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A Message from the Past:
Past Temporal Reference in Early African American Letters

Gerard Van Herk

A dissertation submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts

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Abstract: ***Past Temporal Reference in Early African American Correspondence***

Gerard Van Herk

This study employs the methods of comparative and variationist linguistics in a new data source, letters by semiliterate 19th-century Liberian immigrants, to confirm and extend the findings of earlier studies on the past temporal reference system of Early African American English (AAE). In the first half of the study, the strongest linguistic constraints on the choice of bare verb forms match precisely those described for large-scale studies of spoken (diaspora) Early AAE: the bare form results from consonant cluster simplification in weak verbs, and from lexical preferences attested through the history of English in the case of strong verbs. Conditioning factors proposed to result from earlier creole influence on Early AAE (anteriority, remoteness, or clause type) did not play a significant role.

The second half of the study concerns multiple verb forms, especially the present perfect, described by previous studies as marginal or non-existent in AAE. In contrast, present perfect forms in this corpus are frequent and favoured by all the English-derived conditioning factors tested in this study: ambiguity of temporal orientation and relation, recent or continuing events, negation, extended time adverbials, and *since* clauses, as well as by non-statives. This conditioning, especially taken in concert with the variability of bare verb forms, suggests that the present perfect has long been part of AAE, with its rarity in other corpora due to genre-based differences in the frequency of contexts requiring its use.

The study provides new evidence in the history of the development of African American varieties of English, as well as demonstrating the utility of variationist analysis in resolving problems of linguistic system membership. Combining variationist and comparative analytical methods, it places AAE within the context of the development of the English language.

Acknowledgements

I've been fortunate in my academic life to receive help from a range of sources. Financial support came from the Government of Ontario in the form of graduate scholarships, and at the University of Ottawa, from the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (entrance and excellence scholarships, travel and publication grants, and a summer scholarship), the Department of Linguistics (assistantships and awards), and the Sociolinguistics Laboratory (assistantships).

Everybody at the University of Ottawa has been supportive and helpful. Yolande Thériault, Lise Picard, Sylvie Létang, Jennifer Hill, and Enrique Astorga patiently helped me navigate the university. Professors Helen Goodluck, Phil Hauptman, Paul Hirschbühler, John Jensen, Konrad Koerner, André Lapierre, Ian MacKay, Gerry Neufeld, P.G. Patel, and Eta Schneiderman gave me ideas, books, and encouragement. Help and good company came from grad students -- Olga Arnaudova, Cao Xue Xin, Malcolm Finney, Michele Foley, Abdelhamid Gadoua, Stéphane Goyette, Linda Legault, Margarete Ling, Ahmad Moinzadeh, Reza Ghafar Samar, Danijela Stojanovic, Hank Walker, and particularly Constanta Rodica Diaconescu. My Phonetics and TESL students were a joy to teach.

My academic development owes much to a community of sociolinguists. I've found fine colleagues and good friends in the Sociolinguistics Laboratory over the years from Svitlana Budzhak-Jones, Ejike Eze, Lyne Klapka, Marjory Meechan, Anne St-Amand, Rebecca Silvert, and Lauren Willis. I especially want to thank Dawn Harvie for her constant help and patience, and James Walker and Carmen Leblanc for aid, advice, and models of scholarship. Elsewhere, Sali Tagliamonte has provided encouragement, help, and a model dissertation. I've also benefited immensely from the ideas and suggestions of Alex Kautzsch, Ron Kim, William Labov, Helen Lawrence, Uli Miethaner, Michael Montgomery, Salikoko Mufwene, John Rickford, David Sankoff,

Edgar Schneider, John Singler, and Arthur Spears, although none of them should be blamed for the way I turned out.

This dissertation in particular has benefited from the efforts and patience of library staff (inter-library loans, University of Ottawa; microfilm department, University of Georgia; rare books collection, University of Illinois – Chicago; National Archives of Canada) and the comments of the members of the examination committee: Marie-Hélène Blondeau, Ian Mackay, Eta Schneiderman, and Rena Torres Cacoullos. I thank them all.

Without a doubt, the person who has shaped me the most as a linguist is my academic supervisor, Shana Poplack. Her unfailing intellectual and material support have got (or gotten) me through, and her high methodological and theoretical standards have provided me with a standard at which to aim. I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity to learn from and collaborate with her.

Through my academic career, I've depended on friends and family for places to stay, two-day drives to find data, sounding boards, financial help, big dinners, and so much more. I'd like to thank Cathy Champagne, Tony Dewald, Kevin, Lindorf, Lindsey, Neil, Phyllis, and Sabrina Mayers, and Chris, Cynthia, Heather, Henry, Nick, and Samantha Van Herk for all their help. I especially want to thank my wife Michelle and my sons Max and Willem for their love, support, and patience.

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the hundreds of 19th-century Liberian settlers whose letters furnish its data. It has been an extremely moving experience to be privy to the joys and sorrows of this community, and I hope this dissertation is a first step in sharing their stories with the world.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Differences between Standard English (StdE) and the vernacular speech of many Americans of African descent have led to decades of often heated debate over the origins of African American Vernacular English (AAVE)[1]. Altogether, over fifty phonological, syntactic and morphological distinctions between AAVE and StdE have been claimed (for recent updates, see lists in Winford 1998 and Rickford 1999), with new distinctions observed or proposed on a regular basis (Spears 1982, Rickford 1999, Spears 2000).

Only a few of these features, however, have played central roles in the origins debate. In variationist sociolinguistics, the most studied features are those that have been both salient and frequent enough to permit quantitative analysis. One core area of AAVE grammar in which such features play a major role is the expression of past temporal reference (PTR), which forms the linguistic focus of this study. In AAVE, contemporary and historical, the expression of marked and unmarked PTR structures differs from that of StdE. In particular, single verbs alternate between bare forms, as in example (1), and those marked by suffixation (2) or vowel replacement or suppletion (3). The present perfect (4) has been described as marginal to AAVE, while differing interpretations have been applied to past perfect forms (5).

(1) a. after a Conversation with him a bout africa I ***Give*** him my church letter to look at (155/4/59)[2]

b. on monday 18th I went up to Bexley and ***Join*** Mr Clarke (155/4/59)

(2) I ***Planted*** my Potatoes cassdoes & Rice on my farm (159/10/29)

(3) she ***came*** out in Chilona Right from New orleans (154/3/115)

(4) I ***have Raisd*** some hogs since I ***have Been*** here (159/10/117)

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[1] This dissertation uses the terms most widespread in current use to describe the relevant language varieties of African Americans. African American Vernacular English (AAVE) refers to the contemporary vernacular used by a majority of African Americans in informal in-group speech. Early African American English (Early AAE) refers to the language used by the majority of African Americans in the period between North American colonization and the American Civil War. Use of the term does not imply the existence of a single homogeneous African American language variety at that time. African American English (AAE) is a cover term to describe shared traits and history of Early AAE and AAVE. Quotations maintain the terms used in the source document, explained if necessary in square brackets, e.g. "Non-Standard Negro English [AAVE]."

[2] Except where noted, all examples are drawn from verbatim transcriptions of the Liberian letters in the Ottawa Repository of Early African American Correspondence (OREAAC) (Van Herk & Poplack 2001), which furnish the

(5) the emigrants ***had a greed*** not to come (156/6/8)

These differences have fuelled much conjecture as to the relationship between AAVE PTR forms and their functions, the underlying system that gives rise to these relationships, and circumstances under which such a system could have been formed and maintained.

Aside from the methodological advantages for quantitative analysis that result from its frequency, PTR is a potentially rich field of study due to the variety of forms in use, and the complexity of the factors conditioning their occurrence. Researchers have mined this variability in AAVE to propose widely divergent, even diametrically opposed, scenaria for the origin of AAVE. Some propose that AAVE is descended from varieties of English-based Creoles (EBCs); others, that it derives from earlier and/or dialectal varieties of English.[3]

A major problem, especially in the early days of this debate over the origins of AAVE, has been the lack of appropriate data from an earlier stage of the language. At first, conclusions were drawn from comparisons between contemporary AAVE and EBCs, with reconstructions of earlier stages the result of conjecture. Historical attestations by non-community members hardly improved the situation, as such attestations are infrequent and tainted by the prejudices and conceptions of the eras in which they were gathered. Considerable progress resulted from the (re)discovery of two different sources of spoken data relevant to the origins debate. Interviews with ex-slaves, both transcribed (Rawick 1972, 1979) and recorded (Bailey et al. 1991), supplied data from which it was possible to extrapolate the linguistic system these slaves had acquired as children (c. 1860). Recorded interviews in linguistically isolated communities established by dispersed antebellum African Americans provided a record of early African American English (AAE) apparently little affected by linguistic contact or internal change (Poplack & Sankoff 1987, Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991, Singler 1991). All existing data sources, however, are either filtered in some way through the perceptions of non-community members or recorded in the 20th century.

This dissertation contributes additional evidence to the origins debate through a detailed large-scale quantitative sociolinguistic analysis of a newly-compiled source of Early AAE: the

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data for this thesis. The numbers in parentheses identify each example the by microfilm reel, volume, and letter numbers assigned by the Library of Congress and the American Colonization Society.

[3] These positions can only be characterized as "diametrically opposed" if we allow for no contribution of dialectal or early English to EBCs, itself a questionable assumption.

Ottawa Repository of Early African American Correspondence (OREAAC) (Van Herk & Poplack 2001), made up entirely of letters written before 1866 by semi-literate African Americans. Study of this corpus can complement and verify research on existing corpora by seeking and analyzing previously-described features in a data set that is unquestionably both of African American provenance (unlike historical and literary attestations and, arguably, the transcriptions contsituting the Ex-Slave Narratives) and produced before the American Civil War (unlike diaspora data, the Ex-Slave Recordings, and contemporary data). The capacity of this corpus to represent Early AAE is discussed and justified in chapter 3.

This dissertation is based on research employing the methods of variationist sociolinguistics, in which the frequency, distribution, and conditioning of PTR verbal forms is determined through systematic quantitative analysis of a large corpus of language in use. Within the circumscribed context of variation, past temporal reference, I examine all forms that occur, describing in linguistic and statistical detail the PTR system. The features, and more importantly the linguistic factors conditioning their use, are compared to attested patterns from EBCs, contemporary AAVE, and English dialects, as well as what is known of earlier varieties of English and AAE. Simultaneous analysis of phonological, syntactic, discursive, and lexical factors through the computerized multiple regression procedure of a variable rule programme (Rand & Sankoff 1990) reveals the relative importance of each factor. The results assess the significance of factors derived from each of the potential ancestor or donor varieties, thus enhancing our understanding of the likely contributions of each to the development of AAE.

1.1 Status and origins of African American Vernacular English

Research into African American English, especially into Early AAE , is dominated by the controversy over the nature of its underlying grammatical system, and by extension its origins. Although some researchers invoke second language acquisition processes (Winford 1998) or African language influences (Holm 1984), two main positions dominate.

One viewpoint is that contemporary African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is a linguistic system completely distinct from StdE and other white vernaculars, with its origins in a widespread earlier plantation creole, such as those of the Caribbean. Some research supporting this position is based on quantitative analysis of contemporary AAVE (e.g. Rickford et al. 1991); some is based on qualitative data, anecdotal evidence, or literary attestations from the past

(Dillard 1972). Over the years, this position has been restated in different terms with different degrees of certainty. The earliest position (Dillard 1972, Stewart 1967, Bailey 1965) held that this pan-American creole developed from a widespread English-based pidgin that the first generations of slaves would have begun to acquire in West Africa and transported to the new world. More recent versions (Winford 1997, 1998, Rickford 1998, 1999) are less likely to assume a widespread pidgin stage, suggesting instead a widespread creole, perhaps imported from the Caribbean. Proponents of this hypothesis seem to agree that AAE would have begun to decreolize, i.e. to lose its creole features and approximate nearby varieties of (white) English, considerably earlier than did Caribbean creoles, although they may disagree about the rate and onset period of decreolization. The majority position attributes this breakdown to emancipation and post-Civil War access to education for African Americans (Bickerton 1975, Sutcliffe 1998, Dillard 1972).[4]

This creole origins hypothesis originally derived largely from presumed sociohistoric similarities between plantation societies in the American South and in the Caribbean, and from aspects of the AAVE grammatical system that resemble (at least superficially) those of creoles. These would include grammatical features not found in StdE, such as copula deletion (*He tall*), habitual *be* (*He be walkin'*), and stressed *BIN* to indicate remote past (*He BIN ate it*) (examples from Rickford 1999:6). Of equal or greater importance to this position, however, is the behaviour of grammatical features that superficially resemble StdE, but are claimed by its proponents to have been generated by a different underlying system. For example, preterite marking (*He went*) and past perfects (*He had gone*) are identical in surface appearance to StdE forms, but are said to be reflexes of creole-like anterior relative tense marking (Bickerton 1975, Winford 1992).

Research within a creolist framework, especially early in the debate, tended to prefer anecdotal evidence, often citing isolated examples drawn from literary or historical texts, generally produced by non-community members. Creolist researchers have sometimes dismissed quantitative corpus-based work as lacking time-depth (Rickford 1999:233), or as ignoring infrequent but "interesting" tense and aspect features (Rickford 1999:16). Even some quantitative work within this framework has deliberately eschewed multivariate analysis as being

[4] The implications for African American literacy of slavery and interracial relations are discussed in Chapter 2. Discussion of other sociohistoric assumptions of the creole origins hypothesis, e.g. that Emancipation led to immediate drastic changes in the educational and linguistic opportunities available to African Americans, is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

unable to reveal the "progressive" nature of decreolization (Bickerton 1975).[5]

The other major position traces many grammatical features of and contemporary AAVE to dialectal or historical varieties of English. Proponents of this view stress sociohistoric differences between creole (largely Caribbean) plantations and North American smallholdings (Mufwene 2000). According to this view, the first generations of slaves would have had sufficient exposure to whites (smallholders, overseers, indentured servants) to acquire whatever dialects of English they spoke within a generation or two. This variety would have been transmitted to later generations, whose social and economic marginalization would later have limited their participation in mainstream historical changes or standardization.

This position, variously described as the Anglicist, dialectologist, or English-origins hypothesis, at first relied on dialect atlas work, focussing largely on superficial similarities between AAVE and varieties of English, especially with respect to lexicon and phonology. Later work tended toward quantitative studies of corpora taken to represent either contemporary AAVE or an earlier stage of the language, in which "all possible variants of a given structure are taken into account" (Tagliamonte 1991:3). These studies generally use tape-recorded sociolinguistic interviews, and tend to focus on the linguistic constraints conditioning such grammatical features as negation (Howe 1997, Howe & Walker 2000), question formation (Van Herk 2000), and many aspects of the verbal system (see especially Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001).

Adherence to one or the other of these positions tends to impose particular analyses on the verbal forms found in the data. Unmarked PTR verbs (e.g. *I walk there last week*), for example, can be seen as the result of (phonological) deletion of an underlying (English-like) past tense morpheme (Labov et al. 1968, Wolfram 1969, Fasold 1972). Conversely, they can be interpreted as the result of insertion rules derived from the intersection of past-tense acquisition during decreolization and a persisting creole-like temporal reference system (Bailey 1965, Dillard 1972, Bickerton 1975, Mufwene 1983). Bare participles (*I seen*) may result from the deletion of an underlying (English-like) auxiliary (Labov et al. 1968, Fasold & Wolfram 1975), or they may represent the remains of an underlying relative tense system (Dillard 1972). Preverbal markers (e.g. *done* in *I done told him*) may be remnants of an earlier stage of English

[5] Any such progression is itself a construct of the researcher, as diachronic quantitative data on creoles is even rarer than that on Early AAE.

(Schneider 1989, Traugott 1972), or represent aspect or relative-tense markers retained from a more creole-like earlier stage of African American English (Stewart 1968, Bickerton 1975, Edwards 1991). With different underlying assumptions, data collection procedures, and analytic methodologies, it is hardly surprising that the two positions have not reached a compromise agreement.

These two viewpoints and their associated research traditions have long informed sociolinguistic investigation of both early AAE and contemporary AAVE. Research has tended to focus on forms or linguistic factors that sharply differentiate contemporary AAVE from StdE, are frequent or salient, and are potentially explained through reference to creole origins.[6]

Quantitative methods specifically tailored to the analysis of linguistic variation (Labov 1966, 1972; Labov et al. 1968) have played a major role in increasing the sophistication of analyses of these forms, especially those which could potentially belong to either English- or creole-based systems. By clearly identifying linguistic contexts in which marking would be expected in one system but not in the other, it is possible to quantitatively test the claims associated with either major hypothesis.

1.2 Theoretical framework and method

The theoretical approach of this thesis is empirical and quantitative, operating within the framework of sociolinguistic variation theory. This approach is based on the assumption that variation in language is not the result of speech errors or random speaker choice. Rather, it is conditioned (Labov 1972, Labov et al. 1968, Weinreich et al. 1968) by linguistic and extralinguistic features, including "the phonological environment, the syntactic context, the discursive function of the utterance, topic, style, situation and personal and/or sociodemographic characteristics of the speaker or other participants" (Sankoff 1982:151). In practice, some of these features have been more likely to be investigated within a variationist framework than others, depending on whether they could be empirically determined from the text or situation. This thesis focuses on linguistic features, especially phonological and syntactic environments, as these have been central to the discussion of AAE PTR and can be empirically determined from the text in ways described below.

The variationist perspective is built on the observation that a particular referential value or grammatical function (the *linguistic variable*, Labov 1966/1982) can be expressed by two or more discrete alternative forms (the *variants*) in a particular linguistic situation (the *variable context*). In the present case, the overlapping nature of competing explanations for observed variation demands that I undertake multiple analyses of precisely defined variable contexts and variants.

Recent work (notably Poplack et al. 1996 and Walker 2000b) reminds us of the importance of Labov's accountability principle, which states that we must consider not only the variable forms used to express a particular function, but also the entire reference context in which such forms could potentially occur (Labov 1972). It is necessary to go beyond individual attestations of form-function correspondences (potentially refutable by individual counterexamples) to an analysis of all potential forms within the circumscribed context of variation. This requires determining from competing hypotheses the broadest temporal range over which the forms in question are claimed to operate, while at the same time excluding all contexts in which the variable forms in question cannot occur. In the present instance, the variable forms under study are claimed by creolists and dialectologists to result from underlying rules applicable to events actually occurring before speech time. This makes the variable context for this study the entire realis past temporal reference system.

1.3 Past temporal reference

Past temporal reference is an especially appropriate locus of entry into an investigation of the structure of Early AAE. PTR involves a range of meanings (temporal, aspectual, relational, and discursive) expressed by a complex interplay between a limited number of forms. There is relatively widespread agreement about the PTR forms attested in AAE and its comparison varieties, consisting largely of preverbal markers (*bin, done, did, have, had,* and others) and variable main verb inflection (via preterite, bare, participial, and non-standard forms). The controversy that has surfaced in this area relates to the perceived meaning and function of each of these forms in each variety, and the degree to which the distribution of forms across functions reflects underlying systems, contemporary and earlier. In particular, the variable absence of

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[6] For example, Walker (2000b) points out that the effect of following grammatical category on copula deletion has been widely discussed, while the equal or greater effect of subject type has received little attention. The former has

surface marking (inflection or preverbal markers) in AAE PTR has led to multiple interpretations of the processes leading to such absence.

This state of affairs -- multiple and conflicting explanations for a (relatively) clearly defined range of forms -- is particularly well suited to variationist analysis. It is possible to test the fit of each proposed underlying system to the data at hand. The assumptions of each perspective, creolist and English-origin, can be operationalized as a set of constraints capable of influencing the forms found in the relevant variable context. Where the variable context is identical for both sets of proposals, proposed Creole and English constraints can be simultaneously tested.

Central to the distinction between the temporal reference systems of English and of Creoles (including those not derived from English) is the reference point from which the assignment of temporal specification proceeds. In English, the tense system is said to be absolute: verbs representing events and states are assigned (overt or covert) tense marking based on their place on a time line with respect to a fixed point, the present. In Creoles, there is general consensus that the point of reference relates to the relationship that events or states have with each other – in other words, a relative system.[7] Verbs are marked for *anteriority*, the occurrence of the event/state before (past or present) reference time, rather than for past, the occurrence of the event/state before speech time. For the purposes of this thesis, I will operationalize the factors associated with a relative system, including aspect and temporal relationship. In particular, I will identify the relationship between verbs under study and the verbs with which they are associated, categorizing the time reference of the verb in question and its reference verb.

A second claimed area of distinction between English and Creole PTR systems involves the polyvalence (Mufwene 1983, Greene 1999), or multiple roles, of the unmarked verb.[8] Although unmarked Creole verbs are presumed to have a default interpretation (past for actions, present for states), this default setting can be overridden by linguistic and pragmatic ("real-world") cues, which disambiguate the intended temporal reference. Although pragmatic cues are largely non-quantifiable and thus beyond the scope of this study, we can identify temporally

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been attributed to creole or African sources: the latter has not.

[7] Relative PTR marking is not exclusive to creoles: Bybee et al. (1994) list a range of languages in which anterior marking is determined relatively, including the South Asian languages that may have provided input to Guyanese Creole: Holm (2000) describes the relative systems of West African languages that may also have provided input.

[8] Tagliamonte (1991) points out that the English preterite is similarly polyvalent, occurring in preterite, past perfect, present perfect, and past continuous contexts, among others.

disambiguating linguistic cues, such as adverbials. It is also possible to test additional conditioning factors that have been identified for Creoles, but that do not tie in directly with relative tense or disambiguation, such as clause type.

There are additional arguments for the choice of PTR as a context of investigation of the system underlying AAE. In contemporary AAVE, the proportion of unmarked irregular verbs in PTR contexts is rather low, ranging from 1.6% (Fasold 1971) to 6% (Rickford 1999). This is generally taken to suggest that the past tense is an integral part of present-day AAVE, with unmarked verbs perhaps the residue of an earlier, more divergent system. The proportion of bare irregular verbs appears to have been considerably higher in earlier AAE, based on analysis of contemporary diaspora data (Tagliamonte 1991, Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001). Investigation of an earlier stage of AAE should reveal the system in place at that time, allowing for true time-depth comparison.

There is also a practical methodological argument in favour of PTR as a research focus in the present data set. Previous research on Early AAE letters (e.g. Montgomery 1993, Van Herk 1998, 1999) suggests that the writing process screens out certain non-standard forms (especially those related to negation), while permitting others to surface with some frequency (e.g. verbal s-marking, zero preterites and participles, and preverbal forms). Many of these latter forms cluster in the PTR system, ensuring a rich body of data from which to conduct analyses.

1.4 Hypothesis

The methodological hypothesis of this dissertation is that variation among the PTR forms in these 150-year-old letters is conditioned by a range of linguistic factors, and that these factors can be quantitatively examined to reveal the underlying grammatical system of the letters' authors. These linguistic factors are derived by "operationalizing" in concrete terms the descriptions of the PTR systems of AAVE and the language varieties from which it may be derived. A variationist version of the comparative method (Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001) can then measure the direction and relative strength of each derived constraint to determine which potential donor variety the language of these letters most closely resembles.

Three scenaria for the formation of the AAE PTR system are considered. The first position is that variation results from linguistic processes associated with a creole or creole-like underlying grammar, the remnant of an earlier creole stage of AAE. This scenario would be

supported by the choice of form being linguistically conditioned by creole-derived factors associated with a relative tense system and disambiguation requirements. The second scenario is that variation results from linguistic processes associated with whatever variety of English supplied the model for early generations of African Americans, or from widespread tendencies shared by AAE and English. A result whereby factors relevant to English-derived or universal lexical or phonological explanations were significant would furnish support for this scenario. The third secenario is that variation results from a combination of influences from both English and creole grammars. In this case, both sets of factors would be expected to contribute a significant effect.

Following work in both creolist and non-creolist frameworks, it is presumed that evidence of early forms may persist in a language long after the forms themselves have disappeared, replaced by new forms through sound change, successive approximations of contact or superordinate varieties, or other widespread processes.[9] In the present instance, the testing of constraints described for creoles in Early AAE is justified by the theoretical position of many working in the creole field, who claim that aspects of earlier, deep creole varieties survive in disguised form, evident from the distribution and conditioning of forms in decreolizing varieties (Mufwene 1984, Blake 1997) or in AAVE (Bickerton 1975, Winford 1992). The same methodological reasoning holds for constraints derived from earlier or non-standard varieties of English. Although surface forms that are clearly similar to creoles (e.g. preverbal stressed *bin*) or to archaic English (e.g. preverbal *hast*) are vanishingly rare in the present data set, characteristics of one or both grammatical systems should manifest themselves in the variable patterns found among the forms that are more frequent, such as preterite or perfect marking.

1.5 Outline of the dissertation

The purpose of this dissertation, then, is to report on a variationist analysis that tests competing claims with respect to the origin of AAVE by abstracting and operationalizing constraints from the literature and applying them to a previously-unknown source of Early AAE, letters written by semiliterate antebellum African Americans.

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[9] Whether differences between creolization and decreolization, on the one hand, and processes of linguistic change in non-creole languages, on the other, represent differences in type, degree, or speed, or indeed differences at all, remains a focus of some controversy in creole studies. For recent views, see e.g. Singler (1998), DeGraff (1998), and McWhorter (1998).

In Chapter 2, I review the data sources that have been used as evidence of the nature of Early AAE, and discuss the steps taken to ensure that the data used for this thesis represent earlier African American English as closely as possible.

In Chapter 3, I describe the Ottawa Repository of Early African American English Correspondence (OREAAC) (Van Herk & Poplack 2001), a newly completed collection of letters written by semiliterate African American settlers on the west coast of Africa. As this is the first major analysis of data from this source, I describe the composition and treatment of the OREAAC in some detail. I outline variationist methodology and the implementation of the comparative method, and describe the extraction of tokens.

In Chapter 4, I review the literature on variable expression of single PTR verbs in AAVE and comparison varieties. I then test constraints derived from the literature on the forms in the OREAAC.

In Chapter 5, I review the literature on variable expression of multiple-verb PTR constructions in AAVE and comparison varieties, and test derived constraints in the OREAAC.

Chapter 6 summarizes the findings of the previous two chapters, and discusses their implications. The significance of the findings with respect to the debate over the origins of AAVE is explored, as well as issues relating to the validation of other data sources, written vs. spoken data, the role of letters in reconstructing Early AAE, and directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Evidence of Early African American English

Recent discussions of early African American history by linguists (e.g. Rickford 1997, 1998, Winford 1997, Mufwene 1999) suggest different linguistic outcomes of such history, based on differing interpretations of the micro-demographic and linguistic consequences of regional population ratios and socioeconomic situations. At the heart of the debate is the degree to which the economic and social profile of the American plantation south resembled that of the Caribbean, where creole varieties have flourished, as well as the degree to which similarities can be expected to lead to predictable linguistic outcomes. It is generally held that the classic (e.g. *Gone With the Wind*) plantation model, whereby a tiny number of white slave owners had extremely limited contact with a very large number of slaves, was the situation most likely to lead to a restructured variety of English: "high numbers of African substrate speakers and low numbers of English-speaking superstrate or target language speakers would have favoured pidginization and creolization of English" (Rickford 1997:116).

Perhaps surprisingly, given the level of disagreement over linguistic outcomes, there appears to be considerable consensus concerning the macro-demographic and economic profile of the southern United States in different regions and time periods. In the following section I draw on the work of Rickford (1997), Winford (1997), and Mufwene (1999), as well as the synthesis of their work in Walker (2000b), to describe five broad time periods and two basic geographic areas of relevance to the origins debate.

The ***Colonial*** time period, c.1600-1700, was characterized by small homesteads, the presence of both European and African indentured servants, and a population ratio favouring Europeans. Contact between Europeans and Africans would have been frequent and intense, likely leading to full acquisition of the (non-standard) British varieties of the colonists. Mufwene (1996, 1999) draws on concepts from biology to describe this first group as the "founder population," who would have had a disproportionate effect on the language of later arrivals.

In the ***Plantation*** period, c. 1700-1780, the growth of farms into plantations led to an increase in the importation of slaves, leading in turn to increased African-European population ratios. This would have been particularly true in coastal areas, especially coastal South Carolina, first settled by small landholders leaving Barbados in 1670. Inland areas saw large-scale settlement by Scots and Irish immigrants.

The ***Antebellum*** period, roughly 1780-1860, featured expansion of the plantation system to the inland South (Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas), as well as reduced importation of slaves from Africa or the Caribbean, especially in the latter half of the period. This period presumably saw the consolidation of local speech patterns. In addition, virtually all known sources of primary data on Early AAE (diaspora communities, letters, Ex-Slave Narratives and Recordings) find their roots in this period.

The ***Reconstruction*** period, c.1865-1945, saw widespread urbanization and northward migration of African Americans, especially with the collapse of reconstruction efforts. These population movements, coupled with segregation laws, may have led to dialect levelling within the African American community, and the establishment of particular AAE features as ethnic markers (Mufwene 1999:250-1).

In the ***Urbanization*** period, post-1945, the continued urbanization and northward movement of African Americans, combined with the suburbanization of white Americans, has intensified America's ethnic ghettoization. The combination of *de jure* integration and *de facto* residential segregation creates a situation in which ethnic markers can become highlighted, potentially leading to language divergence (Labov & Harris 1986).

The proposed establishment and maintenance of a restructured or creole-like variety of AAE could have occurred only during the plantation and antebellum periods, when population ratios and the legal and economic system would have most severely restricted African American access to Standard English (spoken and written). Even within these time periods, though, regional demographic distinctions must be drawn, based on population ratios and type of agriculture.

The 18th-century colonies of Virginia and North Carolina, along with inland South Carolina and Georgia, were characterized by relatively small plantations, largely involving tobacco farming, and relatively low African-to-European population ratios. The predicted linguistic outcome in this situation is the relatively complete acquisition of the language of the Europeans. In coastal South Carolina and Georgia, on the other hand, the establishment of large plantations growing rice, cotton, and indigo required the massive importation of slaves and resulting high African-to-European population ratios. The predicted linguistic outcome in this situation is the establishment of a creole, and this appears to be what occurred in these areas: the variety known as Gullah is spoken by approximately a quarter of a million speakers in the

isolated islands off the South Carolina and Georgia coasts (Turner 1949, Mufwene 1997).

Beyond these core facts, however, there is little agreement. The mixture of slaves brought from the coastal areas to the inland states may have led to the dominance of one or the other variety in those states; the degree of linguistic restructuring (potentially leading to a creole) in areas of intermediate plantation size and population ratio is unclear; the geographic reach of Gullah in earlier times is equally uncertain; even the likely linguistic consequences of the importation of African slaves in the late 18th century is uncertain, with proposals ranging from interlanguage or creole-like restructuring (Winford 1997) to little or no effect at all (Mufwene 1999).

It seems unlikely that sociohistoric research alone will be able to resolve these issues. As Walker (2000b:23-24) points out, "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 sociohistorical evidence can serve to inform linguistic reconstruction, it can never give us definitive conclusions about the linguistic consequences of a particular situation." Linguistic models that associate the degree of linguistic restructuring with such sociohistoric evidence as population ratios (e.g. Bickerton 1981) are only as good as the data that they (*post hoc*) describe; the success of researchers in obtaining more or less vernacular samples of any variety will inform the linguistic results that such models claim to explain. A good example is Barbados, whose high percentage of whites has long been said to explain its absence of basilectal creole features (Hancock 1980). However, recent research among elderly rural Barbadians has unearthed many previously-undescribed basilectal features (Rickford 1992, Van Herk 2000, in press), as well as percentages of use of other creole features among both Black and white informants (Blake 1997) exceeding even those in Jamaica (Patrick 1991), whose basilectal creole pedigree is rarely questioned.

2.1 Previous linguistic evidence

Sociohistoric evidence, therefore, must be supplemented with historical *linguistic* evidence to determine what Early AAE actually was like.

Significant gaps remain in our linguistic knowledge, largely due to the paucity of diachronic primary data available to previous researchers. Researchers have been diligent and sometimes highly creative in seeking out data that can shed some light on the state of Early

AAE, but some still claim that "[a] vexing problem in determining the age of particular AAVE features has been the general absence of data about earlier stages. Moreover, the data that have been available have often been suspect because of the circumstances under which they were gathered, because of questions as to whether or not the speakers were actually speaking AAVE, and the like" (Singler 1998:227).

In addition to apparent-time reconstructions based on the contemporary speech of elderly African Americans in rural areas (Cukor-Avila & Bailey 1995, Wolfram 2000), a range of sources purported to represent antebellum African American English have been discovered and developed over the past decades. However, the historical exclusion of African Americans from participation in mainstream (literate) American culture restricts the sources of early material available. Representations of Early AAE discovered to date include:

- scattered attestations by travellers and authors of past centuries (see especially Dillard 1972);

the Ex-Slave Narratives, transcriptions of interviews with over 3,500 elderly former slaves conducted in the 1930s (Rawick 1972/1979, Brewer 1974, Schneider 1982, 1989);

- the Hyatt Corpus, transcriptions of interviews with over 1600 African Americans conducted between 1936-42 (Viereck 1989);
- the Ex-Slave Recordings, published recordings of interviews with 11 elderly former slaves conducted between 1935 and 1972 (Bailey et al. 1991);
- contemporary recorded data from residents of isolated communities in the African American diaspora: Samaná, in the Dominican Republic (settled 1824) (Poplack & Sankoff 1987), Guysborough and North Preston in Nova Scotia (settled 1783, 1813-1815) (Tagliamonte & Poplack 1991), and Liberia (settled 1822-1891) (Singler 1989); and
- collections of letters by African American writers (Montgomery et al. 1993).

In this section I discuss the relative strengths and weaknesses of existing sources of Early AAE data, and of the letters that supply the linguistic data for this dissertation.

2.1.1 Outside observers and literary dialect

Many of the early strong claims as to the nature of Early AAE (e.g. Dillard 1972, Stewart 1970) were based on anecdotal descriptions of African American speech by visitors to the American south and the language of African American characters in novels and plays (literary

dialects). These analyses do have a historical component, but their reliance on data filtered through the perceptions of non-community members restricts their focus to Early AAE forms that were both highly salient (i.e. non-standard) and used in the presence of outsiders. There is no way of knowing whether such forms were used by many (or any!) in the African American community, or what linguistic or social factors might have conditioned their use.

Further, these descriptions may simply be wrong: "they may fail to represent relevant phonological and grammatical features while including mishearings, misinterpretations, and conventionalizations" (Rickford 1991:192). Cooley (1997) presents evidence that one antebellum literary convention, even among writers who had never visited the United States, was to use West Indian creole features to caricature African American speech.

2.1.2 The Ex-Slave Recordings and Narratives

The 1930s saw a revival of interest in the collection of narratives by African Americans who had lived through slavery. Interest in ex-slave narratives was driven by a postwar boom in Black movements, as well as a reaction against the apologist slavery scholarship of the previous two decades (Yetman 1967:538). The establishment of a large programme under the well-known Federal Writers' Project (FWP) (Yetman 1967:543) led to the collection of some 3500 transcribed interviews, the Ex-Slave Narratives (Rawick 1972, 1977, 1979), as well as a handful of sound recordings, the Ex-Slave Recordings (Bailey et al. 1991). Although the recordings avoid the major problems associated with on-site transcription (and subsequent editing) that are unavoidable with the narratives, they share with them problems associated with the interviewers: race, racism, and lack of experience in interviewing and fieldwork. In addition, the recordings' spontaneity may have been reduced by the presence of the bulky recording equipment available at the time.

Given the social climate of the American south in the 1930s and 1940s, it can be assumed that the race of the interviewer had some effect on the informant. The evidence of the recordings suggests that overt racism among white FWP employees appears to have been limited to writing. In the interviews, "a tone of 'amused condescension' toward blacks" (McElvaine 1989:650) seems to have been common, and is mentioned several times with reference to the recordings. Aptitude was as problematic as attitude – most FWP workers were "unsophisticated in the use of interview techniques, expressed little concern for the sources of distortion inherent in the interview process and were insensitive to the nuances of interview procedure... However, as

workers gained sophistication and experience in conducting the interviews, the quality of the products they obtained improved" (Yetman 1967: 551-552).

The Ex-Slave Narratives share the weaknesses of the Recordings relating to interviewer characteristics. They offer one major comparative advantage, a huge amount of data. This is offset by their major disadvantage, the strong possibility that incompetent or biased transcriptions do not reflect in useful detail the linguistic forms actually used. Schneider (1989:127) describes the transcriptions as featuring a greater density of non-standard features than the recordings, which suggests that transcribers may have chosen to flavour the narratives with features of stereotypical African American speech. In addition, it is possible that some features were more salient to some interviewers than others. Transcribers may have chosen not to include non-standard features that were part of their own vernacular speech. This could explain several otherwise extremely unlikely data configurations encountered in Schneider (1989): the absence of preverbal *done* in Alabama (141) and of r-lessness with *their/they* in South Carolina (246, 250). Both these features would have been widespread in the white vernaculars of those particular states.[10]

Given the number of narratives available, careful choice from among them could at least partly address the issue of interviewer reliability. With hindsight, Schneider's choice of non-concord BE presence (e.g. *he am*) as the sole test of interviewer reliability (Schneider 1989) is particularly infelicitous, given the questionable status of that feature in AAE. The decision by Kautzsch (2000) to analyze only narratives collected by an African-American interviewer (Perdue et al. 1976) at least has the socio-historical support of contemporary observations: "Earlier evaluations of the Georgia narratives had reported that Negro interviewers appeared 'able to gain better insight' than whites and that the interviews obtained by Negroes were 'less tinged with glamour'" (Yetman 1967:550-551). Results derived from those narratives require linguistic confirmation through comparative studies with primary data.

2.1.3. African American diaspora communities

The continued existence of African American diaspora communities permits the collection of significant amounts of good (tape-recorded, relatively vernacular) primary data, and the language of isolated communities has been shown to be more conservative than mainstream

varieties (Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001).

The degree to which the language spoken by the original settlers of some diaspora communities actually represented Early AAE has been challenged. The fairly thorough record keeping associated with Liberian settlement, described in section 2.2.1.2, has long suggested that the input settlers to Liberia represented a wide range of African American society, including substantial numbers of rural southerners, the people likely to speak a variety farthest from StdE. Recent historical research (Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001) reveals that agricultural, mostly ex-slave southerners settled Samaná; the roots of the Nova Scotian diaspora communities can be traced more precisely, to rural ex-slaves from South Carolina, coastal Virginia, and the Chesapeake area. These findings overturn earlier characterizations of these input populations as "middle-class African Americans from the North who would not be expected to speak the vernacular to begin with" (Wolfram 2000:46, summarizing Singler 1998).

However, the language of such communities may have diverged from these input varieties in some subtle ways, as a result of linguistic contact or internal change. For example, when Van Herk & Walker (2000) compared present tense s-marking in nineteenth-century Liberian letters with that reported by Singler (1999) for contemporary Liberian Settler English (LSE), we found that some conditioning shared by letters and other diaspora varieties had been lost over time in Liberia, as Singler himself had warned (Singler 1991:148): "Modern LSE is clearly a lineal descendant of nineteenth-century [AAE], but it has undoubtedly undergone both internally and externally motivated change over the years." The discovery of similar linguistic conditioning of features in differently-constituted diaspora corpora suggests the features are retentions from a shared input variety, as in the case of Samaná and African Nova Scotian Englishes (Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001); where differences across corpora arise, authentic historic evidence can help validate the time-depth of particular diaspora features.[11]

2.1.4 Early African American letters

Early letters are the only known source of AAE actually produced by African Americans before the Civil War. To date, however, the little work analyzing such letters has been hampered by a reliance on linguistically naive transcriptions in published data, very small data sets, or both.

