Caribbean Creoles and the Speech Community[1]

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The notion of the speech community has been one of the key concepts in sociolinguistics since its beginning, and yet at the same time remains one of the least satisfactory. This paper examines data from urban Jamaican Creole to shed light on it, in the process taking into account problems that have been raised by other Caribbean creolists in dealing with what Lawrence Carrington has aptly dubbed 'Caribbean Sociolinguistic Complexes' (CSCs, 1992a).

The speech community is the locus of most sociolinguistic and anthropological-linguistic research, indeed all linguistic research that is accountable to a body of naturally-occurring speech or signed data. It represents the social boundaries within which analysts locate, and seek to describe and account for, language variation and change, ways of speaking, and patterns of choice among elements in a linguistic repertoire. It is thus on a par with other basic notions such as 'language', 'dialect' or 'grammar' as a primary object of description and theorizing in our discipline. Like these notions, it is both central and elusive, with definitions frequently offered and even more often called into question – one of those ideas linguists cannot agree on amongst ourselves, and appear to remain happily ambivalent about, while referring to it in textbooks and introductory lectures as though its nature were quite well understood.[2]

Early attempts to grapple with the speech community date back to the Prague School notions of *Sprechbund* or 'speech bond', focused on "shared ways of speaking which go beyond language boundaries", and *Sprachbund* or 'language bond', involving "relatedness at the level of linguistic form" (Romaine 1994:23) – both of which emphasize the production of speech itself over perception or attitudes to it. All efforts since share "the concern for a definition of speech community as a real group of people who share something about the way in which they use language" (Duranti 1997:72), though they differ significantly on the details.

As linguistics has expanded steadily away from the narrow concerns of the structuralists, the role of <u>production</u> and <u>system</u> – the actual linguistic features, and their arrangement – in defining the speech community has gradually shrunk, and that of the social <u>evaluation</u> of speech has grown. (For example, note that Duranti's attempt at a consensus statement, quoted above from his textbook on linguistic anthropology, is non-neutrally phrased in terms of language use rather than structure.) We can clarify the contrast by framing the questions,

1)   How important is it that members of the same speech community actually speak alike?
2)   How important is it that members of the same speech community share similar attitudes to each other's speech?

These questions, useful in outlining the changing conception of the speech community in sociolinguistics, can also usefully be asked in any empirical investigation of a social group's language. In my description of the Jamaican Patwa spoken in Veeton, a neighborhood of Kingston, I have made them central:

- To what extent do residents of Veeton actually speak alike? and,
- To what extent do they share similar attitudes to each other's speech?

Full answers will not be given here (Patrick 1999 gives an extensive account). In asking this pair of questions I acknowledge a debt to William Labov's concept of speech community, which has undoubtedly been the most influential one since it has directly inspired a methodology used in scores or hundreds of empirical studies:

(3)   "The speech community is defined by … participation in a set of shared norms …
        [which] may be observed in overt types of evaluative behavior, and [in] the
        uniformity of abstract patterns of variation" (Labov 1972:120-1)

In fact, Labov's was the first definition to match the emphasis on linguistic production with a focus on perception and social evaluation, an insight which has been followed (sometimes to extremes) in all subsequent efforts. LePage and Tabouret-Keller, for example, take the perceptions and motivations of the individual speaker as primary; they are still interested, but ultimately unable, to understand how "individuals… can be considered members of linguistic communities" (1985:158). Pit Corder goes farther:

(4)   "A speech community is made up of individuals who regard themselves as speaking
        the same language; it need have no other defining attributes." (1973: 53)

Hudson, who makes a general argument that language is located in the individual rather than at the community level, ultimately rejects the whole concept, claiming that "Our socio-linguistic world is not organised in terms of objective 'speech communities' " (1996:29). He argues, following LePage and Tabouret-Keller (1985) to a logical extreme, that since the role of individual speaker perceptions and 'acts of identity' is paramount, and since each speaker is likely to differ from many or all others, there can be no objective basis to any delimitation of a speech community. Consequently, sociolinguistic research ought not to take such an entity as a legitimate object of analysis, and should instead stick to "the micro level of the individual person and the individual linguistic item" (1996:229).

