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PRELIMINARIES TO THE STUDY OF THE DIALECTS OF WHITE WEST INDIAN ENGLISH*

INTRODUCTION

Scattered throughout the anglophone West Indies there exists a minority "poor white" population, descended from the early English colonial expansion. As Hancock (1984: 2) has pointed out, the speakers of various metropolitan English dialects represent one of the ingredients in the contact situation that gave rise to the contemporary English-related creoles. However, this population has received only scant attention from creolists despite the fact that their dialects are the contemporary survivals of those metropolitan varieties which were present in the early sociolinguistic environment.

The purpose of this paper is to present some of the demographic, geographic, and sociolinguistic parameters which affected the development of the dialects of white West Indian English.¹ For the most part, the focus will be on the historical accounts of the white population. By examining the historical evidence, tentative relationships between the dialects which take into account settlement history, internal migration, and areal contact will be presented.

EARLY ENGLISH SETTLEMENT AND THE GROWTH OF THE WHITE POPULATION

With the founding of the first permanent English colonies at St. Kitts (1624) and Barbados (1627) came the immediate need for planters and

laborers to run the agricultural enterprise. The first imported labor force into the English possessions came from the British Isles. Planters in the West Indies established an early preference for white labor, hoping to keep the new colonies primarily European. While servants from Scotland and Wales were generally preferred by the planters in Barbados and St. Kitts, they were forced to acquire servants from all parts of the British Isles (Niles 1980: 22).

Bond servants were shipped from the ports of Bristol and London in England, and Limerick and Kinsale in Ireland (Bridenbaugh 1972: 15; Le Page and DeCamp 1960: 12). The shipping was carried out by both English and Dutch firms. The Dutch participation is not surprising, given the amount of Dutch influence on Barbadian society in the seventeenth century (cf., Niles 1980; Williams 1983a). Servants were procured by a variety of means, including kidnapping (Le Page and DeCamp 1960: 12). The majority of the illegal methods were later outlawed by the authorities in Bristol and London as well as in the colonies.

In the early period, indentured servants worked together in small groups on small farm plots (Niles 1980: 69). This situation stands in direct contrast to the plantation in which the majority of African slaves were later to find themselves. In this period prior to 1660, there was a limited use of African slaves in all of the English possessions. This was due to two related factors, the first being the desire of the colonial administrations to establish a predominantly white population in the islands, and the second being the abundance and availability of white servants to fulfill that desire (Bridenbaugh 1972: 32). Up until 1660, those slaves that were being introduced into the English islands came primarily through the Dutch entrepôts at Curaçao and St. Eustatius (Williams 1983a).

It was not until after 1660 that the European traders – especially the Dutch – were able to make the use of African slaves economically attractive for the English planters. Prior to that, white servants were more easily and more cheaply obtained than were African slaves. The servants were also only bonded for a finite period of time – from about four to seven years depending on their age and sex. The African slaves, on the other hand, were a lifelong investment for the planters. A consequence of this was that the African slaves were given better treatment than were the indentured servants in this early period. Oftentimes, the servants were worked to death during the last year of their indenturage. In doing so, the planter class was able to avoid having to provide the servants with land as their contracts had provi-

ded (cf. Bridenbaugh 1972; Hamshire 1972). During this period, the European servants and the African slaves worked and lived together – a social arrangement which had linguistic consequences (Le Page and DeCamp 1960: 18; Niles 1980: 67; Price 1962: 48).

The white population was steadily increasing up until the 1660s. In particular, the number of Irish in places such as Barbados, St. Kitts, and Montserrat increased to a point that orders were issued to limit their further immigration (Sheppard 1977: 23). While this official action had little effect on the actual situation, it was taken in response to the fears that the predominantly Irish-Catholic servants would side with the French during the territorial battles in the region. This was a particular concern of the planters in St. Kitts since the island was divided between the English and the French at the time. The Irish had also acquired the reputation for being “lazy” and “worthless”² (Le Page and DeCamp 1960: 12). Sheppard (1977: 23) reports that the Irish also had a proclivity for escaping and joining up with African maroon communities. Niles (1980: 79) has documented this pattern of behavior for the entire indentured population.

The increasing white population caused a number of problems for the planter class. Many of the servants brought to Barbados, St. Kitts, and Antigua had been promised a parcel of land at the end of their indenturement. However, the rapid growth in the number of servants left only a small portion of arable land to be divided up amongst them, since the planters had already acquired the majority of it. The continual freeing of large numbers of servants soon gave rise to a large, primarily landless population in the larger islands (Bridenbaugh 1972: 176).

