

FINAL CONSONANT CLUSTERS IN JAMAICAN CREOLE:
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH
IN JAMAICA

Glenn G. Gilbert

Department of Linguistics
Southern Illinois University
Carbondale, Illinois 62901, USA

Each officially English-speaking country in the Caribbean has its own discrete creole language, a product of the continuous interaction between creole basilects and Standard (Caribbean) English. The teaching of Standard English in these countries' schools presents a unique challenge to educators, since Standard English is neither a "foreign language" nor a "native language" in the usual sense of these terms. As part of a sustained effort by Caribbean educators to improve teacher training, the preparation of educational materials, the sequencing of the materials, and the testing of educational achievement, Dennis Craig, Lawrence Carrington, Donald Winford, and others have called for detailed and exacting studies of the respective Caribbean creole continuums and for the improvement of all aspects of education resulting from such studies (Winford 1976:48).

Glenn Akers in his Harvard dissertation (1977) and in the summary of the findings published in book form (Karoma, 1981) has supplied us with just the kind of study being called for, with respect to two socially diagnostic features of Jamaican phonology: final consonant clusters and the distribution of postvocalic *r*. This paper discusses Akers' working hypotheses and findings for final consonant clusters, and explores the pedagogical applications of this most detailed study of the continuum in Jamaican phonology yet carried out.

Akers argues for a bi-polar competence model for Jamaica (Creole ----- English); he employs implicational scales to describe the variable appearance of the second member of final consonant clusters, and he introduces admissibility conditions for these clusters, in place of cumbersome and unrevealing morpheme structure conditions, to represent implicationally ordered variation. Akers' analysis of the data collected during seven (!) fieldtrips from over 150 speakers provides support, from the area of phonology, for Beryl Bailey's assumption (1966) of the bi-polar nature of Jamaican syntax. Since Bailey's hypothesis had the effect of artificially increasing the distance between the two poles, not to mention the fact that the basilectal Creole pole appeared to be a composite creation of the analyst, it was unconvincing when first proposed (Gilbert 1973). Using technology and analytical methods not available to Bailey in the 1960's, Akers' study demonstrates the soundness of her views.

Akers follows the "lectological" model of David DeCamp, C.-J. Bailey, and Derek Bickerton, maintaining that "only the implicational relationships are contained in linguistic competence" (Akers 1981:5; see also Hudson 1980:184 ff.). For Akers, the "variable rule" or "sociolinguistic" model of William Labov, Henrietta Cedergren, David Sankoff, and others, makes little sense since it claims that linguistic competence is lodged in the community as a whole, an assumption which may be hard to maintain for a creole society.

In all fairness to the variable rule model, though, it should be noted that John Rickford (1979) applied it successfully to vowel laxing within the Guyanese creole continuum. Geneviève Escure, in her just published article "Interactional Patterns in Belizean Creole" (1982), goes a step further by maintaining that "it is certainly possible to use the variable rule model to analyze any linguistic variable over a portion of the creole continuum, as long as gradient stratification is involved", though she notes that "whether a variable rule can accommodate all constraints over the complete range of the linguistic spectrum is still open to question" (1982:262, FN 8).

Indeed, both Escure (1981; 1982) and LePage (1980a; 1980b; forthcoming) cast doubt on whether the creole continuums of the Caribbean should be considered as "straight-line" or "uni-dimensional" at all. Escure's work in Belize and LePage and Tabouret-Keller's longitudinal studies in Belize and St. Lucia indicate that there is no simple linear progression from a basilect through a series of mesolects toward Standard (Caribbean) English as an acrolectal model. Although these findings cast doubt on the polylectal/close-implicational model in creole studies, Escure continues to use implicational scales, at least in their multivalued form, i.e., with notation of frequency of occurrence within each cell of the scale. The scales "reveal the co-occurrence patterns of some creole and English features within the overall continuum. Implicational arrays have the advantage of representing a cross-section of the continuum by establishing a hierarchy of varieties based solely on the co-occurrence of linguistic structures. Since extralinguistic factors (such as age, sex, occupation, etc.) are not incorporated in the hierarchical array of samples, it is possible to correlate external parameters to the continuum without 'circularity of argument'" (Escure 1982:241; DeCamp 1971:36).

