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Negation
in
Early African American English

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1. Introduction

This thesis describes the use of negation in three varieties of Ante-bellum African American English. The data on which this study is based were extracted from the *African Nova Scotian English Corpus* (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991), project directed by S. Tagliamonte and S. Poplack and funded by SSHRCC, from the *Samaná Corpus* (Poplack & Sankoff 1981), project directed by S. Poplack, and from the *Ex-Slave Recordings* (Bailey et al. 1991). They build upon the analyses presented in Tagliamonte (1991), Tagliamonte & Poplack (1993), Poplack & Tagliamonte (1994), etc.

There are four conspicuous structures in the negation system of African American English: (i) extensive use of the negative form *ain't*, e.g. (1a); (ii) extensive use of negative concord, e.g. (1b); (iii) negative inversion, e.g. (1c); (iv) negative postposing, e.g. (1d).

- 1a. ... *an' I ain't been to the courthouse but twice* (ESR/001/90)¹
- 1b. *No driver didn't want to kill nobody* (SE/006/1152)
- 1c. *Didn't nobody say nothing about it* (ANSE/038/523)
- 1d. *That one had time to take out nothing* (SE/002/228)

This thesis deals mainly with *ain't* (section 3) and negative concord (section 4), and treats negative inversion and negative postposing only briefly (section 5), because they are rare in the data.

¹ The codes in parentheses identify the corpus, speaker, and location of the token in the Samaná English Corpus (SE), the Ex-slave Recordings (ESR), and the African Nova Scotian English Corpus (ANSE), respectively.

The results in this study are compared to those of previous variation studies in negation in English dialects. This allows for a more general characterization of the nature and origin of each phenomenon investigated. This also aligns the present work with an important line of typological studies in negation (Dahl 1979, Payne 1985, Dryer 1989, Croft 1991, Bernini & Ramat 1992, van der Wouden 1994, and Kahrel & van den Berg 1994). Specifically then, the use of negation in African Nova Scotian English, Samaná English and the *Ex-slave Recordings* is compared to its use in several other varieties of nonstandard English: (contemporary) African American Vernacular English (Labov et al. 1968, Labov 1972: New York; Weldon 1993: Columbus; Wolfram 1969: Detroit), southern white nonstandard American English (Feagin 1979: Anniston, Ala.), Appalachian English (Wolfram and Christian 1975, 1976, etc.) and white nonstandard British English (Cheshire 1981, 1982, 1991: Reading, UK).

Note, finally, that the quantitative approach adopted here affords a wealth of empirical facts that should be especially well received given the recent explosion of interest in theoretical aspects of negation, particularly those pertaining to negative concord.² The relevance of this study to linguistic theory will not be emphasized below, however, since the central concern of this work is to contribute to our understanding of the *origins* of African American Vernacular English, a theme which I develop in the following section.

² By way of illustration of the recent explosion of theoretical research in this area, consider that negative concord has become a central concern in syntax for Haegeman (1991, 1995b), Haegeman & Zanuttini (1991a, 1991b), Déprez (1995a, 1995b), Rowlett (1994, 1995), Giannakidou & Quer (1995), Peres (1995); and in semantics, for Ladusaw (1992, 1995) and van der Wouden & Zwarts (1993). Martin (1992) also discusses recent analyses of negation with respect to multiple negation in African American English.

Negation and the origins of African American English

The use of negation in African American Vernacular English has recently become a controversial issue within the ongoing debate over the origins of this language variety. This debate revolves around the following question: Can African American English be said to have evolved from a prior creole, or are its roots to be found *only* in English? Although various types of evidence have been adduced in favour of the "creole origin" hypothesis³, they typically involve showing (a) how African American Vernacular English is different from other English dialects and (b) how it is similar to other creoles. Thus Labov (1982:192) claims: "It [African American Vernacular English] shows evidence of derivation from an earlier Creole that was closer to the present-day Creoles of the Caribbean". Moreover, although many areas of the grammar of African American Vernacular English have been implicated in this debate⁴, only recently has negation been considered one of "the chief areas in which [Black English Vernacular] shows traces of its creole origin" (Winford 1992:350).⁵

To illustrate the relevance of negation in this controversy, consider first the use of the negative form *ain't*. Unlike any other dialect of English, African American Vernacular English displays a productive alternation between *ain't* and *didn't* (examples from Weldon 1993:16):

- 2a. *I ain't believe you that day, man.*
 2b. *I ain't give you none, Boo, did I?*

³ See e.g. Rickford (1977) for an early review.

⁴ See e.g. Winford (1992) for an update.

⁵ The other "chief areas" are the copula and tense systems. Poplack & Tagliamonte (1989, 1991) and Tagliamonte & Poplack (1988, 1993) argue that these systems derive directly from the English vernaculars which the African slaves were exposed to.

Interestingly, most English-based creoles have a preverbal, monomorphemic negator which, like *ain't* in African American Vernacular English, can appear in the usual context of English *didn't*:

- 3a. *Samo àn téi gòni sùti di pingó*
 "Samo didn't take a gun and (then) shoot the pig"
 (Saramaccan Creole, Byrne 1987:168 - my emphasis)
- 3b. *A teki a nefi foe koti a brede, ma no koti en.*
 "he took a knife to cut the bread, but did not cut it"
 (Sranan Creole, Bickerton 1981:60 - my emphasis)
- 3c. *The girl eh lie.* "The girl didn't lie"
 (Trinidadian Creole, taken from Weldon 1993; Winford (p.c.) points out that *eh* in TC is realized as /ɛ - ɛn - ɛnt/)

Thus, with regard to this particular use of *ain't*, African American Vernacular English is both different from other English dialects and similar to creoles. This may then be construed as evidence for the "creole origin" of African American English (cf. section 3, however).

Consider next the use of multiple negation (henceforth negative concord) in African American Vernacular English (examples from Labov 1972a:786):

- 4a. *Down here nobody don't know about no club.*
 "Down here, nobody knows about any club"
- 4b. *None of our friends don't fight him.*
 "None of our friends fight him"

According to Bickerton (1981:65) negative concord is actually a prototypical feature of creole languages. Cf. (5) (examples are from Guyanese Creole):

- 5a. *non dag na bait non kyat* "No dog bit any cat"
 (Bickerton 1981:66)
- 5b. *nonbadi na sii am* "Nobody saw him"
 (Bickerton 1984:185)

Crucially here, the striking similarity between the examples from African American English in (4) and the creole examples in (5) is accounted for if one assumes that African American Vernacular English originated from a creole. Such an assumption would be problematic, however, because negative concord also occurs in white nonstandard English. The following examples are from Alabama White English (Feagin 1979:241):

- 6a. ... *and nobody didn' do nothin' about it.* "and nobody did anything about it"
 6b. *Nobody don't believe it now.* "nobody believes it now"

As far as the presence (versus the absence) of negative concord is concerned then, African American Vernacular English would have as much in common with white nonstandard English as it does with creoles. Nevertheless, it may be possible to overcome this ambiguity if one is able to show that the *system* of negative concord in African American English is *different* from that in white nonstandard English (and further, that the system of negative concord in African American English is *similar* to that found in creoles). (I will return to this idea in the next section.)

These two examples (viz. the negative form *ain't* and negative concord) illustrate how the negation system of African American English may be probed for clues in the "origins debate". Below, however, I show that such "probing" remains speculative (at best) unless a more rigorous methodology *and* more relevant data are employed. The best approach, it will be shown, involves showing whether the use of such negative structures in early African American English reflects an English or a non-English grammatical system. Crucially, by so using negation as a "probe" into the grammar of *early* African American English, findings become diagnostic for the *overall* nature and origin of present-day African American Vernacular English.

2. Methodology and data:

2.1. Hypothesis testing in a variationist framework:

I adopt the variationist framework for the present study. In this framework, one does not investigate a phenomenon with only data that support a particular hypothesis. Rather, the linguistic phenomenon is studied under *all* of its varied forms, using data from language in its natural context. In what follows, I describe the rationale for such an approach. Following this, I outline how its methods were employed in extracting and analysing the data for this study of negation in early African American English.

Bickerton (1986:25) warns that one cannot claim that languages are related "by simply producing superficially similar surface structures in those languages, [but rather] by producing grammars which [are] substantially identical."⁶ Thus the mere existence of

⁶ An excellent illustration of Bickerton's caveat is provided by plural marking in Nigerian Pidgin English. Tagliamonte et al. (in press) show that the variable use of the English plural affix-*s* is conditioned by animacy and nominal reference in NPE, i.e. two non-English grammatical factors. (Note: the "standard" plural markers - post-nominal *dem* and reduplication - account for less than 2.5% of the data). Cf. also Poplack & Tagliamonte (1989, 1991, 1994) and Tagliamonte & Poplack (1993).

creole-like negative structures in African American Vernacular English is not sufficient to identify the underlying grammar of this language. The issue is compounded by the fact that *ain't* and negative concord, as shown above, are found in African American Vernacular English, English-based creoles as well as in nonstandard English. Hence the presence versus absence of particular forms is not diagnostic for our purposes. Rather, the notion of *system* needs to be developed with respect to each negative structure in (1) above.

Determining the *system* of negation in our data calls for yet another caveat. Many researchers try to control and marginalize those "facts of language" which have (allegedly) little to do with the particular linguistic phenomenon being investigated. As Labov (1972b) describes, these factors which linguists have generally chosen to disregard typically include the fact that languages are *social* constructs⁷, the fact that languages *change*⁸ and the fact that language *varies*⁹. Notice, however, that none of these "facts" should be marginalized in our study, since all three are crucial in understanding the negation system of African American English:

- First, the social violence associated with the African slaves' arrival in English America is held directly responsible for the possibility of "linguistic violence", hence of possible prior pidginization and creolization of (the negation system of) African American English (see e.g. Dillard 1972, Stewart 1967). Moreover, the systematic behaviour of e.g. *ain't* and negative concord is likely to be skewed in any investigation that ignores the socially-stigmatized nature of such features. The data must therefore be collected in a manner that avoids normative pressure. Of course, the informants themselves must also be

⁷ "[The great majority of linguists] insist that explanations of linguistic facts be drawn from other linguistic facts, not from any "external" data on social behaviour" (Labov 1972b:185)

⁸ "The empirical study of linguistic change was ... removed from the program of 20th-century linguistics" (Labov 1972b:xiv)

⁹ "Relations of *more* or *less* were ... ruled out of linguistic thinking; a form or a rule could only occur always, optionally, or never." (Labov 1972b:xiv).

representative of the language community under study (Poplack 1988). Sections (2.2.1) and (2.2.3) describe how such issues were resolved in the present study of negation.

- Second, the question of prior creolization in African American English presupposes linguistic change. One cannot evaluate the degree of “creoleness” of the negation system of African American Vernacular English without knowledge of a prior stage of this language. Also, because the negation system of African American Vernacular English is said to *derive* from a prior creole, one is presumably more likely to find “traces of its creole origin” (Winford 1992:350) further back in time. Section (2.2.2) outlines how these conditions were met in the present study.

- Third, in order to describe a particular phenomenon as an integral part of one language system or another, one must study it not in isolation, but in the general context of language in all its variability. In our case, if the English system - in all its complexity - cannot account for the variable use of *ain't* or negative concord in African American English, and another system can, then (and only then) one may posit the interference of a separate underlying (creole?) system. In particular, we can observe how specific variants of each negative structure pattern according to more general grammatical distinctions in early African American English (assuming the negation system interacts with other areas of the grammar). To the extent that such grammatical distinctions are English-like versus Creole-like, we are then given a solution to the “origins” issue with regard to negation in early African American English.

Note, finally, that in section (4) we will take this overall approach further, since we will establish which particular grammatical mechanisms are relatively *more* important for the system of negative concord in early African American English. This is achieved by analysing the data with Goldvarb (version 2.0), a variable rule application for the

Macintosh (Rand & Sankoff 1990). Even though this has not yet been done for the negative concord system of any other language (hence the lack of cross-linguistic comparability), I believe the results from this variable rule analysis are crucial to understanding both the nature and origin of negative concord in early African American English.

2.2. The data:

2.2.1. The interviews:

It follows from what was said in the previous section that the data used in our study of negation should represent the language variety in its natural state. Accordingly, the data used for the present study of negation were extracted from individual, taped conversations. I used audio-tapes for the African Nova Scotian English and Samaná English data, and reel-to-reel recordings for the Ex-slave Recordings. Specific information regarding these interviews are outlined in Bailey et al. (1991) and Tagliamonte (1991) for the *Ex-slave Recordings*, in Poplack & Sankoff (1987) and Tagliamonte (1991) for the *Samaná English Corpus*, and in Poplack & Tagliamonte (1991) for the *African Nova Scotian English Corpus*.

As described therein, the conversations were generally informal as participants shared stories and personal experiences, casually discussed community issues, recalled emotional historical events and spoke of "life in the olden days". Within individual interviews, speakers occasionally spoke with each other as well. Note, however, that because questions were being asked and answers given, the recordings still do not necessarily represent speech in its most vernacular state (cf. Labov 1972b:208-9). Crucially though, the overall nature of the conversations arguably detracted from the

formal context of recording, i.e., the informants did not pay regular attention to their speech. The data obtained from these informants may thus be considered appropriate for the study of language in its natural context.

2.2.2. The informants, and what they represent:

a) The Ex-slave Recordings:

i) Background:

This corpus was obtained from the U.S. Library of Congress (Bailey et al. 1991). The informants are 11 former American slaves born between 1844 and 1861. The naturally-occurring speech in these audio-recordings is an invaluable, direct source of real-time African American English in the 19th century. As such, the *Ex-slave Recordings* have already played an important role in the "origins controversy" (Bailey et al. 1991; Tagliamonte 1991, 1995; Tagliamonte & Poplack 1993; Poplack & Tagliamonte 1989, 1994).

ii) Speakers:

Because the *Ex-slave Recordings* constitute a rather small corpus, all speakers were included in the present study of *ain't* and negative concord, despite their different backgrounds. They are listed in Table (2.1):

TABLE 2.1
INFORMANTS FROM THE EX-SLAVE RECORDINGS

	Spkr #	Initials	Date of birth	Residence
Men	#001	BL	b. 1861	Oil City, LA
	#002	WQ	b. 1844	Frederica, GA
	#005	BM	b. ?	Jasper, TX
	#006	JM	b. ?	Livingston, AL
	#008	FH	b. 1848	Charlottesville, VA
	#010	IM	b. 1856	Gee's Bend, AL
Women	#012	CS	b. 1844	Houston, TX
	#003	AG	b. 1853	Gee's Bend, AL
	#007	MM	b. ?	Livingston, AL
	#009	HS	b. 1851	Hempstead, TX
	#011	CB	b. 1859	Tyler, TX
	#013	LS	b. ?	Hempstead, TX

b) The Samaná English Corpus

i) Background:

Speakers from the *Samaná English Corpus* (Poplack & Sankoff 1987) were born some decades later than the informants in the Ex-slave Recordings (c. 1895-1910). Even so, unique historical, social and geographical circumstances make the speech of the Samaná informants representative of 19th century African American English (Ibid. for argument).

The Samaná informants are descendants from some 6,000 American slaves who settled in the isolated region of Samaná (Dominican Republic) in the early 1820's. The language variety of these settlers was passed on - as a native language - to the informants through their parents, despite the surrounding monolingual Spanish population:

- 7a. *I'm born talking the American, ain't true?* (SE/007/707)
- 7b. *My parents never spoke one Spanish word with me* (SE/006/248)
- 7c. *I don't know much of Spanish* (SE/011/360)

Furthermore, the social isolation of the English speakers (e.g., *They [the Spanish] don't like us English people* - SE/007/1684) as well as the geographic remoteness of Samaná ("the peninsula of Samaná ... is largely separated from the rest of the country [Dominican Republic] by a gulf of the same name" - Poplack & Sankoff 1987:291) make for a linguistic enclave, i.e. an environment where language typically resists to (socially motivated) change. This has led Poplack & Sankoff (1987), Poplack & Tagliamonte (1989), Tagliamonte (1991) and Tagliamonte & Poplack (1988) to hold Samaná English as representative of early 19th century African American English, thereby implicating it in the discussion over the nature and origin of African American Vernacular English (see also Poplack & Tagliamonte 1994, Tagliamonte & Poplack 1986 and Tagliamonte 1995).

ii) Speakers:

From the 19 interviews that were recorded in 1981-1982 for the *Samaná English Corpus* (Poplack & Sankoff 1987), I retained only those with the following six speakers for my study of negation.

TABLE 2.2
SELECTED INFORMANTS FROM THE SAMANA ENGLISH CORPUS

	Spkr #	Initials	Age
Men	#001	OH	78
	#006	MS	80
	#011	SJ	79
Women	#002	DA	79
	#003	ES	83
	#007	VS	75

These particular speakers were chosen because their interviews are said to contain the most vernacular speech (cf. definition in Labov 1972b:208) of the entire *Samaná English*

Corpus (p.c. Sali Tagliamonte; Keltie Purcell, Sociolinguistics Laboratory, University of Ottawa).

c) The African Nova Scotian Corpus:

i) Background:

The sociolinguistic interviews (cf. Labov 1984) which constitute the *African Nova Scotian English Corpus* were recorded in the summer of 1991 and one should refer to Poplack & Tagliamonte (1991) for detailed information. The informants are all descendants of American slaves who emigrated to Nova Scotia (Canada) in the late 1700's and early 1800's. Thus for instance, almost the entire population of North Preston (where most of the interviews were done), "the largest black community in Nova Scotia", is "old-line" black (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991:310); it is a community which has "remained both geographically and socially separated from surrounding populations since the time of original settlement" (Ibid.:307). In other words, North Preston is a linguistic enclave, just like Samaná. The systematic study of its language variety can therefore also provide us with insights into "old-line" early 19th-century African American English.

ii) Speakers:

The data used for my study of negation were extracted from taped conversations in which all participants were from the North Preston black community. I selected six informants for the study of *ain't* (009, 016, 019, 030, 032, 038), and seven for negative concord (009, 019, 027, 030, 038, 039). They are listed here (asterisks indicate informants whose data were used for both *ain't* and negative concord):

TABLE 2.3
SELECTED INFORMANTS FROM THE
AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN ENGLISH CORPUS

Inf. No.	Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Yrs in school	Former occupation	Former occupation of spouse
009	Anne Chisolm (*)	F	72	2	Housework, teacher	Weaver, mechanic
016	Christine Aitken	F	72	6	Nurse's aide	
019	Agnes Darwin (*)	F	64	3	Housewife	Labourer
027	Bernadette Darwin	F	61		Housewife	
030	John Green (*)	M	88	6	Laid railway tracks	Deceased
032	Calvin Gibson (*)	M	80	9	Farmwork, caretaker in Preston highschool for 40 years	
038	Mike Elliot (*)	M	53	3	Farmer	
039	Ian Darwin	M	62			Housewife

These speakers were chosen specifically because:

- they share relevant ethnic, social and economic characteristics¹⁰:
 - comparable ages¹¹
 - "old-line" descent

¹⁰ These characteristics were gleaned from the taped interviews themselves and from the interview reports.

¹¹ Originally, my study also included Annette Briggs (Age 25) and Margaret Ford (Age 31), but I later excluded them to make the ANSE sample comparable with the Samaná English corpus and the Ex-slave Recordings, which are restricted to older speakers.

- born and raised in remote fringe areas of North Preston, itself a relatively isolated rural settlement
- never lived anywhere else, always isolated from surrounding mainstream populations
- relatively low-prestige occupation (housework, labour)
- low level of education
- shared ethics and beliefs, same social network (the informants all know each other).

- their interviews are reputed to contain the most vernacular speech (cf. Labov 1972b:208) in the entire ANSE corpus (p.c., Sali Tagliamonte, Keltie Purcell, Sociolinguistics Laboratory, University of Ottawa).