Concerns about overcrowding and increasing poverty among the servile whites led to government-initiated relocations from St. Kitts and Antigua during the seventeenth century. A considerable number of independent relocations to the surrounding islands, such as the exodus of servants from St. Kitts to Montserrat, also occurred in this period (Hamshire 1972: 34). Sheppard states that over 500 servants fled from Antigua to the nearby French and Dutch possessions in the time up until 1660.

Hancock (1980: 22) has argued that Barbados was an exception among the English possessions in the West Indies, having a white majority which spoke nautically or provincially influenced varieties of English.³ This situation seems, however, to have been paralleled in many of the other English islands as Table 1 shows. The early demographic situation would have been represented by a large white popula-

tion, including both native and non-native speakers of English; and a smaller African population, none of which would have spoken any type of English at this time. The early work situation was one of small-scale farms on which whites and blacks worked side-by-side. The effect of this on the linguistic situation was realized as early as 1667 by a Barbadian writer, saying that with the large number of white servants and poor whites who worked in the fields, and the number of blacks that had become tradesmen, "... now there were many thousands of slaves that speak English" (CSPC 1661-1668: # 1657).

THE GEOGRAPHY OF WHITE MIGRATION

As previously discussed, during the seventeenth century the white population increased in the British West Indies. As land became scarce and the conditions of indenturage worsened, many of the servants chose to flee from the larger islands in search of places where land was available and where they could not be found and thereby subject to re-indentureship. There were also a number of migrations that were initiated by the colonial administrations of the various islands. These took place, for the most part, in the middle decades of the nineteenth century and were initiated by the Barbadian officials.

It is important for the purposes of determining the relationships between the dialects of white West Indian English to differentiate certain temporal and spatial parameters that have affected the settlement strategies. First, a distinction must be made between the *original settlements*, on the one hand, and the *branch*, or *relocated settlements*, on the other. We are then able to make a distinction between communities such as those in the Scotland District of Barbados, which are original settlements dating back to the seventeenth century, and those communities found on St. Vincent, Grenada, and Bequia, which are offshoots of the original settlements on Barbados. Relocated communities such as these are the products of government-initiated emigration dating back to the nineteenth century. Not to recognize this temporal factor in the settlement histories of these white communities would skew the dialect relationships that would be established.

Within the branch settlements a further distinction must be made between those which were government-initiated and those which were not. This distinction will aid in accounting for those communities which are, or were, in existence but whose origins are not documented in the historical records. Communities such as those on Saba and

TABLE I. THE POPULATION OF THE WEST INDIES IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Location	Date	Whites	Blacks
Anguilla	1676	550	0
Antigua	1672	1200	570
	1678	2308	2896
	1690	5000	?
Bahamas	1670	300	200
Barbados	1692	1400	?
	1650	24000	6000
	1655	23000	20000
	(est)1660	22000	20000
	(est)1670	20000	30000
	1673	21309	33184
	1676	21725	32473
	1684	19568	46602
	(est)1690	18000	50000
Bermuda	1629	2000	?
	1698	3615	2247
Jamaica	1662	4100	552
	1673	7700	9500
	(est)1690	10000	30000
Montserrat	1648	1000 families	?
	1677	2682	1229
Nevis	1672	1600	1739
	1672	3521	3860
Saba	1659	120	87
St Kitts	1667	6823	6350
	1678	1897	1914
St. Thomas	1672	104	?
	1673	29	?
Tortola	1672	10-12 Dutch families	
		80 English, Irish, Welsh	?
	1685	1 couple	?

Anguilla are probable examples. For these communities, ethnohistory is a valuable tool to be used by the creolist in determining the settlement histories.

On Saba, for example, there are no existing historical records which indicate that the influx of the English-speaking whites in the years between 1640 and 1659 was due to a planned relocation on the part of any island's administration. Even so, by 1659, English speakers accounted for half of the total population; the other half being Dutch (Hartog 1982). Given the political relations between England and Holland in the seventeenth century, it is highly unlikely that the Dutch government would have officially approved of the English immigration.