Equally radically, if more constructively, Duranti too recommends that we give up on the speech community as "an already constituted object of inquiry", but instead take it as "a point of view of analysis" (1997:82; his definition is "the product of the communicative activities engaged in by a given group of people"). If these theorists are correct, it appears that the ultimate consequence of taking speakers' views into account is the extinction of the speech community as a useful concept, a conclusion that is too pessimistic.

What does all this have to do with Caribbean sociolinguistics? The Caribbean has served before as a crucial proving ground for skirmishes among Europeans and Americans, often surprising them with its own complexity, unpredictable nature, and original contributions – and so it has been with sociolinguistics. All early models of the speech community tried too hard to create order and simplicity where chaos seemed to prevail, and were consequently inadequate for even such everyday situations as multilingual societies or communities in which language change or shift were active. More generously put, each addressed particular interests of its

author, rather than attempting a comprehensive model. Labov, the first to seriously grapple with an amazingly complex society in New York City, introduced several new dimensions which helped to locate regularity amongst the variation. But only the 'Acts of Identity' approach made a serious attempt to consider the diversity in speakers' orientations and motivations – and this was undoubtedly driven by the nature of the dozen or so Caribbean Creole communities in which LePage worked.[3]

Caribbean scholars have also been influential in pressing this point home, and in rejecting assumptions in Labov's work that are clearly invalid for post-colonial societies. For example, Don Winford (1988), John Rickford (1983, 1986a, 1986b, 1987) and others have argued that all Creole speakers are not driven by a society-wide prestige target, nor do they automatically share the belief that upward social mobility is both possible and desirable.[4] It follows from this that one cannot expect all members of a Creole speech community to consistently agree on the social evaluation of salient linguistic features or variables – since they do not even agree on the evaluation of the 'social goods' which such linguistic displays are intended to 'purchase' for their users.

In a series of commentaries on the nature of 'Caribbean Sociolinguistic Complexes', Carrington (1992a, 1992b, 1993) also takes issue with "paradigm[s] in which each language is considered a self-contained, integrated structural entity… [where] the boundaries of a language are determined prior to the analysis of variable behavior" (1993:229). This criticism holds against most earlier accounts of the speech community, and is motivated by "the rich sample of the nature of human language competence which is offered to us in Creole space" (228).[5]

It seems likely, then, that a close examination of Caribbean Creole speech, both in its production and its perception, informed by an expectation of complexity and multiplicity in the area of speaker goals and motivations, in a framework which does <u>not</u> begin by automatically simplifying and paring away the richness and variability of the data – such an approach might be able to tell us still more, not only about the nature of Caribbean speech communities, but also about this central object of sociolinguistic theory in general.

In the rest of this paper I attempt that task, briefly presenting data which are analyzed in more depth elsewhere (Patrick 1999). What counts here is not their absolute value, their particular social or linguistic interpretation, but rather what they can tell us about uniformity and diversity across the speech community. The data come from an urban neighborhood of Kingston, Jamaica, which I call Veeton (a pseudonym) and were gathered both in sociolinguistic interviews in which I spoke Patwa, and also in more formal interviews and test environments in which I spoke standard Jamaican English. The speakers come from a small sample that covers the social range from lower working class to middle class professional.

In other work, I demonstrate that this language situation constitutes a Creole continuum, and that some revision of the classic continuum model is required, issues not developed here. In its original formulation by DeCamp (1971) and Bickerton (1973), the Creole continuum was held to challenge prevailing notions of the speech community. Grammatical rules were said to differ significantly between individual speakers in such a way that they could not be resolved into discrete social or geographical dialect groupings, because the contrasts refused to bundle

together and required a very large variety of norms to account for all the individual behaviors. At the same time, the contrast between the extreme ends of the continuum was taken to be too great to allow for shared patterns of use within a single system (the motivation for 'poly-lectal grammars', e.g. Bailey 1973). In the first data-set, I look at the behavior of individuals in both conversational and formal-test situations to see whether they can in fact be grouped together, or must be assigned to separate lects, as these earlier creolists argued.

