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**Present Accounted For:  
Prosody and Aspect  
in  
Early African American English**

**James A. Walker**

**B.A. (Hons), University of Toronto (1989)  
M.A., University of Toronto (1991)  
M.A., University of Ottawa (1995)**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	
1.1. African American English and the Origins Debate.....	1
1.2. Method.....	5
1.3. Data.....	6
1.4. The Variables.....	6
1.4.1. Non-Verbal Predication: The Copula.....	7
1.4.2. Verbal Predication.....	9
1.5. Overview of the Dissertation.....	12
CHAPTER 2: THE ORIGINS DEBATE	
2.0. Introduction.....	13
2.1. An Overview of the Origins Debate.....	13
2.2. Types of Evidence.....	17
2.2.1. Sociohistorical Evidence.....	17
2.2.2. Written Evidence.....	24
2.2.3. Oral Evidence.....	25
2.3. Bases of Comparison.....	28
CHAPTER 3: DATA AND METHOD	
3.0. Introduction.....	33
3.1. Data.....	34
3.1.0. The African American Diaspora.....	34
3.1.1. African Nova Scotian English (ANSE).....	35
3.1.1.1. Guysborough.....	35
3.1.1.2. North Preston.....	35
3.1.2. Samaná English (SAM).....	39
3.1.3. The Ex-Slave Recordings (ESR).....	41
3.1.4. Summary.....	43
3.2. Method.....	44
3.2.1. Variable Rule Analysis.....	44
3.2.1.1. The Form-Function Relation.....	44
3.2.1.2. Data.....	47
3.2.1.3. Variationist Analysis.....	47
3.2.2. The Comparative Method.....	49
3.3. Application of the Method to the Data and Hypotheses.....	50
CHAPTER 4: THE COPULA	
4.0. Introduction.....	55
4.1. Zero Copula and the Origins Debate.....	57
4.2. The Variable Context.....	70
4.3. Factor Groups.....	72
4.3.1. Morphological/Lexical.....	72
4.3.2. Phonological.....	73
4.3.3. Grammatical.....	73
4.3.4. Prosodic.....	74
4.4. Results.....	79
4.4.1. Overall Distribution.....	79

4.4.2. Method of Calculation .....	79
4.4.3. Interaction .....	82
4.4.4. Multivariate Analysis .....	84
4.4.4.1. <i>are</i> .....	84
4.4.4.2. <i>is</i> .....	84
4.5. Summary .....	91
CHAPTER 5: THE PRESENT	
5.0. Introduction .....	93
5.1. The Present and the Origins Debate .....	95
5.2. The Present in English-Based Creoles .....	103
5.3. The Present in Historical and Nonstandard English .....	107
5.3.1. Old and Middle English .....	108
5.3.2. Early Modern English .....	110
5.3.3. Modern English, Standard and Nonstandard .....	112
5.4. The Semantics of the Present: Tense, Temporal Reference and Aspect .....	117
5.5. Variable Context: "Present Temporal Reference" .....	121
5.6. Factor Groups .....	125
5.6.1. Phonological .....	127
5.6.2. Lexical .....	128
5.6.3. Syntactic .....	128
5.6.4. Semantic .....	131
5.6.5. Sentential/Discourse .....	135
5.7. Results .....	136
5.7.1. Overall Distribution .....	138
5.7.2. Simple Present: <i>-s</i> and $\emptyset$ .....	141
5.7.3. Progressive .....	150
5.8. Summary .....	156
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	
6.0. Introduction .....	159
6.1. Prosody .....	160
6.1.1. Review of Results .....	160
6.1.2. Methodological Considerations .....	160
6.1.3. Implications for the Origins Debate .....	162
6.2. Aspect .....	164
6.2.1. Review of Results .....	164
6.2.2. Methodological Considerations .....	165
6.2.3. Implications for the Origins Debate .....	167
6.3. Conclusion .....	169
APPENDIX A .....	171
REFERENCES .....	173

## ABSTRACT

This study reconstructs the present temporal reference system of Early African American English (AAE) by investigating the linguistic factors conditioning several variables within the domain of present temporal reference in three varieties argued to be representative of Early AAE. The first half concerns the variable contraction and deletion of the copula, studies of which have used the following grammatical category to ascribe a creole origin to AAE, while downplaying the equally significant subject-type constraint. Arguing that both effects are epiphenomena of constraints dictated by prosodic structure, I show that the complexity of the phonological phrase constrains both contraction and deletion across all three varieties. Thus, the early African Americans exploited a possibility inherent in the English language once contraction developed. The second half concerns verbal predication in the present temporal reference domain, previous studies of which have focussed only on the opposition between bare verbs and verbs marked with *-s*, ignoring other morphosyntactic constructions. Expanding the analysis to the entire present temporal reference system, I demonstrate that different expressions of the present themselves convey different aspects: the previously-noted finding that *-s* marks habitual aspect is confirmed, but zero also marks aspect, that of duration. The progressive is used most often with nonstative verbs, to denote durative aspect, while its much rarer use with statives appears to reflect an older stage in its "grammaticization". Thus, these findings largely comply with the literature on the history and use of the progressive in English. This reconstruction not only serves as further evidence in the history of the development of AAVE, it also demonstrates the utility of variationist analysis in resolving issues of system membership and genetic affiliation. Combining variationist analysis with current advances in linguistic theory, it provides linguistically meaningful explanations of the observed variability and places it within the context of the development of the English language.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. African American English and the Origins Debate

The varieties of English nowadays referred to as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) have probably received more attention than any other variety of English, or indeed any other language. In part, the interest in AAVE arose because of a number of its linguistic features which stand in marked contrast to more standard varieties. Such features include zero copula, the nonstandard use of verbal *-s* and invariant *be*, as shown in examples (1)-(3).

(1) *Zero copula:*

She  $\emptyset$  always eating banana sandwich. (ANSE/039:574)<sup>1</sup>

(2) *Nonstandard verbal -s:*

But you see, the English people *talks* with grammar. (SAM/007:1104)

(3) *Invariant be:*

My foot *be* swell a lot of time. (ANSE/030:775)

Features such as these have led to a sometimes heated debate over the origins of AAVE, with participants in the debate arguing for various sources of these features. Traditionally, this debate has been characterized as two mutually antagonistic positions: one which views colonial American English, especially that of the southern states, as well as the nonstandard British dialects which contributed to its formation (e.g. Krapp 1924; Kurath 1949; D'Eloia 1973; Schneider 1989; Poplack & Sankoff 1987, Poplack & Tagliamonte 1989, 1991; Montgomery et al. 1993; Poplack 1999) as the ultimate source; and one which argues that the nonstandard features are relics of an earlier widespread plantation creole, analogous to and possibly related to those that arose in the Caribbean (e.g. Bailey 1965; Stewart 1967, 1968; Dillard 1972). However, the situation is more

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<sup>1</sup> The examples used in this dissertation are identified by the corpus they are taken from, as well as the speaker identifying number, and either the tape side and counter number or the line number in the transcription.

Abbreviations for corpora are as follows (see Chapter 3):

ANSE	African Nova Scotian English (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991)
SAM	Samaná English (Poplack & Sankoff 1987)
ESR	Ex-Slave Recordings (Bailey et al. 1991)
OH	The Spoken Language Archives of the University of Ottawa
NSVE	Nova Scotian Vernacular English (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991)

complex, with a range of positions between these polar extremes, some positing additional substrate from West African languages (e.g. DeBose 1994; Holm 1984; DeBose & Faraclas 1993), perhaps as the result of imperfect second language acquisition (Winford 1998), some accepting the English-origins view but maintaining creole or substrate contributions (Schneider 1989, 1997; Winford 1997). Indeed, there is no reason to believe that the different scenarios implied by each position are mutually exclusive, since some or all of them could conceivably have obtained simultaneously, or in different parts of the United States. From a linguistic perspective, none of them is *a priori* implausible: for example, zero copula is a feature of many English-based creoles (EBCs) (e.g. Holm 1988:174-82) as well as second language acquisition (e.g. Meshtrie 1992). And the sociohistorical conditions that gave rise to the creoles of the Caribbean may also have obtained in at least some parts of the southern United States (Mufwene 1996, 1999; Rickford 1997; Winford 1997; see Chapter 2). Therefore, we must consider seriously the possibility that AAVE's nonstandard features are the result of language contact, whether second language acquisition, creolization or some other form of restructuring.

However, once we examine varieties of English other than the standard (be they regional or historical), we find that many of these putative creole features exist elsewhere (e.g. Clarke 1997; Howe 1997; Van Herk 1997, 1998a, 1999). Thus, a first obvious consideration is that standard varieties of English are not the proper point of comparison for determining the origin of these features (e.g. Poplack 1999a:15). In addition, AAVE's continuous existence over the last several hundred years raises the possibility of independent linguistic change: that is, some of its features may not be holdovers from an earlier state, whether creole or dialectal, but rather might be recent innovations (cf. Howe & Walker 1999).

For these reasons, among others, "diaspora" communities of African American English (AAE) have become a valuable source of information on early stages of AAVE.<sup>2</sup> As a result of their isolation (geographic, social and/or linguistic), these communities have either not participated in or lagged behind changes that have taken place in more mainstream varieties, and thus afford at

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<sup>2</sup> In this dissertation, I will use the term "AAVE" to refer to 20th-century, usually urban varieties of English spoken by African Americans. "AAE" refers more generally to such varieties as spoken throughout their history.

least an indirect view of what earlier states of AAE looked like (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991, in press; Poplack 1999, 1999a).

While the verbal systems of these varieties have been studied in detail (especially the past: see, e.g., Tagliamonte 1991, Tagliamonte & Poplack 1988, 1993, in press), the present has been treated only rather obliquely, via disparate analyses of different features, such as the copula (Poplack & Sankoff 1987; Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991; Singler 1991a), verbal *-s* (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1989, in press; Singler 1997, 1999; Tagliamonte & Poplack to appear), and invariant *be* (DeBose 1994). Yet there remain a number of analytical problems with these studies.

First, studies of the present focus on tense — a grammatical category (Comrie 1976; Dahl 1985; Binnick 1991) — rather than on temporal reference. For example, the variable context of verbal *-s* includes not only tokens of true present temporal reference, as in (4), but also those in which the present tense is used to refer to past events, as in (5).

(4) The people *buys* them here. They *buys* them. (SAM/001/506)

(5) And I knocked at the door, she *says* "Who's there?" (ANSE/073:412)

In addition, tokens may be ambiguous as to their temporal reference. For example, even after consulting the larger discourse context, it was impossible to tell whether the example in (6) represented a punctual past or a present habitual.

(6) The- the doctor *tell* me I must work. (SAM/003/219)

The inclusion of forms with past or ambiguous temporal reference in the context of present-marking introduces potential problems which could confound the analysis, because such forms intersect with another variable process, that of past marking, whether via stem change or via suffixation of *-t/d* (Patrick 1991; Tagliamonte 1991, Poplack & Tagliamonte, in press).

Second, there has been a tendency to blindly replicate the factor groups used in earlier studies. This trend has been most evident in copula studies, which have continued to use the "following grammatical category" factor first proposed by Labov (1969), despite the inconsistency

of its effects even among varieties of AAVE (Chapter 4). Since variationist research uses factor groups as hypotheses to determine the underlying grammatical system (Chapter 3), it is essential that we know exactly what hypotheses our analysis is testing.

Third, other features of the present, such as the progressive, have received little attention. This lacuna is surprising in the case of the progressive, which has been argued to be important to the history of English (Baugh & Cable 1978) as well as (albeit obliquely) work on AAVE (e.g. Richardson 1991; Winford 1992a). Thus, a common theme is the identification of features for analysis on the basis of their *salience* to speakers of standard varieties, and on the basis of their variant *form* rather than their *function* in the entire linguistic system. But as three decades of variationist research has shown, understanding this function requires examining the distribution and conditioning of features within a circumscribed domain.

The analyses reported in this dissertation fulfill this last criterion by circumscribing the functional domain as the expression of present temporal reference, which acts as the initial variable context. I then further circumscribe this context by subclassifying the data according to the type of predication: non-verbal (the copula and its variable contraction and deletion) and verbal (lexical verbs and the morphosyntactic expression of aspect and agreement). These analyses make use of standard variationist methodology, which requires the use of suitable data, representative speakers and accountable reporting to investigate the quantitative patterning of variable forms (Poplack 1993). I also make use of the comparative method (Anttila 1989:229-63; Hock 1991:556-80; Lass 1997:127), invoking not only cross-variety comparison among the diaspora communities, but also (where possible) comparison with nonstandard varieties of English and English-based creoles. Finally, I draw on the relevant literature — descriptive, prescriptive and theoretical — to arrive at linguistically meaningful analyses of the variability. Thus, this study emerges from a larger, collaborative effort of researchers at the University of Ottawa and elsewhere making use of these varieties to carry out comparative analyses of a number of features (Poplack 1999; Poplack & Tagliamonte in press), such as the copula (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991), verbal *-s* (*ibid.*; Poplack & Tagliamonte in press), past-marking (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991, in press), the future

(Poplack & Tagliamonte 1995, 1999, in press), questions (Van Herk 1999), plural-marking (Poplack, Tagliamonte & Eze 1999), negation (Howe 1995, 1997; Howe & Walker 1999) and relatives (Tottie & Harvie 1999).

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I outline the methods of analysis employed by these studies, the communities whose linguistic varieties they investigate and the variables analyzed, along with the key findings.

## 1.2. Method

In this dissertation, I adopt two methods traditionally associated with sociolinguistics and historical linguistics. *Variationist methodology* takes as the locus of analysis naturalistic linguistic data collected in its social context, rather than speaker intuition. Investigating variation in the formal expressions of linguistic functions, we quantitatively determine the effect of various contextual features on the choice of variant. This method allows us to answer the empirical question of exactly which factors constrain the speaker's choice by defining a context of variability, extracting and exhaustively coding a large number of tokens for various factors and performing multivariate analysis on the data. In addition, I invoke the *comparative method*, traditionally used to reconstruct prior stages of a language. While this method has long proven successful in reconstructing prior phonological and morphological systems, its extension to morphosyntactic features such as those investigated in this dissertation has been more controversial (Anttila 1989: 257; Hock 1991:609-11; Koch 1996:218-19; Ross & Durie 1996). Following Poplack (1999b), I argue that these limits can be overcome by adapting the notion of *inherent variability* to the comparative method. This amalgamated method requires that, for each of the linguistic varieties whose genetic relation is in question, we perform methodologically consistent variable rule analysis on a set of features and perform cross-variety comparison of the linguistic factors conditioning these features. Using the constraint hierarchies emerging from this analysis, we can identify linguistic patterns as diagnostic of system membership. These methods and their implementation in the research questions of this dissertation are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

### 1.3. Data

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, thousands of escaped African American slaves and freedmen emigrated to various locales in North America and Africa (J.S.G. Walker 1992). Because of the *enclave* conditions under which the linguistic varieties spoken by the descendants of these emigrants developed, they have been argued to represent the African American English of the time period in which the communities were first settled, and thus reflect a precursor of contemporary AAVE (Poplack & Sankoff 1987; Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991, in press; Poplack 1999a). In this dissertation, I make use of data from two diaspora varieties located in far-flung locales: African Nova Scotian English (ANSE; Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991), spoken in two communities in Nova Scotia and Samaná English (SAM; Poplack & Sankoff 1987), spoken by residents of the Samaná Peninsula in the Dominican Republic. The speakers whose linguistic data are analyzed in this dissertation were among the oldest members of their communities. These data were collected in "sociolinguistic interviews" (Labov 1984) and group interactions by both outsiders (SAM) and in-group members of the communities (ANSE). In addition, I make use of the Ex-slave Recordings (ESR; Bailey, et al. 1991), interviews with former African American slaves recorded on magnetic reel tapes in the 1940s. These speakers, who never left the five southern states in which they were born, presumably acquired their language some four to five decades after the ancestors of the Samaná and Nova Scotia informants. Therefore, these recordings provide a baseline variety of Early AAE from the continental United States with which we can compare the transplanted varieties (Bailey et al. 1991). Together, these three varieties are used to reconstruct the system of present temporal reference in Early AAE. The circumstances of these communities and the constitution of the corpora are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

### 1.4. The Variables

An ideal study of the present temporal reference system of Early AAE would consider all variables simultaneously. Unfortunately, there are two problems, of a practical and an analytical nature, which obviate such a comprehensive analysis.

The first problem has to do with representativeness: variationist research requires a sufficient number of occurrences of a particular feature in order to consider it for analysis. Some variables, such as invariant *be*, occur so rarely in these data that quantitative analysis is ruled out (see Chapters 4 and 5). Therefore, the variables analyzed in this dissertation comprise the most robust forms in the present temporal reference sector.

The second problem is analytical: the factors hypothesized to condition the variability do not apply across all variable contexts. The most striking distinction is that between verbal and non-verbal predication. While considerations of the phonological environment and the type of subject are shared to some extent, verbal predication also involves considerations of aspect and discourse context, and non-verbal predication involves the following grammatical category and prosody. For this reason, I have separated the analysis into two sections.

#### *1.4.1. Non-Verbal Predication: The Copula*

All varieties of English show variability between full and contracted forms of the copula/auxiliary verb *be*, but some varieties, including AAVE, have an additional zero variant. In AAVE, this variant, as well as its hypothesized conditioning, have led researchers to conclude either that it results from a rule of copula *deletion*, an extension of contraction (e.g. Labov 1969), or that it is evidence of AAVE's prior creole status, since EBCs have zero copula in some grammatical environments (e.g. Holm 1984). Resolving this disagreement has been hampered by a number of methodological considerations, such as different definitions of the variable context, different ways of calculating rates and continued replication of the same factor groups originally proposed by Labov (1969) and the interpretation of their significance (e.g. Holm 1984; Rickford 1996; Rickford et al. 1991; Baugh 1980; Weldon 1996; Winford 1992a).

In Chapter 4, I review the literature on zero copula and its role in the origins debate. Examining arguments for the observed variability on the basis of creole or West African origins and decreolization, I show that the predominant focus of these studies on explaining the effects of one factor — the following grammatical category — may have occluded the recognition of other effects, such as the type of subject. While such factors have been investigated, they have largely

gone unexplained. Making use of recent developments in phonological theory (e.g. Selkirk 1984; Nespor & Vogel 1986; Inkelas & Zec 1993; Zec & Inkelas 1995), I hypothesize that the purported effects of both the following grammatical category and the type of subject are better explained as epiphenomena of constraints dictated by the prosodic structure of the sentence.

I test this hypothesis by operationalizing prosodic categories as factor groups in a variationist analysis. A first important finding is that the grammatical and phonological (segmental and prosodic) factors are not completely independent of each other: not only are the type of subject, the preceding prosodic constituent and the preceding phonological segment highly intertwined, but the following grammatical category and the following prosodic constituent are also interdependent. Although the interdependence of these categories makes it difficult to extricate the prosodic and grammatical effects, we can observe that the more prosodically complex the preceding constituent, the more contraction is disfavoured, while the opposite pattern is seen for zero: prosodically complex constituents favour deletion.

On the basis of the initial results, I further hypothesize that the prosodic factor groups themselves are also intertwined. To test this effect, I combine the prosodic factors into two possible prosodic sentence structures. The crucial difference is the presence of a phonological phrase boundary between the copula and the subject, which deters the resyllabification necessary for contraction.

Thus, I show that the prosodic environment of the copula exercises at least as significant an effect as the following grammatical category, and in fact offers a more meaningful *linguistic* explanation for its variability. Because of its absence from (mainstream) English, zero copula has been used by creolists as a "showcase variable" (Rickford et al. 1991). While a definitive decision must await comparable studies of the prosodic structure of creoles and their effect on zero copula, the findings of this study obviate the need to argue for a creole origin for zero copula, since it is just as likely that the early African Americans exploited a prosodic possibility inherent in English once contraction developed.

### 1.4.2. Verbal Predication

Although the present has figured prominently in the origins debate, studies of the present have focussed most of their attention on verbal *-s*, which is variable across the grammatical paradigm in many varieties of African American English. This variability has led some to identify *-s* as either a hypercorrect intrusion into a non-English system (Wolfram 1969; Fasold 1972) or the relic of a prior creole aspectual system (Pitts 1986). Others, comparing its distribution historically and regionally, have viewed it as the legacy of English dialects. In contrast, other forms of the present, most notably the progressive, have largely gone unexplored. Although the progressive often varies with the simple present without any apparent change in referential meaning, no claims about its origin or patterning, either creole or English, have been made in the origins debate.

In Chapter 5, I review the literature on verbal *-s* and the progressive, not only as they are used in AAVE and in creoles, but also in nonstandard, historical and regional varieties of English. The emphasis of the origins debate on verbal *-s* no doubt stems from its salience to speakers of more standard varieties, accounting for its early characterization as a hypercorrection, based largely on a comparison of its distribution with standard English. It accounts equally well for the lack of attention paid to the progressive, though here with the opposite effect: because variability between the progressive and the simple present is not stereotypically associated with AAVE, it has largely gone uninvestigated. In fact, the literature on AAVE only discusses the progressive in the context of other variables, most notably the copula (e.g. Labov 1969; Holm 1984; Rickford et al. 1991), habituais (e.g. Richardson 1991) and invariant *be* (Green 1998). Apart from the fact that statements about the progressive cannot be extricated from the variables in whose context they occur, they do not speak to one of the concerns of this study: that is, the variation between the progressive and the simple present. As such, this lack of attention may be explained by its *non*-salience: since variability between the simple present and the progressive is attested throughout the history of English (e.g. Strang 1982) and the progressive participle is not considered a feature of

basilectal creoles (e.g. Bickerton 1975), an external, contact-based explanation for this feature does not immediately suggest itself.

The major problem with the abovementioned studies for both variables is the definition of the variable context. Studies of verbal *-s* have tended to focus solely on the opposition between zero and *-s*: that is, they focus on the present tense — a grammatical category — rather than the expression of present time. Thus, the argument that *-s* is a marker of present *tense* (e.g. Poplack & Tagliamonte 1989; Tagliamonte & Poplack, in press), while justified in light of the claims that *-s* represents hypercorrection or a creole legacy, could be considered tautological, since the variable context has already been defined as the present tense (i.e. the alternation between unmarked and *-s*-marked verbs). More importantly, as I noted above, the inclusion of tokens of the present referring to past or future time introduces potential analytical problems: zero-marked verbs with past reference are ambiguous between present-tense forms unmarked with *-s* or past-tense forms unmarked by *-t/d*. The variable context of the progressive, while no less controversial, presents the opposite problem: previous studies provide us with no predefined variable context. Quantitative studies of its development have monitored the apparent increase in usage over the centuries, but these studies invoke rather arbitrary measurements of frequency which tell us nothing about the linguistic environments in which the speaker has a choice between using the progressive or the simple present. Thus, neither the variable context of verbal *-s* nor that of the progressive are without problems, although I will suggest below that we can avoid these problems by redefining the initial context of analysis.

Another problem is the aspectual claims made for both features. The nonstandard use of verbal *-s* in AAVE has variously been characterized as a marker of durative (Brewer 1986a), habitual (Pitts 1981) and punctual (Myhill & Harris 1986) aspect, and in some cases this association has been adduced as evidence of a prior creole state in which such aspectual distinctions were indicated by preverbal markers. However, the progressive is also an exponent of aspect (perhaps its only true exponent in English [Brinton 1988:7]), with descriptive grammars generally regarding duration as its primary meaning (e.g. Curme 1931; Kruisinga 1931; Palmer

1987), often qualifying this meaning as "limited duration". Thus, not only is there a degree of overlap in the aspectual functions claimed for each of these variables, it is not clear that the aspectual distinctions of these forms in EBCs and English are particularly distinctive and, as such, diagnostic of each system. Determining the exact contribution of each morphosyntactic marker to the expression of aspectual meaning requires examining its distribution and conditioning within the full context of present temporal reference and its relation (if any) to the other morphosyntactic expressions of this temporal domain.

In Chapter 5, I perform just such an analysis, taking as the variable context every lexical verb used with present temporal reference. An initial analysis of all morphological forms of the present shows that simple present generally favours habitual aspect. But does this finding confirm the argument (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1989; Tagliamonte & Poplack to appear) that the frequently noted aspectual effect of verbal *-s* has to do with the inherent aspectual expression of the simple present, or does *-s* itself express habitual aspect? Answering this question requires extricating the effects of one from the other. Here I do so by treating *-s*-marked and zero-marked simple presents as separate variants not necessarily derived from each other by processes of insertion or deletion: that is, I calculate rates of *-s* and  $\emptyset$  out of all of the expressions of present temporal reference, rather than relative to each other. This analysis confirms the habitual effect for *-s*, but it also demonstrates that zero-marked forms themselves convey another aspect, that of duration. This finding suggests that, at least in early AAE, the aspectual reading of the simple present has been divided between its two alternate forms.

Furthermore, separate coding of lexical aspect and sentential aspect reveals that the two are not independent: stative verbs tend to occur in non-habitual contexts, and nonstatives in habitual contexts (cf. Poplack & Tagliamonte 1996). This analysis confirms the often-noted tendency for stative verbs to disfavour the progressive. Separating these lexical classes reveals different effects: for nonstative verbs, the basic function of the progressive is to denote durative aspect, as the descriptive and historical literature of English has indicated. However, for stative verbs, the use of the progressive is constrained by other factors, which I argue to reflect older constraints on the

progressive when it functioned as a stylistic marker. These patterns thus appear to reflect the shift of the progressive from an Early Modern English stylistic device, perhaps inherited from Middle English, to a later Modern English aspectual marker. The differences observed between stative and nonstative verbs suggests that these two lexical classes are on different points along the cline of this shift.

### **1.5. Overview of the Dissertation**

This dissertation examines the question of the origins of AAVE by systematically investigating the expression of present temporal reference in three varieties of Early AAE.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the origins debate, and surveys the types of evidence and comparative bases that have been adduced in reconstructing Early AAE.

The data and methodology of these studies is outlined in Chapter 3. After discussing the composition of the corpora examined and outlining variationist methodology and the implementation of the comparative method, I justify the use of the diaspora varieties as evidence of Early AAE and the consistent cross-variety comparison employed.

In Chapter 4, I review the literature on the copula in AAVE and EBCs and determine the linguistic constraints on contraction and zero predication in Early AAE. Focussing on the problems in the interpretation of the following grammatical category, I argue that prosodic structure plays a more significant role in conditioning both contraction and zero copula than the grammatical factors traditionally invoked.

In Chapter 5, I first review the literature on verbal -s and the progressive in the origins debate, before surveying the morphosyntactic expression of the present in EBCs and in historical and regional nonstandard varieties of English. After discussing the semantics of the present, I analyze the factors conditioning the distribution of these forms in Early AAE and relate this conditioning to the aforementioned literature.

Chapter 6 summarizes the major findings of this dissertation and discusses their consequences for the origins debate as well as for our understanding of the structure and history of present temporal reference in English and the implementation of variationist methodology.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE ORIGINS DEBATE**

#### **2.0. Introduction**

Although the debate over the origins of AAVE has often been characterized by two mutually exclusive, antagonistic poles — the "creole" position and the "English" position — there are in fact a number of positions, not all of which are mutually exclusive, often differentiated by subtle implicational distinctions. Therefore, in considering the issues involved in tracing the origins of African American English, it is important to examine (as far as possible) the exact claims made by each position, as well as the different types of evidence adduced and the methodological assumptions made. Given the sensitive and often politically charged nature of the study of AAVE, it is not surprising that each position in the origins debate reflects the different social, political and linguistic milieux in which it arose, often being as much a reaction against previous positions as a conclusion stemming from the linguistic evidence.

In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the origins debate and the methodological issues it has raised. After briefly tracing the evolution of the various positions throughout the past fifty years, I consider the different types of evidence that have been adduced in the reconstruction of earlier stages of AAVE, along with the methodological advantages and disadvantages of each. Finally, I review the nature of comparative data that have been used in arguing for the various positions. This review will serve to demonstrate that the adoption of a particular position often reflects the type of data examined and the comparative basis assumed. These considerations will serve as background to the following chapter, in which I discuss the data and methodology used in this study.

#### **2.1. An Overview of the Origins Debate**

Although commentary about African American varieties of English has apparently existed for almost three hundred years (Wood [1974:190] cites the first use of the term "Black English" in 1734), the beginnings of the origins debate can be traced to the so-called "dialectologist" position

of the first half of the twentieth century. American dialectologists such as Krapp (1924) and Kurath (1949) regarded AAE as virtually identical with the English spoken by whites of roughly the same social status in the southern United States. Under this view, African Americans had simply acquired the nonstandard English they were exposed to, without any sort of modification. Krapp (1924) perhaps represents the most extreme version of this position:

The Negroes indeed in acquiring English have done their work so thoroughly that they have retained not a trace of African speech. Neither have they transferred anything of importance from their native tongues to their general language. (Krapp 1924:190)

As Winford (1997:305) points out, this view implies that African Americans made no contribution whatsoever to the development of the linguistic varieties in the American South. The only exception to the dialectologist position is Gullah, an African American variety of English spoken in the coastal and sea-island regions of South Carolina and Georgia, which even among dialectologists has been accorded a status separate from mainstream AAE. Turner (1945, 1949) argued for an African origin for its linguistic structure, and even McDavid & McDavid (1951) conceded a creole origin for some of its features (but cf. Johnson 1930).

The "creolist" position, a reaction to the dialectologist position, is usually considered to have started with Bailey (1965),<sup>3</sup> who argued that AAVE's features were evidence for an underlying grammatical structure which was different from that of English and had its origins in a proto-creole system. This argument was taken up by Stewart (1967, 1968) and Dillard (1972), and later endorsed by a number of sociolinguists (e.g. Rickford 1977; Baugh 1980; Fasold 1981; Holm 1984; Singler 1991a, 1991b; Winford 1992a). Proponents of the creolist position argue either that AAVE is the result of decreolization of an earlier creole that was widely spoken by African-origin slaves in the plantation areas of the American South from the 17th to the 19th centuries (e.g. Rickford 1977), or that there was extensive input in its formation from Caribbean creoles (Labov 1982; Winford 1992a; Rickford 1996) and/or substrate interference from West African languages (e.g. DeBose 1994; Holm 1984; DeBose & Faraclas 1993). Under this view,

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<sup>3</sup> However, as Rickford (1998:154) points out, earlier scholars (Shuchardt 1914, Bloomfield 1933, Wise 1933, Pardoe 1937) had speculated that AAVE had its roots in something like pidginization and/or creolization.

the nonstandard features of AAVE are *creole* features, which either arose directly as a result of creolization on the plantations of the southern United States or appeared indirectly as part of the language of the slaves imported to the American colonies from the Caribbean, as linguistic interference from or relexification of grammatical categories in these languages (see Section 2.2.1 below). As we saw with the dialectologists, the creolists also accord Gullah a special role, but view it as a survivor of the earlier widespread creole (Dillard 1972).

So popular indeed was the creolist position that by the early 1980s, Labov (1982:194) was able to declare that a consensus had been reached, in which AAVE was considered to show evidence of derivation from an earlier creole that was closer to the present-day creoles of the Caribbean. Even by the end of the decade, Holm (1989:498) stated that the influence of British dialects on AAVE had been "largely rejected" and Wolfram (1990:122,127) noted that the creolist view had become the entrenched position on AAVE's origin and was considered an "already-settled issue".<sup>4</sup>

Challenging this apparent consensus, a growing number of studies have called into question the assumptions of the creolist position on the earlier state of AAVE, primarily on the basis of new (or newly-discovered) sources. These studies can roughly be divided into two groups: the first includes dialectologists (D'Eloia 1973; Montgomery 1997b:8), who have tended to work on textual (Schneider 1989, 1993; Ewers 1996) or historical (Montgomery et al. 1993) sources; the second includes variationists, most of whose work has concentrated on extraterritorial varieties (Poplack & Sankoff 1987; Poplack & Tagliamonte 1989, 1991; Tagliamonte & Poplack 1993; Poplack 1999). The variationists have argued that earlier forms of AAVE show little or no evidence of creole features, and in fact bear even less resemblance to creoles than do modern varieties of AAVE. This position, which I will refer to as the "English-origins" position, differs from the early dialectologist position in at least two ways. First, while the early dialectologists

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<sup>4</sup> An additional issue that arose in the 1980s was the "divergence hypothesis" (Labov & Harris 1986; Bailey & Maynor 1987a), which suggested that African American vernaculars were diverging from mainstream American English. Since this purported divergence appears to be a primarily urban development subsequent to the Second World War (Wolfram 1990:130; Mufwene 1999:251; see Section 2.2.1), and is therefore a separate consideration from the origins issue (but cf. Wald 1995), I will not consider it further here. See Butters (1989) for a cogent overview of the linguistic evidence marshalled for and against the divergence hypothesis.

denied *any* contribution of African Americans to the development of AAVE, proponents of the English-origins, while they do not deny the cultural, lexical or onomastic contributions of Africans to the development of AAE (Poplack 1999a:1), maintain that it is the grammatical core of the language which has been inherited from English. In fact, this position is not incompatible with arguments that the features claimed as creole are in fact later developments of an initially more English-like system (see, e.g., Howe & Walker 1999).

The most important difference between the variationist English-origin position and other positions is methodological. As Wolfram (1990:121) observes, dialectologist arguments typically consisted of "anecdotal evidence that selected creole-like features could be documented in earlier varieties of English scattered about the British Isles," a charge which can equally be levelled at much of the creolist work. In contrast, variationist proponents of the English-origins hypothesis make use of a wider range of types of evidence, invoking quantitative methodology and a more detailed comparative approach, which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 3. Under the variationist English-origins view, then, the African Americans acquired the grammatical system of the settler dialects of British English that were introduced to the colonial South in earlier periods, but in later periods may have developed these features in ways that differed from other Southern varieties.

However, the mounting evidence in favour of the English-origins view has not altogether precluded continued imputations of a creole contribution. A number of scholars (e.g. Schneider 1993, 1997; Fasold 1981; Feagin 1979; Winford 1997) who otherwise accept that the core grammar of AAVE is English-based assert to varying degrees that there remains some (usually unspecified) creole element. For example, alongside statements such as the following:

It can be reasonably stated for Earlier BE as a whole that it was predominantly English in nature [...] there is no serious empirical support for the assumption that black speech in earlier periods, outside coastal South Carolina, was a full creole language or that there was a uniform, supraregional Plantation Creole. (Schneider 1997:50)

AAVE was the result of relatively successful acquisition and adaptation of settler English, and owes much of its structural features to those superstrate sources. (Winford 1997:307)

we find statements that "this continuing process of adaptation resulted in a certain degree of substratum influence from other languages spoken by Africans, including African languages and restructured, especially creolized varieties of English" (ibid.), or that "we do find structures that are unquestionably creole or creole influenced in character" (Schneider 1989:278) or that "[Early AAE] includes creole structures and remnants of an African past. It is related in some ways to the creole languages of the Caribbean and to Gullah" (Schneider 1997:50). Winford (1998:111) has also suggested that some of AAVE's features represent imperfect second language acquisition, with the implication that the features are not creolized forms but rather some sort of fossilized interlanguage (e.g. Selinker 1972). This situation has led to inconsistent imputation of the same features to both English and creole origins, sometimes even by the same author (cf. Winford 1992b:350 vs. Winford 1998:109 concerning negation).

Thus, while the view of the origins debate as a field polarized between two extreme positions (creolists vs. dialectologists) may have been true twenty years ago, the situation today is much more complicated. In fact, it is often difficult to extricate from particular discussions exactly what position is taken, or what type of contact scenario is being put forward. For this reason, it is important to review what evidence ((socio)historical, written, oral) has been brought forward to argue for particular linguistic interpretation.

## **2.2. Types of Evidence**

In this section, I discuss the different types of evidence that have been considered in reconstructing the history of AAE and the drawbacks of each, and how useful they are in illuminating development of AAVE's linguistic features. Adapting Rickford's (1998) discussion of types of evidence used in reconstructing earlier stages of AAE, here I divide them into roughly three categories: sociohistorical, written and oral.

### *2.2.1. Sociohistorical Evidence*

There are two types of sociohistorical evidence that are relevant to the reconstruction of earlier stages of AAE. The first is the different historical events and demographic situations which

obtained in different periods of American history. These situations imply different types of contact situations and their likelihood of contributing to the restructuring or creolization of English. The second type of evidence is the different histories and economies of the various geographical regions of the American colonies. Examining the numbers of speakers, the relative ratios of African and Europeans and the economic development of each of the colonies might serve to reconstruct the sociolinguistic conditions which obtained. In examining this evidence, I rely heavily on recent accounts of the historical context in which AAVE developed which draw rather different conclusions about the linguistic consequences of this context (Rickford 1997, 1998; Winford 1997; Mufwene 1999). I have abstracted the common facts and themes of these sources (supplemented with additional references where relevant) and summarized them in Table 2.1, which outlines the major events and developments in each historical period, and Table 2.2, which outlines the demographic and economic situations obtaining in the earliest southern colonies in the pre-Revolutionary time periods.

Following Rickford (1997), Winford (1997) and Mufwene (1999), I have divided the historical account into five broad time periods (see Table 2.1).

I. The Colonial period encompasses the foundation of the first colonies on the American coast and the initial importation of slaves to the colonies. A factor that has been considered important to determining whether creolization took place is the relative numbers of Africans and Europeans in the early colonies: Rickford (1997:116) argues that "high numbers of African substrate speakers and low numbers of English-speaking superstrate or target language speakers would have favored pidginization and creolization of English" (cf. Winford 1997:309). Since the agriculture of the Colonial period was characterized by small homesteads, and since Europeans tended to outnumber Africans, contact between the two groups would have been relatively intense and the likely linguistic consequence would have been full acquisition of the nonstandard British varieties to which the Africans were first exposed.

**Table 2.1: Time-periods in the history of African American English (after Winford 1997; Mufwene 1999).**

TIME PERIOD	CHARACTERISTICS	LINGUISTIC CONSEQUENCES
I. Colonial ca. 1600 - 1700	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Europeans outnumber Africans</li> <li>• relatively intense contact</li> <li>• more importation of slaves in latter half of century</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• full acquisition</li> <li>• restructured varieties from Caribbean or among new arrivals from Africa (Winford 1997)</li> </ul>
II. Plantation ca. 1700 - 1780	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shift from indentured servants to slaves</li> <li>• establishment of plantations</li> <li>• Scots-Irish immigration</li> <li>• increasing African-European ratios in some colonies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• full acquisition in non-coastal areas</li> <li>• emergence of Gullah</li> <li>• establishment of distinctive features of AAVE (Mufwene 1999)</li> </ul>
III. Antebellum ca. 1780 - 1860	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• expansion to inland South</li> <li>• development of regional cultural/social patterns</li> <li>• slave population grows more by birth than by importation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consolidation of AAVE, Southern vernaculars</li> <li>• African American diaspora</li> <li>• spread of AAVE inland</li> </ul>
IV. Reconstruction ca. 1865 - 1940	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• abolition of slavery</li> <li>• establishment of segregation laws throughout the South</li> <li>• no further immigration from Africa or Caribbean</li> <li>• movement of African Americans northward and westward and from plantations to towns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identification of certain features as ethnic markers</li> <li>• beginnings of divergence of AAVE?</li> </ul>
V. Urbanization ca. 1945 - present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• desegregation and integration</li> <li>• enactment of civil rights laws</li> <li>• further migration to northern cities and urban ghettoization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consolidation of AAVE's innovations</li> <li>• divergence of urban vernaculars?</li> </ul>

However, the latter half of the 17th century saw importation of slaves from the Caribbean, and Winford (1997:315) and Rickford (1997:327) argue that restructured or creolized varieties would also have existed in some areas. However, Mufwene (1996) has argued that it is not the relative proportion of speakers that is important, but rather the composition of the founder population of the colonies. He counters Winford's and Rickford's argument with the view that, since the number of slaves imported from the Caribbean was outnumbered by the indigenous African-origin slaves

and servants, who had fully acquired colonial English, the Caribbean slaves were unlikely to have had much of an impact on the English spoken in the colonies (Mufwene 1999:239). The late 18th century saw the establishment and expansion of the plantation economy in the southern colonies, and increased reliance on slave labour (rather than the more costly indentured servants).