The ethnohistorical account of Saba provided by Johnson (1979), indicates that the influx of English-speaking whites was the result of political events on St. Kitts, in particular, the lack of willingness on the part of some of the Kittians to side with the English against the French. In light of the historical reports concerning the Irish siding with the French against the English, and the long-standing influence of the Catholic Church on Saba, it appears that the first immigrants were Irish Catholics who came from St. Kitts in the time between 1640 and 1659. However, what remains unknown is what percentage of this population was only speaking English as a second-languages – that is, how many were speakers of Gaelic or other languages – but had acquired some command of English through their indenturage. This question remains to be answered.⁴

For the communities such as those on Bequia, St. Vincent, and Grenada which were planned relocations on the part of the Barbadian government, the demographic particulars are somewhat clearer. We know, for instance, the date of migration and the reasons behind it.⁵ However, a generalization concerning the geography of white settlement for both the original and the branch settlements can be made.

The majority of white communities that have continued to exist since the early English colonization have relied on certain topographic features for their longevity. For some of the communities, relative isolation has facilitated their homogeneous development. In the cases of Barbados and Anguilla which are generally flat, the freed servants settled in the more remote and more hilly regions. While remoteness and elevation are only slight in those cases, the preference for settlement in areas of this type is exhibited by the locations of other white communities as well.

On St. Vincent, the whites were relocated to Dorsetshire Hill (Price

1962). The area is one of steep ridges covered with a deep friable soil. It was from this position that the French and the Caribs were able to maintain a stronghold during the eighteenth century, since it completely commands the surrounding area (Shephard 1831; Sheppard 1977; 68-71). However, Dorsetshire Hill has now become a middle-class suburb of Kingstown, changing the racial demography of the district.⁶ The maps show the locations of the communities discussed; Table 2 lists the documented white communities. (I have chosen to include both the Bahamas and Bermuda for historical reasons.)

TABLE 2. CONTEMPORARY WHITE COMMUNITIES IN THE WEST INDIES*

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1.	Anguilla – Irish, Scots
(a)	Island Harbour
2.	Bahamas – English, American
(a)	Abaco
(b)	Eleuthera
(c)	Long Island
(d)	New Providence
3.	Barbados – Irish, Scots, English
(a)	Scotland District
4.	Bay Islands – English, Scots
(a)	French Cay
5.	Bermuda – English
6.	Cayman Islands – English, Irish, Scots
7.	Grenada – Irish, Scots, English
(a)	Mt Moritz
8.	Grenadines – Irish, Scots, English
(a)	Bequia
(1)	Mt Pleasant
9.	Jamaica – German
(a)	Seaford
10.	Saba – Irish, Scots, English
(a)	Hells Gate
(b)	Windwardside
11.	St Barts – French
12.	St. Lucia – Irish, Scots, English
(a)	Roseau Valley
13.	St. Martin – Irish, Dutch, French
(a)	Simson Baai
14.	St. Thomas – French
(a)	Carenage
15.	St. Vincent – Irish, Scots, English
(a)	Dorsetshire Hill
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* compiled by J. Williams (1983)

THE GEOGRAPHY OF WHITE COMMUNITIES

On Grenada, the whites were relocated to Mt. Moritz in the 1870s, where they have persisted as a "closed peasant community of 'poor whites'" (Smith 1965: 15). Here also, the minority white population settled in an elevated region and is relatively isolated from the rest of the society. In both Grenada and St. Vincent, the white communities are located within a few miles of those islands' respective capitals. Being spatially removed from the majority of the population while still being within a short distance of the metropolitan and creole influences has had an effect on the sociolinguistic repertoire of these individuals.

RACE AND SOCIAL IDENTITY IN WHITE COMMUNITIES

The indentured servants who were brought to the West Indies in the seventeenth century were expected to fulfill the same functions as the unprivileged servile class had done in the Motherland. Even though their labor provided the backbone for the agricultural enterprise, they were immediately distinguished as being socially apart from the white planter class in the region (Dunn 1972: 71-72). In Antigua, Barbados, and St. Kitts, they were soon to be grouped with the African slaves in terms of their behavior and their social position. However, they did not view their own position within the larger society as such.

Davis (1978: 16-17) has presented her interpretation of the social and ethnic identity of white Barbadians as follows.

In any case, they (white Barbadians) seem never to have formed a distinct sector in terms of community self-governance, or in forms of mating, marriage, family and household organization, ownership, and inheritance. In these, as in forms of expressive culture (eg. dress, *speech*⁷, gesture, entertainment, skills and knowledge), poor whites were early *creolized*⁷ to a joint culture with lower-class blacks.