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[10] The Ex-Slave Recordings are not free of issues of interpretation, either. Rickford (1991) cites passages that have been interpreted differently by white American and Black Caribbean listeners; Sutcliffe (1997, 1998) reports dozens of creole-like utterances on these tapes not clearly audible to listeners other than himself.

[11] Of course, some similarities may result from universal low-level phonetic reduction or coarticulation processes.

Kautzsch (2000) avoids the type of published letters least likely to reflect authentic Early AAE, those edited and sometimes ghost-written for 19th-century publication (see Blassingame 1977). However, his data set of Liberian letters is drawn entirely from two published volumes transcribed with questionable accuracy by historians, featuring many letters by skilled writers whose command of the prescriptive norm reduces the degree of variation available for analysis (Miller 1976/1992, Wiley 1980). The transcribed data of Mongomery et al. (1993) and Montgomery (1999) are less questionable, but their data sets are too small to permit large-scale analyses of variation.[12] Wolfram (2000), with a data set of only two published letters, wisely restricts itself to a checklist of attested features.

2.1.5 Crossing the barriers of time and knowledge

The increase in the number of potential sources of Early AAE data over the past few decades has permitted the flourishing of work characterizing and evaluating these sources (e.g. Bailey 1998, Singler 1998, Wolfram 2000). Not surprisingly, each author adopts a different evaluation framework, and, even less surprisingly, each evaluation ends by favouring the author's own data source.[13]

There are no perfect (or even near-perfect) sources of vernacular Early AAE, nor of the earlier stages of any language variety spoken by communities denied access to power and education, if only because sound recording equipment capable of accurately representing speech is a relatively new invention. The only surviving linguistic records from earlier periods are written, and elite groups often limit popular access to the tools of wider communication, especially those capable of producing material likely to be retained and archived.

Existing data sources taken to represent Early AAE can be situated with respect to these two barriers of time and knowledge. Literary attestations do derive from an earlier period, but they (and transcribed interviews) filter data through the perceptions of writers whose familiarity with the African American community or language is questionable. The most common result seems to be a caricatured representation, exaggerating (or inventing!) salient features. Spoken

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[12] Half the data in Montgomery (1999) is from published sources: the other half was verified against microfilm copies of original documents (by me).

[13] For example, Bailey (1998) questions the validity of early letters and transcriptions, favouring early recordings and interviews with rural elderly African Americans (as in Bailey et al. 1991, Cukor-Avila & Bailey 1995); Singler (1998) dismisses as insufficiently southern and rural the input populations to diaspora communities other than Liberia (as in Singler 1989); Wolfram (2000) prefers data from written attestations and dialect relic areas (as in Wolfram 2000).

diaspora data avoids such filtering, or at least reduces it to a possible interlocutor effect (Rickford & McNair-Knox 1994), but cannot cross the real time barrier. The Ex-Slave Recordings and Narratives cannot be claimed to fully cross the time barrier, either, as they were collected during the 1930s or later, over 70 years after the time period they are taken to represent.

Published letters written by semi-literate African Americans of past centuries clearly cross the time barrier. However, like the Ex-Slave Narratives, these published letters have been transcribed by writers who are not familiar with the linguistic details of African American English. Unlike the barriers inherent to other sources, however, the knowledge barrier in the case of letters can be crossed. Letters can be chosen and transcribed by linguists, for linguistic purposes, providing a source of Early AAE that is both primary and diachronic. This enterprise is not without dangers of its own, however. In the following section, I discuss potential problems associated with the data value of early African American letters, and foreshadow some of the steps that can be taken to minimize these problems.

2.2 The value of early correspondence

To validate the Liberian OREAAC letters that supply the data for this dissertation as a source of authentic Early AAE, two large questions must be addressed: Do the writers of the letters fairly represent the antebellum African American population? And, do their letters fairly represent the language that they spoke? Montgomery (1999) discusses the linguistic validity of semi-literate documents in terms of representativeness, authorship, and the effect on language of the switch to the written form (the use of other written models, the manipulation of the written code, and style shifting). In this section, I evaluate the OREAAC letters in light of these questions, and raise concerns over the reliability of existing transcriptions.

2.2.1 Representativeness of these writers

The degree to which the writers of these letters can be taken as representative of the overall African American population of the time derives from consideration of the representativeness of (semi)literate African Americans overall, and the representativeness of the Liberian settlers. These issues are addressed in this section.

2.2.1.1 Which African Americans were literate?

The question of whether any of these letter writers fairly represent the antebellum African

American population is closely linked to the nature and prevalence of African American literacy in the early 19th century. The common assumption that literate African Americans represented a radically distinct subset is based on two widely-held beliefs: that antebellum African American literacy was solely the domain of house servants taught by their masters, and that almost no African Americans were literate. Recent historical research calls both beliefs into question.

The association of African American literacy with house servants, and with those who identified with white slaveowners and their values, is seriously challenged by recent research, especially Cornelius (1991) and Anderson (1988). African Americans in the south identified literacy with power and freedom, and "viewed reading and writing as a contradiction of oppression" (Anderson 1988:17). Cornelius (1991:59-84) describes antebellum African American literacy as an undertaking requiring secrecy and great courage, as it was illegal in most slave states to teach slaves to read or write (Cornelius 1991, 1999, Anderson 1988). Skills acquired from free Blacks or sympathetic whites (or from unsympathetic whites through various subterfuges) would be spread through African American communities through secret meetings, usually at night. Ex-slave Uncle Bob Ledbetter told interviewers John and Ruby Lomax, "My daddy jus' taught me how to spell a little at night... he wasn' no educated man. He could jus' read printing. An' he set up at night and teach his children" (Bailey et al. 1991:50).

Teachers (and learners) knew of the risks of such activities: Ex-slave Ferebe Rogers claimed that the slave Enoch Golden confessed on his deathbed that he "been the death o' many nigger 'cause he taught so many to read and write" (Cornelius 1991:78, Anderson 1988:17).[14]

Anderson (1988:17) summarizes the position of recent work that describes antebellum African American literacy as outside both the knowledge and control of slave owners:

> Although slaves became literate in a variety of ways, including at the hands of slaveowners, probably the typical experience was characterized by former slave Louisa Gause: "No child, white people never teach colored people nothin, but to be good to dey massa en mittie, what learning dey would get in dem days dey been get it at night; taught themselves."

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[14] This secret, illegal literacy strongly resembled African American religious practices – the "Invisible Institution" (Raboteau 1978). Field hands with any literacy could become preachers, reading and interpreting the Bible, often in secret night-time meetings: this leadership role then implicated them in resistance practices (Cornelius 1991:85-104). As a result, letters from preachers, community leaders more closely identified with the field than with the master's house, are a good potential source of variation (see e.g. Boston King's letters in Fyfe (1991), discussed in Montgomery (1999:18-20)).

Legal and social pressures within the ruling white class almost certainly contributed to an African American literacy rate lower than that of the overall American population, though not much lower than among working-class white southerners (Anderson 1988). The actual rate of antebellum African American literacy, however, remains unknown. Most estimates put it at five to ten percent, with researchers specializing in the topic preferring the higher figure (Cornelius 1991: 8-9, Woodson 1926). Unfortunately, no known data set investigating slave literacy has ever tabulated the percentage of informants described as illiterate. The frequently-quoted figure of five percent literacy is drawn from the Ex-Slave Narratives (Rawick 1972, 1979), where not all interviewers raised the topic. In Liberian census and ship manifest tables, most African Americans are listed as "literacy unknown," not "illiterate." In any event, the illegal nature of such literacy and the gruesome punishments inflicted upon offenders (Anderson 1988:16-17, Cornelius 1991: 62-67) would almost certainly lead to under-reporting in most cases. Available historical anecdotal reports also vary widely. From one Mississippi plantation, only one of 37 immigrants (3%) to Liberia's Sinoe county was literate (Singler 1998); from another, 17 of 50 (34%) (Huberich 1947:600).

To further confuse the issue, the meaning of the term "literate" in antebellum society was almost certainly different than that of today. In the deep South, any readers who could extract basic meaning from a simple text would have been considered literate. Cornelius (1991: 71) describes how Sella Martin, a hotel slave in Columbus, Georgia, picked out the gist of a newspaper article, and that night found the hotel kitchen "full of neighbouring slaves, each of whom had taken a book or newspaper from their owners for Martin to read."

Cornelius also emphasizes the gulf between reading and writing, especially cursive writing. African Americans, especially slaves, were far more likely to be able to read than to write. This was due to a shortage of writing materials (especially in the rural South), the relatively greater availability of reading-oriented pedagogical materials, a focus on reading to permit Bible study, and the fear that writing skills might help slaves to forge documents that would aid in their escape (Cornelius 1991: 71-73). This situation would have resulted in a large population of African Americans with strong sound-letter correspondences developed by basic reading, but limited instruction in writing. The OREAAC writers whose spellings are non-standard but highly phonetic are presumably part of this population.

The implications of this interpretation of the literacy demographic for the use of letters as a source of information on Early AAE are great. The literate African American community *potentially* represented a wide spectrum of the overall community (see Fig. 2.1); the challenge facing researchers is to discover letters from across that spectrum. The validity of data can be greatly improved by starting with a large data set, then screening out highly standard letters, while still retaining a wide range of writers.

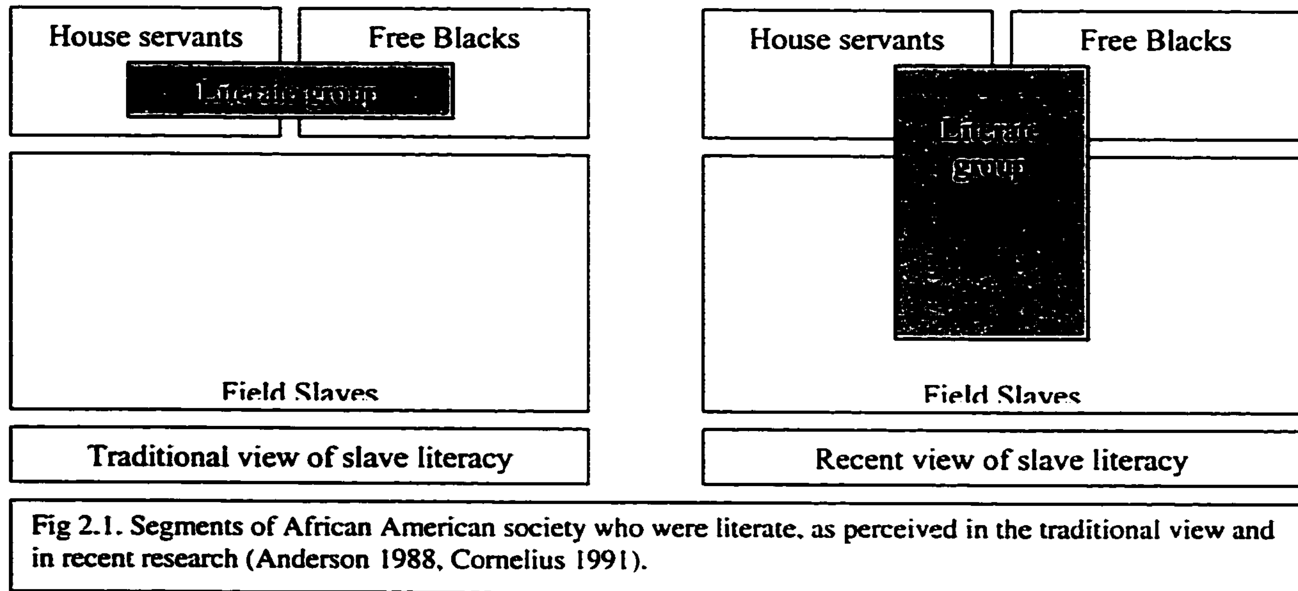

Fig 2.1. Segments of African American society who were literate, as perceived in the traditional view and in recent research (Anderson 1988, Cornelius 1991).

2.2.1.2 Which African Americans emigrated?

The degree to which any group of emigrants represents the overall African American population has been hotly debated, especially with respect to diaspora communities (Singler 1998, Wolfram 2000, Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001). In the present instance, it is necessary to describe not only the antebellum African American population in the United States, but also those who emigrated to Liberia and their relationship to the specialized population subsets who contributed to the OREAAC.

The American Colonization Society (ACS) had been founded specifically to encourage the removal from the U.S. south of the free African American community, perceived by slave owners as a social problem (Jordan 1969) as it offered proof of African American ability, a potential hiding place for escaped slaves, and a venue for racial mixing. Although the ACS was

hampered by opposition from abolitionists and constant financial worries, over 15,000 African Americans did emigrate under its auspices before the Civil War (Fraenkel 1964, Liebenow 1987, Boley 1983, Singler 1991). These emigrants were drawn from all classes, regions, and levels of literacy. Singler (1991b:150) describes each of the following characteristics as holding for "a majority of the emigrants: they came from the coastal states (from Maryland to Georgia), they had had little or no formal education, and they had been enslaved up to the time of their emigration but had been part of comparatively small slaveholdings." Although each of these characteristics is true individually, sometimes for a bare majority of immigrants, the percentage of Liberian immigrants who met *all* these criteria (i.e. from the coastal states *and* uneducated *and* recently freed *and* from small slaveholdings) was far smaller, approximately twelve percent.

Virtually all immigrants came from slave states, in particular the Atlantic coastal states of Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina, Maryland, and South Carolina (Singler 1991:273). The period in which the OREAAC letters were written (especially1845-1861) saw a rise in the number of immigrants from Georgia, as well as from Mississippi to "Mississippi in Africa," Sinoe County. Many early settlers from Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina had died by this point, while the majority from South Carolina and Georgia did not arrive until after the Civil War (Singler 1999:250-251). As well, there are no OREAAC letters from Maryland settlers, who presumably wrote directly to the Maryland agency (Wiley 1980).

The literacy rate among Liberian settlers has been estimated at 25% (Fraenkel 1964:6). Literacy may have actually increased in the early years of the settlement – as early as 1838, there were ten schools founded by church groups (Liebenow 1987:20). Several OREAAC letters describe the rapid establishment of schools, and some letters are written by children on behalf of their parents. By 1843 there were 562 pupils in sixteen schools (with only sixteen teachers!), most supported by missionary societies. The schools taught "basic literacy and the advanced elements of English grammar and arithmetic… the Lancasterian system was used (Shick 1980:55). In this system the teacher selected the best students to learn a given lesson, and they in turn would teach the lesson to ten other students" (McDaniel 1995: 73). This technique meant that only one of eleven students received direct instruction from the teacher, a situation that would presumably be amenable to the maintenance of vernacular forms.

The status of antebellum immigrants was divided roughly equally among free Blacks, recently emancipated slaves, and African recaptives from slave ships. Recaptives would have

had no direct contact with the ACS, presumably were illiterate, and may not have spoken any variety of English. The letters to the ACS, therefore, come entirely from the free Black and emancipated slave groups.

The Liberian settlers were somewhat more likely to be urban, or from small landholdings, than the overall antebellum African American population, although there were groups from large plantations in Mississippi (176 settlers) and Georgia (154 settlers) (Singler 1991:251). These urban or smallholder settlers were still a minority of the overall Liberian community, however, and were more likely to be free Blacks, from whom the elite of Liberian society was drawn (Fraenkel 1964). According to McDaniel, "Between 1820 and 1863 the majority of the African immigrants involved in the ACS schemes were poor slaves from the south. The majority were most likely of purely African descent... The [published] letters of the immigrants to the ACS suggest that most were field hands, although there were many houseslaves, too" (McDaniel 1995:57). Manumitted slaves, emancipated on the condition that they emigrate, were particularly likely to be rural and agricultural (McDaniel 1995:66-67). These immigrants are well-represented in the OREAAC, as many of them write regarding the status of bequests associated with their manumission.

2.2.2 Authorship

Another concern with respect to the validity of these letters is whether they were actually written by their signatories, or even by African Americans at all, given the relatively low African American literacy rate at the time. Montgomery (1999:22-23) cautions us that attributions of authorship are problematic for all such documents, as well as for literary attestations, and must proceed on a case-by-case basis.

In the case of the Liberian situation, both sociohistorical and textual evidence support the attribution of virtually all the letters to their signatories, and the remainder to other African American writers. As in Sierra Leone, there was no available pool of literate whites to write on the settlers' behalf.[15] Liberian communities were made up almost entirely of African American settlers. The only other groups in regular contact were the recaptives and the natives, who would

[15] One of the Sierra Leone letters published in Fyfe (1991) is possibly written by white missionaries; it is not included in the OREAAC.

have been far less likely to be literate, or even to know English.[16] If amanuenses were sought, they would have been from within the settler community. It is unlikely that most settlers would have asked the more literate, perhaps white-identified members of the Liberian elite to write letters on their behalf, as the letters tend to involve complaints about the elite, or attempts to circumvent them through non-payment of duty (example 6).

(6) a. bouth ar en the hous and not fitting for thear office (157/7/238)

b. please to put the price down on the invoice at the lowist calculation and give it to me in full in my pryvet letter and I will understand my reason of doing that for they will use all up with the duty. (155/5/126-2)

The restriction of the OREAAC to the most non-standard letters by the least frequent writers (described in greater detail in section 3.1.2 below) further reduces the chances of highly literate settlers being the writers.

The letters themselves often provide evidence as to who actually wrote them. Many refer to the physical act of writing, or mention haste or the writers' lack of writing skills, as in (7). These letters are almost certainly written by their signatories.

(7) a. this Leter is Badly Connected and Badly spent [<spelled] (155/5/157)
b. at that time I was taken sick so that I could not write (155/5/122)
c. I Have Riten this in quite a hurry, I hope you will Parden all Mistakes (157/7/19)

In other cases, the letters explicitly indicate the use of an amanuensis, sometimes naming the friend or family member who is actually writing, as in (8). These letters are usually no more standard than any others, suggesting that they were written by the most literate member, often a child, of a not particularly literate community or family group.

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[16] The OREAAC letters occasionally mention the pidgin spoken by local tribes; presumably pidgin use would have been more advanced among the Kru, who had been supplying servants to the African American Sierra Leone

(8) a. this is my son James hand writing (158/8/8)

b. i have heartofor wrote all the letters that he wish me to wrot you (159/10.1/14)

c. i cannot rite well anouf myself to rite my letters i told the yong lad to State to you... (155/5/163)

Overall, the sociohistoric and textual evidence strongly suggests that these letters were written by those who signed them, or by a closely related member of the non-elite African American community.

2.2.3 The effect of writing on language use

Three concerns may be subsumed under this rubric. Did the writers follow linguistic models of the time for letter writing? Did these writers have such difficulty with the written code that their output is deformed, resembling neither speech nor the standard? And, to what degree do these letters represent their writers' most formal, least speech-like style?

2.2.3.1 The use of models

In fact, many OREAAC writers follow the letter-writing conventions of the era and use extravagant introductory flourishes, exemplified in (9).

(9) a. i now sit down to write you these few lines hoping that they may find you and family well as it leaves me at this present (155/5/53)

b. i embrace this oppertunity in addresinG you a few Lines and hope that this may fines you & all the family well alSo (157/7/46)

However, as Montgomery (1999:24) points out, "it is true only in a trivial sense that such a phrase indicates use of a written model. Writers of such phraseology...are employing a formula they have memorized from hearing letters read aloud. That they are not copying directly from a written source is often strikingly revealed by their lack of punctuation and capitalization and by the presence of phonetic spellings."

Presumably, these semiliterate writers did use whatever written models were available to them, whether they were signs, packing documents, or letters, in the process of learning to write. We see this in their attempts at non-phonetic StdE spellings, as in (10), and the replacement of

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community since the early 1800s (Walker 1996).

rarely-seen words with more frequently-written homonyms. This is exemplified by the common spelling of *coloured* as *collard*, which writers may have acquired from marketplace signs (11).

(10 let me Know if I Send you a drogt [< draught] if you could attend to it (157/7/76)

(11) africa is the collard mans home (154/3/159)

However, there is no evidence that these writers would have composed their letters with a written model in front of them, as the letters cover a range of subjects and show a productive use of language that would have required far more than mere copying of available written materials. The sole widely used model is the Bible, which yields copies from both written (12) and oral (13) models.

(12) Christ said through his Servant John the Revelation 2C 10 V that i Must Be thou faithful unto Death and i will Give thee a Crown of Life. (157/7/133)

(13) that he himSelf had to contend with Many hardship and privations yet [strikeout] he took them like a lamb and opened he not his mowth (154/3/182)

Such passages were identified during the transcription process to permit their exclusion from future quantitative analyses.

2.2.3.2 Language deformation through writing

As far as difficulty with the code is concerned, the letters chosen for inclusion in the OREAAC show neither invariant use of StdE forms nor deformation.[17] They are clearly the product of "systematic attempts by writers to utilise what orthographic knowledge they possess in a rule governed way to express their phonological and phonetic intuitions" (Jones 1991:83, referring to the Sierra Leone letters). A few non-standard spellings (as in *drogt*, example 10 above) result from misapplications of formal spelling rules, but the vast majority reflect the phonology of AAE, as we know it from diaspora or contemporary data. In some cases, the writers show incredible creativity in representing fine details of their phonological system – so much so that during transcription, the meaning of some sentences was unclear until they were

[17] In letters written in standard or nearly-standard English, difficulty with the code is irrelevant. The writers demonstrate successful acquisition of the rules of written Standard English.

read aloud. In (14), the writer uses his knowledge of sound-letter correspondences to represent consonant cluster simplification (*we punish_*), copula deletion (*we _ punish*), epenthetic schwa (*honger a*), centralized word-final /i/ (*honger a*), labiodentalization of word-final interdental fricatives (*mouft*), and intervocalic lenition (*morer*).

(14) we punish with honger a mouft... my morer is alive
'We are punished with hungry mouths... my mother is alive.' (157/7/238)

Such writers may have had problems with the rules of Standard English spelling, but they clearly had no trouble with using the written code to represent their speech.

2.2.3.3 Style shifting

As far as the issue of style is concerned, the letters of the OREAAC should not be taken to represent the deepest vernacular end of their writers' stylistic continua. The writers are people who do not write often, and are generally writing to (white) officials of the ACS. Presumably, they would at least start their correspondence in the most formal variety available to them.

However, several factors seem to have encouraged these letter writers to move toward a less constricted style. The extremely limited literacy of some of these writers means that even their formal register is neither particularly standard nor consistently maintained. The ACS officials to whom the letters are addressed are not friends, but neither are they strangers: many letters refer to previous meetings between the writers and the officials, or discuss domestic details of family life. Some letters include recipes. One writer, Sion Harris, tells the clergyman receiving his letter a fairly risque joke by the standards of the time (15), and advises the recipient to keep it to himself.

(15) if you dont I will do like the old woman I will resk my lif once more how was that she got marrid & the first child was Born the old woman had a very searis time so the Dr told her if It was ever the case a gain She would Surely die so her husband went & prepared Another Room he went & staid in one & she in the other he had give up all hops After 8 or nine months the old woman gits up [strikeout: & come] in the night & wraps the doore the [< he] thought some one had come to rob him crying out who is that who is that she says me my Dear I have come to resk my life once more I Just give you this lower peace you need not send It to Mr. Haze

Some letters feature danger-of-death narratives, while others portray intensely felt emotions. The correspondence of the settler Peter Ross, for example, begins with genteel forms like "with a bow to you Sir with my hat under my arm" (157/7/133), but in later letters his frustration leads him to vow that ACS officials will face the wrath of God (16), and to ask for a gun.

(16) Mr M lain hav agreat account to answer for at the Bair of Justus Both here & hereafter (159/9/140)

The personal nature or emotional intensity of such letters would decrease the writers' focus on forms. Montgomery (1999:26) refers to semiliterate writers driven to writing through emotional circumstances as "desperadoes," describing their writings as "roughly analogous to the breathless narratives so often sought by sociolinguists."

OREAAC letter collection and research strategies further minimized the barriers to linguistic analysis associated with the formal nature of letter writing. Our collection strategies excluded the most formal and standard letters from the corpus, as their invariant use of prescribed StdE forms provided no clues to the underlying grammatical systems of their writers. Many of the letters in the ACS archives, especially those from frequent writers, fall into this category, as do many letters in previously-published collections, where choice of material is driven by non-linguistic concerns. Example (17) illustrates.

(17) let a few of Columbia's expanding-hearted sons environ it, and it is borne aloft at once; thus a comparatively few men in America will effect more for Liberia than England, France and Russia combined! ...Benedic anima mea Domino! et noli oblivisei omnes ejus beneficientia. (H.W. Ellis, Wiley 1980:228)

The inclusion of such letters dilutes the findings of any study (e.g. Kautzsch 2000) analyzing (variable) linguistic features or testing the usefulness of written material.

2.2.4 Reliability

So far, this discussion has concentrated on data validity, i.e. how well the letters and their

writers reflect antebellum African American language and society. In terms of creating a linguistically useful data set, however, it is also necessary to focus on data reliability, i.e. how well the data subject to analysis reflect what the writers actually wrote. Virtually all early African American letters published to date have been transcribed by historians (Miller 1990, Wiley 1980, Fyfe 1991, Blassingame 1977, Starobin 1974), who differ from linguists both in their research goals and their transcription practices.

The goal of variationist sociolinguists working in this area is to collect as much data of as vernacular a nature as possible. The goals of historians, however, may vary. Generally, published collections have sought to shed light on historically significant issues, especially slavery, colonization, and the racial power balance, and discern the positions on these issues of disempowered groups. This has led to a focus on letters by relatively well-educated community leaders or fugitives, whose letters were frequently edited for publication (see especially Blassingame 1977). This focus distorts the sample of Early AAE presented by published collections of letters. Historians may not be interested in a series of highly non-standard repetitive letters about mundane subjects like root vegetables.[18] Linguists are.

As historians focus on the ideas expressed in the letters, while linguists focus on the language used to express those ideas, it is hardly surprising that they also differ in their transcription practices. At the micro level, historians sometimes tidy up grammar, spelling, and punctuation in order to make letters more readable (e.g. Wiley 1980). Although it could be argued that the minor changes involved should not affect the linguistic (especially syntactic) forms presented, the simple act of breaking up connected text into sentences imposes an interpretation on the data – in this case, the interpretation of a non-linguist. A larger concern is that historians who are not students of Early AAE simply mis-transcribe the finer details of the letters, in some cases at an alarming rate. In Van Herk (1998), I compared seventeen manuscript versions of letters from Sierra Leone with those published in Fyfe (1991), and found 82 differences between the letters and the published transcription. These differences included s-marking on verbs and the sole deleted copula in the data set. Kautzsch (2000) compared five original letters with those published in Wiley (1980) and found 20 differences. None affected negation, the subject of Kautzsch's study, but there were one or two morphological differences and, as in Fyfe (1991), a substantial number of spelling differences. Kautzsch concludes, "this

volume should not be used for studies of pronunciation" (Kautzsch 2000:39).

Comparison of a single Liberian OREAAC letter with the version published in Wiley (1980:220-223) turns up over 40 differences, beyond the standardization of proper names, capitalization, and punctuation acknowledged by the author. While some differences may have no linguistic relevance, others would skew analysis of such variable AAE features as past marking, pluralization, *was/were* distinctions, *pin/pen* merger, consonant cluster reduction or hypercorrection, r-lessness, nasal consonant deletion or hypercorrection, and front vowel raising (table 2.1).

The research goal that informs OREAAC decisions is not to catalogue the presence or absence in these letters of obscure or stigmatized features that formal writers might try to avoid, but rather to ascertain and investigate factors conditioning variability. Perhaps most indicative of the utility of the OREAAC, several variable features occur often enough in the corpus to permit large-scale analysis. This situation permits the application of variationist methodology to determine the factors conditioning this variability, if any. The results can then be compared with like information on spoken materials to determine precisely the relationship of these written materials to speech. Past research shows that the linguistic conditioning of such frequently-occurring features tends to remain stable across corpora, whatever the overall rates of occurrence (Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001).

[ix] Still unpublished from the Sierra Leone collection is an entire letter about napkin theft.

Table 2.1. Differences in the transcription of a Liberian letter (Sion Harris, April 16, 1840) between Wiley (1980:220-223) and the OREAAC.		
	Wiley (1980)	OREAAC
1.	you ordered the things I wished	you ***ordred*** the things I wished
2.	various threatenings from Goterah	various ***treatning*** from Gotorah
3.	3 or 4 hundred warriors	3 or 4 hundred ***wariers***
4.	until about 4 in the morning	***untill*** about 4 in the morning
5.	across the foot of the bed	***acrost*** the foot of the bed
6.	War! War! is come	war! war! is ***com***
7.	At this time two boys were dispatched	At this time two boys ***was*** dispatched
8.	several picked up muskets and ran	several picked up muskets and ***run***
9.	a double load of one ounce balls	a double load ***&*** one ounce balls
10.	I and my colleague	I and my ***Colleag***
11.	After firing catriges at natives	After firing ***4 cartrijes*** at natives
12.	now being out	***mine*** being out
13.	to a large chest	to ***alarge*** chest
14.	the same quantity of powder	the same quantity of ***puff powder***
15.	filled my bosom with too	filled my ***boosom*** with too
16.	a part of it, now [tried] to get behind the church	a part of it ***moved*** to ***git*** behind the church
17.	came in shot	came in ***shot out***
18.	at which I reach for my axe	at which I ***reachd*** for my axe
19.	it was primed good. Fear left me	it was primed good ***&*** fear left me
20.	the kitchen, which he siezed	the kitchen, which he ***siesed***
21.	brandished a dreadful knife	brandished a ***dreadfull*** knife
22.	a hundred and 50 men came up to the fence	a hundred and 50 men ***come*** up to the fence
23.	he was half bent, shaking	he was half ***bint*** shaking
24.	first I and then he	first I and ***them*** he
25.	had it not been for the house	had it ***now*** been for the house
26.	as many more come catching at him	as many ***now some*** catching at him
27.	the contents of one load	the contents of ***our*** load
28.	When I returned back	When I ***returnd*** back
29.	two remaining contry men	two remaining ***coutry*** men
30.	which only made him growl and run	which only made him growl and ***roar***
31.	the dead guard	the dead ***gurd***
32.	turned him over	***turnd*** him ***ovr***
33.	5 inches	5 ***inchis***
34.	I then took my bugle	I then took my ***bangler***
35.	The natives came from all quarters	the natives came from all ***quatrs***
36.	beside their lost head man	beside ***the*** lost head man
37.	about 15 American came	about 15 ***Amricans*** came
38.	We went about 15 miles	We went ***abut*** 15 miles
39.	I delivered to the Governor	I ***dilvered*** to the Governor
40.	I cannot say I was not frightened when the Alarm first came	I cannot say I was not ***frigtened*** when the Alarm first ***com***
41.	we all, I thought, wold die together	we all, I thought, ***woud*** die together
42.	I write or take the privilege	I write or take ***this privilage***
43.	and have condesended	and have ***condecnded*** to write us
44.	I have no Family but Myself and wife and [no] means to come	I have no Family but Myself and wife and ***mean*** to come
45.	If you think it difficult	If you ***thing*** it difficult
46.	being engrossed at H	being on ***guar*** at H

Chapter 3: Data and Method

In this chapter, I discuss the data and method that I use in the studies described in this dissertation. In section 3.1, I detail the steps involved in the construction of a completely new corpus, the Ottawa Repository of Early African American Correspondence. I describe how data extracted from the OREAAC can be used to test and extend the knowledge derived from other sources of Early AAE, based on the underlying understanding that "the usefulness of each type of evidence depends on the extent to which it can be validated by others" (Walker 2000b:33). In section 3.2, I describe the application of variationist techniques and insights to the traditional comparative method, and elaborate upon the issues relevant to establishing the grammatical system of Early AAE through the use of this method. In section 3.3, I illustrate some of the variability found in the OREAAC, and tabulate the distribution of the variable PTR forms that form the focus of this dissertation.

3.1 Data

The building of the OREAAC has been informed by an awareness of the issues described in Chapter 2. Choice of letters, transcriber training, and transcription and correction have all been language-driven, based on a goal of complete fidelity to the manuscripts. The language of the resulting corpus is not always immediately accessible to non-specialists, but it is as close as possible to what was written.

3.1.1 Text collection

The Liberian letters in the OREAAC were copied from microfilm copies of the original letters, acquired through inter-library loan. As the entire archive of the ACS consists of 191,000 documents produced between 1819 to 1917, it was necessary to streamline the search. A research interest in AAE of the pre-Civil War era, the period into which creole traits are claimed to have survived, led to a concentration on incoming correspondence written before 1866, thus halving the data set. A preliminary analysis of eight reels of microfilm revealed that letters written from the United States were far less likely to permit ascription with certainty to African American writers, and that such letters made up a small proportion of the flood of domestic correspondence between ACS agents, journalists, slave owners, politicians, and others. Letters written from

Liberia by settlers, on the other hand, were almost entirely by African American writers. The ACS archives include thirteen containers of original manuscripts, approximately 8,000 letters, written from Liberia between February 1833 and December 1866, when post-Civil War emigration to Liberia commenced. The Liberian OREAAC data was transcribed from 8 microfilm reels copied from these thirteen containers of documents.

3.1.2 Text selection

It was necessary to sift these letters in order to exclude those featuring standard or near-standard spelling and grammar. Letters in standard English, of course, offer no clues to Early AAE speech – we do not know whether the standard forms represent the writer's spoken variety, or simply acquisition of the rules of written English (Montgomery 1999). For each container, we used the original ACS index to exclude anyone who had written more than three letters. This removed from consideration frequent writers, who presumably were sufficiently literate to avoid most non-standard forms, and officers and friends of the society, whose spoken variety was presumably fairly standard. This three-letter maximum was occasionally relaxed –for example, if we knew from published sources that a particular writer's letters were very non-standard, or to increase representation from the early years of the colony, when fewer letters were written.

The remaining letters on each microfilm reel were checked one by one, and rejected if they showed such evidence of full literacy as punctuation, sentence-initial capitalization, and fully standard spelling (as in example 17 above). All remaining letters were photocopied, and writer and letter information was noted in a logbook, along with any particularly interesting linguistic features or demographic information gleaned at the checking stage. This stage produced 456 letters by 235 writers, from all areas of Liberia.

These letters contain a range of phonetic orthography and non-standard grammatical forms, in sufficient numbers to permit detailed analysis. These forms can be presumed to represent the writers' attempts to use the graphemes of an unfamiliar code (written StdE) to represent the phonological and grammatical system of their speech. Example (18) illustrates, providing evidence of r-lessness (*the* < *there*), consonant cluster simplification and merger of front vowels before nasals (*agin* < *agent*), vowel lowering (*thar* < *there*, *af* < *if*, *bot* < *but*), null subject (*tok* < *He took*), *what* relatives (*all what* < *all that*), copula deletion (*boys all a live* < *boys are all alive*), nasal consonant deletion (*watter* < *want to*), zero genitives (*child money* < *child's money*), and the feature studied in this paper, variable past tense marking (*die* < *died*).

(18) thar wors my Sister Nan that die Sriker the agin toke all of her money and left the Child thar an or hans af the is anny law for that I watter nor et my mor er is a live fur sister Six boys all a live tok the child money to and wontter sel the things Bot we wont concent So all what She fish with her w have now (157/7/238)

'There was my sister Nan, who died. Striker the agent took all of her money and left the child there on our hands. If there is any law for that I want to know it. My mother is alive, her sister's six boys [are] all alive. [Striker] took the child's money too, and wanted to sell the things. But we wouldn't consent. So all that she fished/fetched [i.e. brought] with her, we have now.'

3.1.3 Preparation for transcription

The experience of the University of Ottawa sociolinguistics research group in the construction of other corpora (see Poplack 1989, Poplack & Sankoff 1987, Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991) informed the pre-transcription decisions required to build the OREAAC. To some degree, however, the concerns associated with transcribing handwritten materials were different from those involved with a corpus of spoken data. Decisions over degree of detail required to represent phonological or morphological variation are not in the hands of linguists in this case – the original writers of the letters have already decided what to include, and we aimed at a first transcription that represented as accurately as possible their written documents.[19] We also established a transcription protocol, developing and standardizing terms to be used to indicate editorial comment and non-linguistic material like strikeouts, illegible passages, and interpositions. These decisions were influenced by the project's goal of creating a linguistically valid and useful machine-readable corpus. As well, a transcription log was developed to track each letter through the transcription and correction process.

3.1.4 Transcription

Given our concerns over the reliability of historians' transcriptions of Early AAE letters, considerable effort was expended to ensure that linguistic concerns drove the transcription process. All letters were transcribed by graduate students in linguistics, who were trained in the transcription conventions and goals of the project. To ensure consistency in the transcription process, I either transcribed or corrected every letter myself, and over 90% of the transcriptions

[19] We did, however, decide how much descriptive information should accompany each letter (ACS microfilm reel number, container number, and letter number, date of letter, writer, intended recipient, demographic information gleaned from letter itself).

were done by only three transcribers.[20] Transcribers clearly identified their degree of certainty with respect to transcription of particular items, and many of these eventually were marked "[illegible]."

One resource that proved useful was a list of lexical items that might stump transcribers, especially those with limited knowledge of 19th-century dressmaking and agriculture. This list grew quickly, both from sociohistorical research and from information gleaned by the transcribers themselves from the letters. The list included:

- Liberian and American place names, e.g. Montserrado, Grand Cess, Hampton Roads;
- names of people, especially officers of the ACS, Liberian politicians, and local chiefs, e.g. Gurley, Roberts, Goterah;
- terms associated with the time period and setting, including produce (cassada/cassava, Irish potato, eddoe, collards), fabrics (Osnabruck, muslin, calico), and seafaring terms (barque, packet);
- frequent unusual spellings or abbreviations, e.g. *do*(ditto), *ous* (us), *yr umble srt* (your humble servant), *recd* (received), *Revd* (Reverend).

This list was never used to correct the writers' spellings, but it did lead transcribers to a better understanding of the subject matter, which helped clear up illegible passages.

3.1.5 Correction

Each transcribed letter was corrected by a second (usually more experienced) transcriber. When the first transcription was by an experienced transcriber, the correction stage usually filled in words or passages marked illegible, and caught keyboarding errors. When the first transcription was by a less experienced transcriber, the corrector often also caught a number of errors in transcription. When this happened, the transcriber and corrector reviewed the transcription together. This, and the increased use of the lexical items list, greatly reduced transcribers' future errors. A second correction stage with a test sample of letters indicated that the transcription and first correction stages had missed very little. Example (19) illustrates a first transcription (a) and a correction (b).

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[20] I thank my fellow primary transcribers, Jenn Houghton and Ian Wallace, as well as "part-timers" Dawn Harvie and James Walker.

(19) a. I have Endevere to [illeg] now one that is coming
to this country that he would have Litel or
nouthing to do dar from it in Som instance he wou>ld
Be doublyey call uppond to Labour in the first
Instand on his a Rival it will Becom nesesery
for him to Bill himself a house & clare his Lot
as farm

b. I have Endevere to ***flater*** now one that ***in*** coming
to this country that he would have Litel or
nouthing to do ***far*** from it in Som instance he wou>ld
Be doublyey call uppond to Labour in the first
Instand on his a Rival it will Becom nesesery
for him to Bill himself a house & clare his Lot
or farm (155/4/17)

Even with the benefit of training and practice, transcribers and correctors were still occasionally forced to admit defeat. Twenty-nine letters, as in (20), contained so many illegible passages that no linguistically useful final transcription was possible.