II. The Plantation period saw an increasing ratio of Africans to Europeans in certain areas, as well as increased importation of slaves from Africa. This period also saw the massive immigration of Scots and Irish to Virginia and the Carolinas, though they primarily settled in small farms in the inland areas. Thus, if there was a period of restructuring or creolization, it is likely to have taken place in the coastal areas during this period. In fact, Mufwene (1997, 1999) argues that Gullah emerged as a full-fledged creole in the middle of the 18th century.

III. The Antebellum period between the Revolutionary War (1776) and the Civil War (1861-1865) saw the expanded settlement of the South (to the hinterlands, Alabama, Arkansas and Mississippi) and the expansion of cotton plantations inland, as well as the development of distinctive regional social and cultural patterns. In this period, the slave population grew more by birth than by importation. This is the period in which both AAVE and the Southern vernaculars are considered to have consolidated and spread to the newer regions of the South, and is also the period of the African American diaspora (see Section 2.3.3 below and Chapter 3).

IV. In the Reconstruction period, with the end of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, the concomitant collapse of the plantation economy saw the movement of African Americans from the plantations to the towns, as well as northward and westward. From this period to the Second World War (1939-1945), there was no further importation or immigration from the Caribbean or Africa, there were a number of segregation laws instituted throughout the South, and further migration of African Americans northward. Mufwene (1999:250-1) suggests that this period saw the establishment of certain features as ethnic markers, and perhaps even the incipient divergence of AAE from other varieties.

V. The Urbanization period, roughly from the end of the Second World War to the present, has seen the enactment of civil rights laws and desegregation, as well as the ghettoization of

African Americans in northern urban centres. This period, characterized by "minimal qualitative but maximal quantitative change" (Mufwene 1999:252), seems most conducive to the divergence hypothesized by Labov and Harris (1986), as well as to the consolidation of AAVE's distinctive features.

This brief overview of the historical development of AAVE suggests that the period of interest to us is roughly 1600 to 1800, since, if there was a period of restructuring or creolization, it is likely to have taken place in the colonial South between the foundation of the colonies and the Revolutionary War. However, the differential settlement patterns and economies of the colonies suggests that not all were conducive to contact situations in which such restructuring might have taken place. Table 2.2 outlines the different characteristics of each of the first southern colonies in the relative time period (roughly 1600 to 1800). For the purposes of this discussion, I do not consider the situations in the northern colonies, since, as Rickford (1997:318-22) and Mufwene (1999:241) note, the agricultural system there made very limited use of slave labour. As Rickford (1997:320-1) argues, the few attestations of "creole-like" forms cited by Dillard (1972:79-80) as evidence of the existence of a creole(-like) variety in Massachusetts are most likely due to a small number of speakers imported from the Caribbean and Africa. We can discern a general division in situations between Virginia and North Carolina on the one hand, and South Carolina and Georgia on the other. North Carolina and Virginia reflect much the same demography, since the former was settled primarily by migrants from the latter: the immigration of Europeans and northern settlers tended to keep the European-to-African ratio relatively high. Both colonies were characterized by tobacco plantations, but these were relatively small and not on the same scale as the rice and cotton plantations of the more southern colonies.

**Table 2.2: Social, economic and demographic characteristics of the American colonies, ca.1600-1800 (after Winford 1997; Mufwene 1999).**

COLONY	CHARACTERISTICS	LINGUISTIC CONSEQUENCES
Virginia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• settled 1607</li> <li>• small farms and tobacco plantations, even in coastal areas</li> <li>• Europeans outnumber Africans</li> <li>• importation of slaves from Caribbean in late 17th century</li> <li>• increased importation of slaves from Africa in 18th century</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• full acquisition</li> <li>• possible restructuring from late 18th century arrivals from Africa (Winford 1997)</li> </ul>
North Carolina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• settled in second half of 17th century primarily from VA</li> <li>• immigration of Europeans and northern settlers kept overall percentage of Africans low</li> <li>• establishment of tobacco plantations in 18th century</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• full acquisition</li> </ul>
South Carolina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• settled in 1670 via Barbados</li> <li>• shift to plantation economy by 1690</li> <li>• Africans outnumber Europeans by 1715</li> <li>• first segregation laws in 1720</li> <li>• massive importation of slaves from Africa</li> <li>• massive Scots-Irish immigration after 1760, mostly settled on small farms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• before 1700: full acquisition</li> <li>• 1720-1750: formative period for Gullah in coastal areas (Mufwene 1997)</li> <li>• upland SC similar to NC and VA; coastal areas more conducive to restructured varieties</li> </ul>
Georgia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• settled in 1733</li> <li>• plantation economy not characterized by rapid expansion</li> <li>• overall, Europeans outnumber Africans, but reversed in coastal areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• coexistence of a number of varieties</li> <li>• Gullah either imported or developed in coastal areas</li> </ul>

As I have already discussed, the influence of slaves imported from Africa on the local varieties in the 18th century has been viewed as both increasing the likelihood of interlanguage or creolized forms (Winford 1997) or having little or no effect (Mufwene 1999). Another possible

source of restructured varieties was the importation of slaves from the Caribbean (primarily St. Kitts and Barbados) in the late 17th century. While Winford (1997:320-1) suggests that these later arrivals may have been less successful at acquiring the British input dialects, Mufwene (1999:238-9) adduces evidence that the sociolinguistic situation in the Caribbean colonies at this time (at least in St. Kitts) was roughly comparable to that in Virginia. Thus, he argues, the possibility of restructured varieties being introduced via the Caribbean in this time period is low.

The situation in South Carolina and Georgia was rather different. South Carolina shifted to a plantation economy early in its development (1690) and saw a rapid increase in the ratio of Africans to Europeans and the first segregation laws in the colonies (1720). Similarly, although not characterized by rapid expansion, Georgia began with the establishment of a plantation economy. The massive Scots-Irish immigration of the 18th century to South Carolina was concentrated primarily in small farms inland, leaving the plantation economy and high African ratio of the coastal areas predominantly intact. Georgia was also characterized by a division between the coastal and inland areas: although the overall ratio of Africans to Europeans was low, it was much higher on the coast. In fact, either because of the importation of slaves from South Carolina, or the similarity of coastal conditions, Gullah had spread to Georgia by the late 18th century (cf. Winford 1997:309). The coastal regions of Virginia apparently were not conducive to the development of a Gullah-like variety, probably because the agriculture there was characterized by small farms rather than plantations.

While this review of the sociohistorical evidence has served to delineate certain time periods and geographic regions as more conducive to certain sociolinguistic situations than others, and hence to certain linguistic consequences, its major drawback is the openness of its linguistic predictions to very different interpretations. For example, while Rickford (1997), Winford (1997) and Mufwene (1999) agree on the basic historical and demographic facts of these time periods, their conclusions about possible linguistic consequences are rather different, demonstrating that, regardless of how detailed our information is about the social and historical factors involved in a particular contact situation, the possibility of different linguistic outcomes remains. While elaborate

models constructed to predict the linguistic outcomes of different contact situations have been put forward (e.g. Thomason & Kaufman 1988), there has been little empirical success in confirming such predictions (cf. Treffers-Daller 1999 and the responses in *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 2(2)). Thus, while sociohistorical evidence can serve to inform linguistic reconstruction, it can never give us definitive conclusions about the linguistic consequences of a particular situation.

However, this is not to dismiss the importance of sociohistorical evidence in the enterprise of reconstruction, since we can discern a number of relevant historical and geographical distinctions. The evidence of the preceding discussion suggests that AAE had largely stabilized by the late 18th century, and that it was centred on the southern colonies/states (Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia). The period and locales that seem most conducive to processes of creolization (or something similar) are coastal South Carolina and Georgia in the 18th century (cf. Rickford 1997:330), but we already know that a creole-like variety (Gullah) is considered to have developed here (Turner 1949; Mufwene 1997; Rickford 1997:323). The question is whether similar processes took place elsewhere in the same time period. Answering this question requires recourse to *linguistic* evidence from this time period and these locales. In the following sections, I discuss the different kinds of linguistic evidence relevant to the reconstruction of earlier stages of AAE.

### 2.2.2. *Written Evidence*

The most diachronically "direct" type of linguistic evidence that we can adduce in historical reconstruction is written documents, but how representative they are of spoken language is open to interpretation. Literary representations of African American speech, in travellers' accounts, court documents or plays (Dillard 1972; Cooley 1997; Rickford 1997:163), might be suitable at first glance because of their contemporaneousness with the variety under examination. However, these data are problematic because of the issues of representativeness and faithfulness. Survival of these documents is first of all subject to the vagaries of historical accident, meaning that our view of the vernacular of a particular period would be slanted in favour of the documents that have survived.

More importantly, these documents were rarely if ever written by African Americans, more often being the impression of white authors in positions of authority (e.g. Cooley 1997; Mille 1997:98). At best, these data might be used to identify which features of African American speech were salient to colonists or speakers of mainstream American English in the relevant time-periods.

A more promising type of written evidence, which has only relatively recently begun to be exploited, is correspondence by semiliterate African Americans (e.g. Montgomery et al. 1993; Van Herk 1998c, in progress; Poplack et al., in progress). An obvious advantage of these sources is that they are more directly representative of African Americans than literary representations, since they were written by the very people whose linguistic varieties we wish to study, and are already localized for time and place (Montgomery 1999:22). However, these sources are not without problems, many of which are discussed by Montgomery (1999). One problem is the overrepresentation of literate African Americans, who constituted a very small minority of the African American population prior to the Civil War (Woodson 1925; Cornelius 1991; Montgomery et al. 1993; Montgomery 1999:25): not only are they more likely to conform to educated norms of speaking, but their literacy may serve to mask the nonstandard features of their spoken vernacular. There is the additional question of authorship: because many letters were written by the literate on behalf of the illiterate, it is unclear whether the linguistic features represented by such letters should be interpreted as those of the writer or those of the person on whose behalf the letter was written. These problems should not prevent the admission of such data as evidence in reconstructing earlier stages of AAE, but their use requires judicious evaluation of sources, as well as comparison with other types of data (Montgomery 1997; Bailey 1998; Van Herk 1998c; Van Herk & Walker 2000).

### 2.2.3. *Oral Evidence*

Because of the limitations of written evidence of earlier stages of AAE, oral discourse is much more sought after, especially in light of the historical bias of sociolinguistics in favour of spoken, vernacular data. While it is of course impossible to obtain oral data from speakers of pre-20th century varieties of AAE, indirect sources of oral evidence, such as interviews with older

generations of African Americans and modern-day fieldwork in transplanted communities, are available.

There are at least two sources of evidence from older African Americans: studies in apparent time and interviews, either transcribed or recorded. Studies in apparent time, in which the linguistic behaviour of younger speakers are compared with that of older speakers as a way of measuring linguistic change (e.g. Labov 1994:45-72; Chambers 1995:193-4,198-204), are useful in reconstructing the state of AAE at the time the older speakers were acquiring their vernacular. Although such studies have the advantage of providing copious amounts of data for analysis (e.g. Cukor-Avila 1997), an immediate problem is the lack of time-depth such studies afford: at best, we can hope to obtain data indirectly representative of the Reconstruction period (see Table 2.1), since even the oldest speakers would have acquired their language at the end of the 19th century. In addition, the possibility of age-grading, in which "individuals change their linguistic behavior throughout their lifetimes, but the community as a whole does not change" (Labov 1994:84; see also Hockett 1950; Labov 1972a:163; Chambers 1995:188), may mislead us into thinking that differences in generational behaviour are indicative of language change in progress (cf. Rickford 1998:162).

Another source of such evidence exists in interviews conducted in the 1930s and 1940s with elderly former slaves, under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration, known as the Ex-Slave Narratives (ESN; Brewer 1974, 1979, 1980, 1986; Pitts 1981, 1986; Schneider 1983, 1989). While these data are useful in representing a period earlier than that of apparent-time data, they present a number of problems. Since the interviews were written down (often reconstructed from shorthand notes after the interview) and not recorded, some have questioned the accuracy and reliability of the linguistic forms occurring in the interviews (Maynor 1988, 1991; Wolfram 1990; Dillard 1993). For example, the interviewers may have, consciously or subconsciously, edited the linguistic forms toward their own more standard varieties or inserted more nonstandard forms on the basis of stereotyped assumptions about African American speech. (Similar considerations apply to the Hyatt corpus [Hyatt 1970-1978; also known as the "Hoodoo"

texts] analyzed by Viereck [1988] and Ewers [1996]). More direct evidence is available from the recorded interviews known as the Archive of Folk Songs (AFS) or Ex-Slave Recordings (ESR) (Bailey et al. 1991), the composition of which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 3. However, I note here that while the major advantage of these recordings over the ESN is their more direct representation of spoken varieties and lack of intermediary editing, there are other problems. Apart from the (by today's recording standards) generally poor audio quality of the recordings, which may be responsible for the sometimes vastly different transcriptions and interpretations of some of the interviews (e.g. Rickford 1991; Wald 1995; Sutcliffe 1998), some concern has been raised over the both the speakers and the stylistic register as representative of truly vernacular AAE from the appropriate geographical regions and time-periods (Rickford 1991;<sup>5</sup> Schneider 1994; Poplack & Tagliamonte, to appear). An additional problem for quantitative analysis is the relatively small amount of data which can be extracted from these recordings (Poplack 1999a:4; Poplack & Tagliamonte, to appear), which, as we will see in the analysis of the copula (Chapter 4), can prevent the investigation of fine but crucial distributions in the data.

A more promising source of oral data is modern-day fieldwork conducted in transplanted communities of African Americans (Poplack & Sankoff 1987; Singler 1991a; Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991). These diaspora varieties, which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 3, have a number of advantages over other sources of evidence. First of all, the establishment of these communities dates from the late 18th to early and mid-19th centuries, which pushes the time-period back to that before the Civil War, during which the features of AAE are considered to have consolidated. In addition, the availability of modern, high-quality recording equipment, the use of interview techniques in sociolinguistics (Labov 1984), and a relatively wider pool of different speakers allows for less controversial transcription and more detailed quantitative analysis. However, these data are not without potential problems. Some have raised concerns about the status of these varieties as representatives of early AAE (e.g. Rickford 1998:160), especially since the provenance of the founders of these communities may not be documented in detail (see, e.g.,

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<sup>5</sup> Note that Rickford (1991; 1998:160) has raised this concern about all of the recorded datasets, not only the ESR.

Singler [1997] on Samaná; but see Chapter 3 and Poplack & Tagliamonte, to appear, for a reply to these objections). There is also the additional possibility of linguistic change subsequent to the foundation of these communities, either contact-induced or internally motivated (Poplack & Sankoff 1987:293-7; Rickford 1998:160; Poplack 1999a:11; Singler 1999; Van Herk & Walker 2000). Wolfram (1990:127) even goes so far as to suggest that independent decreolization in each of these communities cannot be entirely ruled out! Finally, the fact that, with the exception of the Nova Scotian data (see Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991, to appear, and Chapter 3) many of the interviews in these communities have been conducted by outsiders, some have suggested that the Observer's Paradox ("to observe the way people use language when they are not being observed" [Labov 1972a:61]; see also Chapter 3) may not have been overcome; that is, the informants may have accommodated to the standardizing influences of the interviewers, obscuring their less standard vernacular (Rickford 1998:160; Poplack 1999a:11). While these considerations are not entirely groundless, I will argue in Chapter 3 that a judicious application of variationist analysis and the comparative method can obviate many if not all of these potential problems.

Ideally, the reconstruction of Early AAE would make use of all of these sources of data: sociohistorical, written and oral. As I suggest in the following section, however, part of the problem with previous analyses has been the reliance on an incomplete or inappropriate basis of comparison.

### 2.3. Bases of Comparison

Much of the origins debate has been characterized since its inception by rather superficial (and often implicit) comparative reconstruction. As I have noted, Wolfram (1990:121) criticized the dialectologist argument for being anecdotal (cf. Bickerton's [1981] "cafeteria principle"). Creolists have been equally guilty of this type of comparison, often relying on constructed example sentences or idealized grammars which distance AAVE from its English elements and thus make it appear more creole-like (e.g. Dillard 1972<sup>6</sup>). Furthermore, many creolists have invoked rather superficial and spurious comparison with African languages, few of which have been subject to

<sup>6</sup> Green (1998) and Labov (1998) do this to some extent, though not necessarily to support the creolist argument.

modern sociolinguistic analysis (cf. Holm 1984 on Yoruba). Even those creolist studies which have made use of quantitative methodology (e.g. Baugh 1980; Holm 1984) have tended to compare rates of variability not with rates in comparison varieties, but rather with statements about idealized Standard English, creoles and African languages. A first consideration in any comparative approach is that many if not all of the features of controversy (e.g. the copula, verbal *-s*, multiple negation) are variable, not only in AAVE, but also in the putative source varieties, whether creole or English. This fact necessitates a methodology that takes into account the *variability* of features, rather than their mere presence or absence, one that can be applied consistently across all the comparison varieties. However, this ideal approach is not always feasible, since variationist studies are simply not available for many of the putative source varieties. As we will see (Chapters 4 and 5), despite claims of creole patterns of zero copula and preverbal aspect markers, there is a great deal of variability across and within creoles. And as far as West African languages are concerned (e.g. Baugh 1980; Holm 1984), there are few if any variationist studies of the modern languages, let alone any from the appropriate time-period.

Another methodological consideration is the need for appropriate varieties for comparison. Much of the initial creolist position arose because of comparison with northern varieties of American English. This led to the analysis of nonstandard verbal *-s* usage in AAVE (see Chapter 5) as hypercorrection (e.g. Fasold 1972; Wolfram 1969). Montgomery (1997:8) claims that this type of comparison led to exasperation among Southerners who knew these features to exist in Southern vernaculars. Not to mention the fact that many of the putative creole features have been attested in English since the Early Modern period (cf. Poplack & Tagliamonte 1989; Van Herk 1999). These considerations emphasize the need to examine nonstandard as well as standard varieties of English, especially from the appropriate locations and historical periods. Similarly, creolists have been criticized for comparing AAVE with basilectal creole varieties. If AAVE represents a long-decreolized variety, then the proper point of comparison is decreolized varieties which have also lost contact with their basilect, such as the mesolectal varieties of the Caribbean (Rickford 1974; Bickerton 1975; Winford 1992a:29). Because of this consideration, creolists has

often invoked Gullah as representative of a decreolized variety of a putative prior creole that was widespread in the colonial South. Thus, Gullah either has a common ancestry with AAVE or represents a variety which is less advanced along the path of decreolization that AAVE is presumed to have followed (e.g. Weldon 1996). However, while similarities between Gullah and AAVE may be indicative of a genetic relationship, it is premature to infer from these similarities that they represent points along a cline of decreolization from an erstwhile creole that was more widespread in the colonial South. Before concluding that the features shared by Gullah and AAVE have a creole origin, we need evidence that they show *systematic* similarities to each other and to some other, demonstrably creole variety and that they differ from other, demonstrably *non-creole* varieties. Indeed, a major problem with invoking decreolization to explain the linguistic patterns of AAVE is the lack of independent evidence (e.g. historical evidence, comparison with other mesolectal varieties). Another is the lack of features which are agreed to uniquely characterize creoles (e.g. Mufwene 1986b, 1996): often, features behave essentially the same in both creoles and English, rendering them non-diagnostic (see Chapter 5). Finally, as we will see with the copula (Chapter 4), too often the hypotheses formulated are impossible to test. Rather, creolists simply take for granted that the varieties in question are (decreolized) EBCs and that their nonstandard features are relics of those creoles.

This approach leads to an important methodological consideration: the commensurability of grammatical systems. If the grammatical systems of English and creoles are fundamentally different, then how can we define our analyses along comparable lines for both? For example, although following participles and *gonna* tend to highly favour zero copula (see Chapter 4), Winford (1990:230) has argued that such forms are not true copula contexts in creoles, since "copula" constructions with participles and *gonna* correspond to constructions with preverbal markers of progressive aspect and futurity, respectively. This consideration implies that the framework of the analysis itself can impose an interpretation on the data (as Tagliamonte and Poplack [1993] observe). Overcoming these various problems requires a comparative approach

which makes use of a methodologically consistent cross-variety analysis. In the next chapter, I outline just such an analysis.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **DATA AND METHOD**

#### **3.0. Introduction**

The preceding chapter has raised a number of methodological and data-oriented issues in reconstructing Early AAE: the use of sociohistorical and linguistic evidence, the choice of appropriate varieties for comparison and the use of a consistent methodology that recognizes the inherently variable nature of the data. While the origins debate may once have been characterized by two clear-cut positions, creolist and English-origins, it is nowadays more complex, since mounting evidence against the creolist position has not altogether precluded imputations of some (albeit unspecified) creole contribution. Ideally, reconstructing Early AAE would make use of sociohistorical, written and oral evidence, but all types of evidence have associated drawbacks. Although an examination of the sociohistorical evidence suggests that any restructuring or creolization is likely to have taken place in the colonial South between the foundation of the colonies and the Revolutionary war, this evidence is open to very different interpretations and therefore cannot be interpreted without recourse to appropriate linguistic evidence. From the point of view of variationist analysis, modern-day fieldwork conducted in transplanted communities of African Americans appears to offer the best kind of data for this reconstruction, because of the relatively large amount of data it provides, but the representativeness of these varieties as Early AAE has been called into question. Clearly, then, the usefulness of each type of evidence depends on the extent to which it can be validated by others.

In this chapter, I address all of these issues in discussing the data and method I make use of in the studies reported in this dissertation. The data are taken from two diaspora varieties located in Canada and the Dominican Republic and a third, baseline variety from the United States. In Section 3.1, I briefly detail the circumstances under which these communities were founded, as well as the social and geographic situation of each. I also discuss the conditions under which the data were collected and the social characteristics of the speakers selected for this study. On its own, the

analysis of each of these varieties is insufficient to reconstruct the grammatical system of Early AAE, since without external reference points it is impossible to tell whether a particular feature is the relic of an earlier system or the result of changes (whether internal or contact-induced) that have taken place in the time since these communities were founded. It is only by pursuing a methodologically consistent comparative approach, as outlined in Section 3.2, that we can reliably reconstruct the earlier, shared grammatical system. In the process, we can also overcome many if not all of the objections listed above. As I discuss in Section 3.3, given the disparate circumstances of the founding and development of these communities, the populations with which they each came in contact, and the circumstances under which the data were collected in each community, *any* similarities in the conditioning of linguistic features can only be due to a common origin.

### 3.1. Data

#### 3.1.0. *The African American Diaspora*

As discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2.1), the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw a sporadic diaspora of African American slaves and freedmen who emigrated from the United States to various locales in Canada, the Caribbean and West Africa between the Revolutionary (1776) and Civil Wars (1861-65) (J.S.G. Walker 1992). Because the communities founded by these emigrants have until relatively recently been socially, geographically and/or linguistically isolated from the surrounding populations, they can be considered as *enclaves*, and as such prime candidates for the preservation of older features of African American varieties of English (Poplack 1999a:10-11).

For this reason, the English spoken in the diaspora communities has been argued (Poplack & Sankoff 1987; Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991; Poplack 1999a) to reflect the state of African American English at the time period in which the communities were first settled; as such, these communities are considered to constitute possible (albeit indirect) representatives of the precursor of contemporary African American Vernacular English (AAVE). As I have discussed, however, this argument is not without controversy: the use of these varieties as evidence of early AAE has been disputed on the basis of such factors as the provenance of the communities' founders (Singer

1997, p.c.), the extent of linguistic isolation (Holm 1988:505; Rickford 1998:160), the methods of data collection (Hannah 1997; Rickford 1998) and the possibility of subsequent linguistic development and innovation (Wolfram 1990; Van Herk & Walker 2000). I will address these concerns in Section 3.3.

### *3.1.1. African Nova Scotian English (ANSE)*

One indirect result of the British policy toward African American slaves during the American Revolutionary War was the promise of freedom and land to those who joined with the British forces against the colonial rebels (J.S.G. Walker 1992). Although the Black Loyalists settled in various communities in Nova Scotia, only two of these communities can be considered to have developed into linguistic enclaves (Rawlyk 1968) (see Map 3.1).

#### *3.1.1.1. Guysborough*

Guysborough is located on the northeastern corner of mainland Nova Scotia. In 1783, the first wave of Black Loyalists were settled in this region in communities of their own, apart from the districts populated by whites. Among these settlers were some house slaves and freedmen, but most were former slaves, originating in large part from Virginia and South Carolina (though some came from as far as Florida) (Van Herk, p.c.; Poplack & Tagliamonte, in press). Guysborough was largely unaffected by subsequent African American migrations to and from Nova Scotia throughout the nineteenth century, and today is the poorest county in the province. The African Nova Scotians there are isolated geographically and socially from the neighbouring white communities (J.S.G. Walker 1992: 27-8, 391; Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991:307-9).

#### *3.1.1.2. North Preston*

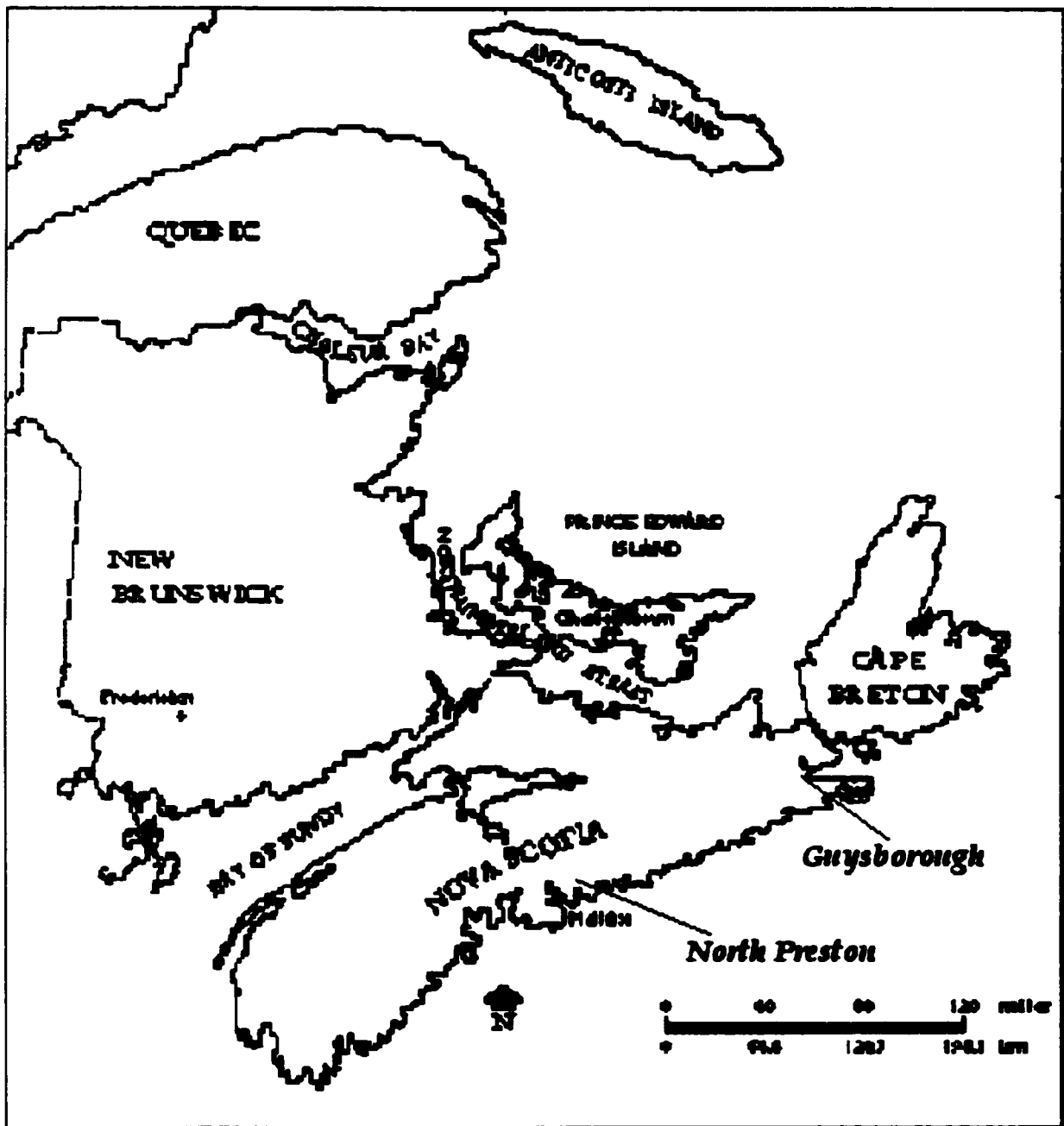
North Preston, though located close to Dartmouth-Halifax, is isolated from that urban centre by the local geography. This community was initially settled at roughly the same time as Guysborough (1784) by both British and Black Loyalists, but by 1792, most of the Black Loyalists had left the community in a mass exodus to Sierra Leone. The current residents descend from the immigration (in 1815) of a group predominantly composed of field slaves, characterized

as having no specific training or skills. Most of these settlers have been traced to Maryland and Virginia, and possibly some from Georgia (Van Herk, p.c.; Cassell 1972; Grant 1973). North Preston is nowadays the largest African Nova Scotian community and is still socially isolated from other nearby settlements (J.S.G. Walker 1992:28-30, 388-391; Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991:309-10).

The *African Nova Scotian English Corpus* (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991) housed in the Sociolinguistics Laboratory of the University of Ottawa comprises recorded interviews with 67 speakers (40 women, 27 men) from both communities (29 from North Preston and 38 from Guysborough), ranging in age from 53 to 97 years. These recordings were collected via "sociolinguistic interviews" (Labov 1984) and group interactions by in-group members of the communities in 1990-1 (see Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991 for further details). All of these recordings have been transcribed into machine-readable format.

Because of the sheer size of this corpus, I have restricted the analysis to the 24 speakers whose characteristics are shown in Table 3.1. The interviews of these speakers, who were among the oldest members of the two communities, were selected to maximize both the quality of audio recording and the quantity of data contained within each interview, as well as to give a representative sample of speakers balanced for sex and (as far as possible) age-group (although, given the relatively undifferentiated social characteristics of these speakers, especially in terms of age and education, I will not consider social factors in this analysis). I initially analyzed the data from Guysborough and North Preston separately, but found them to pattern nearly identically with respect to the variables considered in this study. Because of this parallel patterning, and in order to increase the representation of data in certain categories, in the studies reported in this dissertation, I have treated them as one linguistic variety, "African Nova Scotian English".

**Map 3.1: Location of the African Nova Scotian communities  
(from Poplack 1999a:6).**



**Table 3.1: Speakers selected from the African Nova Scotian English Corpus.**

Community	Speaker Pseudonym & Number	Sex	Age <sup>7</sup>	Year of Birth
NORTH PRESTON	Christine Aitken (016)	F	72	1919
	Marilyn Archer (002)	F	46	1945
	Eleanore Bower (015)	F	61-62	1929-30
	Anne Chisolm (009)	F	72	1919
	Isabel Christie (014)	F	70	1921
	Bernadette Darwin (027)	F	61	1930
	Ian Darwin (039)	M	62	1929
	Mike Elliot (038)	M	?	?
	Calvin Gibson (032)	M	74	1917
	Tony Gibson (033)	M	84	1907
	Walter Gibson (031)	M	79	1912
John Green (030)	M	87	1904	
GUYSBOROUGH	Ardene Stevens (040)	F	66	1925
	Lynn Sommerville (046)	F	75	1916
	Jennifer Sutton (053)	F	68	1923
	Susan Tyler (043)	F	75	1916
	John Valentine (063)	M	64	1927
	Brian Wagner (074)	M	69	1922
	Gladys Wagner (057)	F	64	1927
	Norman Wagner (066)	M	62-63	1928-29
	Thomas Wagner (062)	M	64	1927
	May Young (045)	F	87	1904
	Paul Young (073)	M	80	1911
	Royce Young (070)	M	63-64	1927-28

<sup>7</sup> Age given is the age at the time of the interviews (1990-91)

### 3.1.2. *Samaná English*

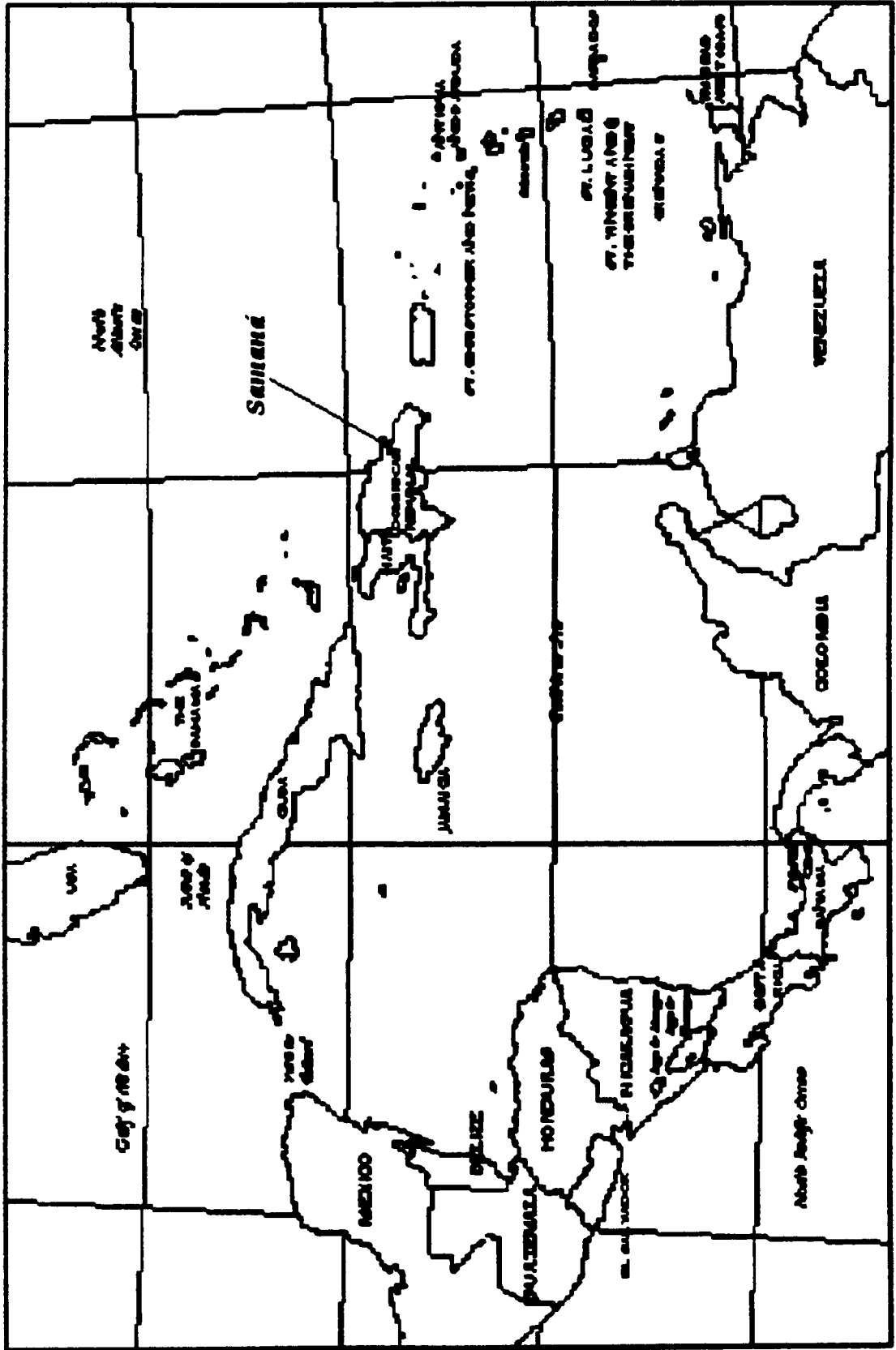
The *Samaná* community, located on the isolated northeastern peninsula of the Dominican Republic, was settled in 1824 by ex-slaves or their descendants who immigrated there under arrangements between philanthropic agencies in the United States and the Haitian rulers of the island of Hispaniola. The exact provenance of the original settlers is uncertain, but newspaper articles from the settlement period reported manumission of entire plantations to Haiti, suggesting the presence of both field and house slaves. Recent historical and archival research (Van Herk p.c.; Poplack & Tagliamonte in press) estimates that, although the immigrants sailed from northern ports (Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore), at least half of the settlers came from the South (mostly from Virginia and North Carolina). Although the community has been shifting from English to Spanish since its inception, and hence has been characterized by increasing English/Spanish bilingualism, especially in the younger generations, English was the primary language for all those interviewed, who were among the oldest members of the community.<sup>8</sup> The community of *Samaná* is generally poor, with most of the residents working in small-scale agriculture. Contact with other varieties of English appears to have been restricted to a few foreign native speakers spread out over several generations (Poplack & Sankoff 1987; Poplack & Tagliamonte, in press).

The *Samaná English Corpus* (Poplack & Sankoff 1987) housed in the Sociolinguistics Laboratory of the University of Ottawa comprises recorded interviews with 21 speakers (13 women, 8 men) ranging in age from 58 to 103 (see Table 3.2), transcribed in machine-readable format. I have made use of all 21 interviews in this dataset.

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<sup>8</sup> Van Herk (p.c.) has pointed out that the informants all have English first names, whereas by 1930 most of the first names in the community were Spanish.

Map 3.2: Location of the Samaná Peninsula in the Caribbean  
(from Poplack 1999a:8).