From both a synchronic and a diachronic perspective, Davis' conclusions appear to be incorrect. Sheppard (1977: 75) reports that in 1895, the "poor whites" often wore masks over the lower portion of the face to prevent the lips from being burned by the sun. She also offers the following interpretation of kinship and incest among white Barbadians: "Certainly their self-enforced isolation from the other sections of the community led to their inbreeding." Price (1962: 50) has commented on the lack of intermarriage among the whites living in the Dorsetshire Hill district of St. Vincent, but does not mention inbreeding. For Saba, Hartog (1982) discusses the history of the white community at Mary's Point, where inbreeding was practiced in an extreme form, leading to a number of birth defects. The community was relocated by the colonial administration to a site near the capital (cf. Williams 1983b).

Price (1962: 51) states that the white Grenadians at Mt. Moritz are culturally distinct from the majority black population. At one time they were also feared by the local blacks. This same sentiment was also expressed to me by informants I worked with in the white community of Mt. Pleasant, Bequia, and by local blacks living in other, nearby communities. The roots of the cultural distinction exhibited by the branch white communities and their preference for isolation can be traced back to the original white communities on Barbados, Antigua, and St. Kitts.⁸

Given the information presented here, it is obvious that the conclusions drawn by Davis are incorrect. White Barbadians, historically, formed a distinct sector within the larger Barbadian society. This pattern was transferred with the relocation of a number of individuals to the islands of Grenada, St. Vincent, and Bequia. While the white Barbadians, or "Redlegs", have generally disappeared as a class in the Scotland District, their descendants on those other islands continue to persist, maintaining a number of the cultural traditions and ways of speaking.⁹

SOCIOLINGUISTIC PARAMETERS AND THE FEATURES OF WHITE WEST INDIAN ENGLISH

In the final section of this paper, an outline of some of the sociolinguistic factors that have affected the development of the dialects of white West Indian English will be presented. Given the scarcity of data for any comparative statements, much of what follows is programmatic in nature.

The aim of the research on the speech of the minority white population is to document, from an ethnographic perspective (cf. Hymes 1972, 1974; Sherzer 1977; Abrahams 1983), the range of social and regional variation that is present. Some of the earlier studies of the dialects of white West Indian English, primarily those of Ryan (1973) and Holm (1980), have failed to contextualize adequately the data presented as being representative of those dialects. My use of contextualization here has two related, yet quite distinct meanings. First, it applies to the overall cultural assumptions and presuppositions that an individual brings to a situation and the ways in which these pragmatic factors influence the sociolinguistic outcome. Second, it refers to the immediate context of the event, or the social situation. Without knowledge of the social identity of the participants involved, or the informants, we cannot ascertain the true nature of the sociolinguistic evidence we are presented with. A necessary goal of any study of the speech of the minority white population in the West Indies will be to contextualize the data in such a way so as to be able to specify under what social and linguistic conditions the use of creole features occurs in their vernacular.

We should also observe if the tendency of creole features to group in relation to the division between Eastern and Western Caribbean also holds for the dialects of white West Indian English (cf. Hancock 1984).

However, in doing so, we do not want to focus only on the creole features of the dialects since they may be attributable solely to areal contact. Related to this is the issue of the directionality of influence between the dialects of white West Indian English and the West Indian creoles. Holm (1980: 60) in his ground-breaking article, has argued for an African origin for many of the features of white Bahamian English. While certain speakers of white West Indian English may have adopted features of the West Indian creoles, this does not necessarily indicate that their origin – in the speech of whites – is African. The view presented here parallels that of Le Page (1977) and Hancock (1984) in which there are multiple influences and a number of ‘ingredients’ which are affected by temporal, spatial, and social factors in the linguistic contact – giving rise to a creole language. The presence of such features is more likely attributable to contact with creole speakers and specific ‘acts of identity’ on the part of individual speakers of white West Indian English (cf. Le Page 1980; Le Page and Tabouret-Keller in press).

Hancock (1984: 5-6) points out that the dialects of white West Indian English as well as those of St. Helena, Tristan da Cunha, Pitcairn, and Norfolk Island will give creolists clues as to the type of English that was taken on ships out of England. Clearly, this will be one outcome of the documentation of these dialects; however, it remains unclear at the present time whether the indentured population that was transported to the West Indies in the seventeenth century actually spoke nautically influenced varieties of English. In stating this I do not intend to misrepresent Hancock’s position, since this statement refers to nautical English as well as any other types that were taken out of England on ships. Instead, I am contending that we must ascertain the degree of overlap between the features of nautical English and the features of the provincial varieties of English.

