

<u>Affirmative sentences</u>. Sentences in the affirmative mode are formed by placing <u>dó</u> before verb phrases in simple present or habitual form and before habitual predicates. A stressed variant of the auxiliary or copula <u>is</u> is used before other verb phrases and predicates.

33. <u>He dó work for Mac Donalds.</u>
34. <u>This nigga ís done gone crazy.</u>
35. <u>She ís nice.</u>

Modal auxiliaries and the past tense marker <u>was</u> receive emphatic stress in affirmative sentences:

36. <u>She kín cook!</u>
37. <u>We wás studyin'!</u>

<u>Noun phrases</u>. BBE noun phrases differ little from their acrolectal equivalents. Some of the main differences are: marked second person plural pronoun, <u>y'all</u>, <u>they</u> as a posessive, invariant use of <u>a</u> as indefinite article, zero noun plurals after quantifiers, and <u>nem</u> used as a pluralizer of proper nouns:

38. <u>Y'all crazy.</u>
39. <u>They daddy a preacher.</u>
40. <u>I ate a apple an' a orange.</u>
41. <u>That'a be five dollar.</u>
42. <u>Willie nem done went home.</u>

<u>Standardization rules</u>. Empirical samples of mesolectal performance contain numerous discrepancies with the predicted patterns of a static synchronic grammar of the kind partially sketched above. In this section it

consonants. If contraction is favored by a preceeding vowel, and deletion is an extension of contraction, then deletion should also be favored by a preceeding vowel. The standardization rule adds a voiced alveolar sibilant to the end of noun phrases. Labov's data supports the hypothesis that such a rule operates upon zero-copula BBE structures, most frequently after vowels, and least frequently after voiceless consonants.

Conclusion. The age-old paradox which led Saussure to formulate the langue-parole dichotomy has been replicated in this study. The fact that a native speaker of Black English has intuitions of two coexisting static, synchronic systems must be reconciled with the fact that empirical studies repeatedly show continuous and patterned variation in primary linguistic data. Similar observations have been made by other linguists who are native speakers of "post-creole" varieties of language. Beryl Bailey, a native speaker of Jamaican creole insists upon analyzing the Jamaican situation in terms of two separate, discrete poles, a creole and a standard, rather than in terms of the continuum found in empirical data. Her Jamaican Creole Syntax: a transformational approach (1966) provides a static, synchronic description of the creole basilect which, admittedly, neither she, nor any other Jamaican consistently speaks. Her native speaker intuitions, however, are sufficiently clear to provide a very detailed and organized account of the basilectal structure. Stanley Tsuzaki (1971) a native Hawaiian, finds that despite the continuous nature of the variation in his Hawaiian English data, his native intuitions show three distinct synchronic systems representing a pidgin, a creole and a non-standard dialect of English which coexist in the linguistic repertoire of the speech community.

In the light of observations like the above, it seems clear that despite the variable and continuous nature of primary linguistic data, the reality in the head of the speaker of a language is static and synchronic in nature. Any complete theory of language should account for this fact by giving some logical status to the intuitions of native speakers by specifying what they represent. For the author of this paper, the static, synchronic entities of the native speaker's intuitions represent neither langue nor competence, which suffer equally from the ultimate lack of accountability to empirical data, but rather the polar lects of a dynamic continuum. Given an adequate characterization of the polar lects of a language (which are not subject to direct empirical

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falsification) it is possible to propose rules which operate upon the output of basilectal or acrolectal grammars to produce the various mesolectal combinations found in empirical data. A theory of a language which generates empirically falsifiable hypotheses fulfills the accountability criterion even though the hypotheses are frequently proven wrong. It is only when hypotheses are not subject to falsification by empirical means that charges of unaccountability are justified.

There is a great and continuing need for reliable information about the grammatical structure of many of the vernacular languages of the world. In recent years, millions of dollars have been spent on studies of vernacular Black English, and massive amounts of data have been compiled. While such studies have contributed greatly to the development of more enlightened attitudes toward the vernacular among educators and policy makers, only fragmentary accounts of isolated features of BE grammar have been produced. This is not surprising in view of the fact that neither structuralism with all its insistence upon rigorous "discovery procedures" nor transformationalism with its heavy emphasis upon abstract formalism have been very successful in producing a complete and comprehensive description of any language. The best comprehensive descriptions of languages continue to be traditional grammars.

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