**Table 3.2: The speakers of the Samaná English Corpus**

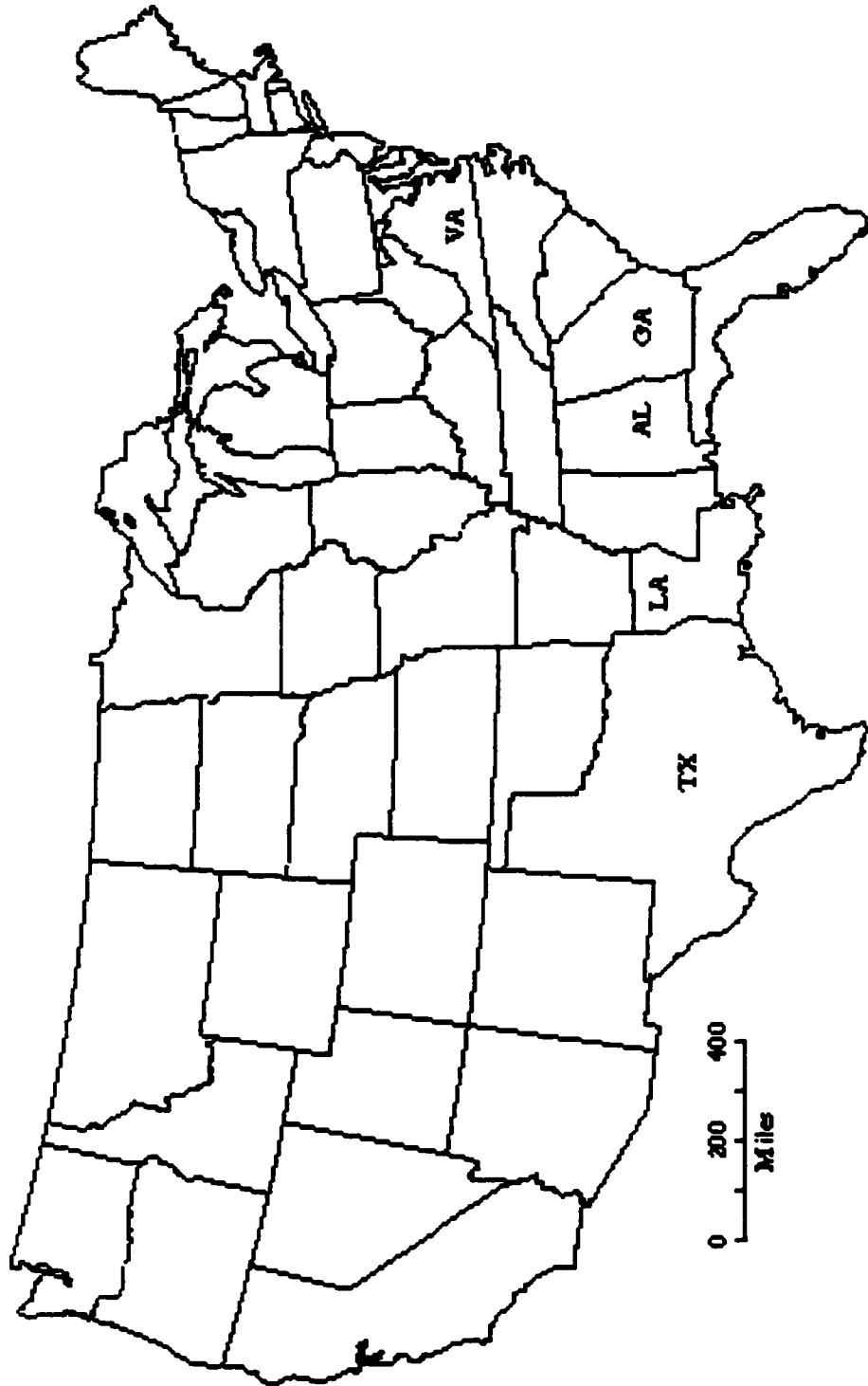
Speaker Initials & Number	Sex	Age <sup>9</sup>	Year of Birth	Speaker Initials & Number	Sex	Age	Year of Birth
O H (001)	M	78	1903	S J (012)	F	79	1902
D A (002)	F	79	1902	M N (013)	F	103	1878
E S (003)	F	83	1898	L G (014)	F	82	1899
E C (004)	M	88	1893	M M (015)	F	72	1909
A D (005)	F	58	1923	S N (016)	M	79	1902
M S (006)	M	80	1901	M D (017)	F	79	1902
V S (007)	F	75	1906	T J (018)	F	79	1902
P G (008)	F	90	1891	E H (019)	M	71	1910
M P (009)	F	73	1908	M R (020)	M	86	1895
T P (010)	M	72	1909	C R (021)	F	90	1891
S J (011)	M	79	1902				

### 3.1.3. The Ex-Slave Recordings

These mechanical recordings of interviews made with elderly former African American slaves, represent the linguistic varieties of speakers who never left the five southern states in which they were born (Bailey et al. 1991a). The recordings were discovered in the Library of Congress and had been made between 1935 and 1974 (though most were made in 1940–42) by fieldworkers of the Federal Writers' Project and folklorists. Bailey et al. (1991a:3–4) rejected a number of these recordings because of poor audio quality or their performative nature, leaving the thirteen shown in Table 3.3.

<sup>9</sup> Age given is the age at the time of the interviews (1981–82).

Map 3.3: The states of the Ex-Slave Recordings (from Poplack 1999a:5)



**Table 3.3: The speakers of the Ex-slave Recordings.**

<b>Speaker Surname &amp; Number</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Year of Birth</b>	<b>Origin</b>
Ledbetter (001)	M	1861	Louisiana
Quarterman (002)	M	1844	Georgia
Gaston (003)	F	1853	Alabama
McCrea (004)	M	?	Texas
MacDonald (005)	M	?	Alabama
Hughes (006)	M	1848	Virginia
Smith (009)	F	1851	Texas
Mosely (010)	M	1856	Alabama
Black (011)	F	1859	Texas
Smith (012)	M	1844	Liberia
Smalley (013)	F	?	Texas

These speakers, born between 1844 and 1861, presumably acquired their language less than half a century after the ancestors of the Samaná and Nova Scotia informants, and therefore provide a comparison point for the transplanted diaspora varieties. As part of a collaborative project (Bailey et al. 1991), copies of the reel-to-reel recordings were provided to the Sociolinguistics Laboratory of the University of Ottawa, where they were subsequently transcribed in machine-readable format. Because of the small size of the dataset, I make use of the transcriptions of all the speakers shown in Table 3.3.

#### *3.1.4. Summary*

Despite the different compositions of these datasets, the speakers whose varieties are represented here are matched along a number of dimensions. The data in each of the corpora examined here differ both in terms of the way the data were collected — sociolinguistic interviews (Samaná, ANSE) vs. formal interviews (ESR) — and in terms of the relationship of the interviewers to the informants: out-group and different ethnicity (Samaná, ESR) vs. in-group and shared ethnicity (ANSE). The reconstructed time-periods represented by each variety range from late Colonial (ANSE) through Antebellum (ANSE, Samaná) to Reconstruction (ESR). However,

the speakers are matched for age, being among the oldest and most isolated members of their respective communities.

### **3.2. Method**

#### *3.2.1. Variable Rule Analysis*

The methodological framework used in this dissertation is that of variationist sociolinguistics (also known as "variation theory") (e.g. Labov 1972; G. Sankoff 1974; D. Sankoff 1988a, 1988b; Poplack 1993; Guy 1993). This framework, pioneered by William Labov in his work in New York City in the 1960s (Labov 1966) and subsequently expanded, methodologically and geographically, by him and his students and associates (e.g. Labov 1972; Sankoff 1974; Sankoff 1988a, 1988b; Poplack 1993; Guy 1993), crucially takes linguistic praxis as the locus of analysis, using naturalistic linguistic data collected in its social context to investigate variation in the formal expression of linguistic functions. This investigation involves quantitatively determining the effect of features of the context (linguistic and extralinguistic) on the choice of variant.

Methodologically, the variationist approach differs from other approaches to linguistic analysis in at least two respects: its assumptions about the relation between form and function and the type of data used.

##### *3.2.1.1. The Form-Function Relation*

In linguistics, it has traditionally been assumed (either implicitly or otherwise) that the relation between form and function (or meaning) is one-to-one: that is, for each function, there is a unique linguistic form, and vice versa. This view has been expressed most succinctly by Bolinger (1977:x):

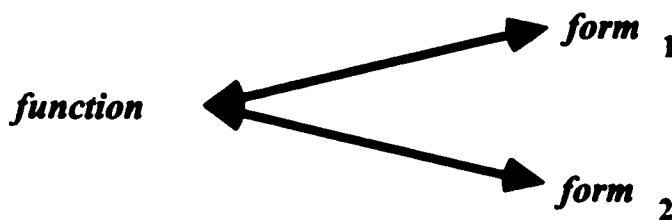
The natural condition of language is to preserve one form for one meaning and one meaning for one form ...

I will refer to this idealized view as the *assumption of form-function symmetry*,<sup>10</sup> which may be visualized as in Figure 5.1.



*Figure 5.1: Form-Function Symmetry*

We can contrast this view with one that recognizes that the form-function relation is often *asymmetric*: that is, the relation can be many-to-one. Thus, a single function can have more than one formal expression, as depicted in Figure 5.2.<sup>11</sup>



*Figure 5.2: Form-Function Asymmetry*

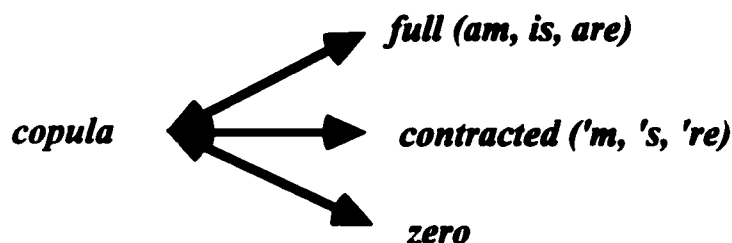
For example, the function of the copula is to carry tense and agreement information for non-verbal predicates (see Chapter 4), but it has several formal expressions, as shown in (1).

- (1) a. There's a conflict between what some people think *is* common sense and what other people think's common sense. (OH/085/2A:191)
- b. So, hey, this *is* my home, home where- this  $\emptyset$  where I was born. (ANSE/008/150)

In most dialects of English, there is variability between a full, syllabic form (*am*, *is* or *are*) and a monosegmental, contracted form (*'m*, *'s* or *'re*), as in (1a). In some nonstandard dialects, such as African American English, there is a third option, that of omitting the copula entirely (1b). This tripartite relation can be expressed as in Figure 5.3:

<sup>10</sup> Givón [1995:10] refers to it as the “idealized principle of iconic correlation,” while Langacker (1982:299) calls it “form-meaning congruence”. Chambers (1995:12) refers to it indirectly as “the axiom of categoricity”.

<sup>11</sup> Conversely, one form can convey many functions (see, e.g., the discussion of verbal *-s* in Chapter 5).



**Figure 5.3: Form-Function Asymmetry in the Copula**

While the *existence* of form-function asymmetry has been acknowledged in linguistics even as early as Schuchardt (1885/1972) and Sapir (1921/1949), it has tended to be regarded as a problem to be reduced or eliminated altogether. For example, Sapir's (1921/1949:147) admission that language is variable was appended with a lament that "all grammars leak." Indeed, traditional analysis of allomorphy, which recognizes that a morpheme can have variant phonological forms, involves determining the conditions under which each of these variants will occur to the exclusion of the others. Similarly, while semantic analysis allows that the meaning of a form may vary in discourse, it is still generally concerned with isolating the basic underlying or prototypical meaning of the form. This approach to the "problem" of form-function asymmetry can therefore be characterized as a search for invariance.

More recent approaches to syntax (e.g. Lexical-Functional Grammar [Kaplan & Bresnan 1982]; Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar [Gazdar et al. 1985]; the Minimalist Program [Chomsky 1995]) and phonology (e.g. Declarative Phonology [Coleman 1998]) have apparently begun to incorporate the form-function asymmetry to some degree, but the variationist framework pioneered by Labov in the 1960s was the first to systematically investigate this asymmetry. This framework allows us to view variability in the formal expression of the same function as the instantiation of speaker choices between the different formal expressions of this function in the course of performance. In addition, because it recognizes the instability of this relation (Sankoff 1988a), the framework can account for language change as the shift over time to one form at the expense of another. Thus, the variationist framework is ideally suited to investigating processes of language variation and change.

### 3.2.1.2. *Data*

While mainstream theoretical linguistics typically relies on intuitive judgments of grammaticality as primary linguistic data, the variationist framework takes linguistic usage as the locus of investigation. For this reason, analyses carried out within this framework require a large body of spontaneous, natural(istic) speech as its data.

The central problem confronting the variationist in the collection of data is obtaining naturalistic speech under circumstances that are far from natural. This problem was first identified within sociolinguistics by Labov as the Observer's Paradox: "to observe the way people use language when they are not being observed" (Labov 1972:61). One solution, surreptitious recording, has been rejected because of the poor quality of the data obtained, as well as being deceptive and unethical (Labov 1984:51-2). Therefore, the investigator must manipulate the context of the situation to approximate that of natural speech settings.

One technique which has been developed to achieve this effect is known as the sociolinguistic interview (Labov 1966, 1984). Despite its name, this is not a formal interview, but rather a set of topics chosen beforehand by the interviewer to direct the informant's attention toward topics of interest (childhood, the neighbourhood, personal experiences) and away from his/her speech. This technique achieves greatest success when the interviewer is already known to the informant (cf. Rickford & McNair-Knox 1994; Cukor-Avila 2000).

This technique has been successful in obtaining representative data (e.g. Poplack 1989), especially when used in conjunction with sociological sampling methods. These data typically consist of recordings of the interviews (made with prior permission of the informants), and may additionally, as with the data analyzed here, be transcribed into machine-readable format for analysis with word-processing and concordancing software.

### 3.2.1.3. *Variationist Analysis*

The empirical question which the variationist method allows us to answer is exactly which factors constrain the speaker's choice of each form.

The first step involves defining the *variable context*, also called the "envelope of variation": that is, isolating the forms which count as variant expressions of each function, and determining where it is possible (or impossible) for each of the variants to occur. This step typically involves excluding contexts where there is no variation (categorical contexts) and contexts in which the variation is ambiguous or impossible to discern (neutralization contexts) (e.g. Guy 1993:239). Once the variable context has been defined, the *principle of accountability* (Labov 1972:72) requires that we report every occurrence (or potential occurrence) of the variable within that context.

The next step is to code each potential context of occurrence, or *token*, for a number of factors, each of which represents a hypothesis about the linguistic or extralinguistic context conditioning the observed variation. It is important to note that while the variationist method *itself* imposes no theory of language on the data (Laks 1992:34), the choice of factors to be tested is typically guided by the research questions — theoretical, linguistic and/or social — of the analyst. Thus, as Laks (1992:41) notes, the variationist method plays a double role: constructing an analysis adequate to the observed reality, and testing theoretical hypotheses.

Determining which factors constrain the choice of variant can be achieved through recourse to multivariate analysis, a statistical method that weighs the effect of each factor while simultaneously controlling for the effects of all the other factors and assigns a numerical value to the likelihood that the factor conditions the choice. The range of numerical values within a group of factors is known as the **hierarchy of constraints** on the variability.

The final — and most important — step in any variationist analysis is the *interpretation* of these numbers in light of the specific research questions. As Guy (1993:245) points out, the numbers themselves do not answer the research questions, but are rather statistical evidence which we can use in our search for answers. The constraint hierarchy thus forms a crucial tool of variationist analysis, allowing us to isolate patterns which are diagnostic (as defined by Poplack 1999a:18; see also Van Herk 1999:179-80) of system membership. As such, the constraint hierarchy plays a key role in the analyses presented here.

### 3.2.2. *The Comparative Method*

In addition to standard variationist methodology, the studies reported in this dissertation also make use of a research construct of historical linguistics known as the *comparative method* (e.g. Anttila 1989:229-63; Hock 1991:556-80; Lass 1997:127), a standard tool in reconstructing prior states of a language or group of languages. As Lass (1997:127) notes, this method involves two steps: first, comparing features among a group of languages to identify genetic (non-) relatedness; and second, reconstructing the common system from which these languages descended on the basis of this relatedness.

However, while the comparative method has been relatively successful in reconstructing lexical items, phonological systems and morphophonemic paradigms, the reconstruction of grammatical systems (i.e. above the level of phonology) has proven controversial (Anttila 1989: 257; Hock 1991:609-11; Koch 1996:218-19; Ross & Durie 1996). This shortcoming limits the usefulness of the method in trying to reconstruct the origin of morphosyntactic features such as those investigated in this dissertation.

As Poplack (1999b) has recently pointed out, the limits of the traditional comparative method derive in part from the assumption of linguistic invariance: the typical basis of comparison is invariant features drawn from different languages, which are themselves used to reconstruct an invariant ancestral form. This assumption raises potential problems, because the languages may contain several variant forms to express the same function. In cases such as this, it is difficult for the traditional comparative method to determine whether the variant forms are an inheritance from the ancestral language or a subsequent innovation.

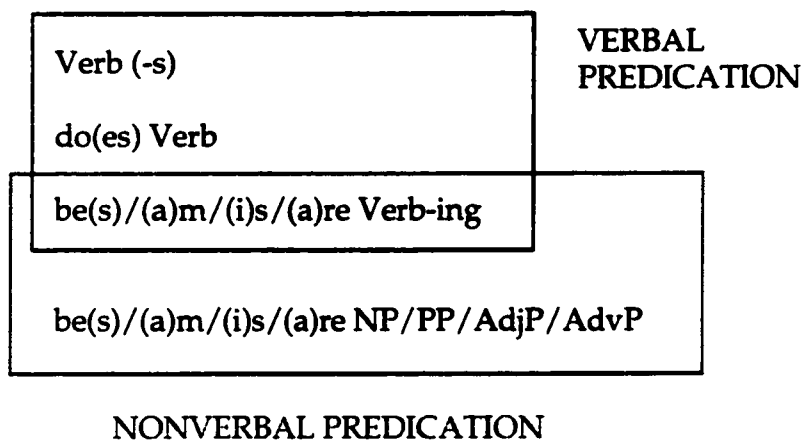
We can overcome the limits of the comparative method as it has traditionally been espoused by adding to it the notion of *inherent variability* (Poplack 1999b). Under this interpretation of the comparative method, we assume that the ancestor language passes on to its offspring not only the variant formal expressions of a particular function, but also the linguistic conditioning of their variability. Thus, it is not merely the presence of a particular form which is indicative of a genetic relationship, but rather its conditioning, as revealed by the hierarchy of constraints on its

variability. This requires that for each of the linguistic varieties in question, we perform methodologically consistent variable rule analysis (as outlined in §3.2) and compare the hierarchies of constraints. This methodology underlies the entire research program of the variationist approach to language contact. While other approaches do make use of comparative analysis, they generally do so on the basis of isolated example sentences and invariant points of comparison. In contrast, the type of comparative approach employed here not only recognizes the inherent variability of language, it makes use of the hierarchy of constraints conditioning this variability as a diagnostic tool.

### **3.3. Application of the Method to the Data and Hypotheses**

The analysis presented in this dissertation differs somewhat from the "classic" case of variable-rule analysis described in Section 3.2. Typically, the functional domain which constitutes the variable context is defined in terms of a set of variants (e.g. full, contracted and zero copula) rather than the functional domain (e.g. non-verbal predication) directly. In this analysis, I begin by defining the functional domain directly, as the expression of present temporal reference (defined more precisely in Chapter 5).

However, the present can be expressed not only through a lexical verb, but also by a copular verb (i.e. *be*) when the predicate is non-verbal. As Figure 3.4 shows, this means that the present temporal reference system actually involves two domains of predication which overlap to some extent. While predicates such as noun phrases (NP), prepositional phrases (PP), and adjectival (AdjP) or adverbial phrases (AdvP) are clearly non-verbal, the status of progressive participles (*V-ing*) as verbal or non-verbal is the subject of controversy, since they share the properties of nouns and verbs (and, to some extent, adjectives and prepositions) (e.g. Visser 1973:1931; Scheffer 1975:5,7; Zagona 1988). Since resolving this issue is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I obviate the need for determining the categorial status of participles by treating them as non-verbal predicates when focussing on the behaviour of the auxiliary (Chapter 4) and as verbal predicates when focussing on the behaviour of the lexical verb (Chapter 5).



***Figure 3.4: Intersection of domains of predication  
in the present temporal reference system.***

Although both domains of predication are involved in the expression of present temporal reference, the linguistic issues involved in each are quite different. For example, the factors which have been hypothesized to affect the variability of non-verbal predication (Chapter 4) do not generally overlap with those of verbal predication (Chapter 5). Dividing these domains into two analyses should not prejudice the discussion in favour of either an English or creole analysis, since analyses of both English (e.g. Langacker 1982:295-6; Smith 1991:230) and creoles (e.g. Winford 1993) generally argue that the two domains involve different issues (whether syntactic or semantic). For each domain of predication, I define different variable contexts and code for different factors, as discussed in the respective chapters, but then I fit these two analyses together in the conclusion in order to arrive at a coherent picture of the present temporal reference system.

For both studies, I make use of the stepwise multiple regression feature incorporated in the Macintosh program GoldVarb 2.0 (Rand & Sankoff 1990) to perform the multivariate analysis which will then serve as the basis for my explanation of variability in the expression of present temporal reference.

The analyses in this dissertation make use of this enhanced comparative method to reconstruct the present temporal reference system of Early AAE. Ideally, this comparison would be based not only on internal comparison of the Early AAE varieties with each other, but also on external comparison of these varieties with other varieties of English (nonstandard or historical)

and with English-based creoles. However, the lack of methodologically similar analyses of the features of interest in these latter varieties limits the feasibility of external comparison. Thus, the central goal of this dissertation is the reconstruction of the present temporal reference system of Early AAE, rather than the resolution of the origins debate. While the latter issue is the ultimate goal of the comparative endeavour discussed above, such a detailed comparison cannot be made without comparable analyses in the comparison varieties. Nevertheless, wherever possible, I draw parallels between my findings and those of the relevant literature.

Since the central goal of this dissertation is the reconstruction of the present temporal reference system of Early AAE, I must address the criticisms that could vitiate the representativeness of these varieties as Early AAE that I mentioned above. The first criticism is that, although we know that the founders of these communities came from different parts of the United States and included freed men, house slaves and field slaves, we do not know their exact provenance. As Poplack (1999a:13) observes, this is an inherent drawback of the diaspora varieties which holds regardless of their location, since the shipping records of the emigrations and the initial records of these communities are often not available or are incomplete. A second criticism concerns the extent of linguistic isolation of these varieties. For example, since Samaná is located in a predominantly Spanish-speaking country in the heart of the Caribbean, some (e.g. Holm 1988:505) have suggested that externally motivated contact may have affected the English spoken there. However, the extent of Spanish interference is limited to a small number of loanwords and discourse particles (e.g. *bueno, ya*), which generally do not affect the core grammatical system (Poplack & Meechan 1998), and the number of speakers of *English*-based creoles in contact with the community appears to have been very small (Poplack & Sankoff 1987:296; Poplack & Tagliamonte, to appear). Indeed, Poplack and Sankoff (1987) and Poplack and Tagliamonte (1991, to appear; cf. Poplack 1999a:11) have outlined the factors which contribute to the resistance of these varieties to contact-induced change, at least as far as the core grammatical system is concerned. Rickford (1997:318) provides further evidence that distinct ethnic groups can remain

linguistically and socially isolated from the surrounding majority population for long periods of time.

Another criticism concerns the methods of data collection: the standard language of some of the interviewers may have caused the informants to switch to a more standard variety, thus obscuring their more creole-like features (Hannah 1997; Rickford 1998). This consideration is not an issue for ANSE, since the interviewers were in-group, community members known to the informants, but it remains a consideration for Samaná. However, as Poplack (1999a:12) points out, this consideration is a problem which confronts all those who have collected data. Since familiarity with the informant appears to be a greater determinant of obtaining vernacular speech than shared ethnicity (Rickford & McNair-Knox 1994; Cukor-Avila 2000), the accommodation effect is a problem that confronts all linguists who have collected data in Samaná, since none of them has been a member of the community. Finally, there is the implicit problem of innovation or divergence subsequent to the foundation of these communities (Rickford 1998; Singler 1999; Van Herk & Walker 2000). Again, this is an inherent drawback of all diaspora varieties as a source of data.

If each community were studied on its own, each of these criticisms might be enough to vitiate the data as representative of Early AAE. However, there are two important considerations of the methodology of this research program which lessen if not eliminate these concerns. The first consideration is that we are not concerned with the overall rate of occurrence of a particular form, but rather with the linguistic factors that condition its variability. While overall rate is subject to fluctuation from a number of external causes — interviewer accommodation, speech style, social class, age, etc. — the conditioning factors generally remain unaffected by such causes (cf. Rickford & McNair-Knox 1994). Second, it is important to remember that we are not studying each community in isolation, but rather are looking at the conditioning factors across all three varieties. Given the vastly different circumstances surrounding the foundation and development of these communities, as well as the different conditions under which the data were collected in each, it is extremely unlikely that any similarities across the varieties would be due to chance, and can

only be explained by derivation from a shared ancestral grammatical system (cf. Poplack 1999a:13).

Thus, the central assumption of the analyses in this dissertation is as follows (cf. Poplack 1999:15-17):

If a variable in one variety of Early AAE is constrained by the same hierarchy of factor weights as the same variable in other varieties of Early AAE, we may conclude that these variables share a common source.

Wherever it is possible to compare the conditioning of variable grammatical features in the Early AAE varieties with the same features in nonstandard varieties of English and English-based creoles, the following additional assumptions obtain:

1. If a variable in early AAE features the same hierarchy of constraints as its counterpart in nonstandard varieties of English (while simultaneously differing from other putative sources, such as English-based creoles and West African languages), we may conclude that the grammar giving rise to the variability is English.
2. If a variable in early AAE features the same hierarchy of constraints as its counterpart in English-based creoles (while simultaneously differing from nonstandard varieties of English), we may conclude that the grammar giving rise to the variability is creole.

Thus, the primary goal of this dissertation is the reconstruction of the present temporal reference system of Early AAE. To the extent that internal cross-variety comparison is possible, I carry out the procedure outlined in this chapter for a number of morphophonological and morphosyntactic variables on three varieties which I have argued to represent Early AAE.

## Chapter 4

### THE COPULA

#### 4.0. Introduction

Of all the features of AAE, the copula<sup>12</sup> is the most studied but least understood: despite almost thirty years of research, its origin and the factors conditioning its variability remain controversial. As I have suggested (Chapter 1), part of the reason for this controversy no doubt stems from the salience of one of its variants in AAE. While all dialects of English show variability between full and contracted forms of the copula, as in (1a), the possibility of omitting it altogether, as in (1b), is not a feature of standard dialects.

- (1) a. The way the world's going, I don't think half of them believe in the God.  
(NSVE/101/1A:350) ... The way the world *is* going and the way people is acting, I don't know, it don't seem like half of them believe in any God. (NSVE/101/1A:358)<sup>13</sup>
- b. So, hey, this *is* my home, home where- this  $\emptyset$  where I was born. (ANSE/008/150)

This third, zero variant in dialects of AAE has been interpreted as resulting from a rule of copula deletion, an extension of standard English copula contraction (Labov 1969, 1972). Others have argued that zero copula is evidence that AAVE derives from a prior creole, since English-based creoles (EBCs) have zero in some copula environments (Baugh 1980; Holm 1984; Rickford et al. 1991; Rickford 1996, 1998). However, given that zero copula has been found to occur (albeit rarely) in nonstandard regional varieties of English (Wolfram 1974; Feagin 1979; Martin & Tagliamonte 1999) and historical varieties (Visser 1970), the mere existence of this feature in AAE says nothing about its origin, or even about what factors condition its variability.

Ideally, then, determining the origins of zero copula in AAE first requires a thorough understanding of copula behaviour in other varieties of English and in EBCs. We could then use the comparative approach outlined in Chapter 3 to determine whether the factors conditioning

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<sup>12</sup> In this chapter and elsewhere I use the term "copula" to cover the use of *be* as both an auxiliary and a true copula, though I differentiate the two uses where appropriate.

<sup>13</sup> NSVE refers to the vernacular English spoken by European-origin residents of Guysborough and Halifax, NS (see Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991, in press).

copula variability in AAVE resemble one or the other of the comparison varieties. However, the basis for this comparison is incomplete: previous studies have tended to compare rates of variability with categorical statements about the copula in (idealized) "Standard English" (StdE) and "creole". Such studies often invoke isolated example sentences from different languages without regard to their quantitative patterning. While recent variationist analysis of the copula in EBCs has begun to address this gap (see section 4.4), studies on demonstrably non-creolized varieties of English are still relatively few in number (Labov 1969; McElhinny 1993; Fasold & Nakano 1996; Meechan 1996; Walker & Meechan 1998).

There are further, methodological impediments to a comparative approach, involving different definitions of the variable context and different methods of calculating rates of contraction and deletion. Moreover, studies have continued to replicate the factors originally proposed by Labov (1969), often without justification of their role or of the hypotheses they are supposed to test. Nowhere is this more evident than in the "following grammatical category" factor, which has played a surprisingly key role in arguing for a creole origin for AAVE (e.g. Holm 1984; Baugh 1980; Winford 1992a; Rickford et al. 1991; Rickford 1996; Weldon 1996), despite the inconsistency of constraint hierarchies between AAVE and creoles, and even within AAVE.

In this chapter, my synthesis of the vast and conflicting literature on the copula shows that the unjustified focus on the significance of the "following grammatical category" has occluded the significance of another factor (the type of subject), whose significance has received surprisingly little attention. This synthesis of the literature serves as a background to the analysis of copula variability in Early AAE. Making use of recent phonological theory, which has paid a great deal of attention to the prosodic properties of the copula (e.g. Selkirk 1984; Nespor & Vogel 1986), I show that prosodic considerations, which have until now gone uninvestigated in the copula studies, are just as significant as (and, indeed, inseparable from) the following grammatical category, and in fact offer a more meaningful *linguistic* explanation for the variability. These findings also have consequences for the use of zero copula as a metric in the origins debate.

#### 4.1. Zero Copula and the Origins Debate

In his seminal study of the copula in AAVE, Labov (1969) noted that zero can occur prior to a noun phrase (NP), a predicate adjective (ADJ), a locative (LOC), negation (NEG), a progressive participle (*V-ing*), or the future *going to/gonna*, and found the following hierarchy of deletion (most > least):

*goin'/gonna* > *V-ing* > PA/Loc > NP

Baugh's (1975, 1980) reanalysis of Labov's data, shown in Table 4.1, used multivariate analysis.

**Table 4.1: Factors contributing to the occurrence of contracted and zero copula in Harlem AAVE (adapted from Baugh 1980).**

		CONTRACTED	ZERO
<b>Preceding Segment</b>	Consonant	0.000	.061
	Vowel	.408	0.000
<b>Following Segment</b>	Consonant	.522	.322
	Vowel	0.000	0.000
<b>Subject Type</b>	Pronoun	.856	.714
	NP	0.000	0.000
<b>Following Grammatical Category</b>	Adjective	.116	1.000
	Det + NP	1.000	.741
	Locative	1.000	.682
	gon(na)	1.000	.601
	V-ing	1.000	.402
<b>TOTAL N: 578<sup>14</sup></b>	NP	0.000	.000

Unlike Labov, Baugh found that, although both *gonna* and *V-ing* favoured contraction, neither category particularly favoured zero, less so even than ADJ, LOC and Det + NP. When LOC and ADJ were separated, Baugh found that ADJ favoured zero more than LOC. Assuming some (unspecified) relationship between Jamaican and AAVE, Baugh (1980:103) argued that originally there was no preadjectival copula in AAVE, and attributed this pattern to influence from West Indian creoles.

<sup>14</sup> This is the total number of tokens in Baugh's dataset; he provides no totals for the individual variable-rule runs.

Although Labov (1969:68; 1995:31) suggested parallels in copula absence between AAVE and both creoles and child language, it was Holm's 1976 study (published in 1984) which made the first explicit comparison between AAVE and EBCs. Comparing transcribed Gullah texts with folktales told by a Jamaican speaker, he arrived at the results shown in Table 4.2 (Holm 1984:293).

**Table 4.2: Rates of zero copula in Jamaican and Gullah according to following grammatical category (Holm 1984).**

Jamaican		Gullah	
Adjective	66%	<i>Gonna</i>	88%
<i>Gonna</i>	32%	Adjective	62%
NP	22%	V-ing	28%
V-ing	17%	Locative	22%
Locative	17%	NP	11%
Total N = 343		Total N = 189	

Based on the high rates of zero before ADJ, which, according to him, had been obscured by Labov's (1969) combining of ADJ and LOC, Holm argued that had Labov separated the two categories (as Holm does in Table 4.1), he would have found a similar pattern in his data, which would in turn indicate a creole origin for AAVE. Holm's explanation for the hierarchy is as follows: *gonna* is a calque for a proto-creole preverbal irrealis marker, *V-ing* is a calque for a proto-creole verb and its preverbal progressive/iterative marker, ADJ was a subclass of verb in the proto-creole, and LOC and NP require copulas because of proto-creole locative and equative copulas, respectively (Holm 1984:298). Holm's explanation implicitly predicts higher rates of zero before *gonna*, *V-ing* and ADJ and lower rates before LOC and NP. Drawing on selections from *Teach Yourself Yoruba* (Rowlands 1969), he argued further that this hierarchy reflects a common African ancestry for both AAVE and EBCs (Holm 1984:301). Observing the variety of copulas used in different semantic and syntactic contexts in Yoruba, he argued that Yoruba speakers learning English would have carried these contextual distinctions into English, where they are not relevant (Holm 1984:297).

Interpreting these results as evidence for a creole origin meets with a number of problems. First, as far as the copula is concerned, there are no testable hypotheses or scenarios for creolization which make clear predictions about what linguistic evidence should be expected for each scenario (English origin, creole origin, West African origin). Second, there is no basis for the comparison of AAVE with either EBCs or English, since no explicit data either from other varieties of English or from EBCs is offered. Furthermore, the comparison with African languages with respect to copula usage provided by Holm is dubious at best: apart from the fact that pedagogical grammars are unreliable sources of evidence for naturalistic linguistic behaviour, there is no one-to-one correspondence between copula categories in Yoruba, EBCs and/or AAVE (as Rickford [1998:186] also notes). More important, neither study mentions Labov's original (Labov et al. 1968; cf. Labov 1972) analysis, in which separation of ADJ and LOC shows *different* orderings across groups of speakers (ibid.:86), who presumably should be on the same point in the creole continuum, if AAVE is a decreolized variety.

In addition, neither Holm nor Baugh provide an explanation for Labov's (1969:85; and Baugh's, as shown in Table 4.1) finding that a pronominal subject correlates more highly with *both* contraction and zero than does a full NP subject. In their focus on the following grammatical category, itself dictated by the (tenuous) parallels they adduced between it and an African origin, both Holm and Baugh neglected the significance of the subject type effect.

In response to these arguments, subsequent work investigated zero and contracted copula in the diaspora varieties of AAE (see Chapters 2 and 3). Table 4.3 compares contraction and zero in ANSE (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991) and SAM (Poplack & Sankoff 1987, Hannah 1997<sup>15</sup>) and Table 4.4 shows the results for three speakers of Liberian Settler English (Singler 1991a).

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<sup>15</sup> For comparability, I include those of Hannah's results that most closely match the variable context and method of calculation used by Poplack and Sankoff.

**Table 4.3: Factors selected as significant to the occurrence of contracted and zero copula in Samaná English (Poplack and Sankoff 1987:306-7; Hannah 1997:356,358) and ANSE (Poplack and Tagliamonte 1991:320).<sup>16</sup>**

	CONTRACTED			ZERO		
	Samaná		ANSE	Samaná		ANSE
	PandS	Hannah	PandT	PandS	Hannah	PandT
Total N:	489	502	545	384	443	462
Corrected mean:	.89	.95	.94	.54	.26	.14
Factor group:						
<b>Subject Type</b>						
<i>I</i>	.45	.32	.46	.06	.01	.16
<i>he/she</i>	<b>.93</b>	<b>.81</b>	<b>.68</b>	.28	<b>.77</b>	.52
<i>it/what/that</i>	<b>.85</b>	<b>.82</b>	<b>.67</b>	.06	.25	.29
<i>you/we/they</i>	.32	<b>.62</b>	<b>.80</b>	<b>.90</b>	<b>.86</b>	<b>.91</b>
<i>those/them/these</i>	.13	.04	.04	.43	.29	—
NP	.08	.04	.07	<b>.81</b>	<b>.81</b>	<b>.89</b>
<i>here/there</i>	<b>.74</b>	.15	<b>.55</b>	<b>.53</b>	<b>.65</b>	.37
Range:	85	78	76	84	85	75
<b>Following Grammatical Category</b>						
<i>gonna</i>	<b>.90</b>	<b>K/O</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>.59</b>	<b>.93</b>	<b>.73</b>
V-ing	.48	<b>.92</b>	<b>.84</b>	.46	<b>.89</b>	<b>.69</b>
Adjective	.35	.54	.39	.19	.44	.46
Locative	.40	.52	.43	.23	.42	.49
NP	.24	<b>.78</b>	.37	.41	.12	.31
<i>wh</i> -clause		.15		<b>.95</b>	.28	<b>.79</b>
Range:	66	85	63	76	81	33
<b>Preceding Phonological Environment</b>						
Vowel	<b>.62</b>	<b>.65</b>	.54	[ ]	.41	.33
Consonant	.38	.16	.47	[ ]	<b>.90</b>	<b>.64</b>
Range:	24	49	7		49	31
<b>Following Phonological Segment</b>						
Vowel	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	.36	[ ]	[ ]
Consonant	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	<b>.64</b>	[ ]	[ ]
Range:				28		

As the shaded areas of Table 4.3 indicate, many of the same factors that favour both contraction and zero are shared by the ANSE data and the two SAM datasets, and parallel the findings for AAVE. In all three datasets, pronominal subjects such as *he/she* and *it/what/that* favour contraction, while NP subjects disfavour contraction and favour zero. With respect to the

<sup>16</sup> The numbers in this table and other tables displaying the results of variable-rule analysis represent the numerical value of likelihood that the factor contributes to the occurrence of the variant (see Chapter 3). The values are assigned by the GoldVarb program (Rand & Sankoff 1990). Throughout this dissertation, I use bolded figures to indicate factors which favour the variant and shading to draw attention to particular patterns. "K/O" indicates a "knockout" or categorical application (0% or 100%).

following grammatical category, *V-ing* and *gonna* favour both contraction and zero more than other categories in all three datasets. More important, ADJ consistently disfavours zero copula, the opposite of what Holm's explanation predicts. Furthermore, in ANSE, LSE (Table 4.4) and Poplack and Sankoff's SAM data, LOC favours zero copula more than ADJ. Even where this order does not obtain, as in Hannah's SAM data, there is virtually no difference between these categories. Although Hannah reports an overall rate of zero in her SAM data (40%) twice that in Poplack and Sankoff's SAM data (20%), it is clear that the factors *conditioning* the variability share more similarities than differences (as indicated by the shaded cells; note also that the corrected mean, indicating the overall tendency of zero to occur, is actually lower in Hannah's data than in Poplack and Sankoff's). Although Hannah makes much of the differences between her SAM data and those of Poplack and Sankoff, asserting that her results show evidence of the creole nature of SAM (Hannah 1997:343, 363-4), the nature of the differences (i.e. in rate only) are consistent with findings (Rickford and McNair-Fox 1994:252) that the level of speech style can affect the overall rate of zero without affecting the factors conditioning its variability (cf. Poplack 1999:11-12).

As we have seen, a great deal of attention has been paid to the relative ordering of ADJ and LOC, which is subject to more fluctuation than that of any other categories (Rickford et al. 1991:119). Poplack and Tagliamonte (1991:323) have pointed out that while LOC and ADJ agree in most studies in showing comparable intermediate effects and being inconsistently ordered with respect to each other, "they should be showing widely consistent *divergent* effects, one highly favoring and one disfavoring," according to Holm's predictions. This minimal effect is evident in Table 4.3, in which the differences between ADJ and LOC, whatever their relative ordering, are very slight. In contrast, Table 4.4 shows LOC to favour zero much more highly than ADJ, again disconfirming Holm's predictions.