To summarize, it is argued that the speech of the informants selected from all three corpora (viz. The *Ex-slave Recordings*, the *Samaná English Corpus* and the *African Nova Scotian English Corpus*) is representative (cf. Poplack 1988:24) of early 19th century African American English and further, that the naturalistic audio-recorded conversations provide us with appropriate data for a systematic study of negation in this language. Once again, the two diaspora varieties (Samaná English and African Nova Scotian English) are taken as representative of 19th century African American English insofar as they have remained relatively resistant to contact-induced change.

The validity of this claim is evident from several studies (notably Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991, 1994; Tagliamonte & Poplack 1993) which show that (i) both diaspora varieties show consistent parallels across various grammatical phenomena (e.g. copula deletion, plural marking, verbal -s marking, past tense marking) and (ii) both diaspora varieties shows consistent parallels with the *Ex-slave Recordings*. These facts

are explained if one assumes that the shared features predate the historical split between Samaná English and African Nova Scotian English in the early 1800s.

In this thesis I will show that the distribution of various negative features is also remarkably similar across the three varieties under study. To show this, results from all three corpora are displayed side-by-side in each table. Where possible, I will also provide examples from each data set. Furthermore, I will show that the distribution of several negative features in early African American English is systematically different from modern varieties of African American English. Crucially, the systematic differences between present-day African American Vernacular English and the three varieties of early African American English is best explained in terms of linguistic *change*.

2.2.3. The variable contexts:

Most formal linguists object to the exclusive use of naturalistic data in linguistic research. In their view "usage data are inevitably an incomplete source of information. The sentences actually produced by a speaker are only a fragment of the sentences he *could* have produced" (Haegeman 1994:10, italics hers). To surmount this problem, linguists will usually rely on speakers' intuitions about their own language. Thus for instance, regarding the use of *ain't* for *didn't* in African American English one may conceivably ask native speakers of this language whether they consider the underlined sentence in (8) acceptable or not (e.g. from Baugh 1988:71):

8. I said, 'I ain't run the stop sign,' and he said, 'you ran it!'

In this study of negation, however, reliance on such informant-introspection is impossible, not only for the general reasons outlined in Labov (1972b)¹² but because (i) the speakers of the *Ex-slave Recordings* (as well as most of the speakers in the *Samaná English Corpus*) are no longer alive and (ii), the speakers in both the *Samaná English Corpus* and the *African Nova Scotian English Corpus* consider their own speech "broken" and "grammar-less" (because it is socially stigmatized), hence the unreliability of their "judgements":

9. *The English people talks with grammar ... and we speaks rough* (SE/006/1104)

For these reasons, the three corpora of "natural use" data (as described in the previous section) remain the only source of information for the study of negation in early African American English. Fortunately though, the variationist approach adopted here offers a unique solution to the problem noted above: the variable nature of most language phenomena (including those under study in this thesis) allows one to circumscribe *variable contexts*, i.e., linguistic environments where specific structures can be expected to occur. Crucially, a variable context can be defined even within the confines of finite corpora. In effect, the variationist approach allows one to make optimal use of naturalistic data

¹² Labov's fundamental insight was this: people have "categorical perception", hence speaker intuitions cannot access *patterns* in the variable use of linguistic phenomena.

3. Ain't:

3.1. Introduction:

100% of the Usage Panel of the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (Morris 1981) "strongly condemns" the use of the negative form *ain't* in both English speech and writing. Notwithstanding, widespread use of *ain't* for *be+not* and the auxiliary *have+not*, as in (10), can be found in nonstandard dialects of English worldwide (Gramley & Pätzold 1992:308-9).

- 10a. *He ain't dead* (ESR/012/134)
- 10b. *We ain't gonna get that money* (SE/001/346)
- 10c. *I ain't seen no Santa Claus yet* (ANSE/038/731)

Various historical explanations have been offered for this grammatical phenomenon in the literature, including that *ain't* originally derived from the contraction of either *am not* (e.g. Cheshire 1991:56) or *are not* (e.g. Curme 1977:137-8), and that its use later spread throughout the paradigm of not only present tense *be* but also present tense auxiliary *have*. Alternatively, Jespersen (1940:430-1) suggests that *ain't* could have derived from (i) *amn't*, (ii) *aren't* and *isn't*, and (iii) *haven't* and *hasn't*, independently. If this view is correct (see also Stevens 1954:200), "the use of the form *ain't* for the negative present tense contracted forms of both HAVE and BE is simply the result of a diachronic coincidence" (Cheshire 1982:53; cf. Cheshire 1981).

As noted in section (1), in African American English *ain't* further occupies the paradigm of the past tense auxiliary *do* (see e.g. Labov et al. 1968:255-7). Thus compare

sentences (11a) and (11b) which were used by a Samaná English speaker only seconds apart in the interview :

11a. *He ain't give the man nothing* (SE/001/987)

11b. *He didn't give the man nothing* (SE/001/989)

This use of *ain't* is considered particularly significant insofar as "the correspondence of standard English *didn't* [with *ain't*] has only been found in Vernacular Black English varieties" (Wolfram 1991:293). The standard explanation for this state of affairs has been that *ain't* evolved from phonetic changes in the standard English form *didn't* (see e.g. Fasold & Wolfram 1970:69; Rickford 1977:203). Recently however, some linguists have challenged this understanding: they suggest (e.g. DeBose 1994) that *ain't* is used across very different verbal paradigms in African American English because it is a monomorphemic negation marker, something like *na* or *en* in Guyanese Creole (12a, 12b), *no* in Sranan (12c) and Jamaican Creole (12d), *ən* in Saramaccan Creole (12e), or *eh* in Trinidadian Creole (12f):¹³

12a. *If deh na fin' yuh, dem seh, 'Well, yuh loss'*

If they don't find you, they say, 'Well, you're lost'

(GC, Rickford 1983:308 - his emphasis)

12b. *Dey en gat no time when is more best fuh taak, yuh know, good English, an talk properly*

There isn't any time when it is better to talk, you know, good English, and talk properly

(GC, Rickford 1983:309 - my emphasis)

¹³ According to Bickerton (1981:65;191) negators are VP-initial in creoles, like *ain't* in African American English.

- 12c. *a teki a nefi foe koti a brede, ma no koti en*
 He took a knife to cut the bread, but he did not cut it
 (Sranan, Bickerton 1981:60 - my emphasis)
- 12d. ... *if you noh know dem, ...*
 ... if you don't know them, ...
 (JC, Sutcliffe 1992:104 - my emphasis)
- 12e. *de + àn téi gòni*
 They didn't take a gun
 (Saramaccan, Byrne 1987:169 - my emphasis)
- 12e. *The man eh a thief* The man isn't a thief
The girl eh crying The girl isn't crying
The girl eh know The girl doesn't know
The girl eh lie The girl didn't lie
 (TC, Winford 1983, taken from Weldon 1993 - her emphasis)

To posit such an interpretation for *ain't* entails that this negator should behave in African American English like negators do in creoles, at least in some essential respects. For instance, Bickerton (1975:99) observes in Guyanese Creole that as a *have/be* negator, *en* is "employed indifferently with past and non-past reference" (see also Rickford 1983:314). In other words, *en* in Guyanese Creole is tense neutral: its use does not depend on, nor does it indicate, temporal reference. It is monomorphemic, it stands for negation and nothing else.

Returning now to *ain't* in African American English, DeBose and Faraclas (1993:370) have suggested that it patterns according to the stativity/nonstativity of the predicate which it precedes, and not according to any particular temporal reference. On the basis of such apparent indiscriminate use of *ain't* across various tense and aspect

configurations, DeBose (1994:128) has further claimed that "AAVE *ain't* is tense/aspect neutral". In other words, *ain't* patterns according to a tense-deficient system, and such a system is characteristic of a creole language (Bickerton 1975). Of course, standard English negation variants (e.g., *didn't*, *isn't*, *haven't*) also occur in African American English, and these pattern according to the tense-prominent grammar of English. Thus, to explain the variable use of *ain't* in African American English, DeBose proposes a "bisystemic analysis" (DeBose 1992, 1994), i.e., what Weldon (1993:) calls "dialect mixture" (i.e., "code-switching").

What makes this proposal so interesting is that it can be operationalized and verified. To verify its claim, all one needs to do is assess the system membership of *ain't*, so it is not necessary to characterize the entire underlying grammatical system of African American English. In practical terms, if the variable use of *ain't* can be shown to pattern according to non-English rules (e.g., tense-neutrality) in our three corpora, this may be construed as evidence for the existence in African American English of an underlying non-English system (this overall approach has been outlined in section 1). It is precisely my testing of this hypothesis which this part of the thesis reports.

3.2. The variable context of *Ain't*:

3.2.1. Tokens included in the data sets:

Using the interviews that I selected from the three corpora (see section 2.2.2), I extracted all sentences where the negative form *ain't* occurs as well as all sentences where that form *could* have occurred. These linguistic environments (which together constitute the variable context of *ain't* - cf. section 2.2.3) are listed here:

13a. The copula environment:

- i. Present tense copula *be* or \emptyset (Neg)+ noun phrase
That's not the finish part (ANSE/032/836)
That ain't no cattle (ANSE/032/271)
- ii. Present tense copula *be* or \emptyset (Neg)+ adjectival phrase
You're not supposed to sue nobody (ANSE/016/236)
You ain't 'posed to eat no food (ANSE/038/306)
Because it not meant (ANSE/009/513)
- iii. present tense copula *be* or \emptyset (Neg)+ locative
she's not here (SE/003/334;335)
The boss of the camp ain't here (ESR/012/251)

13b. The auxiliary environment:

- i. Present tense auxiliary *be* or \emptyset (Neg) + verb-*ing*
He's not worrying about me (SE/003/75)
He ain't worrying with me (SE/003/74)
I not worrying with that no more (SE/003/972)
- ii. Present tense auxiliary *have* or \emptyset (Neg) + past participle (Perfect)
I ain't had no clothes to buy since I been on the project
(ESR/010/94)
I haven't dreamt (SE/003/671)
- iii. Past tense auxiliary *do* (Neg) + verb
He didn't give the man nothing (SE/001/989)
He ain't give the man nothing (SE/001/987)

The examples given for each linguistic environment above illustrate how the use of *ain't* alternates with the standard English negative forms of *am*, *is*, *are*, *have*, *has*, and *did*. Of course, all of these uses of *ain't* are well-documented in the literature (e.g. Labov

et al. 1968; Fasold & Wolfram 1970:69; Wolfram 1991:293). Beyond these, however, the speakers of early African American English also display a correspondence between *ain't* and *wasn't/weren't*; e.g. (13d). For this reason, the past tense *be* was also included in the variable context of *ain't* in this study.

13d. Past tense *be* (Neg)

'Cause it wasn't no church like it is now (ANSE/009/712)

But the boys ain't like the boys is now (ANSE/016/74)

3.2.2. Ambiguous tokens included in the data sets:

The data sets also include a number of forms which share the same surface morphology as one of the negation forms listed in (13), but their interpretation remains too difficult to classify them under those forms. Consider the use of *ain't* in (14) for instance:

14. *I say, you ain't told me to take that. (SE/007/1277)*

The surface form of the past participle suggests that *ain't* stands for *haven't*, i.e. the perfect form. Participles are highly variable in African American English, however, which makes it difficult to identify them accurately. The sentences in (15) illustrate how the past tense morphology is variably doubled in a single preterit form:

15a. *my mother always did taught us (SE/002/243)*

15b. *they didn't have nothing (SE/001/862)*

15c. *they didn't had nothing (SE/001/863)*

In (15c), if *ain't* were used for *didn't*, the surface form would have the appearance of the present perfect, but this is not what the speaker meant. Regarding this, the examples in (16) are a case in point: All four sentences have the same temporal/aspectual meaning, despite their varied surface forms. Reliance on the larger discourse contexts in the interviews make it clear that *ain't* corresponds to *didn't* in (16a), (16c) and (16d); (esp. compare (16b) and (16c) which are only a few seconds apart in the interview with #038):

- 16a. *I ain't saw it* (SE/002/200)
- 16b. *I didn't see nothing* (ANSE/038/404)
- 16c. *I ain't seen nothing* (ANSE/038/409)¹⁴
- 16d. *I ain't seed none* (ESR/010/36)

In the case of (14), however, there is nothing in the larger context surrounding the token with *ain't* that helps disambiguate the interpretation of *ain't* between the perfect from the preterit. The token must therefore remain ambiguous until differences between the behaviour of perfect *ain't* and preterit *ain't* are better understood. I will not contribute to this matter here.

3.2.3. Tokens not included in the data sets ("no-count" contexts):

The following negative linguistic environments were *not* used in this study because they are not part of the variable context of *ain't*. (In the literature, *ain't* has not been reported as occurring in the same linguistic environment as these forms, a finding which our data confirms.)

¹⁴ The (putative) *n* at the end of *seen* is actually merged with the following *n* from *nothing*; the correct transcription may therefore be: *I ain't see nothing*.

17a. Present tense *do* (Neg) auxiliary

I don' know how ol' they are (ESR/008/85)

I don't have no dream (SE/006/1830)

17b. Modal (Neg) + verb

I couldn't go face such a thing (SE/003/626)

They can't get no more (ESR/008/68)

17c. No *not/n't*:

- the negation is carried exclusively by a negative adverb: *never, hardly*

I have never had a dream of warning (SE/006/1832)

- negative postposing (see Appendix)

We're no different (ANSE/009/792)

17d. No predication

Not one like they got now (ANSE/009/308)

Yeah. No teacher. (ANSE/030/78)

3.2.4. The data sets:

I systematically extracted the negative forms described in (16) above as they occurred in the first 1.5-2 hours of each interview of the *African Nova Scotian English Corpus* and the *Samaná English Corpus*. A comparable number of tokens were thus taken from every selected speaker from these two corpora. By contrast, the interviews in the *Ex-slave recordings* vary considerably in length, so no attempt was made to extract a comparable number of tokens from each informant; as stated earlier, all tokens were extracted from the *Ex-slave Recordings*. Table (3.1) depicts the distribution of our sample of the variable context of *ain't* in each variety of early African American English:

TABLE 3.1
 TOKENS in the VARIABLE CONTEXT OF *AIN'T* EXTRACTED per SPEAKER
 FROM THE EX-SLAVE RECORDINGS (ESR), THE SAMANA ENGLISH CORPUS
 (SE) AND THE AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN ENGLISH CORPUS (ANSE)

ESR		SE		ANSE	
Spkr #	Tokens	Spkr #	Tokens	Spkr #	Tokens
#001	17	#001	80	#009	95
#002	7	#002	70	#016	77
#005	4	#003	128	#019	102
#006	4	#006	90	#030	112
#008	57	#007	60	#032	139
#010	7	#011	54	#038	101
#012	33				
#003	1				
#007	0				
#009	34				
#011	26				
#013	65				

3.3. Data configuration:

To facilitate their analysis, I divided the data into whether they corresponded to negative *be*, negative *have* or negative *do*, and coded the data according to temporal and aspectual distinctions, as detailed in (3.3.1) and (3.3.2) below.

3.3.1. Past / present temporal reference:

As described earlier, determining whether negation interacts with tense in earlier African American English should be especially diagnostic in the origins controversy. On one hand, tense figures prominently in the grammar of English. So for instance, *ain't* is not used in the past temporal reference of any English dialect, i.e. it is never used for *didn't*, *wasn't* or *hadn't*. On the other hand, creoles are normally "tense-deficient" (Bickerton

1975), so in these languages *ain't* should be "employed indifferently with past and non-past reference" (Ibid., p. 99).

In coding the early African American English data for past/present, I first considered the surface forms. If the token was a standard English form (e.g. *isn't*, *didn't*, *have not*), I verified the interpretation of its surface form with external indicators of temporal reference. These *external indicators* were typically temporal adverbs but other information was used as well. For instance, I checked the larger context (extra-sentential/discourse) on a case-by-case basis. If the token involved the form under study, *ain't*, I relied solely on the external indicators of temporal reference (including discourse cues):

18a. *you ain't going over now* (ANSE/011/1213) -> present

18b. *It's so long I ain't played* (ANSE/011/566) -> present perfect = past

In several cases though, even when obvious temporal cues were present, the temporal reference remained obscure:

19. *But it wasn't illegal if you ain't supposed to have it* (ANSE/032/716)

Such tokens were coded as "ambiguous".

Finally, as noted above, *ain't* +verb can often result in either a preterit or a perfect interpretation. Both interpretations have a past temporal reference, however, so *ain't* + verb forms were easily coded for temporal reference (see e.g.s in (16), above).

3.3.2. Stativity / nonstativity of the negatively-predicated verb:

The reason for choosing 'stativity/nonstativity' here (among many other possible aspectual distinctions) is given by a consistent finding in creolistics. As Mufwene (1986:139) notes: "To date no creole has been adduced yet that does not rely heavily on the stative/nonstative distinction for the interpretation of its verbal temporal delimitations." A token was marked 'stative' according to the criterion given to the verbal predicate in Quirk et al. (1985), as outlined in Tagliamonte (1991:209):

20. "... verbs which are intellectual:
- mental perception (e.g. *know, think, understand*)
 - states of emotions or attitude (e.g. *want, like, care*)
 - states of sensory perception (e.g. *see, hear, feel*)
 - states of bodily sensation (e.g. *hurt, feel*)
 - stance or relationship (e.g. *hold, depend, belong, live, stand, sit, lie, last*)
 - verbs of measurement (e.g. *weigh, cost, measure*)"

Other predicates were coded as 'nonstative'.

The prediction here runs as follows: If *ain't* in early African American English is essentially an English form in an English system, then as far as stativity is concerned, it should pattern just like the other English forms (*isn't,...*). By contrast, if *ain't* is a creole negator - part of a creole system -, there is no *a priori* reason for it to pattern like the English forms (which belong to the English system) with respect to stativity.

3.4. Patterns in the use of *Ain't*: Results and interpretations

3.4.1. Previous studies

The results of the present study are enriched by the existence of studies on *ain't* in three other varieties of nonstandard English: Weldon (1993) on African American Vernacular English (Columbus, Ohio), Feagin (1979) on southern white nonstandard American English (Anniston, Ala.), and Cheshire (1981, 1982, 1991) on white nonstandard British English (Reading, U.K.). The methodology in each of these studies is similar to what was outlined above. These studies also adopt the variationist framework, using naturalistic audio-recordings of their respective speech communities, and they divide their data into whether *ain't* corresponds to negative *be*, negative *have* or negative *do* (Weldon only). They did not code for temporal and aspectual distinctions, however. For the sake of comparison and contrast I will present the distribution of *ain't* in our data alongside with the results from Weldon (1993), Feagin (1979) and Cheshire (1981, 1982, 1991) whenever this is possible. I will also discuss the interpretations of their results when they apply to our data as well.

3.4.2. The distribution of *ain't* in the *be* environment:

The *be* environment (cf. Labov 1972a:67) is a generic term for two linguistic environments. The first is the "copula" environment: a following noun phrase, adjectival phrase or locative. The second is the "auxiliary" environment: a following gerund (Verb+ing) or *gon'*. What "be environments" have in common is that, in standard English, some negative form of the verb *to be* would normally appear in them: *Am not*, *'m not*, *is not*, *'s not*, *isn't*, *are not*, *'re not*, and *aren't*.

3.4.2.1. The overall distribution of *ain't* in the *be* environment:

The following table reports the use of *ain't* in the *be* environment¹⁵:

TABLE 3.2
DISTRIBUTION OF *AIN'T* IN THE *BE* ENVIRONMENT
IN SOUTHERN WHITE NONSTANDARD ENGLISH (SWNE), AFRICAN
AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH (AAVE), AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN
ENGLISH (ANSE), SAMANA ENGLISH (SE) AND THE EX-SLAVE RECORDINGS
(ESR)

	SWNE	AAVE	SE	ANSE	ESR
Total N	421 ¹⁶	251	159	144	26
<i>ain't</i>	46%	62%	72%	92%	85%

In all data sets of African American English, *ain't* is the highly favoured variant in the negative copula environment. This favouring of *ain't* over *be+not* is much more pronounced in the varieties representative of early African American English, however. In fact, the African Nova Scotian English data set displays near-categorical use of *ain't* in this linguistic environment. In contrast, the white working class informants from Alabama do not favour *ain't* over *be+not*. The following table presents the distribution in the two different types of *be* environment:

¹⁵ This distribution is not available for Reading English.