I will now outline some of the linguistic features of the dialects of white West Indian English that (I) need further documentation and analysis, and following that (II) need comparison with the features in the creole languages of the West Indies. This outline draws heavily on my own work involving the white communities on Saba and Bequia (cf. Williams 1983b and in preparation) as well as the work of Holm and that of Ryan which have already been cited.

Phonology

- (i) Prosodic features of the dialects of white West Indian English. Are they similar to the other varieties of English in the West

Indies, or do they reflect features of the dialects of the British Isles?

- (ii) Frequent use of glottal stop realization of /t/. Common in the speech of white Sabans and Barbadians, but less so in white Bequerian English.
- (iii) Contrast between /v/ and /w/ is neutralized as /w/. Present for Bermuda, the Bahamas, Saba and St. Vincent.
 - (a) 'Wirgin Islands' (Cayman Brac).
- (iv) Lengthening of stressed vowels, particularly in white Saban English.
- (v) Region-wide metathesis, as in /ask/ → [æks].
White Bequerian English also has /film/ → [flim].
- (vi) Distinctive phonetic realization of /i/ as [ɛi~ɜi].
Only present in white Saban English, as in
(a) 'tea' [tɜi].

Morphology

- (i) Third person singular -s suffix is generalized to all persons. It needs to be determined whether this relates to the formality of context as has been reported for Bajan (creole) English by Alleyne (1980: 214). For white Saban and white Barbadian English, formality does not seem to be a conditioning factor.
- (ii) In white Saban English, the previous pattern has been extended to non-finite verbs as well. According to Peter Trudgill (pers. com.), this construction is not known or used in the British Isles.
 - (a) 'He has to takes care of she.' (Saba)
- (iii) What is the morphological marking of the plural of nouns? The possibilities range from the standard -s through $\emptyset$, which is common in white Saban English and white Vincentian English, to *dem*, the pan-West Indian creole form.

Syntax

- (i) The complementizer *for* is followed by the non-finite verbal marker *to* with no overt constituent separating them.
 - (a) 'They is ready for to come ripe.' (Saba).
 - (b) 'She learn for to do it.' (Bequia).
 This construction, present in some of the white dialects, is the probable source of the *fɪ* particle in the West Indian creoles.

- (ii) Unaltered word order in interrogative constructions.
 - (a) 'Why you can't do it?' (Saba).
 - (b) 'Where you's from?' (Saba).
- (iii) Variable application of a low-level *do* insertion rule.
 - (a) 'I says how I know that?' (Saba).
 - (b) 'How does people manage to live?' (Saba).
 - (c) 'What time you came in?' (Cayman Brac).
- (iv) Highlighting with *tis* (<*it is*) corresponding to the fronting and highlighting that is characteristic of the entire Anglophone creole group with *na/da/a/iz*. Norfolk Island creole also has highlighting with *es* (<*it is*) (Hancock 1984: 29).
 - (a) 'Tis is beautiful morning.' (Saba).
 - (b) 'Es I nor bin si you fe too long.' (Norfolk).

CONCLUSION

The study of the dialects of white West Indian English is necessary before a full account of the linguistic history of the Caribbean region can be developed. A prerequisite to such a study is the delineation of periods of sociolinguistic history and the determination of the linguistic 'ingredients' present during each. Otherwise, the results will always be skewed in favor of an African influence while attribution to multiple influences might be more correct.

The varieties of white West Indian English are paradigm examples of the various dialect contact situations that took place in the region. These dialects have been influenced by internal migrations and contacts with the surrounding creole languages. However, it is my contention that these varieties were never creolized. The presence of creole features can be attributed either to contact, or to shared retentions, and not to the process of decreolization as has previously been argued (cf. Ryan 1973).

NOTES

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2. It is interesting to note that these negative attributes were soon to be applied to the African slaves of particular regions in Africa as well.
3. A number of counter-arguments have been developed, most notably by M. Alleyne, R. Allsopp, F. Cassidy, and J. Rickford.
4. See Williams (in preparation) for more on this.
5. Refer to the brief discussion by Price (1962) for details.
6. See Williams (in preparation).
7. Emphasis mine.
8. Highfield (1979) also discusses the preference for isolation and the lack of intermarriage among the French-speaking whites of Carenage, St. Thomas.
9. See Williams (in preparation) for more on "the ethnography of speaking white West Indian English."

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