All speakers performed English-to-Creole and Creole-to-English translation tasks, in which I presented them with tape-recorded stimuli – five or six sentences, one at a time, which formed a brief narrative set in the past – and asked them to translate each sentence into the other variety (if it was in English, translate into Patwa; if it was in Patwa, then into English). Each task was loaded with opportunities for speakers to utter variant forms of the linguistic variables of interest. Here I present results for (TD)-absence, the simplification of final consonant clusters ending in an alveolar stop, and for (Past)-marking, with forms ranging from the inflectional morpheme {-ed} to pre-verbal markers *did* and *ben*.[6]

In both Figures 1 and 2, the filled squares show how speakers behaved when asked to translate Patwa sentences into English; the filled circles show the reverse, translations into Patwa; and an empty diamond shows a speaker's performance over the length of conversational data I recorded with them. (These conversations took place on other occasions, generally long before the tests.) These tasks, then, invite speakers to maximize the contrast between their native stereotypes of "Patwa" and "English", and allow comparison of those results with their production in a somewhat more natural situation.

All speakers clearly distinguish "English" and "Patwa" – whatever values they give to the two – and all vary in the expected direction, with greater (TD)-deletion in "Patwa", and greater verb-inflection in "English". Speakers across the sample show strong consensus on "Patwa" norms for both variables. In Figure 1, nearly everyone agrees on (TD)-deletion around 70-80%, high but not categorical; while in Figure 2, seven of ten speakers (all names are pseudonyms) agree that "Patwa" shows no verb-inflection in past contexts. Despite great differences in the sample of age, education, and social status, there is strong support here for the idea of the Patwa as a national vernacular shared across social boundaries, a resource and locus of identity for Jamaicans. We see also evidence that Veeton is a unified speech community, with common patterns of language use and variation, including style shifting; or to use LePage and Tabouret-Keller's terms, one could argue that there are highly focused norms for Patwa.

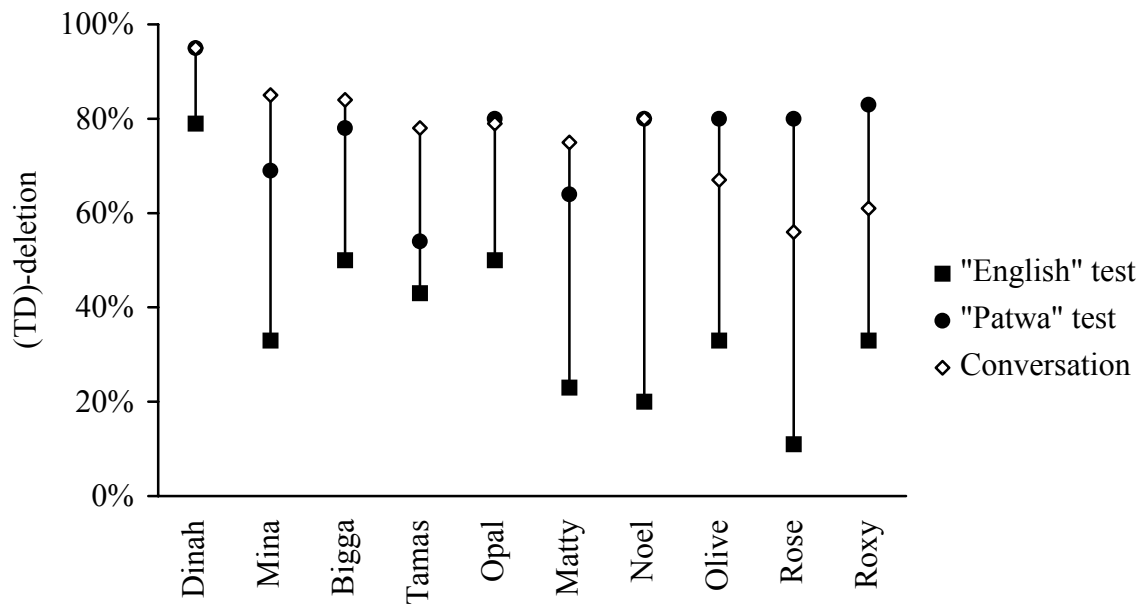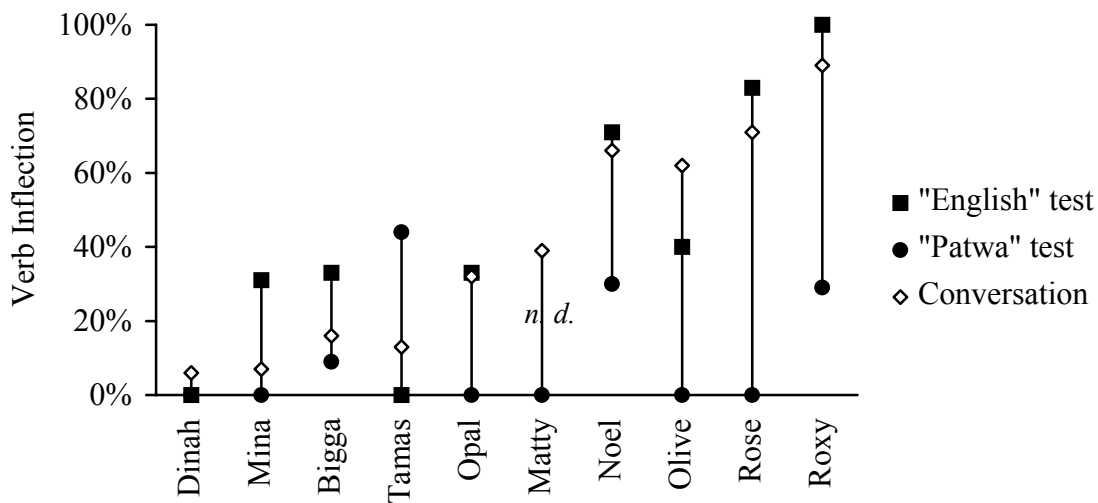*Figure 1:   Test and conversational data for (TD)*