¹⁶ This is the total number of tokens in Feagin's (1979:214) urban and rural working class speakers.

TABLE 3.3
 DISTRIBUTION *AIN'T* IN *BE* ENVIRONMENT BY *BE*-TYPE
 IN WHITE NONSTANDARD BRITISH ENGLISH (WNBE), SOUTHERN WHITE
 NONSTANDARD ENGLISH (SWNE), AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR
 ENGLISH (AAVE), AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN ENGLISH (ANSE), SAMANA
 ENGLISH (SE) AND THE EX-SLAVE RECORDINGS (ESR)

Copula <i>be</i> environment: ___ NP/AP/Locative						
	WNBE	SWNE	AAVE	SE	ANSE	ESR
N	? ¹⁷	222	132	101	77	16
<i>ain't</i>	61-95% ¹⁸	50% ¹⁹	55%	70%	90%	81%

Auxiliary <i>be</i> environment: ___ V-ing/gonna						
	WNBE	SWNE	AAVE	SE	ANSE	ESR
N	? ²⁰	54	119	101	67	10
<i>ain't</i>	42-79% ²¹	55% ²²	71%	74%	94%	90%

Notice here that in modern African American Vernacular English, *ain't* is preferred over *be+not* more in the auxiliary environment than in the copula environment. According to Weldon, her 55% use of *ain't* in the copula environment is indicative of a "close alternation between the two variants" (i.e., *ain't* and *be+not*), whereas in the auxiliary environments, the high frequency of *ain't* - 71% - (and hence, the small frequency of *be + not*) "suggests that there is no underlying *be*". If this interpretation is correct, then the African Nova Scotian English data set in particular shows that there is "no underlying *be*" in the whole *be* environment (its lowest frequency of *ain't* usage being 90%).

¹⁷ The total number of present tense forms of *have+not* and *be+not* in Cheshire (1982) is 439.

¹⁸ *Ain't* = copula *be+not* has a frequency of 61% for the Shinfield girls, 84% for the Orts Road boys, and 95% for the Shinfield boys.

¹⁹ Adapted from Feagin (1979:222) - 22 working class informants.

²⁰ The total number of present tense forms of *have + not* and *be + not* in Cheshire (1982) is 439.

²¹ *Ain't* = aux *be+not* has a frequency of 42% for the Shinfield girls, 79% for the Orts Road boys, and 63% for the Shinfield boys.

²² Adapted from Feagin (1979:222) - 22 working class informants.

If there is indeed "no underlying *be+not*" in early African American English, one may assume a "bisystemic" analysis of the variation pattern. Such a "bisystemist" account would go as follows: *be+not* variants appear according to the standard English system of negation (whereby *not* negates *be*); the *ain't* variant appears where there is no copula, i.e. where the putative early African American English system lies²³. Inasmuch as both *be+not* and *ain't* variants occur naturally in the data, it is necessary to assume that there is code-switching at work. As Weldon points out, such an account is supported by the fact that *ain't* is especially frequent in precisely those linguistic environments where Labov (1972c:87) has found the least surface copulas (i.e., in the *auxiliary* environment; see Table).

Notice, however, that Weldon's interpretation is somewhat *ad hoc*, since there is no *a priori* reason to interpret "small percentages" as "the lack of a well-established *be*" in the copula environment. I.e., even though negative *be* may be used much less often than *ain't*, it may still be "well-established" in African American English. A more convincing "bisystemic" analysis would involve investigating systematically whether the two variant-types are different, aside from the overall distribution of the different surface morphologies. In particular, one should study how each variant behaves in terms of tense and aspect, an area of the syntax where English and creole systems are known to differ substantially. If *ain't* can be shown to behave any differently from *be+not* in the same linguistic environment with respect to tense and aspect, then this may be taken as evidence that the two variants follow two distinct systems in African American English (which are therefore code-switching). Conversely, if they behave the same, then there is no "code-switching" with *ain't*. Table (3.4) tests this hypothesis by showing the

²³ Winford (p.c.) points out that the separate system in a "bisystemic" account needs not necessarily be a "creole".

distribution of the two variants with respect to two tense and aspect distinctions:

Present/past temporal reference, and stativity/nonstativity of the predicate²⁴.

TABLE 3.4
DISTRIBUTION OF *AIN'T* IN *BE* ENVIRONMENT
BY TENSE (past, present) AND ASPECT (stative, nonstative) DISTINCTIONS IN
AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN ENGLISH (ANSE), SAMANA ENGLISH (SE) AND
THE EX-SLAVE RECORDINGS (ESR)

COPULA <i>BE</i>						
	SE		ANSE		ESR	
	<i>be+not</i>	<i>ain't</i>	<i>be+not</i>	<i>ain't</i>	<i>be+not</i>	<i>ain't</i>
Past	62% (48)	1% (1)	95% (154)	14%(11)	94%(51)	1%(1)
Prst	38% (30)	99% (71)	5% (8)	89%(69)	6%(3)	99%(13)
+ Stat.	100% (78)	100% (73)	100% (162)	100% (83)	100%(54)	100%(14)
- Stat.	0	0	0	0	0	0
AUXILIARY <i>BE</i>						
	SE		ANSE		ESR	
	<i>be+not</i>	<i>ain't</i>	<i>be+not</i>	<i>ain't</i>	<i>be+not</i>	<i>ain't</i>
Past	32% (7)	0	85% (23)	0	N=4	0
Prst	68% (15)	100% (43)	15% (4)	100%(63)	N=1	100%(9)
+ Stat.	48% (11)	25% (11)	15% (4)	11%(7)	N=0	N=2
- Stat.	52% (12)	75% (33)	85% (23)	89%(57)	N=5	N=9

²⁴ The data from Weldon, Feagin and Cheshire, which were not configured according to these distinctions, are not given in this table.

This table reveals two patterns across all three types of copula environments: First, *ain't* is basically restricted to the present temporal reference environment (where it is the preferred variant). Second, *ain't* has essentially the same distribution as the *be+not* variants with respect to aspect. I discuss these two patterns in (4.2.2.) and (4.2.3.), respectively.

4.2.2. Distribution of *ain't* vs. *be+not* vs. present/past distinction:

The use of *ain't* in the past copula environment is not a feature of any dialect of English, including modern African American Vernacular English. On the other hand, *ain't* is tense-neutral in English-based creoles (see e.g. *en* in Guyanese Creole - Bickerton 1975:99). Indeed, one does not expect to find negation in interaction with tense distinctions in “tense-deficient” languages. Crucially, Table (3.4) shows that *ain't* is strongly conditioned by tense distinctions in Early African American English. DeBose’s (1994) contention that the use of *ain't* in African American English involves code-switching to a creole grammar is thus unfounded in the *be* environment.

It is worth noting, though, that Table (3.4) also reports thirteen sentences where *ain't* does indeed occur in the past. Of these “exceptions”, those from the African Nova Scotian informants are the most interesting²⁵, e.g.:

²⁵ The other two examples, from the *Ex-slave Recordings* and Samaná English, are not as clear cut:
 (i) *Ain't but one man who ever tried to objec' church and that was Mr. M.*
 (ESR/013/489)
 (ii) *She ain't born in Washington* (SE/011/225, speaking of his daughter who now lives in DC)

English speaker judgements vary as to whether non-past interpretations of these sentences result in temporal anomaly. Thus S. Poplack (p.c.) points out that *born* lends itself to a copula-less/adjectival usage in Standard English.

- 22a. *But the boys ain't like the boys is now* (ANSE/016/74)
 22b. *ain`t one of them as strong as they is now* (ANSE/009/581)

The most noticeable fact about the use of *ain't* for *wasn't* in African Nova Scotian English is that it is restricted to a single linguistic environment, a contrastive construction:

23. "(X) *ain't* (Y) *like* (Z) ... present tense verb ... *now*"

The construction is used with *ain't* by most informants in the North Preston data set (eleven examples altogether), as well as by many informants whose interviews were not included in this study, e.g.:

- 24a. *It was good days. Ain't nothing like it u-- it is now* (ANSE/Elaine Gibson/215)
 24b. *Ain't like it is now* (ANSE/Tony Gibson/232)
 24c. *It ain't like today* (ANSE/Chris Gilbert/2156)

These tokens all confirm that *ain't* may indeed variably occur in the past temporal construction described in (23). To account for these instances in the context of an English grammatical system, one needs to posit a phonological alternation between *wasn't* and *ain't* (*weren't* is rare in the data). This could be done on the basis that the two forms are able to share the same linguistic environment:

- 25a. *No, it wasn't like the children is nowadays* (ANSE/030/324)
 25b. *'Cause it wasn't no church like it is now* (ANSE/009/712)

The phonetic changes involved in this diachronic explanation would then have to be explicated, as Jespersen (1940) did for *ain't* vs. *be+not* and *have+not*, and as Fasold &

Wolfram (1970:69) and Rickford (1977:203) did for *ain't* vs. *didn't*. This would not be easy, however, since one would then have to explain (a) why the use of *ain't* for *wasn't* is not reported in the historical literature and (b), why its “development” is restricted to the context in (23).

Alternatively, one may consider this use of *ain't* as evidence of an earlier stage in African American English when it was (putatively) a universal tense/aspect-neutral negator à la DeBose (1994:128). This may seem plausible if the general “loss” of *ain't* in the past temporal reference system can be linked to a (once again putative) general process of decreolization in African American English. Specifically, one could claim (a) that the earliest African slaves used to speak a creole in which *ain't* was a monomorphemic negation marker, hence *ain't* could be used regardless of tense distinctions; (b) as African slaves came into increasing contact with English, the creole they spoke would presumably have undergone a process of decreolization which by the 1800s restricted the use of *ain't* to the present temporal reference in all linguistic environments except the contrastive one described in (23). Evidence for this comes from another example where *ain't* is used in the past in the same construction, but it is not used for *wasn't*:

26. *Ain't- they ain't got like big ones they got now but they had them I guess*
(ANSE/009/307)

Such a proposal raises a number of difficult questions, however. First, according to Winford (p.c.) there is no correlate of this phenomenon in any creole. For instance, Trinidadian Creole uses invariant *wasn* in such constructions. How then is the use of *ain't* in this context in African Nova Scotian English a reflex of prior creolization? Second, why has this phenomenon never been reported in any other variety of African American

English, including Samaná English and the *Ex-slave Recordings*? Because it is found only in African Nova Scotian English, there is nothing to suggest that it *predates* the historical split between the three varieties of early African American English. Third, the use of *ain't* for *be+not* is essentially restricted to the present tense where it is the preferred form (even within the African Nova Scotian English data: 86% (N=80); see Table (3.5) above). This temporal restriction cannot be linked to a process of *decreolization* in African Nova Scotian English for the following reason: there is no *a priori* reason for *ain't* - taken as a creole-like (tense-neutral) negator - to persist so strongly in present temporal reference environments. It altogether follows that *ain't* is not a "tense-neutral" negator in the *be* environment. Rather, it is a *bona fide* English variant of *be+not*.

Note finally that only one isolated case of *ain't* used for *wasn't/weren't* has ever been reported in the English literature, and it is given here (Feagin 1979:215):

27. *They ain't like they is now* (Melvin H. 72W:32.I.357).

This sentence was used by Melvin H. from the southern white community of Anniston, Alabama. Although this use of *ain't* for *wasn't* is restricted to a single token, the fact that it should take place in exactly the same linguistic environment as the examples from African Nova Scotian English (viz. the contrastive construction in (23)) is suggestive of a real relationship between southern white speech and early black speech. In fact, the very same sentence is found in our data!

28. *They ain't like they is now* (ANSE/030/76)

This suggestion is bolstered by the fact that, as noted above, this phenomenon is not known to exist in creoles (cf. e.g. Winford on *wasn* in Trinidadian Creole). Altogether

then, this a reminder that the privileged relationship between the speech of blacks and whites in the South can often undermine the "creole" hypothesis (Montgomery & Bailey 1986). I return to this point below.

3.4.2.3. Distribution of *ain't*/*be+not* vs. *stative/nonstative distinction*:

The second pattern in the same table is that, with respect to aspect, *ain't* behaves like the *be+not* variants in the same linguistic environment. Unfortunately, there is nothing to argue for here. Interlingual coincidence precludes use of this finding as evidence of either a creole or an English underlying system.

(i) *Copulas* are by definition aspect-neutral; they are always stative. So DeBose's claim that *ain't* is creole like in that it is aspect neutral is not very convincing in the copular context.

(ii) In standard English, *auxiliaries* pattern after the stativity/nonstativity of the predicate which they precede. They are, in this sense, aspect neutral. In other words, English auxiliaries follow precisely what DeBose and Faraclas (1993) say about *ain't* in all sentences in African American Vernacular English (that it is aspect neutral). Consequently, no distinct creole behaviour of *ain't* is identifiable in these linguistic environments either.

To summarize, DeBose claims that *ain't* is a tense/aspect neutral negative morpheme, by which he means a non-English negative morpheme. The fact that *ain't* is generally restricted to the present temporal reference militates against its (putative) tense-neutrality. Given that a similar restriction exists in creoles (cf. use of e.g. *wasn* in Trinidadian Creole, above), the "creole" hypothesis cannot be used to explain the few uses of *ain't* for *wasn't* in our data. On the other hand, the use of *ain't* as a *be* negator with

respect to both tense and aspect in early African American English is entirely typical of nonstandard varieties of English (see e.g. Cheshire 1982, Feagin 1979, Christian et al. 1988). Overall then, *ain't* is best analyzed as a variant of *be+not* in the *be* environment in early African American English, a result which Labov (1972c:70) and Blake (1994) confirm.

3.4.3. Distribution of *Ain't* in the HAVE environment:

The use of *ain't* for *have+not* is attested in most nonstandard varieties of English of the world. The following examples are from British Nonstandard English (29a), Appalachian English (29b) and Southern White Nonstandard English (29c):

- 29a. *What do you expect, you ain't been round here, have you?* (Cheshire 1982:51)
 29b. *I ain't been 'ere* (Christian et al. 1988:169)
 29c. *I sent her a wedding present twice and I ain't never heard from it* (Feagin 1979:217)

Wright (1902:III, 88) also reports that *ain't/have+not* alternation is found early on in the British Isles in Yorkshire, Nottingham, Warwick, Hereford, Suffolk, Kent, Surrey, Sussex, and Hampshire.

The frequencies of *ain't* vs. *have+not* in different varieties are presented in table (3.6):

TABLE 3.6.
 PROPORTION OF *AIN'T* IN *HAVE+NOT* CONTEXTS
 IN SOUTHERN WHITE NONSTANDARD ENGLISH (SWNE), AFRICAN
 AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH (AAVE), AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN
 ENGLISH (ANSE), SAMANA ENGLISH (SE) AND THE EX-SLAVE RECORDINGS
 (ESR)

	SWNE	AAVE	ANSE	SE	ESR
N	127	32	4	15	10
<i>ain't</i>	31% (40) ²⁶	62% (20)	100%	80% (12)	90% (9)

Table (3.6) shows that *ain't* is favoured over *have+not* in all varieties of African American English, but not in Alabama white nonstandard English. Moreover, this preference for *ain't* appears to be more accentuated in early African American English than in modern African American Vernacular English. Unfortunately though, the small number of tokens in these data sets does not allow for solid interpretations of these results.

3.4.4. Distribution of *Ain't* in the *Don't* environment:

As mentioned in section (3.2.3), *ain't* is said not to occur in the same context as *don't*. Consequently, I did not include the latter form in the variable context. For instance, in Labov et al.'s (1968) study of African American Vernacular English in Harlem, "*don't* is ... the normal form of the present negative [in non-copula constructions]" (cf. Weldon 1993:2).²⁷ Weldon's (1993) more recent study of *ain't* in African American Vernacular English found no *ain't/don't* alternation. The same is true of Cheshire (1981, 1982, 1991), Feagin (1979) and Christian et al. (1988) for varieties of white nonstandard English.

²⁶ Adapted from Feagin (1979:226).

²⁷ Oddly, Labov (1972a:812) gives: *Nobody ain't know about no club* (present tense). This is not an actual utterance, however, since Labov simply constructed it to illustrate a point. Labov et al. (1968:ex.334) did find an original example in Harlem African American Vernacular English: *I ain't want some more*.

Weldon notes that this is problematic for the "creole" hypothesis: "if *ain't* represents a residue of a universal negator, why don't we find it in present tense non-copula environments in AAVE, as has been observed in other creole varieties of English?" (cf. examples from Sutcliffe and Winford in section 3.1).

The answer which has been given to this problem is the following: the operation of an underlying aspectual system in African American English prevents *ain't* from appearing in the English *don't* environment. Thus, DeBose and Faraclas (1993:370) claim that *ain't* specifically negates *non-habitual* predicates; consequently, *ain't* is excluded from the primarily habitual *don't* environment. A similar claim is found in Bolton (1982:323): "The punctual aspect takes *ain't* (...). The durative aspect uses a different negator: *She don't be sick, she don't be going.*"²⁸

One should note that both of these explanations seem to contradict DeBose's (1994) analysis of *ain't* as aspect neutral. In fact, by restricting the use of *ain't* they are in contradiction with the idea of a "universal negator". This may not be too damaging to the "creole" hypothesis, however, if one assumes that a selectional property based on aspect is consistent with a typical creole system (Bickerton 1975). Thus in some creoles one may find that aspectual meaning interacts with negation. For instance, (as mentioned earlier) according to Sutcliffe (1992:104) *duon* in Jamaican Creole occurs only before stative verbs and Trinidadian Creole has *doh* (*/dō-don-dont/*) for negative habitual aspect (Winford, p.c.):

30a. *She doh be sick*

30b. *She doh come here*

²⁸ In conformity with this claim, Bolton incorrectly describes sentences like *She ain't going* as having "punctual aspect" (Ibid.).

In this sense, it is no longer argued that *ain't* is aspect neutral but rather that it is used under specific aspectual conditions.

Note, however, that informants in the Samaná English data set and the Ex-slave Recordings do make occasional use of *ain't* for *don't*. as in (31):

- 31a. *I ain't know nothing 'bout that. These the only thing what I know about.*
(SE/007/1674)
- 31b. *If y'all are looking for bad you going find bad, ain't you believe?* (SE/007/1121)
- 31c. *I can't 'count nothing because I ain't remember* (SE/003/667)
- 31d. *He say, I ain't know* (SE/007/970)
- 31e. *If they whip you half a day, you ain't want to eat* (ESR/013/181)
- 31f. *... millionaires dies an' leave all they got. Everything they got. They ain't carry nothing with them* (ESR/012/106)
- 31g. *They gots many a things they ain't have to operate* (SE/002/1250)

In (31a-c), the (extra-)sentential context shows that *ain't* is used for *don't*. In (d-g), the larger discourse context (not given here) makes it clear in each case that the intended meaning for *ain't* is *don't* as well (and not *didn't*). For instance, in (31e) the speaker explains that after you get whipped, you generally don't want to eat (in fact, she explains herself seconds later in the interview: *you can whip a little chil' now, he'll get mad at you and don' want to eat nothing* -ESR/013/182). In (31f) the speaker is being critical of rich people who spend their lives accumulating wealth and when they die, 'they don't carry anything with them'. Finally, in (31h) the informant expresses her view that many doctors nowadays perform surgery even when it is unnecessary.