(20) the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] pleasing style of delivery [illegible] [illegible] and [illegible] [illegible] harris was in earnest [illegible] from the [illegible] of his heart (156/6/106)

In the 427 letters that were fully transcribed, only 0.3% of the material (393 words) remains marked "[illegible]." In a few cases, the writing is legible, but idiosyncratic spellings (or perhaps unfamiliar lexical items) make the writer's intended message unclear. Deciphering some of these passages may yet be possible, perhaps through recourse to historians specializing in the era. Many appear to be names of places or people, so their precise spelling does not affect research on morphological or syntactic features.

The great majority of the remaining illegible letters or passages, however, are due to a non-linguistic factor, the physical condition of the original letters. Letters that in the first selection process had seemed manageable turned out to be too badly faded to read, or damaged by water or mildew. There is no correlation between legibility and standardness for these letters. In fact, the most elegantly written letters are often the most faded. Nothing about the untranscribed letters or passages leads us to believe that they conceal vernacular features not

found elsewhere in the OREAAC.

3.1.6 Automated manipulation of the corpus

The transcription and correction stages described above resulted in a word processing file composed of 427 letters by 235 writers. This file represents as accurately as possible the material written by the Liberian settlers. A copy of this file was converted into a concordance file, using the Concorder programme (Rand & Patera 1992). Example (21) illustrates a sample concordance extract.

(21) 221.251 Amtt of which you had Spent over and also the invoice and **bill** off Lading in which you Desire of Me to Do and i also wish
228.168 Instand on his a Rival it will Becom nesesery for him to **Bill** himself a house & clare his Lot or farm, & though house can
258.11 Sir I Recd your{?} Letter by the Brig Harp Enclosing Invoice **bill** of Laden etc of Goods consign {illegible} to the amt of

To make this concordance more useful for linguistic analysis, words that Liberian writers had idiosyncratically broken up at line endings were reconnected, so that a word like *sailed* would not show up under such entries as *sai, led, sa, iled,* or even *s* and *ailed.*

No other standardizing was done, as it was felt that the gains in automated searching were too small to justify the loss of primary linguistic information (or the work that would be required). Test searches for divergent spellings of variants likely to be sought through a concordance programme (*was/were* variation, negative contractions) revealed that the divergences from standard spellings were almost always found at the end of the word, so that the variant forms almost always clustered together in an alphabetically ordered concordance.[21]

The data set constructed from the transcribed Liberian letters consists of some 135,743 words. Targeting infrequent letter writers at the collection stage sifted out material from the most literate settlers, but it also limited the likelihood of collecting a great deal of information from any one informant. The informants with the most material in the OREAAC are:

- those who wrote infrequently, but over a long period of time (e.g. storekeeper Ann Snow, 13 letters);
- those who wrote frequently without achieving the standard (e.g. Peter or George Ross, 16

letters together);

- those who wrote infrequent but extremely long letters, including five or six relatively literate writers as well as those with limited literacy but much to say (e.g. Sion Harris).

On the whole, however, there is no apparent connection within the letters retained for the OREAAC between degree of literacy and either length of letter or frequency of writing.

3.1.7 Informant data base

Information gleaned from the letters and published historical work on ship's manifests and the 1843 Liberian census was used to build a data base of demographic information about each writer. This included information on sex, place of settlement in Liberia, place of origin in the United States, occupation, age at emigration, status, ascribed literacy, the ACS number and date of letters copied and transcribed, assessment of the vernacular nature of their letters, non-standard linguistic features used, and whatever other information could be gathered from the letters. This information was entered into a database programme (FileMaker Pro), and continues to be supplemented as information from other sources is found.

The following section integrates demographic information about the OREAAC with what is known of the Liberian settler community, thus permitting a determination of which sectors of antebellum African American society the OREAAC informants can be taken to represent.

3.1.7.1 Status

Table 3.1 demonstrates that the OREAAC writers represent very closely the distribution of free versus emancipated settlers in Liberia during the antebellum years. As is the case for the overall Liberian immigrant population, over 60% of OREAAC writers whose status is known had been slaves until they were emancipated to go to Liberia.

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[21] The concentration of divergence in word endings in these letters mirrors recent findings by Labov (1998) for reading errors by African American schoolchildren. Our finding seems to add historical weight to claims that such errors result at least partly from a clash of linguistic systems.

Table 3.1. Slave status of Liberian input population, 1820-1862 (adapted from Liebenow 1987:19), and OREAAC letter writers.

	Liberian settlers, 1820-62		OREAAC writers	
	N	% of U.S. immigrants	N	% of writers of known origins
Born free, pre-1861	4,541	39.1	42	38.1
Purchased their freedom	344	3.0	7	6.4
Emancipated	6,710	57.9	61	55.5
Settled in Maryland County	1,227		0	
Recaptives from slave ships	5,744		0	
unknown[22]			125	
Total	18,912		235	

3.1.7.2 Geographical origin

As table 3.2 shows, 92% of all immigrants to Liberia between 1820 and 1891 and over 90% of all OREAAC writers came from slave states, especially Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina, Maryland, and South Carolina (Singler 1991:273). As with status, the OREAAC correspondents represent fairly closely the distribution of the overall Liberian population, often down to the nearest percentage point.[23] Over-represented in the OREAAC is the coastal South (Georgia, South and North Carolina) and Washington, DC; under-represented are Maryland and, to a lesser extent, the tobacco states of Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky.

[22] "Unknown" in this and subsequent tables includes both informants whose status is listed as "unknown" in source historical documents and informants who could not be traced through these documents. The exception is table 3.4, dealing with literacy, where the source document designation of "unknown" is in itself of relevance to the issue of African American literacy.

[23] The strong correspondences between the OREAAC writers and the overall Liberian community with respect to status and geographic origin suggest that demographic information on one community will broadly apply to the other: future historical research on the Liberian settlers will be relevant to our understanding of the OREAAC data, while information on the OREAAC writers may broaden existing knowledge of early Liberia.

Table 3.2. Origins of Liberian settlers, 1820-1891 (from Singler 1991:273) and OREAAC writers.

	Liberian settlers		*OREAAC writers*	
State of origin:	*Number*	*Percent*	*Number*	*Percent*
Virginia	3755	25.0	23	20.7
Georgia	2265	14.2	21	18.9
North Carolina	2037	12.7	18	16.2
Maryland	1725	10.8	0	0
South Carolina	1374	8.6	17	15.3
Tennessee	993	6.2	4	3.6
Kentucky	678	4.2	3	2.7
Mississippi	664	4.2	5	4.5
Louisiana	316	2.0	1	0.9
Arkansas	254	1.6	0	0
Alabama	199	1.2	2	1.8
Missouri	116	0.7	0	0
Washington, DC	114	0.7	6	5.4
Florida	105	0.7	0	0
Other slave states	159	1.0	0	0
Total slave states	**14,754**	**92.2**	**100**	**90.1**
Pennsylvania	373	2.3	3	2.7
New York	302	1.9	2	1.8
Other free states	567	3.6	6	5.4
Total free states	**1242**	**7.8**	**11**	**9.9**
Grand total	15,996	100.0	111	100.0

Sources: Singler (1991:273), Liberian roll and 1843 census. OREAAC total for free states includes one or more freed slaves resettled in Illinois. Totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

3.1.7.3 Occupation and urbanization

The meticulous demographic research undertaken by McDaniel (1995) tells us much about the occupational profile of the Liberian immigrants compared to the overall African American community of the time, as determined from the mortality censuses of 1850 and 1860. Table 3.3 compares the occupations of male slaves in rural southern districts c. 1860 with those of male freeborn and manumitted immigrants to Liberia c. 1843, the only year for which census information is available. The occupational distribution of the Liberian immigrants in 1843 is not especially different from that of even the most rural districts of the most plantation-based southern states (South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana), and based on state of origin, immigrants arriving after the 1843 census were even more likely to have been

agricultural labourers. The manumitted immigrants in particular show an occupation distribution closely resembling that of the (male) rural southern slave community as a whole. These immigrants make up a majority of the OREAAC, as indicated in section 3.1.7.1 above.

Table 3.3. Percentage of reported occupations of male Liberian immigrants, 1820-1843, and male slaves in southern U.S. rural districts, 1860.

Occupation:	Freeborn immigrants	Manumitted immigrants	Rural southern slaves
Agriculture	37.7	**74.7**	**88.7**
Artisan	40.7	14.7	5.6
Semiskilled labour	12.8	5.0	2.9
Unskilled labour	7.7	5.0	2.8
Professional	1.4	0.7	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Adapted from McDaniel (1995:66-67). Sources: Liberian roll and 1843 census; Ransom & Sutch (1977).

The artisan and labour classes are larger among the immigrants, especially the freeborn, than among the rural southern population, but the combined freeborn and manumitted Liberian immigrants are mostly agricultural workers. Given that the rural southern figures in the table represent only the core large-plantation areas (the areas usually claimed to have produced or maintained an indigenous creole), the demography of the manumitted immigrant community with respect to the testing of creole origin claims is remarkably good. Assuming a higher proportion of artisans and labourers among African Americans outside the core large-plantation areas, the overall Liberian occupational profile can be taken as fairly representative of overall antebellum African American society.

3.1.7.4 Literacy

As described in section 2.2.1.1 above, published estimates of the antebellum African American literacy rate, including Liberian settlers, are low, based on self-reports of the time. The estimated Liberian immigrant literacy rate of 25% (Fraenkel 1964:6) has been used to characterize the immigrant population as relatively untouched by the standardizing effects of literacy (e.g. Singler 1991b), even though the literacy of most immigrants was listed in the 1843 census and ships' manifests as "unknown." The reported degree of literacy among OREAAC writers is therefore most illuminating. As table 3.4 indicates, the great majority of OREAAC writers for whom we have historical documentation were listed on contemporary documents as

"literacy unknown." These are the very people who have been claimed as "illiterate" in descriptions of Liberian immigration. This appears to confirm the suggestion advanced in Chapter 2, that African American literacy may have been considerably more widespread than research based on self-reports to outsiders would suggest.

Also of interest in table 3.4 is the second most frequent literacy level, "reads." This group would be the result of antebellum African Americans' easier access to reading (pedagogy and materials) than to writing, as described in Chapter 2. This group is actually better-represented in the OREAAC than those who claim to read *and* write, further supporting the claim that OREAAC writers are largely semi-literate, representing their spoken language with limited interference from the prescribed requirements of writing.

Table 3.4. Liberian OREAAC writers' reported degree of literacy.

Reported degree of literacy	N
unknown (="illiterate")	81
reads	16
reads and writes	13
writes	2
spells	2
good	2
Total writers reporting	**106**

Sources: Liberian roll and 1843 census.

3.1.7.5 Gender

A majority of the Liberian OREAAC writers, 195 of 235, are men. It is unclear whether this results from higher literacy rates among men, or simply reflects gender role distinctions of the era, with male heads of households writing on behalf of their families. Most of the letters discussing business are also by men.There are significant exceptions to this generalization. Some women write on behalf of their less literate husbands (e.g. Martha and Sion Harris), or conduct businesses themselves (Ann Snow). Settler women occasionally write to the wives of the ACS officers. Widows almost always write on their own behalf.

3.1.7.6 Age

Most Liberian immigrants were young – more than half of the immigrant population was under 20 at the time of immigration (McDaniel 1995:62), although this group (and the elderly) were also the most likely to die from the "acclimating fever," presumably malaria, in their first

year in Liberia (McDaniel 1995:75-88). The Liberian OREAAC writers, on the other hand, were almost all between 20 and 49 years of age at the time of immigration, as table 3.5 illustrates. As with gender (3.1.7.5), this presumably reflects the letter writers' status as heads of households. This age distribution suggests that virtually all writers acquired full control of their language variety in the United States.

Table 3.5. Age of OREAAC writers at time of immigration.

Age	N
0-9	2
10-20	7
20-30	29
30-39	39
40-49	24
50-59	7
60-69	3
unknown	124
total	235

Sources: Liberian roll and 1843 census.

3.1.8 Forms in use in the OREAAC

It is to be presumed that the letters' writers each wrote in something approaching her or his most formal style, although haste and high emotions frequently encourage a more speech-like style (as discussed in section 2.2.3.3 above). Given that constraint, the OREAAC letters include a remarkable number of non-standard features, as well as what appear to be their hypercorrected counterparts. Phonological features include r-lessness (as in example 22), merger of lax front vowels before nasals (the "pin/pen merger") (23), consonant cluster reduction (24), g-dropping (25), replacement of interdental fricatives (26), variable deletion of unstressed initial syllables (27), and the pronunciation of such lexical items as *thing* and *ask*, as in (28).

(22) we wood be ***Sho*** to Get the money (157/7/46)
(23) ***Sind*** us any little thing (159/10.1/25)
(24) I would like to have a ***grine*** stone (158/8/91)
(25) He is ***goin*** to His idols (155/5/158)
(26) I tak ***dise*** oppertunety to Enform you that i am will (155/5/94)
(27) thay wose Will ***tended*** to and thay all have ben will ***atened*** to (155/5/94)
(28) a. is Arrowroot worth ***anythang***, if so, I want to send you some (159/10.1/24)
b. i ***axed*** her who she gave thanks to (155/5/47.5)

Features related to the verb include copula deletion (29), preverbal *bin* (30), variable use of present tense s-marking (31), *was/were* levelling (32), preterite/participle levelling (33), and unmarked preterites (34).

(29) we ***[0]*** punish with honger a mouft 'We are punished with hungry mouths' (157/7/238)
(30) evry Scinc I left New orlens an grad up I ***bin*** want to write you (158/9/42)
(31) tell them, that I ***wants*** to here from them very bad. (159/10.1/40)
(32) you ***was*** my Fathers & husband friend (158/8/132)
(33) they ***done*** everything in their power (154/3/118)
(34) when i ***arrive*** at the cape i was invited to Preach (156/6/72)

Other grammatical features of interest include the absence of possessive –s (35) or plural –s (36), use of *ain't* (37), negative concord (38), and the use of *but* for *only* (39).

(35) My ***GrandFather name*** was Gipson Harris (156/6/12)
(36) two ***packet*** of whale bone (154/3/129)
(37) I ***aint*** got my house built as yet (155/4/113)
(38) I have ***not*** recieved ***no*** answer as yet (160/12/96)
(39) the Man thatis my compextion of myself can doo ***But*** litle at farmin (154/3/95)

All these features are described as distinguishing contemporary AAVE from Standard English (Labov et al. 1968, Wolfram 1993, Fasold 1972, Rickford 1999, Winford 1998). Their presence in the OREAAC may be taken as further evidence that many of the characteristic features of AAVE were already in place over 150 years ago.

Some of these features are extremely common in the letters, making them particularly well-suited to variationist analysis. These include variable s-marking, unmarked preterites and participles, the levelling of *was/were* and preterite/participle, and the first three phonological features. On the other hand, the absence of copulas, plural marking, and possessive marking is infrequent. Non-standard preverbal markers, including *bin* and *ain't*, are rare, and *done* is not found. This distribution may represent some sort of implicational scale with respect to written Early AAE, as previous work has also found variable s-marking to be frequent (Montgomery et al. 1993, Montgomery 1999) and *ain't* to be virtually non-existent (Kautzsch 2000, Van Herk 1999, Montgomery p.c.). In contemporary written AAVE, s-marking and unmarked preterites seem to be the most common non-standard features (Funkhouser 1973).

The frequency of some non-standard features, and the mere existence of rarer ones, speaks to the relatively vernacular nature of the OREAAC corpus. Letters composed by semiliterate infrequent writers, often in haste or under duress, more closely resemble unmonitored speech than is generally presumed. If, on the other hand, these letters do indeed represent their writers' high style, some writers must use a vernacular-like style in both formal and informal settings. Corpora derived from sociolinguistic interviews often include one or two such single-style informants (see e.g. Patrick 1999, Van Herk forthcoming, Labov 1966).

3.2 Method

3.2.1 Variable rule analysis

The methodological framework of my investigation is that of a comparative approach to language change, using the techniques and insights of variationist sociolinguistics, or variation theory (Labov 1972, Sankoff 1974, Guy 1993). The variationist approach requires the analysis of large amounts of linguistic data produced in contexts in which the focus of attention is not on the linguistic forms themselves. For contemporary data, this usually refers to tape recorded interviews in a naturalistic setting, involving questions that engage informants to such a degree that they do not monitor their speech. Historical variationist work relies on written documents that are relatively unmonitored (e.g. personal letters, diaries), or that attempt to reflect spoken language (e.g. transcriptions of court testimony) (see e.g. Nevalainen 1998, Kyto 1999).

Within this data, the variationist method quantitatively investigates the formal expression of linguistic function, by seeking statistically significant correlations between linguistic and extra-linguistic (social) conditioning factors and the various forms under investigation. The empirical question that the theory allows us to answer is exactly which factors constrain a speaker's (or writer's) choice of a particular form.

As the surface forms of the variables under study in this dissertation do not differ from hypothesis to hypothesis (or, to some extent, across comparison varieties), it is not the mere existence of such forms, or even their frequency, that is crucial in determining the linguistic system to which they belong. Rather, it is the *pattern* of use that emerges across thousands of instantiations that permits reliable inferences about the underlying system that has produced them. The statistical method determines which factors contribute statistically significant effects to the choice of variant when they are all considered simultaneously, as well as their relative

magnitude.

Once each aspect of the competing hypotheses proposing to explain variation is operationalized as a factor in a *factor group*, the statistical method of *variable rule analysis* (Goldvarb 2/3, Rand & Sankoff 1990/2000) uses a multiple regression procedure to assess the contribution of each to the choice of variants in three ways (Cedergren & Sankoff 1974, Rousseau & Sankoff 1978; Sankoff 1982).

· *statistical significance* of the effect ($p = <.05$) tests whether the effect observed is greater than that expected by random variation. In some instances, particularly those involving small data sets or extremely rare variants, effects that do not achieve statistical significance may still be considered, if they parallel findings from other, statistically significant analyses (Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001, Sankoff p.c.).

· *magnitude* of the effect, determined by the *range*, or difference between the contributions of the most and least favouring factors within a factor group, tests which of the proposed conditioning effects is most responsible for the linguistic outcome.

· *constraint hierarchies* tests whether proposed factors constrain the use of a feature in the direction expected – in other words, whether a hypothesis actually accounts for the distribution of the data. The constraint hierarchy refines variables into more precise, empirically-determined categories, "yielding the detailed structure of the relationship between variant and context, or the 'grammar' underlying the variable surface manifestations" (Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001: 94).

3.2.2 The comparative method

The comparative method (Baldi 1990, Meillet 1967) is at the core of modern linguistic attempts to recover information about earlier forms of language(s). By reconstructing early forms from the existing evidence of descendant languages, links can be established between the languages and between each language and a reconstructed earlier language (proto-language). Several operating principles are involved:

- A feature shared by languages is presumed to have been transmitted from a common ancestor language, unless it is likely to have developed by accident, later language contact, or universal processes.
- A feature of the ancestor language can only be reconstructed if evidence of that feature is retained in the descendant languages.

- Shared retentions (cognates) in descendant languages can, if present in significant numbers, suggest genetic affinity [24] between those languages.
- Each language may have undergone independent development, through internal change or language contact. Differences between languages or language varieties do not disprove relationship; they are simply silent on the issue, unless the features in question show similarities to some other potential linguistic relative.
- The use of reliable data from as early a period as possible permits the establishment of clearer similarities between languages. This principle has been in evidence since the earliest comparative work: Jones (1786) is based on similarities between Sanskrit, Latin, and Ancient Greek, not Hindi, French, and Modern Greek.

In traditional comparative historical linguistics, the features being compared tend to be lexical and phonological, and the inherent variability of languages is not taken into account. Competing variants in a particular context are troubling to such a method. A language featuring variants A and B in a single context cannot with certainty be related to another language featuring variants B and C, especially in the presence of other candidate languages featuring A and C, B and D, A and D, etc. Without a privative association between forms and functions (or between forms and languages), the traditional comparative method cannot establish relationships between languages simply by comparing attested potential cognates.

A variationist approach to the comparative method, as instantiated in Poplack & Meechan (1998) and Poplack & Tagliamonte (2001), is particularly well suited to dealing with this issue. As outlined in section 1.2 above, it is the direction, degree, and significance of factors *constraining* such variability that permits the establishment of links between a language and its potential donor varieties.

[24] "Genetic affinity" in this case refers strictly to a linguistic relationship between varieties. The term was controversial in the recent Ebonics debate because it echoed early attributions of features of AAVE to racist stereotypes of physical and intellectual ("genetic") attributes of African Americans.

3.2.3 Diagnosticity and comparison of features

Of central importance to the comparative enterprise is the issue of *diagnosticity* (Van Herk 2000b, Poplack 2000). The burden of proof in this respect is considerably heavier than that suggested by Rickford (1977:198): "If a certain set of clear cases are agreed upon by everyone to constitute pidgins and creoles in terms of the standard theoretical parameters, and these cases display certain characteristic linguistic features, then other cases that also display these characteristics can be assumed to belong to the same type or class, unless evidence to the contrary is shown."

I would argue that "evidence to the contrary" virtually always exists – similarities between two varieties mean almost nothing, unless it can be shown that other potential input varieties do not also share these similarities. If a variable and its conditioning are shared by multiple comparison varieties, then the behaviour of that variable in AAE cannot provide conclusive evidence linking Early AAE to any single variety, creole or not. For example, in Van Herk (2000), I demonstrated that the presence in Early AAE of non-inverted yes-no questions, as in (40), could not serve as evidence for a creole origin for AAVE, as this question type is widespread in vernacular English (41). However, the behaviour of non-inverted WH-questions (42), a far rarer type, *was* diagnostic, as such forms appear to be absent from even casual StdE.

(40) He ***don't*** know the pastor? (SE/003/965)

(41) It*'s* near Billings Bridge? (OT/244/A005)

(42) What Ella ***must have done*** with it? (SE/011/1024)

(Van Herk 2000)

The conditioning of these WH forms was found to parallel that of Early Modern English *do*-periphrasis, an early form of non-inversion. WH-questions, then, provided a *conflict site* (Poplack & Meechan 1998), an area in the grammar where competing hypotheses to explain Early AAE grammatical features predicted different, testable outcomes.

In the case of PTR, Chapters 4 and 5 will demonstrate that some features, and their linguistic conditioning, are shared by all or almost all comparison varieties. A good example is the near-universal preference for overt past marking of the verbs *have* and *be*, which Early AAE

shares with mesolectal creoles (Bickerton 1975, Patrick 1991, Winford 1992), putative creoles (Blake 1997), English dialects (Cheshire 1982, Zettersten 1969, Christian et al. 1988), AAVE (Labov et al. 1968, Wolfram 1969, Fasold 1972), second-language varieties (Wolfram & Hatfield 1984, Bayley 1991), and, of course, StdE itself. Although the scenaria proposed to account for this situation in each variety may differ, the empirical linguistic results are identical.

On the whole, the PTR system provides a conflict site that is extremely rich in diagnostic potential. Phonological, morphosyntactic, and discourse conditioning of PTR features can be operationalized from both quantitative and qualitative descriptions of comparison varieties in the literature. In some small ways, diagnosticity and data availability restrict the range of productive investigation possible in this data set. The behaviour of past continuous forms, as in (43), does not appear to differ between English and English-based Creoles – even in fairly basilectal creoles, the only difference is the use of a preverbal marker (usually *a-*) in creoles, as opposed to a suffix (*-ing*) in English.

(43) thay ***was LabourrinG*** for these Last nine years (157/7/133.1)

Other forms, such as preverbal *bin* or *done*, are rare or absent in these letters. This absence cannot be taken as evidence that such forms were not present in the grammars of the letter writers, however. Absence of a form, especially in written data, may be due to any number of factors, including stylistic choice, absence of contexts requiring it, or uncertainty over how to represent it. In this thesis, as in most sociolinguistic work, it is the underlying conditioning of forms that are present, frequent, and variable that is of interest.

3.2.4 Defining the variable context

The first step in an analysis such as this is to define the variable context, i.e. to define where it is possible for variable expression of the functions under consideration to occur. The principle of accountability (Labov 1972:72) associated with the variationist approach requires that I consider not only every occurrence of the forms under investigation, but also every context in which the form might have occurred, but did not. In the present case, the competing hypotheses developed to describe the origins of AAVE agree that the grammatical forms of interest are used to describe real-world (realis) events or states occurring at some point in time earlier than the time at which they are described. This study, then, is able to unite analyses of

PTR features (unmarked preterite, perfects, and less frequent forms) by taking the expression of PTR as the variable context. To investigate the full range of forms available to earlier African Americans to describe past events, every verbal token making reference to a past event was initially extracted from the letters in order to build a data set.

However, it is necessary to establish different variable contexts to test hypotheses concerning different aspects of PTR in Early AAE. This requires the exclusion for some analyses of forms that cannot speak to the associated hypotheses. Testing aspectual constraints on main verb morphology requires the exclusion of perfects and other multiple verb forms; analysis of the perfect requires both contexts in which the perfect is expressed and those in which it is possible, but another variant surfaces (such as preterites and bare forms); analysis of phonological effects requires the exclusion of strong verbs, which do not form their preterites with (phonologically sensitive) –ed suffixes.

3.2.4.1 Exclusions

Within the full PTR context, there are some tokens that cannot speak to any of the hypotheses being tested. These include forms that do not refer to actual past events or states (*irrealis* forms), forms that show no variation whatsoever (*invariant* forms), and forms whose temporal reference cannot be determined from the text (*ambiguous* forms).

Irrealis forms: Irrealis contexts are those that refer to events that have not (or cannot) occur. They include hypothetical situations, as in (44).

(44) I do think if their ***was*** some medicine sent out for the poor after their six months is up (155/4/22)

Although such contexts are often marked with past tense forms (as in the example), their marking cannot be presumed to reflect distinctions based on temporal relations. Thus, they cannot be situated with respect to system membership.

***Invariant forms*:** Studying variable expression of PTR requires the exclusion of categorical contexts from variable rule analysis. If the context in question does not permit more than one variant, we can draw no conclusions about what information that single variant carries. In the present case, the surface forms of invariant modal verbs, as in (45), must be excluded from the variable context: there is no zero-marked or non-standard form of *would* (such as *willed*)

which might carry a contrasting semantic or grammatical meaning.

(45) on the Sabbath he ***would*** be Setting in the agent piassa (160/11/29)

However, the verb phrases in which *would* occurs are variable (*would run* vs. *used to run* vs. *ran*), so the phrases are retained to permit analysis of the expression of habituality in the past (see e.g. Singler 1991, Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001). Verbs such as *cut* or *put*, which are invariant across the paradigm in StdE, are retained until it can be determined whether non-standard representations such as *cutted* or *putten* (Beal 1993:193) play a role.

Ambiguous forms: Ambiguous forms include those where the temporal reference may be either past or present, as in (46).

(46) you ***mention*** in your letter that you would send me the pease (158/8/159)

Here, the letter-writing convention of referring to received correspondence in the present tense makes it unclear whether *mention* has past or present reference.

3.3 Past marking in the OREAAC

The focus of this dissertation is the distribution and conditioning of variants of the verb used to express past temporal reference. The principle of accountability (Labov 1972) associated with the variationist method at the heart of the study requires the extraction of all tokens that fit within that variable context. All tokens with past temporal reference, as well as related forms in passive contexts, were extracted from 427 letters by 235 authors, for a total of 4,961 tokens overall. A total of 916 tokens were outside the variable context, including ambiguous and irrealis tokens, leaving a total of 4,045 tokens available for analysis. Of the 916 exclusions, 635 were tokens of passives and participial adjectives, extracted for comparison purposes.

The overall distribution of PTR forms in this corpus is summarized in table 3.6. The raw percentage distribution of forms in these letters differ from earlier findings in spoken data in several interesting ways, as can be illustrated by comparing the OREAAC figures on the left with those from Samaná English, drawn from Tagliamonte (1991), on the right.

Table 3.6. Distribution of verbal forms with past temporal reference in Liberian OREAAC letters and Samaná English.

	Liberian OREAAC letters		Samaná English (Tagliamonte 1991)	
Verb form	N	% of all	N	% of all
Single verbs:				
Past marked regular e.g. *sailed*	795	19.7	715	8.9
Zero marked regular e.g. *sail*	158	3.9	682	8.5
Past marked irregular e.g. *came*	1336	33.0	4146	51.5
Zero marked irregular e.g. *come*	85	2.1	628	7.8
Participial e.g. *seen*	37	0.9	*	
S marked e.g. *sails*	26	0.6	*	
Regularized e.g. *comed*	2	0.05	*	
Other non-standard e.g. *writ*	4	0.1	*	
No verb e.g. *her name Libitty*	8	0.2	6	0.07
Preverbal markers:				
Have perfects e.g. *have seen*	1247	30.8	86	1.1
Had perfects e.g. *had seen*	85	2.1	120	1.5
Is perfects e.g. *is arrived*	26	0.6	40	0.5
Have been e.g. *have been going/left*	64	1.6	*	
Had been e.g. *had been going/left*	9	0.2	*	
Dummy *do* e.g. *did not know*	72	1.8	*	
Other *do* e.g. *did write, did left*	22	0.5	82	1.1
Ain't e.g. *ain't gone*	1	0.02	36	0.5
Bin e.g. *bin left*	1	0.02	*	
Done e.g. *(had) done left*	0	0	20	0.3
Habitual *would* e.g. *would go*	5	0.1	148	1.8
Habitual *used to* e.g. *used to go*	2	0.05	315	3.9
Progressive e.g. *was going*	40	1.0	304	3.8
Got passives e.g. *got drowned*	20	0.5	88	0.7
Other forms in Samaná			*235	2.9
TOTAL ELIGIBLE PTR VERBS	4045	100		
Ambiguous/other:				
Be passives and derived adjectives (comparison group) e.g. *is astonished*	635		*118	1.5
Second of conjoined (no count) e.g. *has come **and thought***	143		80	1.0
Modals and irrealis (no count) e.g. *could see, if he came*	138		*85	1.1
GRAND TOTAL	4961		8046	100

*In Samaná data configuration, other forms listed separately include preverbal *commence(d) to* and *kept*; passives are past only; modals and irrealis are modals only; and empty cells represent types not listed separately in Tagliamonte (1991).

Perhaps the strongest finding is the robust presence in the OREAAC of present perfect

forms (*have* + V(ed2) and *be* + V(ed2)), paralleling almost exactly figures from a pilot study in letters from Liberia and Sierra Leone (Van Herk 1999b). In Chapter 5, I argue that this difference is the result of topic and discourse differences between letters and speech, especially the speech of the sociolinguistic interview. At this point, it is perhaps enough to assert that the present perfect, often previously described as marginal or non-existent in the core grammar of AA(V)E, is clearly widespread in these letters in contexts that permit or require its use.

In contrast with the present perfect, most preverbal forms are proportionately less frequent in the Liberian letters than in the spoken Early AAE of Samaná. The habitual markers *used to* and *would* are virtually non-existent, as is *bin*. The preverbal marker *done* is completely absent. These differences, too, may result from discourse differences between letters and speech. Past continuous forms and the past anterior marker *had* + V(ed2) appear to be relatively unaffected by any distinctions between writing and speech. By contrast, *ain't* is restricted to a single occurrence in these letters. This is not surprising, as previous researchers (Van Herk 1999, Kautzsch 2000, Montgomery 1999, Montgomery p.c.) have suggested that all contractions are rare in early semi-literate letters, with *ain't* the rarest of all.

Other forms are infrequent in the letters, as in the Samaná data, perhaps because the contexts requiring their use are also infrequent in both speech and writing. Their mere existence, however, indicates that their presence in the grammatical systems of the Liberian writers is sufficiently secure that even attempts to approximate a StdE target in writing cannot screen them out. These forms include preverbal *did* and *s*-marked verbs.

Within the variable enterprise, it is not the simple existence of these forms or the frequency of their use that is the most scientifically useful, but rather the statistical testing of the factors conditioning such use. The number of tokens and the overall high degree of variability within the contexts of interest to this study permit a range of such analyses. In the following chapters, I describe analyses of the often-studied single PTR verb, especially bare forms, and of the far less familiar multiple verbs, especially the present perfect.

Chapter 4: Single verb constructions

In this chapter, I focus on the morphosyntactic expression of single PTR verbs in the OREAAC. This expression is generally conveyed through the use of suffixes, vowel substitutions, or suppletions, both standard and not, or through no mark at all. In section 4.1, I review the literature on these features in AAVE and in varieties to which it may be related. In section 4.2, I describe the variable context in which constraints on the use of single verb marking described in the literature are predicted to operate. Section 4.3 describes how these constraints have been operationalized as linguistic factors to permit their testing in the OREAAC. In section 4.4, I systematically examine the distribution of single verb forms and determine which of the factors extracted from the literature condition their occurrence. Section 4.5 summarizes these findings and relates them to the literature.

4.1 The single verb in AAVE and comparison varieties

The importance of variable or absent verb marking to discussion of the origins of AAVE stems from its perceived non-English nature. This perception appears to be due in part to the metric against which AAVE is often compared, the contemporary prescriptive standard. However, an investigation of the behaviour of single PTR forms in AAVE, in creoles, in English dialects, in earlier English, and in Early AAE reveals widespread variation in verb marking, and much shared linguistic behaviour across varieties. These shared behaviours call into question the frequent association in the literature of particular AAVE features with specifically creole roots.

4.1.1 The single verb in AAVE

Early proponents of the creole origins hypothesis (e.g. Bailey 1965, Dillard 1972: 49-52) suggested that the presence in AAE of unmarked preterites, as in (47), was reminiscent of similar forms in contemporary Caribbean creoles.

(47) and notwithstanding it ***prove*** fatal to three of my children (155/4/115)

Dillard (1972: 50-52) describes an experiment in which African American children were unable to assign tense to unmarked forms in stimulus sentences, concluding that their grammatical system considers tense marking unnecessary or optional. Although the experiment

does support Dillard's claim that AAVE's unmarked past forms are phonetically identical to present tense forms, his conclusions do not necessarily follow – it is hard to imagine how speakers of any language, including tense-prominent varieties like StdE, would assign tense to unmarked stimulus sentences in isolation. Dillard also proposes that AAVE hypercorrections like *felled, frozed, threwed,* or *strucked* indicate that "the speaker may be acting in terms of someone else's expectations of him rather than in terms of his own characteristic linguistic behavior" (49). In other words, he presumes that preterite marking is absent or optional in the speakers' grammar, and inserted randomly in an attempt to satisfy StdE norms.

In contrast to this position, however, variationists working on contemporary AAVE (Labov et al. 1968, Wolfram 1969, and Fasold 1972) concluded that tense marking was a central part of the AAVE verbal system. Strong phonological conditioning on weak (regular) verbs, combined with the rarity of zero-marked strong (irregular)[25] verbs like (48), led many to conclude that contemporary AAVE had "the same basic system of present and past as Standard English" (Labov et al. 1968:337).

(48) the emmegrant that ***Come*** to Bexley have don well (155/4/59)

4.1.1.1 Weak verbs and phonological conditioning

Variationist analysis revealed strong phonological constraints on the tendency for weak verbs to surface in bare form, whereby the -ed suffix would be less likely to appear when it would result in consonant clusters, as in (49).

(49) when they got to the red sea they ***march*** forward (155/5/118)

In particular, following phonological environment has been shown to affect past tense marking. A following consonant has consistently been found to be more favourable to the presence of bare preterites than a following vowel in AAVE (Labov et al. 1968, Wolfram 1969, Fasold 1972), by a factor of more than two to one. Even educated white varieties show this conditioning (Neu 1980).

Fasold (1972:43) demonstrates that preceding phonological environment also exerts a strong influence. Bare forms are found only 27.3% of the time after vowels, but 50.8 % after consonants. This hierarchy would be expected if the bare forms were the result of consonant cluster simplification. Fasold finds a further distinction within the consonant class, with bare forms at a rate of 63.3% after sonorants, 49.1% after spirants, and only 37.4% after stops (70). He cites Wolfram's "eminently reasonable" hypothesis: sonorants and spirants can lengthen to compensate for absence of -ed marking, while stops cannot (Wolfram 1969:71, cited in Fasold 1972:71). Fasold (1972) also suggests a prosodic effect on the occurrence of bare forms (or t/d deletion): If the final syllable of a polysyllabic word is accented, only 19% bare forms are found; if not, 43.9% bare forms surface.

Phonological effects are also proposed to explain the behaviour of PTR verbs with syllabic –ed, verbs like *wanted* and *wasted*. The –ed marker on these verbs, being syllabic, is presumed to be more salient, and this salience is invoked to explain why fewer bare forms surface in this context. Within this category, though, lexical distinctions are found, with *wanted* and *started* being more likely to surface as bare forms (Fasold 1972:101). Fasold suggests a phonological explanation: "bare" *want* usually involves deletion of [te] from the middle of *wanted*, with compensatory lengthening of the [n], resulting in [wannd], not [want] (p.104). He describes this deletion as "quite common in prestige dialects of American English also" (p. 220).[26]

Further evidence that the past tense was an integral part of the AAVE system was suggested by a comparison of consonant cluster simplification rates between contexts where word-final /t,d/ carried a heavy functional load and those where it did not. Clusters are simplified most often in monomorphemic words like *mist*, where they supply no information; less often in irregular inflected verbs like *kept* or *told*, where /t,d/ is not the sole tense marker; and even less often in regular verbs like *jumped*, where /t,d/ is the sole segment overtly marking tense. Table 4.1 demonstrates this hierarchy. If past tense is indeed a functional category in AAVE, this would be the expected result: there is a direct correlation between the prevalence of marked forms and the amount of information they convey.

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[25] In this dissertation I follow previous sociolinguistic AAVE research and use the terms *irregular* and *strong* interchangeably. A strict taxonomy would consider verbs like *think/thought* or *tell/told* irregular, but not strong, in that they require suffixation in order to form their past tenses.

Table 4.1. Morphological conditioning on consonant cluster simplification in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and American Standard English (StdE).							
		Monomorphemes, e.g. *mist*		Doubly marked, e.g. *told*		Regular verbs, e.g. *missed*	
		%	N	%	N	%	N
AAVE	Washington (Fasold 1972)	45.5		80	70	44.2	312
	Detroit lower working class (Wolfram 1969)	72.1				33.9	
	New York City working class (Labov et al. 1968)	74.6	386	41.4	111	31.4	248
StdE	Educated white adults (Neu 1980)	32.4	1072			9.3	237
Adapted from Tagliamonte & Poplack (1988) and supplemented.							

To summarize, the evidence from variationist analyses of AAVE weak verbs suggested the existence of an underlying past tense marker, frequently deleted to satisfy syllable structure and prosodic requirements, but only when such deletion did not impede communication.

4.1.1.2 Bare strong verbs in AAVE

Compared to the rather high rates of bare forms among weak verbs, research on AAVE tends to find far lower rates of bare forms for strong verbs, those whose marked past and bare forms differ in some way other than /t,d/ suffixation. Fasold's (1972) investigation of Washington AAVE found only twelve tokens of bare forms (1.6%) among 833 strong verb tokens. Labov et al. (1968:138) found for their Harlem, New York City data that the "great majority of verbs in text occurrence are irregular, and these show the past tense forms." In more recent AAVE data from East Palo Alto, California, Rickford (1992:189) found only 6% of irregular past forms were unmarked.