Figure 2:   *Test and conversational data for (Past)*

The same figures, however, show very diffuse norms for English. For (TD) most speakers fall in the 20-50% range, but several are well outside that. Verb-inflection in "English" ranges from 0-100%, touching many points in between. For both variables, while the stereotype of "Patwa" is relatively flat across the sample, the characterization of "English" varies widely and often appears to correlate with a speaker's conversational production. In (TD)-deletion we can see a deeper unity, too: though speakers recognize a distinct English target, their conversational

production is close to their stereotypical Patwa target, in nearly every case – i.e., the "Patwa" norm dominates with little competition from the prestige stereotype. That is not true for (Past)-marking, however, where there are clearly dual norms. Speakers at the left of the figure (who are towards the bottom of the socioeconomic scale) behave as for (TD), but from Opal on to the right end, the others' conversational speech is much closer to their stereotyped norm for English.

These production data give evidence for a unified speech community in the strong agreement on vernacular Patwa values, and in the regular style-shifting relation between Patwa and English. However, they also show great variability and little consensus when it comes to actually producing "English", and a status-related split in the sample for the production of one grammatical variable, (Past)-marking, which is highly salient as a marker of "good English" – in other words, for this variable, dual norms appear to exist and divide the community.

The main exception to the patterns in Figures 1 and 2 is Dinah.[7] The speaker lowest on the socioeconomic scale, Dinah does domestic work and lives with her daughter Olive in two small rooms in a 'yard' in the ghetto area of Veeton known as Gullyside. She is qualitatively different: there is very little range or style-shifting, her "English" is nearly identical to her "Patwa", and her values for the standard English variety closely resemble everyone else's values for the Patwa. She is practically unable to produce either consonant clusters or verb-inflection, even upon request. In short, Dinah appears to not really be a mesolectal speaker at all, but rather a basilectal speaker with little competence in producing the standard (other elements in her speech also support this judgment).

Let us now consider the evidence from social evaluation. From the above data one might conclude that speakers' intuitions on the structural nature of "Patwa" and its levels of variability are more consistent than their intuitions about "English". Plainly, the asymmetry is not caused by any lack of sensitivity to the contrasting social values of these two polar stereotypes. As one descends the social order such sensitivity certainly does not diminish – but the practical knowledge speakers have of the educated standard shrinks rapidly. The result is that varieties which are <u>structurally</u> remote from English come to serve the <u>social functions</u> of the standard, and be used in its domains. Dinah illustrates this graphically in her language attitudes interview:

(5)   PLP   / yu main if a as yu somting aboot di patwa an inglish ting /
                'Mind if I ask you something about the Patwa and English stuff?'