The variation apparent in (31) has no correlate whatsoever in any variety of white English (whether modern, regional or archaic). The phenomenon thus represents a unique feature of early African American English. This isolated fact is therefore consistent with the idea that African American Vernacular English evolved from a variety that was different from colonial English. The phenomenon is too rare in the data to draw any conclusions, however, i.e. the examples in (31) cannot be construed as evidence that *ain't* is a universal negator after all (as suggested in DeBose 1994), since there are hundreds of instances in our data on early African American English where *ain't* fails to replace *don't*. For instance, in the African Nova Scotian English data set, *ain't* is never used for *don't*, despite 347 potential environments. If *ain't* was truly universal, there would be no reason for (b) to be so strongly preferred over (a) in the following example-pairs:

32a. ... *I ain't remember* (SE/003/667)

32b. *I don't remember* (SE/001/276; ESR/001/44; ESR/012/234)

33a. *I ain't know nothing 'bout that* (SE/007/1674)

33b. *I don' know nothing about ol' man M. and D. Gee* (ESR/010/71)

34a. *He say, I ain't know* (SE/007/970)

34b. *I don't know* (ESR/011/12; ESR/012/234; ESR/013/241;262;263;289;339; etc.)

Moreover, the rare examples in (31) do not appear to share any common properties (aside from the fact that *ain't* is used for *don't*). By contrast, the exceptional use of *ain't* for *wasn't* in African Nova Scotian English, as seen in section (3.4.2), is systematically linked to a single linguistic environment. For all we know, the examples in (31) may be performance errors!

Interestingly, though, Weldon (1993) does in fact find a particular instance of *substantial* variation between *ain't* and *don't* as both occur before the verb *got*. Here are two examples she presents from her Ohio data:

35a. *He ain't even got a crease in his face.*

35b. *He don't got one crease.*

This phenomenon is particularly interesting since *ain't* alternates with *have+not* in the white nonstandard varieties, not with *don't* (e.g. Feagin 1979:226-227; Cheshire 1982:51; Christian et al. 1988:169-170). Thus compare (36a) with (36b) in Southern White Nonstandard English (Feagin 1979:217; 213):

36a. *Now you've told me four times, and I ain't got any idea of doin' it, so hush!*

36b. *You hadn't got that turned on, have you?²⁹*

At this point it may be interesting to consider whether in early African American English, *ain't* varies with *don't* (before *got*) as in modern African American Vernacular English or with *have+not* as in white Englishes. As it happens though, *ain't* is used categorically before *got* in all three data sets, so there is no way of telling whether *ain't* corresponds to *don't* or *have+not*. Frequencies in *ain't* variation before *got* are illustrated in the following table:

²⁹ Feagin explains that *hadn't* is used for *hasn't* here.

TABLE 3.7.
DISTRIBUTION *AIN'T* vs. *HAVE* + *NOT* or *DON'T*
IN ___ *GOT* ENVIRONMENT
IN SOUTHERN WHITE NONSTANDARD ENGLISH (SWNE), AFRICAN
AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH (AAVE), AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN
ENGLISH (ANSE), SAMANA ENGLISH (SE) AND THE EX-SLAVE RECORDINGS
(ESR)

	<i>ain't</i> vs. <i>have+not</i>		<i>ain't</i> vs. ?		<i>ain't</i> vs. <i>don't</i>
	SWNE	ANSE	SE	ESR	AAVE
N <i>ain't</i>	29 72%	24 100%	45 100%	10 100%	62 66% (41)

The most reasonable explanation for the distributions in Table (3.7) is this: *ain't* was originally used for *have+not*, and it was particularly well-favoured in the ___ *got* environment. This tendency became categorical in early African American English (just as negative concord became categorical in African American Vernacular English - see below). To explain the use of *don't* before *got* in modern African American Vernacular English (as found in Weldon's Ohio data), several approaches can then be adopted. First, some assume that (i) *got* was relexicalized as a stative verb, presumably because it has the same denotational meaning as main verb *have*, and (ii) *don't* came into use because the "new" stativity of *got* was inconsistent with the non-habitual/punctual requirements of *ain't* (as postulated by DeBose & Faraclas and Bolton). Second, one may assume that *don't* began replacing *ain't* by simple analogy of *got* with *have* (presumably, the analogy also followed from the fact that *have* and *got* may share the same denotational meaning).

Both of these accounts are problematic from the point of view of linguistic change, however. As Christian et al. (1988:7) explain in the introduction to their study of Appalachian and Ozark English:

If nothing else, the past two decades of variation studies have demonstrated that language change implies language variation of some type. Speakers undergoing change do not simply go to bed one evening with an old form intact and wake up the morning with a new form firmly in place. On this point, there is apparent agreement among linguists with quite different orientations concerning language change (Weinreich, Labov and Herzog 1968; Bailey 1973; Wang 1977; Labov 1981a; Romaine 1983).

The problem resulting from Table (3.7), then, is that modern African American Vernacular English would have developed the use of *don't* before *got* without variation, since this use is invariably absent from both early African American English and Southern white nonstandard English.

A third account must therefore be considered, one that does involve prior variation. Crucially, one could assume that the use of *don't* before *got* in modern African American Vernacular English developed not from variation between *ain't* and *don't*.but rather from variation between *have* and *got*. This assumption could be made on the basis that such variation was already present in early African American English, e.g. cf. (37a-b) and (38a-b):

37a. *I never had a strapping* (ANSE/039/350)

37b. *I never got a strapping* (ANSE/039/350)

38a. *They got things what you ain't got to operate* (SE/002/1250)

38b. *They gots many a things they ain't have to operate* (SE/002/1250)

Accordingly, I will hold that there is no variation between *ain't* and *don't* before *got* in modern African American Vernacular English (since there is no evidence of prior variation in early African American English). Rather, I will hold that the variation

Weldon (1993) reports originates from variation between *have* and *got*, since there is at least some evidence for this in early African American English, as in e.g.s (37-38).

3.4.5. Ain't vs. Didn't:

39. *I ain't shut my eyes last night* (SE/003/638)

The use of *ain't* for *didn't* as in (39) is a widely-attested feature of African American English (Fasold & Wolfram 1970:69). Moreover, according to Wolfram (1991:293) "the correspondence of standard English *didn't* [with *ain't*] has only been found in Vernacular Black English varieties".

The following table shows the variation between *ain't* and *didn't* in modern African American Vernacular English (Weldon 1993) and in our three varieties of early African American English:

TABLE 3.8.
DISTRIBUTION *AIN'T* vs. *DIDN'T*
IN AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH (AAVE), AFRICAN NOVA
SCOTIAN ENGLISH (ANSE), SAMANA ENGLISH (SE) AND THE EX-SLAVE
RECORDINGS (ESR)

	AAVE	ANSE	SE	ESR
N	161	258	189	144
<i>ain't</i>	40% (64)	2% (5)	6% (11)	3% (4)
<i>didn't</i>	60% (97)	98% (253)	94% (178)	97%

The lack of alternation between *didn't* and *ain't* in the three data sets representing early African American Vernacular (2-6%) is indeed damaging to the "creole" hypothesis. In the creole account (as described above), there is no *a priori* reason for *ain't* not to occur in the environment of *didn't*: this environment is generally [-habitual] and

[+punctual], and therefore consistent with the aspectual requirements of *ain't* that have been suggested (e.g. Debose & Faraclas 1993:370). The lack of a putatively universal negator (DeBose 1994) in this overall linguistic environment thus remains unexplained in the creole account.

Weldon's suggestion that there is a "process of decreolization" at work also becomes problematic: the three data sets of the present study represent varieties that are at least a century older than the speech variety of Weldon's young informants (see section 2.2.2). In fact, it follows from Table (3.8) that the relative prominence of *ain't/didn't* in modern African American Vernacular English is a recent spectacular development. Interestingly, this is confirmed by Labov (1972c:284) who reports that "[a]dults ... rarely use *ain't* for *didn't*" whereas youth do in South Harlem. In this respect, our data lends more support to the "divergence" hypothesis than to the "creole" hypothesis (cf. Bailey & Maynor 1989).

It is therefore not surprising to find the following remark by Fasold and Wolfram (1970:69), made some twenty-five years ago while discussing the correspondence between *ain't* and *didn't*: "This probably developed from rather recent phonetic changes". To a certain extent, the divergence in Table (3.8) between Weldon's "modern" African American Vernacular English and our "earlier" varieties lends support to this view. Note, however, that invoking "recent phonetic changes" is problematic, since Table (3.8) also shows that *ain't/didn't* alternation was in fact present (albeit in a very limited fashion) in early African American English, e.g.:

40a. *He ain't give the man nothing* (SE/001/987)

40b. *He didn't give the man nothing* (SE/001/989)

Moreover, it should be noted that Fasold and Wolfram are not very specific in their explanation of just how *ain't* derived phonetically from *didn't*. Actually, the only specific "phonetic explanation" that has been put forward in this matter is Rickford's (1977:203), and it happens to be used in favour of the "creole" hypothesis: the loss of the initial voiced stop of *didn't* supposedly reflects a morphophonological simplification process affecting auxiliaries in African American English; according to him (Ibid.:195-6), to the extent that such simplification is a creole feature, one may consider this reduction of *didn't* to *ain't* as evidence of prior creolization.

There are two serious problems with Rickford's account. First, the loss of the initial [d] in *didn't* represents the loss of the onset of a syllable, i.e., a process generally marked in the phonology of any language (cf. e.g. "onset principle" in Prince & Smolensky 1993). It thus seems inappropriate to consider such a process a creole-like simplification rule. Second, it is not the case that Rickford's (1977:203) putative "morphophonemic condensation of certain auxiliaries [in African American English] is ... unparalleled in ... white nonstandard dialects". In fact, the specific "condensation" Rickford refers to (viz. loss of initial [d]) is also found in Feagin's (1979:212) southern white English data:

41a. I [ō] (don't) *remember*.

41b. I [ō] (don't) *know what it's called*.

In contrast with these accounts involving "phonetic change", Winford believes that the alternation between *ain't* and *didn't* was probably present from the earliest stages of African American English, when a process of approximation to standard English (similar to decreolization) was taking place (p.c.). This may well be the case, given examples like (39) from varieties representing early African American English. But there

is one piece of evidence against this view. Feagin (1979:215) found three examples of *ain't* functioning as *didn't* in her Southern white nonstandard English:

42a. *I ain't notice that*

42b. *I ain't go huntin but four or five times*

42c. *That knock you down, ain't it!*

Weldon (1993:17) has dismissed these occurrences as "idiosyncratic" and "non-productive" in Alabama English (compared to their productive use in her data on modern African American Vernacular English). And yet, because such occurrences are equally rare in our data representing early African American English (see Table 3.8), the possibility exists that the African slaves acquired their conspicuous use of *ain't* for *didn't* directly from the speech of southern whites, not via approximation or creolization.

Ain't in early African American English: Conclusion

We have observed that as far as lone attestations are concerned, the use of *ain't* in early African American English is generally similar to what is found in Southern white nonstandard English. Even the peculiar and rare uses of *ain't* for *didn't* and *wasn't* are found in Feagin's (1979) study of Alabama English. A few instances of *ain't/don't* represent the only feature of early African American English that is not attested in other varieties of English.

More importantly though, it was shown that the overall use of *ain't* in early African American English is conditioned by tense and not aspect. As such, no distinct synchronic creole behaviour is observable. By contrast, the behaviour of *ain't* in early African American English is entirely predictable from the English historical record.

Specifically, *ain't* is not used productively for *hadn't*, *wasn't*, *weren't*, *didn't* or *don't* in the varieties of early African American English simply because *ain't* is an English form; as e.g. Jespersen (1940:430-1) and Stevens (1954:200) describe, English *ain't* derived historically from *amn't*, *aren't*, *isn't*, *haven't* and *hasn't*. (Crucially, all of these forms are in the present tense.)

Comparison with modern African American Vernacular English has further revealed that: (a) with regard to *ain't/be+not* and *ain't/have+not*, modern African American Vernacular English is more conservative than early African American English; (b) with regard to *ain't/didn't*, early African American English is far more conservative than modern African American Vernacular English. In other words, the different uses of *ain't* show varying results in terms of the "divergence controversy" (Guy & Maynor 1989).

4. Negative concord:

Negative concord is the term used by Labov (1972a) to describe constructions "where the negative feature is spread, so to speak, over all elements in the sentence (or the clause) that can bear it" (van der Wouden 1994:93). In the literature, the phenomenon is also referred to as redundant negation (Ramsey 1892), negative attraction (Jespersen 1917), negative agreement (e.g., Labov et al. 1968; Kaplan 1989:17-18), cumulative negation (e.g., Barber 1976), pleonastic negation (e.g., Curme 1977, Martin 1992), negative spread (den Besten 1986) and (most commonly) double or multiple negation³⁰.

³⁰ According to van der Wouden (1994:93) the linguistic phenomenon known as *negative concord* (NC) is but a subtype of one of several types of "multiple negation" found across languages.

Negative concord phenomena in early African American English are extremely rich and varied. Following Labov's (1972a) landmark article, I distinguish two general types of negative concord: to indefinites, as in (43), and to verbs, as in (44).

43a. *I didn't had no chance to go to no school* (SE/001/214)

43b. *'Never tried to whip them with no whip or nothing like that* (ESR/013/474)

43c. *No young fella had no business doing this* (ANSE/030/912)

44a. *No stranger ain't got to come* (SE/002/476)

44b. *I didn't think it wasn't no phone then* (ANSE/030/451)

44c. *Well, isn't nobody wouldn't go out* (ANSE/030/812)

I treat these two phenomena separately in sections (4.1) and (4.2)/(5), respectively.

Before proceeding, however, recall that the study of negative concord in early African American English is relevant to the debate over the origins of African American English. As noted in section (1), negative concord is characteristic of many varieties of English as well as of creoles, so it should be interesting to establish whether early African Americans inherited their widespread use of negative concord directly from colonial English or from a process of creolization. As described earlier, one may do this by comparing the *system* of negative concord in early African American English to the *systems* of negative concord in archaic and regional varieties of English and in creoles.

4.1. Negative concord with indefinites

Negative concord with indefinites in early African American English is interesting in a number of ways: First, negation may be spread in a sentence by various kinds of negative

48b. *People never went to no Grace* (ANSE/032/699)

48c. *I didn't believe in it neither* (ANSE/009/610)

The most general feature of negative concord with indefinites in early African American English is its *variable* application. In the following section I discuss how this variation has been characterised in previous studies, and I propose a revised circumscription of the variation that account for both the nature and the extent of negative concord in early African American English.

4.1.1. Circumscribing the variable context: previous analyses, and proposed revisions

Variation occurs when two or more surface forms share a single underlying form. For instance, it is often the case that two or more phonetic realizations correspond to a single abstract phonological unit (cf. e.g. Kenstowicz 1994:57-88). This concept is more controversial when it is carried "above and beyond phonology", however (Sankoff 1973). Thus in the descriptive and prescriptive literature especially, a one-to-one relationship between form and function is usually assumed in the syntax, even in those cases of "apparent" variation (Lavandera 1978). The disruption of this one-to-one correspondence in the syntax has been characterised as "the most controversial area of research in sociolinguistics" (Wald 1988:1164).

Weiner and Labov (1980) claim that two syntactic forms may be said to *vary* if (and only if) they share the same referential meaning. Accordingly, in the present study of negative concord in early African American English I hold that a negative sentence without negative concord and an analogous sentence with negative concord are syntactic variants of the same abstract construct (viz. simple logical negation of the sentence). In other words, I assume that negative concord does not affect the meaning of the sentence

where it occurs. Regarding the validity of this assumption, consider the sentence pairs in (49-51) from our data:

49a. *I wouldn't take anything from him* (ESR/002/83)

49b. *I wouldn't take nothing from him* (ESR/002/88)

50a. *I wouldn't have knowed anything* (ANSE/019/714)

50b. *I wouldn't have knowed nothing* (ANSE/019/719)

51a. *he never saw them anymore* (SE/011/1181)

51b. *And never saw them no more* (SE/006/458)

Negative polarity items are simply indefinites (Heim 1984), so *anything* is interpreted as 'thing' in (49a) and (50a) and *any more* is interpreted as 'more' in (51a). Moreover, *nothing* and *no more* fail to contribute any negative force to (49b-51b), despite their negative morphology; they are also interpreted as 'thing' and 'more', respectively. The sentences in each pair are therefore completely equivalent in terms of truth conditional semantics; they are alternate ways of saying the same thing in African American English. Thus the sentences in (49) and (50) were uttered only seconds from each other, by the same speakers, and the meaning has not changed in any way.

Note, however, that the examples given in (49-51) are particularly transparent because they involve only *any* and *no* forms, and "[i]t is generally agreed that the *no* in [e.g. *nothing* or *no more*] represents an underlying indefinite *any* combined with a negative which has been attracted to it from elsewhere" (Labov 1972a:775). In contrast, negative sentences with indefinite common noun phrases are more controversial. To see this, consider the sentences in (52-54):

- 52a. *I don't sass old people* (ANSE/019/452)
 52b. *I don't sass no old people* (ANSE/019/453)
- 53a. *Never had pain* (ANSE/027/637)
 53b. *Never had no pain* (ANSE/027/633)
- 54a. *She wasn' a cripple woman like me* (ESR/013/10)
 54b. *She wasn' no ol' cripple woman like me* (ESR/013/11)

The sentences in (52-54) were also uttered only seconds from each other, by the same speakers, and the meaning has presumably not changed either. It may be argued, though, that these sentences do not necessarily constitute minimal pairs in the same way as the sentences in (49-51) do, since the sentences in (52b-54b) may actually correspond to those in (52c-54c), which differ from the (52a-54a) sentences by the presence of *any*.

- 52c. I don't sass any old people.
 53c. Never had any pain.
 54c. She wasn' any (ol') cripple woman like me.

As was just mentioned, most linguists analyse *no* as NEG+*any* (e.g. Labov 1972a; Feagin 1979; Cheshire 1982), so (52b-54b) would typically derive from (52c-54c), not from (52a-54a). Notice that this analysis has the advantage of giving a unified account of negative concord in (49b-51b) and (52b-54b). The following sentence-pairs apparently conform to this view:

55a. *I don't think abouts no- no drinking* (ANSE/030/544)

55b. *I don't care about any drinking* (ANSE/030/76)

56a. *That didn' make no difference* (ESR/008/211)

56b. *It don' make any difference* (ESR/008/333)

57a. *He didn't use no kind of bad words before me* (SE/006/1759)

57b. *they don't use any kind of word* (SE/011/390)

The latter example offers an especially strong argument for viewing negative concord as the conversion of *any* to *no*, since *any* in (57b) is the only viable alternative to *no* in (57a). Thus the sentences in (57) are not likely to vary with those in (57').

57'a. ?they don't use a kind of word.

57'b. ?they don't use kinds of word.

The involvement of adjectives in negative concord provides further evidence for the analysis of *no* as NEG+*any*. Adjectives generally do not undergo negative concord, e.g. (58-59), but the adjectives *good* and *different* do, e.g. (60-61):

58. *no, that ain't fine* (ANSE/030/955)

59. *I still ain't hungry* (ANSE/019/574)

60. *that ain't no good* (ANSE/030/1121)

61. *We ain't no different* (ANSE/009/792)

Assuming *no*=NEG+*any*, the explanation for this state of affairs runs as follows: *good* and *different* can be preceded by *no* because they can be preceded by *any* (unlike other adjectives). Thus, compare (58'-59') with (60'-61'):

58'. *No, that ain't any fine.

59'. *I still ain't any hungry.

60'. That ain't any good.

61'. We ain't any different.

Despite all this evidence for the standard analysis of *no* as NEG+*any*, another view must still be considered for the examples in (52-54), namely that (52b-54b) may vary with *both* (52a-54a) and (52c-54c). Of course, this view is tenable only if the sentences in (52a-54a) and (52c-54c) have the same denotational meaning (Weiner & Labov 1980). To verify this, consider the nature of *any*. According to Kadmon and Landman (1993:360), "the effect of *any* is to widen the previously given domain of quantification"; "in a [noun phrase] of the form *any* [common noun], *any* creates this effect by EXTENDING THE INTERPRETATION OF THE COMMON NOUN PHRASE" (emphasis theirs). I now consider how this characterization of *any* relates to our comparison of the sentences in (52a-54a) and (52b-54b).