**Table 4.4: Factors contributing to the occurrence of contracted and zero copula in Liberian Settler English (adapted from Singler 1991a).<sup>17</sup>**

	CONTRACTED		ZERO	
	CAROLINA (%)	ALBERT AND SLIM	CAROLINA (%)	ALBERT AND SLIM
<b>Total N:</b>	135	393	135	393
	<b>Subject</b>			
<i>I</i>	0	.90	100	.24
<i>he/she</i>	0	.77	100	.51
<i>we/you/they</i>	4	.16	96	.51
NP (sg.)	0	.07	77	.43
NP (pl.)	0	.00	100	.89
<i>it/what/that</i>	33	.85	64	.22
<i>here/there</i>	0	.38	50	.63
	<b>Following Grammatical Category</b>			
<i>gon</i>	0	.00	100	1.00
Locative	0	.17	100	.86
Participle	0	—	100	—
V-ing	3	.20	97	.72
Wh-comp	8	.45	92	.65
Adjective	0	.70	91	.35
Det + NP	56	.87	55	.13
NP	18	.60	28	.29

In Singler's study of *Non-Settler Liberian English*, which he characterizes as representing several levels of the creole continuum, the LOC/ADJ ordering changes from the basilect, "where the rate of preadjectival deletion was far greater than the rate for the other two environments," to the mesolect and acrolect, where "the rate of preadjectival deletion is consistently lower than the rate of prelocative deletion" (Singler 1991a:156). This tendency is shown below, along with the rankings from the other varieties discussed above:

<sup>17</sup> Totals for Albert and Slim are from the percentage tables, since none are given for the variable-rule runs.

ADJ > LOC

Basilectal/Lower Mesolectal  
Non-Settler Liberian English  
(Singler 1991)

Jamaican, Gullah  
(Holm 1984)

AAVE (Harlem, Cobras)  
(Labov 1969/1972)

AAVE (Harlem)  
(Baugh 1980)

LOC > ADJ

Upper Mesolectal/Acrolectal  
Non-Settler Liberian English  
(Singler 1991)

Samaná English  
(Poplack and Sankoff 1987)

Liberian Settler English  
(Singler 1991)

ANSE, Ex-slave Recordings  
(Poplack and Tagliamonte 1991)

AAVE (Harlem, Jets)  
(Labov 1969/1972)

Singler's claim holds for the Liberian continuum, but the diaspora varieties (including the one he studied) show a ranking unlike that of the putative creole pattern, which we would not expect if, as postulated above, they represent *more* creole-like varieties. In addition, two sets of Labov's AAVE data are divided as to ranking, despite the fact that both sets represent the same speech community.

Although not often emphasized in the literature, subject type is selected as significant in all the diaspora varieties, but with results that are not straightforward. While the high correlation of *he/she* with both contracted and zero copula across all three datasets in Table 4.3 suggests that the same finding for the subject type effect noted above applies here as well, these studies include *is*, *am* and *are*, whereas Labov (1969) excluded *am* and Baugh (1980) studied only *is*. Since the differences among personal pronouns in Table 4.3 could be attributed to confounding effects of the different morpholexical properties of each underlying form (*am/is/are*), separating these forms is an important analytical step.

To explain the failure of following grammatical category to pattern according to the predictions of the creole-origins hypothesis, some have appealed to processes of decreolization. For example, Singler (1991a) explains the LOC/ADJ reversal as a function of decreolization, though he notes (ibid.:155) that the outcome of the ranking of grammatical constraints depends on the model of decreolization assumed, as shown in Table 4.5.

**Table 4.5: Singler's (1991a) models of decreolization.**

	MODEL A			MODEL B				
	Basilect		Acrolect	Basilect		Mesolect		Acrolect
LOC	<i>de</i>	→	<i>is</i>	<i>de</i>	→	∅	→	<i>is</i>
NP	<i>be</i>	→	<i>is</i>	<i>be</i>	→	∅	→	<i>is</i>
ADJ	∅	→	<i>is</i>	∅	→	∅	→	<i>is</i>

In Singler's Model A, the basilect has overt copulas for LOC and NP and zero copula for ADJ, all of which are replaced with *is* in the acrolect. This model predicts that, even in decreolized varieties, ADJ occurs with the highest rate of zero (but note that it fails to predict zero variants for either LOC or NP). In Model B, all copulas are replaced with zero in the mesolect and *is* in the acrolect. This model predicts that the rate of zero mesolectally and acrolectally is roughly the same for all three environments (ibid.). Model B explains why there are zero forms in NP and LOC in decreolized varieties (since they are introduced in the mesolect), but if zero originates in the mesolect, then it also predicts a higher rate of zero for ADJ than for either NP or LOC (since non-zero forms are not introduced until the acrolectal stage). Yet in almost all studies, ADJ and LOC pattern more closely together than do LOC and NP. Furthermore, there is no explanation for why LOC should consistently rank higher than NP, since neither model shows a difference between these two categories. Therefore, neither model's predictions are supported by the results of any studies.

Winford (1992a) develops a more elaborate model of decreolization to explain the results of his analysis of Trinidadian Creole English (TC), on the basis of the results in Table 4.6. As I have mentioned (Chapter 2), Winford (1992a:29) has criticized analyses which compare AAVE with basilectal creole varieties, and suggests that decreolized or mesolectal varieties such as TC are more appropriate. In TC, zero is favoured most by *goin*, *V-ing*, LOC and ADJ, though by no means highly enough to warrant Winford's categorical statement (1992a:33) that "TC simply has no copula or auxiliary in such structures in present contexts." He argues that the high rate of zero with *V-ing* and *gonna* in both TC and AAVE demonstrates the lack of an underlying copula in such

structures, and that the low rate of zero with NP in both languages (0%-3.5% in TC) demonstrates that they *now* have a copula in such environments.

**Table 4.6: Factors contributing to the occurrence of contracted and zero copula in Trinidadian Creole (adapted from Winford 1992a:34,46).<sup>18</sup>**

	CONTRACTED	ZERO
Total N:	1522	1522
Corrected mean:	.03	.70
<b>Subject Type</b>		
<i>we/they/you</i>	—	.64
<i>he/she</i>	.61	.60
<i>I</i>	.64	.49
NP (Plural)	—	.46
NP (Singular)	.15	.42
<i>it/that/what</i>	.68	.39
<i>Range:</i>	53	25
<b>Following Grammatical Category</b>		
<i>goin</i>	—	.88
V-ing	.38	.85
LOC	.33	.80
ADJ	.77	.64
NP	∅	.00
<i>Range:</i>	77	88

To explain the different rates of zero with NP between the two languages, he argues that in TC the basilectal copula *a* was replaced by invariant *is* (ibid.:35), whereas AAVE originally had no copula with NP, ADJ or LOC and has been incorporating an overt copula in such environments under the influence of StdE (ibid.). He argues that the differences in rates of zero between the following categories reflect the sensitivity of copula insertion to specific grammatical environments (ibid.:45, 49). Table 4.7 summarizes his model of decreolization for Caribbean EBCs.

<sup>18</sup> Because the zero copula results are taken from the group session data, I have included the contraction results only for the group session data (Winford 1992a:46). The totals are from the entire dataset, since he provides no totals for the variable-rule runs. In addition, he excludes *goin* from the variable rule analysis of contraction.

**Table 4.7: Winford's (1992a) model of decreolization for Caribbean English Creoles.**

	<b>Basilect</b>		<b>Lower Mesolect</b>		<b>Upper Mesolect</b>		<b>Acrolect</b>
LOC	<i>de</i>	→	∅	→	∅/forms of <i>be</i>	→	inflected <i>be</i>
NP	<i>a</i>	→	invariant <i>is</i>	→	<i>is</i> /forms of <i>be</i>	→	inflected <i>be</i>
ADJ	∅	→	∅	→	∅/forms of <i>be</i>	→	inflected <i>be</i>
Progressive	<i>a + V</i>	→	∅ <i>V + -ing</i>	→	( <i>be</i> ) <i>V + -in</i>	→	<i>be V + -ing</i>
Future	<i>a go + V</i>	→	∅ <i>goin + V</i>	→	( <i>be</i> ) <i>goin to + V</i>	→	<i>be goin to + V</i>

If zero is cumulative, persisting from the basilect into the upper mesolect, ADJ and LOC should favour zero most in mesolectal varieties. But Winford's model does not explain why *V-ing* and *gonna* favour zero copula so highly, more so even than ADJ and LOC, in both TC and AAVE. Nor does it explain why some grammatical environments should be more resistant (or amenable) to copula insertion than others, and in particular, why *V-ing* and *gonna* should be so resistant. In addition, he offers no explanation for the fact that the effect of subject type for his contracted tokens is much more pronounced than that of following grammatical category (Winford 1992a:46). More recently, Winford has reinterpreted his decreolization model as a process of "shift" resulting from imperfect second language acquisition (SLA) (1998:111-2), but the same objections I have raised to his decreolization model apply to its reinterpretation as a model of SLA. As Rickford (1998:180) notes, patterns of zero copula in SLA do not appear to parallel those in AAVE, but given the paucity of such studies, it may be premature to make such a judgment.

Because the use of the following grammatical category as a diagnostic of a creole origin requires a consensus on the proper analysis of copula behaviour in EBCs, perhaps the greatest obstacle to a comparative study is the lack of such a consensus, as Holm's (1988:174-79) overview (based on secondary sources) reveals. Although the literature surveyed by Holm is based on categorical rather than variable statements, it still does not support the claim that all EBCs have a single equative copula (preceding NP). Jamaican has one (*da/a*), but Sranan has two: *na*, distinguishing natural, inborn or permanent characteristics, and *de*, used for accidental, acquired or temporary characteristics. Similarly, many EBCs have a locative copula *de*, derived from English

*there* (Mufwene 1986; Pochard & Devonish 1986; Holm 1988:177; Winford 1993:171), but Holm (1988:177) notes that *de* is often ambiguous with the adverb *de 'there'* and may even be omitted, suggesting that this copula is in fact ambiguous with the deictic adverb (cf. Jaganauth 1987:7 [cited in Winford 1993:173]; McWhorter 1997:103-4). Furthermore, Sranan distinguishes between existential/locative *de* and attributive *tan* (< 'stand') ('to be a certain way') (Holm 1988:178), and the uses of locative *de* and equative *da* overlap to some extent in Saramaccan (McWhorter 1997:87-90), complicating the picture even further.<sup>19</sup>

Even more controversial is the status of adjectives in creoles. While Holm (1988:176) characterizes them as stative verbs, since they take preverbal markers in some EBCs, Seuren (1988) argues that some adjectives in Sranan take a copula and are therefore not verbs, and Winford (1990) draws a distinction in Guyanese Creole between "physical property" adjectives, which behave like true adjectives, and all others, which behave like verbs (cf. Winford 1993:179-87).

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, a further obstacle to a comparative analysis is the commensurability of the context of copula variability between EBCs and varieties of English. Although *V-ing* and *gonna* tend to favour zero highly, Winford (1990:230) argues that such forms are not true copula contexts in EBCs: *V-ing* corresponds to a verb plus the preverbal marker *a* and *gonna* corresponds to future marker *gon*.

Despite these obstacles, there are several recent studies of copula variability in creole or creole-like varieties, such as Barbadian English (BE; Rickford and Blake 1990), Jamaican Creole English (JC; Rickford 1996) and Gullah (Weldon 1996). Their results are summarized in Table 4.8.

As Rickford and Blake (1990) note, the main factors affecting contraction and zero in mesolectal BE are the preceding subject, with pronouns favouring contraction and NP subjects favouring zero, and the following grammatical category, the hierarchy of which parallels one of Labov's (1969) AAVE groups and Poplack and Sankoff's (1987) SAM data.

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<sup>19</sup> Note that none of these observations appears to be based on systematic analysis of spoken language.

**Table 4.8: Factors contributing to the occurrence of contracted and zero copula in Barbadian English (BE; Rickford and Blake 1990),<sup>20</sup> Gullah (Weldon 1996 [2nd runs])<sup>21</sup> and Jamaican Creole English (JCE; Rickford 1996).<sup>22</sup>**

	CONTRACTED		ZERO		
	BE	Gullah	BE	Gullah	JCE
Corrected mean:	.86	.104	.88	.581	.52
Total N:	522	403	385	403	368
<b>SUBJECT TYPE</b>					
Personal Pronoun	.79	.75	.19	.65	.60
Other Pronoun	.58	.22	.45	.40	.23
NP	.16	.29	.84	.32	.70
	<i>Range</i>	63 46	65	22	47
<b>FOLLOWING GRAMMATICAL CATEGORY</b>					
<i>gonna</i>	.91	.08	.77	.96	—
<i>V-ing</i>	.55	.29	.65	.75	.79
Locative	.54	.55	.54	.48	.12
Adjective	.40	.57	.42	.42	.75
<i>V-ed</i> (Participle)	—	—	—	—	.69
NP	.16	.72	.08	.23	.23
	<i>Range</i>	75 64	69	73	56

Rickford's (1996) study of JC reanalyzes the recordings on which the texts used by Holm (1976/1984) were based. Since this reanalysis is based on less than two hours of recorded speech of one speaker of JC, the findings may not be generalizable to the language as a whole. Nevertheless, Rickford does address a number of the methodological shortcomings of Holm's original analysis. Following Winford (1992a:26), Rickford excludes *gon*, *de* and *a*, with the result that the rate of zero with *V-ing* is raised, which, according to him, makes these data look more like the pattern found in AAVE (Rickford 1996:367). Although LOC and NP do not correlate highly with zero, unlike other studies, LOC here favours zero even *less* than NP, a finding which Rickford (ibid.:366) attributes to "the persistence of creole copula *de*". He argues that his reanalysis makes the following grammatical category hierarchy much more similar to that of AAVE, explaining the difference in patterning for some forms as due to a(n unelaborated) reanalysis process on the part of AAVE speakers. Since Rickford characterizes the JC speech as

<sup>20</sup> I have excluded from the contracted run in BE the factor groups not selected as significant, as well as the factor groups of speaker, underlying form and following segment.

<sup>21</sup> Excluding *it/that/what*, *am* and collapsing *gon* and *gonna*.

<sup>22</sup> I have excluded from the JCE run the factor group of tense. Note that both present and past forms are included.

"replete with basilectal or 'deep creole' elements" (ibid.:361), and bearing in mind Winford's caveat that mesolectal varieties are the proper point of comparison with AAVE, it seems odd that AAVE should in one study (Winford 1992a) look mesolectal and in another (Rickford 1996) look basilectal.

In Weldon's (1996) study of "mesolectal" Gullah, which attempts to heed Winford's caveat of comparing mesolectal varieties, the pattern of following grammatical category is identical to that found for (one variety of) AAVE (Weldon 1996:17; Rickford et al. 1991), a finding she uses to support Stewart's (1973) claim that AAVE is a slightly decreolized form of Gullah and hence derives from a common creole origin. She argues that the low rate of zero with adjectives supports Winford's (1992a) claim that "high adjectival" is not characteristic of mesolectal varieties. Recall that the creole origins hypothesis was originally made on the basis of a high rate of zero with adjectives (Holm 1984); here a low rate of zero in this context is being used to argue for the same thing. If there were indeed pan-creole constraints on copula variability, we would expect Weldon's Gullah results to look much more like those of Rickford's JC.

Indeed, although these studies of BE, JC and Gullah represent a methodological step forward in the study of the copula in EBCs and creole-like varieties, they have not succeeded in uncovering a single, consistent pattern of copula behaviour in EBCs with respect to the following grammatical category.

This review of the literature on copula variability in AAVE and EBCs over the last thirty years has revealed a number of recurring themes, some of them interrelated. Most frustrating is the lack of a comparative base, since no single model of copula behaviour in EBCs has emerged. The few studies of creoles reveal no clear relationship among them, at least with respect to following grammatical category. There is also the unanswered question of the variable context of the copula in EBCs. Thus, it is difficult to substantiate arguments for similarity of AAVE to EBCs. All of these reasons are responsible for the absence of clear hypotheses about the nature of the linguistic consequences of prior creolization, at least as far as the copula is concerned. While the creole-origins hypothesis initially predicted a high correlation of zero with following adjectives, this

prediction was not confirmed by studies of any of the diaspora varieties. This discrepancy was then explained as a function of decreolization in the case of Liberian Settler English, but subsequent examination of this explanation revealed it to be *post hoc* and unmotivated by independent linguistic evidence. Moreover, the hypothesis of high correlation of following adjectives with zero copula has only been confirmed in one of the creole(-like) varieties investigated quantitatively (JC). Most strikingly, much attention has been given to the following grammatical category, whose effects are notoriously inconsistent, while the more consistent effect of subject type has never been highlighted or explained. In the remainder of this chapter, I put forward an alternative explanatory factor that the recurring reliance on the following grammatical category as a diagnostic of creole origin has obscured: prosodic structure.

#### 4.2. The Variable Context

The variable context of non-verbal predication is every present-tense declarative sentence in which the verb *be* was used or could have been used as a copula or an auxiliary. As in previous studies, I do not consider environments in which neither contraction nor zero can occur, such as infinitival environments, imperatives, yes/no and tag questions and clause-final position (see Labov 1969:69-73; Blake 1997). I also disregard past-tense contexts, as in (2), as well as ambiguous temporal reference, as in (3), since it is impossible in these cases to determine whether the full form of the verb would be *is* or *was*.

(2) And then uh- we thought we's in big city. (ANSE/053/065)

(3) When Mama was gone, that's when Papa used to take over. (ANSE/040/241)

Restricting the context to declaratives avoids the issue of variable non-inversion in questions (DeBose 1996; Van Herk 1999; Blake 1997:66-67). For example, in (4), because it is impossible to tell what position the full form would occupy, some of the factors cannot be coded.

- (4) What we going to do? (SAM/003/427)  
 = What *are* we going to do?  
 = What we *are* going to do?

In addition, I decided not to include tokens with *it/that/what* subjects, as in (5-7).

- (5) And when you are old *it's* something else. (SAM/003/229)  
 (6) Old aspirin, *that's* all they got. (ANSE/040/362)  
 (7) This is *what's* all the trouble. (ANSE/033/263)

Labov (1969:69-70) notes that such forms tend to be almost invariably contracted in AAVE, often as *i's/wha's/tha's* (but cf. Winford's [1992a] analysis of *i's*). Similarly, the results of both Meechan's (1996) analysis of contraction in Canadian English and Weldon's (1996) analysis of contraction and zero in Gullah show that including such forms can distort both the overall rate of contraction and the effect of the type of subject. These findings suggest that *it's/what's/that's* have become lexicalized in several varieties of English as well as in AAVE.

Finally, I excluded neutralization contexts (where contraction and zero are indistinguishable), as illustrated in (8-9) for *is* and *are*.

- (8) He('s) civil engineer, navy engineer. (SAM/001/125)  
 (9) They('re) ransacking all the time. (ANSE/063/842)

Since invariant *be* has also received a great deal of attention (e.g. Bailey & Maynor 1985; Ewers 1996), I initially also extracted every occurrence of uninflected *be*. However, the number of occurrences of this form in these dataset was so small (ANSE=21; SAM=14; ESR=1) that I have excluded it from the analysis, and focus only on inflected forms of *be*.

The total number of tokens extracted was 997 for ANSE, 941 for SAM, and 155 for the ESR.

### 4.3. Factor Groups

In addition to noting whether the copula occurred as full, contracted or zero, every token was coded for several factor groups, each representing a hypothesis about the linguistic constraints on variability.

#### 4.3.1. Morphological/Lexical

Previous studies have shown that the morpholexical properties of each underlying form of the copula (*is/s*, *am/m* and *are/re*) have different effects. In Poplack and Sankoff's (1987:307) SAM data, *is* contracts more than *am*, which contracts more than *are*. In Labov's (1969) AAVE data, *am* contracted so much that he did not consider it part of the variable context. To test whether the same effect obtained for my data, I coded every token, whether overt or zero, for its corresponding full standard form.

**Table 4.9: Cross-tabulation of overt forms of *be* with personal pronouns.**

	<i>I</i>	<i>he/she</i>	<i>we/you/they</i>
<b>ANSE</b>			
<i>am/m</i>	206	0	0
<i>is/s</i>	0	79	6
<i>are/re</i>	0	0	165
<b>Agreement:</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>96%</b>
<b>SAM</b>			
<i>am/m</i>	167	0	0
<i>is/s</i>	0	170	29
<i>are/re</i>	0	0	34
<b>Agreement:</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>54%</b>
<b>ESR</b>			
<i>am/m</i>	66	0	0
<i>is/s</i>	0	2	2
<i>are/re</i>	0	0	8
<b>Agreement:</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>80%</b>

A problem with coding this factor group is that these varieties have nonstandard subject-verb agreement (see Chapters 3 and 7; also Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991:327-331). Thus, it is unclear whether surface zeros are underlyingly *is* or *are*. In order to determine what degree of

nonstandard agreement obtained in this dataset, I cross-tabulated overt forms with personal pronoun subjects. Table 4.9 shows that there is categorically standard agreement for all pronouns except *we/you/they*. In ANSE and ESR, there are very high rates of agreement for these pronouns (96% and 80%, respectively), thus justifying the decision to code for the standard underlying form. However, the lower rate of agreement in SAM (54%) suggests that this factor could confound the analysis if the different underlying forms are not separated, a point to which I return in section 5.

#### 4.3.2. *Phonological*

These factor groups were coded because of Labov's (1969, 1995) claim that the effect of contraction is to reduce phonological structure. For example, a CVVC sequence would be reduced to CVC. However, in some cases, a CVCVC sequence would be reduced to CVCC, resulting in a consonant cluster, which AAVE tends to avoid. In this case, zero would be favoured (Labov 1969:106, 1995:44-5). The following phonological segment was coded only as a consonant or vowel, but the preceding segment was coded as [r], a sibilant, any other consonant, or a vowel, since Fasold and Nakano (1996) found preceding [r] to favour contraction highly in StdE and preceding sibilants to disfavour contraction strongly in both StdE and AAVE. Thus, we expect preceding vowels and [r] to favour contraction, and following consonants, especially sibilants, to favour zero.

#### 4.3.3. *Grammatical*

Each token was coded for whether the subject was a personal pronoun (e.g. *he/she, we/you/they*), other pronoun (*there/here, this/these*) or a NP, because of the subject type effect noted above.

The following grammatical category was also coded, despite the lack of clear predictions for this factor group. For example, if early AAE was more creole-like, we would expect higher rates of zero before adjectives. However, as I showed above, this prediction cannot be maintained, given the contradictory findings in various studies. Nevertheless, I adopted the traditional coding

of this factor (*V-ing, gonna, ADJ, LOC, NP*) and, following recent studies (e.g. Poplack & Sankoff 1987, Meechan 1996, Rickford 1996), I separated participles (9) from "true" adjectives (10).<sup>23</sup>

(9) The children today *are* **blessed**. (ANSE/008/208)

(10) The cotton root's **good** for plenty medicines. (SAM/002/721)

Following Poplack & Tagliamonte (1991), I initially separated following wh-clauses from following NPs, since they found a high rate of deletion in the former. However, this distinction was not justified by the distribution of the data.

#### 4.3.4. Prosodic

While the foregoing factors more or less replicate those of previous studies, the prosodic factors are an innovation of this study, at least as far as the copula is concerned. Given that the variable contraction of unstressed auxiliaries has been a feature of English for several hundred years (see, e.g., Saxon 1737/1971:25), and given the similarities between contraction and the more general phenomenon of vowel elision (Selkirk 1984), which is uncontroversially conditioned by prosody, it seems surprising that an explanation of copula variability (at least for contraction) has never been explored in prosodic structure. Prosodic and syntactic structure are crucially not isomorphic, but the former is based on information about the latter (Nespor & Vogel 1986:171, Selkirk 1986:373, 1990:180), which suggests that the effects of the grammatical factors might in fact be epiphenomena of constraints dictated by prosody. In this section, I outline the model of prosodic structure which I will use in my analysis.

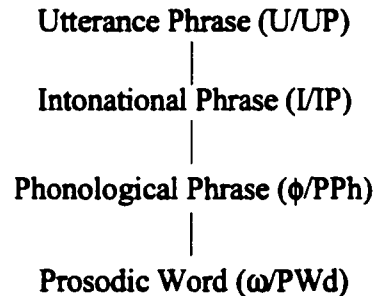
For the purposes of this analysis, I adopt the prosodic hierarchy outlined in Nespor and Vogel (1986), as shown in (10). Although Nespor and Vogel (1986) include a Clitic Group level between the Prosodic Word and the Phonological Phrase, recent analyses (e.g. Selkirk 1995,

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<sup>23</sup> Following participles such as *gone, grewed, and changed* (intransitives involving a change of state or location) were not considered because contraction here is ambiguous between *is* and *has*, reflecting an earlier stage in the grammaticization of the perfect tense in English (Tagliamonte 1996).

Booij 1996) argue against such a level. Therefore, I have excluded the clitic group from my analysis.

(10) *The Prosodic Hierarchy*



The levels that concern us are the Prosodic Word (PWd or  $\omega$ ) and the Phonological Phrase (PPh or  $\phi$ ). Selkirk (1986:385) argues that these levels are defined in terms of the edges of syntactic constituents: in English, it is the right edge of a lexical category (N, V or A) and the right edge of its maximal projection that define the edges of the PWd and the PPh, respectively, as demonstrated in (11) (structural details adapted from Selkirk 1986:387, 1990:193): (a) is the syntactic structure of the sentence, while (b) shows the edges relevant to the mapping of the prosodic structure in (c).

- (11)           The    dog                   licked    the    man.  
 a. [[[ Det ] [ Noun ]]NP [[ Verb ] [[ Det ] [ Noun ]]NP]VP]S  
 b.                                 ]w                                 ]w                                 ]w  
   ]Xmax   ]Xmax  
 c. (                                 )ω (                                 )ω (                                 )ω  
      (                                 )ϕ (                                 )ϕ

While lexical words map to PWds, the mapping of function words (e.g. auxiliaries, modals, complementizers) depends on their syntactic position (Selkirk 1995:440). Function words that are not emphasized and do not occur phrase-finally become a prosodic clitic to the following PWd(ibid.), as shown in (12).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> This structure violates the Strict Layer Hypothesis (SLH; Selkirk 1984:26, Nespor and Vogel 1986:7), which prohibits both the “nesting” and the “skipping” of prosodic levels, but recent work (e.g. Ladd 1986, Drescher 1994, Selkirk 1995, Booij 1996) suggests that the SLH can be minimally violated to satisfy other requirements. Jensen (1993; p.c.) has suggested that nested analysis (of either the Foot or the PWd) is possible for structures such as (12), but Selkirk (1995) offers evidence against nested PWds in such structures.

(12) [*function-word (lexical-word)*<sub>PWd</sub>] <sub>PPh</sub>

Since the copula is a function word, its prosodic behaviour follows from its position and its interaction (syntactic, phonological and prosodic) with adjacent elements. As a function word, the copula has a number of "strong" and "weak" allomorphs (Inkelas & Zec 1993:208):

	<b>Full</b>	<b>Reduced</b>	<b>Clitic</b>
<i>is</i>	ɪz	ɪz	z
<i>am</i>	əm/æm	əm	m
<i>are</i>	ɑr	ər	r

Full forms occur only when the copula is mapped to a PWd — that is, phrase-finally or emphatically (Selkirk 1984:400), but since these cases are invariant, I do not consider their prosodic structure here. Following (12), the reduced form is incorporated into the following PPh:

(13) [(Tom)<sub>ω</sub>] <sub>φ</sub> [ɪz (complaining)<sub>ω</sub>] <sub>φ</sub> (Inkelas & Zec 1993:218)

The contracted form is *enclitic*, subcategorizing for a PWd on its left (Inkelas 1989, Inkelas & Zec 1993:243, McElhinny 1993:383), and cliticizes to the *preceding* PWd, entailing resyllabification, as in (14).<sup>25</sup>

(14) a. [(Tom)<sub>ω</sub>] <sub>φ</sub> [ 'z (complaining)<sub>ω</sub>] <sub>φ</sub>  
 ↓↓  
 b. [(Tom'z)<sub>ω</sub>] <sub>φ</sub> [(complaining)<sub>ω</sub>] <sub>φ</sub>

I hypothesize that the structure of the preceding prosodic constituent accounts for the effect previously attributed to the subject type. The phonological literature on English auxiliaries makes several predictions about the effect of the preceding prosodic constituent, but it has little to say about the effect of the following prosodic constituent. Nevertheless, given the apparent significance of the following grammatical category, I hypothesize that the prosodic structure of the

<sup>25</sup> Note that a derivational conceptualization of resyllabification (i.e. an intermediate prosodic stage) is not crucial here. The important consideration is the mismatch between the syntactic and prosodic phrasing of the clitic.

following constituent is also relevant to the choice of variant, and may serve to explain this significance.

Note that operationalizing prosodic factor groups in the analysis of the copula is made difficult by the limited number of structures in which the variants appear (see Chapter 2). Unlike other variables whose prosodic effects have been investigated within the variationist framework (e.g. Poplack & Tagliamonte 1993, Silva 1994), the copula is restricted to one morphosyntactic environment: the left edge of a VP, which maps to the left edge of a PPh. If copula tokens were coded in the prosodic environments in which they appear on the surface (e.g. (4) and (5b)), there would be no variation, since the contracted form would always occur with a preceding PWd. Therefore, I assumed that the choice of variant occurs at a point after the mapping of prosodic structure, but before resyllabification.

Under the Strict Layer Hypothesis (Selkirk 1984:26, Nespor & Vogel 1986:7), the preceding constituent is always a PPh (except for pronouns, as I explain in the next paragraph). Since my hypothesis is that the effects of the preceding prosodic environment are related to the complexity or branchingness of the PPh, I coded each PPh as either "simple" (a single PWd, as in (15)) or "complex" (a PWd plus additional functional elements or other PWds, as in (16)).

(15) [ (Tansy)<sub>ω</sub> ]<sub>φ</sub> 's really good. (ANSE/014/293)

(16) [ (The milk)<sub>ω</sub> in (town)<sub>ω</sub> ]<sub>φ</sub> is fifteen. (SAM/003/69)

Subject pronouns are syntactic NPs, but prosodically, they behave like function words (Selkirk 1984:346; Inkelas & Zec 1993:206; Selkirk 1995) and procliticize to the following PPh (17).

(17) [ (You)<sub>c1</sub>'re (going)<sub>ω</sub> in (debt )<sub>ω</sub> ]<sub>φ</sub> for what you want. (ESR/006/015)

I coded all subject pronouns, as well as subjects that normally do not receive primary stress, such as expletive *there*, as a proclitic. Constituents longer than a PPh, such as

nonrestrictive relative clauses and parentheticals, as in (18), were coded as a preceding IP (Selkirk 1984; Nespor & Vogel 1986:188; Taglicht 1998).

(18) A vision, [you know]<sub>IP</sub>, is not like a dream. (ANSE/008/536)

The following prosodic constituent was more difficult to operationalize. Since the copula always surfaces at the left edge of a PPh, the following constituent is always internal to that PPh. I coded the PPh as simple if the following constituent was a lexical category, as in (19), and as complex if it was a functional category (e.g. *gonna*, determiner, quantifier), as in (20).

(19) but tomorrow the tourist boat  $\phi$ [  $\emptyset$   $\omega$ (coming) ]. (SAM/010/767)

(20) You have a feeling when something  $\phi$ [*'s gonna*  $\omega$ (happen)]. (ANSE/046/668)

One exception to this coding was clause-final function words, as in (21).

(21) Through the field there where Doug  $\phi$ [  $\emptyset$   $\text{mc}$ (at)]. (ANSE/032/042)

Although such words are phrase-final and bear stress (Nespor & Vogel 1986:179, Inkelas & Zec 1993:221), they do not otherwise qualify as PWds (cf. Selkirk 1995:454-5) and were coded separately. A number of tokens did not fit the other categorizations, such as parentheticals, slight interruptions, hesitations and prolongations, as in (22).

(22) The weight  $\phi$ [*is—* IP[ pulling them down. (ANSE/039/516)

Despite the fact that these junctures differ from the characterization of preceding IPs, in that they are truncations (what Taglicht [1998:183] refers to as "IP breaks") arising from performance errors and thus do not constitute well-formed prosodic boundaries, I classed all such tokens as following IPs.

The first prediction made by these factors is that preceding elements which are prosodically simple (i.e. nonbranching: proclitics and simple PPhs) favour contraction more than those which are prosodically complex (complex PPhs, IPs). Although the theoretical literature makes no claims

about prosodic constraints on zero, the second prediction is that zero is an additional strategy for avoiding prosodic complexity where contraction is disfavoured; in other words, complex preceding and following prosodic constituents favour zero more than simple ones.

#### 4.4. Results

##### 4.4.1. Overall Distribution

I analyzed all factor groups first individually and then together using GoldVarb 2 (Rand & Sankoff 1990), a variable-rule application for the Macintosh. Table 4.10 shows the overall distribution of copula occurrence by underlying form. Because *am* contracts so much, especially in ANSE and the ESR, it does not figure in the ensuing analysis.

**Table 4.10: Overall distribution of the realization of the copula by verb form.**

	Full (%)	Contracted (%)	Zero (%)	Total N
<b>ANSE</b>				
<i>am/'m</i>	1	98	1	208
<i>is/'s</i>	31	48	20	486
<i>are/'re</i>	8	53	39	303
Overall %:	18	60	22	997
<b>SAM</b>				
<i>am/'m</i>	13	77	10	186
<i>is/'s</i>	48	38	13	582
<i>are/'re</i>	20	10	71	173
Overall %:	36	41	23	941
<b>ESR</b>				
<i>am/'m</i>	1	96	3	68
<i>is/'s</i>	46	30	24	37
<i>are/'re</i>	10	12	78	50
Overall %:	15	53	32	155

##### 4.4.2. Method of Calculation

Recently it has been argued (Rickford et al. 1991) that the method of calculation affects the results obtained, and that the choice of method is determined by the analyst's assumptions about the linguistic processes giving rise to surface variability. For example, since the environments in

which deletion can occur are a subset of those of contraction, Labov (1969:88, 1995) regarded contraction and zero as related and thus chose the following method of calculation:<sup>26</sup>

$$(23) \quad \text{a. Labov Contraction:} \quad \frac{C + D}{F + C + D} \quad \text{b. Labov Deletion:} \quad \frac{D}{F + C + D}$$

'Labov Contraction' includes both contracted and zero tokens, while 'Labov Deletion' can only operate on those tokens which have already contracted. This relation is apparently supported by the similarity of factors which affect contracted and zero forms. For example, Poplack & Sankoff (1987:308) found contraction and zero in SAM to be virtually parallel in terms of the following grammatical category. Similarly, Poplack & Tagliamonte (1991) point out that the following grammatical categories which favour zero copula most (*gonna* and *V-ing*) are also most favourable to contracted copula in more standard varieties of English (see also McElhinny 1993; Meechan 1996; Walker & Meechan 1998).

Rickford et al. (1991) contrast Labov Contraction/Deletion with Straight Contraction/Deletion, in which contracted and zero tokens are calculated out of all possible environments:

$$(24) \quad \text{a. Straight contraction:} \quad \frac{C}{F + C + D} \quad \text{b. Straight deletion:} \quad \frac{D}{F + C + D}$$

They show that the ordering for the following grammatical category in (Palo Alto) AAVE is reversed depending on which method is used (Rickford et al. 1991:114; cf. Labov 1969:732-733), and outline three possible rule orderings for contraction, deletion and insertion (Rickford et al. 1991:120-4; the first two orderings were already discussed by Labov [1969:728]):

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<sup>26</sup> C = number of contracted tokens, D = number of zero tokens, F = number of full tokens.

<i>Case 1: Phonological</i>	<i>Case 2: Grammatical</i>	<i>Case 3: Insertion</i>
1. Contraction	1. Deletion	1. Insertion
əz → z / ...	əz → Ø / ...	Ø → əz / ...
2. Deletion	2. Contraction	2. Contraction
z → Ø / ...	əz → z / ...	əz → z / ...

In Case 1, zero results from contraction feeding deletion (Labov Contraction and Deletion). In Case 2, contraction applies to forms which have not first been deleted (Straight Contraction and Deletion). In Case 3, consistent with the creole-origins hypothesis, there is no underlying copula: full forms are first inserted, then contracted. Rickford et al. [1991:123] erroneously formulate the insertion rule as Labov Contraction, but the correct formula is as in (25a), while the Case 3 contraction rule corresponds to what they call Romaine Contraction (25b.)

<p>(25) a. <i>Insertion</i></p> $\frac{F + C}{F + C + D}$	<p>b. <i>Romaine contraction:</i></p> $\frac{C}{F + C}$
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As Rickford et al. (1991) correctly point out, the method of calculation and the results differ depending on which case the analyst assumes.

However, I cannot agree with some of the assumptions made by Labov and Rickford et al. First, the restriction of zero to environments of contraction (e.g. Labov 1969:69-73, 1995:39), which led Labov and others to view the two forms as outcomes of the same process, may in fact have more to do with universal requirements of phrase structure (Ferguson 1971; Winford 1992a:50) or, as I will argue, prosody (see Nespor & Vogel 1986:168), rather than with a specific relationship between contracted and zero forms. Second, there is no one-to-one mapping of methods of calculation to hypotheses about rules or their ordering: a large number of linguistic analyses can correspond to a small number of possible statistical analyses (Sankoff & Rousseau 1989:6). Since the three cases posited by Rickford et al. do not exhaust the number of possible linguistic assumptions behind the different methods of calculation, there is no guarantee that obtaining the results the analyst expected justifies his/her theoretical assumptions. Third, the creole-origin hypothesis as it has appeared in the literature makes the assumption that there is

underlyingly either an overt or no copula, the former associated with English and the latter with EBCs. We have already seen that the latter part of this assumption is premature, given the lack of consensus on copula behaviour in EBCs. Moreover, such assumptions do not reflect recent semantic theory, which argues that, even in English, the copula is only introduced to satisfy tense/agreement requirements of non-verbal predicates and is not underlyingly present (e.g. Hengeveld 1992:32-33; Mufwene 1989, 1990:790-1; Bouchard 1995:470). In environments of non-verbal predication, English varieties with a zero variant have three options (a full copula, a contracted copula or nothing), whereas other varieties have only two.

For these reasons, I have determined the appropriate method of calculation on the basis of statistical rather than theoretical assumptions. Following Sankoff and Rousseau (1989:4-7), I performed a series of calculations on the data with the same set of conditions, obtaining results for every possible method of calculation (Labov, Straight, Romaine, Insertion), and compared the log likelihoods for each run. For these data, the greatest log likelihoods were consistently those of the sum of the log likelihoods of  $\{\{F\}, \{C, D\}\}$  and  $\{C, D\}$ , indicating that a rule ordering  $F \rightarrow (C \rightarrow D)$  was the most likely. On this basis, I chose Labov Contraction and Deletion as the most appropriate method of calculation.

#### 4.4.3. Interaction

A first important finding is that, regardless of the labels attached to the factors, they correspond to different prosodic configurations. This correspondence resulted in two types of interaction which initially made it impossible to obtain valid results with GoldVarb's multiple-regression feature. The first is between the subject type and the preceding prosodic constituent: as Table 4.11 shows, personal pronoun subjects are always proclitics, and nominal subjects are virtually always PWds or PPhs, while other pronominal subjects (*there*, demonstratives) can be either proclitics or PWds, but not PPhs. To factor out this interaction, I combined these two factors as one (Preceding Grammatical/Prosodic Context).