        Dinah / di patwa hhh yu no wan taim mi yuusi kuda taak di patwa /
                'The Patwa. [laughs] Y'know, I used to be able to speak Patwa.'

        Dinah / mi no memba boot hoo di patwa go so iizi agen yu no /
                'I don't remember so well any more how Patwa goes, y'know.'

                / de a tong so lang yu no /
                'Been in town so long, y'know?'

                / laik di riil patwa /
                'Like the real Patwa…'

                / miebi wen mi s- miebi spiikin tu sombadi somtaim /
                'Maybe when I'm s- maybe speaking to somebody sometime'

                / a patwa slip op stil yu no /
                'it's Patwa that still slips in, y'know?'

PLP   / sə wich wan yu se yu yuuz muor a di taim /
                'So which one would you say you use more of the time,'

                / y yuuz inglish or patwa muor/
                'do you use English or Patwa more?'

Dinah   / inglish /
                'English!'

PLP   / inglish muor /
                'English more?'

Dinah   / inglish   yee yu no riili /
                'English. Yeah you don't really–

                / yu no riili a go waan yuuz patwa /
                'You're not really gonna wanna use Patwa.'

                / mi no put mi main pan it bikaa mi no waan /
                'I don't think about it because I don't want–'

                / mi no riili waan spiik ina patwa langwij /
                'I don't really want to speak in Patwa language.'

                                                                                    (Dinah; #95a, 2/25/90)[8]

        Here, social reality and the reality of linguistic structure fail to coincide. In a formal interview with a white American speaking the standard, "proper English" is required by local norms: the situation calls for Dinah to demonstrate both her abilities in the standard <u>and</u> the correct public attitudes towards Patwa. Unable to meet the first demand adequately, she compensates by adhering to the prevailing prestige norms, voicing disdain for the "Patwa", and noting its social undesirability in an urban context against her own extended urban residence. Though Dinah's speech in this context is clearly Patwa and not English – that is, she fails the <u>linguistic</u> test – what is most important in daily life, especially for speakers with very limited knowledge of the standard, is to correctly evaluate and address the <u>social</u> requirements of a speech situation. This she does with flying colors.

        At the bottom of the social order in the Veeton sample, Dinah nevertheless binds herself to publicly-acknowledged values – values which denigrate her own way of speaking, and

handicap her in the linguistic marketplace (Sankoff and Laberge 1978, Sankoff et al. 1989). This is typical of the hegemony exercised by standard languages in urbanized speech communities. Even where the power of prestige forms is counter-balanced to some extent by the "covert prestige" (Labov 1966, Trudgill 1972, Rickford 1983) attached to certain stigmatized vernacular forms, such speakers consistently express the opinion that the standard variety is more valuable, and the one they aspire to speak. This has been called the 'consensus' or 'concord' model of the speech community; it reflects the assumptions and findings of Labov for New York City, noted earlier, and many scores of urban areas studied since. In contrast, 'conflict' or 'contrast' models describe a situation in which non-elite speakers overtly value their own variety more than the standard for important domains.

Rickford (1986a, 1986b) convincingly demonstrated that both concord and contrast operate within a single Guyanese village. In respect to some speech acts and events (e.g. 'rowing'), all speakers share rules for use and interpretation of language, and agree in associating speech styles with levels of social status – concord reigns. Others, however (e.g. 'talkin Nansi'), are performed only by members of the Estate Class, who sharply disagree with Non-Estate Class speakers on the association of speech styles with a solidarity measure. The same group of core speech community members may share common ground with their neighbors on certain ways of talking, while bitterly differing from them on others – contrast occurs, rooted in social conflict. Rickford is not arguing that consensus on the value of speech never occurs; rather, he concludes that it cannot be the defining characteristic of a speech community. Even in small and not very urbanized communities, internally contrasting patterns of language use and evaluation may exist.