In recent years, LePage has proposed a much more complex procedure, better designed to accommodate a society with sharply competing linguistic loyalties. In a letter to the author, dated August 4, 1982, he put his views succinctly: "I do not believe in linear progressions from 'basilectal' to 'acrolectal' dialects, and if one is to have -- as I think one must -- a set of socially-marked systems then again a bi-polar model is inadequate; in Jamaica one has at least the Standard Written language as one

Final Consonant Clusters in Jamaican Creole

model, the usage of educated Jamaicans as another, and urban Kingstonian creole as a third and one or more rural creole dialects as well [not to mention Rastafarian lingo, North American English, Cuban Spanish, and so forth!]. One needs, in other words, the multidimensional model of my Acts of Identity theory; the descriptive apparatus must be polysystemic (but that does not mean 'polylectal' and certainly not closely implicational - David DeCamp told me not long before he died that he was sorry people had taken up implicational grammars with so much zest because he no longer believed in them)." LePage proposes using a type of factor analysis called cluster analysis within the multidimensional model of his acts of identity theory. This will be more fully explained in his forthcoming book, Acts of Identity. (See also the discussion of LePage's proposals, in relation to the lectological and variable rule models, in Escure, 1982:240-241, 261-262.)

Although Akers could probably muster plenty of arguments in favor of his strict lectological approach to Jamaican phonology (after all, he still has Derek Bickerton and C.-J. Bailey on his side), his work suffers from the failure to take the findings of LePage, Tabouret-Keller, Escure, et al. into account. With this caveat in mind, let us now turn to the methodology and principle findings for the teaching of Standard English in Jamaica.

Akers' strict lectological approach dictates that he begin with the individual as the fundamental unit of analysis describing the lects that each individual uses in production and reception. He analyzes each lect separately and then formulates an implicationally ordered set of adaptation rules for converting one lect into another.

Using socially diagnostic features (such as final consonant clusters), individual speakers may themselves be ranked on an implicational scale. Only after such a ranking is performed does he analyse other characteristics of the speakers (such as socio-economic class, ethnic group, age, and sex) to determine how these factors related to the ranking established by purely linguistic criteria, thus avoiding DeCamp's "circularity of argument". In Jamaica, socio-economic class and age would be especially important factors for the educator to take into account, since they are presumably closely associated with the positioning of individuals in the ranking and can thus serve as predictors of the problems they are likely to have in learning Standard English.

Following Lindo (1973), Akers estimates that approximately 94% of Jamaicans are Creole-dominant. The remainder -- insofar as they are native speakers of English -- are English-dominant (Akers 1981:8). According to the typology of language use proposed by Joshua Fishman (1972), Jamaica can be characterized as plus diglossic, plus bilingual, (diglossia being defined as the socially regulated presence within the same society of two competences, two linguistic entities related through the bi-polar model). The use of forms from the Creole and English ranges is

both socially regulated and is also characteristic of the speech of the vast majority of individuals. For Creole-dominant speakers, Creole occurs in unmonitored speech and English in monitored speech; English is associated with certain formal situations within domains narrowly defined by the society, and it will be subject to both frequency and structural hypercorrection. (The reverse will be true for English-dominant speakers who will tend to hypercorrect when attempting to speak Creole.) Hypercorrection is thus seen to be diagnostic of dominance in the other language.

In his analysis of final consonant clusters, Akers identifies four Creole stages (lects) and six English stages. (See Fig. 1, next page). Fig. 1 suggests that Jamaican speakers have a "split range" (Bickerton 1975:187 ff.), i.e., there are two linguistic competences present: Creole and English. For Creole-dominant speakers, the monitoring associated with situations of increasing formality begins in English stage 1. Each successive adaptation toward the acrolectal model moves the speaker up one stage. (For English-dominant speakers attempting to talk Creole, the problem is to move down the scale. Monitoring presumably begins when Creole stage 4 is reached.)