**Table 4.11: Cross-tabulation of subject type by preceding prosodic constituent.**

	NP	Personal Pronoun	Other Pronoun
Proclitic subject	0	778	234
Simple PPh	333	0	22
Complex PPh	235	2	3
Intonational Phrase	19	2	2

Further cross-tabulation revealed interaction between this new factor and that of the preceding phonological segment: as Table 4.12 shows, the most serious effect is that proclitic pronouns end exclusively in vowels. Based on a series of runs to determine whether any factors patterned similarly, I first collapsed the two factors internally, to obviate the problem of low representation evident in many of the cells in Table 4.12: the preceding segment was reduced to two values, vowels/[r] and consonants/sibilants, and all proclitics were grouped together. I then combined the factors with each other, and classed preceding IPs, whatever the phonological segment, as one category (Preceding Grammatical/Prosodic Context & Phonological Segment).

**Table 4.12: Cross-tabulation of preceding segment by prosodic status of subject.**

	Proclitic (Pronoun)	Proclitic (Other)	Simple PPh (Noun)	Simple PPh (Other)	Complex PPh	IP
[r]	0	102	17	20	26	4
Vowel	778	27	67	2	37	9
Sibilant	0	69	55	18	42	4
Other Consonant	0	17	191	1	136	6

**Table 4.13: Cross-tabulation of following prosodic constituent by following grammatical category.**

	Phrase-Final Function Wd	Prosodic Word	Complex PPh	Intonational Phrase
V-ing	2	303	34	4
gonna	0	0	113	0
Locative	26	37	153	1
Adjective	1	213	99	3
Participle	1	64	36	1
NP	3	407	116	12

The second type of interaction was between the following grammatical category and the following prosodic constituent. As shown in Table 4.13, *gonna* correlates highly with a complex PPh, and phrase-final function words are almost exclusively locatives. To overcome this interaction, I combined these two factors (Following Grammatical Category & Prosodic Context), and grouped phrase-final function words with complex PPhs.

#### 4.4.4. Multivariate Analysis

Although the underlying form of the copula was selected as significant in initial runs, I found in separate runs for *is* and *are* that contracted and zero *are* occur only when the preceding element is a proclitic/pronoun ending in a vowel or [r]. Because of this restricted distribution, I consider the results for *is* and *are* separately.

##### 4.4.4.1. *are*

Once tokens of *is/s* were eliminated, it was found that contracted *'re* occurs only when the preceding segment is a vowel or when the preceding subject is a pronominal clitic. Thus, the only remaining factor group to investigate was the collapsed factor group of the following grammatical category and the following prosodic constituent, but this factor was not selected as significant in any of the varieties. This finding shows that *'re* is much more restricted in its distribution than *'s* and is exclusively conditioned by phonological considerations.

##### 4.4.4.2. *is*

The results of multivariate analysis of *is* in all three varieties of Early AAE are shown in Table 4.14.<sup>27</sup> For each variety, there is one variable-rule run for contraction and one for zero. To illustrate the different effects of the interacting factors, within each factor group I have separated the original factors along different axes. Note that, once the analysis was restricted to *is*, the ESR data contained insufficient data (N=37) to perform multivariate analysis.

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<sup>27</sup> In the SAM data, following phonological segment interacted so much with the other two factors that it was impossible to obtain a valid result. It was excluded for comparability with the ANSE findings.

**Table 4.14: Factors contributing to the occurrence of contracted and zero is in Samaná English (SAM) and African Nova Scotian English (ANSE) (Labov Contraction ( $\frac{C}{F+C+D}$ ) and Deletion ( $\frac{D}{C+D}$ )).**

	SAM		ANSE	
	CONTRACTED	ZERO	CONTRACTED	ZERO
Corrected mean:	.564	.166	.874	.241
Total N:	556	287	465	334
<b>Preceding Grammatical/Prosodic Context &amp; Phonological Segment</b>				
	Vowel/[r]	Consonant	Vowel/[r]	Consonant
Proclitic, Personal Pronoun	.91	no data	.97	no data
Proclitic, Other Pronoun	.45	.21	no data	.94
Simple $\phi$ , Other Pronoun	.48	no data	100%	no data
Simple $\phi$ , Noun	.41	.10	.42	.66
Complex $\phi$	.21	.07	.22	.63
IP	0%	no data	.01	—
		71		70
<b>Following Grammatical Category &amp; Prosodic Context</b>				
	Simple $\phi$	Complex $\phi$	Simple $\phi$	Complex $\phi$
gonna	no data	.97	no data	.64
Verb-ing	.83	.89	.76	.94
Adjective	.54	.20	100%	.24
Locative	.66	.46	.41	.67
Participle	.33	.42	.38	0%
NP	.36	.47	.28	.19
IP	0%	no data	.27	.35
		77	.05	no data
		73		75
<b>Following Phonological Segment</b>				
Vowel	.62	excluded	[ ]	[ ]
Consonant	.45	excluded	[ ]	[ ]
		17		

In both ANSE and SAM, the preceding context was selected as significant, both for contraction and zero. For contraction, two trends can be observed, one prosodic and one phonological. Prosodically complex elements tend to disfavour the contracted form: a preceding IP disfavors contraction highly, while proclitic personal pronouns favour contraction almost categorically, and all other categories disfavour. The conspicuous "no data" gaps in the table demonstrate the impossibility of extricating the effects of prosodic and grammatical factors from those of phonological factors. Nevertheless, a robust phonological effect is evident in those categories in which a comparison is possible, with a preceding vowel or [r] favouring contraction more than a preceding consonant.

Zero shows complementary results, not only in the preceding phonological segment but also in the preceding prosodic/grammatical constituent: those categories that favour contraction disfavour zero, and vice versa. Phonologically, zero is favoured more by a preceding consonant than by a preceding vowel or [r]. Thus, the argument that contraction and zero arise from different historical processes because they are subject to significantly different constraints (e.g. Rickford et al. 1991:124-7) misses the point: the difference in results between the two forms is a result of the complementary nature of their application. While contraction is a means of reducing prosodic complexity, zero copula, however it originated, appears to have developed in Early AAE as an additional means of reducing prosodic complexity in contexts where contraction is disfavoured.

As the bottom half of Table 4.14 shows, the following constituent was also selected as significant in both ANSE and SAM, although an interpretation of the results is not immediately apparent. As in previous studies, *V-ing* and *gonna* favour both contraction and zero, while NP disfavors and ADJ and LOC have intermediate effects. When these categories are separated according to the complexity of the following PPh, as I have done, different rankings emerge, even within the same dataset. Some grammatical categories are associated exclusively with certain prosodic constituents: for example, *gonna* and complex PPhs. More notably, the ordering of the contentious categories, ADJ and LOC, is sometimes *reversed* according to whether they occur in a simple or a complex PPh, as in Table 4.14. Thus, the hierarchy of the following grammatical

category depends not only on grammatical structure, but also on the complexity of the prosodic environment, further evidence that contraction and zero are strategies for reducing prosodic complexity. These findings reveal the problematic nature of the following grammatical category factor: the fluctuating rankings noted in many studies may have less to do with processes of decreolization than with the interaction between grammatical and prosodic structure.

**Table 4.15: Prosodic and phonological factor groups contributing to the occurrence of contracted and zero in early African American English.**

	CONTRACTED		ZERO	
	ANSE	SAM	ANSE	SAM
Corrected mean:	.848	.652	.319	.189
Total N:	309	464	215	274
<b>PRECEDING PHONOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT<sup>28</sup></b>				
Vowel/[r]	.65	.60	[.47]	.45
Consonant	.29	.31	[.57]	.86
Range:	36	29		41
<b>PRECEDING PROSODIC CONSTITUENT</b>				
Proclitic	.93	.80	.31	[.45]
Simple $\phi$	.22	.23	.57	[.70]
Complex $\phi$	.31	.10	.75	[.61]
IP	.01	—	—	[—]
Range:	92	70	44	
<b>FOLLOWING PROSODIC CONSTITUENT</b>				
Simple $\phi$	.70	[.49]	[.50]	[.50]
Complex $\phi$	.41	[.52]	[.50]	[.50]
IP	.07	[—]	[.70]	[—]
Range:	63			
<b>FOLLOWING PHONOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT</b>				
Vowel/[r]	[.39]	[.56]	.34	.22
Consonant	[.54]	[.47]	.57	.68
Range:			23	46

[ ] = not selected as significant

Given the inextricable nature of the grammatical and prosodic factors, for the remainder of this analysis I will disregard the grammatical factors and focus solely on phonology and prosody.

<sup>28</sup> I excluded preceding sibilants from this analysis because of the near-categorical lack of contraction we found in this environment.

(However, as I show below, ongoing research into this area may allow these factors to be compared in future studies.) Table 4.15 shows the initial results for prosodic and phonological factor groups in ANSE and SAM. Note that, for contraction, the preceding prosodic constituent is selected as significant for both varieties, with almost identical patterns: proclitics favour, simple PPhs disfavour or have intermediate effects, and complex PPhs and Intonational Phrases disfavour. This pattern again supports my hypothesis that prosodic complexity conditions contraction: the more prosodically complex the preceding constituent, the more contraction is disfavoured. The sole exception to this pattern is ANSE, in which complex PPhs favour contraction more than simple ones. However, this variety is also the only one in which the following prosodic constituent was also selected as significant.

The results for zero are less straightforward: in ANSE, the preceding prosodic constituent was selected as significant, whereas in SAM, it was the preceding phonological segment. However, note that the pattern for both factor groups is exactly the opposite of that of contraction: consonants favour zero, while vowels disfavour; and prosodically complex constituents favour zero. In both varieties, the following segment was selected as significant, with consonants favouring zero.

On the basis of these initial results, I hypothesized that the prosodic factor groups themselves might also be intertwined, along the lines of Inkelas and Zec's (1995) contention that what conditions contraction is the prosodic configuration of the entire sentence. To test this effect, I combined the prosodic factors into one. Using Zec and Inkelas's (1990) argument that, in English, sentential prosodic structure differs depending on whether the subject and/or predicate branches, I coded each token according to possible prosodic sentence structures, as shown in (8). Initial calculations showed that these structures fell into two types. Type 1 includes sentences with clitic subjects and sentences with nonbranching subjects and predicates. These sentences consist of one PPh. Type 2 includes sentences in which one or both of the subject and predicate are branching, and consist of two PPhs. The crucial difference between these two types is the presence of a PPh boundary between the copula and the subject. This boundary would deter the

resyllabification necessary for contraction. Therefore, we predict that Type 2 sentences, in which a PPh boundary intervenes, should disfavour contraction.

(8) *Prosodic Sentence Structures*

TYPE 1: SINGLE PPH (NO PPH BOUNDARY TO CROSS)

Clitic Subject

[ (subject)<sub>c</sub> | **COP** (predicate)<sub>ω</sub> ]<sub>φ</sub>

[ (subject)<sub>c</sub> | **COP** (predicate)<sub>ω</sub> (predicate)<sub>ω</sub> ]<sub>φ</sub>

Nonbranching Subject + Nonbranching Predicate

[ (subject)<sub>ω</sub> **COP** (predicate)<sub>ω</sub> ]<sub>φ</sub>

TYPE 2: TWO PPHS (PPH BOUNDARY TO CROSS)

Nonbranching Subject + Branching Predicate

[ (subject)<sub>ω</sub> ]<sub>φ</sub> [ **COP** (predicate)<sub>ω</sub> (predicate)<sub>ω</sub> ]<sub>φ</sub>

Branching Subject

[ (subject)<sub>ω</sub> (subject)<sub>ω</sub> ]<sub>φ</sub> [ **COP** (predicate)<sub>ω</sub> ]<sub>φ</sub>

[ (subject)<sub>ω</sub> (subject)<sub>ω</sub> ]<sub>φ</sub> [ **COP** (predicate)<sub>ω</sub> (predicate)<sub>ω</sub> ]<sub>φ</sub>

The results are shown in Table 4.16. Note the strong effect of the preceding segment, with vowels favouring contraction and consonants disfavouring. More interestingly, we see a consistent effect of the prosodic sentence structure in both varieties, with Type 2 disfavouring contraction. Thus, my prediction that a PPh boundary acts to block contraction appears to be supported. Furthermore, this finding accounts for the selection of the following prosodic category in ANSE in Table 4.15. The exact opposite pattern is seen for zero copula. Preceding consonants and Type 2 sentences favour zero. In addition, following consonants favour zero.

**Table 4.16: Prosodic and phonological factors contributing to the occurrence of contracted and zero is in early African American English. (Collapsed: Preceding and Following Prosodic Constituent.)**

	CONTRACTED		ZERO	
	ANSE	SAM	ANSE	SAM
Corrected mean	.750	.597	.307	.186
Total N	309	464	215	274
<b>PRECEDING PHONOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT</b>				
Vowel/[r]	.67	.70	.44	.46
Consonant	.27	.15	.65	.80
Range:	40	55	21	34
<b>SENTENTIAL PROSODIC STRUCTURE<sup>29</sup></b>				
Type 1 (One $\phi$ )	.53	.60	.45	.47
Type 2 (Two $\phi$ s)	.46	.21	.60	.77
Range:	7	39	15	30
<b>FOLLOWING PHONOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT</b>				
Vowel	[.51]	.61	.31	.21
Consonant	[.50]	.45	.58	.70
Range:		16	27	49

[ ] = not selected as significant

Thus, both contracted and zero copula are conditioned by segmental *and* prosodic factors. Contraction is blocked by a preceding consonant, which supports Labov's (1969) phonological explanation that contraction is disfavoured in environments where consonant clusters would be created. Similarly, contraction is blocked by the intervention of prosodic boundaries at the PPh level. Therefore, my initial explanation of contraction as a strategy for reducing prosodic complexity would more accurately be re-stated as a strategy for reducing the complexity of PPhs, perhaps analogous to liaison phenomena like that found in French. Thus, I suggest that those dialects that have zero copula as a variant have an additional means of reducing both consonant clusters and PPh complexity in contexts where contraction is disfavoured.

<sup>29</sup> I excluded both preceding and following IPs from this analysis, because their boundaries do not appear to play the same role in blocking contraction that PPh boundaries do. Also, it is not clear that our coding of IPs corresponds exactly to IP boundaries (as opposed to IP breaks; see Taglicht 1998:183).

#### 4.5. Summary

In this chapter, I have shown that the near-exclusive focus on the following grammatical category in the literature on copula deletion has either ignored or downplayed the significance of other factors, such as the type of subject or the prosodic structure of the sentence, which might offer a linguistically more meaningful explanation for the observed variability.

Arguing for a creole origin for zero copula in AAVE on the basis of the following grammatical category requires a thorough understanding of copula behaviour in EBCs and clear predictions about its linguistic patterning. However, there is no consensus on the behaviour of the copula in the creole literature, and even recent variationist studies of creole varieties have not succeeded in uncovering a single, consistent pattern of copula behaviour, at least with respect to the following grammatical category. I have argued that explaining this inconsistency by appealing to processes of decreolization is *ad hoc* and not based on independent evidence. To these problems we can add the different definitions of the variable context, different methods of calculation and the question of whether the context of copula variability in EBCs and English are strictly commensurable.

The study reported in this chapter not only replicated the factors investigated in previous studies, but also introduced factors based on recent work in prosodic phonology (Selkirk 1984; Nespor & Vogel 1986; Inkelas & Zec 1993, 1995). I hypothesized that the prosodic structure of the sentence accounts for the effect previously attributed to the subject type and the following grammatical category. In addition, acknowledging recent concerns (Rickford et al. 1991) that the choice of the method of calculation can influence the results, I determined the appropriate method of calculation on the basis of statistical analysis.

Two initial findings have illustrated the need to separate the different underlying forms of the copula from each other and the interdependence of several factors. Apart from being restricted to first person singular pronoun subjects, *am* was almost categorically contracted. Similarly, contracted *are* occurred only when the preceding element was a proclitic/pronoun ending in a

vowel or [r]. In addition, the prosodic structure was found to be highly intertwined with both phonological and grammatical categories.

Focussing on the conditioning of *is*, contraction was found to be favoured by a preceding prosodically simple element, while deletion had complementary results. Initial results for the following prosodic constituent were less clearcut. Because of the interdependence of grammatical and prosodic factors, subsequent analysis focussed solely on phonology and prosody.

Hypothesizing that the prosodic factor groups themselves might be intertwined, I classified sentential prosodic structure as one of two types, on the basis of the branchingness of the subject and predicate. Results revealed a consistent cross-variety effect, with sentences consisting of one PPh favouring contraction and those with two PPhs favouring deletion. I interpreted this result as evidence that a PPh boundary intervening between the subject and predicate acts to block contraction, revising my initial explanation of contraction as a reduction of prosodic complexity to a reduction of the complexity of PPhs. Thus, prosodic structure offers a linguistic explanation for both the contraction and the deletion of the copula, suggesting that Early AAE developed copula deletion as an additional means of reducing both consonant clusters and PPh complexity in contexts where contraction was disfavoured. In Chapter 6, I discuss the implications of these findings for variationist methodology and for the origins debate.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE PRESENT

#### 5.0. Introduction

In contrast with the copula, the present has figured less prominently in the origins debate, although not all variables of the present are created equal. A great deal of research has focussed on determining the patterning and conditioning of verbal *-s*, which, as the examples in (1) show, is variable across the grammatical paradigm in AAE.

- (1) a. If I *go-Ø* to a lake in- uh- in a car and a lake is handy, I *get-s* all nerved up.  
(ANSE/016:35-6)
- b. And you *put-Ø* that in there and *give-Ø* it to your child, they *vomit-s*.  
(SAM/002:994-5)

Various studies of verbal *-s* have adduced their findings as evidence for a creole (e.g. Pitts 1981) or English (e.g. Schneider 1983) origin for AAE. Meanwhile, other variables, such as the progressive and nonstandard *do*-support, illustrated in (2), have largely gone uninvestigated.

- (2) a. I *try* my best to serve my master. I'm I- *trying* my best to serve my uh, heavenly father, try- *trying* my best to serve God. (ESR/011:139-41)
- b. And I *does enjoy* certain of his show. (ESR/006:318)

This almost exclusive focus on one linguistic feature at the expense of all others is not unusual, as we have seen with the focus on the following grammatical category in studies of the copula (Chapter 4), but given the number of studies on the present in AAVE and other nonstandard varieties of English (see Section 5.6), it is surprising that none have ever considered widening the scope of research to include other morphosyntactic markers. This lacuna is all the more evident when we consider the importance of other morphosyntactic markers besides verbal *-s* in the history of English (e.g. Baugh & Cable 1978; see Section 5.3) and in EBCs (e.g. Singler 1990; see Section 5.2).

As I suggested in Chapter 1, there are at least two reasons for this exclusive focus on verbal *-s*. The first is the salience, or noticeability, of its variability to speakers of more standard varieties of English, where such variability is negligible or absent. Variationist studies often choose variables for analysis, either implicitly or explicitly, on the basis of differences between standard and nonstandard features (cf. Wolfram 1993:204; Christian et al. 1988). While this consideration does not necessarily invalidate such studies, it does tend to exclude from analysis those variables which, while patterning superficially like those in Standard English, may be generated by quite different underlying grammatical systems (cf. the future in Early AAE [Poplack & Tagliamonte 1999, in press]). Moreover, the isolated study of individual features can often obscure their role in the larger system (cf. Wolfram 1999; Winford 1992b).

The second reason has to do with the difficulty of defining the variable context for other morphosyntactic features. The variable context of verbal *-s* is relatively straightforward: present-tense verb forms, either unmarked or marked with *-s*. As I have discussed in Chapter 3, the traditional method for defining the variable context involves delimiting the set of variants as a means of isolating their common function. Logically, then, if we cannot identify exactly what the variants *are*, we cannot isolate their common function. As we will see, this problem is most apparent in determining the environment(s) in which the progressive can vary with the simple present.

In this chapter, I focus on the morphosyntactic expression of present temporal reference in verbal predicates in Early AAE. This expression is generally conveyed in two ways: via the inflectional/periphrastic component (e.g. verbal *-s* and the auxiliaries *do* and *be*) and the distinction between the simple and participial forms of the verb. I begin by reviewing the literature on these morphosyntactic features in AAE (historical and contemporary) and contrast the claims of aspectual conditioning in these varieties with the treatment of the present in EBCs. In order to balance the comparison, I then outline the historical development of the morphosyntactic expression of the present in English from Old and Middle English through Early Modern English to modern standard and nonstandard varieties. In reviewing the historical development of these features, I draw not

only on historical studies, but also on contemporaneous prescriptive and descriptive grammars, where possible. Finally, I briefly review the semantic considerations of tense, temporal reference from the perspective of descriptive grammar and theoretical semantics. This review of the literature from these various perspectives is used to inform my analysis of the present temporal reference system in Early AAE. Defining the initial context of analysis according to temporal reference, I systematically examine the distribution of each of its major morphosyntactic exponents and determine which of the factors extracted from the historical and semantic literature condition their occurrence.

### **5.1. The Present and the Origins Debate**

In this section, I provide an overview of the history of the study of the present in AAVE. As I have noted, prior studies of the present in AAVE have focussed almost exclusively on the variable occurrence of verbal *-s* across the grammatical paradigm, and have paid little attention to other features of the present, such as the progressive.

The first studies of verbal *-s* in AAVE characterized its use as hypercorrection. Under this view, AAVE speakers trying to emulate a Standard English agreement system foreign to their grammar inserted *-s* in "odd, unpredictable and idiosyncratic positions" (Labov et al. 1968:165). Two types of evidence apparently supported this conclusion. The first was the overall distribution of *-s*: it occurred on grammatical persons other than third singular, as well as on nonfinite verbs and with invariant *be* (i.e. *be's*), and was categorically absent with certain lexical items (e.g. *got*) (Labov et al. 1968). The second was the absence of style-shifting and conditioning by the preceding/following phonological environment, both of which characterized other variables, such as postvocalic /r/ and the deletion of cluster-final [t] and [d] (Labov et al. 1968; Wolfram 1969:136-7; Fasold 1972:125-6). This evidence led to the conclusion that third singular *-s* was absent from the underlying grammar of AAVE (Labov et al. 1968:164).

This conclusion apparently stemmed from certain methodological principles and operative assumptions of early variationist research. Absence of phonological conditioning was taken as evidence of hypercorrection, which meant that the feature was not part of the underlying grammar.

However, as Fasold (1972:145) observes, the absence of phonological conditioning indicates only that the feature is not a *phonological* variable. Similarly, the lack of stylistic stratification implies that the variable is not socially significant. But neither fact says anything about its membership in the underlying grammar (Fasold 1972:144). In addition, the comparative base available to early variationist research was limited to the (relatively) standard English of New York City (Labov et al. 1968) and Detroit (Wolfram 1969), in which *-s* functions in its standard role as an agreement marker in third person. Yet, as we will see (below and Section 5.3), verbal *-s* has been far more variable across the grammatical paradigm in historical and regional varieties of English than it is in modern, standard varieties. Despite these considerations, there was implicit evidence in the findings of this early research for conditioning of other linguistic factors. Wolfram (1969:139) observed what he called a "hierarchy of hypercorrection" according to the grammatical context, with most *-s* in third singular, less in third plural, even less in non-third person and least in nonfinite verbs. Since hypercorrection is characterized by lack of systematicity, we would not expect it to exhibit a hierarchy. Thus, the focus of early researchers on phonological and stylistic considerations led them to overlook the possibility of other types of linguistic conditioning.

Subsequent research on verbal *-s* has tried to determine exactly which linguistic factors condition its occurrence. Contrary to the early research discussed above, there does appear to be phonological conditioning, though its effects have proven inconsistent and have not been tested in many varieties of AAE. For example, Schneider (1989:70-1) found that *-s* was lower after sibilants and prior to a pause in the Ex-Slave Narratives, while Poplack and Tagliamonte (1989:65) found preceding vowels to favour *-s* but no effect of the following environment in Samaná English and the Ex-Slave Recordings. Poplack and Tagliamonte (1989:64) also noted that syllabic forms ([əz]) (i.e. following a sibilant) favour *-s* over nonsyllabic forms ([s], [z]) for these varieties, an effect that has been confirmed for Liberian Settler English (Singler 1997) and for third-person contexts in African Nova Scotian English (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991:329). Thus, while there may be phonological constraints on *-s*, they do not appear to operate consistently across grammatical persons and varieties.

The type of subject has also proved to be an important consideration, but it is not clear whether this effect is due to the grammatical category of the subject, its size or its ambiguity as singular or plural. One effect first noted by Bailey, Maynor and Cukor-Avila (1989) for AAVE (Texas) and by Poplack and Tagliamonte (1989:66) for Samaná English and the Ex-Slave Recordings is the grammatical category of the subject: full NPs favour *-s* over pronouns. This effect has been confirmed in studies of nineteenth century AAE correspondence (Montgomery & Fuller 1996:217-18; Montgomery et al. 1993:346-7) and in African Nova Scotian English (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991:330), but not in Liberian Settler English (Singler 1997). This effect appears to have been weakening in AAVE more recently (Cukor-Avila 1997). Poplack and Tagliamonte (1989:66) also noted for Samaná English and the Ex-Slave Recordings that "heavy" NPs (containing a relative clause) favoured *-s* over other NP subjects. This effect has not been found in other AAE varieties (e.g. Montgomery et al. 1993:347-8; Singler 1997), but this may have to do with sparseness of data (cf. Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991:330) as well as the different ways that "heaviness" of subject have been defined in the literature (e.g. Wolfram & Christian 1976:78, 83; Bailey & Ross 1988:200; Christian et al. 1988:115-16; Clarke 1997). Finally, there is variability of *-s*-marking with collective nouns, such as *people*, which historically have been characterized by both singular and plural interpretation (see Section 5.3.3). Where such nouns have been investigated in studies of verbal *-s*, they have not been found to have an effect in AAVE (Fasold 1972:129) or have not been sufficiently represented in the data (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1989:68).

A consideration of the subject which may be more important is its proximity to the verb. Montgomery and his associates (Montgomery et al. 1993:350) first noted that "if an adverbial or a phrasal element comes between the personal pronoun subject and the verb, the verb is not marked; but in a coordinate context [...] it often is". This finding suggests that separation of the verb from the subject by a clause boundary promotes *-s*-marking, a finding which has been related to similar patterns in nonstandard British dialects (Montgomery & Fuller 1996; Montgomery 1997; Singler 1997). While subsequent studies have found confirmation for this effect in AAE (e.g. Tagliamonte & Poplack to appear; Van Herk & Walker 2000), it appears to be inconsistent across varieties

(Montgomery & Fuller 1996:219-20), though as with the heavy-subject constraint discussed above, this may have to do with the different definitions of proximity (Ellis 1994; Clarke 1997).

Note that most if not all of the above effects are sensitive to the grammatical person of the subject. In fact, as was originally pointed out by Wolfram (1969:139) the overall distribution of verbal *-s* is highly sensitive to grammatical person. Most studies of AA(V)E have agreed that third singular is the environment most favourable to *-s* (Fasold 1972; Schneider 1983:103, 1989:70; Myhill & Harris 1986:27; Poplack & Tagliamonte 1989:62-3, 1991:328; Montgomery et al. 1993:345; Singler 1997),<sup>30</sup> but the remaining hierarchy according to grammatical person varies between third plural (Wolfram 1969:139; Montgomery et al. 1993:345) and first person (Myhill & Harris 1986:27; Schneider 1989:70; Singler 1997). The presence of zero-marking in third singular has been attributed by Schneider (1983:106-7) and Cukor-Avila (1997) to a levelling or hypercorrection influence from the other grammatical persons. Poplack and Tagliamonte (1989) initially hypothesized that there were two processes at work (deletion in third singular and insertion in third plural), at first apparently supported by the weakness of linguistic effects in third singular (ibid.:75), but the parallel conditioning of these two processes led them to argue that *-s*-marking constituted a "unitary process" (ibid.) regardless of grammatical person. Nevertheless, many of the linguistic effects I have discussed are restricted to certain persons. For example, the subject-type effect can apply only within third person, since only here is the opposition between NP and pronominal subjects possible (e.g. Bailey, Maynor 1987, 1988; Cukor-Avila 1988). The proximity effect appears to be most robust in third plural contexts (Montgomery et al. 1993:350; Tagliamonte & Poplack, in press), which emphasizes the importance of separated singular and plural contexts within third person.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Brewer's (1986) finding that *-s* is used more with non-third person subjects can be explained by the fact that she calculated the proportion of occurrences of *-s* in each grammatical person, rather than the proportion of *-s* to zero.

<sup>31</sup> This consideration has led Montgomery and Fuller (1996) to postulate up to seven separate *-s* morphemes, each having a different function. This hypothesis does not admit standard variability: rather, each (homophonous) *-s* constitutes a separate morpheme. This view of a one-to-one relation between function and form recalls the assumption of form-function symmetry discussed in Chapter 3.

We can now add to the findings on African American varieties of English a number of studies on possible source varieties from the southern United States and the British Isles. The subject-type effect has been confirmed in different varieties of American and British English in written documents from the 15th to the 19th century (Bailey & Ross 1988:200; Bailey et al. 1989; Montgomery 1997:130-2), as well as in extant nonstandard southern American varieties (Wolfram & Christian 1976:78, 83; Feagin 1979:190; Bailey & Maynor 1988; Christian et al. 1988:115-16) and British varieties (Godfrey & Tagliamonte 1999). In these varieties, *-s* in third singular is generally very high or categorical (Cheshire 1982:32; Bailey & Ross 1988:199; Christian, Wolfram & Dube 1988:111), except with certain specific lexical items, such as *seem* and *don't* (Wolfram & Christian 1976:79; Christian et al. 1988:123-4), but *-s* in other grammatical persons tends to differ across varieties (Feagin 1979; Cheshire 1982:32; Bailey & Maynor 1987b, 1988; Cukor-Avila 1988; Bailey et al. 1989:287; Bailey & Ross 1988:199). The proximity constraint has been confirmed for some varieties (Bailey & Ross 1988:200; Ellis 1994; Godfrey & Tagliamonte 1999, Tagliamonte & Poplack to appear), but not others (Montgomery & Fuller 1996:219-20; Clarke 1997:240). Thus, while the subject-type effect does appear to be a legacy of British dialects, this effect does not appear to manifest itself consistently across all the descendant varieties.

However, the linguistic factor which has been attributed the most significance in the origins debate, and which constitutes the primary focus of this chapter, is verbal aspect. No doubt this factor has received so much attention because of its putative connection to creole varieties, in which aspectual considerations are paramount (see Section 5.2 below). Bickerton (1975:136-7) was the first to suggest the possibility that aspect might be an important consideration in *-s*-marking in AAVE. Based on his work on Guyanese Creole, he argued that the creole nonpunctual marker *doz* was first reduced in rapid speech to *-z* or *-s* and then later became transferred to postverbal position by analogy with English *-s*. He predicted that, if AAVE had gone through a process of decreolization, we should expect to see the vestiges of a similar, aspectual distinction. Similarly, Pitts (1981) argued that verbal *-s* in AAVE was the relexification of the preverbal habitual marker

*de* found in Gullah (and, presumably, in the putative earlier plantation creole) as *is*, which was then contracted and, as Bickerton claimed, transformed to postverbal position. Note, however, that Bickerton's creole nonpunctual marker subsumes both habitual and durative functions (see Section 5.2 below). In fact, Brewer (1981, 1986) claims a durative function for *-s* in the Ex-Slave Narratives, on the basis of its distribution with adverbs of duration. For the same dataset, Pitts (1986) divides the nonpunctual function of *-s* between stative verbs not associated with punctual adverbs, and nonstative verbs in habitual contexts. In contrast, Myhill and Harris (1986:26) found that *-s* in Philadelphia AAVE marks narrative complicating action clauses (i.e. punctual aspect), an effect they say is not characteristic of other varieties of English<sup>32</sup> (ibid.:30). Thus, verbal *-s* has variously been assigned a range of aspectual readings: nonpunctual, durative, habitual and punctual.

These aspectual claims have been tested in several of the diaspora varieties, but a clear pattern has not emerged. Poplack and Tagliamonte (1989:68, 1991:329-30) found aspectual effects in Samaná English, the Ex-Slave Recordings and African Nova Scotian English. However, as Table 5.1 shows, these effects were not entirely consistent among varieties and in different grammatical persons. Habituals favoured *-s* in third singular contexts across all three varieties, but so did duratives in ANSE. In contexts other than third singular, habituals again favoured *-s* in Samaná, but in the Ex-Slave Recordings and ANSE, it was *punctuals* that favoured *-s*. However, as they observe (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991:330), some of these effects may be spurious because of the sparse distribution of data in certain factors. Singler (1997) also found a habitual effect in Liberian Settler English, which he attributed to a creole origin.

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<sup>32</sup> However, note that Rickford (1992) found no effect of *-s* in narrative clauses in AAVE in Palo Alto, CA.

**Table 5.1: Contribution of factors to the occurrence of verbal -s in three varieties of Early AAE (adapted from Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991:329-30).**

	3rd sg. <sup>33</sup>			non-3rd sg.		
	SAM	ANSE	ESR	SAM	ANSE	ESR
Total N:	604	137	42	1881	408	332
Corrected mean:	.43	.57	—	.22	.06	.03
VERBAL ASPECT						
Habitual/Iterative	.67	.63	86%	.68	.46	[.30]
Durative/Continuous	.44	.72	70%	.44	.38	[.50]
Punctual/Instantaneous	.43	.31	62%	.39	.67	[.71]
DEFINITENESS OF SUBJECT						
Definite	[.51]	[.49]	71%	.56	[.45]	[.45]
Nondefinite	[.46]	[.55]	71%	.39	[.60]	[.60]
TYPE OF SUBJECT						
Noun phrase + relative	[.68]	—	69%	.91	—	—
Noun phrase	[.49]	[.51]	73%	.67	.78	.94
Pronoun	[.48]	[.49]	73%	.48	.47	.45
UNDERLYING FORM						
[əz]	.92	100%	—	.67	0%	0%
[s]	.44	[.59]	67%	.53	[.62]	[.61]
[z]	.49	[.45]	77%	.46	[.40]	[.44]
PRECEDING SEGMENT						
Vowel	[.57]	[.51]	89%	.62	[.56]	[.61]
Consonant	[.49]	[.50]	67%	.48	[.48]	[.47]
FOLLOWING SEGMENT						
Pause	[.43]	[.77]	—	.60	.68	0%
Vowel	[.47]	[.52]	70%	.55	.70	[.47]
Consonant	[.55]	[.44]	71%	.47	.36	[.51]

While the aspectual effects of verbal -s have received a great deal of attention in the AAE origins debate, they have remained largely uninvestigated in other regional and historical varieties of English. The few studies of possible source varieties from Britain and their descendants have confirmed the association of -s with habituais. Clarke's (1997) examination of verbal -s in Newfoundland Vernacular English, whose input varieties came only from southeastern Ireland and southwestern England, and Godfrey and Tagliamonte's (1999) study of Devon English, a direct source of both Newfoundland English and early American English, both found a habitual effect. In

<sup>33</sup> Poplack & Tagliamonte's (1991:329) figures in 3rd singular were for -s-deletion. Here I have subtracted the figures from 1.0.

contrast with other researchers, Tagliamonte and Poplack (in press) have attributed this effect to the inherent correlation between the use of the present tense and habituality, noting that this effect has largely gone unreported in the English dialect literature. Indeed, while the dialectological literature does occasionally make reference to the habitual use of *-s* (e.g. Elworthy 1877; Aitken 1984; Viereck & Ramisch 1991; Gachelin 1997:39), these references are generally not independent of the discussion of the habitual use of the present tense. Thus, it is unclear to what extent habitual interpretation can be attributed to *-s* itself.

Despite the methodological inconsistencies in the variationist literature on verbal *-s* in AAVE and other nonstandard varieties of English, a number of generalizations can be made. Many of the effects of phonology and subject type appear to have developed differently in different varieties, limiting their use as diagnostics in reconstructing earlier linguistic periods. The proximity and subject-type effects seem to have been operative in Early AAE, but have weakened in at least one variety of mainstream AAVE and some of the diaspora varieties. The most robust effect is the aspectual function of *-s* in African American and other varieties of English, but exactly what this function is remains to be determined: while habituality is the most likely function, this may have more to do with the default habitual reading of the present tense.

In contrast with verbal *-s*, the origins debate contains few statements about the progressive that are independent of other variables. Labov et al. (1968:254, 337) and Schneider (1989:143) both note that the progressive is used in New York City AAVE and the Ex-Slave Narratives, respectively, in much the same way as it is used in standard varieties, although neither investigated its use quantitatively. No doubt the absence of quantitative investigation is because the progressive participle figures only incidentally in these studies in the first place. Since, as we have seen (Chapter 4), progressives have repeatedly been found to favour copula deletion more than any other following grammatical category (e.g. Labov et al. 1968:254; Labov 1969; Rickford et al. 1991), it is not surprising that the focus in such structures has been on the form of the auxiliary rather than the participle.

One exception to this rule is the combination of the progressive with uninflected *be*, exemplified in (3). In a study of habitual contexts in contemporary AAVE and Standard American English, Richardson (1991) found that this construction has become a marker of habitual aspect for African American speakers.

(3) Like girls *be saying* now. (ANSE/009:403)

Green (1998:44-6) concurs, arguing that in AAVE this type of habitual construction is differentiated from the habitual meaning of the simple present (cf. *Like girls say now.*) in that the latter denotes a "general property" rather than a repeated occurrence (Richardson 1991:294). However, Green (1998:45) attributes this reading to the presence of "aspectual *be*" (cf. Fasold 1972:150-84; Myhill 1988), which "signals the recurrence of a process or state of affairs" (Green 1998:45), rather than to the progressive participle itself.

Thus, neither of these findings speaks to the type of variation in the main verb exemplified in (4), in which the progressive covaries with the simple present.

(4) Some is *living* in Bronx ... and then they- some they- they *live* in Manhattan.  
(SAM/004:269-70)

This dearth of variationist analysis presents certain difficulties, as we will see, the greatest of which is that there is no predefined variable context provided for the researcher, and that the factor groups affecting this variable are not clear. The analysis which follows thus makes use of the historical and semantic literature in investigating the variability of the progressive.

## 5.2. The Present in English-Based Creoles

In order to understand the degree to which the findings on the present in AAE represent the legacy of a creole or English origin, it is first necessary to examine the system of present temporal reference in both comparison varieties. While there is a tradition (albeit limited) of quantitative analysis of the progressive in historical and standard English (see Section 5.3), the literature on the present in EBCs is characterized by categorical statements.

Under the prototypical creole system (first proposed by Bickerton 1975, 1981, 1984) there is no "present tense": verbs are either bare or occur with a variety of preverbal tense (anterior), mood (irrealis) or aspect (progressive, habitual) (TMA) markers. Since anterior tense and irrealis mood have to do with past and hypothetical reference, respectively, and thus fall outside the scope of this study, I consider here only the interpretation of unmarked verbs and the use of aspectual markers in the present.

Under Bickerton's original model, the temporal interpretation of the unmarked verb depends on the stativity of the verb: unmarked nonstatives, as in (5a), have past temporal reference, while unmarked statives (5b) have present temporal reference (Bickerton 1975; Holm 1988:150-1).<sup>34</sup>

- (5) a. Jan *iit* di mango. (GC/JC; Winford 1993:33)  
'John ate/has eaten the mango.'
- b. Mi na *no* wai dem a du dis ting. (GC; Bickerton 1975:29)  
'I don't know why they're doing this.'

Subsequent work has challenged Bickerton's model, adducing as counterevidence examples of unmarked nonstatives with present temporal reference and unmarked statives with past reference (e.g. Winford 1993:36). This has led some (e.g. Mufwene 1984b:216-221; Holm 1988:150; Greene 1999:40) to argue that unmarked verbs refer to "whatever time is in focus", either specified at the beginning of the discourse or explicitly indicated by other contextual elements. Nevertheless, Winford (1993:34-5) maintains that, without explicit contextual specification to the contrary, the default interpretation of unmarked nonstatives is "past" and that of unmarked statives is "present".