I found a dual consciousness about language in the language-attitude interviews I conducted in Veeton, too, though it did not fall strictly along class lines. Not surprisingly, people preferred "English" in mass media news and weather reporting, in the classroom, in business communication with other nations, and for general public communications between strangers. Media figures, such as the moderators of call-in radio talk shows, are praised for their "proper" speech. However, people praised those moderators who also speak Patwa to callers as needed, or when making a persuasive point. Very few people report watching television shows conducted entirely in English (other than the news), but practically everyone speaks most favorably of comedies conducted largely in Patwa. Patwa was also cited as the code of choice for speech events involving forms of humor, dispute, and abuse, among other types of verbal art (including, of course, music). The same public that accepts the official hegemony of the standard also shows wide agreement on the cultural value and rhetorical effectiveness of Patwa. This supports the Hymesian argument advanced by Rickford, Winford, and Carrington that the Creole speech community be defined not only with regard to linguistic structure but also on cultural grounds.

Following this lead, when ethnographic methods are applied to elucidate the rules and meanings of Creole speech events, the results can further sharpen our appreciation of the speech community's normative complexity. The Jamaican genre known as 'Speakin and spokin' or 'Speaky-spoky' (described in more detail in Patrick and McElhinny 1993, Patrick 1997) is proof that evaluative norms may be mutually opposed and yet widely-accepted within the <u>same</u> group – i.e. they cannot necessarily be resolved on grounds of social class (or other similar divisions).

'Speaky-spoky' is a negatively-valued label for a Jamaican speech style which typically manipulates a few prestigious, highly salient sociolinguistic variables, rather than an entire grammatical system. A kind of qualitative hypercorrection (Janda and Auger 1992), it draws on the linguistic resources of metropolitan standards and uses them in non-standard ways, super-imposing them on the speaker's native Patwa grammar. Its more obvious features include:

(6)   substitution of the rounded vowel /ɔ/ (which does not exist for most mesolectal
        Patwa speakers as a distinct phoneme) into low-vowel environments, many of which
        do not have a rounded vowel in standard dialects,

as well as

(7)   insertion of /h/ (which is normally absent in Patwa) before non-emphatic vowel-initial
        lexical items – again, including ones that lack it in English.

Jamaicans recognize both sounds as belonging to standard metropolitan varieties. Across the continuum, they understand hypercorrect insertion of these sounds as a claim to a higher social status than the speaker's normal Patwa variety implies.[9] Accusing someone of "talkin speaky-spoky" is a challenge to the validity of that claim.

Yet hypercorrect use of the variables alone is neither necessary nor sufficient to establish that Speaky-spoky talk has occurred – i.e. it is not strictly defined by linguistic criteria. The speaker's social identity, their known or presumed competence in the standard, plus the context of use, are all crucial elements. What is required is that the <u>intention</u> to speak "proper English" be made salient, and that the <u>success</u> of that effort be open to question in public interaction.

Speaky-spoky is associated with lower mesolectal and basilectal speakers because of their distance from the standard; and it is associated with 'mistakes,' failed attempts to speak a metropolitan prestige variety that is not native to these speakers. (Acrolectal and upper mesolectal speakers are viewed as using Standard Jamaican English appropriately, and not making linguistic errors in its use, despite the variation in their spoken and written speech; cf. Shields 1989, Sand 1996, Mair & Sand 1998.) However, it is not associated with all such speakers regularly, and thus it is not simply a class-linked dialect. Similarly, hyper-correction may occur without the speech being interpreted as Speaky-spoky, and someone may be charged with 'speakin and spokin' even in the absence of 'mistakes'.

In fact, accuracy is not the point of 'speakin and spokin'. Conforming to the proper placement patterns of /ɔ/ and /h/ in a prestige English variety may not be particularly important to speakers, since they frequently employ the style among peers, none of whom may be fully competent to judge their linguistic efforts. Rather, signalling their social ambitions to members of the relevant local community is paramount, and their peers are exquisitely equipped to evaluate such moves. In this way, Speaky-spoky mobilizes the diffuse norms for "English" described above in service of a crucial social function.