The split-range lectal array of Fig. 1 was arrived at by Akers using the following procedure:

- 1) Identify consonant clusters whose second member is never deleted by Creole-dominant speakers. In the present study these turn out to be -mp, -lf, -ns, -nc, -nk, -ps, and -ks. Those speakers who do delete are presumably English-dominant persons attempting to speak Creole. Their "mistakes" are a kind of reverse structural hypercorrection.
- 2) Set up an implicational scale where speakers are ranged along one dimension and consonant clusters along the other dimension.
- 3) Examine the cluster types which go together, i.e., those which form the same row. A cover term (e.g., "placeholders") or symbol (e.g., "CC" for core clusters) may be assigned to each group for convenient reference. The rows will make up the tentative lects or stages.
- 4) State the morpheme structure conditions (MSC) which characterize each stage. The MSC are a formal statement of sequences which are permissible in each stage. MSC are a standard procedure for stating syntagmatic phonological relationships in current phonological analysis.
- 5) Reformulate the MSC in terms of admissibility conditions (AC). These represent an improvement over MSC since they "describe the subset of clusters added to the system at each given stage from the total set of clusters found in the

<u>Creole</u>						
Stage						
1	mp	lf	ns	ɲc [∨]	ŋk	ps, ks
2		lv	nz	ɲj [∨]		
3	lp		ls, lt	lc [∨]	lk	
4	lb		lz, ld	lj [∨]		
<u>English</u>						
Stage						
1			nt			
2	sp	ft	nd, st		sk	pt, kt
3	mz, bz	fs, vz	nz, ts, dz		gz	
4	md, bd	vd		st [∨] , ct [∨] , jd [∨]	ŋd, gd	
5	mθ, pθ	fθ	nθ, lθ		ŋθ	
			θs, tθ, θt			
			θz, θd			
6	lm		ln			

Figure 1. (Monomorphemic) Clusters Present According to Stage. (Source: Akers 1981:49.)

acrolectal model. The full set of clusters found at any given stage is determined by the AC for that stage and for all previous stages" (Akers 1981:54). The MSC's are grammatical statements which characterize each individual lect independently; AC's are a statement of the permissible variable output of adaptation rules forming part of a speaker's competence, enabling him to shift from one lect to another. This model of cluster production accounts for a continuum of speech forms in terms of individual differences in learning the implicationally-related admissibility conditions (Akers 1981:54).

6) Examine the lects for diagnostic markers of switching (in this case the -nt of English stage 1). If such markers are detected, they will point toward a split-range or bi-polar model, indicative of societal diglossia. Failure to detect these features might be taken as evidence for a single-range type of post-creole continuum (presumably far more decreolized, as is the case in U.S. Black English Vernacular).

An interesting test of the scale of lects in Fig. 1 would be language use in those social situations where large numbers of Jamaicans have emigrated to cities outside the Caribbean, e.g., London (as described by Wells 1973), New York, and Toronto. For the Jamaicans, such a situation would become minus diglossic, plus bilingual. Although personal bilingualism would presumably persist for most individuals, principally because of the covert prestige carried by a knowledge of Creole, from the standpoint of the larger society the societal regulation of the use of Creole would be removed. A replication of Akers' study among such émigré Jamaicans would show, among other things, whether the predicted order of acquisition of final consonant clusters is preserved. The explanation of the findings from such a study would be a good test of the strict implicational model (and its purely linguistic predictions) as opposed to the acts of identity model, with its polysystemic emphasis.

Since the admissibility conditions are formulated in terms of the full set of acrolectal clusters, the model proposed by Akers also reflects the asymmetry between perception and production by Creole-dominant speakers for clusters within the English continuum (Akers 1981:62). Indeed, such asymmetries appear to extend to all areas of English grammar. As Dennis Craig puts it, there is an area of the English repertoire of the creole-influenced learner of English that involves "English structures which the learner would recognize and comprehend if they are used by other speakers (especially in meaningful contexts) but which the learner would be unable to produce" (1978:420). This is the third of Craig's four-part division of the English repertoire confronting the learner. The first category includes structures shared with the Creole and is the easiest; the fourth and most difficult category is made up of "English structures totally unknown to the learner".) It is especially in Craig's third area of Standard English pedagogy that suitably formulated implicational scales, couched in terms of admissibility conditions for phonology, syntax, etc., could form the basis for diagnostic

testing, achievement testing, and sequencing of teaching materials. Such studies also help to distinguish Craig's area three from area four.