The main aspectual distinction which is relevant to the present is between "perfective" and "imperfective" (Winford 1993:33) or "punctual" and "nonpunctual" (Bickerton 1975) viewpoints. As I have noted, the creole perfective/punctual category applies (in nonstatives) to unmarked verbs,

<sup>34</sup> Note that Bickerton's (1975:30) original formulation of this distinction referred to the stativity of the *proposition* rather than that of the verb (cf. Leech 1987:8; Mufwene 1984:2; Ljung 1980). See section 5.6.4 for a discussion of lexical vs. sentential aspect.

which are either ambiguous or given a default reading of "past". To mark imperfective/nonpunctual aspect, creoles make use of a number of preverbal morphemes, summarized in Table 5.2 (adapted from Holm 1988:406).

**Table 5.2: Creole pre- and postverbal aspectual markers (adapted from Holm 1988:406).**

	Progressive	Habitual
<b>WEST AFRICA</b>		
Krio	de	kin
Liberian	de ~ -in	kan ~ dɔ
West African PE	de	sabi ~ fit
<b>SURINAME</b>		
Sranan	(d)e	(d)e ~ Ø ~ sa <sup>35</sup>
Saramaccan	ta	ta
Ndyuka <sup>36</sup>	e ~ tan	e ~ Ø
<b>EAST CARIBBEAN</b>		
Barbados	-in	dʌz
Leeward Islands	(d)a	(d)a ~ Ø
Virgin Islands	a ~ -in	dʌz
Windward Islands	a ~ -in	dʌz ~ -in
Guyana	a	a
<b>WEST CARIBBEAN</b>		
Jamaica	(d)a ~ de	Ø (~ a)
Miskito Coast	de ~ -in	doz
Belize	de	Ø ~ de
Panama	de ~ -in	doz
<b>NORTH AMERICAN</b>		
Bahamas	-in	dʌz ~ ɪz
Gullah	da ~ -in	dʌz ~ da (~ kin)
AAVE	-in	bi -in

However, as Table 5.2 demonstrates, the division between progressive and habitual aspect is not clear-cut for a number of creoles ( cf. Holm 1988:158; LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985:163): some use the same marker for both functions, and some markers vary with each other or with Ø. For example, there appears to be a distinction between eastern Caribbean creoles such

<sup>35</sup> Holm does not include *sa* in the table, but indicates its habitual use elsewhere (1988:160).

<sup>36</sup> Huttar & Huttar (1994:491, 498, 499).

as GC, in which the nonpunctual marker *a* indicates both durative/progressive and habitual/iterative aspect (Bickerton 1975:34, 1980:6; Winford 1993:38), and western Caribbean creoles such as JC, in which progressive aspect is conveyed by *a*, but habitual is conveyed by  $\emptyset$  (Winford 1993:38; cf. Christie [1986], who notes that JC sometimes uses *a* with habituais). The nonpunctual marker *a* is said to be restricted to nonstative verbs (Bickerton 1975:30), but here again counterexamples have been offered (e.g. Devonish 1978; Mufwene 1984a:19; Gibson 1986; Jaganauth 1987). Gibson (1986) argues that *a* with statives has habitual interpretation only, whereas Winford (1993:40) suggests that the different interpretations of *a* with stative and nonstative verbs is a property of the verbal semantics of particular lexical items (i.e. *Aktionsart*; see Section 5.4), rather than a property of the preverbal marker.

Another preverbal marker whose aspectual function appears to overlap with that of *a* is *de* (derived from *there* and cognate with the locative copula [see Chapter 4]) (Holm 1988:150; Matthews 1993:239-40). Winford (1993:33) calls this the "durative" marker, but it is unclear how its function differs from that of *a*. He suggests (*ibid.*:44) that its function, at least in GC, is to limit the duration of an event to a particular point or period in time, a function reminiscent of that claimed for the English progressive (see Section 5.4). Indeed, Mufwene (1984:41) states that, except for the sensitivity to certain types of stative verbs, the progressive in English and those in GC and JC are nearly identical (cf. Winford 1993:43).

Complicating the system of preverbal markers is the presence of variability between (and even within) different levels of the creole continuum. For example, JC is said to contain not only *a* and *de* but also the "decreolized form" *-in* (cognate with English *-ing*) (Holm 1989:406). Bickerton (1975:73) notes that verbal *-ing* is not commonly used among his basilectal GC speakers. Given the purported disparities between the English and EBC tense/aspect systems an important question for the purposes of the creole-origins debate is how the creole tense/aspect distinctions manifest themselves in a variety which is undergoing decreolization. Many creolists attribute the aforementioned variability in the use of preverbal markers to decreolization. Both Holm (1988:156) and Greene (1999:44) argue that the variation between *de* and "acrolectal" *-in* is

a consequence of shift upwards in the continuum, with the basilectal form gradually losing out. Indeed, *-in* is considered to be one of the first inflections introduced in decreolization (Holm 1988:156). Bickerton (1975:76) argues that, as speakers move up the creole continuum, the [+continuative] *a* is "respelled" as *-ing* and then moved to postverbal position. The variation between *a* and habitual *doz* in mesolectal varieties is similarly argued to be a consequence of decreolization (Holm 1988:158; Winford 1993:41). Thus, in decreolized varieties, we would expect verbal *-ing* to correlate with durative contexts.

This overview of present temporal reference in EBCs reveals that there is no one-to-one correlation between aspectual distinctions and preverbal tense/aspect markers. This form-function variability belies the categorical statements made in the literature. However, although we do not know which features constrain this variability, we can nevertheless make a couple of important generalizations. The relevant divisions in the creole aspectual system appear to be punctual/nonpunctual (perhaps better described as perfective/imperfective; see Comrie 1976) and a further division of nonpunctual into habitual and durative, with the latter being relevant to the present. However, the putative punctual/nonpunctual distinction is blurred by the ability of unmarked verbs to indicate past or present reference. In addition, many of the putative creole distinctions are identical with those of English, and, as I show in the next section, these distinctions have been operative throughout the history of the English language. These facts make it difficult to determine how diagnostic (see Poplack 1999a:18) of either a creole or English origin tense/aspect features are.

### **5.3. The Present in Historical and Nonstandard Varieties of English**

In this section, I review the history of present temporal reference in English along two axes: the development of the periphrastic forms and inflection in the simple present. In this review, I not only draw on historical studies of the relevant features, but also, wherever possible, examine their treatment in contemporaneous descriptive and prescriptive grammars of the 17th and 18th centuries (compiled as part of the *Ottawa Historical Resource on English* [Poplack et al., in progress b]).

### 5.3.1. Old and Middle English

As Denison (1998:134) notes, there has been little change in tense usage in the history of English, with the notable exception of the development of periphrastic forms. Morphologically, there has only ever been an opposition of past and non-past, a division which has obtained since the Old English (OE) period (Mitchell & Robinson 1982: 33, 107).

In OE and early Middle English (ME), the simple present was the predominant form for the expression of present temporal reference, and expressed a range of aspects, including habitual and continuous events and states, even those of temporary duration (Mitchell & Robinson 1982:107). Although OE and ME did make use of a construction which was superficially similar to the ModE progressive, (exemplified in (6)), this construction differed from the ModE form in at least two respects.

- (6) þæt seo ea *bið flowende* ofer eal Ægypta land  
 'that this river is flowing over [=floods] all Egyptians' land'  
 (Orosius 12.35; cited in Traugott 1972:90)

The first difference lay in its frequency of use: the OE/ME "progressive" was nowhere near as prevalent as it is in Modern English (Elsness 1994:9). Periphrastic verb forms are said to have first appeared in the 9th century (Strang 1970:350), but were extremely rare in OE and have often been considered to be loan translations from Latin (Visser 1973:1994; Scheffer 1975:244; Denison 1993: 387; Ziegeler 1999: 68).

The second difference lay in its function, which differed from that of the ModE progressive. For example, Mitchell and Robinson (1982:109-10) state that present participles in OE were interchangeable with the simple form and were adjectival rather than verbal. Strang (1970:351) notes that, although this construction was common with temporal expressions, it required an adverbial of time. However, while historical scholars agree that its function was different, there appears to be disagreement as to what exactly *what* its function was. For example, some argue that it was a stylistic device that emphasized or gave "greater vividness" to the action of

the verb (Mitchell & Robinson 1982:110; Nehls 1988:181; Nurmi 1996), much as emphatic *do* does today, rather than an explicitly aspectual marker. Even those scholars that do attribute it an aspectual function assign it different readings: Mitchell (1985:275) notes that it could also be used to express habitual aspect, but Elness (1994:7) argues that it expressed general duration (rather than the limited duration nowadays associated with it [see Section 5.2]).

Within the simple present, there were four endings in OE in the indicative: *-e/∅* for 1st person singular, *-(a/e)s* for 2nd person singular, *-(e)þ* for 3rd person singular and *-(a)þ* for all plural persons (Jespersen 1909/1949; Holmqvist 1922:2; Mitchell & Robinson 1982:43). By the late OE period, regional variation developed, such that *-(e)þ* and *-(a)þ* were replaced in the North with *-(e)s*, while the OE endings were retained elsewhere (Barber 1976:237). For example, *-s* was already attested in Northumbrian texts of the 10th century in 3rd singular and 3rd plural contexts (Holmqvist 1922:2). Variability in the use of *-(e)s* in third person plural persisted into ME, in which there were three regional patterns of verb-marking in plural persons: *-(e)s* in the North, *-(e)s* or *-(e(n))* in the Midlands and *-eth* in the South (Mossé 1952:78; Barber 1976:242).

However the variability between *-th* and *-s* developed,<sup>37</sup> throughout the Middle English period (roughly the 11th to 15th centuries), the use of *-s* spread from northern Britain to the Midlands, and co-existed with *-th* and other dialect endings such as *-(e/a)n* (Curme 1977:53; Mossé 1952:78; Wakelin 1977:119; Barber 1976:237). Verbal marking in third person plural also varied regionally in ME, with three forms: *-(e)s* in the North, *-(e)s* or *-(e(n))* in the Midlands and *-eth* in the South (Mossé 1952:78; Barber 1976:242). Strang (1970:201) notes that in educated London speech around 1370, the present indicative paradigm would have been as follows (except for some verbs which had special form for third person singular):

1sg	<i>-e ~ ∅</i>
2sg	<i>-(e)st</i>
elsewhere	<i>-eth ~ -(e)n</i>

<sup>37</sup> See Godfrey & Tagliamonte (1999:89-90) for a brief summary of the various theories.

Note that, apart from the (phonologically predictable) alternation involving epenthetic vowels, third person and plural contexts would still have been characterized by variability.

Similarly, the more frequent usage of the periphrastic construction in late ME (Visser 1973:1994) was regionally constrained. At first characteristic of the southeast of England in the 13th century, within a hundred years it had also become well established in the north, and by the 14th century it was in general use everywhere except in the west Midlands, where there was a low rate of use (Strang 1970:280).<sup>38</sup> Although Strang (*ibid.*) states that the periphrastic construction began to assume durative properties between the 12th and 14th centuries, she notes that simple forms were also "inherently durative". These statements suggest that there was no single aspectual meaning uniquely associated with either the progressive or the simple present at this time.

### 5.3.2. *Early Modern English*

In the Early Modern English (EModE) period (ca. 1500-1700), variability in agreement began to diminish, at least in the written standard, and the periphrastic constructions began to expand. In third person singular contexts, variability in inflection was confined to *-s* and *-th*, which I will not consider in detail here.<sup>39</sup> In plural persons, *-s* had become regionally restricted and associated with colloquial, especially Northern speech (Barber 1976:239; Strang 1970:146). Though common in writings of the 16th and 17th centuries (Barber 1976:243), it became increasingly rare in the 17th century (*ibid.*:244). In fact, Barber (*ibid.*) points out that a common later "correction" of the text of Shakespeare's plays, even as early as the Second Folio (1632), is

<sup>38</sup> One problem in charting the development of the "progressive" in this period is, as Strang (1970:280) notes, that our main source of evidence is from poetry, in which periphrastic forms are rarely used. Therefore, the differential rates of usage across regions may have less to do with regional differences and more to do with the genres of texts that have survived.

<sup>39</sup> At the beginning of the 16th century, *-s* was infrequent, but increased in usage by the end of the century, as evinced in poetry, where the choice between *-s* and *-th* was often dictated by rhyme or prosody (Barber 1976:238). By the 17th century, *-s* was more frequent than *-th*, except in frequently-occurring words like *hath* and *doth* (*ibid.*; though Strang [1970:146] asserts that there is "abundant evidence" that the *-th* in these words was read as [s] by this time). Contemporaneous grammars of English support the existence of variability between the two forms and the increasing preference for *-s*, at least in writing. For example, Miege (1688/1968:52) lists *-eth* as the third person singular marker, but also notes that "'tis usual now adaeias to use only an *s*." Although some grammars of the 18th century continued to list *-th* as the preferred ending (e.g. Greenwood 1711/1968:142; Fenning 1771/1967:42 for *hath*), both forms were more often offered as variant markers of third person singular, without explicit preference for either (e.g. Duncan 1731/1967:18; Buchanan 1762/1968:173; Fenning 1771/1967:33-4, 42; Fell 1784/1967:57).

the removal of plural verbal *-s*. The loss of plural *-s* in Standard English (which Strang [1970:146] relates to the contemporaneous regularization of plural *-s* in nouns) must have been completed by the end of the 17th century, since grammarians of that time (e.g. Wharton 1654/1970; Miege 1688/1969) make no mention of it.

This time period also saw the origin of the modern progressive construction, as part of the general restructuring of the verb phrase (Baugh & Cable 1978). However, the first mentions of the progressive by contemporaneous grammarians do not appear until the very end of this period, in the last half of the 17th century (the first is purported to be Cooper's [1685/1968] *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae* [Michael 1970; Ljung 1980:5], but Wharton [1654/1970:54] and Miege [1688/1969:67] also discuss its use). In fact, Visser (1973:1920) notes that the construction remained nameless among these early grammarians. The origin of the progressive coincided approximately with that of *do*-support, which originally could be used in a variety of contexts. However, by the 18th century, auxiliary *do* was virtually restricted to contexts of emphasis, negation and interrogation (Ellegård 1953:162; Rissanen 1991:324-5). I will not consider the history of *do*-support in detail here (see Ellegård 1953; Kroch 1989a, 1989b), although it is interesting to note that by the end of the EModE period, there would have been two periphrastic alternatives to the simple present (the progressive and *do*) which may have been in competition for the expression of similar aspectual meanings (Nurmi 1996:152; Gachelin 1997:38).

Since its inception in EModE, the progressive has been characterized by "rapid" expansion: its frequency in texts has approximately doubled every century from 1500 on (Dennis 1940; Denison 1998:143), with a threefold increase in the 19th century (Arnaud 1983; Denison 1998:143). Elsness (1994:9) notes that the increase is more marked in American than in British corpora from 1500 to 1800 (cf. Scheffer 1975:113).

Although the EModE progressive is nowadays regarded by historical linguists as a "functional blend" of several variants of the earlier OE/ME form (Nehls 1988; Ziegeler 1999), its present function took several centuries to develop. Its usage prior to 1600 has been characterized as "unsystematic" (Strang 1982:429), and the present-day form of its usage is considered not to have

developed until the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Strang 1982:441-2), when it became obligatory to denote "Actual Present" (Nehls 1988:186).

### 5.3.3. *Modern English, Standard and Nonstandard*

Thus, by about 1700, the modern pattern of agreement in Standard English appears to have been set, with third person singular marked by *-s/th* and other grammatical persons marked with zero (Quirk & Greenbaum 1978). However, a number of comments in descriptive and contemporary prescriptive grammars suggest that the variability of verbal *-s*, at least in third person plural, and in the progressive, persisted and was constrained by a number of linguistic factors.

The most common source of prescriptive comments about verbal *-s* is the conflict between the formal singularity of the subject and its functional or "notional" plurality. For example, prescriptive grammarians of the 17th and 18th century (e.g. Miege 1688/1969:74; Maittaire 1712/1967:139-40) felt obliged to proscribe *-s*-marking with coordinate or conjoined nouns, even when individually singular, as in (7).

(7)... reason and respect, *Makes* Liuers pale, and lustyhood deiect (Shakesepeare, *Troilus and Cressida* [Barber 1976:243])

Barber (1976:243) attributes this effect to what he calls the "notional singularity" of certain NPs (cf. Fell 1784/1967:96). Despite such prescription, however, the use of verbal *-s* with conjoined singular subjects has persisted into the 20th century (Fries 1940:53; Christian et al. 1988:118-19). This form-function conflict is most apparent when the noun is what we may call a "notional plural" (e.g. *people, assembly, multitude*), the different treatment of which is considered a shibboleth of American vs. British usage (Quirk & Greenbaum 1978:176-7). Even prescriptive grammarians (e.g. Fenning 1771/1967:108; Fell 1784/1967:96) recognized this variability and admitted the use of either form with this type of subject.

Another often-cited source of *-s* variability, which we have seen invoked in recent variationist work (see Section 5.1), is the adjacency of the verb and its subject. The adjacency effect must have been common in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, since Maittaire

(1712/1967:140) goes out of his way to correct it: "The Agreement is not hindered by any thing, that comes in between the Agreeing words." Not only has this effect been recognized in the prescriptive and descriptive literature, but it has also been attributed to at least two sources.

First, the adjacency effect may have something to do with the size and constituents of the subject NP. For example, Barber (1976:243) argues that many cases of plural -s are due to the separation of the verb from its plural subject by other elements within the NP, as exemplified in (8):

- (8) The venome clamors of a iealous woman, **Poisons** more deadly than a mad dogges tooth.  
(Shakespeare, *Comedy of Errors* [Barber 1976:243])

He also suggests (ibid.) that the proximity to the verb of a non-subject singular noun at the end of the subject NP triggered "singular agreement" (i.e. Ø-marking; see also Fries 1940:55). This effect has persisted even into 20th century written varieties of English. For example, Fries (1940) found numerous examples of it in his corpus of written American English, as exemplified in (9):

- (9) Absence from continental United States and my home **prevent** obtaining ...  
(Fries 1940:55)

Another type of non-adjacency is the separation of the verb and its subject by clause boundaries. Maittaire (1712/1967:140) asserts that "If it happens, that the Agreeing words are not in the same clause or sentence, then they must agree as if they were." This effect is most noticeable in relative clauses, which may agree with the formal singularity of the relative marker (*that, which, who, what*) or the notional plurality of the antecedent.

Another possible source of the adjacency effect is the so-called "Northern Subject Rule" (NSR; Ihalainen 1992:221; also known as the "personal pronoun rule" [McIntosh 1983:237]), so named because of its persistence in regional and historical dialects of Scotland and northern England. The NSR states that the verb is bare if it is immediately preceded by a pronoun subject

(Sweet 1891:379; Curme 1977:247; Wakelin 1977:119; Ihalainen 1992:221-2; Henry 1995:17, citing Milroy 1981), but is marked with *-s* otherwise,<sup>40</sup> summarized succinctly in (10).

- (10) "plural present-tense verbs take *-s*, unless they are immediately preceded by a personal-pronoun subject, as in *They peel them and boils them* and *Birds sings*"  
(Ihalainen 1992: 221-2)

A final factor which does not appear to have been noted in previous writing on verbal *-s* is the persistence into EModE of the present subjunctive, in which all grammatical persons and numbers were zero-marked. Although productive use of the subjunctive had disappeared by late ME (Strang 1970:209), and subsequently became associated with certain constructions, primarily involving the verb *be*, Strang (ibid.) notes that it was "widespread" in certain types of dependent clauses until the end of the EModE period. In fact, a casual reading of Elizabethan plays and correspondence reveals a noticeable preference for zero-marked verbs in certain "subjunctive-selecting" contexts, such as conditional and counterfactual clauses introduced by *if*, as exemplified in (11) and (12):

- (11) if he **marry** elsewhere [...] all pernicious intents depending on him shall cease  
(Letter of Robert Cecil to Queen Elizabeth I, 1569 [Johnson 1974:175])

- (12) if she **enter** into any further speech on the matter [...]  
(Letter of Francis Walsingham to Christopher Hatton, 1583 [Johnson 1974:114])

In fact, prescriptive grammars up to the late 18th century (e.g. Fenning 1771/1967; Fell 1784/1967) list a complete subjunctive mood in the present, in which all grammatical persons and numbers are unmarked.

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<sup>40</sup> There is some disagreement about the circumstances under which the verb is marked. Some state that marking occurs if the verb is not immediately preceded by a pronoun (Wright 1905:296; Jespersen 1909/1949:15; Montgomery 1989:251, citing Wilson 1915:118), others if the subject is a noun (Murray 1873:211-12; Wright 1905:296; Cowling 1915:129) (or an adjective, interrogative or relative pronoun [Murray 1873:211-12]). Others state that marking occurs when the subject (noun or pronoun) and verb are separated (Cowling 1915:129; McIntosh 1983:238), especially by a clause boundary (Murray 1873:211-12; Wright 1905:296).

Although historical studies of the progressive have not generally concerned themselves with determining the *linguistic* effects, a number of possible pertinent factors can be extracted from comments in the historical and dialectological literature and contemporaneous grammars of the 18th and 19th centuries. Note that the use (or non-use) of the progressive in certain contexts has been considered a marker of certain dialect regions of Britain for the last century (Gachelin 1997:34). As late as 1904, one prescriptive grammarian decried the overuse of the progressive: "When [...], without wishing to signify continuance, or occupation, we employ a progressive tense, we violate the best English usage" (Bain 1904; cited in Visser 1972:662).

At least two findings appear to indicate linguistic conditioning of the progressive stemming from an earlier period. The first is the polarity of the sentence: Strang (1982:453) has noted that there was more freedom to negate the progressive in the 19th century than previously, which suggests that, prior to the 19th century, the progressive was restricted to affirmative sentences. The second effect has to do with the type of clause: both Strang (1982) and Denison (1998) have noted that, prior to the eighteenth century, the progressive was confined to certain types of subordinate clause, especially temporal, relative or local clauses. This effect becomes clear when we examine the increase in the frequency of the progressive across clause type: throughout the late 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries, while the overall rate of the progressive doubles each century, the rate within non-subordinate clauses increases by a factor of more than two, sometimes quadrupling (Strang 1982). While I have been unable to corroborate this effect in statements in either the descriptive or prescriptive literature, it could be interpreted as the relic of an earlier system in which stylistic or discourse functions of the progressive were paramount.

Another consideration which has only recently figured in work on the progressive is the animacy or humanness of the subject. For example, Denison (1998: 145) notes that progressives in the 18th century were restricted to human or human-like subjects, and Ziegeler (1999:72) points out that Strang's (1982) list of eight novels of the 18th century contain no progressives with inanimate subjects.

A consideration which has recurred in both the historical and prescriptive literature is the stativity of the verb. Although some regard the more frequent use of the progressive with statives as a fairly recent development (e.g. Denison 1998:146; Elsness 1994:19; Ljung 1980:14; Nehls 1988:177), the stative/nonstative restriction does not appear to have obtained throughout its history. According to Nehls (1988:185), it was not until the eighteenth century that it became "inadmissible" to make use of the progressive with statives. His observation is corroborated by contemporaneous grammars, in which rules against the use of the progressive with statives do not begin to appear until the late eighteenth century (e.g. Pickbourn 1789/1968:20-1; Sedger 1798/1970:43).

An important concomitant of the distinction between statives and nonstatives is the aspectual meaning attributed to the progressive, which, as we have seen, is considered the clearest instantiation of an aspectual category in English (Brinton 1988:7), with duration (e.g. Curme 1931; Kruisinga 1931; Palmer 1987) or limited duration (e.g. Joos 1964; Kruisinga & Erades 1955; Leech & Svartvik 1975; Mufwene 1984a; Scheffer 1975; Comrie 1976) as its primary meaning. As with stativity, the association of duration with the progressive does not appear to have crystallized until about 1800. Prescriptive grammarians are silent concerning an aspectual meaning for the progressive (e.g. Wharton 1654/1970; Miede 1688/1969; Duncan 1731/1967; Saxon 1737/1971) until the late 18th century, when all begin to unanimously designate the meaning of the progressive as the "continuance" or "continuation" of an action (e.g. Buchanan 1762/1968:125; Fell 1784/1967:23; Greenwood 1711/1968:143; Ussher 1785/1967:30). Thus, the effects of stativity and aspect appear to be more "recent" constraints on the use of the progressive, given that they only start to surface in the (late) eighteenth century.

Thus, despite the apparent standardization of both verbal *-s* and the progressive, variability in their use appears to have persisted in nonstandard speech even into the 20th century. However, it remains to be determined whether the linguistic factors governing this variability parallel those found for extant varieties of English.

#### 5.4. The Semantics of the Present: Tense, Temporal Reference and Aspect

Many of the historical and variationist studies discussed in this chapter appear to equate the present tense with the expression of present time. But a first consideration from the point of view of semantics is that "present tense" and "present temporal reference" are not isomorphic: "tense" is a formal (morphological/syntactic) category which does not bear a one-to-one relation to the functional (semantic) concept of temporal reference (see, e.g., Jespersen 1924; Dahl 1985; Binnick 1991; Denison 1998:133). Tense bears at best an indirect relation to temporal reference. I follow Dahl (1985:2) in viewing tense markers as "deictic categories" which are only linked with their functional referents to the extent that they play a role in grammatical relations (cf. Klein 1994:18-20).

The tenuous nature of the relation between tense and temporal reference is most evident in the range of uses to which the category of "present tense" can be put in English (e.g. Leech 1987; Palmer 1987; Binnick 1991; Olsen 1997). Despite its commonly-used designation, the "present tense" can be used to refer to non-present events or states, either in the future (e.g. Binnick 1991:37, 247), as in (13a), or in the past, as in (13b) (the latter especially in narrative contexts, in which it is often referred to as the "historical present") (Leech 1987:5, 10-12; Binnick 1991:247).

- (13) a. When she *send* the cent, then I'll know what I'm going to do. (SAM/003:1338-9)
- b. When I *look* in like that, and I *look* in that door, and I *look* back in the corner, I  
seen them great big eye. (ANSE/030:884-6)

The present tense can also be used to refer to events or states which hold true both for the present and for other times (or all time). These include frequentative, habitual or iterative contexts (Brinton 1987:203), in which the activity is true for the extended present but may not take place at the actual moment of speaking, as in (14a), as well as 'gnomic' utterances, which express timeless truths or generalizations, as in (14b) (Visser 1972:668; Dahl 1985:100; Brinton 1987:196; Leech 1987:6; Palmer 1987:61).

(14) a. Yeah, I always *give* them apple and thing. (ANSE/030:1008)

b. Only man that *forgive* your sins is Christ. (SAM/001:243)

The contexts in which the present refers to true present reference (i.e. the actual moment of speaking) are relatively restricted (Leech 1987:6-7; Binnick 1991:37). These include present states (Palmer 1987:71), as in (15a), and simultaneously reported events, most commonly found in sports commentaries (Palmer 1987:71), as in (15b).

(15) a. Now, I *want* you to please tell me how you call that. (SAM/007:717)

b. Walker *swings* a right at the West Indian — he *ducks* and it *glances* harmlessly off his shoulder. (Leech 1987:6)

In addition, there is a small class of "performative" verbs, in which the speech act itself constitutes the event or state (Leech 1987:7-8; Palmer 1987:58), as in (16).

(16) "I double *dare* you to cut it off." (ANSE/032:349)

Thus, it would be more accurate to refer to the present tense in English as "non-past" (Binnick 1991:22) or even "tenseless" (Visser 1972:661).

Many of the functions of present temporal reference in English are performed not by the simple present alone but by a range of auxiliary and modal constructions, such as habitual *will* (Palmer 1987:61) and "semi-auxiliary" constructions, such as *keep* + *V-ing* (Heine 1993), and, most notably, the so-called "progressive"<sup>41</sup> construction *be* + *V-ing* (Binnick 1991:255). While numerous attempts (e.g. Granville Hatcher 1951; Kruisinga & Erades 1955; Zandvoort 1962; Diver 1963; van Ek 1969; Comrie 1976; Bennett & Partee 1972; Mufwene 1984; Portner 1998) have failed to arrive at a satisfactory uniform analysis of the progressive (Dowty 1975:585; Binnick 1991:281), most analysts agree that its primary function is aspectual. Indeed, Brinton

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<sup>41</sup> While there are a variety of terms used to refer to this construction (see Visser 1973:1921 for a list of terms used by various authors), I will use the term "progressive", despite the problems associated with it.

(1988:7) argues that the progressive "is considered the clearest, sometimes the only, exponent" of an aspectual category in English. The aspectual meaning which is typically attributed to the progressive is duration or continuation (Poutsma 1926: 290; Curme 1931:373-7; Kruisinga 1931:237; Comrie 1976:33; Brinton 1988:7; Binnick 1991:284), though this is often qualified as limited or transient duration<sup>42</sup> (Kruisinga & Erades 1955:251; Twaddell 1963:9-12; Joos 1964:106-15; Leech & Svartvik 1975; Scheffer 1975:85-6; Comrie 1976:38; Mufwene 1984:20; Binnick 1991:284), action in progress/process (Schachter 1983:163; Palmer 1987:54; Binnick 1991:284), or incompleteness (Schachter 1983:163; Palmer 1987:55; Binnick 1991:284; Portner 1998:776).<sup>43</sup>

All of these characterizations are inaccurate to some degree. For one thing, the progressive is not the sole exponent of aspect in the present. The simple present itself expresses aspectual distinctions, though its "default reading" is habitual or iterative (Langacker 1982:289; Mufwene 1984:23, 25; Leech 1987:10; Palmer 1987:57; Binnick 1991:173; Smith 1991:231), not durative. Moreover, neither the simple present nor the progressive is straightforwardly associated with one particular aspectual reading (Diver 1963:150-1; Scheffer 1975:89; Mufwene 1984:32; Bache 1985:165; Brinton 1987:208; Palmer 1987:55, 57; Smith 1991:231; Goossens 1994), and the choice of each form is restricted by various factors.

One such restriction is the stativity of the predicate: the progressive is said to occur readily with dynamic verbs but not with statives (Brinton 1988:38; Binnick 1991:282; Denison 1998:188). Comrie (1976:35) and Brinton (1988:40) view this restriction as a consequence of the inherently dynamic aspect conveyed by the progressive: "stative verbs do not have progressive forms, since this would involve an internal contradiction between the stativity of the verb and the nonstativity essential to the progressive" (Comrie 1976:35). Indeed, a frequently-invoked test of lexical

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<sup>42</sup> Diver (1963:148) criticizes such a qualification as inherently ambiguous, since it is not clear what "limited" or "transient" means in such contexts.

<sup>43</sup> Others have drawn attention to the "emotive" effect of the progressive (Kruisinga & Erades 1955:256; Visser 1973:1922-3; Schopf 1974; Scheffer 1975:23; Comrie 1976:37, 39; Ljung 1980:19; Palmer 1987:63; Arnaud 1999) or have attributed its use to "relevance" to the speaker (Van Ek 1964:584; Scheffer 1975:39-40).

stativity is whether or not the verb can occur in the progressive (Sag 1973; Comrie 1976:35; Mufwene 1984:5; Brinton 1988; Winford 1992b:332).

However, the restriction on statives is not always observed in usage: the progressive does sometimes occur with predicates which are otherwise considered stative (Sag 1973; Mufwene 1984a:7; Brinton 1987:207-8; Binnick 1991:282; Smith 1991:225-6; Denison 1998:188), as in (17).

(17) That's why this world is- *is having* such a hard time now. (ANSE/016:079)

This fact makes the use of combinability with the progressive as a test of stativity problematic (in fact, Comrie [1976:35] goes so far as to call it circular). Some have argued that this is the result of highly specialized circumstances (Leech & Svartvik 1975; Mufwene 1984a:5), in which verbs which are normally stative can sometimes be treated as if they were not (Comrie 1976:36). Others view this as an extension of the progressive's preexisting functions with dynamic verbs to statives, either portraying a state as if it were dynamic (Brinton 1988:40; Smith 1991:226) or indicating its limited duration (e.g. Joos 1964; Denison 1998:188). Still others have seen these exceptions as indicative of ongoing instability and change in the system of the progressive (Schopf 1974; Strang 1982:446; Leech 1987:31).

One way of accounting for the problematic relation between the aspectual properties of the progressive and the verbs with which it can occur is to appeal to work in semantics which makes a more general distinction between different types of aspect. First, there are the inherent aspectual properties of the verb itself, also known by the German term *Aktionsart* ('type of action'), properties which are not syntactic or predictable from the syntax and must therefore be considered part of the verb's lexical representation (cf. Freed 1979:16; Dahl 1985:26; Brinton 1987:202; Binnick 1991:170; Klein 1994:30-1, 72-4; Olsen 1997:16). Second, there are the aspectual properties of the proposition in which the verb occurs, often subsumed under the names "grammatical", "sentential", "contextual" or "propositional" aspect (e.g. Brinton 1987:202; Binnick 1991:170; Olsen 1997:16), usually instantiated as fully grammaticized and obligatory

linguistic categories. Under this view, sentential aspect could be said to take the lexical aspect of the verb as input (Olsen 1997:16) and, through other elements, such as modal/aspectual operators (Freed 1979:16; Portner 1998:762), adverbials (Jespersen 1931/1961; Crystal 1966:5; Scheffer 1975:48-53; Palmer 1987:55), verb complements (Smith 1991; Goossens 1994) and perhaps even pragmatic context, output an aspectual reading to the entire proposition (Brinton 1987:202).

Since the aspectual interpretation of an utterance depends on a variety of factors, accounting for the aspectual function of a particular proposition requires taking all these factors into account and not relying on a single factor (such as the lexical verb). An additional advantage of distinguishing between lexical and sentential aspect is that it becomes much easier to accommodate variability in the interpretation of verb forms, as I will show.

### **5.5. Variable Context: "Present Temporal Reference"**

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, the precise context which delimits the speaker's choice of markers of present temporal reference other than the simple present is unclear. For example, many studies of the progressive (Curme 1931:375; Granville Hatcher 1951; Joos 1964:37-8; Van Ek 1969:584; Strang 1982:430; Mufwene 1984a:31; Smith 1991:223-4) acknowledge that there are contexts in which the choice between the progressive and the simple form is possible, but none have ever delimited the context of that choice. While quantitative studies of the development of the progressive (e.g. Mossé 1938; Scheffer 1976; Strang 1982; Elsness 1994; Arnaud 1998) have monitored its increase in usage over the centuries, these studies are unsatisfactory from a variationist point of view, because the measurement of frequency invoked is rather arbitrary: most follow Mossé (1938), who calculated frequency as the number of progressive forms per 100,000 words of text (M). However, this kind of measurement does not describe in exactly which linguistic environments the speaker has a choice between using the progressive or the simple present, and thus provides no basis for determining the variable context. Thus, unlike the copula (Chapter 4), there is no predefined variable context available for this study.

The variationist literature does provide a precedent for a solution to this problem, namely Poplack and Tagliamonte's (1996; Tagliamonte & Poplack 1993) innovative studies of past-time

marking in Samaná English and Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), in which the entire sector of past temporal reference was taken as the initial variable context, with the distribution of each of the morphosyntactic markers being used to further delimit the context. This approach not only has the advantage of determining the true role of a particular form within a functional domain, but also redefines variationist analysis as a *function-* rather than *form-*driven approach to linguistic problems.

Therefore, following Poplack and Tagliamonte's approach, I begin by defining the initial context as every instance of a lexical verb used with present temporal reference. Unlike past temporal reference, though, the concept of "present temporal reference" is not a well-defined functional domain, since it subsumes a variety of temporal and aspectual contexts — durative, habitual, gnomic, etc. — not all of which are, strictly speaking, "present". This problem requires that present temporal reference be defined negatively; that is, what it is not. For the purposes of this study, I define "present temporal reference" as all non-past and non-future contexts, also excluding all hypothetical and counterfactual (i.e. "irrealis") contexts.

On the basis of this definition, I therefore excluded certain contexts *a priori* from the data extraction process. The first type of context excluded was any present-tense form that was used to express temporal reference other than present, such as future reference (as in (18a)), where the simple present and the progressive are in competition with *will* and *going to/gonna* (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1999), and past (18b) reference, as well as ambiguous contexts (18c).

(18) a. And I just hope and pray that the day *come* when I will have a home. (ANSE/b:181)

b. Interviewer: Had what going?

Informant: Ashes out the stove. Stay in the house for nine days. That was way back.

Interviewer: What- what she mean?

Informant: You know how you *burn* wood?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Informant: And *take* ashes out the stove? (ANSE/014:629-30)

c. Uh- a child *got* measles sometimes the measles won't come out.

(ANSE/046:817)

Because I have limited the context to realis situations, I also excluded hypothetical or counterfactual contexts, as in (19)

(19) "Fore I *let* my daughter get married to you I- I sooner *follow* her to her grave."

(ANSE/030:696-7)

As we saw in Section 5.3, these contexts have historically been associated with subjunctive forms, which are unmarked. Note that I have retained conditionals, provided they are not counterfactual, as in (20).

(20) If they know you *handling* money well then they- they raise your- your wages.

(SAM/010:1006)

The definition also required excluding auxiliaries other than *be* and *do*. Thus, the perfective auxiliary *have*, as in (21), was excluded, because of the problematic relation of perfectives to both present and past temporal reference (Elsness 1994; Tagliamonte 1996).

(21) That was the first they learnt me and I'm old and it *have* remained here.

(SAM/002:115-6)

Also excluded were modals, such as *can*, *may* and *must*, both because these forms were categorically unmarked by verbal *-s*, *do*-support and progressives and because these forms contribute additional modal meanings to the proposition (Palmer 1979; Coates 1983; Heine 1993). The sole exception to this exclusion was the modal *will* when used in a non-future sense, as in (22).

(22) A boat *'ll sink* on you, but a- [...] raft never *sink*.. (ANSE/032:158-160)

Although the inclusion of this form in the present temporal reference system is not without controversy, since *will* may still contribute modal meaning to a present-reference predicate,<sup>44</sup> I have retained it at least for the preliminary analysis because of its purported aspectual distinctions, especially in habitual and gnomic contexts (Poutsma 1926:309; Brinton 1987:206; Palmer 1987:61; Bybee 1988:374).

Finally, as is standard in variationist methodology, I excluded all frozen expressions (e.g. *you know*, *I mean*), as well as quotations from the Bible and songs or hymns, since such expressions are not representative of productive grammatical forms.

**Table 5.3: Overall distribution of present temporal reference tokens in Early African American English, by community.**

	N
African Nova Scotian English	3363
Samaná English	4237
Ex-Slave Recordings	521
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8121</b>

From each of the interviews of the speakers selected from the three communities, I extracted roughly the first 200 to 250 tokens (wherever possible) of lexical verbs with present

<sup>44</sup> Portner (1998:760) argues that the progressive also contributes modal meaning to the proposition.

temporal reference. Using the above extraction protocol resulted in a dataset of 8121 tokens, distributed by community as shown in Table 5.3.

## 5.6. Factor Groups

Each token was then coded for a number of factor groups, each of which represents a hypothesis about the linguistic context which influences the choice of form. These factor groups, culled from previous variationist studies and from the semantic, descriptive, historical and prescriptive literature reviewed in Sections 5.2-5.4, are summarized in (23).