If Kadmon and Landman are correct, the noun phrases in (52c-54c) have wider denotations than those in (52a-54a). Note, however, that while the denotational difference is especially obvious between *a cripple woman* and *any cripple woman*, the contrasts in *old people/any old people* and *pain/any pain* are subtle at best. This is because the latter involve indefinite plural and mass nouns respectively, i.e. elements which already have "wide" interpretations, so to speak (they apply to whole sets). In effect, there is arguably no

difference in referential meaning between the sentences in (52a-53a) and their counterparts in (52c-53c). Perhaps for this reason, Labov (1972a) implicitly assumes that *no*+CN may derive from \emptyset +CN when the CN is a noncount noun or a plural count noun, e.g.:

62a. *Children wasn't- couldn't spen' money when I come along* (SE/008/145)

62b. *Young men couldn't spend no money until they was twenty-one years old*
(SE/008/147)

63a. *I don't trace up dreams* (SE/003/673)

63b. *I don't remember no dreams* (SE/003/680)

In contrast, singular indefinite count nouns as in (54a) denote a single person or thing, i.e. by definition they do not allow for a "wide" interpretation (unless they are accompanied by the determiner *any*). The apparent denotational difference between singular indefinite count nouns with and without *any* has led most linguists to claim that the latter cannot be involved in negative concord (recall that the involvement of the former in negative concord is a given). Thus Cheshire (1982:65) states: "With singular countable nouns the form *a* is used in ... Reading English" and "[n]egative concord does not occur with *a*" (Ibid.:66). And Labov (1972a:806): "the underlying form of *no* is NEG+*any*, not NEG+*a*, which is realized as *not a*: I'm not a baby". Evidence for this claim is available from the contrast in (64):

64a. *You're nothing but a dog* (ESR/008/231) = NEG+*anything*

64b. *You're not a thing but a dog* (ESR/008/232) = NEG+*a thing*

Nonetheless, in the present study I adopt the controversial view that negative concord can also occur with the indefinite *a*+CN. There are several reasons for this.

First, there are a number of instances in our data where *no* is best interpreted as NEG+*a* and not as NEG+*any*. Consider (65) for instance:

65. *it ain't been thirty-seven- thirty-seven... I ain't been no deacon thirty-seven year
(...) *it wouldn't be thirty-seven years* (ANSE/032/902)*

65'a. I ain't been a deacon (for) thirty-seven year(s)

65'b. I ain't been any deacon (for) thirty-seven year(s)

In this example, there is nothing within the sentence or in the extra-sentential/discourse context to suggest that (65) should be interpreted as (65'b) rather than (65'a). In fact, the "wider" interpretation of *no* as NEG+*any* in (65'b) is rather undesirable, since the speaker is denying not that he is a deacon (there is no doubt that he is a deacon) but rather that he has been one for thirty-seven years. Under these circumstances, the analysis of *no deacon* as NEG+*a deacon* is more appropriate. Besides, incontrovertible evidence for the possibility of such an analysis is available in the following exchange in African Nova Scotian English:

66. FW: *I bet a lot of people were scared Uncle Al, though, wasn't they?*

INF: *Everybody. No lot. Everybody.* (ANSE/032/374-5)

This example is particularly compelling in that it imposes the interpretation of NEG+*a* on *no*, since the underlying expression is *a lot* (and not *any lot*).

Second, Labov (1972a:806) claims that "[t]he indefinite article *a* ... is not involved in NEGCONCORD" because [+partitive] indefinite nouns do not participate in negative concord. The following examples from our data disprove this claim, since both involve negative concord with partitive noun phrases:

67. *She don't ask me not a thing* (SE/007/926)
 68. *I never made not one prayer that whole night* (ANSE/039/132)

Third, as Tottie (1991:306) observes, "the variation between the indefinite article and *any* with countable heads is, to my knowledge, a neglected area of the grammar requiring much further work". Tottie (Ibid.) also reports ongoing change in American English between the use of *any* and *a* with countable nouns, despite the standard view (e.g. Quirk et al. 1985). The fact that *any* and *a* are currently in variation even in standard English suggests that interpreting every instance of *no*+CN (where the common noun is a singular count noun) as NEG+*any*+CN and never as NEG+*a*+CN is an *ad hoc* assumption.

In short, I argue that negative concord can occur with a wider range of elements than has previously been assumed, since it seems that with negative concord *no*+CN can vary with *any*+CN, \emptyset +CN as well as *a*+CN. Note also that negative concord can occur with *one*, *hardly*, *either*, *ever* and *ary*³¹, as in (69-73):

69. *She couldn't speak not one word in Spanish* (SE/006/178)
 70. *you couldn't hardly talk on your- on your phone* (ANSE/009/102)
 71. *I didn't believe in it neither* (ANSE/009/475)
 72. *Nobody never got mad with each other* (ANSE/038/933)

³¹ The unusual alternation *ary/nary* is very rare in the data. Only four instances are found, all in the *Ex-slave Recordings*. Feagin (1979:227) also reports this "unusual alternation ... in the older Anniston area working class, especially the rural people"; she describes its meaning as 'a single one', 'either', or 'not a (single one)', and she notes that both *ary* and *nary* are usually followed by *a*.

73. *If I weren't not nary one* (ESR/012/305)

Crucially, the application of negative concord with all of these forms is variable. As outlined in Labov (1972b), Sankoff (1980) and Sankoff (1982, 1988), the problem now is the description of the syntactic variation observed in terms of linguistic structure. It is this description which allows for comparison with varieties of English and creoles.

4.1.2. Coding and analysis of the data:

From the transcripts, I systematically extracted, as they occurred naturally in the interviews any sentence containing one negative element with at least one indefinite to its right.³² To facilitate the analysis of negative concord with indefinites in early African American English, I coded the data sets according to two social factors (speaker, gender), and four linguistic factors (type of indefinite, type of neg-element, location of indefinite, and perseverance). Only the latter (linguistic factors) need to be explicated here.

Type of indefinite

Indefinites in frozen expressions were excluded from the data sets because they do not participate in negative concord, e.g.:

74. *you can't make fun of that* (ANSE/030/956)

75. *I didn't stay in school long...* (ANSE/009/413)

76. *you couldn't go to sleep after you got it* (ANSE/039/87)

³² According to Martin (1992), the only sentence type where an indefinite can never attract a preceding negation is WH-questions. No such sentences were found in the six interviews.

Indefinite quantifiers, e.g. *many*, *much*, were also excluded from the data sets because they never undergo negative concord. E.g.:

77. *I don't eat much* (ANSE/039/631)

78. *I didn't get much schooling* (SE/003/131)

Finally, tokens where negative concord could not be unambiguously confirmed were excluded from the data set. In (79) for instance, it is not clear whether the transcribed *n* on *never* actually belongs to *ain't* (the [t] is not pronounced). Similarly, in (80) it is not clear whether the transcribed *n* on *nary* can be entirely attributed to *weren't* (the [t] is not pronounced either). (I listened carefully to the recordings of such tokens, however, to see whether the transcription could be confirmed, with a pause in the informant's speech for instance).

79. *I ain't never worn none* (ESR/012/270)

80. *If I weren't nary one now, I couldn't be* (ESR/012/307)

Type of Neg-element

A *neg-element* is the True Neg (Martin 1992), i.e. the only element that actually (logically) negates the sentence. Putatively, it is also the neg-element that "spreads" negation onto indefinites in the sentence during negative concord. Because I was interested in whether the surface form of any particular neg-element was more likely to induce negative concord, I coded the data according to several types:

- *do* auxiliary: *they don't make nothing* (SE/007/1169)

- *ain't*: *he ain't got no more* (SE/011/222)

- negative noun: *No one need no light* (ANSE/039/1269)
- *be/have+n't*: *It wasn't no person* (ANSE/027/777)
 I haven' never met him (ESR/009/408)
- *never*: *She never has no trouble with her stomach* (ANSE/039/630)
- modal: *I can't go nowheres* (SE/007/1341)
- *not*: *But candidate not supposed to go to wedding in the first place*
 (ANSE/027/214)

Location of indefinite in the sentence

Martin (1992) formally shows that the only syntactic categories to have any role in negative concord are *functional categories* (as opposed to *lexical categories*, in the Government and Binding sense). Accordingly, I only coded indefinites as to whether they were inside or outside the clause containing the neg-element (True Neg).

Same clause as neg-element, e.g.:

81. *But you fellas ain't putting nothing down* (ANSE/030/117)

Other clause than neg-element, e.g.:

82. *I don't think that takes off no weight* (ANSE/019/579)

Perseverance

The term *perseverance* (also known as *concord* in Poplack 1979 or *parallel processing* in Scherre & Naro 1992) is used here to describe the following possible scenario: The use

of negative concord leads to more use of negative concord, and the “non-use” of negative concord leads to more “non-use” of negative concord.

Because I extracted my tokens from transcripts of sociolinguistic interviews, I had to establish an artificial limit on the “range” of perseverance, viz. five lines of transcription. Thus, if an indefinite with (potential) negative concord was preceded within five lines of transcription by another indefinite with (potential) negative concord, I coded for the effect of perseverance (“Yes” if both were negativized or if both were not negativized, “No” if they had different morphologies with respect to negation). Although the limit I set (5 lines) is somewhat arbitrary, it prevents me from coding for indefinites that are so far removed from each other in connected speech that chance is more likely to prevail than perseverance.

4.1.3. Patterns in the use of negative concord: Results and interpretations

4.1.3.1 Overall rates of negative concord with indefinites

The overall rates for negative concord with indefinites in early African American English are displayed in Table (4):³³

³³ The rates for African Nova Scotian English and Samaná English include three and ten tokens with *hardly*, respectively.

E.g.: *it was a baby I couldn't hardly carry* (SE/002/367)

These tokens are excluded from the variation analysis below, since it is not clear what they vary with.

TABLE 4
 OVERALL RATES OF NEGATIVE CONCORD WITH INDEFINITES IN
 THE EX-SLAVE RECORDINGS (ESR), THE SAMANA ENGLISH CORPUS (SE)
 AND THE AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN ENGLISH CORPUS (ANSE)

ESR	SE	ANSE
70% (N=210)	63% (N=332)	78% (N=692)

To make these rates comparable to those from other studies, however, I excluded all tokens involving (potential) negative concord to indefinites outside the clause. I also excluded tokens with indefinites such as *one*+common noun or *a*+common noun, as these were not included in previous studies. The results are given in the following table:

TABLE 4.1.
 RATES OF NEGATIVE CONCORD WITH INDEFINITES
 WITHIN THE SAME CLAUSE
 IN SOUTHERN WHITE NONSTANDARD ENGLISH³⁴ (SWNE), NORTHERN
 WHITE NONSTANDARD ENGLISH³⁵ (NWNE), AFRICAN AMERICAN
 VERNACULAR ENGLISH³⁶ (AAVE), AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN ENGLISH
 (ANSE), SAMANA ENGLISH (SE) AND THE EX-SLAVE RECORDINGS (ESR)

	SWNE	NWNE	AAVE	ANSE	SE	ESR
N	718	42	654	492	222	153
%	75%	81%	98%	89%	66%	80%

Negative concord is by far the preferred negative form in all varieties of nonstandard English in Table (4.1), be they white or black. And yet, the three varieties of early African American English have relatively low rates given the essentially categorical use of negative concord that Labov et al (1968:277) found in Harlem Black English. In fact,

³⁴ Feagin (1979:232): Urban working class whites.

³⁵ Labov et al. (1968:277): Individual interviews.

³⁶ Labov et al. (1968:277): Individual interviews.

the overall results from our data are much closer to what Labov et al. (1968) and Feagin (1979) found in their individual interviews with white Inwood working class teenagers and white Anniston urban working class informants, respectively. It is thus obvious that widespread negative concord is a feature of nonstandard English, and working class speech more generally, not just of African American English, a result that supports the following argument by Marxist linguist Max Adler (1980:67-57):

... For some years American linguists investigated what they called "Black English." In fact, this language is confined to the Negro poor in the United States. As soon as a black man climbs up the social ladder and becomes middle class he changes from "Black" English to the educated form of American English....³⁷

In her study of working-class Reading English (U.K.), Cheshire (1982:65) does not distinguish between clause-internal and clause-external negative concord, and the rates she reports involve *any* forms only (*any/no*, *any/none*, *anything/nothing*, *any more/no more*, *anyone/no one* and *anywhere/nowhere*). As such, her results are not completely comparable to those in Table (4.1). It is still worth noting that the frequencies for her informants range between 51% and 89% (Total N=141). Not surprisingly then, negative concord is often considered a "supra-regional", "trans-national" diagnostic feature of "substandard culture" in the English speaking world (Gramley & Pätzold 1992:309; 377).

³⁷ The problem with marxist theories of language is that they often carry Labov's original idea of "linking linguistic structure to social structure" to the extreme. Fortunately, Newmeyer (1986:134-135) has clarified the issue in the case of NC:

there is nothing intrinsic to working-class life that would lead a worker to prefer negative concord and a capitalist to avoid it. The correlation is a historical accident, and, as such, Marxist theory has nothing whatsoever to say about it. If the correlation were not accidental, then we would expect negative concord to occur disproportionately among the world's proletarians. But it is not only in the English speech community that the correlation exists. All classes of Spanish speakers have concord; as far as this grammatical phenomenon is concerned, King Juan Carlos of Spain has more in common with a West Virginia coal miner than he does with President Reagan.

That this should be the case is hardly surprising: negative concord with indefinites has a long history in the English language. Thus Traugott (1992:170): "Negative-concord (also called multiple negation) is frequent, indeed the norm, in OE [Old English]." And Jack (1978:67): "the forms *any* and *ever* ... are generally avoided in negative clauses in ME [Middle English], and by 'negative concord' the corresponding negative forms, *no(n)* and *never*, are used instead". And finally, Austin (1984:146): "in spite of the general absence of citations in better-known grammars, double negatives [negative concord] never wholly disappeared from the English language ... and, indeed, as Poutsma [1914:679] says, 'in dialects and vulgar speech, repeated negatives flourish to this day and will, most probably, never cease to flourish'." Examples are given in (83-85):

83. OE: *& ne bid dær nænig ealo gebrowen mid Estum* (Traugott 1992:268)

84. ME: *But nevere gronte he at no strook but oon* (Fischer 1992:284)

85. Early Modern English: *I cannot goe no further* (Barber 1976:282)

The near categorical rate of negative concord in Labov et al.'s (1968) Harlem data³⁸ (AAVE in Table 4.1) constitutes the basis for Labov's (1972a:806) statement that in African American Vernacular English, negative concord "is NOT optional; in the major environment, within the clause, NEGCONCORD to indeterminates is obligatory" (his emphasis). *Prima facie*, this is an exciting result, since Bickerton (1981:65) claims that negative concord with indefinites in the same clause is also obligatory in creoles generally. But the *lower* rates found in early varieties of African American English (especially in Samaná English) suggest that the categorical use of negative concord may be a recent development, rather than a creole feature. Moreover, this development is probably attributable to African American youth: in Wolfram's (1969) study of Detroit African American Vernacular English, the preadolescent and teen informants use far

³⁸ The overall rate for group sessions is 99% (N=283) (Labov et al. 1968:277).

more negative concord than working-class adults. Baugh (1983:82) reports similar findings in his study of "Black Street Speech".

Unfortunately, it is not clear whether white nonstandard varieties of English are also extending their application of negative concord. Consider Table (4.2):

TABLE 4.2.
RATES OF NEGATIVE CONCORD WITH INDEFINITES
WITHIN THE SAME CLAUSE
IN ANNISTON WHITE WORKING CLASS NONSTANDARD ENGLISH (AWNE)
AND WEST VIRGINIA WHITE WORKING CLASS NONSTANDARD ENGLISH
(WVNE)
[Sources: Feagin 1979:232-3; Wolfram & Christian 1975:161]

AWNE	Age	%	WVWE	Age	%
	Teenagers	64% (N=244)		7-11	73%
				12-14	63%
				15-18	62%
	Older	75% (N=718)		20-40	68%
				40+	53%

In Wolfram and Christian's (1975) study, the older informants (40+) have the lowest rates of negative concord whereas in Feagin's (1979) study, the older informants use more negative concord than the teenagers (see also pp. 233-234). Thus according to the apparent time construct, the two communities have opposite tendencies: in West Virginia, use of negative concord is increasing; in Alabama, it is decreasing. This suggests that it is *premature* to claim that African American English is diverging from white nonstandard English, since the use of negative concord is increasing in at least some white varieties (e.g. West Virginia). Nonetheless, the extreme use of negative concord among African American youth is unparalleled even in nonstandard varieties of white English.

4.1.3.2. Specific patterns in the use of negative concord in early African American

English:

Table (4.3) presents the results for the different factor groups that emerge from analysing the data with Goldvarb, a variable rule application for the Macintosh. The application is particularly useful in that it allows us to understand the *relative* importance of the various factors affecting the use of negative concord in early African American English.

TABLE 4.3:
Results of three independent variable rule analyses of the contribution of factors selected as significant to the probability of negative concord with indefinites in African Nova Scotian English (ANSE), the Ex-slave Recordings (ESR), and Samaná English (SE).

	ANSE	SE	ESR
TOTAL N:	689	322	208
CORRECTED MEAN:	.86	.68	.78
Type of Indefinite			
Any/No pronouns	.75	.89	..79
Ever/Never; Either/Neither	.27	.48	.39
Common noun	.32	.16	.30
range:	48	73	49
Perseverance			
Yes	.61	.59	.64
No	.13	.29	.20
range:	48	30	44
Factors not selected:			
Informants			X
Type of neg-element			X
Location of indefinite		X	
Sex of informant	X	X	X

Although other groups were selected as significant in individual data sets, "type of indefinite" and "perseverance" were the only groups selected as significant in all data sets. They were also selected as the most significant factor groups in all three data sets. I will now discuss the interpretation of these results, in the following order: social factors

("sex", "informant"), linguistic factors ("type of indefinite", "perseverance", "location of indefinite", "type of indefinite").

a) Social factors:

Given the limited number of speakers in our data sets, it is impossible to assess fully the complex conditioning effect of social factors in the use of negative concord.

Nevertheless, the relative homogeneity of the speakers described in section (2.2.2) allows us to consider -at least tentatively- the effect of gender on overall rates of negative concord.

Gender

A recurrent finding in variationist studies is that men use a higher frequency of nonstandard forms than women do. Labov (1990) notes that this "principle" is reported in English for: the *ing*-variable, final *-t/d* cluster simplification, copula deletion, vocalization of (*r*), deletion of 3rd pers. sg. *-s*, absence of possessive *-s*, and negative concord. It was Wolfram (1969) who, in his *Sociolinguistic Description of Detroit Negro Speech*, first reported men's more frequent use of negative concord. The results for the early African American English data sets are displayed in the following table.

TABLE 4.4.
 RATES OF NEGATIVE CONCORD WITH INDEFINITES
 BY GENDER OF INFORMANT IN AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN ENGLISH (ANSE),
 SAMANA ENGLISH (SE), AND IN THE EX-SLAVE RECORDINGS (ESR)

	ANSE		SE		ESR	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Men	80	435	55	146	71	117
Women	72	254	68	176	69	91

The rates presented here are rather confusing. Men favour *more* negative concord than women do by a margin of 8% in the African Nova Scotian data set, they favour *less* negative concord than women do by a margin of 13% in Samaná English and no real difference is found between men and women in the *Ex-slave Recordings*. In any case, the difference in rates are rather small. Not surprisingly then, the contribution of sex is discarded (as non-significant) in the variable rule analyses of all three data sets (see Table 4.3). These results do not conform with Labov's "principle", given the nonstandard status of negative concord³⁹. Because the data used here represent earlier varieties of African American English than Wolfram's (1969) data (for instance), the different distributions among women and men may be attributable to changes in the social meaning of negative concord. The precise nature of this "meaning" is beyond the scope of this thesis, however.