In fact, Fasold (1972) found nearly as many strong preterites with non-standard marking as with no marking at all, generally through regularization, as in (50).

(50) there was a good many persons in washington that ***speaked*** of coming out here

[26] Winford (1992) questions Fasold's attribution of differential marking rates in this category to phonological rules, pointing out that four rules are required to deal with a category with very few tokens.

(154/3/115)

Although this might suggest that informants were unfamiliar with the past form required for the verb in question, Fasold (1972:39) suggests that any marking shows that these informants do observe a tense distinction, albeit expressed in a non-standard fashion.

Fasold (1972:155 fn3) further notes that some verbs are more likely to surface in bare form (e.g. *know, come, give*), while others are almost always receive standard marking (e.g. *have, get, make, do, go*). Labov et al. (1968:257) suggest that "careful study of these may show system where none appears at the moment." The same might prove to be true of verbs that are regularized.

Although the presence of any bare strong verbs at all suggests that phonological explanations alone cannot account for zero-marked AAVE preterites, the rarity of such forms led Fasold (1972) to conclude that "the past tense distinction is an inherent part of the grammar of all the speakers in the sample" (p. 39). Winford (1992) concurs, as does Rickford (1999:13): "In general, the past tense category is well established in AAVE...Unmarked pasts tend to come either from regular or weak verbs (like *walked*) in which the final consonant is deleted by phonological rule, or from the small set of irregular verbs (including *come, say, run, give,* and *eat,* among others) which sometimes occur without past inflection."

4.1.1.3 Preterite-participle levelling in AAVE

The use of participle forms where StdE would require the preterite (51), or vice versa (52), has been claimed as evidence that the preterite/participle distinction may not be relevant in AAVE (Fasold & Wolfram 1975:66), or that these participles may not be part of AAVE's core grammar at all (Labov et al. 1968, Fasold 1972). Even the existence of an AAVE present perfect is questioned (see chapter 5).

(51) i ***written*** to my father To Send me Sum mony (155/5/169)

(52) all that i ***hav Rot*** to you is tru (155/5/94)

A couple of caveats should be noted in this respect. The first is that many verbs, including all regular verbs, have identical preterite and participial forms (*I jumped/I have jumped, I thought/I have thought*); the second is that contexts requiring a participle are rare in

everyday speech, and even rarer in recorded interviews. As a result, most corpora appear to have contained too few tokens of this form to permit analysis of variation.

Another possible interpretation of forms like (51) is that they do not represent preterites at all. Rather, they are the result of deletion of a preverbal auxiliary, *have*. This is suggested by Fasold & Wolfram (1975:65), especially for the use of *been* in this context (*I been here for hours*). However, as Tagliamonte (1991:131) points out, the extreme rarity of overt *have* (*I have been, I've been*) in contemporary AAVE makes it difficult to support the idea of an underlying auxiliary that virtually never surfaces.

4.1.2 Creole single verbs

From the 1960s onward, investigations into the tense and aspect systems of Caribbean creoles led to new interest in a creole-based explanation for non-standard AAVE PTR forms (Bailey 1965, Stewart 1967, Dillard 1972). Bickerton (1975) described aspectual distinctions for Guyanese Creole, involving temporal remoteness, clause type, and anteriority (roughly, overt marking with past-before-past actions (as well as past states), especially when events are narrated in non-chronological order). He suggested these distinctions would also have held for an earlier stage of AAE, with subsequent decreolization resulting in phonological constraints that disguise them (Bickerton 1975:159).

4.1.2.1 Anteriority

Bickerton (1975) was the first to suggest that the marked vs. unmarked distinction in creoles was based on a system in which marking indicated *anteriority*, rather than simple past. An anterior form was said to represent an action or state taking place before (anterior to) *reference time*, rather than *speech time*. Reference time in the case of stative verbs was said to be the present, requiring that all stative events occurring prior to speech time (e.g. past events) be marked, while present states take unmarked verbs. In the case of non-statives (especially punctuals), reference time was the past, requiring that past events take unmarked verbs, but all events occurring *prior to that past event* be marked – with *bin* in the basilect, and *did* or *had* in the mesolect. Present-tense punctuals required the continuous form, while present-tense habituals required the bare form or a preverbal habitual marker. Other disambiguating indicators (adverbials, real-world knowledge) were said to be able to "trump" these default settings (Mufwene 1984).

Bickerton (1975:36) further claims that anterior forms can be used to mark remote past

events, even without reference to the relationship to another past event. Bybee et al. (1994) point out that this is a natural development for past anteriors, and list other languages in which this extension of anterior marking has occurred.[27] Winford (1992:333) reiterates the observation of Jaganauth (1987) and Pollard (1989) that "the discourse function of the anterior marker is primarily to *distance* events from the present, to identify them as not having current relevance, or as relevant only to some past situation." A more remote past event, then, would also be more anterior.

While many creolists have adopted the basic framework laid out in Bickerton (1975, 1981), whereby (relative) anteriority rather than (absolute) past is the relevant distinction, they do not accept all aspects of Bickerton's scenario, especially the stativity distinction. They also challenge the assumption that many aspects of the (basilectal) anteriority distinction would surface in AAVE ed-marking, as such distinctions appear not to be present in contemporary upper-mesolectal creoles. A more frequent conceptualization (e.g. Winford 1992, Blake 1997, 2000) is that present-day reflexes of creole anterior markers are more likely to involve preverbal markers (see chapter 5).

4.1.2.2 Aspect and clause type

The focus on stativity and anteriority in creole PTR marking has tended to overshadow another distinction, described in most detail by Winford (1992), although suggested earlier by Bickerton (1975): in mesolectal creoles, habitual or generic events with past temporal reference are unmarked, while punctuals referring to specific past events tend to receive ed-marking. Bickerton treats this distinction as a mesolectal innovation, replacing (or at least overlapping with) a basilectal stativity distinction, while Winford (1992:333) finds that this aspectual distinction is strong across all lectal levels, rather than a mesolectal innovation. Building on the work of Dahl (1985), Winford suggests that the zero forms represent the perfective, which he describes asassociated with past events, present states, and generic or habitual actions.[28]

Winford further proposes that the specific/generic distinction is responsible for another finding in Bickerton (1975), that temporal clauses (italicized in example 53) favour bare forms, although he does not test the relative contribution of aspect and clause type.

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[27] This extension is associated by Bybee et al. specifically with Indic languages. Bickerton's basilectal speakers, from whose data he develops the anterior/remote connection, are all elderly women of Indian descent who maintain some familiarity with Indian languages. It is tempting to propose an explanation based on language contact, rather than creolization, for this association in Bickerton's data.

(53) *When I come here to live* there was no bauxite nor nothing. (Bickerton 1975:150)

Bickerton himself had suggested that bare forms in such clauses (which would otherwise presumably attract overt marking, as they are usually anterior) might result from their frequent generic quality, whereby *when* behaves like *whenever*. He further characterizes the temporal clause distinction as "both the least important and the one least consistently held" of all the constraints on mesolectal zero-marking (Bickerton 1975:157).

4.1.2.3 Morphological subtype

Common to several studies explicitly linking PTR in AAE and in English Caribbean creoles (Winford 1992, Blake 1997) is an assumed hierarchy of marking of morphological categories. Five categories are usually considered. I reproduce their description from Patrick (1991:84):

(-ED): Syllabic regular verbs, whose stems end in /-t/ or /-d/, and which take the syllabic affix /-Id/ (e.g., *want/want-ed*).
(V-D): Nonsyllabic regular verbs, whose stems end in a vowel, and which take the normal /-d/ affix (e.g., *die/die-d*).
(C-D): Nonsyllabic regular verbs, whose stems end in a consonant, and which take the /-t/ or /-d/ affix (e.g., *pass/pass-ed*).
(DM): Doubly marked verbs, with both /-t,-d/ affixation and ablaut of the stem vowel (e.g., *leave/lef-t*).
(IRR): Irregular verbs, with various forms of ablaut (e.g. *give/gave*).

It is sometimes claimed that these forms tend to show a particular hierarchy of marking (Blake 1997:158, Winford 1992:322).[29]

IRR < V-D < -ED < C-D

The similarity of hierarchies across varieties (including creoles and AAVE) is claimed by Winford (1992:325) to be a possible "universal diagnostic of language shift," whereby all zero-marking varieties grow to approximate a standard ed-marking variety through a particular order

[29] Winford appears to conflate Dahl's zero perfective and habitual-generic types here.

of verb types. A variety of methodological problems, discussed in detail in Poplack & Tagliamonte (2001), seriously compromises the diagnosticity of this hierarchy. Some of the morphological subtypes in the hierarchy are not included in studies of /-t,-d/ deletion in StdE; authors differ in their criteria for counting doubly marked verbs as "marked" (*tell* vs. *tol'* vs. *told*), or even considering them in the hierarchy; and some aspects of the hierarchy are common to all English-derived varieties that have been studied (e.g. irregular verbs marked more than regular), and perhaps even to language generally (e.g. V-D verbs marked more than C-D verbs).

4.1.2.4 Lexical effects

The focus on aspectual and relative-tense distinctions in creole studies since Bickerton (1975, 1981) has overshadowed the lexical effects on verb marking found by quantitative studies of creoles and putative creoles (e.g. Bickerton 1975, Rickford 1987, Blake 1997, Winford 1992, Patrick 1991). For example, past tense *have* and *be* are almost always marked from the mesolect up (table 4.2). This is not an unexpected finding. Mesolectal speakers are exposed from above to many examples of marked forms of these particular verbs, due to their frequency. On the other hand, there are no unmarked basilectal forms in competition from below: auxiliary *have* does not exist (speakers use completive *done*, or no present perfect at all), lexical *have* is expressed by *got/gat*, and present tense forms of *be* are frequently expressed by the zero copula (Bickerton 1975). On the whole, however, Bickerton (1975:147) claims no connection between frequency of use of a particular verb and degree of marking.

Table 4.2 reveals some parallel lexical effects on tense marking in mesolectal English-based creoles. The verb *say* is frequently bare in all varieties (especially in narratives), while *go* and *do* tend to be marked. Bickerton's data reveals relatively high rates of marking for *make, see, take*, and *come*. By contrast, *get, leave, lose*, and *break* are almost always unmarked. A comparison with the description of English dialects shows that the lexical profile of past marking differs in some subtle ways. In Bickerton's Guyanese data, bare forms of *come* and *go* are nearly equally frequent; in English dialects, *come* is far more often bare. The *come/go* distinction offers a potential conflict site to investigate the system membership of Early AAE, albeit a sharply restricted one.

[29] Both Winford (1992) and Blake (1997) relegate some opposing findings (Bickerton 1975, Rickford 1987, Patrick 1991) to footnotes.

Table 4.2. Overt past tense marking of common verbs described for mesolectal English-based creoles.

Variety:	Guyanese		Trinidadian	Barbadian	Jamaican
Source:	Bickerton 1975	Rickford 1987	Winford 1992	Blake 1997	Patrick 1991
have	"acquired"	86%	91%	94%	68%
be	"acquired"	83%	marked in examples	57%	
make	53%				
go	48%		84%	89%	50%
do	--			47%*	45%
see	44%				
take	41%				
come	40%				
hear	35%				
give	23%				
run	20%				
get	9%				
say	8%		28%	6%	18%
leave	marked				
lose	forms				
break	avoided				

*Calculated from raw Ns.

4.1.2.5 What counts as a creole effect?

Establishing a valid comparison model is problematic in dealing with AAVE and English-based Creoles, which share with contemporary English dialects input from some variety of English. Mufwene (1994:6) argues that "it would be surprising if varieties that share part of their ancestries and developed in related sociohistorical conditions did not share several of their structural features." To establish a creole origin for AAVE PTR features, it is necessary to determine whether features in AAVE and creoles are conditioned by the same linguistic factors, or whether there are simply "superficial resemblances between AAVE and creoles which involve use of the same forms but with different semantic and syntactic properties" (Winford 1998:116).

Determining what underlies the variation evident in creoles is hampered by the relatively recent history of empirical study in this area, compared to work on metropolitan languages, and by the creolist research tradition of describing an idealized variety in categorical terms by factoring out variants that resemble StdE (Bailey 1965b).

One result of this tendency is that features in creole languages whose existence or conditioning is attributed to creolization processes turn out to be found in unrelated non-creole varieties. A case in point is the distinction whereby basilectal creole speakers assume zero-marked punctuals to have past reference, while the default setting for zero-marked statives is the present (Bickerton 1975:29-30). In fact, the tendency for a marked progressive form (such as Guyanese Creole *a-*) to trigger such a distinction is described as a widespread grammaticization process by Bybee et al. (1994:77): "A zero form, in languages in which the imperfective [including progressive] is overtly marked but does not occur on stative predicates, will indicate perfective [including past] for dynamic verbs, but present for stative ones (e.g. Ngambai and Nakanai zeroes)."

Marking past events and present states in the same way (in the creole case, with zero) is a reasonable result of our real-world knowledge that present states result from past events (Winford 1992:336, Dahl 1985, Holm 2000). The same link between past events and present states is found in the productive StdE use of (past) participial forms as (present reference) predicate adjectives or passives, as in (54).

(54) a. I am ***astonished***.
b. It is ***damaged***.

This reduces to some extent the diagnosticity of the stativity distinction for determining the creoleness of AAE. Poplack & Tagliamonte (2001), among others, point out other proposed creole distinctions in e.g. Bickerton (1975) or Winford (1992) that are either found in non-creole varieties, or do not behave consistently across creoles.

A second, less discussed obstacle to operationalizing proposed creole distinctions is that for many features, there appears to be a disjunct between the behaviour of basilectal (deep) creoles and that of (upper) mesolectal creoles, which varieties Winford (1992) and others propose as appropriate comparison varieties for AAVE. For example, an obstacle to operationalizing Bickerton's proposed stativity/anteriority distinctions is the fact that such distinctions appear not to hold in the mesolect or above, where past punctuals are marked, past habituals are unmarked, and statives take a range of markers (Winford 1992, Bickerton 1975:103,113). Although several authors, including Bickerton (1975), describe the linguistic

behaviour of several lects between basilectal creole and acrolectal near-standard English, implying a continuum, it is unclear how a *reversal* in marking constraints constitutes evidence of the influence of the basilect on higher lects.

The morphological subtype hierarchy proposed in Winford (1992) and described in section 4.1.2.3 above shows a similar disjunct when the results of several studies are compared. Studies of mesolectal Caribbean creoles in Guyana (Bickerton 1975) and Jamaica (Patrick 1991) suggest a very different hierarchy, although Winford (1992:185) cites data from Edwards (1975) and Rickford (1986) ("from one upper-mesolectal speaker and her family") challenging the mesolectal nature of Bickerton's data. It is clear that there are different conceptions of the mesolect at work in these studies, with Bickerton (1975) and Patrick (1991) representing a strongly creole-influenced mesolect, while Winford (1992), Edwards (1975), Rickford (1986) and others are dealing with a more acrolectal variety. This distinction surfaces in two described distinctions: that between regular and irregular verbs, and between monomorphemic and bimorphemic forms (e.g. *mist* vs. *missed*).

Table 4.3. Percentages (and probabilities) of bare PTR verbs by morphological subtype in mesolectal English-based Creoles.

Mesolectal creole type		Strong	Doubly marked	Syllabic regular	V-final regular	C-final regular
Upper	Trinidad LMC	14.7 (.39)	11.4 (.28)	18.9 (.51)	28.1 (.61)	35.8 (.72)
	Trinidad UWC	40.4 (.35)	44.3 (.38)	48.3 (.51)	50.6 (.52)	77.2 (.73)
Lower	Trinidad LWC	67.4 (.37)	65 (.39)	83.6 (.62)	64.7 (.36)	92 (.74)
	Jamaican	70 (.41)	57 (.26)	52 (.25)	50 (.36)	80 (.82)
	Guyanese	69	--	40	63	63

Trinidadian Creole English (Winford 1992:328), mesolectal Jamaican Creole English (Patrick 1992:84), and mesolectal Guyanese Creole English (Bickerton 1975: 143, 146). Figures for Jamaican Creole calculated by subtracting figures for overt marking from 100% (1.00). Trinidadian divided into lower middle, upper working, and lower working classes.

The relative behaviour of irregular verbs, syllabic -ed verbs, and regular verbs sharply distinguishes upper-mesolectal varieties from those mesolects closer to their creole roots. Table 4.3 illustrates the differing behaviour of Guyanese and Jamaican mesolects, on the one hand, and the mesolects of the less proletarian Trinidadian classes on the other. The Trinidadian lower working class mesolect patterns just like Guyanese and Jamaican with respect to the relative behaviours of irregular and regular verbs, and differs from all varieties with respect to syllabics.

The table shows that the hierarchy proposed in Winford (1992) holds only at the upper end of the scale, and then only to indicate that the processes influencing zero-marking are the same as those in other varieties of English. In the more creole-like varieties, a completely different hierarchy applies.

The second morphological effect sharply differentiating upper mesolects from other creole varieties is the monomorphemic/bimorphemic distinction. This distinction has been used in studies of AAVE as a test for the presence of an underlying form: if the final consonant of *mist* is deleted more often than the final consonant of *missed*, it is presumed that the final consonant of *missed* carries a heavier semantic load, and that tense marking is part of the speaker's underlying system. In studies addressing this issue, the distinction is strong among upper-mesolectal TC speakers, virtually non-existent among lower-mesolectal TC speakers, and reversed among mesolectal JC speakers (see Table 4.4). Patrick points out that, as with the regular/irregular pattern, the absence of this distinction in Jamaican Creole, compared to non-creole varieties of English, results from JC verbs being influenced by two processes (a creole tendency to zero-mark verbs and a universal phonological tendency), while JC monomorphemes and all forms in other varieties of English are influenced solely by the phonological environment.

Table 4.4. Percentages of zero-marked pasts in mesolectal Trinidadian Creole English (Winford 1992:328) and mesolectal Jamaican Creole English (Patrick 1992:84)

Variety	Monomorphemic (e.g. *mist*)		Bimorphemic (e.g. *miss + ed*)	
	Before C, 0	Before V	Before C, 0	Before V
Trinidad lower middle class	80	69	38	34
Trinidad upper working	86	85	79	75
Trinidad lower working	94	93	93	91
Jamaican mesolect	71		79	

Again, we see a strong break between the linguistic behaviour of the upper mesolect and that of the deeper creole varieties from which this upper mesolect has been proposed to derive. For both the regular/irregular distinction and the monomorphemic/bimorphemic distinction, upper-mesolectal forms behave like other Englishes, while those varieties in closer contact with deep creoles maintain a distinct creole behaviour, parallelled across the varieties for which we have empirical data. Similarities between upper-mesolectal varieties and AAE, therefore, may be

as much evidence of their shared English input as of any deep creole influence.

4.1.3 English dialect single verbs

There is a tendency in the origins debate (as, for that matter, in creole studies generally) to focus on distinctions between (prescriptive) StdE on the one hand and AAVE and creoles on the other. This focus obscures the substantial amount of variation in PTR structures that continues to exist in non-standard varieties of English, even in the face of centuries of stigmatization.

In addition to the StdE preterite form (in strong and weak verbs), we find four variant expressions of past tense single verbs in dialectal English: bare forms, as in example (55), participial forms (56), regularized forms (57), and non-standard irregular morphology (58).

(55) a. Carol and them *come* up there and picked us up.
b. I *run* into this barbed wire fence.
c. She *give* him a dose of castor oil.
(56) a. I told her I *done* it.
b. He *seen* something off this bluff.
(57) a. We *throwed* them a birthday party.
b. Seemed like everybody *knowed* where I was from.
(58) a. He *brung* it up there.
(Christian et al. 1988)

4.1.3.1 Bare forms

The use of bare forms is of greatest interest to this study, as such forms are similar to those found in AAVE and in creoles, and have played a central role in the discussion of putative links between those varieties. Unlike creoles, which are said to feature bare forms of virtually all verbs, English dialects show a strong tendency for these forms to surface with particular lexical items, particularly among strong verbs. Variationist analyses of dialects in America, Britain, and elsewhere reveal this distinction clearly. The description of Appalachian and Ozark Englishes in Christian et al. (1988) lists *give, come, run, eat,* and *begin* as the verbs most likely to surface with bare forms. In a study of Alabama working class English, preterite *come, run,*and *give* were the only bare forms used by a majority of informants (Feagin 1979:87). Among adolescents in Reading, England (Cheshire 1982), bare forms were most frequently found with *give, come, run, become, see, string up,* and *shit.* In urban Australian English, zero forms were frequently found with *come* (67%), *give* (18%), and *run* (13%), and occasionally with *bring, break, stand,* and

hang (Eisikovits 1991:128). All studies highlight the preference for preterite *come*: in Appalachia and the Ozarks, low rates of bare preterites overall contrast with the 70-72% rate for *come* (Christian et al. 1988:90); in the Reading study, preterite *come* occurred 73% of the time for girls, and 100% for boys, while preterite *see* ranged from 44% to 100% (Cheshire 1982:49).

This lexical conditioning of bare preterites is also described in non-variationist studies: in North Carolina (Atwood 1953), in Tristan da Cunha English (Zettersten 1969), and across British dialects (e.g. Hughes & Trudgill 1979:68). The studies of regional urban dialects collected in Milroy & Milroy (1993) clearly reveal similar lexical conditioning across all of the British Isles: *come* in Scotland (Miller 1993:107) and *come, run,* and *give* for Ireland (Harris 1993:153), Northern England (Beal 1993:193) and Southern England (Edwards 1993:221).

Another special case is associated with *say* and *tell*, the *verba dicendi* (verbs of saying). These verbs are not listed among bare forms by Christian et al. (1988), but neither do they take past marking. Christian et al. list them as universally marked, but it is clear from the discussion in Wolfram & Christian (1976:79) that what they mean by "marked" is the use of verbal –s, which is usually associated with the present tense or the "historical present." The only white dialect with bare *verba dicendi* appears to be Tristan da Cunha English, as in example (59), which may have had some pidgin or creole input from St. Helena.[30]

(59) And the captain *say*, a squall come over the boat and she disappear, and he never see it, but they *say* he lie. (AG 42, Zettersten 1969:84)

Note the use of the bare form to introduce a direct quote, a traditional location for s-marking (rather than preterites) in first and third person in the English historical present (Jespersen 1949). As we will see, this association of non-past forms (s-marked or bare) with past-referring quotative contexts is shared by English dialects, earlier English, and (spoken) Early AAE.

It should be noted that both Cheshire (1982) and Christian et al. (1988) draw a distinction between bare preterites that are clearly distinct from their participial forms (like *give*) and those whose bare and participial forms are identical (like *come, run,* and *become*). Christian et al.

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[30] Beal (1993:193) also lists *sayed* for *said*, which suggests at least the possibility that AAE *say* is the result of a confluence of the *verba dicendi* effect with the phonological reduction of *sayed*.

(1988:92) consider this second group a separate "ambiguous" verb class, in which it is unclear whether the preterite form is substituted by a bare form (similar to *give*), or a participle (similar to preterite *seen* or *done*). In this ambiguous verb class, two of the three competing variants (present, preterite, participle) are the same, which might reinforce the tendency of that variant to spread across the paradigm. It must be noted that this verb "class" is rather small, and disproportionately represented by one verb, *come*, which we have already seen is likely to surface in bare form (see also the discussion in Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001). Testing of English dialect effects in the present data set, then, must distinguish between verb-class and lexical effects.

4.1.3.2 Non-standard preterites

As with bare preterites, the use of non-standard forms in preterite contexts seems to be strongly associated with a small number of lexical items.

The most common non-standard marking is the use of participial forms in preterite contexts. Christian et al. (1988:90-91) mention preterite *seen* (71%), *done* (53%), and *taken* (25-27%) in Appalachian and Ozark Englishes; Cheshire (1982:48-49) mentions *seen* and *done* for Reading English, with categorical use of preterite *done* by all 22 speakers in her sample. *Seen* and *done* are mentioned for a range of British dialects (Hughes & Trudgill 1979, Miller 1993, Harris 1993, Beal 1993, Edwards 1993), with *done* apparently extremely common in the South (Cheshire et al. 1993:78), and Tristan English includes *done*, as well as *been*:

(60) They've had their experience about sea, since they *been* boys. (BL 148, Zettersten 1969:85)

In this example, *been* might also result from *have been* with a deleted *have*, also a possible explanation for some *been* + verb combinations elsewhere.

There also appears to be a lexical effect on regularizing (i.e., using verb stem + *-ed*) of strong verbs in English dialects. Cheshire (1982:47) lists eight regularized preterites for Reading English: *gived, holded, drawed, swinged, runned, blowed, fighted,* and *woked,* although she supplies no percentages. Christian et al. (1988:91) list *throwed, heared, knowed,* and *growed,* with *knowed* preterites reaching 28% in Ozark English. Zettersten (1969: 84) lists only regularized *blowed*, while Edwards (1993:221) lists *knowed, breaked,* and *seed*. Common to all

the lists are verbs of the *grow/grew* type, perhaps by analogy with other verbs that have become regularized in StdE (e.g. *snowed*).

Many English dialects also include some preterite forms that are neither standard, bare, participial, nor regularized, although these forms are far less common. Christian et al (1988:92) list *brung (bring), drug (drag),* and *retch (reach)* for Appalachian and Ozark English, as well as a few verbs with devoicing of the preterite suffix (*boilt, smelt, fount*) (p.94). Cheshire (1982) lists only *driv (drive)* as a non-standard form in Reading English.

Bybee & Molder (1983) propose that [caret + nasal] is the preferred past form for English irregular verbs, "reflecting the way in which they are stored and accessed in the mental lexicon as well as the way in which they have developed historically" (Cheshire et al. 1993:78-79). Although there are many exceptions to this rule, many of the most common bare or non-standard preterites described here do conform, including *come, run, become, done* and *brung*.

4.1.3.3 Bare and non-standard participles

As with the preterite, participial forms in English dialects can in theory diverge from the standard in four ways: the participle can be completely uninflected, or replaced with the preterite form, regularised form, or non-standard irregular morphology. In practice, dialectal English features only occasional uninflected participles (61), or claims of regularized forms (*have putten, forgetten*) (Beal 1993:193). By far the most frequent non-standard instantiation of participle forms is the substitution of the preterite form, as in (62).

(61) And he's *stop* being captain, now. (Tristan, Zettersten 1969:85)
(62) a. Her home *had went*, I guess 50 yards or more (Appalachian)
b. Because I've never *saw* one. (Ozarks)
c. When I brung it back out, my rod *was broke*. (Appalachian)
(Christian et al. 1988: 86)

Bare participles are less clearly patterned than are preterites. The Tristan example (61), with homorganic stops on either side, may indicate phonological influence; others like *have eat* (Beal 1993:193) involve verbs that are also often bare in the preterite. Cheshire (1982) registered participial *see* for Reading English; few other forms are mentioned.

Preterite forms in participial contexts are considerably more common, with again a few lexical items recurring. Christian et al. (1988:90-91) list participial *got, went, broke, saw, wrote,* and *took* in Appalachian and Ozark English, ranging up to 50-61% use of *have took*.

54-68% *have went*, and 74-90% use of participial *got*, a form generally associated with British varieties. Cheshire (1982:47) noted participial uses of *went, took, forgot, ran, broke, threw, beat, and see(d)* in Reading English. Zettersten (1969) lists only *have wrote* for Tristan English. The studies of regional British dialects collected in Milroy & Milroy (1993) also show remarkable cross-region similarities in the lexical items involved: *wrote, broke, (for)got*, and *went*.

The preference for preterite forms over bare forms in the participle is presumably due to paradigm levelling. In the preterite, identical bare and participle forms e.g. *come, run*) reinforce the use of bare preterites; in the participle, there are few identical bare and preterite forms, but there are many identical preterite and participle forms to serve as a model for the extension of preterite-participle levelling.

4.1.3.4 Hierarchies of dialect verb morphology

Christian et al. (1988) propose an implicational scale ranking non-standard past morphology in Appalachian and Ozark Englishes. Speakers of each variety with any one feature show a strong tendency to use all the more popular features (those listed to the left in table 4.5 below). The two varieties differ only in the greater relative frequency of bare preterites in Ozark English (highlighted in the table), perhaps due to a few frequently bare verbs (especially *eat*).

Table 4.5. Frequency of occurrence of non-standard past temporal reference morphology in Appalachian English (AE) and Ozark English (OE) (from Christian et al. 1988:97-98).

AE:	Ambiguous (e.g. *come*)	Preterite as participle (e.g. *have went*)	Participial preterite (e.g. *he done*)	Bare preterite (e.g. *eat*)	Regularized forms (e.g. *knowed*)	Different strong forms (e.g. *drug*)
<<< most frequently occurring............................least frequently occurring >>>						
OE:	Ambiguous	Bare preterite	Preterite as participle	Participial preterite	Regularized forms	Different strong forms

A far stronger recurring trend in English dialects, however, is the lexical effect on verb form choice, illustrated by table 4.6 below. Again and again, the same few verbs (*come, run, give*) occur with no past marking. The same few verbs show preterite-participle levelling, either by taking participle forms in preterite contexts (*see, do*), preterite forms in participial contexts (*go, get, break*), or both (*take*). Given the fluidity of the English strong verb classes in earlier times, discussed in section 4.1.1 below, and the tendency of dialect varieties to lag behind mainstream linguistic change, these forms almost certainly represent retentions from earlier

English. As the language of indentured servants, poor immigrants, and overseers, it is this variable earlier English, rather than the prescriptive standard, that would have provided the model for the first generations of African Americans.

Table 4.6. Most frequent or categorical non-standard main verb forms in English dialects by lexical item.

	bare preterite			preterite-participle levelling					
	come	*run*	*give*	*seen*	*done*	*took*	*went*	*got*	*broke*
Appalachian	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Ozarks	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Alabama	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Reading, England	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Australia	x	x	x	?	?	?	?	?	?
Tristan da Cunha	x	x	x		x	?	?	?	?
Scotland	x			x	x	x	x	x	x
Ireland	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
Northern England	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Southern England	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	

Sources: Christian et al.1988, Feagin 1979, Cheshire 1982, Eisikovits 1991, Zettersten 1969, Miller 1993, Harris 1993, Beal 1993, Edwards 1993. "?" = feature not discussed by source.

The primary methodological conclusion to be drawn from the investigation of dialectal English is that virtually all dialects use past morphology distinct from the prescriptive standard, meaning that the mere presence of these forms in AAE varieties cannot be taken as evidence of their non-English nature. The non-standard forms are not limited to dialects that may have been in contact with African American varieties; instead, we see consistent effects across varieties that often have had little meaningful contact, even with each other, for several hundred years.

4.1.4 Earlier English single verbs

The English PTR system has been characterized by widespread variation and change throughout its history – in particular, the continuing breakdown of the Old English seven-class strong preterite system, discussed here, and the proliferation of preverbal auxiliaries, discussed in chapter 5 below. The failure of much of this variation to persist into present-day StdE deforms the metric against which AAVE and creoles are compared.

Standard English has, until quite recently in some cases, differed greatly from contemporary prescriptive norms (Visser 1973, Traugott 1972), and recently published material (Gorlach 1999) reveals that some of this variation persisted well into the 19th century.[31] In this dissertation I draw heavily on such widely-known works, but I will also take advantage of a recently-constituted collection of historical works that sheds new light on the degree of variation inherent in the English PTR system.

The Ottawa Grammar Resource on Early Variation in English (OGREVE) is a collection of information from 98 grammars, usage manuals, and dialect works published between 1577 and 1898, described more fully in Poplack et al. (2002). As its name suggests, the OGREVE differs from other collections of such works (e.g. Gorlach 1998, Sundby et al. 1991) by focussing on the grammars' descriptions of variation and non-standard forms. Although these frequently prescriptive works cannot be taken as precise representations of the colloquial speech of their times, the features mentioned and the manner in which they are described can, through principled analysis, reveal much about earlier spoken English. Some striking early findings from the OGREVE have been used to refine the characterization of Early AAE features found in Poplack & Tagliamonte (2001). OGREVE data contributes information about the presence of unmarked preterites in the varieties of English that would have provided the model for Early AAE. It also describes lexical and verb class influences on non-standard preterites and participles that can be operationalized and tested through variable rule analysis.

Since the Middle English period, two major loci of variation have surfaced with respect to the expression of the English preterite: the rise of unmarked past forms, often described as the "historical present," and the erosion of strong verb classes. Both processes led to rampant variation in PTR expression during the Early Modern English period (roughly 1550-1800), when

the colonial varieties that served as models for Early AAE were formed.

4.1.4.1 The "historical" present

By the Middle English period, verbs with past temporal reference begin to surface with present tense marking (*-eth* or zero), as in example (63).

(63) Sche ***fond*** and ***gadreth*** herbes suote (Mosse 1952:98)
'She found and gathers sweet herbs'

These forms are characterized, as in the example, by two traits: they alternate with marked preterite forms, and they can occur whenever the past temporal reference frame has already been established (Visser 1973, Traugott 1972). Traugott (1972:142) describes the form as "a stylistic device used chiefly in storytelling. It is especially frequent in the reporting of dreams or visions, but may occur in any narrative which treats past events as if they occurred at the time of the utterance." Similar forms are found in French and in all the Germanic languages, but both Visser (1973) and Traugott (1972) rule out language contact as a likely origin.

Visser (1973) differentiates between the so-called "historical" presents, which "represent in a vivid way the suddenness, unexpectedness, importance or oddness of an incident witnessed in the past" (Visser 1973:724), and these early written examples. He points out that the form is first encountered in poetry, and proposes (contra most previous work) that it originally served to maintain poetic rhyme and meter.[32] While it is true that such forms do not surface in prose until much later, c. 1700 (Traugott 1972:142), a more likely explanation for their presence in poetry is that medieval and Elizabethan poets simply took advantage of a form already current in speech.

This interpretation is supported by a perusal of the early grammars collected in the OGREVE, in which forms without past marking are described as part of everyday language. In the very earliest grammars, unmarked or present-marked PTR verbs are usually listed under "Enallage" (the replacement of one form with another). Later, the grammars suggest something like the historical present, although we will see that the current definition of "historical" in this

[31] Given that the distinction between standard and dialectal English has only achieved its current strength over the past few centuries, the term "Standard English" used in historical contexts refers to the language of the majority of English speakers, i.e. excluding only marked local or contact-influenced forms.

[32] Although Visser's claim that poets are responsible for many features of English (including the historic present and do-periphrasis) is questionable, the massive amounts of earlier English data he supplies furnish clear evidence that the forms in question were widespread.

context is of extremely recent origin.

In the early grammars constituting the OGREVE, the replacement of the preterite with the present, as in (64), is both the earliest and the commonest type of enallage.

(64) a. Enallage of tyme, when we put one time for another, thus. *Terence*. I ***come*** to the maydens, I ***aske*** who she is, they ***say***, the sister of *Chrisis*, for, I came to the maydens, I asked who she was, they sayd the sister of *Chrisis*, the Presentence for the Preterperfectence.
(Peacham 1577: no page number)

b. The *Present* Tense in particular is sometimes used for the Preter Imperfect. As, *having met with him, he* **brings** *him to his House, and* **gives** *him very good Intertainment*. There we say *brings* for *brought*, and *gives* for *gave*. (Miege 1688:70)

c. "*Then* ***comes*** *Alexander with all his forces*" for "Then *came* Alexander."
(Lowe 1723:7)

d. And sometimes, we put one Time for another; as *John* vi.19. When they had rowed about five and twenty, or thirty Furlongs they ***see*** Jesus, instead of they *saw* Jesus.
(Collyer 1735:104)

Note the early and frequent references to *come*, *say*, and *give*, verbs that still feature today in descriptions of the unmarked past in Early AAE and English dialects. OGREVE authors also point out that enallage of a letter can be one vowel used for another, as in "*sware*, for *swore; speak*, for *spoke*"(Fisher 1750:125), which results in present forms with past reference in irregular verbs.

The present-tense forms in these examples are often used after such past-time anchors as "then" or "when they had rowed." Of course, we have no way of knowing whether such disambiguating anchors favour use of the present, or whether the existence of enallage of tense is clear to these grammarians only when such anchors are present. Obviously, the search for an unambiguous variable context is not confined solely to our century, nor to our discipline.

In the 1700s, the term "enallage" falls from use, concurrent with the decline in focus on Greek grammar, from which it is derived. Instead, authors propose the "historical present," which in its earliest instantiations does appear to refer to things historical, as in (65).

(65) a. in historical narratives, this tense [simple present] is sometimes substituted for the preterite; as, he ***fights*** and ***conquers***, ***takes*** an immense booty from his enemies, which he ***divides*** among his soldiers, and ***returns*** home in triumph. (Pickbourn 1789:24)

b. In animated historical narrations, this tense [the present] is sometimes substituted for the preterimperfect tense; (Murray 1795:41)

c. in animated historical narration, this tense [the present] is substituted for the

past to give vividness and reality to the ideas;
(Hazlitt 1810:44)

d. In historical narration, it [the present] is used with great effect for the Past tense;
(Bullions 1869:39)

e. The *Present Tense* ... is used in describing past or future events as if occurring at the time of the speaking. (Reed & Kellogg 1886:250)

f. the writer, without apparent cause, goes from the past to the present tense and back again. (Hill 1893:96-97)

g. the speaker, as it were, forgets all about time and recalls what he is recounting as vividly as if it were now present before his eyes. (Jespersen 1933:IV:238-239).

Note the elaboration over time in the meaning assigned to the use of the historical present – the present is first substituted "sometimes," then "to give vividness and reality," and only much later in non-historical contexts "as if it were now present." The concept of "historical present" as used today appears to be a *post hoc* attempt to describe (and limit) longstanding widespread variation in English. The examples of present-for-past given by the earliest grammarians of English are clearly not taken from historical sources, or even particularly animated narrative. It is possible to draw a line from Peacham and Miege to contemporary authors, tracing centuries of widespread use of the present in past contexts in mainstream English.

4.1.4.2 Verb class and lexical effects

A second area of language change that begins in Middle English (if not sooner) and reaches a peak by the Early Modern English period is the erosion of the Old English verb class system, and subsequent variability. Old English boasted a complex but regular system of verbal preterite inflection, based on a verb's membership in one of seven different classes according to vowel type (Pyles & Algeo 1993:119), although presumably language contact with Old Norse after 870 had already led to some simplification (McCrum et al. 1992:69-70). Weak (i.e. ed-inflected) verbs were already in the majority in Old English, by number of verbs if not by frequency of use (Pyles & Algeo 1993: 123), and this tendency toward regularization was accelerated by the influx of French loanwords into the verbal system during the medieval period (Strang 1970:276). The playwright and grammarian Ben Jonson rather poetically refers to the growing weak verb class as "the most usuall forming of a *verbe*, and thereby also the common Inne to lodge every strange, and forraine guest." (Jonson 1640:63).

The remaining strong verbs were subject to a variety of forces: language contact, borrowing, divergent dialect forms, and analogical change, as well as the competing linguistic

processes of regularization of paradigms (Mosse 1952:69, Wardale 1937:107) and a functional need to sharply distinguish tenses (Wardale 1937:107). The result was a reduction in the number of strong verbs, and a great deal of variability among many of those that remained. Wharton (1654), for example, lists a total of 71 irregular (strong) verbs, of which 48 (68%) have competing variants.