This is illustrated by Fig. 2 (next page) which displays phonological and grammatical admissibility conditions for the six stages of English. AC-5 (English stage 1) allows the second segment to be minus voice and minus sonorant, i.e., a voiceless obstruent, which would permit for example /t/ and /s/. Notice, however, that English stages 3 and 4 are characterized by grammatical conditions GC-Z and GC-D, which show where -s and -t, as grammatical markers, are acquired. (The five kinds of final -s morphemes -- noun plural, possessive, third singular present of verbs, contracted copula, and contracted auxiliary -- are not distinguished here; -D is the regular past tense morpheme.) Since the two preceding English stages and the Creole stages permit various monomorphemic clusters ending in -s and -t, it is clear that bimorphemic clusters (involving inflectional morphemes with -s or -t) are acquired considerably later than their monomorphemic counterparts.

This explains why a student might be able to distinguish (though perhaps not produce for himself) the phonological and semantic difference between miss and mist (Craig's area three), but not between miss and mised (Craig's area four). The same prediction could be made of lap and lapse versus lap and laps.

Akers' proposal of an ordered set of admissibility conditions within a bi-polar model for Jamaica contrasts strongly with the views of many linguists about Black English Vernacular in the United States. Although sociolinguists such as Wolfram and Fasold (1974:125 ff.) admit that the third person singular verb suffix /-Z/ is lacking in the competence of many speakers of the dialect, they view the frequent non-appearance of /-D/ as being the product of variable phonological deletion. In other words, it is claimed that BEV speakers possess /-D/ in their competence. Clearly, teaching strategies aimed at decreasing the frequency of stigmatized deletions ("frequency correction") should be different from those intended to teach a related, but different acrolectal (H) code to students who do not possess such structures in their Creole (L) competence.

At the same time, Akers' findings (as illustrated in Fig. 1) predict the lectal location of hypercorrection and thus point the way to diagnostic criteria for determining Creole dominance or English dominance. Especially diagnostic for the particular language that a speaker is using at any given moment is the presence or absence of the cluster -nt. In Creole productions, it never appears; in English productions, it is present in underlying form and is realized variably (Akers 1981:48). Its diagnostic value is enhanced by the failure of the six English stages to follow the four Creole stages in a neat linear order; there is some "overlap". In English

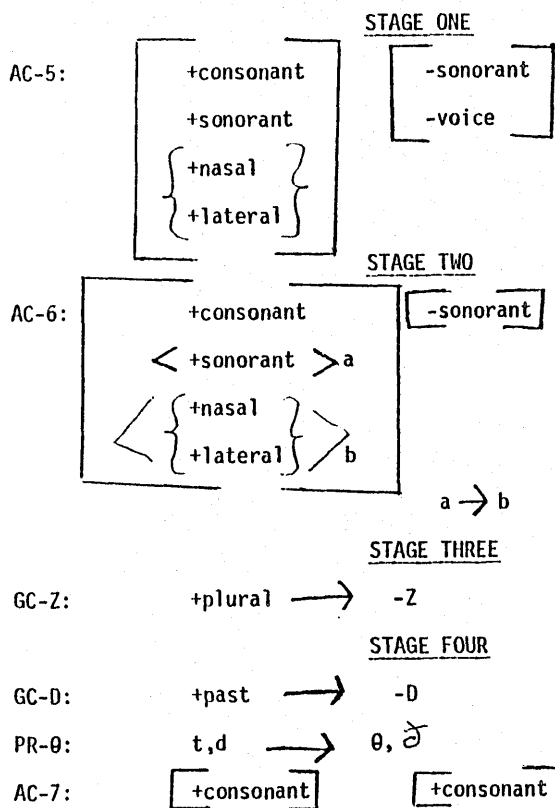


Figure 2: Admissibility Conditions for English Stages 1-6. (AC = admissibility condition; GC = grammatical condition; PR = phonological condition. Source: Akers 1981:61.)

productions, English stage 1 appears before Creole stage 4. In Creole productions, Creole stage 4 may or may not be present, but there will be no trace of English stage 1 (which is in fact made up of -nt, plus the clusters permitted by Creole stages 1, 2, and 3).