Individual informants

Table (4.3) shows that the difference between speakers is not selected as significant in the *Ex-slave Recordings* (note that informants #2, #6 and #7 were not included in the

³⁹ See, for instance, Wolfram's *Selective Inventory of Socially Diagnostic Structures* (Wolfram 1991:292-293), or Gramley and Pätzold's list of stigmatized features (Gramley & Pätzold 1992:308-309;377).

analysis, since they only had between one and three tokens each). The factor of individual differences was selected as significant, however, in African Nova Scotian English and Samaná English (ranges: .36 and .27). This result has at least one methodological consequence for the present study: When considering the linguistic factors (i.e. only part of the data at a time), I must make sure that the patterns noted there are not due to an uneven distribution of the data across speakers. In terms of Goldvarb, this is done by including the factor of individual differences in variable rule analyses with linguistic factors. Crucially, when the factor group "informant" is removed from the analyses, the constraint hierarchies presented in Table (4.3) remain the same.

b) Linguistic factors:

Type of Indefinite

Table (4.3) shows that the factor group "type of indefinite" contributes the most to the variability of negative concord in early African American English (it contributes the same as "perseverance" in African Nova Scotian English). The contrasts between the various types of indefinites are interesting in a number of ways.

First, *any* pronouns (e.g. *anywhere, anything*) contribute the highest probabilities to negative concord: between .75 (ANSE) and .89 (SE). In heavy contrast, indefinite common nouns (e.g., *money, any money*) disfavour negative concord at .32 in African Nova Scotian English, at .30 in the Ex-slave Recordings and most conspicuously, at .16 in Samaná English. Finally, *ever* and *either* contribute probabilities of .27 in African Nova Scotian English, .38 in the Ex-slave Recordings, and .48 in Samaná English. The actual rates of negative concord are reported in Table (4.5) for the different pronouns and in Table (4.6) for indefinite common nouns.

TABLE 4.5.
 RATES OF NEGATIVE CONCORD WITH ANY PRONOUNS
 IN AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN ENGLISH (ANSE), SAMANA ENGLISH (SE)
 AND THE EX-SLAVE RECORDINGS (ESR)

	ANSE		SE		ESR	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
<i>none < any</i>	93	14	100	7	89	9
<i>nothing < anything</i>	92	168	94	90	90	49
<i>no more < any more</i>	95	39	86	28	100	5
<i>nobody < anybody</i>	93	30	88	8	100	9
<i>no one < anyone</i>	82	22	100	1	-	
<i>nowhere < anywhere</i>	100	12	100	9	100	3
Total	92	285	94	143	92	75

TABLE 4.6.
 DISTRIBUTION OF INDEFINITE COMMON NOUNS
 IN AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN ENGLISH (ANSE), IN SAMANA ENGLISH (SE)
 AND THE EX-SLAVE RECORDINGS (ESR)

	ANSE		SE		ESR	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
<i>any</i> +CN	-	1	2	4	3	3
∅+CN [mass]	7	27	19	32	11	11
∅+CN [plural]	6	22	15	26	7	6
<i>a</i> +CN	19	73	25	42	16	17
<i>one</i> +CN	1	5	5	9	3	3
<i>no</i> <i>not a</i> + CN <i>not one</i>	66	252	33	56	62	65
TOTAL	-	380	-	169	-	105

Comparison of Table (4.5) with Table (4.6) shows not only that *any*-pronouns are more responsive to negative concord than indefinite nouns are (as seen in Table 4.3), but also that the behaviour of pronouns is far more consistent. A possible explanation for the relatively predictable, uniform behaviour of pronouns across all three varieties of African American English can be inferred from current views on lexical diffusion in syntactic change. According to Tottie (in press), frequency contributes to the preservation of older forms.⁴⁰ Since in our case, the *any*-pronouns constitute a closed lexical set, the high frequency of individual forms within this set (notably, *nothing*) could be responsible for the "older" *no*-pronouns prevailing over the "new" *any*-pronouns. In this view, the uneven, lower rates of negative concord with indefinite nouns, as seen in Table (4.3), would be explained by their lower frequency: nouns form an open class, so individual items are used less frequently than pronouns.

The pronouns may also involve more negative concord because they are exclusively negative polarity items (for a basic discussion of NPI's, see Quirk et al. 1985:10.54-70). The very occurrence of a negative polarity item crucially depends on the presence of a neg-element (or at least a strong downward-monotonic expression, such as *hardly*). In contrast, indefinite common nouns (except those with *any* as a determiner) can occur regardless of whether a negative is nearby or not. It follows intuitively that the special relationship the pronouns all entertain with negative elements is probably responsible for their high rate of negative attraction during negative concord.

Additional evidence for the explanation just given comes from the fact that adverbs (*ever, either*) also have a higher probability of negative attraction than nouns do (except in the African Nova Scotian English data set). Although the status of the adverb *either* (not the pronoun) as a negative polarity item is not clear (I have not yet seen it

⁴⁰ See also Poplack (1990) for a demonstration of this regarding the use of French subjunctive.

cited in the literature on NPI's), *ever* is in fact a well-established negative polarity item. So once again, it is probably their special status within negation that makes these adverbs more susceptible than indefinite common nouns to negative concord.⁴¹

It altogether follows that the conditioning effect of "type of indefinite" on negative concord variation in early African American English is rather predictable given what is known about negation in English generally. Negative polarity items are the privileged locus of negative concord in early African American English as in other nonstandard dialects of English (see for e.g. Cheshire 1982, Feagin 1979). There is, therefore, no *a priori* reason to posit here the interference of a separate (creole) underlying system of negative concord.

- *Perseverance: Concord with concord*

The "mechanical" effect known as *perseverance* or *concord* is described by Labov (1994:568) as "simple repetition of the preceding structure". According to Table (4.3), the concordial effect of this mechanism in early African American English clearly favours the occurrence of negative concord and is the second most important factor conditioning its variation (range of probability = .30-.48). This result is particularly interesting in light of the growing interest in parallel processing (Scherre & Naro 1992), and also in light of other similar results on different variables studied in the same data sets (notably Poplack & Tagliamonte 1994), so I will pay special attention to its interpretation here.

⁴¹ I have no explanation for why adverbs have between .40 (ESR) and .48 (ANSE) less probability of negative attraction than the other negative polarity items do (i.e. the "any" pronouns). It should be noted, however, that Wolfram (1969, cited in Feagin 1979:233) also found that "the rates of concord are higher for *any* than for *ever* and other adverbs" in his Detroit study. Feagin reports the same tendency in her Alabama White English corpus (Ibid.; no figures are given, however). The special behaviour of adverbs is most apparent in Cheshire's (1982) data from Reading English: she finds no negative concord with *ever* for instance.

The effect of *perseverance* in variation was first exposed by Poplack (1979) in the phonology of variable plural marking in Puerto Rican Spanish in Philadelphia with the following tendency: An /s/ tends to produce an /s/, and a zero tends to produce a zero. Poplack's finding was important in two respects: First, the tendency she reported was counterfunctional: A functional theory would predict that an /s/ should follow a zero (to avoid ambiguity) and that a zero should follow an /s/ (to avoid redundancy). In contrast, the concordial tendency Poplack observed was redundant even at the risk of ambiguity.⁴² Second, the robust concordial effect she found suggested the existence of a "principle of least effort" in the grammar (Poplack 1979, 1980, 1981). Simply, the grammar mechanically uses the same structure over and over again. My results regarding perseverance in the negative concord system of early African American English support Poplack's conclusions (namely that perseverance in the grammar is counterfunctional and mechanical).⁴³

⁴² See Labov (1994:547-568) for a presentation of Poplack's findings and others' along with an overall discussion on "The Overestimation of Functionalism".

⁴³ To better understand the mechanical nature of perseverance, I removed the overall agreement mechanism from its particular role in favouring negative concord in early African American English. I found (in the marginals) that the preceding structure (either negative concord or absence thereof) is repeated (within 5 lines of transcription) at 81% (N=379) in African Nova Scotian English, 72% (N=111) in Samaná English, and 72% (N=99) in the Ex-slave Recordings. In particular,

- negative concord follows negative concord (within 5 lines of transcription) at a rate of:
 - 91% (N=291) in African Nova Scotian English
 - 80% (N=60) in Samaná English
 - 86% (N=69) in the Ex-slave Recordings
- absence of negative concord follows absence of negative concord (within 5 lines of transcription) at a rate of:
 - 53% (N=88) in African Nova Scotian English
 - 63% (N=51) in Samaná English
 - 40% (N=30) in the Ex-slave Recordings

As the percentages show, there is "more" perseverance with negative concord than with the absence of negative concord: 38% more in African Nova Scotian English, 17% more in Samaná English and 46% more in the Ex-slave Recordings. In other words, it would seem that although both the application of negative concord and the non-application thereof are affected by *perseverance*, the mechanism is more likely to favour "concord with negative concord", as Table (4.3) above confirms.

The intuitive idea I want to submit here is this: Perseverance is maximally efficient when it actually has something to "repeat" (in our case, negative concord). On the other hand, its effect is weaker when it is "repeating" something abstract (in our case, the absence of negative concord). In other words,

The argument against functionalism is even plainer in the case of negative concord (as opposed to plural marking) and does not necessarily involve *perseverance*. Traditional grammarians, for instance, have argued that negative concord is both misleading ("two negatives make an affirmative") and otiose (don't linguists call it "pleonastic negation"?; e.g. Martin 1992). In this uncharitable view, negative concord is *inherently* counterfunctional. As Newmeyer (1986b:45-46) points out, this has led some "pop grammarians" to claim that African American English is the language of "ignorant, misguided, or merely lazy creatures for whom making distinctions is an unnecessary effort" (Simon 1980:148). Aside from its racist overtones, Simon's comment assumes that people should make distinctions when speaking, presumably because according to him language should be maximally communicative. Even Chomsky (1986) has posited a Principle of Full Interpretation in the grammar, which bans elements in a sentence unless they contribute to meaning.

Perhaps in an attempt to reconcile negative concord with such functional views, Labov (1972a:803-804) and Martin (1992:141) have claimed that negative concord is "meaningful": According to them, speakers use negative concord specifically for "emphatic negation". As noted earlier, however, the fact that negative concord reaches near categorical status in modern African American Vernacular English (Labov 1972a) makes this claim untenable. Not every linguistic phenomenon is meaningful. In fact, the very existence of parallel processing suggests that language has a "mind of its own". So the fact that perseverance is such an important factor in early African American English (see Table 4.3) also shows that negative concord is counterfunctional.

the "mechanism" is more efficient at applying a rule repeatedly than at not applying a rule repeatedly. This interpretation contributes to our understanding of Poplack's "mechanism".

In the literature, the only description of negative concord which conceivably involves "perseverance" is found in Jack (1978) for later Middle English prose. Regarding the alternation between the conjunctions *and* and *ne* (which no longer exists in modern English), Jack (1978:67-8) notes that: "The choice of conjunction is strongly connected with the character of the preceding clause to which the negative one is conjoined. When the preceding clause is positive it is usual to find the conjunction *and*, instances of *ne* being very uncommon ... When the clauses conjoined are both negative, ... *ne* is almost twice as common." Our finding that *perseverance* is operative in the negative concord system of early African American English as well thus contributes to the accumulating evidence that the two varieties (in this case later Middle English and early African American English) are related.

Location of Indefinite

The rates for negative concord within and outside the clause are tabulated here for the three data sets:

TABLE 4.7.
RATES OF NEGATIVE CONCORD WITH INDEFINITES
WITHIN THE SAME CLAUSE AND OUTSIDE THE CLAUSE IN AFRICAN NOVA
SCOTIAN ENGLISH (ANSE), SAMANA ENGLISH (SE) AND IN THE EX-SLAVE
RECORDINGS (ESR)

	ANSE		SE		ESR	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Within clause	79	593	62	270	74	170
Outside clause	66	96	62	52	55	38

As reported in Table (4.3), the location of the indefinite with respect to the clause containing the neg-element does not contribute to the variation in negative concord in Samaná English. In African Nova Scotian English and the Ex-slave Recordings, however, the contribution of this factor group is selected as significant (range of probabilities: .26 and .22, respectively). Although there is a higher probability for negative concord to occur when the negative and the indefinite are clause-mates in African Nova Scotian English and the Ex-slave Recordings, the fact that between 55% (ESR) and 66% (ANSE) of all indefinites attract negation outside the clause is nonetheless impressive.⁴⁴

Unfortunately, there are no good reference points for these results. Feagin (1979), Cheshire (1982) and Wolfram and Christian (1975, 1976) all report the occurrence of negative concord with indefinites outside the clause in their respective data sets, but they do not provide any figures. The numbers associated with this particular use of negative

⁴⁴ These results are important because their interpretation has implications for theoretical linguistics. One may posit, for instance, that negative concord does not occur with indefinites in a certain syntactic environment because the neg-element does not have “scope” over that position, or that it does not c-command it (see Martin 1992 for an analysis of negative concord using Government and Binding theory). And yet, because negative concord can be variable over clausal boundaries (as observed in African Nova Scotian English and the Ex-slave Recordings), no matter how explanatory the proposed rule is, it must ultimately be associated with some “probability of application”. As it happens, probabilistic rules or principles are not common-place in current theoretical syntax, but this may change as syntactic variation studies become more frequent.

In the meantime, linguists may try to explain different rates of negative concord inside and outside the clause as the result of the application of specific categorical rules. Given the high degree of variability in negative concord phenomena, this approach is not likely to succeed, however. For instance, Haegeman (1995a:80-83) claims that in nonstandard varieties of English, indefinites following *that* in a relative clause may not participate in negative concord (actually, she considers this constraint to be universal). The following example from our data does not conform to this view, however:

- i. *he supposed to be well because I ain't heard that nothing is happening*
(SE/006/1493)

According to Haegeman, a negative concord reading of this sentence is excluded since she adopts the hypothesis that at LF, *nothing* undergoes quantifier raising and this movement leads to the representation in (i'), i.e. it leads to a “*that*-trace effect”.

- i'. * $[AgrPnothing [I ain't heard [CPthat [Agr t is happen]]]]$

Unfortunately, it was not possible to find other examples like (i) in the data on early African American English, since indefinites are very rare in subject position in English generally. (Givón 1979:52: In a sample of approximately 350 subjects (vs. objects) drawn from a diverse set of written texts, 91% were definite and only 9% were indefinite.)

concord were perhaps too small for an adequate study. Even in African American Vernacular English, Labov et al. (1968) report only three such instances (out of 13 potential contexts) in their individual interviews with Harlem black gang members (see Labov 1972a:807). In the English-based creole literature (e.g. Bickerton 1975, 1981, 1987) negative concord with indefinites across clausal boundaries is not reported, but Déprez (1995a) does report such instances in Haitian Creole. Until more is known from English-based creoles, the behaviour of negative concord outside the clause in early African American English is therefore not diagnostic in the "origins" controversy.

Type of Neg-element

Table (4.3) shows that the factor group "type of neg-element" is not selected as significant in the *Ex-slave Recordings*. By comparison, "type of indefinite" was selected as the most important factor group in the variable rule analysis of the same data set (range of probability = .49). In other words, it is the indefinite, not the neg-element, that determines whether negative concord will take place or not (all things being equal in Goldvarb). This is an important finding because it suggests that we are dealing with "negation attraction" (Jespersen 1917) rather than "negation spreading" (van der Wouden 1994).

However, "type of neg-element" does contribute to the variation of negative concord in African Nova Scotian English and Samaná English (ranges of probability: .57 and .44, respectively). The rates of negative concord for the different types of neg-elements are therefore reported here (including those from the *Ex-slave Recordings*):⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Tokens with *hardly*, *without* and *won't* are excluded from this table (as well as from the variable rule analysis), because there were only between one and three tokens with each.

TABLE 4.8.
 RATES OF NEGATIVE CONCORD WITH INDEFINITES
 BY TYPE OF NEG-ELEMENT
 IN AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN ENGLISH (ANSE), SAMANA ENGLISH (SE) AND
 THE EX-SLAVE RECORDINGS (ESR)

	ANSE		SE		ESR	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
<i>do</i> auxiliary	83	211	77	109	73	79
<i>ain't</i>	85	122	69	72	77	22
<i>be/have+n't</i>	87	104	-	4	83	25
modal	70	121	46	50	66	44
<i>not</i>	-	4	52	29	-	2
negative NP	72	18	83	6	80	5
<i>never</i>	63	93	29	35	58	24

The results here are rather uneven. This is especially apparent with *not*, although this is probably attributable to the small number of tokens with this neg-element. One fact that emerges clearly is that *never* is followed by relatively less negative concord than both the negative NP's and the inflected elements (*do*, *ain't*, *be/have*, modals). I have no explanation for this result with regard to negative NP's (note also the relatively small number of tokens in this category). The result with respect to the inflected elements is interesting, however, insofar as it provides indirect support for the following claim made by Martin (1992:Abstract): "In pleonastic negative sentences, the negative element which is closest to Infl (True Neg) is the element responsible for sentential negation".⁴⁶ Of all the neg-elements we coded for, the inflected elements are obviously "closest to Infl". After all, they are *inflected*. Tentatively then, I suggest that the privileged relationship that these elements have with the inflectional head (which is marked with the

⁴⁶ Martin (1992) assumes that negation is a functional feature on the Inflectional head (Infl).

[+Neg] feature - at least according to Martin 1992) allows them to be "better neg-elements" than adverbs like *never* (and possibly *not*).

Against the historical background of linguistic negation in many languages, Jespersen (1917:4) suggests that, in time, "the original negative adverb is first weakened, then found insufficient and therefore strengthened, generally through some additional word...". Because this idea (which is known as "Jespersen's cycle") has now become the standard explanation for negative concord⁴⁷ (e.g., Horn 1989:454; Martin 1992:153-154; Rowlett 1995) and because it relates to our factor group "type of neg-element", I pay special attention to it here. Specifically, I want to see whether in our data on early African American English more negative concord tends to occur with "weak" neg-elements (as opposed to "strong" ones).

The whole problem here, of course, is to determine what constitutes a "weak" neg-element (and what constitutes a "strong" one). Jespersen (1917:5) himself refers to the "formal insignificance of the negative", i.e. its lack of "prominence" in the negative sentence, but a clear definition of such terms is still unavailable. This is because:

... prominence is exceptionally hard to define except in theory-internal terms. Clearly, the absence of stress and cliticization will be involved, but I suspect that determining a threshold level for prominence is a problem which will remain unsolved for some time to come. (Martin 1992:153, fn.64)

In any event, the difference between sentences with *not* and sentences with cliticized *n't* should be particularly relevant in this regard. Neg-elements in the categories "modal" (*can't, couldn't, wouldn't, shouldn't*) and "*be/have+n' t*" (*isn't, aren't, wasn't, weren't, hasn't, haven't, hadn't*) can also be considered "weak" compared to negative NP's and *never*, since the negative on the former is reduced to a post-clitic consonant

⁴⁷ Jespersen (1917:5): "The incongruity between the notional importance and the formal insignificance of the negative may ... cause the speaker to add something to make the sense perfectly clear to the hearer."

cluster, i.e., it lacks both syntactic and phonetic prominence, whereas the latter occupy a syntactic position of their own and they have both vowel quality and stress. Moreover, in the case of *do* auxiliary, the negative adverb is also reduced to *n't* but the very fact of periphrastic *do* ensures the prominence of negation. In other words, the negative is "supported" by the syntactic and phonetic prominence of *do*-support in English negative sentences.⁴⁸ Finally, *ain't* has a surface form that is completely specific to negation. Accordingly, *ain't* may also be considered "strong" in Jespersen's sense.