Grammars of English have long attempted to ascribe the widespread variation in preterite (and participial) marking to verb class membership; for a review of the argument over how many verb classes exist, see Poplack & Tagliamonte (2001:112-114). Fenning (1771:65) explains that the rules given for verb conjugation are "so numerous and intricate, that they rather perplex the judgment than assist the memory of the learner... The best method of understanding them seems to be to give a complete catalogue of them, by which means all their irregularities may be seen at one view." By the mid-1800s, almost all grammars adopt this plan, but a comparison of these huge tables shows a great deal of disagreement about which forms to use. This suggests that variation was so widespread that even grammarians were unable to agree on which forms to back. This is particularly true in the early 1600s, when grammarians acknowledge that vulgar speech, especially dialect, not only assigns verbs to different classes, but varies even in the marking of individual lexical items (example 66).

(66) In this conjugation also belong almost all the common verbs of the second conjugation (not because of any peculiarity in our language, but because common usage attempts anything)... dialects other than the common one should be sedulously eschewed... for there is scarcely a verb which is not deformed in the dialects according to their hearer's vulgarity.
(Gill 1619:121)

Two observations emerge. First, variation in the expression of the past was so great in earlier Modern English that even prescriptivists were forced to discuss it in some detail. Secondly, verbs may have belonged to completely different verb classes during the time that contemporary varieties of English were establishing themselves. Analysis of past temporal reference based on verb class may have to proceed on a verb-by-verb basis. In fact, despite the apparently chaotic nature of Early Modern English strong verb inflection, a careful analysis (of both historical linguistic literature and of the OGREVE) reveals a strong tendency for particular verbs to surface in particular forms.

Visser (1973:709) uses *come* as his archetypal example of the ability of the English verb

to surface in bare (present tense) form in preterite contexts, as "many Middle English dialects had only one form for the 1st and 3rd person plural of the present and the preterite." Preterite *come* is also found in the OGREVE, featuring in several of the early examples of enallage quoted in section 4.1.4.1 above. Other verbs that appear to have frequently expressed their past tenses with present tense forms include *eat* and *say*.

Eat has long permitted a present tense form in the past. Wallis (1653:117) lists *eat* as the past tense form, not *ate*. Lye (1671:126-128) accepts either form. Bayly (1772:45-47) prefers the spelling *ate*, but lists it, along with *beat*, under verbs whose "ea long" verb stem vowel changes to "e short or a." This suggests that past-tense *eat* was pronounced something like the contemporary British form "et."[33]. Pegge (1803/1814:131), writing about cockney and mainstream London English, reminds his readers, "The true Past Tense is *ate*... Square-toed and old-fashioned as it may be". The idea that *ate* fought a losing battle through the 1800s is reinforced by Hill (1893:91-2): "It is an exaggeration to say, as an American newspaper recently did, that 'ate' has almost disappeared from printed books; but it is certain that *eat* is often substituted for 'ate'." In other words, *ate*, now universally prescribed, fought a losing battle for three centuries, and has only come to ascendance in the last hundred years.

Much the same is true of *said*. The verb *say* has surfaced in grammars without past marking for over four centuries, since at least Peacham (1577): "I aske who she is, they say, the sister of *Chrisis*." The verb *say* not only surfaces without its past tense morphology, but often with third-person -s across other persons, even with past temporal reference. This appears to be a case of *say* borrowing morphology (or its absence) from its predecessor, *quoth*, which is described as a defective form, somewhat like a modal, that always takes the 3rd-singular form, no matter the number, person, or tense (Wharton 1654:53). Visser (1973:726-728) traces the use of *saith/says* in quotative ("parenthetic") contexts from the thirteenth century to the present, and shows how its use has become more stigmatized since the 18th century. Jespersen (1949:IV:20) describes "Says he" as being of "popular native growth".

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[33] Past-tense *beat* would thus have been pronounced *bet*: this form, nowadays considered highly non-standard, is found in African Nova Scotian English.

Table 4.7 The treatment of selected non-standard preterite forms in grammars represented in the OGREVE (from Poplack et al. in press)

Year of Publication

[illegible]

Form	Treatment (chronological order)
eat	o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o X o o o o X X o X X o X
run	o o o o o o o o X o X X X X o X X X X o
come(d)	o o o o o o o X X
say(s)	o o X X
give	o o
done	X X X X
see(n,d)	o X X X X
have	
go	
be	

Key:
o variable (non-standard) form not stigmatized
X variable (non-standard) form stigmatized

In fact, as table 4.7 shows, a good deal of variability in PTR expression in earlier English can be attributed to the idiosyncratic behaviour of a few verbs. The table, from Poplack, Van Herk, & Harvie (2002), illustrates the treatment of a number of variable verbs (*run/ran*, *come/came*, etc.) in the 56 OGREVE works that mentioned such variation. Non-critical attestations of variability (represented as o's) cluster in the early period, at the left side of the table. Note the frequency of mention of particular verbs (*eat, run, come, say*), relative to the complete absence of mention of variation associated with *have, go,* or *be.* Over time, although the variation persists, its acceptability to grammarians decreases, as illustrated by the reduction in the number of mentions in the middle of the table. As the standard becomes firmly entrenched (post-1800), there is an increasing tendency to stigmatise the variable or non-standard forms as vulgar, provincial, or dialectal (represented by Xs). The same variable forms, presumably identical in use, are assigned a different place in constructed Standard English. The success of the prescriptive enterprise results in these same variants being seen by many today, including scholars of AAE, as incursions from a non-English system, rather than as retentions of widespread English forms.

4.1.5 Early AAE single verbs

The absence of standard preterite marking seems to have been one of the most widespread (or most noticed) features of Early AAE. In addition to their frequency in the Ex-Slave Recordings and Narratives, and in all diaspora studies, bare preterites are the sole non-standard forms found in all five sources of information on Early AAE studied by Wolfram (2000).[34] When we turn from descriptions by non-community members to quantitative analysis of data that can be taken to represent Early AAE, we find strong conditioning of the use of such forms.

4.1.5.1 Bare forms

Early AAE bare forms are found more frequently with weak than with strong verbs, although the difference is not as marked as in contemporary AAVE (Tagliamonte 1991, Fasold 1972). Poplack & Tagliamonte (2001), summarizing their nearly two decades of work on diaspora AAE and the Ex-Slave Recordings, find strong phonological conditioning of bare forms

of these irregular (weak) verbs. Preceding and following consonants are the strongest factors favouring bare forms, presumably the result of a desire to avoid consonant clusters.[35] In marked contrast to these findings, Schneider (1989) indicates almost no phonological effect whatsoever in his analysis of data from the Ex-Slave Narratives. Neither the difference between preceding vowels (69.5% ed-marked) and consonants (65.3%), nor between following vowels (68.7%), consonants (65.3%), or pause (74.8%) is statistically significant (Schneider 1989:84). The narratives are, of course, transcriptions rather than recordings, so the unskilled transcribers may simply not have noticed this rather subtle effect.

Poplack & Tagliamonte (2001) found that the greatest effect on bare strong verbs was verb class, whereby the class of verbs in which the verb stem is equal to the participle in StdE (e.g. *come/came/come*) strongly favour bare forms. They attribute this effect largely to the behaviour of the verb *come*, which tends to surface in bare form and which takes up most of its verb class. Other lexical effects attach to *give*, which tends to surface bare, and *know*, which occasionally regularizes to *knowed* (Tagliamonte 1991:261), as well as to the *verba dicendi*, *say* and *tell*, whose bare forms are favoured when they introduce direct quotes (Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001:136-138). Schneider (1989) also describes an overwhelming favouring effect on bare forms of a few lexical items, *come* (92% unmarked), *run* (83% unmarked), and *give* (93% unmarked). Overall, strong verbs in Early AAE surface with bare forms rather more frequently than they do in contemporary AAVE (Tagliamonte 1991, Singler 1991, Schneider 1989), suggesting that this is one area in which AAVE and StdE are converging.

Also favouring bare forms in the diaspora AAE varieties studied by Poplack & Tagliamonte (2001) were past habitual contexts. This habituality effect was also found by Singler (1991) for an informant from Sinoe County, Liberia, who zero-marked 56% of her strong verbs, with habituality the strongest favouring factor (131), and by Singler (1991a) for the ESR. Although this effect has been invoked to draw parallels between Early AAE and creoles (most forcefully by Winford 1992), an alternative explanation has been advanced, notably by Singler (1991a) for the ESR and Poplack & Tagliamonte (2001) for their diaspora data. This involves the

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[34] It should be noted that only one of these sources, a pair of early letters, is actually produced by African Americans. The others are an amanuensis account of an interview with a slave, sermons aimed at African Americans, a play, and court records.

[35] The widely-described parallel-processing constraint, whereby use of one form favours its continued use in subsequent variable contexts, will not be considered in the present study, as it is presumably a real-time processing effect that cannot be measured in written data.

elision of a reduced form of the habitual marker *would*, so that apparently unmarked habituals like *they find* actually represent *they'd find* with the *'d* deleted. Singler (1991a:256-7) feels this explanation is more suited to the ESR, which features frequent use (and reduction) of habitual *would*, than to his Liberian diaspora data, where *would* is rarely used and never contracted. He does, however, accept the possibility that reduced auxiliaries existed at an earlier stage of Liberian Settler English, at least for *have* and *had*, especially as their later deletion is "a step that would have been consistent with a preference in LSE for vowel-final syllables" (Singler 1991a:257). Poplack & Tagliamonte (2001) test this hypothesis with respect to habituals in their diaspora and ESR data, demonstrating bare forms are far more frequent in situations where StdE permits habitual *would* (e.g.*They would laugh and* play) than in those where it does not (e.g. **They would live next door*). This distinction would presumably also explain a similar finding by Poplack & Tagliamonte (2001) for an isolated white variety, Nova Scotian Vernacular English.

Creole-like relative temporal effects, whereby forms are marked when they refer to the earlier (i.e. anterior) of two events when described out of chronological order, were not selected as significant in the varieties studied by Poplack & Tagliamonte (2001), and showed inconsistent ordering among temporal relationships.

4.1.5.2 Non-standard forms

Tagliamonte (1991:255-6, 451), based on the largest single data set of recorded Early AAE PTR, lists several types of non-standard marking of single verbs. The most frequent are those involving possible deletion of an auxiliary (including both participial forms like *I been* and copula deletions like *I going*). Nearly as frequent are regularized forms, such as *blowed*. Each of these represents about one percent of all PTR verbs in the Samaná English and ESR data sets. Less frequent are devoiced suffixes (e.g. *boilt*) and completely irregular forms (e.g. *fit* for *fought*). The examples given resemble those found throughout the history of English; to the best of my knowledge, however, no lexical analysis has been performed on these non-standard tokens, perhaps due to their rarity. Holm (1991:235-5) also describes English-like regularization of irregular verbs for the Ex-Slave Recordings.

Schneider (1989:94-113) lists each non-standard lexical preterite and participle that surfaces in his analysis of PTR in the Ex-Slave Narratives. He associates the majority with widely attested forms from earlier or non-standard English, especially those that are regularized (*blowed, dreamed, gived, growed*) or involve paradigm levelling (*have beat, have broke, done,*

drunk, have went, growed, riz(<rose), seed/seen, have spoke, (have) taken/tooken/tuck, and *have wrote).*

4.1.5.3 Early AAE effects and system membership

Overall, existing quantitative studies of the behaviour of Early AAE single verb forms offer little support for the hypothesis that such forms behave in a specifically creole manner, assuming we can determine what creole behaviour is. Linguistic constraints on the use of bare forms that are shared by creoles and AAE often turn out to be universal (phonological effects), or due to underlying phonological effects (habitual effect) or lexical effects.

The OREAAC data offers an opportunity to test and extend these findings in a new and fully diachronic source of Early AAE.

4.2 The variable context and the variable

Central to the debate over the origins of AAE is the function of morphological distinctions (suffixation, vowel change, or suppletion) on verbs with past temporal reference. A creole-origins model suggests that such marks are reflexes of earlier creole anterior markers, related to temporal relation, remoteness, and the like. This model is countered by suggestions that unmarked past forms result from universal or dialectal phonological or lexical factors. Before testing these constraints in the data, however, it is necessary that we determine what we mean by "marked." Single verbs in this data set surface with a range of markers: English-like preterite forms, in both weak (e.g. *jumped*) and strong (e.g. *went*) verbs; bare forms (e.g. *jump, come*); and rarer forms, including s-marking, (e.g. *jumps*), participial forms (e.g. *done*), and other non-standard forms (e.g. *writ, knowed*).

In data sets consisting largely of preterite forms, it has been possible to collapse all non-zero forms, including all verbs with preverbal markers and all morphologically marked verbs, into a single "marked" category, contrasting with all zero forms (e.g. Tagliamonte & Poplack 1993). This is in keeping with the most generous possible reading of the likely effect of decreolization – that an early creole anterior marker (generally preverbal *bin*) has been replaced by a [+marked] form, which might be *had, did,* or the English past tense form. There are several problems with such an approach to the present data set.

A first problem relates to the role of present perfect forms. In this data set, they make up 31.4% of the PTR context, a huge proportion. A creole perspective considers such forms to be

intrusions from StdE. Although the StdE present perfect is an anterior form, it is an *absolute* anterior, in that its reference point is speech time, not another event. In this sense, the present perfect, although "marked," actually occupies contexts (recency, present relevance) directly opposite to those associated with the creole anterior. Counting such forms as marked would eradicate any possible creole anteriority effect.

Also problematic is the consideration of *had* forms, the StdE past perfect, as a marked form similar to marked preterites and in contrast with zero forms. As pointed out elsewhere (Tagliamonte 1997, Bybee et al. 1994), the English past perfect is an archetypal (past) anterior context. Counting such forms in with marked preterites vs. zero forms (presumably unmarked preterites) would produce a "creole" anteriority effect in any variety, including StdE.

A third problem is the s-marked verb. Although technically "marked" in the sense that it is not a zero form, s-marking is not associated with past or anterior marking in either English or in English-based creoles. In English, it is assumed to represent the present tense (usually third person singular, but not always), and perhaps the Historical Present. In (eastern Caribbean) creoles, it is assumed to represent the habitual present, generally as a mesolectal reflex of an earlier habitual marker like *da* or *duz* (Schneider 1987, Van Herk 2000, in press).

Even unmarked PTR forms are potentially problematic, as it is often unclear whether they represent simply zero, a deleted –ed form, or a deleted Historical Present-like –s form.

The present study deals with these problems as follows: included as marked forms are all those that have been proposed as creole anterior markers, or the reflexes thereof, that represent past tense marking in English. These would include all morphologically marked forms, including non-standard (e.g. *fit* for *fought*) and regularized (e.g. *blowed* for *blew*) preterites, as well as the rare preverbal *bin* and *did* forms. Included as unmarked forms are all verbs with no morphological marking at all. Excluded from this analysis are all forms whose conditioning factors are completely indistinguishable between English and creoles, or whose meaning even in creoles is not related to anteriority. These would include *had* + V(ed2), *was/were* V-ing, preverbal habitual markers (*used to, would*), and s-marked forms. The distribution and function of these forms are considered elsewhere in this thesis.

Although this restriction of the variable context permits the inclusion of some forms for which particular constraints are irrelevant (e.g. preceding and following phonological environment for *did*-prefixed verbs), such forms are rare. Separate runs excluding such forms

when necessary (not reported here) showed identical results.

In order to test the proposed constraints on zero-marking in Early AAE PTR, it is also necessary that we establish two separate contexts: one for regular verbs, those that in StdE form their past tense form through ed-suffixation, and one for irregular (strong) verbs, those that in StdE form their past tense form in other ways, such as suppletion or vowel substitution. Although this is clearly necessary to test non-creole constraints such as the phonological environment, it does not affect testing of creole constraints. If these Liberian letters represent a variety only recently separated from its creole roots, anteriority, stativity and other effects should be consistent across all Early AAE PTR verbs. If, on the other hand, the letters represent a variety in which decreolization is well under way, these effects will underlie phonological effects that have developed later. In other words, the remnant linguistic constraints of an early creole state should apply in Early AAE no matter what the verb type. Both creole- and English-origin hypotheses, then, are better investigated by considering and comparing variable contexts in which effects potentially resulting from decreolization or other input varieties may or may not apply, as summarized in table 4.8.

4.3 Factor groups

The descriptions of comparison varieties summarized in section 4.1 suggest a range of constraints on the use of bare and other non-standard single PTR verb forms. Some, it has been shown, are more problematic than others, in terms of either their privative association with a particular comparison variety or the likelihood that they can be operationalized as a linguistic factor group. Table 4.8 summarizes some linguistic effects proposed in the literature, and the degree to which such effects can be considered diagnostic of an association between Early AAE and particular comparison/input varieties.

Table 4.8. Potential constraints on Early AAE bare verb forms and their association with comparison varieties.

Constraint	Description of effect	Diagnositicity
Creole features:		
Mesolectal punctuality	Habituals favour bare forms over punctuals	Good, despite disjunct with basilect; epiphenomenon of *would*-deletion?
Basilectal stativity	Non-statives favour bare forms over statives	Acceptable; weak in mesolect; may reflect widespread tendencies
Mesolectal temporal clause	Temporals favour bare forms over other clause types	Acceptable; possible interaction with lexis
Remoteness	Remote pasts favour ed-marking over recent pasts	Acceptable; may reflect widespread tendencies
Anterior punctuals	Past-before-past favours *had* or ed-marking over other punctuals	Acceptable
Temporal disambiguation (Mufwene 1983)	Temporal adverbs favour (or permit) bare forms	Questionable; see next
Mesolectal "reminder effect" (Bickerton 1975)	Temporal adverbs disfavour bare forms	Questionable; see previous
Dialect/historical features:		
Lexical zero effect	Some strong verbs (e.g. *come*) favour bare forms	Good; unlikely to reflect universal tendencies
Lexical participial effect	Some verbs (*be, do, see*) favour participial preterites	Good; unlikely to reflect universal tendencies
Quotative effect	Quotative contexts favour bare forms of *verba dicendi*	Good; unlikely to reflect universal tendencies
Verb class effect	Verbs whose participle = present favour bare forms	Uncertain; epiphenomenon of lexical effect?
Cross-variety (i.e. not creole diagnostic) features:		
Preceding phonological effect	Preceding consonant favours bare forms	Good
Preceding consonant type	Preceding stop favours –ed	Not widely replicated
Following phonological effect	Following consonant favours bare forms	Good
Morphological subtype	Regular verbs favour bare forms over irregular verbs	Acceptable; universal status sometimes disputed
Syllabicity	Syllabic –ed usually overt	Acceptable; universal status sometimes disputed
Syllabic lexical restrictions	*Wanted/started* favour zero	Good; not widely discussed

The proposed linguistic effects described above, each of which in effect represents a

hypothesis concerning the nature of Early AAE, were operationalized as factors that could be empirically assigned to each token falling into the variable context. The factor groups are described below.[36]

Temporal conjunctions and clause type test the association of bare forms with temporal clauses (*when, since, after* clauses) described for creoles (Bickerton 1975).

w *when*
s *since*
a *after*
m main
s subordinate

Aspect tests the claim that Early AAE verbs are more likely to be marked in punctual contexts than habitual contexts (Singler 1991a:256), paralleling claims for mesolectal creoles (Bickerton 1975:160).

p punctual context
i iterative/habitual/durative context

Temporal relation relates to claims that in creoles marking is based on anteriority, rather than tense (Bickerton 1975). Coded as anterior is the first in a sequence of PTR events, and any subsequent events described out of sequence, e.g. *He hurried downstairs (anterior) and walked outside (posterior) while whistling a tune (coincidence). Then he cursed (posterior) because he had forgotten to shut off the kettle (anterior).*

p posterior
a anterior
c coincidence
r other: repetition, reorientation, ambiguous

Stativity is claimed to influence the presence of anterior marking in creoles (Bickerton

[36] In some cases, the factor groups represent finer distinctions than required to test hypotheses concerning morphological choices, as they are required to test constraints on the use of the perfect (chapter 5). These finer distinctions, however, always map to those required for the present analysis.

1975). In a creole system, it is claimed, the point of reference for determining anteriority depends on the stativity of the verb (Bickerton 1975). The reference point for actions is another action in the past, while the reference point for states (at least in basilectal creoles) is the present.

s stative
n non-stative or ambiguous

Temporal context tests the claims that "past tense" marking is the reflex of an earlier creole tendency to mark remote past contexts (Bickerton 1975). Degree of remoteness is coded based on either calendar time (when known) or distance with respect to major events in the writer's life. In a situation where letters are written infrequently and take several months to reach their destination, degrees of recentness or distance may not be identical to those used in speech. Remote and continuing contexts, however, are similar enough between speech and writing to permit comparisons.

r remote (more than ten years ago, or prior to emigration)
d distant (more than one year ago, or prior to previous letter)
n recent (within past year, or since last letter)
i imminent (within past week, including time of letter writing)
c continuing (situations continuing up to point of letter writing)

Temporal adverb type is associated with diametrically opposed claims in the creole literature. One claim is that temporal adverbs in creoles are associated with bare forms, as marking in such a context would be redundant (Mufwene 1983, Todd 1971); Bickerton (1975), on the other hand, associates temporal adverbs in upper-mesolectal Guyanese creole with marked forms, presumably because such adverbs remind speakers of the temporal orientation of the utterance.

s *since...*
t time/frequency, e.g. *always, every day*
b subsequence, e.g. *then, after that*
p precedence, e.g. *before, until...*
a dependent, e.g. *at that time*
S lexicalized specific, e.g. *in March, in 1853*
c continuous, e.g. *for a week, while...*
d deictic past, e.g. *yesterday, three days ago*

Morphological subtype tests a hierarchy frequently proposed for variable marking of AAE and creole preterites, ranking irregular verbs, verbs taking syllabic *–ed*, and regular verbs ending in vowels or consonants (Winford 1992). This coding also permits comparison of Early AAE with claims for contemporary AAVE (Wolfram 1971, Fasold 1972) regarding the effect of preceding consonant type on *ed*-marking in regular verbs. The effect of phonological type on *ed*-marking in these letters may speak to Bickerton's (1975) previously-untestable claim that AAVE decreolized early enough to give morphophonemic rules time to develop. Although written data are expected to show weaker phonological effects than does speech, similar conditioning would show such rules were already in place 150 years ago and are not the result of the passage of time in AAVE or diaspora AAE.

i	irregular/strong (e.g. be, *have*, *sing*)
d	double-marked (e.g. *told*)
f	fricative or affricate
p	voiceless stop
b	voiced stop
n	nasal
l	liquid
v	preceding V or glide
c	cluster (e.g. *ask*)
s	syllabic –ed without nasal (e.g. *started*)
S	syllabic –ed with nasal (e.g. *wanted*)

Following environment similarly tests the strength of (presumably universal) phonological constraints on (non-) marking of regular verbs. It also speaks to the speech-like quality of the letters, by testing phonological conditioning (as with preceding environment) and by considering the presence of marking before identical segments (/t,d/).

c	consonant
v	vowel
t	alveolar stop ("neutralization" context in speech)

Quotative markers are coded to test the claim that the verbs *say* and *tell* tend to surface in their bare forms when introducing direct quotes (Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001). Such forms, common in the narratives found in sociolinguistic interviews, are rare in these letters.

q quotative (e.g. *She said, "I don't know."*)
n non-quotative (e.g. *She said she didn't know.*)

Verb Class tests the proposal that irregular verbs surface as bare forms at different rates, depending on their membership in verb classes, as appears to be the case for some British-origin dialects (Christian et al. 1988) and (superficially at least) for diaspora AAE (Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001). These classes are based on degree of similarity between present, preterit, and participle forms. This factor group also permits the exclusion from analysis of preterite marking, where necessary, of those verbs with identical preterite and present forms in StdE (class A).

A (present=preterite=participle), e.g. *put, hit*
B (all different), e.g. *fall*
C (preterite=participle), e.g. *thought*
D (present=participle), e.g. *come, run*

Discourse type tests the association of bare forms with narrative complicating action clauses, associated with both the English historical present and similar claims for creoles (Rickford 1987).

n narrative (i.e. narrative complicating action, subsequent events, etc)
o narrative non-complicating action (evaluation, setup)
x non-narrative

Lexical identity follows up on recent claims (notably in Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001) that proposed verb-class effects are actually the result of the idiosyncratic behaviour of particular frequently-occurring verbs, behaviour that can be traced to an earlier stage of English. Data from the OGREVE on fluid verb class membership in earlier English will also inform the discussion of findings in this area. Each lexical verb occurring at least twice (and thus potentially variable) is coded. Because it is so fragmented (201 factors), this factor group is not part of the multivariate analyses described in sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.2.

Participle type is not a group of factors predicted to influence the use of bare preterites at all. Rather, it is a comparison data set, which permits the parallel testing of phonological and lexical effects associated with preterites, as with the treatment of consonant clusters in derived

adjectives in Fasold (1972). It also permits the investigation of parallels between Early AAE, contemporary AAVE (Rickford 1999) and English dialects (Milroy & Milroy 1993, Cheshire 1982, Christian et al. 1988) with respect to lexical effects on preterite-participle levelling.

b	bare (e.g. *have see*)
d	preterite (e.g. *have saw*)
p	std participle (e.g. *have seen*)
r	regularized (e.g.*have seed*)
n	other non-standard (e.g. *have writ*)
a	ambiguous (e.g. *have thought*)

4.4 Results

Comparison of the overall rates of occurrence of marked and bare preterites in the Liberian OREAAC letters, illustrated in table 4.9, reveals a lower overall percentage of bare forms than in previously published work on spoken Early AAE. Rates of bare forms, listed in the "percent of context" column, range from one-third to one-half of those in, for example, Poplack & Tagliamonte (2001).

Table 4.9. Distribution of bare and marked verb forms with past temporal reference in the Liberian OREAAC letters.

Verb form	N	Percent of context	Percent of total data
Past marked regular e.g. *sailed*	795	83.4	39.0
Zero marked regular e.g. *sail*	158	16.7	
Past marked irregular e.g. *came*	1336	94.0	58.2
Zero marked irregular e.g. *come*	85	6.0	
Participial e.g. *seen*	37		1.5
Regularized e.g. *comed*	2		0.1
Other non-standard e.g. *writ*	4		0.2
Other marked e.g. *did sail, bin left*	23		0.9
Total	2440		

This is not surprising, given differences between writing and speaking. In fact, it is striking that such a high percentage (16.7%) of unmarked regular verbs persists in these letters, given that research on spoken corpora finds the major influence on these forms to be phonological. This seems to testify to the speech-like nature of many of these letters. Zero-

marked irregular preterites occur at a lower rate (6%) than in Samaná English (Tagliamonte 1991) or the Ex-Slave Narratives (Schneider 1989), but at a rate similar to or higher than that reported for contemporary AAVE (Rickford 1999, Fasold 1972). The overall rates, however, are of less importance to the analysis described here than are the linguistic factors conditioning the use of these forms in each variable context.

4.4.1 Bare vs. marked forms in regular verbs

The first variable context to be so analyzed is the regular verb. Table 4.10 displays the results of a variable rule analysis of the effect of operationalizable constraints proposed to account for bare forms on AAE PTR regular verbs, i.e. all the constraints described in section 4.3 except verb class.

4.4.1.1 Phonological effects

Marking of the regular verb is a context in which any predicted phonological effects would be expected to surface, and indeed such an effect is by far the most significant predictor of zero past marking in this context, with a range of .76. As table 4.10 indicates, the major constraint influencing the zero form in regular verbs is the nature of the preceding segment. Paralleling the findings of earlier studies of AAE (past and present), in the Liberian letters a preceding consonant favours zero, while a preceding vowel strongly disfavours. The letter writers presumably use zero to avoid consonant clusters and maintain the CV(C) structure of their speech as far as is possible. The presence of such a constraint in these letters, written a century and a half ago, strongly validates similar findings from the diaspora communities studied in Poplack & Tagliamonte (2001), and seems to indicate that such conditioning was already in place when such communities were established. In other words, the widely-described phonological effect has not developed over the last century or so in AAVE and diaspora AAE, as Bickerton (1975) implies, but was already firmly in place 150 years ago.

Table 4.10. Linguistic factors selected as significant to the probability of bare forms of regular past temporal reference verbs in Liberian letters.

Corrected mean: .126 Total N: 953		%	N
PRECEDING PHONOLOGICAL CONTEXT			
Voiced stop	**.936**	66	3
Nasal stop	**.798**	38	55
Consonant cluster	**.746**	32	74
Voiceless stop	**.707**	29	24
Fricative	**.701**	23	284
Liquid	.386	8	90
Non-nasal + syllabic –ed	.382	9	100
Doubly marked	.321	6	144
Nasal cluster + syllabic –ed	.318	7	57
Vowel	.179	3	121
RANGE	*76*		
TEMPORAL REMOTENESS			
Remote past	**.746**	30	46
Immediate past	**.595**	16	43
Distant past	**.556**	17	225
Recent past	.453	15	621
RANGE	*29*		
ANTERIORITY			
Posterior	**.610**	21	306
Co-occurring	.466	14	28
Ambiguous or unrelated	.458	14	553
Anterior	.351	10	66
RANGE	*26*		
Not selected: Following phonological context, adverbial type, clause type, narrative type, aspect, stativity.			

The sole type of preceding consonants not strongly favouring bare forms are liquids (/l,r/). These are semi-vocalic in nature and evidence in these and other Early AAE letters (Montgomery 1999) suggests liquids are themselves frequently deleted, making this environment something of a subset of vowels. No strong distinction is found among the other consonant types,[17] unlike the findings described by Wolfram (1971) and Fasold (1972) for some

[17] Preceding voiced stops are too infrequent to support strong claims regarding their behaviour with respect to other consonant types.

contemporary spoken AAVE corpora. As those authors suggest that a consonant type effect results from the varying potential for compensatory lengthening, the lack of a parallel finding here may reflect the lack of a means to indicate lengthening in the written mode.

The letter writers maintain a pattern described for most AAE varieties and many comparison varieties, whereby regular verbs in which the –ed suffix is syllabic are less likely to surface bare. This is usually described as a saliency effect, in which the syllabic nature of the –ed suffix makes it more evident to speakers (and, in this case, writers). As in the preceding section, we see the absence of a finer distinction within this category reported by Fasold (1972) for spoken contemporary AAVE, whereby verbs permitting compensatory lengthening (largely *wanted*) were more likely to permit bare forms. Again, this presumably results from the lack of a means to indicate lengthening in the written mode.

Although preceding phonological context exhibits a highly significant effect on bare forms in this corpus, the same cannot be said for the following phonological context, despite its significance in many previous studies (including those of StdE, e.g. Neu 1980). It seems likely that this reflects the writing process of the majority of the Liberian letter writers, whereby words would be considered more or less one at a time, reducing the likelihood of sandhi effects making it into the letters. Research into the pedagogical materials used by American slaves supports this claim, as all the widely used materials were phonics-based, teaching learners to sound out and write syllable-by-syllable (Cornelius 1991). A similar writing vs. speech distinction with respect to phonological context is reported for contemporary AAVE by Funkhouser (1973), so presumably such an effect could result simply from the writing process, no matter which pedagogical materials were used.

In spoken corpora, verbs that mark past tense with both a vowel change and a coronal suffix (e.g. *keep/kept, tell/told*) tend to favour zero, at least as long as "zero" is defined solely as absence of the suffix (see e.g. Fasold 1972, Winford 1992, Blake 1997, Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001). In this corpus, no such effect is found. In fact, this verb type tends to disfavour zero, surfacing in its complete (doubly-marked) preterite form. This may also be an artifact of the writing process, and of the models available to writers. While singly-marked regular verbs have a corresponding bare form in written StdE (e.g. *jumped* > *jump*), doubly-marked forms either have no such form (e.g. **kept* > *kepp*), or have only a homophonous unrelated form (e.g. ?*told* > *toll*). Completely bare forms, identical to the present (e.g. *told/tell*), are found in the letters, but are

infrequent.

From a methodological perspective, the finding of a phonological conditioning effect in a written corpus speaks strongly to the speech-like nature of these letters. The authors are clearly writing as they speak, at least in this context.

4.4.1.2 Anteriority

Bickerton (1975) describes remote past as one of the possible meanings of the creole anterior form. If these letters represent a creole-influenced variety, this constraint should produce more marking on verbs indicating states and events occurring in the remote past. Instead, table 4.10 shows an opposite pattern, in which verbs with remote reference are less likely to be marked, i.e. more likely to surface with bare forms. Other degrees of temporal distance (distant, recent, immediate past) show intermediate and inconsistent effects.[38] It is unclear why such an effect should be found. It might be associated with the dramatic change in the nature of the letter writers' lives over the years -- perhaps the situation of slavery associated with remote temporal reference contexts for these authors is more likely to call for particular verbs, collocations, adverbials, or sentence types. What is clear is that this finding is not indicative of any known creole conditioning.

A major prediction of the creole-origins hypothesis is that pure anterior events (i.e. those occurring prior to a reference state or action) are more likely to be overtly marked, at least in the basilect.[39] Table 4.10 shows that in these Liberian letters, anterior events are indeed more likely to be marked, to disfavour the bare form. The table also shows, however, that events co-occurring with the reference state or event also disfavour bare forms, as do events whose relationship to the reference verb are unclear, albeit to a lesser extent. The only events that are likely to be zero-marked are those coded as posterior, i.e. occurring after a reference event or state. This parallels precisely the results (percentages only) described by Tagliamonte (1991:355) for Samaná English, as shown in table 4.11: posteriors are less likely to be marked than either anterior or coincidental events. This profile matches the first half of the (not specifically creole) anterior/posterior distinction described by Bybee et al (1994: 54-55), in which anterior forms "would not be marked on several verbs in succession that are reporting a sequence of events."

[38] The disfavouring effect of recent pasts cannot be due to such forms preferring present perfect forms – this would not affect a distinction between bare and marked *single* forms.

[39] The term pure anterior is used to specifically indicate the relative sequencing of events, as opposed to other notions (e.g. remote past) sometimes described as conceptually linked to anteriority.

The parallel findings for Liberian letters and Samaná English do not, however, match the second half of Bybee et al.'s definition, whereby (past) anterior "would *only* be used to show that some action is prior to the others in the narrative (Givon 1982)" (emphasis added).

Table 4.11. Percentage of overtly marked verbs according to temporal relationship and mark of preceding reference verb in Samaná English (adapted from Tagliamonte 1991:355, table 27).

	Previous verb past marked		Previous bare	
	%	N	%	N
Anterior	89	142	73	29
Coincidence	87	2015	76	173
Posterior	**71**	976	**52**	299

A system in which co-occurring as well as unrelated forms share overt marking with anteriors, while only posteriors tend to be unmarked, suggests that overt marking becomes optional when temporal reference is extremely clear, with marking on some earlier verb and no expressed change of reference time. Tagliamonte describes the relationship between optional marking and clear sequential reference as "functionally unique [among form-function relationships] in languages in general… these findings cannot be taken to reflect a Creole system as opposed to any other" (Tagliamonte 1991:356). This disambiguation context is reminiscent of claims for creoles such as Mufwene (1983), but also of past perfect vs. preterite contexts in varieties of English (Visser 1973: 759).

4.4.1.3 Non-significant effects

Adverbial type: Adverbials such as *since, before, after, while, at that time, in 1850,* or *last Tuesday* overtly situate events with respect to each other, to the timeline of a narrative, to real time, and to speech time. As such, they might be expected to indicate the relative importance of relative vs. absolute temporal reference in these letters. That they did not do so is not a diagnostic refutation of either creole or English hypotheses in this respect.

Clause type: Bickerton (1975) found that zero forms in mesolectal creoles were more frequent in temporal clauses (e.g. *when X occurred*) than elsewhere. This creole-derived constraint did not hold for the Liberian letters, matching results described in Poplack & Tagliamonte (2001) for their diaspora data.

Discourse type: In a "historical present" (or narrative present) analysis of zero PTR forms, zero forms should occur in greater density in the complicating action portion of narratives

than they do in the orientation or evaluation clauses, or in non-narrative clauses. Similar distributions have been proposed for both creole (Rickford 1987:189) and non-creole (Traugott 1972) varieties, as well as for other corpora of Early AAE (Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001).

In the Liberian letters, no such distribution was found. Overall, narratives in the letters accounted for only 16% of all regular PTR verbs. This number is low, especially compared to PTR contexts in spoken corpora collected through sociolinguistic interviews, where the elicitation of narratives is a major tactic in the attempt to focus informants' attention away from their speech. Although the narrative portions of these letters often resemble those sought by sociolinguistic interviews, including dramatic descriptions of the danger of death, they do not feature a statistically significant increase in the number of unmarked forms, indicating that the stylistic factor is not significant here.

Aspect type: A strong punctual effect has been described for mesolectal Guyanese Creole (Bickerton 1975) and diaspora AAE, whereby punctuals tend to be marked and habituals favour bare forms, either due to creole-like aspectual distinctions or the deletion of a preverbal marker, *would* (Singler 1991a, Tagliamonte 1991, Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001), to satisfy CV syllable structure constraints. The present corpus shows no such effect. This may result in part from the rarity of habitual contexts (N=37) in this data set. This is especially true when the data is compared to spoken Early AAE data, collected from elderly informants who often speak of childhood games and activities. Neither overt nor deleted preverbal markers appear to play much of a role in the Liberian letters. Habitual situations, when they occur, are largely described with the simple (and marked) preterite.

Stativity**:** Another frequent claim for creole grammars, particularly in the basilect, is that stativity exerts an influence on overt verbal marking, whereby past states require marking, while past events do not. This is not the case with regular verbs in the Liberian letters. Stativity exerts no significant effect.

4.4.1.4 Regular participles and derived adjectives

A strong finding of early research into AAVE was that a mark was more likely to be absent in contexts where it carried no semantic load, as when /t/ would be deleted from a monomorphemic form (e.g. *mist*) more often than from a bimorphemic form (e.g. *missed*). The robust presence of present perfect and passive forms in this data set, and the variability of marking on the resulting participle forms, results in a large data set that permits a similar

comparison. In perfects and passives, and in adjectives derived from participial forms, the –ed suffix on the participial form, as in (67), carries a low semantic load, permitting its deletion, as in (68).

(67) I have Just ***Raised*** me A Brick hous up on It (156/6/12)

(68) howeve I have not ***regret*** comeing out here (156/6/43.5)

Tense and aspectual information is primarily encoded on the auxiliary verb (*have* or *be*). This provides a comparison data set, not available to previous studies due to the shortage of perfect forms, whose phonological similarities to preterite verbs are even closer than those of monomorphemic forms.

Table 4.12 shows the results of a variable rule analysis of 1139 participial forms in this data set, paralleling the analysis of regular PTR main verbs described in sections 4.4.1.1-3 above. A first general finding, identical to that of earlier work on monomorphemes (e.g. Fasold 1972) is that bare forms surface at a higher rate here (25%, .221 corrected mean) than in the single verb context described above (16%, .126 corrected mean). This suggests a conclusion similar to that drawn by earlier studies: ed-marking is more likely to be retained on single verbs because it "means" more, i.e. it carries the semantic load of past tense marking, This reinforces the suggestion that the past category is an active part of the letter writers' underlying linguistic system, and that these letters reflect distinctions carried over from speech.

A second finding is that the factors conditioning marking are virtually identical to those found for single verbs. The strongest finding, as for single verbs, is that preceding consonants strongly favour bare forms, preceding vowels disfavour, and preceding liquids occupy an intermediate position. This appears to further reflect a tendency in the linguistic system of the letter writers (as in other varieties) to avoid word-final consonant clusters. The association of syllabic –ed verbs with overt marking also parallels the single verb finding, presumably again the result of the saliency of the form. The absence of an effect of following phonological context also parallels that of single verbs, further suggesting that the writers were strongly influenced by speech, but tended to consider words in isolation when spelling them.