### (23) Factor Groups Coded

*Morphosyntactic:*

Morphosyntactic marking (zero, inflected, *do*, *be*)  
Morphological form (simple, progressive)

*Phonological:*

Preceding phonological environment  
(vowel/glide, /r/, sibilant, other consonant)  
Following phonological environment  
(vowel, glide, consonant, pause)

*Lexical:*

Lexical verb

*Syntactic:*

Type of subject  
(personal pronoun, relative/demonstrative pronoun, other pronoun, conjoined NP, NP + relative clause, NP + PP, notional plural NP, other NP, null)  
Grammatical person of subject  
(first singular, first plural, second, third singular, third plural)  
Adjacency of subject and verb  
(adjacent, nonadjacent, intervening adverbial)  
Type of clause (main clause, subordinate clause, relative clause)

*Semantic:*

Lexical aspect (stative, nonstative)  
Sentential aspect  
(durative/continuous, habitual/iterative, punctual/temporary)

*Sentential/Discourse:*

Polarity (negative, affirmative)  
Sentence type (declarative, question)  
Adverbial specification (adverbial, no adverbial)

Each token was first coded for two factor groups representing the two axes of morphosyntactic expression: the type of morphosyntactic marking on the verb or within the VP, and the morphological form of the lexical verb. MORPHOSYNTACTIC MARKING was coded as zero (whether on the simple or participial form), as in (24) or inflected (with *-s*), as in (25) or marked with *do*,<sup>45</sup> as in (26), or *be* (whether inflected or invariant), as in (27).

(24) a. You *know-Ø* where that hill is out there, don't you?

(ANSE/4:1169)

b. You can understand something of what they *Ø saying*.

(SAM/D:106)

(24) Oh no. I *pay-s* all my bill up just like that.

(ANSE/030:479)

(25) We *does take* the cotton leaves, likewise.

(SAM/002:1027)

(26) a. They don't know what you're *talking* about.

(ANSE/030:877)

b. 'Cause he *be knowing* everything.

(ANSE/030:1399)

The MORPHOLOGICAL FORM of the lexical verb was coded for whether it occurred in its simple (27a) or participial form (27b).

(27) a. Well there, the sister— she *lives* with her sister.

(SAM/001:166)

b. Now she *Ø living* in the capital.

(SAM/002:793)

Note that these two factors interact to some degree, since *do*-support is generally restricted to simple forms and auxiliary *be* to participles.

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<sup>45</sup> I have excluded emphatic *do*.

### 5.6.1. Phonological

The phonological factor groups, which apply only to bare verb stems and verbs marked with *-s*, required excluding two types of tokens. The first is the irregular verb *have*, which was excluded because the alternation between *have* and *has* appears to be conditioned by morphology or the lexicon rather than by phonological processes of suffixation or deletion. The second type of exclusion is neutralization contexts, as in (28), where, because of the following segment, it is impossible to tell whether verbal *-s* is present or not.

(28) When you *want(s)* something, wait until you get the money. (SAM/è:016)

The PRECEDING PHONOLOGICAL SEGMENT was coded as a vowel or glide, as in (29a), /r/, as in (29b), a sibilant (/s, z, ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, ʒ/), as in (29c), or other consonants, as in (29d).

- (29) a. Oh there's a lot of things that *stays* with me about her. (ANSE/046:724)
- b. Yes, it *renders* less now. (SAM/018:878)
- c. When you talk to them they *raises* up their head. (SAM/008:426-7)
- d. Because the truth *cuts* its own way. (ANSE/014:531)

I have already discussed (Section 5.4) the finding, first noted by Poplack & Tagliamonte (1989, 1991), that a preceding sibilant favours the occurrence of *-s*. While, to my knowledge, no study has attributed effects on verbal *-s* to the nature of the following segment, it is conceivable that considerations of phonotactics or resyllabification may play a role. The FOLLOWING PHONOLOGICAL SEGMENT was coded as a vowel, a consonant or a pause.

### 5.6.2. *Lexical*

Each lexical verb for which more than one token occurred in the dataset was assigned an individual code. This factor group was coded to investigate the effect of individual lexical verbs on the variability.

### 5.6.3. *Syntactic*

A number of factor groups were coded to test the effects of syntactic properties of the clause or sentence in which the verb occurred, including properties of the subject, the adjacency of the subject and the verb, and the type of clause.

#### TYPE OF SUBJECT

As we saw in Sections 5.3 and 5.4, the type of subject has proven relevant to the variability of verbal *-s* in the historical literature and previous variationist studies, with NPs, especially "heavy" NPs, favouring. To test these effects on these data, I coded each token according to the type of subject. I first distinguished between pronominal and nominal subjects. Pronominal subjects were coded as personal (*I/you/he/she/we/they*), impersonal (*it*), relative/demonstrative (*what/that/who/which*) or other (*there, here*). Noun-phrase subjects were coded as conjoined, NP+PP, NP+Rel, notional or other, as exemplified in (31).

- (31) a. Because *their mother and father goes* out [...] (SAM/009:517)
- b. *Every lake up on the barren go* up this way (ANSE/032:137)
- c. They think that *all this group what I got in there is setting* this choir up and doing everything. (ANSE/016:175)
- d. In the hot weather season, when *people comes* very often. (SAM/010:763)
- e. *Nothing worries* me. (ESR/006:028)

However, as I will show, many of the finer distinctions in nominal subjects are not warranted by the distribution in the data. In addition, the crucial distinction in the Northern Subject Rule is between personal pronoun subjects and all other subjects, which thus obviates the need for finer distinctions among NP subjects.

While null subjects, as in (32), were coded separately, they do not figure in the ensuing analysis, since such subjects have not been hypothesized to affect the variability in the literature.

(32) You know,  $\emptyset$  'minds me of the baby. (SAM/005:258)

#### GRAMMATICAL PERSON

As we saw in Sections 5.3-5.4, the grammatical person of the subject has been considered relevant to both of the dependent factors considered here. Verbal *-s* variability is conditioned by different linguistic constraints in different grammatical persons: for example, the NSR is said to apply only in third-plural contexts. Although no direct claims have been made about grammatical person in the literature on the progressive, at least two considerations suggest that it may be relevant. First, it has been said (Goossens 1994:171; Mufwene 1984a:21) that the arguments of the verb, including the subject, may play a role in determining the choice of progressive. In addition, Ziegeler's (1999) contention that the degree of agency of the subject conditions the use of the progressive could be realized as a tendency for first- and second-person subjects, which are normally animate and human, to favour the progressive. Accordingly, each token was coded for the grammatical person (first, second, third) and number (singular, plural) of the subject. Note that no number distinction was made in coding second-person contexts.

#### ADJACENCY

As we saw in Sections 5.3-5.4, the adjacency of the subject and the verb has been hypothesized to affect morphosyntactic marking in a number of ways. Nonstandard agreement has been attributed to the separation of the verb from its subject across clause boundaries or through intervening material within the NP or the VP. To test the effect of adjacency, each simple present

token was coded for whether the subject was immediately adjacent, as in (34), or nonadjacent, as in the examples in (35).

(34) She *have* twenty-nine years. (SAM/005:254)

(35) a. They go in the sun and *try* and get- get like us. (ANSE/009:801)

b. Some of them, you know, *speaks* a little different. (SAM/009:267)

Note that the nonadjacent contexts subsume a number of different types of nonadjacency: coordinate structures (35a), intervening PPs or relative clauses within the NP (31b-c), or intervening parentheticals (35b).

An unresolved issue in the variationist literature is how to code intervening adverbials, as in (36).

(36) And I *always swear* that and I *always just stick* to that. (ANSE/038:462)

Montgomery et al. (1993) consider an intervening adverbial as adjacent, but other studies (e.g. Ellis 1994; Clarke 1997) adhere to a strict interpretation of adjacency. Although tokens with intervening adverbials were coded as nonadjacent for this analysis, it should be noted that no differences were observed in the results whether adverbials were classed as adjacent or nonadjacent.

#### TYPE OF CLAUSE

The type of clause in which the verb appears has been considered relevant to both verbal -s and the progressive. Recall that one of the injunctions of the prescriptivist literature is to maintain concord across relative clause boundaries, and that prior to the 18th century, the progressive was confined to certain types of subordinate clause. Although Scheffer (1975:53-5) found no inclination for either main or subordinate clauses to favour the progressive, I coded each token for whether occurred in a main clause, a subordinate clause or a relative clause, as in (37).

- (37) a. Yeah, they *have* some what have twelve, they *have* some what have ten, and they *have* others have eight. (SAM/002:446-7)
- b. Well Lord knows I'm *telling* you the truth. (ESR/001:101-2)
- c. Everything she *gets* she rips apart and put it back together again. (ANSE/040:737)

#### 5.6.4. Semantic

Given the importance of aspectual considerations to the distribution of all of the morphosyntactic features considered here, I coded each token for factor groups testing the effect of aspect. As noted in Section 5.2, I assume that the aspectual meaning of the proposition is determined not only by the type of verb, but also by other constituents of the sentence, such as adverbials, particles, and complements, as well as the wider pragmatic/discourse context. For this reason, I have coded aspect in two factor groups, distinguishing between the aspectual properties (*Aktionsart*) of the lexical verb and the aspectual reading of the entire sentence. This study thus follows more recent studies (e.g. Winford 1992b; Tagliamonte & Poplack 1993; Poplack & Tagliamonte 1996) in attempting to operationalize the difference between the aspectual properties of the verb and those of the sentence as separate factor groups.

#### LEXICAL ASPECT

A first problem which confronts us in classifying verbs according to lexical aspect is the criteria for determining class membership. A survey of the literature on lexical aspect reveals a great deal of disagreement about the membership of particular verbs in particular aspectual classes (e.g. Vendler 1957; Scheffer 1975:61-4; Mufwene 1984:2; Dahl 1985:29; Palmer 1987; Smith 1991:229-31; Winford 1992b; Verkuyl 1993). Because such classifications are often crucial in supporting one's hypotheses, it is important, for reasons of objectivity, to adopt a system of classification which is independent of one's hypotheses. As Dahl (1985:27) notes, an additional problem in isolating inherent lexical aspect is that every verb always occurs in a context (i.e. there

is no "neutral" or "minimal" context, *pace* Smith [1991:229]). Therefore, it is very difficult to separate the contextual factors contributing to the verb's aspectual reading from its inherent aspectual properties.

For the purposes of this analysis, I have adopted the verb classification system elaborated by Olsen (1997; based on work by Smith 1991 and Levin 1993), who conceptualizes lexical aspect as a set of privative, underspecified features: [dynamic], [durative] and [telic] (Olsen 1997:25). The feature [dynamic] refers to situations in the process of change (vs. states; *ibid.*:35, 51); [durative] to situations that take "an interval of time" (vs. punctuals; *ibid.*:41, 51); [telic] to situations with an inherent end or goal, versus situations which are open-ended (*ibid.*:31-33, 51; Brinton 1988:27; Smith 1991:29). Olsen conceives of event-structure in terms of a nucleus and coda (similar to the phonological notion of the syllable), with [dynamic] and [durative] occupying the nucleus, and [telic] occupying the event coda (Olsen 1997:52).

Under this system, while the underlying aspectual representation of each verb consists of one, two or all of these features, further features can be contributed by other contextual elements to yield a sentential situation type which may augment (but not delete) the inherent features of the verb (*ibid.*:16). The advantage of this model is that it can account for the range of aspectual contexts in which a verb can occur (Brinton 1987:204). Olsen uses Levin's (1993) exhaustive categorization of English verb-classes (based on their range of behaviours) to isolate the features which are common to all of that verb's uses. For example, as noted in Section 5.2, it is often possible for otherwise stative verbs to be treated as if they were dynamic. But every use of such verbs contains a common element — duration (Brinton 1988:202-3) — which suggests that [durative] is an underlying feature of such verbs. According to Olsen, the combination of these three features can account not only for the inherent properties of Levin's verb-classes, but also for their range of permissible aspectual contexts. Casting her classification in terms of Vendler's (1957) aspectual categories, she arranges the features in the configurations shown in Table 5.4.

**Table 5.4: Classification of lexical aspect by privative features (Olsen 1997:154)**

<b>Class</b>	<b>NUCLEUS</b>	<b>CODA</b>	<b>Examples</b>
State	[durative]		<i>know, be, have</i>
Activity	[dynamic] [durative]		<i>run, paint, sing</i>
Accomplishment	[dynamic] [durative]	[telic]	<i>destroy, create</i>
Achievement	[dynamic]	[telic]	<i>win, bend, break</i>
Semelfactive	[dynamic]		<i>wink, tap, cough</i>
Stage-level state	[durative]	[telic]	<i>be pregnant</i> <sup>46</sup>

The advantage of Olsen's model for the purposes of this analysis is that she provides explicit reference to each of the verb-classes listed in Levin (1993). This allowed me to consistently classify each of the verbs that occurred in my dataset according to Levin's (1993) categories and code it according to the features provided by Olsen.

While, as Table 5.3 shows, Olsen provides a categorization by features for all of Vendler's situation-types, here I am concerned only with the opposition between statives and nonstatives, given their relevance to aspectual distinctions in both English and EBCs. Recall from Sections 5.2 and 5.3 that stativity is a crucial distinction for the use of the progressive, and that a frequently invoked test of lexical stativity is whether or not the verb can occur in the progressive. Therefore, I coded each verb for whether it was stative, as in (38a),<sup>47</sup> or nonstative (38b), regardless of whether the context in which it occurred was stative.

<sup>46</sup> As Olsen (1997:159) notes, English seems to lack the stage-level category at the lexical level and has only states unspecified as to telicity.

<sup>47</sup> I initially distinguished among three kinds of statives (perception [e.g. *feel, hear, see, smell, taste*], cognition [e.g. *believe, think, imagine, like, hate*] and relation [e.g. *have, own, resemble*]), based on observations of differential behaviour of the progressive according to each of these types of stative (Ota 1963:2-3,72-3; Joos 1964:116-20; Hirtle 1967:69-85; Scheffer 1969:61-4; Leech 1971:20-2; Palmer 1974:70-3,1987:71; Mufwene 1984a:35-6; Bache 1985:233-7; Brinton 1988:38-9; Olsen 1997:52). However, initial analyses showed no clearcut correlation between these types and the distribution of the progressive in my data.

(38) a. There's nothing in the stores that *taste* like it. (ANSE/053:629)

b. And when he *come* in the house he want to talk it with me. (SAM/007:649)

#### SENTENTIAL ASPECT

As we have seen, aspectual claims have been made for the meaning of both verbal *-s* and the progressive. Verbal *-s* has variously been attributed habitual, durative and punctual readings, while the progressive is typically attributed durative aspect, or limited duration. My assumption is that these distinctions are typically made on the basis of the discourse context rather than on the inherent aspect of the verb. To test the effects of these aspectual categories, sentential aspect was coded independently of the form of the verb, solely on the basis of elements in the wider discourse context (as per Poplack & Tagliamonte 1989:68).

For this factor group, I distinguished among three types of sentential aspect: habitual/iterative, durative/continuous and punctual. Habitual/iterative contexts were considered to be any situation which takes place habitually or repeatedly (Comrie 1976:25; Poplack & Tagliamonte 1989:68), as in (39).

(39) Every time Gladys *give* me soup on the table it *puts* me right in mind.

(ANSE/032:402)

As Comrie (1976:27-8) notes:

[habituals] describe a situation which is characteristic of an extended period of time, so extended in fact that the situation referred to is viewed not as an incidental property of the moment but precisely, as a characteristic feature of a whole period.

Durative/continuous contexts were considered to be "events or processes that are extended in time or states that exist continuously" (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1989:68; cf. Comrie 1976:41), as in (40).

(40) But anyway we *going* through whatever it is. (SAM/014:094)

The third category, punctuals, is somewhat problematic. Given that the definition of a punctual event — a point-action with no duration (Comrie 1976:42) — is incompatible with the imperfectivity associated with the present (ibid.), can there be true punctuals in the present? A closer examination of the variationist literature reveals that, where criteria for aspectual coding decisions are made explicit, what is coded as punctual turns out to be either past temporal reference contexts (e.g. Myhill & Harris 1986; see Poplack & Tagliamonte, to appear) or based on aspectual properties of the verb itself (e.g. Godfrey & Tagliamonte 1999:105).<sup>48</sup> The sole exception that I have found in the literature is Clarke (1997:242), who defines punctuals as "dynamic events of momentary duration". While this definition is not, strictly speaking, true (since punctuals should have no duration), I have adopted this definition, expanding it to include states (as well as dynamic events) of momentary duration (i.e. that hold true only for the time of speaking), as in (41).

(41) Great big rock right where you *sitting* at right there. (ANSE/032:461)

Although such contexts are not *true* punctuals, I will continue to refer to them as such. In fact, as I will demonstrate, such contexts are probably more accurately described as "limited duration".

#### 5.6.5. Sentential/Discourse

Finally, several features of the sentence or the discourse context were coded to account for a number of effects noted in the literature.

##### SENTENCE POLARITY

Every token was coded for whether it occurred in a negative (42a) or affirmative (42b) sentence.

(42) a. But then they gets married but then they *don't keep* their wedding. (SAM/R:189)

b. That's the name I *go* with now. (ESR/012:090)

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<sup>48</sup> In fact, Binnick [1991] considers "punctual" an *Aktionsart* rather than a grammatical aspectual category.

## SENTENCE TYPE

Every token was coded for whether it occurred in a question (43a) or a declarative sentence (43b).

(43) a. What you *telling* story to the people for? (ANSE/016:142)

b. An' they all *treating* me nice, all the white folks that know me, they *treats* me nice.  
(ESR/003:025)

## ADVERBIAL SPECIFICATION

It has often been noted (e.g. Palmer 1987:57,60-3; Crystal 1966:5; Brinton 1988:41; Jespersen 1931/1961; Scheffer 1975:50-53) that temporal reference and aspect are conveyed not only by the morphosyntactic form of the verbal complex, but also by the presence of adverbial specification. Furthermore, Scheffer (ibid.) has noted the correlation of particular classes of adverbial with the choice of the progressive or the simple form. Initially, I distinguished among three types of adverbial: frequency (e.g. *never, again, every day*), duration (e.g. *all day, still, all the time*) and time (e.g. *today, always, now*). However, because of sparse distribution of adverbials within some of these categories, and their interaction with the sentential aspect factor group, this factor group was coded only for the presence (44a) or absence (44b) of an adverbial.

(44) a. The boys lived quite different from the way they *live now*. (ESR/006:081)

b. They can eat all kind of steaks, anything they *needs*. (ANSE/014:491)

## 5.7. Results

All of the factor groups detailed in Section 5.6 were investigated individually and together by means of GoldVarb2 (Rand & Sankoff 1990). However, as Table 5.5 shows, not all of the factor groups coded are relevant to all of the variant expressions of present temporal reference. For example, the phonological and adjacency factor groups, as well as the type of subject, have been hypothesized to be relevant only to verbal *-s*. In contrast, the aspectual and discourse factor

groups have been hypothesized to be relevant to most if not all of the variants. For these reasons, the analysis I present here is divided into three sections. In the first section, I discuss the overall distribution of the variants, as well as their distribution with respect to the generally relevant discourse, aspectual and syntactic factor groups. In the following sections, I narrow the variable context in different ways in order to treat in detail the factors conditioning the occurrence of each of the more robust variants.

**Table 5.5: Relevance of factor groups coded to the variant expressions of present temporal reference.**

	Simple Present	-s	be V-ing	do	will
<i>Phonological:</i>					
Preceding environment		✓			
Following environment		✓			
<i>Lexical:</i>					
Lexical verb		✓			
<i>Syntactic:</i>					
Type of subject		✓			
Grammatical person and number of subject		✓	?		
Adjacency of subject and verb		✓			
Type of clause		✓	✓		
<i>Semantic:</i>					
Lexical aspect	✓		✓		
Sentential aspect	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Sentential/Discourse:</i>					
Polarity			✓	✓	
Sentence type				✓	
Adverbial specification			✓		

### 5.7.1. Overall Distribution

The overall distribution of forms is shown in Table 5.6

**Table 5.6: Distribution of morphosyntactic markers of present temporal reference in Early African American English, by community.**

	SAM		ANSE		ESR	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Simple Present	2634	78	2792	66	360	69
<i>do/does</i>	436	13	858	20	92	18
(be) V-ing	232	7	524	12	58	11
<i>will/'ll</i>	61	2	63	1	11	2

Note that the distribution of morphosyntactic markers is virtually identical in all three varieties: the simple present is overwhelmingly preferred for the expression of present temporal reference, with *do* following far behind, a smaller proportion of the progressive, and a negligible amount of *will*.

However, as I discussed in Chapter 3, the important consideration in variationist research is not the overall distribution of a particular form, but rather its conditioning by the linguistic context. This conditioning can only be revealed by determining the hierarchy of factors contributing to the occurrence of each form. To this end, I performed a multivariate analysis of each of the forms listed in Table 5.5 using the factor groups hypothesized to be relevant to most if not all of the variants: the grammatical person and number of the subject and the lexical and sentential aspect.

A first consideration is that *do* and *will* are highly restricted in their distribution with respect to the discourse factor groups. Preliminary analysis revealed that *will* is confined to declarative contexts and *do* is virtually categorical in negative and interrogative sentences (except in Samaná, where the direction of effect, though less robust, is still in the same direction), the latter effect reflecting the Standard English pattern of *do*-support (see Appendix A, Table 1). Because of

the virtually categorical distribution of *do* and *will* in these contexts, I hypothesized that these effects might be occluding the conditioning effects of the other, less categorical constraints. Therefore, I reanalyzed the data, excluding negative sentences and questions. The results are shown in Table 5.7.

First, note that, in all three varieties, the simple present is favoured by stative verbs and habitual contexts. For grammatical person, the results are less consistent, but in ANSE the simple present is favoured in non-third-person contexts.

The patterning of the progressive is virtually complementary to that of the simple present. In all three varieties, the progressive is favoured by nonstatives and durative (except in the ESR) and especially punctual contexts. This last result is not surprising, given that, as I have discussed, the definition of "punctual" I have adopted here is reminiscent of the concept of "limited duration" often attributed to the progressive (Section 5.2). Again, the only variety in which grammatical person is selected as significant is ANSE, in which the progressive is favoured by third persons (singular and plural). Note that, while there is no clearcut pattern in the distribution of simple present and the progressive with respect to the type of sentence, both variants are favoured in affirmative contexts.

**Table 5.7:** *Twelve independent variable rule analyses of the contribution of factors to the occurrence of four morphosyntactic markers of present temporal reference (affirmative and declarative contexts only) in Early African American English. Factor groups not selected as significant in brackets.*

	SAM				ANSE				ESR			
	Simple*	V-ing	do	will	Simple*	V-ing	do	will	Simple*	V-ing	do	will
Total N:	2819				3149				411			
Corrected mean:	.925	.045	.013	.011	.892	.079	.006	.009	.874	.104	.007	.007
<b>Lexical Aspect</b>												
Stative	.80	.17	[.52]	0%	.78	.19	.65	[.42]	.67	.32	[.44]	0%
Nonstative	.20	.82	[.48]	4%	.19	.84	.33	[.59]	.31	.69	[.56]	4%
Range:	60	65			59	65	32		36	37		
<b>Sentential Aspect</b>												
Habitual	.68	.26	[.58]	.78	.76	.20	[.51]	.74	.53	.42	1%	4%
Durative	.34	.73	[.36]	.16	.41	.65	[.29]	.28	.56	.50	0%	0%
Punctual	.23	.83	[.57]	.34	.20	.82	[.65]	.30	.21	.82	0%	0%
Range:	45	57		44	56	62		46	35	40		
<b>Grammatical Person</b>												
3rd sg.	[.44]	[.56]	[.63]	[.52]	.36	.65	[.30]	.65	[.46]	[.53]	[.79]	2%
3rd pl.	[.54]	[.47]	[.50]	[.43]	.33	.66	[.60]	.71	[.43]	[.63]	[.61]	2%
non-3rd	[.51]	[.49]	[.43]	[.53]	.59	.41	[.53]	.40	[.53]	[.45]	[.41]	2%
Range:					26	25		31				

\* Includes both bare and -s-marked.

These varieties also show similarities in the patterning of the less robust variants, which are extremely restricted in terms of the conditioning of their distribution, but here the similarities are not as consistent. Despite its overall low rate of occurrence (as indicated by the corrected means), the functions of *do* appear to be aspectual: it is generally favoured with statives (except in the ESR), and it is favoured in habitual contexts. In addition, in Samaná (where it is most robust), it fulfills a dual role, expressing both habitual (where it competes with *will*) and punctual aspect (where it competes with the progressive). This latter competition (between *do* and the progressive) appears to reflect the vestiges of more robust prior variability: as Nurmi (1996) has noted, both forms were in competition in EModE for the expression of (an unspecified) aspectual reading, with the progressive gradually winning out. *Will* is categorically restricted to nonstatives in all varieties but ANSE, and is favoured in habitual contexts. Thus, the central function of *will* appears to be the expression of habitual aspect with nonstative verbs.

Because of the highly circumscribed distribution of *do* and *will*, I ignore them in the remainder of the analysis. In the following sections, I consider each of the more robust variants — simple present (unmarked or *-s*-marked) and the progressive — in more detail.

### 5.7.2. Simple Present: *-s* and $\emptyset$

In this section, I consider the linguistic constraints on the distribution of  $\emptyset$ -marking and *-s*-marking on tokens of simple present. This analysis requires excluding from consideration the other variants (the progressive, *do* and *will*), though I return to the consideration of simple present against these variants at the end of the section.

Table 5.8 displays the results of a multivariate analysis of verbal *-s* in simple present in each of the three varieties according to the factor groups which I have hypothesized to be relevant to *-s*: the preceding and following phonological environment, the type of subject, the grammatical person and number of the subject, the adjacency of the subject and verb, the type of clause and the sentential aspect. (Note that, because I am here concerned only with the opposition between *-s* and  $\emptyset$ , the values for  $\emptyset$  in Table 5.8 can be derived by subtracting those of *-s* from 1.00 or from 100%.)

**Table 5.8: Three independent variable rule analyses of factors contributing to the occurrence of verbal -s.**

	SAM			ANSE			ESR		
Corrected mean:	.211			.045			.058		
Total N:	2427			2548			323		
	%	N		%	N		%	N	
<b>PRECEDING PHONOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT</b>									
Vowel	.57	28	484	[.49]	9	875	[.62]	11	133
Consonant	.46	25	1294	[.51]	13	1485	[.41]	8	176
Sibilant	.70	41	75	[.32]	8	59	[.43]	10	10
Range:	24								
<b>FOLLOWING PHONOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT</b>									
Vowel	.54	<u>27</u> <sup>49</sup>	1007	.55	12	1112	[.57]	11	136
Consonant	.47	21	1197	.44	10	1185	[.45]	8	171
Pause	.50	<u>28</u>	114	.59	19	183	[.46]	8	12
Range:	7			15					
<b>SUBJECT TYPE</b>									
Personal pronoun	[.49]	20	2080	.47	4	2103	[.48]	6	282
Other pronoun	[.57]	49	145	.80	66	98	[.74]	38	8
"Heavy" NP	[.84]	71	7	.27	11	9	[.96]	50	2
Notional plural	[.58]	39	31	.64	25	36	[.61]	17	12
Other NP	[.50]	37	164	.61	39	302	[.55]	37	19
Range:				53					
<b>GRAMMATICAL PERSON</b>									
3rd singular	.73	43	545	.90	49	417	.95	52	29
3rd plural	.57	28	655	.62	11	401	.61	9	70
non-3rd person	.36	12	1219	.35	2	1730	.38	4	224
Range:	37			55			57		
<b>ADJACENCY</b>									
Adjacent	[.50]	23	2360	.51	11	2432	[.49]	9	318
Non-adjacent	[.55]	28	67	.32	8	116	[.84]	20	5
Range:				19					
<b>CLAUSE TYPE</b>									
Main	.49	22	2172	[.50]	10	2171	[.53]	9	280
Subordinate	.39	16	44	[.48]	18	202	[.26]	5	19
Relative	.61	35	211	[.51]	18	175	[.35]	13	24
Range:	22								
<b>SENTENTIAL ASPECT</b>									
Habitual	.59	30	1261	.64	17	1173	[.50]	11	164
Durative	.47	19	851	.53	15	507	[.50]	8	123
Punctual	.24	6	315	.30	2	866	[.47]	3	36
Range:	35			34					

<sup>49</sup> Underlined figures show a mismatch between the hierarchy of factor weights and the hierarchy of percentages.

Although these results appear to show a great deal of inconsistency in effect across the three varieties (especially in the phonological, adjacency and clause type factor groups), I believe that this inconsistency in fact results from two statistical problems: sparse distribution of data in some cells and interaction among factor groups. In order to demonstrate these problems more clearly, I have included not only the weights but also the percentages and number of tokens for each factor, as well as the values of the factors not selected as significant (shown in brackets). The problem of sparse distribution can be seen most clearly in the type of subject, in which there is an underrepresentation of certain categories (most notably, "heavy" NPs). In addition, in two factor groups the hierarchy of factor weights does not match the hierarchy of percentages in at least some varieties (as underlined). In fact, cross-tabulating each factor group against every other factor group revealed at least two types of interaction. First, the type of subject interacts strongly with adjacency, since pronominal subjects tend to be adjacent to the verb. Thus, the only consistent effect of the type of subject, the disfavouring effect of personal pronouns, may also be due to the favouring effect of subjects other than adjacent pronouns. Second, not only are the effects of the type of clause inconsistent across the three varieties (as shown in Table 5.8), but cross-tabulating this factor group with every other factor group revealed interaction in almost every case.

Most consistent are the effects of grammatical person and sentential aspect. First, habitual contexts tend to favour *-s* in all three varieties, although in the ESR, durative and habitual contexts favour *-s* almost equally. More notably, grammatical person is selected as significant in all three varieties, and in fact is the only factor group selected as significant in the ESR. Third-person contexts (especially singular) favour *-s*, and non-third-person contexts disfavour.

In order to avoid the problems associated with the interaction of the type of subject and adjacency, I combined these two factor groups into one (as recent work [e.g. Godfrey & Tagliamonte 1999; Tagliamonte & Poplack to appear] has done), distinguishing only between adjacent personal pronouns and all other subjects, whether adjacent or not. In addition, because of the high degree of interaction of the clause-type factor group with most other factor groups, which might skew the results, I excluded it from the analysis. The results are shown in Table 5.9. First,

note that the results for grammatical person correspond to those of Table 5.8: most in third singular, less in third plural, least in non-third. In fact, grammatical person is the most significant factor group, as revealed by the range of factor weights, which is the highest across all three varieties. This consistent result suggests that a major (if not primary) function of *-s* in these varieties is the same as that of Standard English; namely, concord with third person singular subjects. It also bolsters the findings of previous studies (Section 5.6) that *-s* has different effects in different grammatical persons.

**Table 5.9: Three independent variable rule analyses of factors contributing to the occurrence of verbal *-s*.**

	<b>SAM</b>	<b>ANSE</b>	<b>ESR</b>
Corrected mean:	.215	.046	.059
Total N:	2520	2649	333
<b>PRECEDING PHONOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT</b>			
Vowel	.55	[.49]	[.68]
Consonant	.47	[.51]	[.42]
Sibilant	.70	[.31]	[.54]
Range:		23	
<b>FOLLOWING PHONOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT</b>			
Vowel	.55	.57	[.62]
Consonant	.47	.46	[.46]
Pause	.53	.57	[.45]
Range:		8	11
<b>GRAMMATICAL PERSON</b>			
3rd singular	.72	.92	.94
3rd plural	.57	.62	.59
non-3rd person	.36	.33	.37
Range:		36	59
<b>ADJACENCY &amp; SUBJECT TYPE</b>			
Adjacent pronoun	[.49]	.47	[.47]
Nonadjacent pronoun or NP	[.54]	.59	[.62]
Range:			12
<b>SENTENTIAL ASPECT</b>			
Habitual	.59	.63	[.51]
Durative	.47	.51	[.50]
Punctual	.25	.32	[.44]
Range:		34	31

Several other functions of *-s* are also indicated by consistent cross-variety effects. First of all, although the combined factor group of adjacency and subject type is selected as significant only in ANSE, it consistently operates in the direction specified by the dialectological literature: nonadjacent pronominal subjects and NP subjects favour *-s* over adjacent pronominal subjects.

The effect of sentential aspect is also somewhat consistent across the three varieties, with habitual contexts favouring *-s* over duratives and punctuals. The only exception to this pattern is the ESR, where there is almost no difference between habituals and duratives. The disfavouring effect of punctuals is completely consistent across all varieties. However, recall Myhill and Harris's (1986) contention that punctuals were a *favouring* environment for *-s*. How can we explain the discrepancy between their finding and ours? Here I argue that the apparent punctual effect in their study results from different variable contexts and different coding practises. First, recall that the definition of "punctual" that I have employed here is not the same as that used by previous studies. Such studies included narrative (i.e. past temporal reference) clauses in the variable context (e.g. Myhill & Harris 1986; Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991). As Poplack and Tagliamonte (in press) show, whether or not narrative complicating action clauses are included in the variable context affects the results for the aspectual factor group. Thus, the punctual effect noted by Myhill & Harris (1986) is apparently a consequence of their definition of the variable context. In addition, as I have noted, previous studies have also been inconsistent in coding aspect according to *Aktionsart* and sentential aspect. Since the events I have coded as "punctual" here are not *true* punctuals, we would not necessarily expect a punctual effect to obtain.

A more interesting result is revealed by examining the distribution of punctuals according to grammatical person, as shown in Table 5.10. Since the majority of punctual tokens cluster in non-third person contexts, the disfavouring effect of punctuals may have more to do with the disfavouring effect of non-third person in general: as we have seen, these contexts are less conducive to *-s* than third person.

**Table 5.10: Cross-tabulation of grammatical person (3rd vs. non-3rd) with sentential aspect, by community**

	SAM		ANSE		ESR	
	<i>3rd</i>	<i>non-3rd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>non-3rd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>non-3rd</i>
HABITUAL	746	553	557	669	78	86
DURATIVE	488	391	278	258	21	102
PUNCTUAL	25	<b>292</b>	33	<b>855</b>	0	<b>36</b>

However, I would argue that the disfavouring effect of non-third person, as well as the sparse distribution of punctuals in non-third person contexts, may in fact be rooted in another factor, the lexical verb. Since I coded each frequently occurring lexical item individually, it was possible to determine the distribution of lexical items according to their occurrence. Table 5.11 shows the most frequent<sup>50</sup> lexical verbs in non-third person contexts in the three varieties. Note first of all that the frequently-occurring lexical verbs in this context are limited to a relatively small set, shared for the most part by all three varieties. More importantly, these verbs are generally stative verbs of cognition (*think, know*) or perception (*see*). Thus, the apparent punctual effect appears to be the result of the clustering in non-third person of a small class of (generally stative) verbs which tend to disfavour *-s*.

<sup>50</sup> "Frequent" is here defined (admittedly arbitrarily) as occurring more than 10 times in each dataset.

**Table 5.11: Percentage of verbal -s on frequent verbs ( $N \geq 10$ ) in non-3rd person contexts. (Verbs listed in descending order of frequency.)**

SAM		ANSE		ESR	
	% -s		% -s		% -s
All verbs:	12		2		3
<i>have</i>	8	<i>know</i>	1	<i>know</i>	0
<i>know</i>	9	<i>think</i>	0	<i>remember</i>	0
<i>say</i>	9	<i>got</i>	0	<i>got</i>	4
<i>got</i>	0	<i>remember</i>	0	<i>want</i>	13
<i>see</i>	6	<i>have</i>	0	<i>get</i>	0
<i>understand</i>	6	<i>want</i>	0	<i>go</i>	0
<i>remember</i>	0	<i>get</i>	21	<i>think</i>	0
		<i>go</i>	3		
		<i>say</i>	8		
		<i>see</i>	0		
		<i>forget</i>	0		
		<i>believe</i>	0		
		<i>call</i>	3		
		<i>do</i>	0		
		<i>tell</i>	0		
		<i>take</i>	8		
		<i>put</i>	0		
		<i>like</i>	5		
		<i>dream</i>	0		
		<i>buy</i>	8		
		<i>wonder</i>	0		

The remaining question is whether the recurrent favouring effect of habituals is a function of -s itself or merely a concomitant of the variable context in which it has been studied (i.e. the present tense). Recall the results of Table 5.7, which provided quantitative justification for Poplack and Tagliamonte's (1989; Tagliamonte & Poplack, to appear) hypothesis that the aspectual effect noted frequently in previous studies of verbal -s results from the fact that the simple present itself conveys aspectual meaning.

Resolving this question requires extricating the aspectual effects of verbal -s from those of the simple present. In previous studies, it has been assumed, either implicitly or explicitly, that bare and -s-marked forms of the simple present are related to each other either phonologically (via a process of insertion or deletion) or morphologically (via insertion under agreement or

hypercorrection). Thus, rates of *-s* have been calculated by dividing its number of occurrences by the total number of simple present tokens, as I have done in Tables 5.7 and 5.8, as shown in (45).

$$(45) \quad \text{a. Insertion:} \quad \frac{\# -s}{\# -s + \# \emptyset} \quad \text{b. Deletion:} \quad \frac{\# \emptyset}{\# -s + \# \emptyset}$$

In order to extricate the effects of verbal *-s* from simple present, I reanalyzed the data treating simple presents with *-s* and those without as separate variants within the present temporal reference context (that is, as if they were not necessarily derived from each other by processes of insertion or deletion). Thus, rather than calculating the rate of *-s* or zero out of the sum of simple present forms, I calculated each variant separately out of the total of all present temporal reference variants, including the progressive, *do* and *will*, as shown in (46).

$$(46) \quad \text{a.} \quad \frac{\# -s}{\# -s + \# \emptyset + \# do + \# will} \quad \text{b.} \quad \frac{\# \emptyset}{\# -s + \# \emptyset + \# do + \# will}$$

The results are displayed in Table 5.12 (which excludes the results for the other variants, since they are identical to those in Table 5.8). I have divided the analysis into third singular, third plural and non-third contexts in order to determine the extent to which the most robust and consistent effects (sentential aspect and adjacency/subject type) are restricted within each grammatical person. Note first of all the effect of adjacency and subject type, which again not only applies consistently across the three varieties, but also operates only in third person plural. This restriction to third-plural contexts is exactly the environment which the Northern Subject Rule, discussed above, was hypothesized to apply within.

**Table 5.12:** Eighteen independent variable rule analyses of the contribution of factors to the occurrence of zero- and s-marked verbs against all other expressions of present temporal reference in Early African American English. Factor groups not selected as significant in brackets.