Unfortunately, as noted above, the uneven results for *not* in Table (4.8) do not allow for comparison. *Do+n't*, *ain't* and negative NP's are all "strong" neg-elements, and they are all ranked relatively high in Table (4.8). However, as already noted, *never* - also a "strong" neg-element - is ranked relatively low. Moreover, although "modals" occur with less negative concord than *do+n't*, *ain't* and negative NP's (presumably because the former are "weaker" than the latter), *be/have+n't* (i.e. arguably "weak" neg-elements) are associated with the highest rates of negative concord in both African Nova Scotian English and the Ex-slave Recordings. On the whole then, "Jespersen's cycle" does not explain the synchronic state of affairs in negative concord in early African American English.

4.2. Negative concord with verbs

In early African American English, negative concord with verbs can occur clause-internally, as in (87), or clause-externally, as in (88). I discuss these structures separately, in sections (4.2) and sections (5).

⁴⁸ Craig (1991:202):

the negative particle *not* is a primitive concept and all that happens in English is that negation is additionally and redundantly expressed with the use of *do*; the redundancy of *do* in this respect is attested in archaic forms of English where *do* is absent, as in: *He sleeps/slept not*. This use of *do* is, of course, also absent from creole, which relies on a negative particle alone (even when, in mesolectal speech, the particle is *duon*, which resembles only superficially the English *don't*).

87. *Nobody down in Cherry Brook didn't like her* (ANSE/030/742)
 'Nobody in Cherry Brook liked her'
88. *I don't think they ain't gonna- not gonna change* (ANSE/030/451)
 'I don't think they're gonna change'

4.2. Negative concord with verbs in the same clause:

The rates of neg-marking of verbs following negativized subjects within the same clause are tabulated in Table (4.9). Note that the unusual sentences given in (89) and (90) apparently also involve negative concord to verbs. Yet, because they are isolated cases in terms of negative concord within the clause, I did not include them in the rates reported here.

89. *I ain't no kidding* (ANSE/030/491)⁴⁹
90. *you not don't drink coffee* (SE/001/923)

TABLE 4.9.
 RATES OF NEGATIVE CONCORD TO VERBS IN THE SAME CLAUSE
 IN AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN ENGLISH (ANSE), IN SAMANA ENGLISH (SE)
 AND THE EX-SLAVE RECORDINGS (ESR)

ANSE		SE		ESR	
%	N	%	N	%	N
55	22	60	25	0	5

⁴⁹ I verified the existence of these unique tokens on the audio-recordings.

The lack of variability in the Ex-slave Recordings can be attributed to the small number of tokens in that data set. Otherwise, the rates in African Nova Scotian English and Samaná English show that negative concord with verbs in the same clause is a highly variable phenomenon in early African American English, e.g. (91) and (92).

91a. *nobody here went* (SE/003/625)

91b. *nobody didn't go* (SE/003/626)

92a. *Nothing is happen* (SE/011/143)

92b. *Nothing ain't happen* (SE/011/808)

The rates Labov et al. (1968) found in the Black English vernacular of South Harlem gangs⁵⁰ were lower than those for African Nova Scotian English and Samaná English: 28% (28/99) in group interviews and 39% (58/149) in individual interviews.⁵¹ These differences in rates may be due to a variety of factors (e.g. age, style, etc.). Generally though, our results simply confirm Labov's (1972a:806) observation that "NEGCONCORD is never obligatory to the pre-verbal position". (By "pre-verbal" Labov means the locus of inflection in negative sentences, i.e. where auxiliaries, *do*-support and modals appear.)

It is therefore difficult to defend Sells et al.'s (1995:17, n.17) argument that sentences such as "**Nobody said that*" are "unacceptable in AAVE". Sells et al. specify

⁵⁰ The breakdown of their data is as follows (from Labov 1972a:807):

	Group interviews	Ind'l interviews
T-Birds (9-13 yrs.)	2/13	12/34
Cobras (12-17 yrs.)	12/35	7/18
Jets (12-16 yrs.)	10/38	39/97
Danger Girls (13-17 yrs.)	4/13	

⁵¹ Note that these rates draw on far more tokens than those from our data, i.e. the rates may not be completely comparable, hence the difference is not necessarily diagnostic of linguistic change.

that such a sentence may be "considered syntactically well-formed, but uninterpretable, on the assumption that the [negative quantifier *nobody*] should be in the scope of a true negation for successful interpretation" (Ibid.). Rather, the preponderance of such sentences in even the most vernacular varieties of both early⁵² and contemporary Black English (they represent 72% of the cases in Labov et al.'s 1968 group sessions!) clearly invalidates Sells et al.'s assumption (which they inherit from Ladusaw 1992).⁵³

Returning now to the "origins" issue, recall that the variability described here is consistent with the "creole" hypothesis for the origin of African American Vernacular English, since Bickerton (1981:65) states explicitly that the optional application of negative concord with verbs is a prototypical feature of creole languages.⁵⁴ E.g.:

93. "nonbadi na sii am" "Nobody saw him"
(Guyanese Creole - Bickerton 1984:185)

On the other hand, clause-internal negative concord with verbs is also attested in "restricted northern and most southern vernaculars" (Wolfram 1991:293). Feagin, for instance, gives many examples from her White Alabama informants:

- 94a. *None of em didn't hit the house.* (Feagin 1979:229)
94b. *And neither of the boys can't play a lick of it.* (Feagin 1979:236)
94c. *Nobody don't come along and tell you you have to move.* (Feagin 1979:240-1)

⁵² E.g. (i) *And no anchor hold that ship* (SE/001/502)
(ii) *Nobody got mad with each other* (ANSE/038/103)
(iii) *None of them never was sold* (ESR/013/127)

⁵³ Sells et al. (1994) actually claim that "negative quantifiers [such as *nobody*] cannot express negation themselves" (p. 4), "and that the only elements which can impart "true negation" are negated auxiliaries" (p. 17). In our data, the many instances of negative quantifiers imparting negative concord to indefinites but not to the auxiliaries deny this claim, e.g. *Nobody give nobody nothing to eat* (ANSE/030/666).

⁵⁴ Regarding the possibly innate nature of such structures, see McNeill (1966), Kiparsky (1978) and Bickerton (1984).

94d. *I looked in her purse Saturday, and nothin' wadn' in there.* (Feagin 1979:240-1).

It is also worth noting that such variable neg-marking of verbs has a long-standing history in English. For instance, Nagucka (1978:61) describes the sentences in (95) as "optional variants" in Old English. (Recall that the equivalent of modern English *n't* is preverbal *ne* in Old English and Middle English).

95a. [-NC] *and him nænig widstod* (Alfred, Bede 52/25)

95b. [+NC] *and him nænig ne widstod*

'and none withstood him'

Jack (1978:62) observes the same for Middle English: "*Ne ... is almost never necessary on grounds of sense in clauses containing a negative form ... In these instances the construction that includes ne seems virtually interchangeable with the one which omits it...*" (my emphasis):

96a. [+NC] ... *ne a moment of an hour ne shal nat perisse of his tyme ...* (p. 60)

96b. [-NC] *No man is [vs. nis] here in erþe ...* (p. 63)

Of course, even if the variable neg-marking of verbs in early African American English is a lineal descendent of the pattern observed in Old English and Middle English (via the white southern plantation workers), the rates of application of the rule may have changed over the centuries and perhaps also the *mode* of application of the rule. Thus Cheshire (1982) finds that negative concord to verbs no longer exists in modern Reading English (U.K.). And yet, unless some affinity can be established between negative

concord in earlier English and early African American English, there is nothing to disprove the "creole" origin of negative concord in African American English Vernacular.

For instance, the variable marking of verbs following a negative adverb (e.g. *na* or *næfre* 'never') was part of earlier English grammar. Thus Traugott (267-269) states for Old English: "Negative adverbs other than *ne* ... may negate finite verbs, with or without *ne*"; cf. e.g. (97) and (98):

97a. [+NC] ... *þæt he na siþþan geboren ne wurde*
 ... that he never after born not would-be
 "that he would not be born afterward"

97b. [-NC] ... *þæt hit na geweorþan sceolde þæt ...*
 ... that it never come-to-pass should that ...
 "that it should never come to pass that ..."

98a. [-NC] *Næfre ze wilde to wudu fleozan!* (Charm 2)

98b. [+NC] *Næfre ze wilde to wudu ne fleozan*
 'Never fly wild to the wood!' (e.g. from Nagucka 1978:61)

By contrast, Bickerton's (1981, 1984) description of negative concord with verbs in creoles implies that, within the same clause, the rule applies only after a negativized indefinite subject. Apparently, the rule does not apply after a negative adverb as in earlier English. Interestingly, the same is true of all previous descriptions of negative concord in modern African American Vernacular English (Labov et al. 1968; Labov 1972a, 1972b, 1992c; Wolfram 1969; Fasold & Wolfram 1970; Bolton 1982; Baugh 1983; Martin 1992;

Ladusaw 1992, 1995; Sells et al. 1994; etc.). Note, however, that this is not sufficient evidence for the "creole" origin of negative concord in African American English since the same description applies to nonstandard varieties of English (Wolfram & Christian 1976; Christian et al. 1988; Feagin 1979).

In our data on early African American English, a preverbal negative adverb did in fact induce negative concord to a verb, but only once:

99. *I never didn't had no problem too much with them* (ANSE/038/88)

In the African Nova Scotian data set, this is the only instance of such negative concord out of 117 potential contexts with preverbal *never*. And yet, (99) cannot be considered a performance error, since other examples can be located in interviews that were not included in the data set:

100. *But they never don't want to take their clothes off* (ANSE/Marcia Dickson/1023)

101. *Never didn't do nothing though* (ANSE/Lisa Evans/184)

102. *And never didn't- couldn't find it* (ANSE/Lisa Evans/1651)

103. *Never I didn't get sick* (ANSE/John Green/2090)

This phenomenon does not occur in the Samaná English data set or in the Ex-slave Recordings at all, despite 79 and 58 potential contexts, respectively. Likewise, four sentences with preverbal *hardly* also failed to induce negative concord to the verb, e.g.:

104. *you hardly can speak to people today* (ANSE/032/800)

105. *When I came here, they hardly had no houses here* (SE/011/121)

Thus on one hand, the mere fact that (99) occurred in our data may reflect the English origin of negative concord to verbs in early African American English (recall that the phenomenon is apparently not found in creoles). On the other hand, the rarity of negative concord to verbs following a negative adverb in our data raises an interesting theoretical question which, to my knowledge, has never been asked in the literature: Aside from negative indefinites in subject position, why don't other preverbal negative elements (such as the negative adverbs *never* and *hardly*) induce negative concord with verbs in the same sentence? I hope to address this question in further research.

5. Evidence from lone attestations:

As seen in sections (3) and (4), *ain't* and negative concord are so prevalent in the data that the *systems* underlying the use of these negative structures in early African American English are relatively easy to describe. We have also seen how these negative systems can be compared to what is known about such systems in English and creoles. By contrast, in this section I will present three negative structures that are relatively rare in the data: negative concord to a verb outside the clause (5.1), negative inversion (5.2) and negative postposing (5.3). It is precisely because they are rare in the data that no *system* can be described with any certainty for these structures. And yet, because they happen to be marked structures cross-linguistically, it is worth discussing what is entailed by their mere *presence* in early African American English.

4.2.3. Negative concord with verbs outside the clause

106. *It ain't no cat can't get in no coop* (Labov 1972a:773)

In their study of Harlem African American Vernacular English, Labov et al. (1968) found three examples of negative concord extended to the verb in the next clause.⁵⁵ By far the most famous example is given in (106). That this sentence (out of only three) should have drawn so much attention to Labovian linguistics is somewhat surprising, given the quantitative orientation of this field. In all likelihood, the original attention given (106) was due to the belief that only African American Vernacular English allows this phenomenon (Labov et al. 1968; Labov 1972a, 1972b, 1972c). Since then, however, Wolfram and Christian (1976:113) have reported one sentence with negative concord to a verb in another clause in white Appalachian English and Feagin (1979:229) reported three examples in white Alabama English. These are given in (107-110):

107. *I wasn't sure that nothing wasn't gonna come up at all*
(Wolfram & Christian 1976:113; 35:23)
108. *I'm not gonna stay home when I ain't married; me and my kids can go on campin' trips* (Feagin 1979:229)
109. *We ain't never really had no tornadoes in this area here that I don't remember*
(Ibid.)
110. *But our church did not have any young people that I can't remember* (Ibid.)

The crucial point here is that negative concord to a verb in a different clause is vanishingly rare, even in those varieties that do allow it.⁵⁶ Our data representing early African American English are no exception in this regard. The phenomenon does not occur in the *Ex-slave Recordings*, it occurs three times in the Samaná English data set, and seven times in the African Nova Scotian English data set. I consider these occurrences to be of two different types:

⁵⁵ Labov (1972a:774) suggests there were "a half dozen examples" but he claims elsewhere there were only three (p. xiii, Foreword by Labov in Feagin 1979).

⁵⁶ Wolfram (1991:293) concludes that negative concord with verbs across different clauses is found only in restricted southern and black varieties of American English.

The first type involve cases of negation spreading to a lower clause. Consider the tokens in (111-115):

111. *But don't you think that I'm not gon' take it. Not me, no.* (SE/007/1291)

'But don't you think that I'm gon' take it. Not me, no.'

112. *Well isn't nobody wouldn't go out* (ANSE/030/812)

'there isn't [past reference] anybody who would go out'

113. *if he ain't the right man what not to suffer with people, he don't do nothing with the people* (SE/011/1016)

'if he [the bishop] is not the right [kind of] man that suffers with people, ...'

114. *I didn't come no scare you to death* (ANSE/039/820)

'I didn't come to scare you to death'

115. *they ain't going to don't take out the Mayfish* (SE/001/495)

'they aren't going to take out the Mayfish'

In (111), the negation from the imperative spreads from the main clause to the verb in the relative clause. (112) and (113) are instances of negation spreading to a verb in a noun phrase complement. In this regard, they resemble Labov et al.'s (1968) example in (106) as well as Feagin's (1979) examples in (109) and (110). (113) is unique, however, in that the NP complement is non-finite. The examples in (114) and (115) also involve negation spreading to a non-finite clause, but they are rather strange in their choice of "negators". (114) involves the pleonastic use of *no* (in a purpose clause). In this, it is reminiscent of (89) above, also from African Nova Scotian English data. And (115) involves the use of *don't* (in a similar non-finite clause) as if it were monomorphemic. This is reminiscent of the example in (90), from the same informant. In short, (111-115) show that negative concord to a verb outside the clause is not only a rare phenomenon but also a highly

heterogeneous one. Here we have five examples with three different pleonastic negators (*n't/not, no, don't*) in both finite and non-finite lower clauses. Fortunately, the second type of negative concord with verbs across clauses is more uniform.

In contrast with the first type just seen, the second type of negative concord may involve the upward-spreading of negation, from the verb in a lower clause to a verb in a higher clause. Examples are given in (116-118).

116. *I don't think some of them ain't no better than the one that don't go to church*
(ANSE/009/743)
117. *I don't think they ain't gonna ch- not gonna change* (ANSE/00h/98)
118. *I didn't think it wasn't no phone then* (ANSE/030/451)⁵⁷

The surrounding discourse context makes it clear that a single negation is intended in each of these sentences. Note crucially that the verb in the higher clause is always *think*., i.e. a "negative raising" verb like *believe, suppose, want*; etc (cf. Horn 1989). Negative raising verbs allow the negation to move from a lower clause (where it logically belongs) to a higher clause; cf. (119) and (120):

119. *I think it ain't like old time* (ANSE/019/411)
120. *I don't think they is* (ANSE/009/317)

It is therefore possible to describe (116-118) as a modified version of the negative raising rule: in early African American English, the negative may be copied rather than raised

⁵⁷ In this example, the higher clause refers to the present temporal reference. It would thus seem that both the negative and the past tense morphology were raised from the lower verb *wasn't* to the higher auxiliary *do*.

from the lower clause to the higher clause.⁵⁸ Thus (117) for instance would be derived from (117'a), not (117'b).

⁵⁸This parallel with negative raising is problematic in at least two ways, however:

First, the phenomenon illustrated in (133-135) occurs only in the African Nova Scotian English data set and it occurs five times, always with *think*. (There are also two sentences with *think* where the negation remains in the lower clause, as in (136), and eight sentences with *think* where the negation raises completely into the higher clause, as in (137).) It does not occur with other negative raising predicates in early African American English, e.g.:

A. *Just didn't figure that anyone would take anything* (ANSE/030/943)

Because the phenomenon is lexically restricted to *think*, the parallel with negative raising could be simply accidental. Specifically, one could argue that the examples in (133-135) derive from sentences like (137). I.e., negative raising would occur as it does in many languages with and without negative concord, and African American English has the unique option of subsequently spreading the raised negation back down to the lower clause (as in the first type of negative concord with verbs outside the clause). In this view, (133) would be derived as in (B):

B. I think some of them ain't no better than the one that don't go to church
 ii. -> I don't think some of them are no better than the one that don't go to church
 iii. -> I don't think some of them ain't no better than the one that don't go to church

This view is tenable since all three stages of the derivation are observable in the data; cf. (133-135), (136) and (137).

The second problem in comparing the phenomenon in (133-135) with negative raising is that negative concord can take place under circumstances where negative raising cannot. Consider (C):

C. *they didn't think we still wasn't gone in our bed. They thought we was up- wasn't gone in our bed* (ANSE/019/232)
 a. ?they didn't think we still was gone in our bed
 b. they thought we still wasn't gone in our bed

The presence of the adverb *still* disallows negative raising, as can be seen from the unacceptability of (a). Negative concord occurs nonetheless. Interestingly, this sentence also constitutes crucial evidence against the proposal described in (B), since the intermediate stage (i) in this proposed derivation is unavailable (a).

On the other hand, if the parallel with negative raising is discarded altogether, an important generalization could be lost. For instance, even in modern standard English it is possible to double a negation in two different clauses when the verb in the higher clause is a "negative raising" verb. Thus Feagin (1979:230) gives the example in (D) and she reports that the phenomenon is attested in Standard Anniston English:

D. *Well, he wouldn't never have been President, I don't think*

Lawler (1974:369) states that sentences like (D) are possible in Standard English (without the negative concord on *never*, of course) "because the negative is not in the proper place and does not bear the appropriate relationship to the rest of the utterance". His explanation relies on a Gricean-like constraint against "sentences (or utterances) which require the addressee to reinterpret the meaning after hearing most of the utterance" (Ibid.). If this explanation is correct, it follows that early African American English is uniquely exempt from this constraint, since negative concord takes place with no extraposition of the higher clause. Thus in (133-135) for instance, the negative is at "the proper place" and does in fact "bear the appropriate relationship to the rest of the sentence".

117'a. 'I think they ain't gonna change'

117'b. 'I don't think they're gonna change'

Note, however, that this finding does not constitute sufficient evidence for claiming the existence of a distinct behaviour in negative concord in African Nova Scotian English, since the example from Appalachian English given in (107) above involves a negative raising verb in the main clause (viz. *be sure*). As such, it can also be considered part of our second type of negative concord with verbs outside the clause. In other words, negative concord to verbs outside the clause, whether of the first or second type, is a feature shared between early African American English and select varieties of nonstandard English. Given the conspicuous nature of this feature (which has not been reported in the creole literature), this "sharing" is best explained by positing a common origin between these varieties.

5.2. Negative inversion:

121. *Won't nobody catch us* (Willie J., 15, Chicago; Labov 1972a:811)

Labov (1972a:811) argues that negative inversion as in (121) should also be considered a case of negative concord to a verb in the same clause. For him, "Negative inversion plainly depends upon and follows NEGTRANSFER from the subject indefinite to the verb, i.e. *Nobody will catch us* -> *Nobody won't catch us* -> *Won't nobody catch us*." (Ibid.). Accordingly, eight cases of negative inversion in the African Nova Scotian English data set and the Ex-slave Recordings⁵⁹ should supposedly be added to the figures in Table (4.9) above. E.g.:

⁵⁹ The African Nova Scotian English data set includes four unambiguous cases of negative inversion, the Ex-slave Recordings have four as well and the Samaná English data set has none.