Table 4.12. Linguistic factors selected as significant to the probability of bare forms of regular participles and derived adjectives in Liberian letters.	
Corrected mean: .221	
Total N: 1139	
PRECEDING PHONOLOGICAL CONTEXT	
Voiced stop	**.916**
Voiceless stop	**.673**
Fricative	**.659**
Consonant cluster	**.650**
Nasal stop	**.646**
Liquid	**.528**
Nasal cluster + syllabic –ed	.312
Doubly marked	.270
Non-nasal + syllabic –ed	.228
Vowel	.193
RANGE	*72*
TEMPORAL REMOTENESS	
Remote past	**.657**
Distant past	**.612**
Time indeterminate	**.588**
Continuing	**.501**
Immediate past	.458
Recent past	.381
RANGE	*30*
Not selected: Following phonological context, adverbial type, clause type, narrative type, habitual vs. punctual, stativity, anteriority.	

In participial contexts, tense and aspect information are coded on the auxiliary. Therefore, neither creole nor English hypotheses predict semantic, syntactic, or discourse-based conditioning here, and indeed most of these factors do not play a role. The favouring effect of bare forms to signal remote past events, the opposite of creole predictions, does parallel findings for the main verb, however. This further suggests that something other than actual temporal distance is at work here.

The overall profile of participial marking reinforces the conclusions drawn from analysis of regular single verbs above and from earlier research. Bare forms are more likely when a mark

carries a low semantic load, and widespread phonological conditioning on such bare forms was already in place in AAE 150 years ago.

4.4.1.5 Summary of conditioning of bare regular verbs

To summarize, the majority of effects proposed to condition zero marked PTR verbs in English-derived varieties (historical, dialectal, creole) were found not to apply to regular verbs in this data set. The majority of favouring contexts associated with creoles (stativity, habituality, and *when*-clauses) were not selected as significant by the variable rule programme. The same was true for several contexts potentially related to either creoles or English (narrative and clause type), and the presumably universal effect of following phonological context.

By far the most significant contributing factor was preceding phonological context, in a direction that confirms diaspora findings and matches universal tendencies. This suggests that at least some constraints on speech are accurately transmitted to writing. Syllabicity of the –ed suffix was also significant, in a similar direction, while a finding counter to previous research on spoken AAE for doubly-marked verbs may be an artifact of the writing process.

Two constraints associated with creoles appeared to exert a significant effect, although not in the directions a creole origin hypothesis would predict. Remoteness conditioned bare forms in a direction opposite to creole predictions, while anteriority showed complicating factors not predicted for creoles.

4.4.2 Marking of irregular verbs

Irregular verbs, those whose past tense in English is marked through vowel change (e.g. *blow/blew*) or suppletion (e.g. *go/went*), should differ from regular verbs in showing no effect of phonological environment on the rate of bare forms. "Zero" marking in this case results from the use of a bare present tense form (e.g. *go*), rather than one marked for tense (e.g. *went*) or person/number (e.g. *goes*). A creole origins hypothesis would predict the same semantic and syntactic constraints on bare forms for irregular as for regular verbs; presumably, in the absence of (putatively more recent) phonological constraints, these creole constraints should be even more significant in this environment. Hypotheses invoking universal constraints on Early AAE bare forms would predict lower overall bare forms on irregular verbs, as the aforementioned phonological constraints would not contribute to bare forms in these contexts. An English origin hypothesis would predict an additional constraint in this environment, that of verb class, as described for dialectal and earlier English. We might also expect some lexical effect, involving

particular verbs with either a history of non-standard marking (English origin) or differing frequency of use (second dialect acquisition, potentially associated with a creole origin or language or dialect contact).

The left column of Table 4.13 displays the results of a variable rule analysis in this corpus of all operationalizable constraints proposed for irregular verbs– in other words, all constraints described in section 4.3 except phonological effects, which are only relevant to ed-marking on regular verbs.

Table 4.13. Linguistic factors selected as significant to the probability of bare forms of irregular past temporal reference verbs in Liberian letters.

All irregular PTR verbs		Irregular PTR verbs without *have* and *be*			
Corrected mean: 0.018 Total N: 1440		Corrected mean: 0.073 Total N: 825		%	N
		ADVERBIAL TYPE			
		After + reference event	**.851**	27	18
		Lexical time	**.714**	25	28
		When + reference event	**.640**	15	33
		No adverbial	.487	9	677
		While + reference event	.378	4	22
		Before + reference event	.334	5	20
		Deictic (from speech time)	.306	5	19
		RANGE	*55*		
VERB CLASS		**VERB CLASS**			
Class IV (e.g. *come*)	**.761**	Class IV (e.g. *come*)	**.759**	22	163
Class III (e.g. *go*)	**.529**	Class III (e.g. *go*)	.472	8	306
Class II (e.g. *think*)	.422	Class II (e.g. *think*)	.394	6	352
RANGE	*34*	*RANGE*	*37*		
STATIVITY		**STATIVITY**			
Non-statives	**.827**	Non-statives	**.557**	11	710
Statives	.179	Statives	.196	1	115
RANGE	*65*	*RANGE*	*36*		
ANTERIORITY		**ANTERIORITY**			
Co-occurring	**.771**	Co-occurring	**.744**	25	31
Anterior	**.629**	Anterior	**.645**	16	80
Posterior	**.575**	Posterior	**.527**	10	232
Ambiguous or unrelated	.441	Ambiguous or unrelated	.445	8	482
RANGE	*33*	*RANGE*	*30*		
Not selected: remoteness, adverbial type, clause type, narrative type, aspect.		Lexical items *be* and *have* excluded. Not selected: remoteness, clause type, narrative type, aspect.			

4.4.2.1 Stativity

Table 4.13 shows that PTR marking in these Liberian letters follows one pattern often described for creoles, at least at their basilectal stage: past-referring statives tend to be marked (Bickerton 1975). By comparison, in diaspora AAE, a stativity effect is described only for Samaná English, where it appears to result from a tendency for "lexical items [to] behave idiosyncratically, a tendency which, as expected, is particularly pronounced for strong verbs" (Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001:143).

Previous stativity effect findings (e.g. Tagliamonte & Poplack 1993 for Early AAE, Patrick 1991 for Jamaican Creole English) have often turned out to result from the distorting presence of one or two frequent and almost invariably marked verbs, especially *have* and *be*. These verbs tend to surface in their overtly marked forms in both creoles and dialectal/historical English. A second variable rule analysis of irregular PTR verbs in Liberian letters with these two verbs removed is presented in the right-hand column of table 4.13. Note that the effect of the stative/non-stative distinction is drastically reduced. This fact, combined with a strong verb class effect and the puzzling (in creole terms) findings that stativity is significant only in irregular verbs and that basilectal conditioning is found in a purportedly mesolect-derived variety, suggests that further lexical distinctions may be responsible for much, if not all, of the remaining stativity distinction – both here and, potentially, in creoles.[40] Section 4.4.4 below elaborates.

4.4.2.2 Anteriority and temporal specificity

As with regular verbs, we see in table 4.13 a statistically significant effect of temporal relationship. Here, however, the direction of effect is even less like creole predictions than that found for regular verbs. Verbs describing posterior events are zero-marked, as was the case with regular verbs, but so too are anterior and co-occurring events. The presence of this particular hierarchy of factors only in irregular verb contexts, where verb class also plays a role, suggests that unexpected lexical factors may be at play here, as they appear to be with respect to anterior contexts.

A stronger temporal relations effect is associated with the factor group of adverbial, which consists of two relatively distinct groups: those which describe temporal relations between events (e.g. *after, while, before*) and those which contrast a single point in time (*May 1850, when*

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[40] This is another situation in which variable rule analysis reveals interactions or complicating factors that are inaccessible to cruder statistical analyses (e.g. Bickerton 1975).

I arrived) with an extended period (*while*). As table 4.13 shows, both groups exert a significant effect, albeit only once the levelling effect of *have* and *be* are removed.

Temporal relations adverbials situate events with respect to other events. Posterior events are represented by *after* type adverbials, co-occurring events by *while* type adverbials, and anterior events by *before* types (anterior to another past event) and deictic types (anterior to speech time). The table indicates quite clearly that overtly adverbially marked posterior events favour bare forms, while overtly adverbially marked anterior and co-occurring events favour overt marking. This association of anteriority and marking parallels the direction described for creoles, but its association with overt expression of temporal relations runs counter to a creole effect. If anterior marking is optional in creoles depending on other disambiguating markers (Mufwene 1983:9), the adverbials described here should be associated with a weakened anteriority effect compared to verbs with none. Instead, we see an anteriority effect with disambiguating adverbials, and a counter-creole effect overall. This suggests that the overt adverbial expressions of temporal relations, rather than permitting bare forms, serve to remind the writers of the need for past marking.

The second adverbial contrast described for these irregular verbs is that of temporal specificity. Bare verbs are favoured by verbs linked to a specific point of time in the past, whether lexical (*May 1850*) or dependent on another event (*when I arrived*). Bare forms are disfavoured by verbs more loosely linked (e.g. *while* + verb), and (slightly) by verbs with no adverbials. This profile is more like a disambiguation effect, whereby overt and specific time of reference makes tense marking on the verb redundant. Similar effects are described for the comparison varieties, including creoles (Mufwene 1984) and English, even StdE, where temporal adverbials can (re)situate narrative and futurate presents.

4.4.2.3 Verb class

The Liberian letters match the findings of earlier work on diaspora varieties (Tagliamonte 1991, Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001), in which bare forms are strongly favoured by Class IV verbs, those in which the participle and present forms are the same (e.g. *come*). This also matches findings for English dialects (Christian et al. 1988). It is possible that the apparent prevalence of bare forms with this verb class is actually the result of a combination of true bare forms (i.e. bare present form for preterite) and preterite/participle levelling (i.e. participle form for preterite) – as the two forms are identical, both would result in "bare" forms. A greater

contribution is likely due to the fact that this verb class consists largely of two or three verbs (*come, run, become*). As discussed in section 4.1 above, these verbs have a long history of surfacing with a flattened paradigm in dialectal and earlier Englishes. A more detailed discussion of lexical conditioning is found in section 4.4.4 below.

4.4.2.4 Non-significant effects

Remoteness: Unlike the prediction associated with at least some forms of the creole origins hypothesis, temporal remoteness has no effect on bare forms in irregular Liberian PTR verbs.

Clause type: Bickerton's description of Guyanese Creole (Bickerton 1975) suggests that bare forms should be associated with *when*-clauses. The factor group of clause type was, however, not selected as significant in this analysis, matching findings for regular verbs (section 5.1.1.1.8 above) and overall findings from diaspora data (Tagliamonte 1991).

Discourse type: Historical present contexts described for both creole and non-creole varieties suggest that bare forms should be favoured in narrative complicating action clauses, as compared to narrative non-complicating action clauses or non-narratives. As with regular verbs in section 4.4.1 above, irregular verbs show no such tendency. Possibly the infrequency of extended narratives in these letters reduced the number of potential narrative contexts below a threshold required to achieve statistical significance.

Aspect: As for regular verbs, the creole origins prediction of increased bare forms in past habitual contexts was not borne out.

Quotatives: Unlike findings for spoken Early AAE corpora, the verbs *say* and *tell* did not tend to surface as bare forms in this corpus when they introduced direct speech. This corpus features few of the narrative contexts in which such an effect is likely to occur, and even fewer examples of quoted direct speech.

4.4.2.5 Summary of conditioning of bare irregular verbs

Variable rule analysis of irregular PTR verbs in these Liberian letters revealed statistically significant effects on bare forms associated with stativity, anteriority, adverbial type, and verb class. A stativity effect in the direction predicted for creoles in the basilect, but not the mesolect, was found, although this effect weakened substantially after the removal of two verbs that are nearly categorically marked. Anteriority effects, both general and linked to adverbials, did not match those associated with creoles. A verb class effect similar to that associated with

earlier and dialectal English was also found. All these effects may result from specific lexical influences, whereby certain contexts are likely to feature certain lexical items. This possibility is explored in greater detail in section 4.4.4 below.

Not selected as significant were most constraints operationalized from descriptions of creoles, associated with remoteness, clause type, or habituality. Constraints potentially associated with both creoles and non-creoles, discourse type and quotative context, were also not selected.

4.4.3 Other marking on single verbs

Marked and bare preterites take up by far the greatest part of PTR single verb morphology in these letters. No other form makes up more than one per cent of the overall PTR context. In this section I briefly discuss each of these rare forms, and mention constraints that appear to favour their use. As none of these forms is frequent enough to permit an analysis of the statistical significance of these constraints, any observations must be considered preliminary.

Participial preterites: The most frequent non-standard single verb form in these letters involves the use of a participial form in a preterite context, as in example (69). The Liberian OREAAC letters include thirty-seven such tokens, 1.5% of all single verb forms.

(69) I ***done*** it to you all (156/6/228)

Their occurrence is lexically constrained, with the majority occurring with the verbs *do* (17%), *see* (14%), *take* (16%), *write* (15%), and, to a lesser extent, *give* (6%). Participial preterite forms of the first three are widespread in English dialects, as discussed in section 4.1 above.

Compared to the overall rate of 1.5% of all single verb contexts, participial forms appear to be favoured by *since* (17%) and *before* (10%) type adverbials, *since* clauses (12%), and continuing contexts (21%), largely parallelling contexts favouring the use of the present perfect (see chapter 5). This suggests that at least some of these forms are perfects with deleted auxiliaries (*I have written> I written*), a suggestion reinforced by the frequency of participial forms of *written* (N=9) and *been* (N=9), both of which feature initial consonants homorganic with the final consonant of *have* and thus likely to favour deletion.

This finding sheds light on a discussion in Singler (1991a) concerning the origin of participial forms in present-day Liberian Settler English. Present-day LSE never reduces *have*, *had* or *has*; forms like *been*, *gone*, and *seen* simply occur without *have*. Singler (1991a) suggests

two possible explanations: the bare verbs may represent "imperfect acquisition of the standard forms" or "the contracted forms of *have* were present in an earlier stage of LSE but subsequently dropped out, a step that would have been consistent with a preference in LSE for vowel-final syllables" (257). The second hypothesis seems to be favoured by the present findings, especially as the presence of contracted *have* in earlier LSE is proven by the existence in this corpus of sentences like (70).

(70) their no doctor hear sence ***Iv been*** here (155/4/108)

The contribution of simple preterite-participle levelling to the presence of *I seen* types in this corpus is reinforced by the presence of preterite forms in participles, as in (71).

(71) the acclimating fever ***has*** not ***went*** so very hard with me (155/4/95)

As with participial preterites above, preterite participles in this corpus tend to be associated with particular lexical items, widespread in dialectal or earlier English (*have wrote, got, gave*).

S-marked preterites: Twenty-six single verbs in this corpus are marked with –s, as in the StdE third person singular present, exemplified by (72).

(72) after looking at the letter he ***says*** to me Brother Harris I will give you inployement (155/4/59)

All instances of s-marking are associated with the verb *say*, as in the English historical present *Says I* form, and with the frequent idiosyncratic use of *leaves* with remote past reference by a single but highly non-standard letter writer, George Jones of the Ross Estate in Mississippi.

Zero verbs: In eight cases in this corpus, as in (73), the (copula) verb is absent completely.

(73) I wel pleased with the country (155/5/203)

No linguistic conditioning appears to be involved, beyond the obvious fact that all are statives (the missing verb being *be*). Such forms are sometimes associated with mesolectal creoles, e.g. Bajan (Blake 1997). The infrequency of the form makes further analysis difficult.

Regularized preterites: The corpus includes two tokens of irregular verbs with regular preterite morphology, as in (74). Regularized forms are also found in the participle, as in (75).

(74) there was a good many persons in washington that ***speaked*** of coming out here (154/3/115)

(75) A Good many has Not ***Drawd*** thair Land (156/6/105)

These tokens are with verbs frequently regularized in English dialects. It is possible that some of the zero-marked verbs in this corpus (e.g. *teach*) are actually regularized verbs with phonologically-based suffix deletion, but the rarity of marked regularized verbs argues against such forms accounting for more than a few tokens.

***Non-standard marking*:** Four tokens surface with preterite morphology that does not fit into any of the above categories, as in example (76). Such non-standard forms are also found in the participle, as in (77).

(76) a grat meny of them or dade ase i ***Rit*** to you (155/5/94)[41]

(77) we have ***writ*** you So often (157/7/105)

The lexical items in question are attested in the historical and dialect literature.

Most infrequent single verb forms in this corpus appear to behave as such forms do in other varieties of English. A possible exception is the zero verb form, where the (copula) verb is missing entirely. However, all such forms are too infrequent to permit statistically significant analysis.

4.4.4 Lexical effects on single verb forms

Section 4.4.2 described a verb class effect on zero-marking of irregular verbs, and invoked previous work that suggested such an effect might be an epiphenomenon of the powerful

[41] This author's spelling elsewhere makes it clear that a /I/ is intended here (i.e. *writ*), rather than a diphthong (*write*).

effects of several specific lexical items. In this section I look at the percentages of bare forms associated with verbs that are frequent or demonstrate idiosyncratic behaviour. I then consider the possibility that the distribution of these lexical items might be responsible for some effects proposed in earlier research, beyond verb class.

4.4.4.1 Lexical effects and bare forms

Table 4.14 illustrates the rates of bare forms associated with specific lexical items. The table includes all the most frequent verbs in this data set, those for which specific claims have been made in earlier work, and those showing idiosyncratic or illustrative behaviour in this data set.

Table 4.14. Percent of bare PTR verbs in Liberian letters, by lexical item.

Lexical item	% bare	Overall N	% of data
Write	1	59	2
Leave	3	60	2
Frequently marked in spoken corpora:			
Have	0	173	7
Be	0.2	442	18
Go	1.9	51	2
Do	0	42	1
Frequently bare in spoken corpora:			
Come	33	154	6
Give	25	36	1
Say	6	48	1
Tell	15	45	1
Statives marked outside narrative contexts:			
Think	0	44	1
See	0	28	0.6
Hear	0	17	0.4
Find	0	10	0.3
Average strong verbs	**6**	**1440**	
Want	5	17	0.7
Land	14	14	0.6
Receive	11	131	5
Arrive	16	31	1
Mention	63	11	0.5
Preach	85	20	0.8
Die	2	50	2
Average weak verbs	**20**	**953**	
Singleton forms	**13**	**208**	**8**
TOTAL, all verbs	**10.1**	**2413**	**100**

Note first the extremely low frequency of bare forms with a handful of very common verbs, as discussed in section 4.4.2 above. These include *have, be, go,* and *do*. These verbs show the highest rates of marking in almost all studies of English and English-based varieties, including many creoles, although Bickerton (1975) reports relatively low rates of marking for *go*. Also rarely bare in this data set are the fairly frequent verbs *write* and *leave*. The widely-attested tendency for preterite *wrote* to generalize to participial contexts (*have wrote*) may contribute to its tendency to surface with preterite marking.

The frequent bare forms of Class IV verbs, those with identical preterite and participial forms, is clearly due to the behaviour of *come*, by far the most frequent verb in this class, and the most often bare frequent verb in the entire data set. This finding parallels diaspora findings (Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001). Preterite *come* is by far the most frequently-mentioned bare lexical item in the literature on historical and dialectal English; another frequently mentioned item is *give*, which also shows very high rates of bare forms in this corpus.

The *verba dicendi, say* and *tell*, do not show the high rates of bare forms described for diaspora AAE and other varieties. This is presumably largely due to the shortage in this corpus in quotative and narrative contexts, which previous studies have shown to favour the use of zero-marked forms with these two verbs.

Aside from *have* and *be*, only 115 tokens of stative irregular verbs occur in this data set, and a mere four lexical items (*hear, see, think, find*) account for 86% of them (N=99). As with the behaviour of *say* and *tell* described above, the apparent tendency to mark stative verbs seems to result from the scarcity of the narrative contexts that would favour bare forms of these four verbs. A similar interaction of stativity, lexical, and discourse context effects is noted for Samaná English by Tagliamonte (1991:405-409).

The syllabic –ed verb *want(ed)* does not show the high rates of bare forms described in some other studies; rather, it (and *landed*) match the widespread tendency for syllabic ed-marked verbs to retain their marking.

Phonological conditioning effects are presumably at play in the marking of some regular verbs. The frequently-occurring *arrive* and *receive* show intermediate effects, while *mention* and *preach* show the strong favouring effects of homorganic preceding nasals and affricates on ed-deletion. By contrast, the diphthong-final *die* is almost never bare.

Singleton forms, those verbs occurring only once in the corpus, match the overall profile

of bare forms found here. This further argues against the possibility that these writers are struggling with an unfamiliar system. If that were the case, it would be expected that these rarely-occurring forms would be unfamiliar and thus give the writers more trouble, tending to surface without standard preterite marking.

Most of the lexical and phonological/lexical effects described here match those of earlier studies on spoken Early AAE and historical and dialectal English, diverging only when genre differences intervene. In some cases, notably the relative behaviours of *come* and *go*, they may differ from creole findings; in other cases, creoles appear to show no lexical effects at all, or match those of other English-derived varieties.

4.4.4.2 Lexical effects and "creole" conditioning

Perhaps more startling is the relationship in this data set between these idiosyncratically-marked lexical items and two factor groups that have played central roles in the descriptions of English-based Creoles (and, by extension, the diagnostic constraints for a creole origins hypothesis for AAVE).

Table 4.15 shows the relationship between frequent or idiosyncratic lexical items and temporal relations (anterior, posterior) and clause type. The variable context is the entire PTR system. Anterior contexts are claimed to favour overt marking, while posterior contexts and temporal clauses are claimed to favour bare forms.

A handful of "stage-setting" verbs, such as *leave, come, commence, land*, and *arrive*, are far more likely to occur in anterior contexts than are most other verbs.[42] This is presumably a consequence of the sequential temporal organization of narratives, personal histories, and the like. More interesting is the strong association of particular lexical items with posterior contexts. Leaving aside *preach*, which is infrequent and idiosyncratic in this corpus,[43] we see a strong association of posterior contexts and the verbs *give, say, tell, commence, go* and *die*. The posterior context, linked in creoles to bare forms, is over-represented by verbs that surface with bare forms in many varieties of English (*give, say, tell*) or in creoles (*commence* for phonological reasons, *go* overall). In fact, the only strongly zero-selecting lexical item in varieties of English that does not surface disproportionately in posterior contexts here is *come*.

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[42] The frequency of *write* in anterior contexts in these letters is presumably an artifact of the slow exchange of letters: a previous letter is often the first event (chronologically) in a recounting of recent news.
[43] The corpus is heavy with preachers describing sequential events.

Table 4.15. Relationship in Liberian letters between lexical items and creole distinctions (Bickerton 1975).

Lexical item	Anterior %	Posterior %	Temporal clause	Overall N
Have	7	13	1	234
Be	7	13	3	697
Go	6	**33**	3	87
Do	4	18	1	100
Write	**14**	9	3	149
Leave	**18**	16	**7**	113
Come	**11**	16	**13**	179
Commence	**13**	**40**	1	22
Give	6	**38**	1	65
Say	2	**32**	1	76
Tell	3	**25**	3	51
Want	4	22	0	22
Land	**17**	13	**17**	23
Receive	4	18	1	259
Arrive	**10**	20	**14**	39
Mention	3	15	0	26
Preach	4	**91**	0	24
Die	3	**30**	1	60
Singleton forms	4	21	1	700
TOTAL with other verbs	7	20	2.5	4843

Come, however, shows a strong association with temporal clauses, another context claimed to favour zero-marking in creoles. In fact, most of the same "scene-setting" verbs are frequent in temporal clauses, but the overall frequency of *come* makes it by far the most influential verb in this context.

As with many such associations, the finding of a quantitative correlation leads to a type of 20-20 hindsight, whereby it becomes clear that many sample sentences from the (qualitative) literature happen to match the correlation. For example, a review of non-inverted WH-questions in the AAVE literature revealed a previously-ignored correlation with negated causatives (*Why I can't go?*), matching quantitative findings for Early AAE (Van Herk 2000). The same situation may obtain here – many sentences purporting to show unmarked pasts, temporal clauses, or disambiguation contexts in the literature turn out to feature *come* in *when*-clauses (78).

(78) ***English dialects:***

a. I went to Coventry and when I ***come*** back I stopped with Florrie (Hughes & Trudgill 1979:68)

b. And when he ***come*** out whaling, the captain tell him... (Zettersten 1969:84)
Early AAE:
c. I remember they asked my sister a day when she ***came*** out from America. (Tagliamonte 1991:351)
English-based Creoles:
d. When the dog ***come*** he raise right up. (Bickerton 1975:150)
e. wel wen yu ***kom*** you go get dis bai (Bickerton 1975:31)
f. Jien ben (de) a taak wen dem ***kom*** (Mufwene 1984:216)

The relationship between specific verbs and temporal relation and clauses that I have sketched out here is suggestive, but requires confirmation across genres and varieties. It would be especially instructive to trace the connection of lexicon to temporal relations and clauses in English-based Creoles; such a connection might help explain some of the contradictory findings in the literature with respect to these particular contexts.

4.5 Summary

The bare verb form in past contexts has probably received more attention in the literature than any other aspect of AAE verbal marking. Although superficial similarities in the form of the verb have been observed between AAE and English-based Creoles, quantitative studies have been remarkably consistent in finding phonological or lexical conditioning on the choice of form in AAE. It is significant that the studies that have described divergent or non-existent conditioning have involved reported, rather than primary, data (Dillard 1972, Schneider 1989), or have not been about AAE at all (Bickerton 1975).

The analyses I report in this chapter reveal that much of the reported conditioning on AAE PTR single verb forms has been in place for over 150 years, and can be found even in written data. Bare forms are more common in weak verbs than in strong verbs, and more common when marking carries less information. Bare forms of weak verbs are favoured by widespread, potentially universal constraints associated with the preceding phonological context and with posterior temporal reference. Bare forms of strong verbs are favoured by overt relative adverbial marking associated with posterior temporal reference, and by verb class. These findings match those for spoken varieties of AAE, early and contemporary, and are associated with universal or English-based effects. Effects associated with creoles were either not selected as significant, or operated in a direction inconsistent with creole predictions.

I have linked differences between these and earlier findings to differences in the

requirements of letter writing and spoken interviews (aspect, discourse type, following phonological context). Finally, I have suggested that other effects, both in these letters and in other corpora, appear to derive from the tendency for certain lexical items to surface in particular lexical contexts (statives, posteriors, temporal clauses), especially with strong verbs. I have suggested that this finding of a lexical effect apparently underlying what have in the past been considered general linguistic processes should be tested in other (spoken) varieties, especially creoles.

Chapter 5: Multiple verb constructions

5.1 Multiple verb constructions in AAVE and comparison varieties

Preverbal tense/mood/aspect (TMA) markers are often considered a distinguishing characteristic of creoles, and preverbal TMA markers in English appear to have peaked in number during the period associated with the formation of creoles, colonial English, and AAE (Brinton 1988). Early AAE naturally features many such markers, and all hypotheses associated with its origin include reference to them. Examining the factors conditioning their use permits the testing of these hypotheses.

5.1.1 Multiple verb constructions in AAVE

Compared to the attention fostered on the behaviour of the preterite in non-standard varieties, multiple verb constructions are considerably less studied. This is particularly true of the present perfect form, *have* + V. Other preverbal markers, such as *bin* or *done*, have been the focus of more study in AAVE, despite their relative rarity. In AAVE, as in most varieties of English, a wide range of preverbal markers is associated with an equally wide range of functions, although each of these forms occurs infrequently in natural speech.

5.1.1.1 Perfects

The preverbal auxiliary *had*, as in (79), is usually described as a productive part of the AAVE PTR system, used in much the same way as it is in the StdE past perfect (Labov et al. 1968), and perhaps even more common in narratives in AAVE than in StdE (Fasold & Wolfram 1975:65).

(79) i axed her who she gave thanks to she ***had beaten*** sassywood (155/5/47.5)

Several authors (Rickford 1977, Winford 1992) have at one point or another suggested that AAVE *had* is a replacement for or adaptation of an earlier creole-like anterior marker (*bin* in the basilect, *did* in the mesolect), as appears to be the case for mesolectal Barbadian creole (Blake 1997). More recently, an apparently innovative use of *had* in contexts that in StdE require the preterite has been described for AAVE (Cukor-Avila & Bailey 1995, Rickford & Theberge-Rafal 1996). This use is described as of recent origin, however, and so cannot speak to the origins debate.

In contrast to the past perfect, the present perfect, as in (80), has been assumed to be "marginal" in AAVE, based on its rarity and the apparently unconstrained variability between preterite and participial forms (Labov et al. 1968:254).

(80) I ***hav travell*** Back in this Country (155/4/59)

In fact, it has been claimed that AAVE has "no underlying *have*" (Loflin 1970), or that the present perfect is "not part of Negro dialect" (Fasold & Wolfram 1975). As Tagliamonte reminds us, however, these claims have not been quantitatively verified, "so it is not clear what the actual distribution of these forms would be in contexts *where they would have been expected to occur*" (Tagliamonte 1991:131, emphasis added).

5.1.1.2 Other multiple verb constructions

Labov et al. (1968:265) and Fasold & Wolfram (1975:66) describe *done*, as in example (81), as a type of completive preverbal marker.

(81) I ***done told*** you on that. (Labov et al. 1968:265)

Labov et al. (1968) discuss its decline in use in northern AAVE, and its use as an intensifier or emphatic form. Edwards (1991), based largely on grammaticality judgements, describes differences between AAVE *done* and that of English-based Creoles: AAVE *done* is less stressed, and less acceptable in stative contexts. He attributes this difference to grammaticization associated with decreolization. Holm (1991) and Singler (1991a) point out another distinctive characteristic of AAVE *done*: it is generally followed by an inflected verb, unlike creole *done*.

The preverbal marker *bin* (82,83), despite its overall rarity, is frequently mentioned in descriptions of AAVE (Rickford 1975, Winford 1992). Presumably it is salient due to its difference from StdE and superficial similarity to widely-discussed creole anterior forms (Bickerton 1975).

(82) I ***bin*** drinkin water all morning. (Winford 1992:344)

(83) a. I ***BIN*** know it.

'I've known it for a long time.'

b. They ***BIN*** ended that war.

'They ended that war a long time ago.' (Rickford 1975:167, 178)

The unstressed form (82), which behaves like "a continuative perfect or perfect of persistent situation" (Winford 1992: 344), probably derives from the StdE *have been* form with the *have* deleted (Schneider 1982, Winford 1992). The stressed form, on the other hand, differs from both StdE and creoles by preceding stative verbs (83a), and past-inflected non-statives (83b) and describing a state that has persisted for a long time, or an action "completed in the more or less distant past" (Winford 1992:345). Winford (1992) suggests that AAVE has combined the remote sense of creole anterior *bin* and the continuative meaning of StdE *(have) been*. As with *done*, stressed BIN is seen as being in decline in AAVE (Rickford 1977).

The characteristics of the AAVE PTR system are usually described negatively – that is, the supposedly characteristic features of AAVE are those (and solely those) that are claimed to be non-existent in prescriptive StdE, such as the preverbal markers *done* and stressed BIN. Other forms, such as unstressed *bin* + V, *had* + V, and *was* V-*ing*, appear to behave much as they do in StdE; the present perfect form, *have* + V, appears to be rare in corpora of spoken AAVE.

5.1.2 Creole multiple verbs

Creoles are generally described as marking tense, mood, and aspect distinctions with preverbal markers, rather than verbal inflections (Bickerton 1980), and so it comes as no surprise that the preverbal markers of English-based creoles have been seen as a potential source of AAVE marking, preverbal or morphological.

5.1.2.1 Anteriority

The central relevant distinction is that between anterior and non-anterior contexts, described in section 4.1.2 above, involving the anterior preverbal marker *bin*. Bickerton (1975) describes the contexts favouring or requiring the use of *bin* in basilectal Guyanese Creole: past statives, past-before-past non-statives, remote pasts, and non-temporal clauses.

Mesolectal creoles are presumed to replace *bin* with marking more similar to that of StdE in form, if not in meaning (Bickerton 1975, Winford 1992, Blake 1997). This marking includes forms resembling the StdE past (as discussed in chapter 4), and the preverbal markers *did* and *had*, as in (84).

(84) a. he ***did Leaves*** the money for us (157/7/133.2)

b. after they ***had dun*** all they could (157/7/19)

Blake (1997, 2000) interprets the greater overall frequency of these preverbal markers in the speech of her Black informants compared to her white Barbadian informants as evidence that the markers reflect reflexes of an earlier creole form. However, her tokens are too few to permit a quantitative analysis that links them specifically with creole anterior contexts. McWhorter (2001) argues that unstressed preverbal *did* is so moribund in English that its adoption by Black Barbadians must have occurred centuries ago, so that its use cannot reflect relexification of a creole anterior marker. Further, as Tagliamonte (1997) points out, the English past perfect (*had*) and the creole anterior form occur in virtually indistinguishable contexts, drastically reducing the potential of *had* to serve as a creole diagnostic.

5.1.2.2 Present perfects and completives

Given the frequent references to creole tense-aspect systems as based on anteriority distinctions, it is strange to note the absence in descriptions of creoles of the English present perfect (*I have gone*), described as a near-prototypical anterior form by Dahl (1985, cited in Bybee et al.1994:61).[44] A more common form is (basilectal) *done* V, described as a perfect (Edwards 1991) or completive (Winford 1992, Bickerton 1975) form. Winford describes *done* as widespread, even into the mesolect, while Bickerton (1975:122) says "shortly after the mid-mesolect, it vanishes altogether."[45] Present perfect forms begin to surface at about the same level, although even near-acrolectal speakers do not necessarily have full control of them (Bickerton 1975:122-130).

For our purposes, there seem to be no relevant descriptions of the linguistic conditioning of the present perfect in the creole literature, in that the form is claimed to be near-non-existent. The sole relevant claim is probably Bickerton's, who describes the present perfect as a form so alien to creoles that speakers cannot control the (English) constraints on its use. Distinctions are usually drawn, however, between preverbal *done* in AAVE and creoles: in AAVE the main verb

[44] The reference point for the present perfect is speech time, rather than a relative reference time, so the parallel is not exact.

[45] As was the case with morphological subtype distinctions, described in Chapter 4, this appears to be a case where Winford's mesolect is more acrolectal than Bickerton's.

is inflected, while in creoles it is not (Holm 1991:238); in AAVE *done* is generally restricted to non-statives, while in creoles it is not (Edwards 1991:240, 248).

5.1.2.3 Imperfects: habituals and progressives

Bickerton (1975:112) and Winford (1992:331) agree in describing a single prefix *a-* for basilectal Guyanese creole, covering both habitual and progressive (continuous) meaning. Bickerton calls the form non-punctual, while Winford follows more mainstream linguistic terminology and prefers the term imperfect, which contrasts well with his description of the zero-marked form as perfective. Imperfective forms in many languages (e.g. French, Latin) are used to express both habitual and progressive meanings.

In the mesolect, this single imperfective function is split in two, with preverbal markers (*duz, useto, would*) for the habitual and the *–ing* suffix serving as a progressive marker (Bickerton 1972:112, Winford 1992:331). This split appears to occur very early in the decrolization process, with insertion of the past copula *was* occurring soon after, so that we are left in this respect with a system whose forms and functions, especially in PTR contexts, differ little from that of StdE. This, naturally, reduces the diagnosticity of the form.

5.1.2.4 Summary of proposed creole effects

As observed in Poplack & Tagliamonte (2001), a surprisingly large number of proposed distinguishing features of creoles turn out to be either difficult (if not impossible) to operationalize, or non-diagnostic, in the sense that they are not limited to creoles. Similarities in the behaviour of English and creoles with respect to progressives and past perfects, for example, render these forms non-diagnostic.

There are, however, a range of distinctions between creoles and StdE that have been claimed by one or more authors as diagnostic to system membership, including (basilectal) stativity, remoteness, and anteriority, and these are operationalized and tested in the present study.

5.1.3 English dialect multiple verbs

Many of the forms described for English-based creoles turn out to be operative in contemporary English dialects, as well.

5.1.3.1 Perfects and completives

The dialect literature seems to have little to say on the subject of perfect forms such as *have* Ven and *had* Ven, beyond variability in the participle (e.g. *have went*, described in chapter

4). The lack of salience of these forms suggests that they are not perceived as distinguishing dialects from StdE. Little attention appears to have been focussed on the linguistic constraints on the use of the forms in dialects, however, and this is clearly an area in which further research would be useful. The English dialect literature does refer to one construction not found in the contemporary prescriptive standard: the use of the *be* auxiliary where StdE would use *have*, as in example (85).

(85) We ***are become*** satisfied with Liberia now
(158/9/71)

These *be* perfects are attested for Scottish, Leicesterhire, Devon, and Irish English (Edwards & Weltens 1985:112), as well as for (white) Alabama English (Feagin 1979:127); in Irish English, they are specifically linked to verbs of motion.

The preverbal completive *done*, as in example (86), is described for earlier English (see section 5.1.4 below), but most attestations in contemporary dialect English are from the U.S. south. Feagin (1979:147) describes unsuccessful attempts to track attestations of the form in dialects of English not potentially influenced by creoles or AAE, while Tagliamonte (1991:93) finds it "also attested in some parts of Newfoundland (Williams 1975:272)."

(86) ***Alabama English:***
a. She told me not to mess around, but I ***done*** let the deal go down.
(Williams 1947)
Tristan da Cunha English:
b. I ***done*** went to the doctor. (Zettersten 1969:85-86)

The form is also reported for West Virginia (Hackenburg 1973, Wolfram & Christian 1975), the Ozarks/Arkansas (Randolph 1927), and Tristan da Cunha (Zettersten 1969). Unlike creoles, where *done* tends to occur alone or with *bin*, these dialect varieties frequently use the auxiliaries *have* or *be* with the form. Christian et al. (1988) describe the form as being in decline, with younger speakers using it infrequently.

5.1.3.2 Other multiple verb forms

Preverbal *been*, like *done*, seems to occur in Newfoundland English (Noseworthy 1972) and (infrequently) in southern white English (Alabama English, Feagin 1979).

(87) a. I ***been*** drove lots of nails. (Noseworthy 1972:22)
b. I ***been*** knowin' your grandaddy for forty years. (Feagin 1979:255)

Noseworthy (1972) and Feagin (1979) both describe the form as a type of remote perfect, describing events or situations occurring or beginning in the distant past with continuing relevance. Feagin (1979) feels the form is similar to AAVE stressed BIN; however, many of her examples contravene the rules of AAVE BIN use.

Ihalainen (1976) describes the use of preverbal non-emphatic *did*, as in (88), in present-day dialect use in southwestern England (East Somerset).

(88) A lot of villagers ***did rent*** this land (Ihalainen 1976:618)

The form marks past habitual events, in the same way that *used to* or *would* do in both East Somerset and StdE. Unlike those two forms, however, preverbal *did* is restricted to generic reference. In this sense, it parallels the use of present-tense periphrastic *does* in the dialects of southwestern England and in varieties influenced by them, such as the creoles of the eastern Caribbean (Van Herk in press).

5.1.3.3. Summary of English dialect forms

As was the case with single verbs (Chapter 4), an investigation of English dialects extends the number of forms associated with English. In this case, they include *be* perfects, as well as preverbal *did*, *done*, and *been*, all features often assocated with English-based creoles.