	3RD SINGULAR			3RD PLURAL			NON-3RD PERSON		
	SAM	ANSE	ESR	SAM	ANSE	ESR	SAM	ANSE	ESR
Total N:	688	568	42	756	528	94	1335	1968	257
Corrected mean:	Ø .507 -s .350	Ø .401 -s .376	Ø .403 -s .410	Ø .673 -s .246	Ø .719 -s .087	Ø .721 -s .054	Ø .780 -s .103	Ø .851 -s .011	Ø .852 -s .026
<b>Sentential Aspect</b>									
Habitual	.42 .59	[.51] .55	[.48] [.52]	.43 .57	.45 [.54]	[.44] [.50]	.43 .60	.54 .82	.46 [.46]
Durative	.60 .44	[.53] .48	[.53] [.47]	.66 .37	.65 [.41]	[.82] [.51]	.65 .50	.80 .40	.61 [.59]
Punctual	.36 .17	[.34] .30	0% 0%	.06 0%	.30 0%	0% 0%	.44 .30	.38 .27	.33 [.37]
Range:	24 42	25		60 20	35		21 20	42 55	28
<b>Subject-Verb Adjacency</b>									
Adjacent	[.50] [.51]	[.52] [.52]	[.43] [.67]	.54 [.48]	.56 .44	[.55] [.38]	[.50] [.50]	[.51] [.49]	.53 [.47]
Non-adjacent	[.50] [.49]	[.50] [.42]	[.53] [.42]	.38 [.56]	.40 .60	[.40] [.72]	[.62] [.46]	[.43] [.27]	.16 [.87]
Range:				16	16 16				37

More interesting is the effect of aspect, which applies consistently across all three varieties and almost all of the grammatical persons (except the ESR in non-third person contexts). First of all, *-s* is consistently favoured by habituais, confirming the view that it is used to mark habitual aspect. However, we can also see that zero forms themselves express another aspect, that of duration. Thus, I conclude that the previously noted habitual effect of *-s* is valid and not simply a consequence of its variable context: that is, in these varieties at least, and presumably others with robust use of nonstandard verbal *-s*, *-s* functions to convey habitual aspect. Furthermore, I conclude that the aspectual reading of the simple present has become divided between two alternate forms: *-s* to mark habitual, zero to mark durative. Moreover, this effect obtains regardless of the grammatical person.

These results demonstrate the importance of aspect to the occurrence of verbal *-s* in Early AAE. Contrary to those who have suggested that *-s* functions as a durative (e.g. Brewer 1981) or punctual (e.g. Myhill & Harris 1986) marker, these results show clearly that the aspectual function of *-s* is to mark habitual, a function it shares with present-reference *will* and (in some varieties) *do*. Durative aspect can be marked in two ways, via the progressive or a bare simple present form. As we have seen, the previously reported effect of punctuals to favour *-s* appears to have to do with the definition of the variable context (i.e. whether or not narrative clauses are included) and the way in which aspect is coded (i.e. on the basis of the *Aktionsart* of the verb or the sentential aspect). However, the effect of punctuals to disfavour *-s* in these varieties does not appear to be a true aspectual effect, but rather due to the confluence of environments that disfavour *-s*-marking more generally: non-third person contexts and certain stative verbs. In contrast, the habitual effect of *-s*, previously attributed to the inherent correlation between the present tense and habitual aspect, has been shown to be a *bona fide* aspectual function of *-s*.

### 5.7.3. *Progressive*

Having dealt with the overall distribution of forms and the more specific constraints on the distribution of verbal *-s* within the simple present, in this section I consider in more detail the

linguistic factors conditioning the occurrence of the progressive. As in the preceding section, I exclude the less robust variants (*do* and *will*).

Before discussing the analysis of the progressive in more detail, I first consider the distribution of the progressive with invariant *be*. As discussed in Section 5.1, studies of modern urban varieties of AAVE have found that this construction is frequently used to express habitual aspect (e.g. Richardson 1991; Green 1998). In these data, this hypothesis is difficult to test, since there were only 10 occurrences of this construction across all three corpora (3 in SAM, 7 in ANSE and none in the ESR). Of these 10 tokens, 7 occurred in habitual contexts. If we compare this rate (70%) with the overall rate of *inflected* forms of *be* with the progressive occurring in habitual contexts (29%), it does appear that invariant *be* marks habitual. However, given the vanishingly rare occurrence of this construction in the dataset, it cannot by any means be considered a *major* exponent of habitual aspect, as Richardson (1991) found for AAVE. Therefore, in the following analysis, I will not consider the form of the auxiliary, but focus instead on the opposition between simple present and progressive forms.

As we have seen in the historical, prescriptive, descriptive and creole literature (Sections 5.2-5.4), verbal stativity is an important consideration in the use of the progressive, and Table 5.6 confirmed that this consideration is reflected in these data. Given the significance of verbal stativity to the occurrence of the progressive, we might ask whether the factors conditioning its distribution in statives and non-statives is the same. In other words, are the effects of lexical and sentential aspect completely independent?

In order to answer this question for these varieties, I first cross-tabulated the factor groups of lexical aspect and sentential aspect. Since Table 5.7 showed that progressives function to convey both durative and "punctual" sentential aspect, here I consider only the distinction between habituals and non-habituals. Table 5.13 shows that lexical stativity and sentential aspect are not independent: as the figures in bold indicate, nonstative verbs cluster in habitual contexts and statives cluster in non-habitual contexts. Because of the disproportionate representation of verb-classes within each type of sentential aspect, including both factor groups in the same multiple-

regression analysis could mask any differences in conditioning. For this reason, in the analysis that follows, I perform separate runs for statives and nonstatives.

*Table 5.13: Cross-tabulation of lexical stativity and sentential aspect (by community).*

		Habitual	Non-Habitual
ANSE	Stative	454	1958
	Nonstative	1220	395
SAM	Stative	304	1369
	Nonstative	1276	190
ESR	Stative	64	232
	Nonstative	185	27

Table 5.14 displays the results of these analyses for the three varieties, separated according to lexical stativity. Note first that the prediction that statives disfavour the progressive is here confirmed: in each variety, the corrected mean, which indicates the overall tendency for the progressive to occur, is consistently and substantially lower for statives than for nonstatives.

With nonstative verbs, the progressive is obviously much more productive and less restricted, as revealed not only by the higher overall rate but also by its conditioning. In all three varieties, the most important factor is sentential aspect, with duratives favouring. In fact, the effect of sentential aspect outweighs that of all other factors, as indicated by the large ranges. These findings confirm that the general tendency of the progressive to convey durative aspect (whether generally durative or limited duration) noted in Table 5.7 applies to nonstative verbs. However, the association with durative aspect does not hold for stative verbs, since sentential aspect is not selected as significant in any variety. These results indicate that, unlike for nonstatives, the progressive does not appear to convey aspectual nuances with statives.

**Table 5.14: Factors contributing to the occurrence of progressive in declarative present temporal reference contexts in Early African American English.**

	NONSTATIVE				STATIVE			
	ANSE	SAM	ESR	N	ANSE	SAM	ESR	N
<b>Total N:</b>	1615	1467	212		2412	1673	296	
<b>Corrected mean:</b>	.193	.082	.163		.025	.022	.037	
<b>Sentential Aspect</b>								
Habitual	.33	.41	.43	185	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	64
Durative	.90	.91	.87	27	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	222
	<i>Range:</i> 57	50	44					
<b>Clause Type</b>								
Main	.47	.46	[ ]	168	.47	[ ]	.42	252
Subordinate	.59	.75	[ ]	44	.72	[ ]	.85	44
	<i>Range:</i> 12	29		25			43	
<b>Adverbial Specification</b>								
Adverbial	[ ]	.66	[ ]	25	.73	.73	[ ]	20
No Adverbial	[ ]	.48	[ ]	187	.48	.48	[ ]	276
	<i>Range:</i> 18			25		25		
<b>Polarity</b>								
Negative	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	16	.26	[ ]	[ ]	81
Affirmative	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	196	.61	[ ]	[ ]	215
	<i>Range:</i> 35			35				
<b>FACTORS NOT SELECTED:</b>								
Sentential Aspect			X		X		X	
Clause Type			X		X		X	
Adverbial Specification	X		X		X		X	
Polarity	X	X	X		X		X	

What of the other factors conditioning the distribution of both types of verb? With nonstative verbs, in addition to the aspectual effect, there are effects of other factors (at least for ANSE and SAM): the type of clause and adverbial specification (in SAM). However, these effects are less important than that of sentential aspect, as indicated by the lower ranges. With stative verbs, these same factor groups are selected as significant: the type of clause in ANSE and the ESR, adverbial specification in ANSE and SAM, and, additionally, polarity in ANSE. Moreover, where these effects obtain, they operate in the *same* direction with both statives and nonstatives. Recall from Sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2 that, prior to Early Modern English, the progressive construction functioned as a stylistic or discourse marker. Given the association between clause type and discursive function (e.g. Hopper 1979; Wallace 1982), we might then regard the effect of factors such as the type of clause to reflect this older function. This interpretation receives some support from the finding that the expansion of the progressive developed differently in main and subordinate clauses prior to the 18th century (Strang 1982; Denison 1998), an effect which does not appear to obtain in mainstream 20th century varieties of English (Scheffer 1975:53-5). Furthermore, I suggested in Section 5.3.3 that the association of the progressive with durative aspect appears to have developed in the 18th century, and that this period also saw the beginning of the restriction on the use of the progressive with statives. If we assume that the diaspora varieties represent English varieties of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the patterning of the progressive observed in Table 5.14 reflects two major types of effect: the "newer" effect of aspect, and older, discourse effects. The older constraints are operative with both statives and nonstatives, but their effect with nonstatives is eclipsed by the much stronger effect of sentential aspect, which does not affect statives. The strongest constraints on statives are still those which are most representative of the older system of progressive usage. Thus, the findings of this study largely confirm predictions of the historical, descriptive and prescriptive literature.

A final consideration of the progressive is whether its variability, at least with stative verbs, can be attributed to lexical effects. As we saw in Section 5.7.2, the apparent effect of punctual aspect to disfavour verbal -s turned out to result from the interaction of non-third person contexts

and a small set of stative verbs. Table 5.15 displays the overall percentage of progressive forms occurring in the most frequent stative verbs in the dataset.

**Table 5.15: Percentage of progressive with frequent ( $N > 5$ ) stative verbs in three varieties of Early African American English**

		SAM		ANSE		ESR	
		%		%		%	
ALL STATIVES		2		4		5	
FREQUENT STATIVES ( $N > 5$ )	<i>wait</i>	<b>63</b>	<i>try</i>	<b>50</b>	<i>live</i>	<b>67</b>	
	<i>try</i>	<b>56</b>	<i>stand</i>	<b>43</b>	<i>know</i>	0	
	<i>look</i>	<b>15</b>	<i>live</i>	<b>42</b>	<i>got</i>	0	
	<i>live</i>	<b>13</b>	<i>look</i>	<b>38</b>	<i>remember</i>	0	
	<i>hear</i>	<b>7</b>	<i>lay/lie</i>	<b>38</b>	<i>want</i>	0	
	<i>see</i>	<b>1</b>	<i>sit</i>	<b>37</b>	<i>think</i>	0	
	<i>have</i>	<b>0</b>	<i>stay</i>	<b>20</b>	<i>have</i>	0	
	<i>know</i>	<b>0</b>	<i>bother</i>	<b>10</b>	<i>see</i>	0	
	<i>got</i>	<b>0</b>	<i>have</i>	<b>5</b>			
	<i>want</i>	<b>0</b>	<i>think</i>	<b>2</b>			
	<i>like</i>	<b>0</b>	<i>like</i>	<b>2</b>			
	<i>understand</i>	<b>0</b>	<i>want</i>	<b>1</b>			
	<i>say</i>	<b>0</b>	<i>see</i>	<b>1</b>			
	<i>remember</i>	<b>0</b>	<i>know</i>	<b>0</b>			
	<i>believe</i>	<b>0</b>	<i>got</i>	<b>0</b>			
	<i>stay</i>	<b>0</b>	<i>remember</i>	<b>0</b>			
	<i>remain</i>	<b>0</b>	<i>believe</i>	<b>0</b>			
	<i>forget</i>	<b>0</b>	<i>forget</i>	<b>0</b>			
	<i>find</i>	<b>0</b>	<i>taste</i>	<b>0</b>			
	<i>follow</i>	<b>0</b>	<i>hear</i>	<b>0</b>			
		<i>wonder</i>	<b>0</b>				
		<i>find</i>	<b>0</b>				
		<i>keep</i>	<b>0</b>				
		<i>wish</i>	<b>0</b>				

As Table 5.14 shows, the occurrence of the progressive with most frequently occurring statives is extremely low, except for a very small set of verbs which are responsible for most of the variability. In fact, this set in the ESR is limited to one verb: only *live* occurs in the progressive. The set of verbs in ANSE and Samaná is somewhat larger, but still restricted to a relatively small set, some of which (e.g. *try*, *look*, *live*) are shared in common by both varieties. Thus, it appears

that we cannot entirely attribute variability in the use of the progressive to verb class, but must also consider the contribution of certain lexical verbs.

The analysis presented in this section has demonstrated that the effects of lexical and sentential aspect on the occurrence of the progressive in Early AAE are highly interrelated. The progressive is much more robust with nonstative verbs, where it conveys durative aspect consistently across all three varieties, as predicted by the semantic and prescriptive literature. With stative verbs, the linguistic effects are inconsistent across varieties and appear to reflect older, discourse constraints. Moreover, the variability of the progressive in stative verbs can be attributed to a relatively restricted set of verbs.

### 5.8. Summary

The present has figured in the origins debate only with respect to one feature, verbal *-s*. Initial research on this feature in AAVE characterized its use as hypercorrection, but subsequent research has found a number of linguistic factors to condition its occurrence, such as the type of subject and its proximity to the verb, grammatical person, and verbal aspect. While the aspectual effects have received a great deal of attention in the origins debate, no clear picture has emerged, and they have remained largely uninvestigated in other varieties of English. In contrast with verbal *-s*, there are few statements about the use of the progressive in AAVE, except for constructions with uninflected *be*, which does not speak to the variation between the progressive and the simple present.

Tracing the origins of the system of present temporal reference in Early AAE first required examining this system in EBCs, as well as in regional nonstandard and historical varieties of English. Although the prototypical creole system distinguishes stativity and punctuality, the division in nonpunctual between progressive and habitual markers in EBCs is subject to inter- and intralinguistic variability, usually attributed to decreolization. Thus, while the aspectual effects of verbal *-s* in AAVE have been attributed to a creole origin, there appears to be no one-to-one correlation between aspectual distinctions and preverbal tense/aspect markers.

In the history of English, the major change within present temporal reference had to do with the development of periphrastic constructions, especially the progressive, in EModE. Although nonstandard agreement within the simple present has persisted in nonstandard varieties even into the twentieth century, it is the relatively rapid expansion of the progressive, which appears to have developed out of an OE/ME stylistic device into an obligatory marker of aspect. However, this aspectual marking is considered to be restricted to nonstative verbs. Despite the apparent standardization of both verbal *-s* and the progressive, variability in their use appears to have persisted in nonstandard speech even into the 20th century.

Although many of the studies discussed above equate present tense with present time, there is a tenuous relationship between these categories. Furthermore, characterizations of the aspectual meanings conveyed by the simple present and the progressive are problematic to some degree. For one thing, the progressive is not the sole exponent of aspect in the present. In addition, although the progressive is said to be restricted to dynamic verbs, this restriction is not always observed in usage. I have argued that many of the mismatches between verb form and aspectual function can be accounted for by distinguishing between the inherent lexical aspect of the verb and the sentential aspect of the proposition in which the verb occurs, taking into account a variety of contextual factors.

Since the precise context in which the speaker has a choice between markers of the present is unclear, I followed Poplack and Tagliamonte's (1996; Tagliamonte & Poplack 1993) work on past-time marking and initially defined the context as present temporal reference. I then coded each token for a number of factor groups culled from the literature reviewed in this chapter. In coding the factor groups testing the effect of aspect, I have adopted Olsen's (1997) verb classification system, conceptualizing lexical aspect as a set of privative, underspecified features, as well as definitions of sentential aspect that are standard in the variationist literature.

In all three varieties of Early AAE, the distribution of morphosyntactic markers was virtually identical, with the simple present overwhelmingly preferred. Examining the conditioning of these forms, the simple present was favoured by stative verbs, habitual contexts and in

affirmative sentences. Focussing on the distribution of  $\emptyset$  and *-s* within simple present, I found the most consistent effects to be the grammatical person and sentential aspect. While third singular contexts favoured *-s*, and the Northern Subject Rule applied only within third plural, the aspectual effects applied regardless of the grammatical person. The consistent disfavouring effect of punctual environments was found to be due to a combination of disfavouring effects of grammatical persona and certain lexical verbs. Given that the apparent punctual effect is due to a combination of lexical and grammatical factors, the remaining question, whether the habitual effect is an effect of *-s* itself or merely a concomitant of its association with the present tense, required extricating the aspectual effects of verbal *-s* from those of the simple present. Reanalyzing the data by treating simple presents with *-s* and those without as separate variants within the present temporal reference context, I was able to confirm the habitual effect of *-s*, as well as noting the durative effect of  $\emptyset$ .

The progressive was favoured by nonstatives and nonhabitual contexts. Although the progressive construction with invariant *be* was vanishingly rare, it did appear to be associated with habitual aspect. A first finding is that lexical and sentential aspect are intertwined: stative verbs are associated with nonhabitual contexts and nonstatives are associated with habituales. With nonstative verbs, the progressive is much more productive and less restricted, and generally operates to convey durative aspect. However, this pattern does not hold for stative verbs, where sentential aspect is not selected as significant in any variety. I argued that the effects operative in both statives and nonstatives reflect older, discourse effects. Finally, I showed that much of the variability of the progressive with statives could be attributed to a relatively small class of verbs.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

#### **6.0. Introduction**

Spurred by conflicting claims about the origins of a number of salient features of African American English, my goal in this study has been to reconstruct the present temporal reference system of an earlier stage of African American English. But, whereas the debate over the origins of AAVE may once have been characterized by two mutually exclusive poles, the situation nowadays is much more complex, requiring that we evaluate a wider range of positions. We also have a greater range of data available, including sociohistorical and demographic information, written and oral data from earlier time periods, and modern fieldwork in diaspora communities. Yet each of these types of data requires judicious evaluation. Although the use of the diaspora varieties as evidence of earlier stages of the development of AAE is fraught with potential problems, we can overcome these problems by making methodologically consistent use of the tools of variationist sociolinguistics and comparative reconstruction. To this end, the studies reported in this dissertation have investigated the linguistic factors conditioning several variables within the domain of present temporal reference in three varieties argued to be representative of Early AAE.

What is perhaps most striking about the results of these studies is the number of similarities in the conditioning of features across the three corpora. Given the widely disparate circumstances under which the communities represented by these varieties were founded and have developed, coupled with the different conditions under which the data constituting each corpus were collected, these similarities are all the more striking. In light of these considerations, and the assumptions of the comparative endeavour outlined in Chapter 3, these findings point to a common origin for these varieties and provide further validation to similar cross-variety similarities found in other sectors of the linguistic system (e.g. the papers in Poplack 1999; Poplack & Tagliamonte, in press).

This chapter constitutes a review and discussion of the findings of Chapters 4 and 5. For each of these chapters, I summarize the major findings and discuss the implications of these

findings for the methodology of the variables considered and their relevance to the AAVE origins debate. I conclude by summarizing the picture of the grammatical system of present temporal reference in Early AAE and how this picture relates to current developments in AAVE and the English language.

## 6.1. Prosody

### 6.1.1. Review of Results

Although the attention which the origins debate has paid to the present has largely focussed on the copula, the variable contraction and deletion of which has variously been ascribed to a creole or English origin, thirty years of research has failed to achieve consensus on the factors conditioning this variability. An enormous amount of research has gone into investigating the effect of the following grammatical category, a presumed legacy of a creole origin, while the equally significant effect of the type of subject has largely been ignored. Making use of recent work in phonological theory, I have argued that the effects of *both* the type of subject and the following grammatical category are probably better explained by constraints dictated by the prosodic structure of the sentence. Despite the initial finding that prosodic and grammatical structure are highly intertwined, I have shown that it is the complexity, or branchingness, of the phonological phrase in which the copula appears that constrains both its contraction and deletion across the corpora of Early AAE examined here. Furthermore, contraction appears to be blocked by the intervention of a phonological-phrase boundary, which I interpret as deterring the resyllabification necessary for contraction. These results suggest an alternative explanation for the origin of zero copula: that the early African Americans exploited a possibility which was inherent in the English language once contraction developed, using deletion to reduce prosodic complexity.

### 6.1.2. Methodological Considerations

A first, important methodological consideration is separating the different morpholexical forms of the copula: *am*, *is* and *are*. The high rate of contraction of *am* in AAVE (Labov 1969, Rickford et al. 1991) suggests that *I'm* has become a single entry in the speaker's lexicon. While

the findings for SAM and Liberian Settler English, in which *am* is not more favourable to contraction than *is* or *are*, suggest that this lexicalization is a more recent development, the near-categorical figures of *I'm* in ANSE and ESR make the hypothesis of recent lexicalization difficult to justify. Furthermore, Meechan's (1996) finding of near-categorical *am*-contraction in disparate Canadian English dialects suggests that lexicalization is proceeding at different rates in different varieties of English and does not appear to be an innovation of AAVE. As McElhinny (1993:392) points out, most copula research concerns *is*, whose contracted form ([z]) has few syllabic restrictions. In contrast, contracted *are* ([r]) is restricted to postvocalic environments: in other environments, it becomes syllabic to satisfy English phonotactics and thus is not, strictly speaking, contracted. Phonotactics may also explain why phonological considerations are consistently selected as significant. In addition, the restriction of zero *are* to postvocalic environments could be related to the fact that at least one of these varieties (ANSE) has a high rate (60%) of (r)-lessness (Walker 1995). Because the environment of *are*-contraction is exactly that in which postvocalic (r)-deletion occurs, many tokens of zero *are* may in fact be *are*-contractions that have undergone (r)-deletion. Since we cannot distinguish *are*-deletion from (r)-deletion, *are* should be excluded from future analysis of zero copula.

Another question which has been raised but which I have not explicitly addressed is whether the variable context of the copula as it has traditionally been defined is valid. Perhaps the problem is not that the contexts of copula variability in EBCs and English are incommensurable, as Winford (1992a) has argued, but rather that we have conflated two variable contexts: verbal aspect, marked by auxiliaries in English and by preverbal markers in EBCs (see Chapter 5); and non-verbal predication, marked by a true copula in all varieties. Although Rickford et al. (1991) have argued that StdE shows only a distinction between copular and auxiliary functions, while AAVE shows a more fine-grained distinction of grammatical function, there is a consistent opposition in almost all varieties of AAE between auxiliary *V-ing* and *gonna* on one hand, and all other following grammatical categories on the other. In addition, McElhinny (1993:378) found *gonna* to disfavour contraction in Standard American English, and Meechan (1996) found no clear

copula/auxiliary distinction in Canadian English. Even Labov (1969) was careful to note that grammatical differences between the two uses were still significant (ibid.:721). These findings suggest that there is no clear split between African American and other varieties of English with regard to the different uses of *be*.

### 6.1.3. *Implications for the Origins Debate*

One of the most important considerations for the origins debate as it concerns the copula is the relationship between contraction and deletion: are they fundamentally different processes stemming from historically different origins (English and creole, as per Rickford et al. [1991:124-7]), or is Labov's (1969) contention that deletion is an extension of the English contraction rule correct? I believe that the findings of this study support both these positions to some extent, but they can both be attributed to an English origin. Although contraction and zero are both sensitive to phonological and prosodic effects, these effects are different and impossible to extricate from each other: contraction is favoured by preceding proclitics ending in a vowel or [r] and disfavoured by all other forms, while zero is favoured by all forms but proclitics and non-nominal simple PPhs ending in a vowel or [r]. This correlation is understandable whether we regard it as evidence that clitics (contracted elements) prefer to pattern with elements that are also clitic or as evidence of lexicalization (of pronoun and contracted auxiliary) and phonotactics. Similarly, the intervention of a PPh boundary between the subject and predicate disfavours contraction but favours deletion. Thus, while the direction of these effects differs for contraction and deletion, this difference appears to stem from the same historical processes: that is, the same prosodic factors which affected contraction also affect deletion. But by the same token, this does not imply that zero is an *extension* of contraction, since it is favoured only by factors which disfavour contraction.

More telling is the similarity of constraint hierarchies of the following grammatical category for contraction and deletion. We see the same tendency of *V-ing* and *gonna* to favour both contraction and zero, NP to disfavour, and LOC and ADJ to have the same intermediate effects that we have seen in other studies. Separating the following category according to prosodic structure revealed the epiphenomenal nature of the effect of the following grammatical category, the most

striking result being the reversal in ordering of ADJ and LOC with respect to zero copula in ANSE. The fluctuating ordering of these two categories, a finding noted in many studies, can therefore be straightforwardly explained by appealing to the interaction between grammatical and prosodic structure, independent of processes of decreolization. I argue that this interaction is an inherent property of language, which, despite its extremely pervasive and perhaps universal nature, has until now gone uninvestigated. Although it is frustrating to be unable to extricate the effects of different parts of the linguistic system on the variation (after all, we like our questions to have clear-cut answers), this interaction is itself a significant finding. These considerations argue that the copula is not solely a *grammatical* variable, as the creolist position, and the focus on the following grammatical category, would imply. Thus, I conclude that the following grammatical category is not a well-defined factor: its constituents represent an overlap of syntactic, semantic and prosodic structures. If the variable ranking of its constituents is better explained by interaction with prosodic structure than by decreolization, it is not surprising that the use of this factor as a tool in the creole-origins debate has not met with any lasting success. The analysis in this paper has demonstrated that many of the purported grammatical effects are due to prosody.

A remaining question to be answered is why *V-ing* and *gonna* favour contraction and zero and NP disfavours them so consistently in every study. The most obvious answer is that this pattern reflects a distinction between the auxiliary and copular functions of *be*. In auxiliary contexts, *be* functions only to convey tense or aspect (see e.g. Li and Thompson 1977:436, Mufwene 1989, Napoli 1989:9, Langacker 1991:65, Bouchard 1995:470) and, since this information can be conveyed in a number of other ways in discourse (via adverbs, sequencing, discourse context, etc.), it can be omitted. In contrast, *be* with NP predicates has been argued (e.g. Napoli 1989:16, Hengeveld 1992:74, Bouchard 1995:470) to convey several semantic functions: thus, it has a higher "semantic load" and is less easily omitted. In fact, the category "NP" designates a syntactic constituent, but this designation matches completely neither the prosodic structure to which it is mapped, nor the range of semantic functions it serves.

These findings also hold implications for the larger question of the development of copula (and auxiliary) variability in English. Although zero copula has been attested in older forms of English, it seems to have been more of a restricted, perhaps literary construction, rather than a productive process: the examples cited by Visser (1970:190-1) in Old and Middle English occur almost exclusively in appositional contexts with following NPs and in inversion contexts. Although zero copula does exist in other nonstandard varieties of English, in locales such as Alabama (Feagin 1979), Mississippi (Wolfram 1974) and Yorkshire (Martin & Tagliamonte 1999), it has not become so highly developed there as it has in AAVE, thus making zero copula another spectacular and relatively recent innovation of AAVE (see Howe & Walker 1999). In fact, Martin and Tagliamonte's (1999) study of zero copula in Yorkshire English shows surprisingly robust parallels with the prosodic effects observed here for Early AAE.

Given the complementarity of contraction and zero, zero likely represents the exploitation in AAVE of an additional possibility of reducing prosodic complexity that was inherent in the English language once contraction developed. A recent study of contraction in Shakespeare's plays (Walker 1999b) shows that the prosodic constraints on contraction observed here are also (weakly) present in EModE. Studies as diverse as Jacobs's (1994) (non-variationist) work on clitic placement in Brazilian and European Portuguese, Cedergren's (1986, 1990; Cedergren and Simoneau 1985) on rhythmic differences between Québécois and Parisian French and Yoneda's (1993) on intergenerational changes in pitch accent in Japanese demonstrate that varieties of the same language can and do differ prosodically, and that these differences have grammatical consequences. Therefore, the differences we see between AAE and other varieties of English are the kind we see elsewhere among dialects of the same language.

## 6.2. Aspect

### 6.2.1. *Review of Results*

Research in the origins debate on verbal predication in the present has focussed only on verbal *-s*, variously ascribing its usage to hypercorrection or the legacy of a prior creole aspectual system or nonstandard British dialects, ignoring other morphosyntactic expressions of the present.

Expanding the analysis to encompass the entire domain of present temporal reference, I have demonstrated that different expressions of present temporal reference themselves convey different aspects. I not only confirmed the finding of previous studies that *-s* marks habitual aspect, I also showed that the habitual effect of verbal *-s* is not simply a result of its association with the simple present, and that the zero-marked present also conveys an aspectual distinction, that of duration. In addition, I showed the disfavoured effect of punctual aspect to be a consequence of coding practices and the combined effect of grammatical person and a small set of lexical verbs. Making use of current work in aspectual semantics, my separate coding of lexical and contextual aspect revealed inherent interaction between the two categories, such that stative verbs tend to occur in nonhabitual contexts. The importance of stativity was reflected in differential constraints on the use of the progressive with stative and nonstative verbs. Nonstatives were shown to be conditioned by sentential aspect, reflecting the predictions of the prescriptive and descriptive literature. In contrast, the use of the progressive with statives is conditioned primarily by discourse factors, which I have argued to reflect a prior stage in the development of the progressive, when it functioned as a stylistic alternative to the simple present. In addition, I found that most of the usage of the progressive with statives was due to a small set of lexical verbs.

### *6.2.2. Methodological Considerations*

An important methodological consideration arising from this study is the effect that analytic practices can have on the results, both in the definition of the variable context and in the coding of factors. Previous studies of verbal *-s* focussed solely on the present tense rather than present time, despite the tenuous association between tense and temporal reference. The inclusion of past-reference verbs in the variable context is understandable, in light of the frequent use of the present tense in narratives. But zero-marked verbs with past reference are often ambiguous between present-tense verbs unmarked by *-s* or past-tense verbs unmarked by *-t/d*. Such a consideration was no doubt responsible for Myhill & Harris's (1986) finding of a punctual effect for *-s*. More important is the lack of attention given to expressions of present time other than the simple present, which have undoubtedly been overlooked because they appear to pattern like StdE and are not

stereotypically associated with nonstandard varieties. However, given the importance of such forms to aspectual marking and the importance which has been attached to the aspectual effects of *-s* in the literature on the origins debate, it is surprising that they have received so little attention in the variationist literature. In order to determine that *-s* has an aspectual function that is not simply due to its association with the simple present, I had to consider the aspectual role of other verb forms in the present temporal reference domain.

A further methodological consideration has to do with the coding of aspect in variationist analysis. A glance at the relevant literature reveals a great deal of inconsistency, with some analysts coding aspect on the basis of properties of the verb and others on the context of the sentence. In many cases, these decisions are not even made explicit. By coding lexical and sentential aspect as separate factor groups in this study, I have been able to discern differential behaviour of aspectual verb-classes with respect to their interaction with the aspectual composition of the entire sentence, and their occurrence with the progressive. A related problem in coding the aspectual class of the verb is the conflicting criteria for classifying verbs as stative or nonstative. As we have seen, relying on traditional tests of stativity, such as whether the verb can occur in the progressive, are problematic, since this is an area in which there is ongoing variation and perhaps change. More fundamentally, such tests rely on judgments of the observer's native-speaker intuition, which may not match that of the informant(s). But a basic tenet of variationist analysis is that, because the observer may (subconsciously) make judgments which accord with his/her normative or theoretical predispositions (or "scholarly bias" [Wald 1995]), especially in the case of stigmatized features, it is important to code the data in a way which is objective, replicable and consistent (Sankoff 1988a:145). In this study, I adopted a system of classification that is independent of the hypotheses I tested and that provided clear criteria for classifying verbs. This allowed me to code aspectual verb-classes in an objective and consistent manner. I would like to emphasize that this coding was not dictated by my preconceived notions about which verbs were stative: in fact, the classification sometimes conflicted with my own native-speaker intuitions. In the case of the

progressive, this coding system avoided circularity, since it obviated the tendency to code as stative any verb which never occurred in the progressive in these corpora.

### 6.2.3. *Implications for the Origins Debate*

The primary implication of this study for the origins debate is that we need to re-examine our assumptions about the aspectual systems of English and EBCs. Studies of creole tense-aspect systems typically emphasize the features that differentiate them from English, either downplaying similarities or attributing them to decreolization. The overall effect of this approach is to mask features that are shared by all varieties (English and creole), which are due to either their common ancestry or universal semantic principles. In fact, the implicit assumption of the creolist argument is that the aspectual systems of English and EBCs are fundamentally different, and this difference is reflected in AAVE. However, as we have seen, some of the semantic distinctions regarded as quintessentially creole — perfective/imperfective, stative/nonstative — are also operative in English. Furthermore, while the systems of present temporal reference in English and EBCs may differ in their morphosyntactic exponents, they appear to be identical in many ways.

With respect to verbal *-s*, it is difficult to justify claims of a creole origin in Early AAE. Its preponderance in third person singular contexts suggests that its primary role is, as in StdE, a marker of concord or agreement with the subject. The restriction of the adjacency effect to third person plural contexts is most likely the legacy of the Northern Subject Rule operative in a number of British dialects, in which *-s* functioned as a kind of "predicate marker" for verbs separated from their subjects in plural grammatical persons. The habitual effect applies regardless of grammatical person and therefore must be considered a general aspectual function. Does this justify the creolist claim that the aspectual effect of *-s* is a creole legacy? There are as yet no studies of English dialects which have attempted to extricate the effect of *-s* from that of the simple present, as I have done here. However, the repeated findings of the habitual effect of *-s* in demonstrably *non*-creolized varieties of English (e.g. Clarke 1997; Godfrey & Tagliamonte 1999) detracts from the claim that this effect in AAVE derives from a prior creole. What of Montgomery and Fuller's (1996) interpretation that these different functions of *-s* represent different morphemes? This interpretation

seems to me to stem from a particular view of the relation between form and function. Specifically, it reflects the assumption of idealized form-function symmetry discussed in Chapter 2, in which there is a one-to-one correspondence between linguistic form (i.e. morphemes) and function. In the case of *-s*, this view raises certain problems, the most obvious of which is that *-s* may serve more than one function in each occurrence. For example, which "morpheme" is used in third singular habitual context? This problem is irrelevant if we adopt the assumption of form-function asymmetry, under which one form can serve any number of functions, even simultaneously.

The results of the analysis of the progressive parallel more strongly its patterns of usage in English. However, since it is difficult to discern a *distinctly* creole usage of the progressive from the (admittedly methodologically limited) creole literature, the results of this study are silent with respect to the origins debate. Although we must await a suitable variationist study of the creole progressive to decide, the likeliest explanation for the patterns of usage observed here is that they reflect the development of the progressive in the history of English. The different overall rates of occurrence with stative and nonstative verbs may reflect a more general pattern, incipient at the time these communities were founded, of the spread of the progressive to statives. This spread is supported by Bybee et al.'s (1994:139) cross-linguistic finding that progressive meaning tends to originate with activity verbs before being extended to other predicates. What is needed now is evidence that the effect of aspectual conditioning has penetrated to statives in more mainstream varieties of English. Such evidence would constitute more convincing proof that the stative/nonstative distinction noted here reflects the progress of the progressive incipient in its roots in the 18th century. Whether we can refer to this progress as "grammaticization" is controversial, since the term usually applies to situations in which a lexical item takes on grammatical functions (e.g. Bybee et al. 1994:4-5; Pagliuca 1994:ix-x). In this case, what appears to be happening is the shift of a morphosyntactic construction from one function to another (i.e. an EModE stylistic device, perhaps inherited from OE/ME, to a later ModE aspectual marker). The differences between statives and nonstatives, with the aspectual effects not evident in statives, suggest that these two verb-classes are at different points along the cline of this shift.

### 6.3. Conclusion

Considering the results of the studies reported in this dissertation, a number of features of the present temporal reference of Early AAE emerge:

- Zero copula, although not as prevalent in its overall distribution as it is in modern AAVE, was well-established. It was already established as an additional strategy for reducing prosodic (or at least PPh) complexity in environments in which contraction was disfavoured.
- Invariant *be* was extremely rare, but its use as a marker of habitual aspect was incipient, at least in constructions with the progressive.
- Verbal *-s* conveyed habitual aspect across all grammatical persons, patterned as a concord/agreement marker in third person singular contexts, and a verb marker with nonadjacent subjects in third plural contexts.
- Zero-marked simple present verbs additionally conveyed durative aspect.
- There was virtually standard use of the progressive, though its increasing use with statives, which has been characterized as a 20th-century development, was incipient. The linguistic factors conditioning the use of statives appear to stem from older, discourse effects.

Although the primary goal of these studies has not been to resolve the origins debate, it is interesting to note that most of these features can be traced to the nonstandard varieties of English of the American South and the British Isles that constituted the initial input to the formation of AAE. More importantly, those features which are arguably innovations of Early AAE — namely, zero copula and invariant *be* — are much less frequent in these varieties than they are in modern urban varieties of AAVE. This suggests that these features, along with others such as the

expansion of *ain't* (Howe & Walker 1999), are spectacular developments which probably originated in the migration and urbanization that has characterized AAVE in the twentieth century.

This reconstruction could serve both as further evidence in the origins debate and as an impetus for comparable analysis in the comparison varieties. The origins debate requires a number of vantage points in order to reconstruct the history of AAE. This reconstruction represents one particular stage, centred on about 1800, and could be used as a comparative point for further work in tracing features back to earlier periods or forward to link it with current developments in AAVE. Many of the factor groups and methodological techniques I have introduced in this analysis have not been tested in other varieties of AAE, but it is clear that future studies should take them into account.

More generally, this reconstruction demonstrates the utility of variationist analysis in resolving issues of system membership and genetic affiliation. By paying attention to the need for appropriate data and accountable methodology, as well as examining not only the varieties under question but also relevant findings from historical linguistics, prescriptive and descriptive grammar and generativist theory, we can provide linguistically meaningful explanations for the observed variability and place it within the context of the development of the English language.

**Table 1:** *Twelve independent variable rule analyses of the contribution of factors to the occurrence of four morphosyntactic markers of present temporal reference in Early African American English. Factor groups not selected as significant in brackets.*

	SAM 3363			ANSE 4237			ESR 521			
	Simple	V-ing	do will	Simple	V-ing	do will	Simple	V-ing	do will	
Total N:										
Corrected mean:	.852	.038	.031	.698	.063	.028	.734	.077	.029	.014
<b>Lexical Aspect</b>										
Stative	.75	.18	.59	.73	.20	.71	.68	.31	[.39]	.31
Nonstative	.23	.85	.40	.18	.89	.21	.26	.75	[.65]	.75
Range:	52	67	19	55	69	50	42	44	44	44
<b>Sentential Aspect</b>										
Habitual	.65	.24	.59	.75	.19	.66	.59	.40	[.41]	4%
Durative	.43	.73	.32	.52	.67	.29	.49	.49	[.68]	0%
Punctual	.24	.79	.60	.25	.74	.43	.21	.84	[.26]	0%
Range:	41	55	28	50	55	37	38	44		
<b>Polarity</b>										
Affirmative	.67	.53	.30	.77	.53	.18	.72	14%	.21	[.45]
Negative	.01	.34	.99	.01	.39	.99	.02	0%	.99	[.72]
Range:	66	19	69	76	14	81	70			78
<b>Sentence Type</b>										
Declarative	[.50]	[.51]	[.50]	.52	[.50]	.46	[.51]	[.50]	.48	2%
Question	[.61]	[.36]	[.54]	.20	[.57]	.97	[.22]	[.55]	.97	0%
Range:				32		51				49
<b>Grammatical Person</b>										
3rd sg.	[.45]	[.55]	[.54]	.39	.64	.34	[.51]	[.52]	[.59]	[.44]
3rd pl.	[.54]	[.46]	[.52]	.36	.65	.44	[.48]	[.65]	[.28]	[.34]
non-3rd	[.50]	[.50]	[.47]	.56	.44	.55	[.51]	[.45]	[.56]	[.56]
Range:				20	21	21				

**APPENDIX A**



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