122. *Didn't no white people stay in Africa* (ESR/012/51)
 123. *Can't no one get there* (ANSE/019/564)
 124. *Didn't nobody go to no doctor in them day* (ANSE/038/653)

I did not include such sentences in the rates of negative concord with verbs (section 4), however, since I consider them to be instances of negative concord with indefinites. To see this, consider first that negative inversion is a phenomenon found not only in African American English but also in many white nonstandard varieties of English. Thus the examples in (125) and (126) are from Appalachian English and Alabama English, respectively:

125. *Didn't nobody get hurt or nothin'* (Christian et al. 1988:169)
 126. *Wouldn't nobody be out there but jus' what would go with us* (Feagin 1979:234)

Feagin (1979:252) reports the variable use of negative inversion in Anniston upper class as well. Note, however, that many of Feagin's (1979:234-242) examples of negative inversion show no negative concord to the indefinite subject:

127. *Didn't anybody go last year, did they?* (p. 235)
 128. *And couldn't anybody do it but Charlotte.* (p. 242)

If Labov is right (i.e. that negative inversion depends on prior negative concord to the verb), Feagin's examples in (127-128) argue for the existence in nonstandard white English of an additional "negative disconcord" rule. Her data would thus be derived as in (129):

129. *Nobody will catch us*
 -> *Nobody won't catch us*
 -> *Won't nobody catch us*
 -> *Won't anybody catch us.*

I find this scenario rather unlikely, especially since one may assume instead that the indefinite subjects in examples like (122-124) are simply undergoing negative concord as they do in most non-inverted negative constructions. Cf. e.g. (130) and (131):

130. *Didn't nobody say nothing about it* (ANSE/038/523)
 131. *'Didn't find nothing of him* (SE/002/937).

Of course, in our data on early African American English it so happens that the indefinite subjects are all negated in the sentences with negative inversion. This is what Labov et al. (1968) also found in their study of Harlem Black English. Notwithstanding, I hold that even in these cases the indefinites are simply attracting negation (albeit categorically) from the negated auxiliary or modal that dominates them.

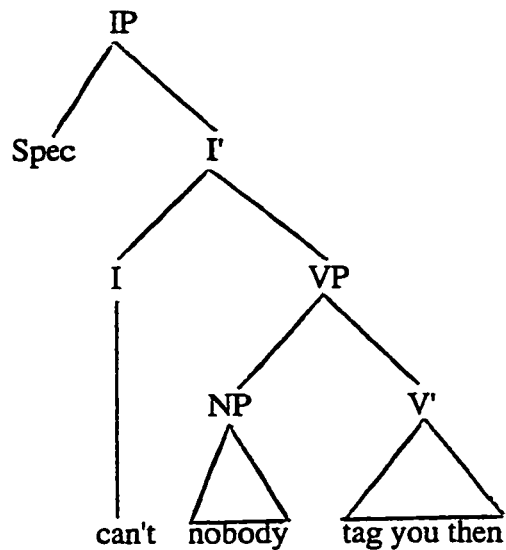
Further evidence for describing the examples in (122-124) as simple negative concord to the indefinite subject comes from recent theoretical accounts of negative inversion in African American Vernacular English: Sells et al. (1994) propose that auxiliaries/modals are base-generated with the negative and that negative inversion occurs when the negated auxiliary/modal raises to Infl but the (thematic) subject remains in [SpecVP].⁶⁰ This account is intended as an alternative to traditional I-to-C accounts of inversion (cf. e.g. Martin 1992 for a similar position on negative inversion, and e.g.

⁶⁰ "It is now fairly widely assumed that subjects are base-generated internally to VP." Roberts (1993:21)

Morin 1979 and Noonan 1989 on inversion in French). For instance, the representation they provide for the sentence in (132) is given in (132'):

132. *Can't nobody tag you then* (Labov et al. 1968:ex. 366)

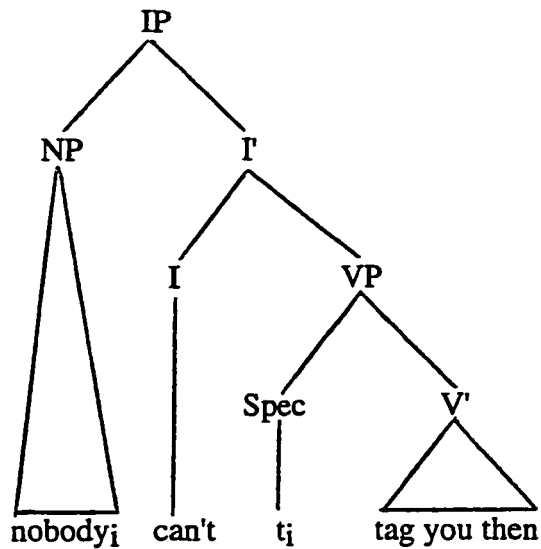
132'.



By contrast, a sentence without inversion like (133) would have the normal representation in (133'):

133. *Nobody can't tag you then*

133'.



Given the different structural positions of the negative subject indefinites in (132) and in (133), it seems unreasonable to claim (as Labov 1972a does) that negative concord to the verb must precede negative inversion, since the subject indefinite apparently never dominates the verb in negative inversion constructions. On the other hand, it can be safely assumed that the subject indefinite in (132) has simply undergone negative concord from the negated modal that c-commands it.⁶¹

A serious problem with Sells et al.'s (1994) proposal is that it leaves [SpecIP] empty, thereby violating either the extended projection principle (EPP; see e.g. Haegeman 1994:68-69) or alternatively, an Optimality-type constraint which Sells et al. (1994:17) call **FillSpec** ("SpecIP must be filled"). Interestingly, a convincing case can be made for precisely this state of affairs in negative inversion constructions. Consider the two examples in (134) and (135) from the *Ex-slave Recordings*:

⁶¹ Haegeman (1994:134):

"Node A c-commands node B if and only if

(i) A does not dominate B and B does not dominate A; and
 (ii) the first branching node dominating A also dominates B."

134. *So there wouldn't nobody interfere with me and tell who I belong to*
(ESR/008/121)
135. *There couldn't many of them go to school* (ESR/008/157)⁶²

If we assume that in (134) and (135) the expletive *there* occupies the specifier of IP (i.e. the canonical subject position), then the EPP (or **SpecFill**) is satisfied. Note that such variable use of the expletive *there* in negative inversion constructions is also found among Feagin's (1979) White Alabama informants (p. 238):

136. *there wouldn't nothin' go down through there.*
137. *They asked the four men, but there didn' anyone want to leave their church.*

Of course, the expletive does not always occur with negative inversion, but the simple fact that it *can* occur suggests that the thematic subject does not raise to SpecIP in negative inversion constructions.⁶³

Turning now to the "origins" issue, recall that negative inversion is also found in white Southern English (e.g. Feagin 1979), Appalachian English (Wolfram & Christian 1975, 1976) and Ozark English (Christian et al. 1988). By contrast, no mention is made of negative inversion in creoles (e.g. Bickerton 1975, 1981, 1984). As far as this negative construction is concerned then, early African American English has more in common

⁶² This example shows that negative inversion can also occur with *many* in earlier African American English. Labov et al. (1968) report a similar example in their Harlem data: *Don't many of them live around here* (Cleveland, 12, ex. 350).

⁶³ Variation in the use of expletives with negative inversion constructions is an interesting question. Unfortunately, these constructions are too rare in our data (as in any variety of English) to allow for a quantitative study. Sells et al. (1994:20) suggest the variation results from different rankings of **FillSpec** and **AvoidExpl** (an economy-driven constraint: "Do not use an expletive-subject"). What they propose, then, is an unseemly struggle between two opposing constraints, namely "Put an expletive in SpecIP" and "Don't put an expletive in SpecIP".

with White English than with creoles. Moreover, the variable occurrence of expletives in [Spec IP] in sentences with negative inversion in both the *Ex-slave Recordings*⁶⁴ and Southern White English (Feagin 1979) suggests a qualitative commonality between these two varieties. However, the fact that indefinite subjects in negative inversion constructions attract negation categorically in early African American English but not in Anniston English suggests a quantitative difference.⁶⁵

5.3. Negative postposing

141. *I had no young people friends* (SE/002/631)

All three varieties of early African American English participate in negative postposing (Jespersen's 'synthetic negation').⁶⁶ The phenomenon generally occurs within the same

⁶⁴ The continued use of expletives with negative inversion in modern African American Vernacular English is also implicitly assumed in Sells et al. (1994:20-1).

⁶⁵ The history of negative inversion in English is remarkably obscure. For instance, while reviewing the grammatical features of Anniston English against the historical background, Feagin (1979:260) observes: "The only feature which could not be found in any source [on regional or archaic British English] is negative inversion". Note, however, that according to Traugott (1972:107; 160) inversion with negative adverbs (e.g. *Never did he come again*) can be traced from Old English, through Middle English and early Modern English.

⁶⁶ Interestingly, one could argue that negative postposing varies with constructions with negative concord, as in (A) and (B).

A.a. *it ain't no good* (SE/002/1378)

A.b. *... it is no good* (SE/002/1382)

B.a. *we're no different* (ANSE/009/792)

B.b. *we ain't no different* (ANSE/009/792)

Crucially, though, negative postposing to a lower clause is very rare: only three instances, e.g. (C), are found, all in the Samaná English data set.

C. *you gon' make no mistakes* (SE/003/145)

In contrast, negative concord to a lower clause is a very common phenomenon (see section 4.2.1 above). This suggests a real difference between negative postposing and negative concord (see also Labov 1972a). It is therefore more plausible that negative postposing alternates with constructions without negative concord, as in (D):

D.a. *it won't be good* (SE/003/871)

D.b. *it will be no good* (SE/003/905)

clause, as in (141); six times in the African Nova Scotian English data set, 54 times in the Samaná English data set, and 12 times in the *Ex-slave Recordings*.

The rule usually applies with the predicates *be/zero* as in (142-143), *have* as in (144) and *got* as in (145):

- 142. *You're nothing but a dog* (ESR/008/231)
- 143. *There no lights on the road* (ANSE/032/258)
- 144. *We had no home* (ESR/008/108)
- 145. *They got no hills* (SE/007/1155)

Only a few instances of negative postposing are found with other predicates in the data:

- 146. *the child know nothing about it* (ANSE/027/1317)
- 147. *I needs nobody* (SE/002/476)
- 148. *' give him none* (ESR/013/233)
- 149. *I knows nothing about that* (ESR/001/138)

Most importantly, though, Déprez (1995) indicates that negative postposing is not allowed in European-based creoles, since she claims that negative words which remain inside VP must be bound by an *overt* head of negation. The examples in (154a) and (154b) are from Louisiane French Creole and Haitian Creole, respectively:

- 154a. Mo te *(pa) wa pe^rson I did not see anyone (Déprez 1995b)
- 154b. Jan te *(pa) wa pésonn John did not see anyone (Ibid.)

Winford (p.c.) has also confirmed the general absence of negative postposing in English-based creoles.

On the other hand, the behaviour of negative postposing in early African American English is consistent with results from a recent large-scale study of this phenomenon in American English speech and writing. Tottie (1991:233) reports that most negative postposing occurs with (existential and copular) *be* and (stative and nonstative) *have* (hence *got*). This is what we find in our data as well, e.g. (141-145). Tottie (Ibid.) also finds that the lexical verbs that involve the most negative postposing are *do*, *know*, *give* and *make*. The few instances of negative postposing with lexical verbs in early African American English [(146-149) and (152)] also conform to these results:

(155) Distribution of negative postposing constructions by verb

N=78	<i>be</i>	26%
	<i>have</i>	47%
	<i>got</i>	6%
	<i>know</i>	4%
	<i>give</i>	3%
	<i>make</i>	3%
	<i>get, forget, hurt, tell, think, talk, hurt, turn, need</i>	

In other words, negative postposing in early African American English operates the same as in other dialects of English.

6. Conclusion

Labov (1972a:773) states: "Whatever the historical origins of [Black English], it is now a dialect of English." In other words, if African American English ever was a creole, it is now at a very advanced stage of decreolization. Obviously then, if data are used that represent an earlier stage of African American English, one would presumably have a better chance in finding evidence of a creole system. Use of such data would also allow

us to observe whether African American English Vernacular is diverging from Standard English (cf. Guy & Maynor 1989).

Prompted by Winford's (1992:350) (and others' - e.g. DeBose, Faraclas) claim that negation is one of "the chief areas in which [Black English Vernacular] shows traces of its creole origin", I have studied the negation system of 19th century African American English, as represented by African Nova Scotian English, Samaná English and the *Ex-slave Recordings*. The relation of early African American English to other varieties of English and creoles with respect to *ain't*, negative concord, negative inversion and negative postposing is displayed in the following table:

TABLE 6.
USE OF NEGATIVE STRUCTURES IN STANDARD ENGLISH (STD E), CREOLES (Bickerton 1975, 1981, 1987), BRITISH WHITE NONSTANDARD ENGLISH (BWNE - Cheshire 1982), NORTHERN WHITE NONSTANDARD ENGLISH (NWNE - Labov et al. 1968), SOUTHERN WHITE NONSTANDARD ENGLISH (SWNE - Feagin 1979), APPALACHIAN WHITE NONSTANDARD ENGLISH (AWNE - Wolfram & Christian 1976), EARLY AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH (EAAE) AND AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH (AAVE - Labov et al. 1968)

	<i>Ain't</i>	NC to indefinites		NC to the verb		Negative Inversion	Negative Postposing
		Same cl.	Other cl.	Same cl.	Other cl.		
Std E	0	0	0	0	0	0	X
BWNE	X	X	X	0	0	0	X
NWNE	X	X	X	0	0	0	X
Creoles	X	X	?	X	0	0	0
SWNE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
AWNE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
EAAE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
AAVE	X	1	X	X	X	X	?

Following Labov (1972a:815), in this table the symbol **0** indicates that the rule is not used at all; **X** that it is used variably; and **1** that it is used categorically. It can be seen clearly that as far as the overall presence (versus absence) of negative structures is concerned, early African American English is best described as a dialect of English, since it has the same negative structures as white Alabama nonstandard English and Appalachian English. The parallels with creoles are less striking, especially since no mention is made of negative inversion, negative postposing or negative concord with verbs outside the clause in the relevant literature.

Regarding the structures that early African American English shares with both White Nonstandard English and English-based creoles, namely *ain't* and negative concord within the same clause, I have emphasized the notion of *system* of negation. It was thus shown that the distribution of *ain't* in earlier African American English is best explained with reference to tense, and that the variable use of negative concord is conditioned by a complex series of constraints, including "perseverance" and the special use of English negative polarity items. It was also shown that negative postposing behaves as it does in English. As such, no distinct creole behaviour is ever observable. Rather, comparison of these results with sociolinguistic studies in white English, both archaic (e.g. Austin 1984; Barber 1976; Curme 1977; Croft 1991; Fischer 1992; Jack 1978; Jespersen 1933, 1937, 1940; Noland 1989; Poutsma 1914-29; Rowlett 1994; Steven 1954; Strang 1972; Tottie 1991; Traugott 1972, 1992; Ramsey 1892; Wright 1898-1905) and regional (e.g. Cheshire 1982, Feagin 1979, Christian and Wolfram 1976) argues that the variable patterns in negation in early African American English can be traced back directly to colonial English and, at least in the case of negative concord, to the origins of English.

Throughout this study, the three varieties of early African American English showed consistent parallels in the distribution of their negative features. For instance, all three showed very high rates in the use of *ain't* in the auxiliary *be* and *have* environments and very low rates in the use of *ain't* in the *didn't* context, and “type of indefinite” and “perseverance” were the most important factors conditioning the variable use of negative concord in all three varieties. This corroborates what has been found in several studies across various grammatical phenomena (e.g. copula deletion, plural marking, verbal *-s* marking, past tense marking), notably in Poplack & Tagliamonte (1991, 1994) and Tagliamonte & Poplack (1993).

Comparison of our results with modern African American Vernacular English (e.g. Weldon 1993, Wolfram 1969, Labov et al. 1968) has further revealed that early African American English is far more conservative, showing e.g. reduced rates of *ain't/didn't* alternation and negative concord with indefinites. The fact that the distribution of various negative features is remarkably similar across the three varieties under study, and systematically different from modern varieties of African American English adds to the accumulating evidence for the following conclusion:

We have indeed described the negation system of early African American English, and insofar as it is consistently both similar to other English dialects and different from (English-based) creoles, it can be said to have derived directly from English. More generally then, it would appear - contra e.g. Rickford (1977; 1995), DeBose (1994), DeBose and Faraclas (1992) and Winford (1992) - that the African American slaves simply learned and spoke the colonial English they were exposed to, apparently without approximation or creolization.

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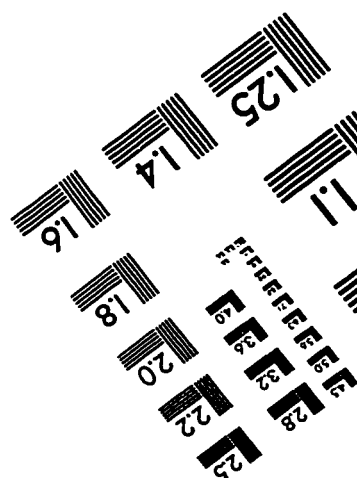
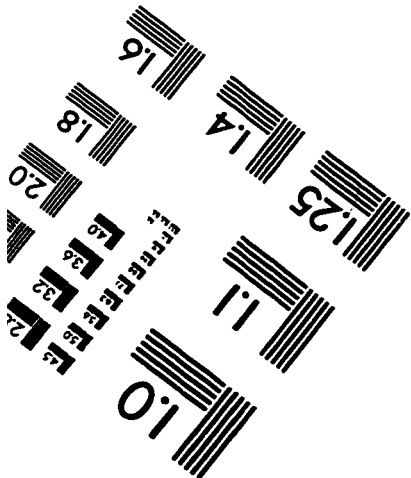
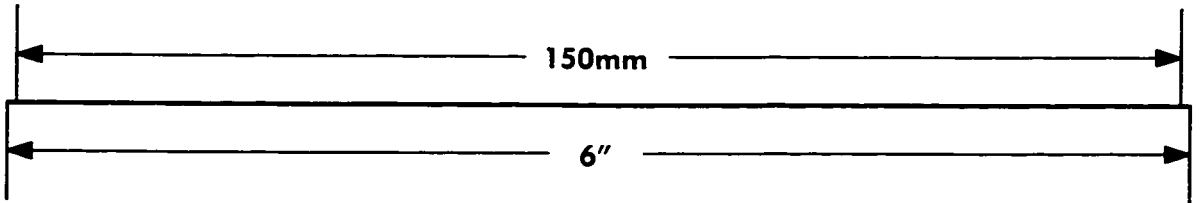
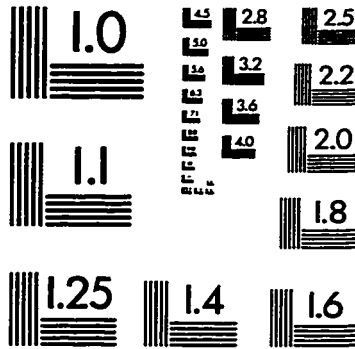
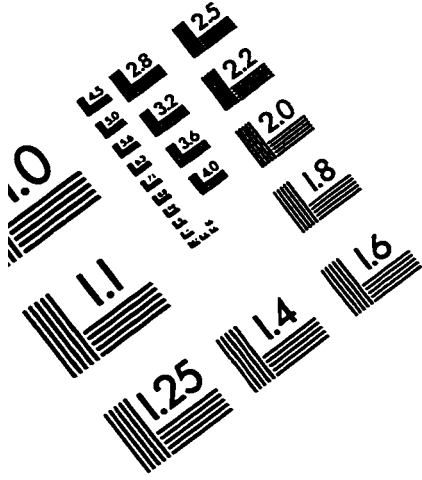
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TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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