5.1.4 Multiple verbs in earlier and contemporary English

Throughout its history, English has made use of preverbal markers to indicate various aspectual distinctions. Although most of these preverbal forms can trace their origins to the Middle English period, it is in Early Modern English that their use accelerates. Some, such as the (present and past) perfect and continuous forms, have become firmly entrenched in StdE; others, notably unstressed periphrastic *do/did*, are defunct today but were widespread in earlier English

(Ellegard 1953).

5.1.4.1 Perfects and completives

Of all English multiple verb forms, the perfect (especially the present perfect) has been perhaps the most successful, rising over the centuries to express an ever-larger share of the PTR context.[46]

Elsness (1997) traces the origins of the perfect construction in English back to the earliest written records. At first, the auxiliaries *have* and *be* retained much of the value of their main-verb instantiation, so that examples (89) and (90) meant something like "He possessed his book in a state of learnedness" and "they existed as newly-arrived help" respectively.

(89) tha (he) thas boc ***haefde geleornode***
'when (he) that book had, learned'

(90) Hie ***waeron cumen*** Leonithan to fultome
'they were come to-Leonitha as help'

As existing states imply previous action (as we saw with creoles), structures like *haefde geleornode* slowly became more verb-like, linking the present to the past (Curme 1977:358). Some sense of their original meanings were retained in that *have*-type forms were used with transitive actions, while *be*-type forms were associated with mutative verbs, i.e. those indicating a change of state or location. As *have* and *be* came to be interpreted as auxiliary verbs, the word order changed: *he has the book learned* became *he has learned the book* (Elsness 1997:240). The word order thus conforms to Behaghel's Law, whereby auxiliary verbs are attracted to the main verb in order to form one continuous verbal constituent (Hock 1991:332, cited in Elsness 1997:240). By the Middle English period, *have* ousts *be* in all transitive verbs, perhaps to avoid confusion with passives. The *be* auxiliary does continue with mutative (change of state) verbs, especially *come, arrive, run,* and *go* (Jespersen 1949), until its use declines sharply after about 1830 (Gorlach 1999, Ryden & Brorstrom 1987).[47]

Elsness (1997:237-348) analyzes a collection of written documents to show the rise in the proportion of the PTR system taken up by present perfects, at the expense of the preterite, from

[46] The expansion of forms linking the past to present results (such as the perfect) to the full past temporal reference context is described as a common grammaticization path by Bybee et al (1994). In this respect, the English present perfect has been a sluggard compared to forms like the passé composé in French.

[47] Van Herk (1999b) compared African American letters from the 1790s and the 1840s/1850s and found a similar decline.

Old English to c. 1800. Throughout this long period, however, both the preterite and present perfect continue to occur in many contexts that require the other in the contemporary prescriptive standard. These include present perfects used with specific past time indicators like *in tyme past* or *in my youth*, and preterites in sentences like *I did not see you since you sent me hence* (Shakespeare, Comedy of Errors II, ii, 15, cited in Visser 1973:754). In fact, Visser (1973:751-754) claims that the preterite and perfect were virtually interchangeable in all contexts. The preterite is used through Middle and Early Modern English to translate Latin perfect forms, and early grammarians argue over the fit of English forms to Latin perfect and imperfect forms.

In present-day English, debate rages over the supposed reversal in the growth of the perfect (see e.g. Elsness 1997, Tagliamonte 1997). Elsness (1997) claims that quantitative analysis of written data over the past two centuries shows a decline in the overall portion of the PTR context taken up by present perfects, at least in American English (Elsness 1997:340). A genre-by-genre examination of the American data analyzed by Elsness reveals a decline only in fictive direct speech, perhaps reflecting a change in fiction writing styles over the past 200 years. The major contribution to the perfect's reported decline results from an inappropriate comparison: the contemporary data used by Elsness contains no letters, the genre that traditionally uses the most present perfects. In the period and genre closest to that of the OREAAC letters, American letters 1750-1800, the present perfect takes up 27.7% of all PTR contexts (Elsness 1997:274), one of the highest rates of present perfect use reported for any genre or period.

More important for comparative purposes, Elsness (1997) investigates a range of linguistic factors conditioning the use of the present perfect in various genres of contemporary English. This results in findings that are far more amenable to testing in a variationist framework than are earlier characterizations of the present perfect (e.g. Pickbourn 1789, Jespersen 1933, Chomsky 1970, Comrie 1976). Those non-quantitative analyses propose different types of present perfects, such as universal, existential, stative/resultative, and "hot-news" (McCawley 1971). They are not generally linked to linguistic anchors, but rather to a context based on speaker intent or current relevance of the action described: "the interpretation of sentences is based on what the speaker and addressee take to be shared knowledge" (McCawley 1981).

The factors that can be operationalized from Elsness (1997) are not associated with any of these interpretations of the underlying meaning of the perfect; rather, they are simple

correlations between empirically determined linguistic factors and the present perfect form. These factors include temporal location, negation, new versus given information, adverbial type, and clause type.

Temporal location: In a context described as "of crucial importance for the choice between the present perfect and the preterite" (Elsness 1997:128), temporal location not wholly in the past (i.e. continuing up to speech time or vague), the present perfect occupies 78-88% of all PTR contexts, versus 4-6% for the preterite. This distribution has changed little since 1750 or earlier (287). It is unclear how many such contexts can be empirically determined, however, in the absence of adverbials or other disambiguating information. In a sentence like *I have visited Paris*, it appears that the present perfect form itself is responsible for the attribution of continuing time. Temporal location can be operationalizd, however, in terms of temporal recency, with more recent events favouring the use of the present perfect.

Negation: Elsness (1997:201) finds that negative clauses favour the use of the present perfect over affirmative clauses, by a factor of nearly two to one (table 5.1). Elsness attributes some of this distinction to the need for auxiliary support in *not*-type negation, which would favour the introduction of the *have/had* auxiliary. However, the favouring effect of what he calls "semi-negatives," forms like *never* or postposed negation (*we have none*), shows that it is the effect of negation overall that is the major factor here. Elsness links this to the diffuse nature of negation: "in a past-oriented negative construction the reference can be expected more often to be non-specific... precisely the kind of temporal reference typically associated with the present perfect" (202).

Table 5.1. Distribution of present perfects in Standard English by negation type.

	Present perfects	Preterites	% Perfects
Affirmative	676	3116	17.8
Not negation, e.g. *haven't, didn't*	93	164	**36.2**
Other negation, e.g. *never, I have none*	31	68	**31.3**
Total	800	3348	19.3

Adapted from Elsness (1997:201). Percentages recalculated horizontally to allow comparison across contexts.

New vs. given information: Elsness (1997: 126) distinguishes between given versus new time, based on whether events occur in a series or are the sole event in a particular time frame. An overlap of this category with discourse type renders it difficult to operationalize. Van Herk

(1999a) analyzed this in terms of new vs. given information, based on object type (pronoun = given, full NP = new). In both cases, new information is predicted to favour the use of the present perfect.

Adverbial type: As illustrated by table 5.2, based on Elsness (1997:111-123), present perfects are strongly favoured by frequency adverbials (e.g. *never, for an hour*) and deictic adverbials, those linked to the present (e.g. *yesterday*). Present perfects are strongly disfavoured by lexical adverbials, such as *June 20th* or *in 1850*. Past perfects are favoured by frequency adverbials, like present perfects, but are also strongly favoured by relative adverbials like *then* or *before/after that*. This highlights the role of the past perfect as a relative tense in English, identical to the described behaviour of the creole anterior form. Past perfects are disfavoured by deictic adverbials, a natural result of relative tense forms being connected to other past events, rather than to speech time.

Table 5.2. Distribution of present perfect, preterite, and past perfect forms in contemporary Standard English (Elsness 1997) by adverbial type.

	Present perfect		Preterite	Past Perfect	
	N	% vs. preterite	N	N	% vs. preterite
Unspecified	793	18.5	3490	192	5.2
Deictic, e.g. *yesterday*	109	**31.5**	237	7	2.8
Relative, e.g. *then*	90	23.0	301	29	**8.7**
Lexical, e.g. *in 1850*	17	7.6	207	7	3.2
Frequency, e.g. *never*	70	**43.5**	91	12	**11.7**
Total	1160	20.2	4590	265	5.5

Adapted from Elsness (1997:113). Percentages recalculated horizontally based on distribution of each perfect form vs. preterites.

Clause type: Present perfects are favoured by subordinate clauses, while main clauses slightly favour preterite forms. One clear exception to this tendency is the behaviour of clauses introduced by *when*, which are almost entirely made up of preterite forms (89.4% preterite, 2.1% present perfect, vs. 65.8% preterite and 16.2% present perfect overall) (Elsness 1997:165).

All these strong conditioning factors suggest that the English present perfect is not in decline, but rather is becoming more concentrated in the contexts permitting or requiring its use. Unfortunately Elsness considers each factor in isolation, so that it is unclear which conditioning factors take precedence, or how much interaction occurs between factors.

The past perfect has developed in a similar manner to the present perfect, presumably by analogy with that form, albeit at a slower rate. In Middle English, the past participle begins to occupy a larger portion of past anterior contexts (Visser 1973:757, Jespersen 1949). The preterite continues to be found frequently in these contexts: "The preterite occurs especially frequently after the conjunction *after* ('After they cloas'd in earnest, they parted very fairely in jest'), apparently because the intrinsic meaning of this conjunction renders it superfluous once more to point out the time-relations between the two acts" (Visser 1973:759). The reduced frequency of the perfect form with temporally disambiguating conjunctions, where it would be redundant to mark the verb for anteriority (Diver 1963, Jespersen 1949), is extremely similar to claims made about the behaviour of creole anterior forms (Mufwene 1984), as indeed is the relative temporal reference of the English past perfect generally.

The completive form *done* was widespread during the Middle English period (Visser 1973:2210), although after the fifteenth century its use appears to have been restricted to northern dialect areas (Williams 1975:273). Visser (1973:2209) describes the form as "having fallen into disuse (or gone to America) in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries." Although the main verb surfaced with inflection (*hadde do(ne)* ***sherchyd***), as in contemporary AAVE, and without (*hes done* ***invent***), as in contemporary creoles, the earlier English form apparently differed from both in requiring the auxiliary *have/had*. In speech, this distinction would be erased through the use of reduced auxiliaries (*he'd done told you = he done told you*).

5.1.4.2 Past continuous forms

The past continuous *was* V-*ing* form, as in (91), parallels the present continuous (92) in that its widespread use is relatively recent, although similar forms (*he is huntende, he is on hunting*) have existed since at least the beginning of the Middle English period (Traugott 1972:143).[48]

(91) you ***was going*** to See a Bout it (155/4/8)

(92) outhers ***are inquiring*** and asking wat thay must do to Be Saved (155/4/17)

The rise in use of the form is sometimes associated with stylistic features of narrative

[48] Competing explanations for the rise of the continuous do not affect the eventual form chosen, and will not be discussed further here.

(Visser 1973:1997). The grammarians of the OGREVE generally assign an imperfect meaning to *was* V-*ing*, as an activity underway when another occurs. The recent growth in use of the form means that the earlier English that would have provided a linguistic model for the first African Americans would have featured greater use of the preterite in what are now continuous contexts.

The perfect continuous form *have been* V-*ing*, little discussed in the literature, combines the present relevance or recency functions ascribed to the present perfect with the continuous nature of the *was* V-*ing* form. The result is a sort of emphatic perfect (93), emphasizing the recency of the action, which Winford (1992) suggests merged with creole anterior *bin* to produce the stressed BIN of contemporary AAVE. However, Gorlach (1999) describes a 19th-century StdE use of this form, without ing-marking on the following verb (94), more similar to AAVE and creole forms.[49]

(93) I have ***been*** trying to Preach ever sence I been here (155/5/122)

(94) I have ***been*** returned since Saturday

(Jane Austen 1816, cited in Gorlach 1999:81)

The form and functions of these verb types, and of continuous forms generally, are sufficiently similar in English and in other comparison varieties to negate their use as diagnostics of system membership.

5.1.4.3 Other multiple verb forms

The preverbal forms *used to* and *would* both have a long history of use in English to represent habitual or frequently-occurring (iterative) events, as illustrated by examples (95)-(97).

(95) we are the Ross people that ***use to*** live in Jeferson county (157/7/49a)

(96) they delighted in being advisd and ***would*** do anything that was told to them (156/6/171)

(97) *Amavissem, amavero.* Wee ***use to*** expresse by a *Syntaxe* (Jonson 1640:61)

Historical work, and an examination of the OGREVE, suggests that *used to* is the earlier form to be strongly associated with habituality. Originally, it could even occur in the present tense, as in example (97). *Would* as a specifically habitual form is of later date, and as late as 1761 was claimed by grammarians to retain some of its original lexical meaning of volition

(White 1761:211-212). It continues to be seen as associated with personal interest, and restricted to use with actions (Visser 1973:1414, 1710). Despite the strong association of both *used to* and *would* with habitual contexts, their use is not required: Visser (1973:1710) points out that habituality is "often implicit in a simple preterite form."

Unstressed preverbal *do/did* was a widespread tense marker in earlier English, unlike its contemporary restriction to *do*-support in questions and negation and to emphatic contexts. Periphrastic *do* and *did* were most frequent in the late Middle and Early Modern English period, used across dialects and in all types of writing (Ellegard 1953). In virtually all early grammars, the periphrastic form (*I did* love) is listed side by side with the simple preterite (*I loved*) as a way of expressing past tense, through the 1600s and most of the 1700s. In fact, Mason (1633) describes periphrastic *did* as the only way to form the past tense (although he lists plain preterites elsewhere). Visser (1973:1502) describes the choice between periphrasis and preterite as "wholly a subjective matter."[50]

5.1.4.4 Summary of early and contemporary English multiple verbs

Both earlier and contemporary English display a far wider range of variable forms than is generally acknowledged. In particular, preterite forms (with overt or zero morphology) have been acceptable in virtually all contexts that supposedly "require" other marked forms in English (present perfect, past perfect, past continuous, *used to, would, was V-ing, have been* V-*ing*). More importantly, descriptions of earlier and contemporary English offer hints as to the linguistic factors conditioning the choices between these variant forms. Many of these factors have been little discussed with respect to the AAVE origins debate, in particular those associated with the present perfect (if only because too few present perfect tokens have surfaced in any AAE data set to permit statistically significant analysis).

[49] This form seems to occur with verbs that formerly formed their perfects with *be;* perhaps *have been* is an attempt to emphasize both the past action and the resulting state.

[50] An aspect of the early grammatical treatment of periphrastic *did* that has apparently not caught the attention of historians of English is its association through the seventeenth and eighteenth century with the imperfect tense (Lane 1695:47, English Accidence 1742:68, Hume 1617:31, Ussher 1785: 31). In other words, *I did write* was claimed to perform the same roles as *I was writing* and (to a lesser extent) *I used to write* do today. As these contexts are identical to those described for *did* + V forms in mesolectal English-based Creoles, their apparent frequency in earlier English could have significant repercussions for theories of creole genesis and decreolization. At the very least, they call into question the creole diagnosticity of anterior or habitual *did.*

5.1.5 Early AAE multiple verbs

Despite the tendency of AAE scholars to focus on preterite marking, a full range of Early AAE preverbal PTR forms have received scholarly attention. However, the relative infrequency of these forms in other Early AAE corpora has limited the depth (or statistical significance) of the analyses possible for most features. Tagliamonte (1991) tends to collapse StdE favouring factors for each form into a single "favouring context"; Schneider (1989) gives overall frequencies of each form and compares each to its (dialectal or Standard) English equivalent, but he does not investigate factors conditioning the choice of the forms.

5.1.5.1 Perfects and completives

Both Tagliamonte (1991) and Schneider (1989) describe *had* + V(en) forms in Early AAE, behaving like past anteriors, as they do in StdE (as well as in mesolectal English-based creoles). Tagliamonte (1991:275) finds the form occurring almost entirely in contexts that permit or require the past perfect in StdE. Overall, the form is relatively infrequent (about 1.5% of all PTR contexts in Tagliamonte 1991, 117 tokens in Schneider 1989), but its use by about half of all the informants in Schneider (1989:117) suggests that it is well-established, with its infrequency due to the infrequency of contexts requiring its use.

Surprisingly, given its reported marginal nature in contemporary AAVE, the present perfect appears to occur with some frequency in Early AAE. It is nearly as frequent (109 tokens) as the past perfect in the Ex-Slave Narratives, although used by fewer informants (Schneider 1989:114); it is also nearly as frequent (1.1%) as the past perfect in Samaná English, and *more* frequent in the Ex-Slave Recordings (Tagliamonte 1991:249). Schneider lists a few examples of perfects of experience in which he claims English rules "seem to be somewhat extended" in Early AAE (Schneider 1989:116), but it is not clear how they are non-English (*I has voted two times, I've worked many a day*). Aside from that, both authors describe present perfects as used in an English-like way, with Tagliamonte (1991:275) demonstrating that they occur almost entirely in contexts requiring or permitting their use in StdE. Tagliamonte (1997:46) suggests that the rarity of the present perfect among all past references in any particular corpus "may be entirely due to the fact that its meaning was also quite rare." This seems to be the case for all preverbal forms.

Unlike perfects, attestations of preverbal *done* vary greatly across Early AAE data sets. In the Ex-Slave Recordings (Tagliamonte 1991:250, Schneider 1989:127) and Samaná English

(Tagliamonte 1991:250), the form is extremely rare; in the Ex-Slave Narratives, the form is about as common (102 tokens, 45 informants) as *have* and *had* (Schneider 1989:121). This discrepancy may result from a tendency for the transcribers of the Narratives to over-report stigmatized features. The *done* + V(*en*) forms in the narratives, as in other *done*-using varieties, act as completive or emphatic markers; unlike creoles, Early AAE *done* usually precedes a verb that is inflected (ESR, Holm 1991:238, ESN, Schneider 1989:121) or uninflected due to phonological reduction (Schneider 1989:121).

5.1.5.2 Past progressives

The behaviour of the past progressive in Early AAE (Tagliamonte 1991, Schneider 1989) is best summed up by Schneider (1989:143): "for all informants, and in all tenses, the use of the progressive in EBE is identical with its use in standard English. The corpus does not contain any instances of deviant rule applications, neither with respect to a progressive form in use where it would not be expected, nor vice versa."

5.1.5.3 Other multiple verb forms

Two forms of preverbal *bin* are attested in Early AAE corpora. The first precedes V-*ing* or passive forms, and is infrequent (Tagliamonte 1991:249, Schneider 1989:118-119) but found across a wide geographical area, and "clearly can be identified as surface formal variants of standard structures" (Schneider 1989:119). The other is a creole-like *bin* V form (*he been stay in de swamp*) (Holm 1991:235-6, Schneider 1989:119-120, Oomen 1985), restricted to coastal South Carolina and the Charleston area that "seems to be an early stage of Gullah and not continental EBE" (Schneider 1989:121).

Habitual contexts are frequent in diaspora and ex-slave corpora, which are largely built on interviews with elderly informants describing times long past. Many are expressed through use of the (marked or unmarked) preterite, as in English; others feature an overt habitual marker, usually *used to* or *would*, and occasionally *did*.[51] The Ex-Slave Recordings massively prefer *would* (Tagliamonte 1991:269, Singler 1991b:256-7); Samaná English prefers *used to*, with some *would* and *did* (Tagliamonte 1991:269); Liberian Settler English appears to prefer (usually bare) single verb forms. Tagliamonte (1991:270-1) demonstrates that Early AAE *used to* and *would* each congregate, in each variety studied, in the contexts that would require or prefer their use in StdE. The preference for *would* in the Ex-Slave Recordings, then, presumably results from the

natural tendency for narratives of slavery times to involve descriptions of habitual actions with connotations of personal perspective – a context for *would* in English (Jespersen 1964, 1933).

5.1.5.4 Summary of Early AAE multiple verb forms

A range of multiple verb forms are described in the literature on Early AAE, including the preverbal markers *have, had, (had) done, used to, would, bin, did,* and *was;* the relative infrequency of any one of these forms may result from the infrequency of contexts requiring its use. In addition, all these multiple verb forms appear to alternate with the preterite, marked or bare, which occupies the bulk of all PTR contexts.

5.2 The variable context and the variables

Establishing a function-based variable context for the analysis of multiple verb forms is complicated by the distribution of the forms in this corpus, and by the difficulty associated with operationalizing non-empirical functional domains like "present relevance."

Of all the multiple verb forms found in the Liberian OREAAC letters, present perfects (*have* + V) are by far the most frequent, as illustrated by tables 3.6 above and 5.4 below. An analysis that takes the entire PTR context as its variable context, then, risks claiming constraints favouring one form that are, in fact, constraints disfavouring one of the many competing forms. In this analysis, I have chosen to take past temporal reference as the variable context, but the tokens retained for each analysis consist solely of the form under study and all tokens of the form(s) described in the literature as representing the same function. In this study, the distinction is a simple one: the non-application form in each case is the preterite, marked or bare. The analysis of the present perfect, then, considers all present perfect and preterite forms; the analysis of the past perfect considers all past perfect and preterite forms.

This choice also avoids the problem of operationalizing non-empirical functional claims like "present relevance." As Elsness (1997) shows, it is possible to establish (on non-linguistic grounds) situations in which virtually any sentence can be claimed to signal present relevance. The series of papers following Chomsky (1970) on the sentence "Einstein has visited Princeton" illustrate – even though the subject of the sentence is dead, the sentence is acceptable in a discussion of Nobel Prize winners who have visited Princeton, memorable occasions at Princeton, Jewish scholars coming to the United States, etc. etc. (Elsness 1997: 32-36). By

[51] "[1] *Did* is largely restricted to *used to* contexts (Tagliamonte 1991:270).

studying the distribution of all preterite and present perfect sentences in PTR contexts, we can test constraints favouring the choice of the form to build up a picture of its use, rather than establishing a priori a "present perfect" context on shaky empirical grounds.

5.3 Factor groups

The descriptions of comparison varieties summarized in section 5.1 suggest a range of constraints on the use of multiple verb forms. The infrequency in past studies of some of these

Table 5.3. Potential constraints on Early AAE multiple verb forms and their association with comparison varieties.

Constraint	Description of effect	Diagnosticity
Creole features:		
Basilectal stativity	Statives favour marking over non-statives	Acceptable; Weaker if "marked" includes preterites
Mesolectal temporal clause	Temporals disfavour marking	Acceptable; Weaker if "marked" includes preterites
Remoteness	Remote past favours *had* over recent pasts	Acceptable; may reflect widespread tendencies
Anterior punctuals	Past-before-past favours *had* over other punctuals	None; identical to StdE
Temporal disambiguation (Mufwene 1983)	Temporal adverbs disfavour marking	Questionable; see next
Mesolectal "reminder effect" (Bickerton 1975)	Temporal adverbs favour marking	Questionable; see previous
StdE features:		
Negation effect	Negatives favour present perfects over preterites	Good; may reflect widespread tendencies
Recency/continuity effect	Recent or continuing events favour present perfects	Good; may reflect widespread tendencies
Adverbial type	*Since* favours or requires present perfect, time adverbials favour preterite	Good; may reflect widespread tendencies
Information type	New information favours present perfects over given information	Good; may reflect widespread tendencies
Clause type	Subordinates favour multiple verbs; *after* favours preterites	Good; may reflect widespread tendencies
Dialect/historical features:		
Mutative perfect effect	Mutative verbs (*come, arrive, become*) favour *be* perfects	Good; unlikely to reflect universal tendencies

forms, especially the present perfect, has led to their characterization as alien to particular varieties, notably basilectal creoles. As a result, many of the linguistic constraints on the use of the present perfect tested in this analysis are derived from studies of its variable use in StdE, which are not plentiful. It is possible, however, to include in the analysis constraints associated with creole anterior forms, identical to those described in Chapter 4. If a decreolization scenario could result in creole anterior conditioning being transferred to English-like preterite forms, it could as easily transfer to present perfect forms. Table 5.3 summarizes some linguistic effects described or proposed in the literature, and the degree to which such effects can be considered diagnostic of an association between Early AAE and particular comparison/input varieties.

These proposed linguistic effects, each of which represents a hypothesis concerning the nature of Early AAE, were operationalized as factors that could be empirically assigned to each token falling into the variable context. The factor groups are described below.

Clause type tests the association in StdE of preterites with *since* clauses (Elsness 1997) and main clauses, of preterites with *after* clauses (Visser 1973), and of complex forms (e.g. perfects) with subordinate clauses (Tagliamonte 1991).

w	*when*
s	*since*
a	*after*
m	main
s	subordinate

Aspect tests the claim that Early AAE verbs are more likely to be marked in punctual contexts than habitual contexts (Singler 1991a:256), paralleling claims for mesolectal creoles (Bickerton 1975:160).

p	punctual context
i	iterative/habitual/durative context

Temporal relation relates to claims that in creoles marking is based on anteriority, rather than tense. The reference point for anterior marking is a situation (event or state), rather than speech time. The earlier ("anterior") of two situations (events or states) is more likely to be marked (Bickerton 1975).

p posterior,
a anterior,
c coincidence,
r other: repetition, reorientation, ambiguous

Stativity tests the claimed behaviour of marked anterior forms in creoles, whereby the point of reference for determining anteriority depends on the stativity of the verb (Bickerton 1975). The reference point for actions is another action in the past, while the reference point for states (at least in basilectal creoles) is the present. The result should be more marking on statives than on non-statives in PTR contexts.

s stative
n non-stative or ambiguous

Temporal context tests two claims: that marked forms in AAE are reflexes of an earlier creole tendency to mark remote past contexts (Bickerton 1975), or that present perfects are associated with recent or continuing events, as in StdE (Tagliamonte 1997, Elsness 1997). Note that this second claim is distinct from claims about the continuing *relevance* of events described by the present perfect. A sentence like *His father has died*, for example, is coded for how long ago death occurred, ignoring the fact that the state of death presumably continues into the present.[52]

Degree of remoteness is coded based on either calendar time (when known) or distance with respect to major events in the writer's life. In a situation where letters are written infrequently and take several months to reach their destination, degrees of recentness or distance may not be identical to those used in speech. Remote and continuing contexts, however, are similar enough between speech and writing to permit comparisons.

r remote (more than ten years ago, or prior to emigration)
d distant (more than one year ago, or prior to previous letter)
n recent (within past year, or since last letter)
i imminent (within past week, including time of letter writing)
c continuing (situations continuing up to point of letter writing)

[52] As it does after a preterite form like *His father died.*

Information status tests the association of present perfect forms with new information, as in StdE (Elsness 1997) and a pilot study of the perfect in a sample of these letters (Van Herk 1999b). New information is here operationalized as NP objects; given information as pronominal objects.

n NP object (new information)
p pronominal object (given information)
i intransitives, sentential complements

Discourse type tests the lack of affinity between narrative complicating action clauses and present perfects implied by the association of present perfect forms with present relevance.[53]

n narrative (i.e. narrative complicating action, subsequent events, etc)
o narrative non-complicating action (evaluation, setup)
x non-narrative

Temporal adverb type tests the claim that present perfects and preterites are each associated with particular adverbs or adverbial phrases, as in StdE (Elsness 1997, Van Herk 1999b). The existence of diametrically opposed claims with respect to creoles (Bickerton 1975 vs. Mufwene 1984) renders testing of proposed <u>creole</u> conditioning in this context near impossible.

s *since...*
t time/frequency, e.g. *always, every day*
b subsequence, e.g. *then, after that*
p precedence, e.g. *before, until...*
a dependent, e.g. *at that time*
S lexicalized specific, e.g. *in March, in 1853*
c continuous, e.g. *for a week, while...*
d deictic past, e.g. *yesterday, three days ago*

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[53] Note that the definition of "complicating action clause" in this study differs from that of Tagliamonte (1991), which excludes from the context any earlier events mentioned during the body of the narrative (e.g. *In this time, my frind had fired 12 of his own loads* (154/2/37)), thus blurring the distinction between anteriority and narrative type.

5.4 Results

Table 5.4 illustrates the relative frequency of multiple verb forms in this corpus. The most striking difference from earlier work on spoken Early AAE, creoles, and contemporary AAVE is the frequency of present perfect forms. They, and past perfect forms, occur often enough to permit variable rule analysis of the factors conditioning their choice over bare and marked preterite forms. Here, present perfect forms make up over 30% of all PTR verbs, nearly twenty times as many as in spoken Early AAE corpora (as illustrated in table 3.6 above with data from Tagliamonte 1991). These analyses make up sections 5.4.1 and 5.4.2 of this chapter. Other multiple verb forms, too infrequent to permit analysis, are briefly described in section 5.4.3 below.

Table 5.4. Distribution of multiple verb forms in Liberian OREAAC letters.

Verb form	N	Percent of total PTR data
Have perfects e.g. *have seen*	1247	30.8
Had perfects e.g. *had seen*	85	2.1
Is perfects e.g. *is arrived*	26	0.6
Have been e.g. *have been going/left*	64	1.6
Had been e.g. *had been going/left*	9	0.2
Dummy *do* e.g. *did not know*	72	1.8
Other *do* e.g. *did write, did left*	22	0.5
Ain't e.g. *ain't gone*	1	0.02
Bin e.g. *bin left*	1	0.02
Done e.g. *(had) done left*	0	0.0
Habitual *would* e.g. *would go*	5	0.1
Habitual *used to* e.g. *used to go*	2	0.05
Progressive e.g. *was going*	40	1.0
Got passives e.g. *got drowned*	20	0.5
TOTAL	1594	

5.4.1 The present perfect

The StdE present perfect has usually been considered marginal to AAVE, and largely absent from basilectal and mesolectal creoles. The form occupies less than 2% of all PTR contexts in spoken Early AAE corpora such as the Samaná corpus (Tagliamonte 1991). By comparison, the Liberian OREAAC letters are filled with present perfects, as were other corpora

of letters considered in a pilot study to the present work (Van Herk 1999b). In fact, the percentage of the PTR context taken up by present perfects in these Early AAE letters is higher than that reported for most genres of StdE, written or spoken, and most closely resembles the rates reported for 18th-19th-century letters (Elsness 1997), as table 5.5 illustrates.

Table 5.5. Percentage of past temporal reference context occupied by present perfects across genres representing 18th and 19th century varieties.

Genre and estimated date	*% present perfect*
Liberian OREAAC letters c. 1850	**30.8**
Sierra Leone OREAAC letters c. 1790 (Van Herk 1999b)	**34.0**
American letters, 1750-1800 (Elsness 1997:274)	**27.7**
American drama, 1750-1800 (Elsness 1997:275)	14.1
American novels, narrative, 1750-1800 (Elsness 1997:274)	0.6
Samaná sociolinguistic interviews representing c. 1824 (Tagliamonte 1991)	1.1
Ex-Slave Recordings representing c. 1860 (Tagliamonte 1991)	0.9

What are we to make of this rather drastic departure from the findings of previous, speech-based studies of AAE? Two potential explanations suggest themselves. One is that Early AAE, like basilectal and mesolectal creoles, had no present perfect form. These present perfect tokens thus represent an intrusion from a StdE system – that is, the writers of the letters are using forms that are not part of their daily language, in response to their perception of the requirements of formal letter writing. In this case, we might expect to find evidence of conditioning on the present perfect that differs greatly from that described or proposed for English. This is especially true given the divergences reported above with respect to StdE preterite marking, which presumably writers would be trying equally hard to approximate. Under this scenario, it may also be possible to find some faint traces of creole anterior conditioning in these contexts, as the writers might try to impose aspects of an earlier system on the new one, parallelling the claims for past marking.

A second explanation is that the present perfect is a fully functional and productive part of the grammatical system of Early AAE, acquired by early generations of African Americans at the same time as other features of English. Differences in overall rates of present perfect use in

different genres, then, would result from the different requirements of each genre.[54] This is the scenario hinted at in Tagliamonte (1997:46), who suggested that the rarity of the present perfect "may be entirely due to the fact that its meaning was also quite rare." In this case, the instances of present perfect use in these letters would be constrained by the same factors as the earlier and dialectal English that presumably provided the model for those first generations. By testing such constraints on all PTR tokens marked by variants of present perfect (*have* + V, *be* + V) or preterite (standard, non-standard, or zero), these two competing hypotheses can be evaluated quantitatively.

5.4.1.1 Near-categorical contexts

Discourse type: A first finding lends support to the idea that the absence of present perfects in spoken AAE corpora to this point may have more to do with the exigencies of genre (Bakhtin 1986:78) than with the supposed peripherality of the form. As table 5.6 indicates, present perfect forms are almost entirely absent from the complicating action clauses of narratives in this corpus. In fact, the lack of variability in this context renders this factor group unsuitable for multivariate analysis. In the sociolinguistic interview, however, the elicitation of narratives is a primary goal, and such narratives make up a large part of spoken corpora. The rarity of present perfects in other corpora, then, may simply reflect a rarity of the non-narrative contexts that favour their use.

Table 5.6. Percentage of present perfect forms (vs.preterite) according to narrative type in past temporal reference verbs in Liberian letters.

	N	%	Total	% of PTR
Non-narratives	1267	38	3334	90
Narrative non-complicating	6	9	63	2
Narrative complicating action	1	0.3	283	8
Total	1274	34	3680	

[54] This possibility is further suggested by the similarly high rates across AAE and StdE letters and low rates across AAE and StdE narrative contexts.

Aspect: Table 5.7 shows another near-categorical correspondence in these letters, whereby verbs that clearly refer to habitual occurrences, or to a specific single incident (punctuals), surface almost entirely with preterite forms (standard or otherwise). As with narrative type, the lack of variability in these contexts renders this factor group unsuitable for variable rule analysis. This specialization of forms is a natural outcome of the association of present perfect (i.e. present anterior) forms in languages generally with present relevance and/or diffuse temporal specification.[55]

Table 5.7. Percentage of present perfect forms (vs.preterite) according to aspect in Liberian OREAAC letters.

	N	%	Total	% of PTR
Punctuals	6	0.5	1464	39
Habituals	2	2	116	3
Ambiguous, other	1266	60	2100	58
Total	1274	2406	3680	

Aside from these two factor groups, a range of (largely English-derived) constraints can be tested in this data set, relating to temporal relation between actions (anteriority), temporal remoteness, negation, stativity, clause type, adverbial type, and new vs. given information (operationalized as object type). As table 5.8 indicates, a variable rule analysis selected all of these factor groups as significant.

5.4.1.2 Linguistic factors favouring present perfects

Non-remote contexts: Table 5.8 displays a strong significant association (range = 94) between use of the present perfect and the temporal location of the event described (remoteness), matching the use of the present perfect in English. As in English, events continuing to the present strongly favour the use of the present perfect.[56]

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[55] Punctuals do not categorically disfavour the present perfect; the archetypal "hot-news" perfect (McCawley 1971) example, "The president has been assassinated." presumably refers to a punctual event.

[56] It should be remembered that continuing events are not the same as the (ascribed) continuing relevance of an event, claimed in much of the literature to be the case for all present perfects (though also true of many preterites). In the present instance, events that occurred at a specific time were coded according to that time, whether or not the results or consequences of that action continued into the present

Table 5.8. Linguistic factors selected as significant to the probability of *have* + verb marking vs. preterite marking in Liberian OREAAC letters.			
Corrected mean: 0.316 Total N: 3680		%	N
REMOTENESS			
Continuing	**.984**	97	677
Ambiguous or unclear	**.922**	74	118
Immediate past	.428	31	122
Recent past	.305	20	1889
Distant past	.238	14	690
Remote past	.041	2	184
RANGE	*94*		
ADVERBIAL TYPE			
Since + reference event	**.948**	91	117
While + reference event	**.625**	56	80
Before + reference event	**.615**	33	55
Deictic (from speech time)	**.559**	40	90
No adverbial	**.535**	34	2978
After + reference event	.257	5	56
Always/never type	.205	47	96
Lexical time	.054	1	98
When + reference event	.033	1	110
RANGE	92		
CLAUSE TYPE			
Since	**.793**	59	111
Main	**.536**	38	2398
Other subordinate	.458	28	1040
After	.271	9	22
When	.061	3	109
RANGE	*73*		
ANTERIORITY			
Ambiguous or unrelated	**.579**	40	2522
Anterior	.466	27	241
Posterior	.315	23	823
Co-occurring	.202	9	94
RANGE	*38*		
OBJECT/INFORMATION			
NP (new information)	**.560**	45	959
Intransitive or other	.486	31	2578
Pronoun (given information)	350	27	143
RANGE	*21*		
NEGATION			
Negative	**.687**	65	262
Affirmative	.485	32	3418
RANGE	*20*		
STATIVITY			
Non-stative	**.550**	35	2448
Stative	.402	33	1232
RANGE	*15*		
All groups selected as significant.			

The English present perfect is also associated with recency, and the relative frequency of the form in the Liberian OREAAC letters tallies perfectly with this use. Although all precise temporal anchors disfavour the form compared to the strong favouring effect of continuing contexts, frequency of use of the present perfect decreases from the immediate past through recent and distant pasts to the remote past, which strongly disfavours. Another favouring context in these letters is no "context" at all – that is, events whose temporal location cannot be determined from linguistic or contextual clues, as in the StdE perfect of experience (e.g. *I have been to Georgia*) (Zandvoort 1932).

Adverbial type: The other extremely strong finding displayed in table 5.8 is that of adverbial type, with a range of 92. As in English, *since*-type adverbials strongly favour use of the present perfect. This is a very strong, perhaps even categorical favouring context for the present perfect in contemporary StdE.[57] The presence of a few preterites in this context, as in a pilot study of other Early AAE letters (Van Herk 1999b), suggests that this rule remained flexible in Early AAE, as it did in earlier English.

Adverbials associated with overt mention of a specific point in the past strongly disfavour use of the present perfect, as in English. These include both absolute specification (lexical items like *in 1850*) and relative specification (indicating an event took place after, while/during, or when another event occurred). One relative adverbial factor that does not match this pattern is the *before/until* type, largely due to sentences describing a state of affairs that continued over a period up to a (generally recent) point, as in (98).

(98) I ***has had*** the oppertunity of being with the Dr. from his arrival *until his departure* (153/1/10)

The *always/never* adverbial type disfavours present perfects, aligning the language of these letters more closely with American than British English (Elsness 1997).[58]

Clause type: Table 5.8 also shows a strong clause type finding for these Liberian letters. The relative status of main and subordinate clauses appears to reflect the tendency of these letters

[57] Even in StdE, however, sentences like *Since last Tuesday I saw her four times* are possible.

[58] *Always/never* type adverbials are the only ones that are found between the subject and the main verb: perhaps tendencies to reduce (as in American English) or delete (as in AAE) the *have* auxiliary lead to a preference here for unambiguously past marked preterites.

to foreground (in main clauses) recent news, favouring the "hot news" reading of the present perfect (McCawley 1971). A typical sentence in these contexts would be something like example (99).

(99) An old man ***has just stepped*** in (155/5/182)

After and *when* clauses, used for series of specific events described in order, favour the preterite form.

A more interesting, because less expected finding is that *since* clauses favour present perfects. The more common contemporary StdE pattern for such sentences is *Since we Xed (preterite), we have Yed (present perfect).* The letters clearly associate present perfect with the Y-clause (seen in the favouring effect of *since* adverbials, described immediately above), as in StdE. However, they also favour this form in the X-clause, where StdE prefers the preterite. This two-perfect construction (*Since we have Xed, we have Yed*) was more common in earlier English (Visser 1973). In the present corpus, the X-clauses contain many "scene-setting" verbs, such as *since we have come, have arrived, have landed* (see section 4.4 above). This suggests that the letter writers have used the present perfect to emphasize the recency and continuing relevance of the events establishing their new lives.