For Black English Vernacular in the United States, the bulk of the linguistic evidence seems to favor a monolingual, frequency-correction approach. In Jamaica, on the other hand, even "monoliterate bilingualism" may be insufficient. (This term was adapted by Craig from Fishman and Lovas' typology of education in a bilingual context, 1970. See his interesting discussion of five or six alternative educational models in creole societies in Craig, 1980).

A conscious level of political and cultural protest since independence may eventually bring with it a change of underlying attitudes toward the value of Creole and the relationship between English and Creole (Carrington 1976:33). In that case, standardization (perhaps of a more flexible type, better suited to the continuum) and financing may also not be insuperable obstacles.

Craig's current assessment remains cautious: "In countries like the officially English Caribbean countries, for example, the policy of monoliterate bilingualism seems to be as far as society is prepared to go in the direction of educational programs in creole" (1980:259). This is doubtless realistic for the present, but future changes in attitude may dictate a shift in policy.

Escure's finding that the language of Belize is "a creole (not post-creole) continuum. . . [which] is a basically bilingual situation. . ." (1982:240) is likely to hold for Jamaica as well. Increasingly, the linguistic evidence calls for partial or full bilingualism. Thus, the introduction of full-scale bilingual education which has been proposed for such creole societies as Haiti would seem to apply to Jamaica as well.

REFERENCES

- Akers, Glenn A. 1981. Phonological variation in the Jamaican continuum. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Karoma.
- Bailey, Beryl. 1966. Jamaican Creole syntax. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bickerton, Derek. Dynamics of a creole system. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carrington, Lawrence D. 1976. Determining language educational policy in Caribbean sociolinguistic complexes. International Journal of the Sociology of Language 8.27-43.

- Craig, Dennis R. 1978. Language education in a post-creole society. Case studies in bilingual education, ed. by Bernard Spolsky and Robert L. Cooper, 404-426, Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House.
- _____. 1980. Models for educational policy in creole-speaking communities. Theoretical orientations in creole studies, ed. by Albert Valdman and Arnold Highfield, 245-265. New York: Academic Press.
- DeCamp, David. 1971. Implicational scales and sociolinguistic linearity. *Linguistics* 73.30-43.
- Escure, Geneviève. 1981. Decreolization in a creole continuum: Belize. Historicity and variation in creole studies, ed. by Arnold Highfield and Albert Valdman, 27-39. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Karoma.
- _____. 1982. Contrastive patterns of intragroup and intergroup interaction in the creole continuum of Belize. *Language in Society* 11.239-264.
- Fishman, Joshua A. 1972. The sociology of language. An interdisciplinary social science approach to language in society. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House.
- _____, and J. Lovas. 1970. Bilingual education in sociolinguistic perspective. *TESOL Quarterly* 4.215-222.
- Gilbert, Glenn G. 1973. Review of Bailey 1966. *Zeitschrift für Dialektologie und Linguistik* 40.216-222.
- Hudson, R.A. 1980. *Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- LePage, Robert B. 1980a. Hugo Schuchardt's creole studies and the problem of linguistic continua. Hugo Schuchardt: Schuchardt-Symposium 1977 in Graz. *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, ed. by Klaus Lichem and Hans Joachim Simon, 113-145. Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- LePage, Robert B. 1980b. Theoretical aspects of sociolinguistic studies in pidgin and creole languages. Theoretical orientations in creole studies, ed. by Albert Valdman and Arnold Highfield, 331-367. New York: Academic Press.
- _____. forthcoming. *Acts of identity*.
- Lindo. 1973. *Demographic information: Jamaica*. Mimeographed. Kingston, Jamaica: NCK Advertising.
- Rickford, John R. 1979. Variation in a creole continuum: quantitative and implicational approaches. Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Pennsylvania. (University Microfilms 7928172.)

Final Consonant Clusters in Jamaican Creole

- Wells, John C. 1973. Jamaican pronunciation in London. (Publications of the Philological Society, XXV.) Oxford: Blackwell.
- Winford, Donald. 1976. Teacher attitudes toward language varieties in a creole community. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 8.45-75.
- Wolfram, Walt, and Ralph W. Fasold. 1974. *The study of social dialects in American English*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).