Anteriority: There is no indication of a relative temporal system in the anteriority finding displayed in table 5.8. Instead, events whose temporal relation to other events is unmarked or unclear favour the present perfect form, while any clear temporal relation whatsoever – anterior, posterior, or co-occurring – disfavours.[59] This is in keeping with two separate aspects of the present perfect. The favouring effect of an unclear relation suits the diffuse temporal anchoring of the form; the absence of a favouring effect for events clearly linked to other past events seems to be due to the temporal reference point for the present perfect being speech time, not some past point.

Object/information type: In the letters, as table 5.8 shows, new information favours use of the present perfect. The association of present perfects with new information (in this case, operationalized as NP objects) vs. given information (pronominal objects) relates to the recency

[59] This factor clumping matches that found for bare forms in single irregular verbs (section 5.1.1.3.2), where any clear relation favoured zero.

and present-relevance functions of the present perfect. New (recent, relevant) information must be specified (with an NP), while given information can be described with an (anaphoric) pronoun (see also Van Herk 1999b).

Negation: Elsness (1997) traces the long association of present perfect forms and negation in the history of English. He suggests that this association is reinforced by the dual role in this context of the auxiliary (usually *have*) attracting the negator (*I have not seen anybody*) while also serving as perfect auxiliary. As with the data presented in Elsness (1997), this is not the sole explanation in this case. These letters feature many perfects with negators other than *not* (e.g. *I have never seen...*), and very little negative contraction (e.g. *I havent*). Furthermore, previous research (Kautzsch 2000, Van Herk 1999) has shown that the preferred negation strategy in Early AAE letters is postposing (e.g. *I saw nobody*), requiring no auxiliaries. It is possible that the association of negation and the present perfect, in these letters as in the StdE studied by Elsness, has its roots in the semantics of the forms. The performance of an action (the affirmative) is usually more tightly linked to a particular point in time than its non-performance (the negative), and this diffuse time linkage appears to be characteristic of the perfect as well.

Stativity: A favouring effect of non-statives on present perfects does not appear to speak to either of the competing hypotheses for the origins of AAE. English does not appear to make a stativity distinction here, and a basilectal creole distinction, if relevant, would predict more marking for statives, assuming that preverbal *have* represents a more marked form than suffixed or zero-marked preterites. Instead, table 5.8 shows us that it is non-statives that favour present perfect forms, although by a smaller margin than those seen for other factor groups. One possible explanation is that the news-giving function of letters would lead to states continuing to the time of writing being described in the present (e.g. *We are hungry*) rather than the present perfect (e.g. *We have been hungry*), thus rendering them outside the variable context.

5.4.1.3 Summary of conditioning on present perfects

In this, the first multivariate analysis of present perfect use in Early AAE, we have seen the strong favouring effect of constraints derived from the literature on English. Present perfect forms are far more widespread in this corpus than in spoken corpora generally, and occur almost entirely in non-narrative contexts, to describe events that are not clearly punctual or habitual. The present perfect forms are favoured by ambiguity of temporal orientation and relation, recent or continuing events, extended time adverbials, *since* clauses, negation, and non-statives. The

direction and magnitude of these effects are consistent with a single explanation, that the English present perfect is part of the core grammar of the authors of these letters. In some cases (notably the presence of a few preterites with *since* adverbials and many present perfects in *since* clauses), the OREAAC letters mirror variable contexts found in earlier English, rather than the near-categorical contexts found in the contemporary prescriptive standard. This is an expected outcome, given that an earlier Colonial English would have provided the linguistic model for early African Americans.

5.4.2 The past perfect

By way of contrast with the present perfect, *had* + verb forms are presumed to be alive and well in creoles, generally presumed to be a (high) mesolectal reflex of the creole preverbal marker *bin*. A commonly accepted decreolization path is that *bin* is replaced by *did*,which is in turn replaced by *had* (Winford 1992, Blake 1997, 2000, Bickerton 1975).[60] Should this be the case, a creole origins hypothesis would predict that *had* + V forms should behave much like creole *bin*+ V forms, surfacing largely in creole anterior contexts. These contexts are the same as those operationalized to test similar claims with respect to preterite marking in chapter 4.

A complicating factor in this case is that the expected StdE form in this context, the past perfect, serves a linguistic function that is virtually identical to the past-before-past portion of the creole anterior context. In fact, Bybee et al. (1994) refer to the English past perfect as a past anterior. There are, however, subtle distinctions noted for the past perfect in StdE and the (past) anterior in creoles, distinctions that can be operationalized and tested. This necessarily involves focussing on different aspects of some factor groups, those proposed to condition past perfect marking in varieties of English, as well as the retention of potentially creole-associated anterior conditioning factor groups from the analyses of zero marked single verbs in chapter 4.

5.4.2.1 Near-categorical contexts

A first finding is that events that can be clearly identified as either punctual or habitual from the linguistic context nearly categorically disfavour the past perfect, as illustrated in table 5.9.

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[60] The "top-down" hypothesis of creole formation, whereby less restructured lects form first from near-complete acquisition of non-standard models and strongly creolized lects form over time from those other lects, would argue that *did* forms were available from earlier English (especially southwestern English dialects) all along, but would have disappeared from English by the time decreolization is proposed to occur in bottom-up models (McWhorter 2001). This would make *did* forms, at least, non-diagnostic in both their presence and the factors conditioning their use.

Table 5.9. Percentage of past perfect forms (vs.preterite) according to aspect in past temporal reference verbs in Liberian letters.				
	N	%	Total	% of PTR
Punctuals	1	0.1	1459	58
Habituals/duratives	0	0	114	4
Ambiguous and other	92	10	932	38
Total N	93	4	2505	100

This is similar to the near-categorical findings in this category for the present perfect, as described in section 5.4.1 above.

Fig 5.1. Location on a time line of events described by tense and aspect forms in English (adapted from Quirk & Greenbaum 1985:42-45)

(past) reference point (present) speech time	
X	punctuals *(I wrote my letter of 16 June)*
	habituals *(I used to write with a special pen)*
	present perfects *(I have written...)*
	past perfects *(When I met him John had lived...)*

As illustrated by Fig 5.1, events described by perfect (i.e. anterior) forms are temporally bound, but only at their endpoint, the event or state before which they are presumed to have occurred. Their beginning temporal bounding is not specified. Punctuals, then, with their association with a specific point in time, would be at odds with the broader temporal reference associated with perfects. Past habituals, like perfects, are bound only at their endpoint. However, in the absence of disambiguating adverbials, this endpoint is usually speech time. This renders them incompatible with past perfects, which by definition have an endpoint earlier than speech time. This distinction is maintained in these letters, with habitual contexts including a few present perfect forms (table 5.7 above), but no past perfects.[61]

[61] It is possible that this default exclusivity of past perfect and habitual contexts may underlie some previous findings for mesolectal creoles, whereby habituality disfavours anterior marking. If those studies operationalized as mesolectal marked forms *had* + V as well as marked preterites, an association of habituality with zero forms would surface even if the *had* forms behaved exactly as in StdE. Even if studies excluded all preverbal forms (*had, did, used to, would*), the default exclusivity of past perfect (=anterior) and habitual contexts would make it difficult to decide whether an "anterior" finding actually represented an absence of unmarked habituals in anterior contexts, or whether a "habitual" finding actually represented an absence of marked anteriors in habitual contexts.

5.4.2.2 Linguistic factors favouring past perfects

Anteriority: Table 5.10 displays the results of a variable rule analysis of the factors contributing to the choice of *had* + V versus preterite forms (bare or overtly marked). As expected, the strongest finding of this analysis is that anterior contexts favour use of the past perfect, while posterior contexts strongly disfavour. As the English present perfect and the creole anterior occupy identical (past-before-past) spaces with respect to anteriority, this finding does not speak to any particular hypothesis as to the origin of this form in these letters. The strength of the finding simply indicates that the letter writers had full control of the anteriority function of the form, whatever its origin.

Remoteness: If *had* + V forms are reflexes of an earlier creole anterior marker, whose meanings include "remote past," remote past contexts should be a prime location for this form. Table 5.10 shows that this is not the case. Instead, remote contexts are the least favourable environment for past perfects, while other degrees of temporal remoteness show inconsistent effects.[62] The past perfect is strongly favoured by a small number of continuing and ambiguous tokens (N=27 and 38 respectively). Ambiguous temporal specification suits the diffuse temporal nature of perfect forms generally, while the favouring effect of continuing tokens, a prime present perfect context, suggests some leakage between past and present perfect forms in these letters. Textual evidence supports the attribution of this leakage to the reduction of auxiliary forms like *has* and *had* in the speech of these writers, so that they would sometimes be interchanged in writing.

Clause type: As table 5.10 shows, use of the past perfect is strongly favoured in clauses like *after X had happened*. This finding is logical, given that such clauses clearly indicate an anterior temporal relation. The finding, however, counters descriptions or predictions with respect to (past) anterior forms in both creoles and English. In both cases, the presence of *after* or other material clearly indicating the temporal relation of the clause to others is said to make anterior/past perfect marking on the verb redundant. And in both cases, an acceptable alternative (zero in creoles, the preterite in English) is available. Apparently the requirement to use the past perfect in anterior contexts, signalled by the closeness of the temporal adverb to the verb, overrides any effect of disambiguation.

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[62] This disfavouring effect may, again, reflect some sort of association between the writers' remote slavery or childhood activities and particular lexical items.

Table 5.10. Linguistic factors selected as significant to the probability of *had* + verb marking vs. preterite marking of past temporal reference verbs in Liberian letters.

Corrected mean: 0.016; Total N: 2505

		%	N
ANTERIORITY			
Anterior	**.898**	18	216
Ambiguous or unrelated	**.596**	3	1560
Co-occurring	**.522**	2	88
Posterior	.156	1	641
RANGE	*74*		
REMOTENESS			
Continuing	**.928**	29	27
Ambiguous or unclear	**.924**	18	38
Distant past	**.540**	4	616
Immediate past	**.509**	2	86
Recent past	.487	3	1555
Remote past	.268	1	183
RANGE	*66*		
STATIVITY			
Non-stative	**.646**	5	1675
Stative	.229	1	830
RANGE	*42*		
CLAUSE TYPE			
After	**.808**	23	26
Other subordinate	**.557**	6	794
Main	.473	2	1531
Since	.247	4	48
When	0% (KO)	0	106
RANGE	*56*		
NARRATIVE TYPE			
Narrative complicating action	**.823**	7	305
Narrative non-complicating action	**.530**	3	59
Non-narrative	.445	3	2141
RANGE	*38*		
NEGATION			
Negative	**.769**	9	100
Affirmative	.488	3	2405
RANGE	*24*		
Not selected as significant: adverbial type, object/information			

Table 5.10 also shows that the past perfect is categorically disfavoured in *when* clauses in this data set, parallelling the strong disfavouring effect of this context for present perfects.

Stativity: As was the case for present perfects, stative verbs disfavour the past perfect form. This is the opposite of the predicted outcome if the AAE past perfect were a reflex of the earlier basilectal anterior marker *bin/did*. As with other stativity findings in this study, the possibility of a confounding lexical factor must be considered.

Discourse type: As table 5.10 shows, narrative contexts favour past perfects. As narratives feature the serial presentation of events, they are an ideal context to require overt marking of anterior (and therefore out of sequence) events. This is as true for English as for creoles. The association of past perfects with performed narratives provides further evidence for the proposal advanced in section 5.4.1 above, whereby differences in overall rates of particular PTR forms appear to reflect genre-based distinctions: narrative-heavy interviews favour past perfects and disfavour present perfects.

***Negation*:** As for present perfects, negation is seen to favour past perfects over preterites in the Liberian letters. Presumably, the same factors are at play here: the verbal auxiliary is required for both negation and to mark temporal relations, and the diffuse temporal nature of negation suits the diffuse temporal nature of the perfect.

5.4.2.3 Non-significant effects

Adverbial type: A functionalist hypothesis (neutral to creole vs. non-creole hypotheses) would argue that the presence of overt adverbial marking indicating anteriority (such as *Before we left...*) would disfavour use of an overtly-marked past anterior form like the past perfect. In fact, no such effect obtains.

Object/information type: The favouring effect of new information on the use of the perfect would be expected to apply with more force in present perfect vs. preterite contexts, where the reference point (the present) is more sharply differentiated (in terms of recency) than is the case with past perfect vs. preterite contexts. This is, in fact, the result found in this data set.

5.4.2.4 Summary of conditioning on past perfects

Had + V forms are infrequent in this corpus, as in most corpora, but they supply enough tokens for an analysis of their distribution to confirm the essentially English-like nature of the form in Early AAE. It must be remembered, however, that there is a substantial overlap between the function of the form in English and in English-based creoles. Anteriority is the core meaning of *had* + V forms in English, and a core meaning of the creole form *bin* + V from which mesolectal *had* is presumed to derive, and anteriority is the strongest favouring context in these

letters. Ambiguous temporal distance and negation are other factors that can be linked to anteriority, and in this corpus both constraints operate in the direction expected.

Remoteness, on the other hand, provides a conflict site between English and creoles, and the OREAAC letters clearly do not favour a creole remoteness reading for *had*+ V. An effect whereby remote pasts actually *disfavour* the form, as well as a disfavouring effect for statives, may be influenced by lexical effects, although this would require further analysis to confirm. In addition, the association of *had* + V with narratives in this corpus may partly explain the tendency in past studies of AAVE and creoles to find greater use of this form than of the present perfect, as those studies tend to be narrative-heavy compared to these letters.

5.4.3 Infrequent multiple verb forms

Although these letters feature many multiple verb forms, the great majority of those forms are present and past perfects. The remaining forms make up less than twenty percent of all multiple verb forms, and less than five percent of the total PTR context in this corpus. With the possible exception of the absence of preverbal *done*, the supposed standardizing effects of the writing process do not appear to be responsible for the infrequency of these forms. In fact, the highly standard *was* V*ing*, *would* V, and *used to* V are considerably less frequent in this corpus than in the spoken Early AAE corpus (Poplack & Sankoff 1987) described in Tagliamonte (1991).

In this section I discuss each of these rare forms, and mention constraints that appear to favour their use.[63] As none of these forms is frequent enough to permit an analysis of the statistical significance of these constraints, any observations must be considered preliminary.

***Was* V*ing*:** The *was/were* V*ing* form, as in example (100), occurs 40 times in this corpus. No diagnostic claims are made with respect to the behaviour of this form in the literature. In the Liberian letters, the form appears to be favoured by *at that time* type adverbials, subordinate clauses, and coincidence with a reference verb, as in English (and, presumably, creoles).

(100) thay ***was LabourrinG*** for these Last nine years (157/7/133.1)

The form also appears to be favoured when referring to recent actions, probably because

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[63] As dummy *do* functions solely as an empty element in questions and negation, I do not investigate conditioning of its use.

of its use in *I was* V*ing when your letter arrived* type sentences.

Be perfects: Present perfect forms using *be* forms, as in (101), instead of *have*, as in contemporary StdE, occur 26 times in this corpus.

(101) i ***am*** now ***become*** a member of christ mistacle body (155/5/53)

They appear to be favoured by the same contexts that favour *have* perfects, suggesting that they, too, are part of a fully-operational present perfect system. *Be* perfects in this corpus also occur with particular lexical items, including *go, return, become, die, leave, commence, arrive,* and *come*. These verbs are identical to the mutative (change of state or location) verbs in which *be* perfects persisted in StdE before undergoing a steady decline c. 1830 (Gorlach 1999). The (English-like) association of *be* perfects with mutative verbs in the OREAAC confirms the findings of Tagliamonte (1991) for Samaná English.

Preverbal did: The use of preverbal *did* in contexts where it is not required by negation or question formation occurs 22 times in this corpus, as in (102).

(102) I ***did hear*** Some what or your unwellness (155/4/122)

Preverbal *did* appears to be favoured by remoteness and anteriority, and disfavoured by habitual contexts. The first two associations match those proposed for the use of *did* in decreolizing varieties, and apparently some earlier English, while the third seems to run opposite to the use of *did* in some Caribbean creoles (e.g. Bajan) and the southwestern dialects from which they partly derive.

It should be kept in mind that in a written corpus, it is impossible to distinguish between stressed and unstressed uses of preverbal *did*. This tentative association of *did* with remote and anterior events may be contaminated by uses of emphatic *did* to emphasize promises and expectations from the writers' (remote) time in slavery.

Habitual forms: These forms, as in (103), are extremely rare in this corpus. *Would* occurs five times, *used to* only twice.

(103) a. they delighted in being advisd and ***would do*** anything (156/6/171)

b. we are the Ross people that ***use to live*** in Jeferson county (157/7/49a)

This contrasts sharply with findings from spoken corpora (e.g. Singler 1991, Tagliamonte 1991), where discussions of bygone eras with elderly informants result in many habitual contexts. The absence of these forms here, then, may reflect a shortage of habitual contexts. The *used to* and *would* forms that occur in this corpus *are* found in habitual contexts, but the majority of habituals, as in most corpora, are expressed with (overtly or covertly marked) preterites.

The letters may, however, speak in some way to issues concerning habitual marking. Singler (1991b) suggests that zero-marked habituals in the Ex-Slave Recordings may result from a deleted preverbal *would*, but is less willing to accept this trajectory for Liberian Settler English, due to the rarity of *would* forms and the fact that LSE does not feature reduced preverbal auxiliaries. These letters show that, despite overall infrequency, *would* as a habitual marker was part of the input variety to Liberia – in fact, more frequent than *used to*. And, although there are no instances of reduced *would* in these letters, there are reduced preverbal markers, as discussed in section 4.4.3 above.

Got passives: *Got* passives, as in (104), which are not diagnostic with respect to the origins of AAE, occur 20 times in this corpus.

(104) My Son ***got Married*** to Miss Caroline Johnston (155/4/81)

They are found in many contexts, generally with the same lexical items with which they are associated in contemporary varieties of English (*got married, drowned, shot*). Interesting in this corpus is the association of *got* passives with the class of verbs whose preterites and participles are identical. This suggests that *got* may serve to accentuate the differences between participial (passive) and preterite (active) forms. Such a functional explanation merits further study in a corpus in which *got* passives are more frequent.

Preverbal ain't, bin, and done: The present corpus features a single token of *ain't*, reproduced in (105).

(105) but I ***aint got*** my house built as yet (155/4/113)

This contrasts with other studies of (spoken) Early AAE in which *ain't* is widespread (Tagliamonte 1991, Howe 1995, Howe & Walker 2000). Previous research (Kautzsch 1998, 2000, Van Herk 1999) has demonstrated that this form is particularly likely to be absent in writing. In fact, the single token in this study is one more than is generally found in written Early AAE corpora (Kautzsch 2000, Montgomery p.c.).

Preverbal *bin* is also represented by a single token in this corpus, reproduced in (106). This token resembles contemporary AAVE stressed BIN in both location (preceding a stative) and meaning (remote continuous).

(106) evry Scinc I left New orlens and grad [<growed] up I ***bin want*** to write you & Mr Gurly (158/9/42)

The association with a time adverbial (*evry Scinc I left New orlens*) seems to distinguish it from AAVE stressed BIN, however; it may represent *I have been wanting to* with deleted *have* and *–ing*, both of which are features found in this and other OREAAC letters.

Preverbal *done* is non-existent in the corpus. The status of the form in Early AAE is questionable; the only corpus in which it is frequent is the Ex-Slave Narratives, which are particularly sensitive to transcriber insertion of highly salient non-standard forms. It is possible that the form was extremely limited in Early AAE (as it is in Samaná, Tagliamonte 1991); another possibility is that the form, with its secondary emphatic meaning, is largely restricted to argumentative spoken dialogue.

The infrequency of the preverbal markers discussed in this section makes it impossible to make strong claims with respect to their place in the Early AAE PTR system. Many forms are associated in the literature with specific, narrowly-bounded contexts, and it is in these contexts that they tend to appear in this data set. This is particularly true for *be* perfects, habitual markers, and progressive (*was* V*ing*) forms, which seem to behave as they do in present or earlier StdE.

It is tempting to take the possible association of rare preverbal *did* with remote and anterior contexts as evidence that at least a few Liberian letter writers used *did* in a creole-like way. Given the wide scope of the corpus, and the range of origins of antebellum African Americans, such a finding would not be surprising, and would help validate the geographical and social reach of the corpus. Unfortunately, the rarity of the form and the impossibility of teasing

apart stressed and unstressed *did* forms reduces the certainty of creole claims in this respect.

5.5 Summary

Much of the focus in the literature on AAE multiple verbs focusses on a few preverbal markers, such as *ain't*, *bin* and *done*, despite the rarity of some in contemporary AAVE. This is presumably because such forms are clearly distinct from those of StdE, while bearing similarities in form, if not identity in function, to English-based creoles. However, in some cases (notably *ain't*), they turn out to be virtually identical in both form and function to widespread features of English dialects.

In this corpus, those rare forms are greatly outnumbered by multiple verbs that are identical in both form and function to those of English, even StdE. The present perfect, in particular, is extremely frequent in this corpus, more frequent than any other PTR marker except the simple preterite. This frequency is even more surprising considering that this form has been described as rare in AAE, or even not part of the core AAE grammar. More important than the form's frequency, however, is its distribution. Present perfects are favoured over preterite forms (marked and unmarked) by recency, adverbials related to speech time, *since-* type clauses, ambiguous relative time, new information, negation, and non-statives. Virtually all these effects represent favouring contexts for the present perfect described for contemporary StdE, in some cases differing only in more closely resembling the earlier stage of English that would have provided a model for Early AAE.

The past perfect also behaved as it does in StdE, favoured by anteriority, negation, and narratives. In the sole context fully diagnostic of the distinction between English and descriptions of English-based creoles, the OREAAC letters more closely resemble English in not maintaining a marking distinction based on temporal remoteness.

Other preverbal forms were rare in this corpus, as in other corpora, and the majority are not diagnostic with respect to system membership (e.g. *was/were* V*ing*, *have been*V*ing*, *did*, and *got* passives). One feature of the letters, *be* perfects, reflect an English form of the time that has since fallen from use. Several other features attested in spoken Early AAE (*ain't*, *bin*, *done*) are rare in this corpus. This rarity appears to reflect a combination of speech-writing differences and the rarity of some forms across all corpora.

Chapter 6: Discussion and conclusion

The debate over the origins of contemporary AAVE, characterized as "one of the oldest and as yet unsolved questions in modern sociolinguistics" (Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001:1), may have generated more heat than light at times. The debate has, however, provided the fuel for decades of research. Over time, scholars have unearthed data sources that come ever closer to representing Early AAE, and have refined the tools used to describe its linguistic system. The problems of crossing the barriers of time and knowledge can be overcome to an ever-greater degree through "methodologically consistent use of the tools of variationist sociolinguistics and comparative reconstruction" (Walker 2000b:159), but results achieved through such work always require validation through recourse to as many differently-constituted data sources as possible.

To that end, this dissertation has contributed to the origins debate through the first large-scale quantitative analysis of linguistic variation in a primary diachronic source, i.e. material actually produced by slavery-era African Americans. The studies reported here have investigated the linguistic factors conditioning several variables within the domain of past temporal reference in this newly-available source of authentic written Early AAE.

From both a methodological and linguistic perspective, the most exciting result of these studies is the similarity in the conditioning of these features between this written corpus and previously-investigated diaspora corpora taken to represent spoken Early AAE. This extends and further validates recent work that reveals strong similarities across these widely scattered diaspora varieties (Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001, Walker 2000a, Van Herk 2000, Howe & Walker 2000, Tottie & Harvie 2000).

In this chapter, I review and discuss the findings of Chapters 4 and 5, summarizing the findings of each and discussing their relevance to the AAVE origins debate. I then discuss methodological issues raised by these studies, and evaluate the potential of primary documents such as the OREAAC letters to shed further light on the nature of Early AAE. I conclude by summarizing and situating the contribution of these studies to our understanding of the Early AAE past temporal reference system.

6.1 Single verbs

The behaviour of AAE single verbs in past temporal reference contexts has been the focus of enough study to permit a good deal of comparative endeavour. In the studies reported in Chapter 4, the strongest linguistic constraints on the choice of bare verb forms match precisely those described for large-scale studies of spoken diaspora Early AAE: the bare form is "unequivocally the product of consonant cluster simplification in weak verbs, as originally observed by Labov et al. (1968), and [determined] by historically-determined lexical preferences in the case of strong verbs" (Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001:244).

With regular verbs, the majority of favouring factors described for creoles (stativity, habituality, and *when*-clauses) were not selected as significant by the variable rule programme. The two constraints associated with creoles chosen as significant did not operate in the directions a creole origin hypothesis would predict. Remoteness conditioned bare forms in a direction opposite to creole predictions, and anteriority showed complicating factors not predicted for creoles. Further investigation and cross-corpora comparison may reveal lexical preferences are at the root of these findings.

Instead, the most significant contributing factor was preceding phonological context, with results consistent with a universal linguistic tendency to avoid consonant clusters. This phonological distinction was also evident in a parallel analysis of participial forms, as was a tendency described for contemporary AAVE and StdE, whereby preterite *–ed* forms are deleted at a lower rate than those forming part of a monomorpheme.

Analysis of irregular verbs revealed statistically significant effects on bare forms associated with stativity, anteriority, adverbial type, and verb class. Anteriority effects, both general and linked to adverbials, did not match those associated with creoles. A stativity effect parallelling creole predictions for the basilect, but not the mesolectal variety that would presumably most resemble AAE, appears to be largely due to lexical factors. Not selected as significant were remoteness, habituality, or clause type, constraints operationalized from descriptions of creoles.

Instead, a verb class effect was found. Upon further investigation, this turned out to be an epiphenomenon of strong lexical effects, identical to those described for diaspora data, whereby the proportion of bare forms ranges from 0.2% (*be*) all the way up to 21.4% (*come*). This matches the long history in English of idiosyncratic unmarking of particular verbs, including but

not limited to *come*, *run*, and *give*. In the case of regular verbs, a similar lexical effect is the natural outcome of the (relatively constant) phonological shape of each lexical item (i.e. *jump* always ends with a consonant cluster).

The interaction of this lexical effect with other observed linguistic phenomena, handled in section 4.4.4, is of particular interest, and is to the best of my knowledge new to this study. Previous authors (e.g. Christian et al. 1988, Tagliamonte 1991, Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001) have remarked on the likely lexical underpinning of a verb class effect in dialects and in Early AAE. The results of the present study begin to suggest that such a lexical effect may also underlie some of the strong claims made with respect to stativity, anteriority, or clause type. Particular lexical items appear to be favoured in stative (*hear, see, think, find*), anterior (*leave, come, commence, land, arrive*), posterior (*go, commence, give, say, tell*), and *when*-clause (*come, land, arrive*) contexts; in many cases, these are the same lexical items that strongly favour or disfavour bare forms.

If this finding were to be replicated with spoken data, especially from mesolectal English-based creoles, the relationship between mesolects, basilects, and lexifier languages would require serious reconsideration. Some cross-lect aspectual or relative-tense constraints reported in the literature may simply be the result of the clustering of zero-favouring verbs in particular contexts.[64] For example, the tendency for *when*-clauses to favour bare forms right from the basilect to the near-acrolect in the data studied in Bickerton (1975) may only reflect the oversupply in such clauses of verbs like *come* and *arrive*, which favour bare forms for lexical or phonological reasons respectively. At the very least, testing for interaction between all "significant" factors and lexical effects must be considered a necessary step in future studies purporting to describe the behaviour of PTR verbs.

A major implication for the origins debate of these findings is that it is now possible to attribute incontrovertible time-depth not only to the attested features of Early AAE past temporal reference, but also to the conditioning of those features. This addresses the suggestion advanced

[64] Variable rule programmes permit cross-tabulations that would catch the most extreme of these interactions. However, many interactions between lexical identity and other factor groups are likely statistically significant tendencies, rather than absolutes, so they would not interfere with automated variable rule analyses. In addition, lexical identity is rarely run as a factor group in variable analyses, as the huge number of different verbs creates too many empty cells when considered in tandem with other factor groups. A more suitable approach would be to consider only frequent verbs known to strongly favour or disfavour bare forms, and test for correlations by considering verbs individually as application values.

in Bickerton (1975) that more robust phonological conditioning on contemporary AAVE verb marking than on that of mesolectal creoles resulted from AAVE's accretion of articulation effects following an earlier decreolization. The present data clearly indicate that such conditioning was already completely in place in AAE 150 years ago, rather than accumulating over time in AAVE or diaspora varieties.

The nature of that Early AAE system, as revealed by the conditioning on the use of zero forms, is also clear. Universal or English-derived constraints are clearly in evidence in this corpus; creole-derived constraints tested here are either not significant, epiphenomonal, or operate in inconsistent or opposite directions to those proposed in the literature.

6.2 Multiple verbs

The parallels to English varieties are not restricted to preterite contexts. Analysis of present perfect contexts, so rare in other AAE data sets, reveals strong conditioning of these forms, in the same direction as in English. The present perfect forms are favoured by all the English-derived conditioning factors tested in this study: ambiguity of temporal orientation and relation, recent or continuing events, negation, extended time adverbials, and *since* clauses, as well as by non-statives. The present perfect is clearly part of the core grammar of the authors of these letters, and the direction and magnitude of conditioning effects reveal the very English-like nature of the forms. Even the variability in *Since I Xed, I have Yed* sentences in this corpus reflects the state of the English form at the time AAE would have developed, rather than inappropriate handling of contexts that are near-categorical in contemporary StdE.

The authors'complete control of the English present perfect in these letters is all the more surprising when one considers that much earlier research has suggested that the present perfect is not even part of the core AAE grammar. This earlier conclusion was largely based on two pieces of evidence: the presence of non-standard participials when the perfect occurred, and the overall infrequency of occurrence of present perfects in existing AAE corpora. The levelling of preterite and participial forms with particular lexical items, through the history of English and its dialects (table 4.6) and in this corpus (section 4.4.3), calls the first argument into question. Forms like *he done it* and *I have went* do not indicate unfamiliarity with the present perfect; rather, they reveal complete control of a non-standard marking system shared with English dialects around the world. As for the second argument, the great frequency and English-like conditioning of present

perfect forms in this corpus suggest that their rarity in other AAE corpora is, indeed, due to the rarity of contexts requiring their use, as Tagliamonte (1997) had suggested. In this data set, we have seen that present perfect forms are far more common in letters, including the OREAAC, than in spoken corpora generally, and that they are disfavoured by narrative contexts and adverbials linked to specifically punctual or habitual contexts. The "news-giving" function of letters, especially those written before the days of electronic media, appears to provide many more contexts for present perfect forms than is the case for sociolinguistic interviews, especially those focussing on long-past narratives or descriptions of habitual activities.

In fact, the relative frequency of several AAE PTR forms may have more to do with the exigencies of narrative speech than with underlying grammars. In this data set, we saw that narratives significantly favoured use of the past perfect in anterior contexts, and disfavoured the present perfect. The narrative-heavy sociolinguistic interviews that have provided the data for most quantitative studies of creoles and varieties of AAE have included many contexts for past perfects, but fewer for present perfects. Similarities of techniques across those studies provide strong inter-study reliability, but weaken the power of conclusions drawn from comparing such data with descriptions of other varieties drawn solely from qualitative or anecdotal evidence, or native speaker intuitions. This is especially true when linguistic descriptions are based on the absence of a particular form, whether that form is standard or not. A sounder methodology is, of course, to compare factors conditioning the presence or absence of a particular form across varieties or genres.

It must be emphasized that the greater frequency of the present perfect in this corpus compared to spoken corpora is a matter of genre, rather than the greater formality of letters or standardizing effects of literacy. It is inconceivable that the act of writing or of becoming (semi)literate should permit the OREAAC writers to perfectly acquire the StdE present perfect of the early 19th century, while at the same time maintaining high rates of non-standard use of the preterite, as described in Chapter 4. We see again that it is the parallel conditioning of forms across corpora that reveals the true nature of the shared underlying linguistic system – even in spoken corpora, the present perfect appears to be used in an English-like way; it is simply used in such a way less frequently.

There are, of course, forms whose overall infrequency of use marks a sharp distinction between the language of these letters and the presumed speech patterns of their writers. The

stigmatized forms *ain't* and *done* are rare or non-existent here, and their sensitivity to attempts at style shifting has been noted in other studies (including those of non-AAE varieties) (Van Herk 1999a, Feagin 1979). Contracted forms, equally sensitive to the writing/speech distinction, are also rare in this corpus. They do, however, surface often enough to suggest that they were part of the speech of the input settlers to Liberia. This seems to settle the choice between two competing explanations for the use of bare participles in modern-day Liberian Settler English: clearly the preferred explanation is that "contracted forms of *have* were present in an earlier stage of LSE but subsequently dropped out, a step that would have been consistent with a preference in LSE for vowel-final syllables" (Singler 1991b:257). It seems likely that a similar deletion of reduced preverbal *would* explains at least some of the connection between habitual contexts and bare verb forms in contemporary LSE reported in Singler (1991b:255-7).[65]

As was the case for bare single verbs, the findings for multiple verb forms seem to reinforce earlier diaspora-based findings (Poplack 2000, Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001) concerning the essentially English-like nature of 19th-century AAE. The linguistic profile displayed here, with writers perfectly controlling the English perfect forms while maintaining phonologically and lexically constrained variability in the preterite, does not match any proposed decreolization scenario.

6.3 The value of letters

The results of this study also speak strongly to the value of written data in reconstructing an earlier language variety that has previously been considered almost entirely oral. There are, of course, some areas in which written and spoken Early AAE appear to differ, in addition to the genre-based distinctions described above with respect to the present perfect. In terms of PTR, the differences between the language of these letters and that of spoken Early AAE as instantiated by diaspora data can in many cases be attributed to the nature of the writing process itself. A clear example of this is the absence of a significant finding for following phonological environment, especially compared to the strong preceding phonological effect. This finding (effect before, but not after) matches precisely previous findings with respect to contemporary written data from African American college students (Funkhouser 1973). In addition, sociohistorical research

[65] Van Herk & Walker (2000) revealed a similar phonologically-based erosion of English-like constraints on the use of present-tense s-marking for LSE, by comparing OREAAC letters with findings reported in Singler (1998).

supports the idea that the literacy instruction available to slaves used a word-by-word method, which would explain the absence of sandhi effects. A difference between this study's findings and those of previous speech-based research with respect to doubly-marked verbs also appears to be due to the writing process, as the singly-marked forms (e.g. *lef* for *left*) do not have written analogues. Such differences between corpora may signpost distinctions between written and spoken Early AAE, and such knowledge should certainly inform future research.

Another, expected finding with respect to speech-writing differences is that the overall rate of use of non-standard features (in this case, the bare verb) is lower in these written documents than in spoken diaspora data (e.g. Tagliamonte 1991, Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001) – about one-third the rate. Presumably these letters are written (or at least started) in their authors' most formal register. Given this fact, the density of bare forms in these letters is surprisingly high, up to 16.7% with regular verbs. In fact, for irregular verbs it is as high as or higher than that found by widely-cited studies of contemporary spoken AAVE (Fasold 1972, Rickford 1992). Assuming that these letter writers are attempting to shift toward mainstream norms, and thus using StdE marked forms more frequently than they would in speech, this finding suggests that the use of zero-marked strong verbs in AAE has been in decline over the past two centuries. This parallels the findings for diaspora data of Tagliamonte (1991), Singler (1991), and Poplack & Tagliamonte (2001).

More important, I would suggest, are the strong similarities between the factors conditioning variability in this corpus and those discovered for spoken diaspora data. This strongly supports the notion that these letter writers are using a variety rooted in their vernacular speech, and that the linguistic profile that can be abstracted from these findings represents to a significant degree the writers' underlying grammar. In particular, the strong effect of preceding phonological environment, matching precisely diaspora findings, is a striking example of the speech-like nature of these letters. The letter writers are not only adapting the alphabet of StdE to represent AAE forms; they are *accurately representing the variable conditioning* of those forms. This is a task beyond the abilities of the dialect authors, travellers, and transcribers responsible for previous historical evidence of Early AAE – in fact, the absence of phonological conditioning on ed-marking in the Ex-Slave Narratives, as reported in Schneider (1989), is one of the sharpest distinctions between that work and other quantitative analyses of Early AAE. The phonological effects reported here are possible *only* if the letters' authors are writing in the same way that they

speak.

It is the parallels between the present findings and those from other corpora that confirm the validity of sociolinguistic research using suitable early letters by semiliterate authors. These parallels cover not only conditioning that is shared (preceding phonological environment, lexical effect, regular/irregular and monomorphemic/bimorphemic distinctions, and constraints on the use of the perfect), but also the shared absence of other hypothesized conditioning (anteriority, clause type, remoteness). Not all features will be equally represented in these letters, of course, but the same is true for any corpus, based on restrictions inherent to the genre, interlocutors, or data collection procedures. In the case of letters, features unsuitable for analysis due to their sparse representation include some preverbal markers, many of which are also rare in spoken corpora (e.g. *done, bin*), as well as features associated with contraction of auxiliaries or negators (including *ain't*). The strong parallels between the findings of this study and those of speech-based research clearly reveal that variable forms present in the letters in sufficient numbers to analyze can be expected to reveal traces of the underlying grammar of their authors. Frequent variable features include the morphological marking of preterites, participles, and present tense verb forms. Letters such as these offer much potential for future research on Early AAE, especially in conjunction with spoken (diaspora) materials.

Cross-validation of diaspora data is another major contribution of this study. Any similarities between findings from large-scale analyses of letters and diaspora data validate both corpora as sources of information on Early AAE. As the diaspora corpora involve tape recordings of spoken data, similarities between them and the letters suggest that non-standard features in the letters can be taken as representative of the spoken AAE of the time. And as the letters uncontroversially date from before the Civil War, similarities between them and the diaspora corpora suggest that diaspora features were present in the input data, rather than being post-isolation innovations or contact phenomena. This cross-corpora validation strengthens the claim of each corpus as a valid and reliable sample of Early AAE.

Over the past two decades, there has been a great increase in the number of sources that potentially represent earlier AAE. Conceivably, many still remain to be discovered: more recordings with African Americans born during the antebellum era, more travellers' observations, potentially even other diaspora communities. Letters by antebellum African Americans, however, may hold the most potential for development, as good linguistic practice

can overcome concerns about their validity and reliability better than it can hurdle the barriers of time and community/linguistic knowledge associated with other sources of earlier AAE. The archives of state historical societies, government, and universities presumably contain more letters by semi-literate African Americans of earlier centuries – travellers, escapees, soldiers, prospectors, and slaves. Analysis of the language of these letters may shed new light on the development of AAE in different time periods and different regions, and increase our knowledge of less frequent forms.

6.4 Conclusion

This dissertation has employed the methods of comparative and variationist linguistics in a new data source to confirm and extend the findings of earlier studies on the past temporal reference system of Early African American English. This work has pushed back the real-time limit of knowledge of Early AAE to a point previously accessible only to apparent-time analysis. Strong findings have matched those from diaspora research, whereby regular verbs are largely conditioned by phonology, irregular verbs by lexicon, and neither by anteriority, remoteness, clause type, or other creole factors. These findings buttress earlier claims as to the fundamentally English-like nature of the Early AAE PTR system. And new findings, based on features infrequent in other corpora, reveal new links to an English-like system. These results support the value in AAE, as in other varieties, of authentic diachronic material as a tool to explore the long-hidden history of linguistic variation.

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