Levelling a charge of Speaky-spoky is a powerful way to expose a community member's ambitions – to brand them a social climber, opportunist, lame or traitor. Someone who

challenges another's talk as Speaky-spoky objects to perceived errors in "English" – and so may be seen as policing standard language norms. Yet the challenger may also be objecting to the speaker's efforts to distance herself from "Patwa" – and so may be seen as enforcing 'local-team' language values (Blom and Gumperz 1972). Speaky-spoky simultaneously constructs and resists the authority of the standard, and in this way constitutes a strategic resource for conflict talk. It is associated with conflict, but not conflict <u>between</u> social groups so much as <u>among</u> comparable members of the same group, who are competing for the valuable and limited benefits and opportunities to which the standard is linked.

Speaky-spoky thus displays elements of both contrast and concord. It plays off of attitudes widely shared across the society: the association of English with high social status and mobility, as well as the linking of Patwa to positive cultural and community values, are indeed norms on which there is consensus in Veeton. On the other hand, when a speaker engages in use of this style, she performs a move that is inherently subject to conflicting evaluations, both positive (talking "proper", affirming overt prestige values, lifting herself up) and negative ("passing her place", social climbing, disloyalty to core vernacular culture).

Faced with the variety of social evaluations he found in Cane Walk, Rickford's analysis assigned some norms to everyone, and distributed others by social class. In the case of Speaky-spoky, however, mutually-opposed values are applicable to the same speech activity by people of comparable status; conflict between these values is not localized within particular classes or groups. In fact, a challenger who cries 'Speaky-spoky!' one day may well be a user of it the next. Agreement on the relevant opposing values, and the rules for invoking them, unifies community members by providing them a common framework and set of symbolic resources.

This brief review of some elements of urban Jamaican speech suggests some things about the nature of speech communities in general, and research into them. I note once again the utility of Labov's observation that norms of language production (i.e., speech behavior) and norms of sociolinguistic evaluation (i.e., speech attitudes and expectations) are distinct types of evidence. For example, one cannot necessarily predict from shared patterns of structure and use (such as I have shown to hold in Veeton) that there will be a unified evaluative mechanism. However, it has also been necessary to go beyond Labov's distinction, and even beyond Rickford's useful criticism and refinement of it.

In the classic variationist notion of a unified speech community, social stratification, a strong set of shared evaluative norms, plus normal processes of language change, constrain the linguistic variability in regular ways. Earlier variationist work (e.g. Guy 1980) accepted that a Creole continuum could not be handled by normal variationist methods, being a fundamentally different sort of sociolinguistic structure. Caribbean scholars such as Carrington and Winford, on the other hand, have rejected versions of the continuum model as incapable of describing Creole speech communities, with their typically heterogeneous and manifold norms and varilingual competence. (Regardless of one's view about the continuum model, it may be taken here as shorthand for the Jamaican sociolinguistic situation – which indeed was the impetus for DeCamp's (1971) invention of it, and has served as a primary example of it in much literature since.)

The two groups recognize the same thing about a continuum situation such as exists in Jamaica: the wealth of both productive and evaluative norms. This richness of variation is the principal obstacle to incorporating Creole continua into the classic speech community model. In my opinion, however, the problem lies not with Creoles, but rather with the speech community concept, which is impoverished. I have suggested a specific expansion of it for the Jamaican situation: a recognition that dual, opposing sets of norms exist for the (synchronically-) related varieties of the continuum, and that they are asymmetrically weighted due to the historical pressure of the metropolitan standard. At the same time, the fact that the standard was imposed from outside (and its privileges largely accrued to a small, distinct social set), yet never succeeded in holding complete sway over the Creole vernacular, has conferred a certain vitality on the relationship.

I refuse to go so far as Hudson or Duranti in rejecting the speech community as a useful object of investigation, however. Their rejections are, I believe, premature. Instead, a re-imagining of it – and, in the case of Jamaica at least, synthesis with a reinvigorated notion of the Creole continuum concept – will prove more useful for describing Caribbean sociolinguistic complexes. Revising the framework involves integrating situation-types more varied than the usual American or European monolingual urban center with its standard-plus-dialect case, and anticipating normative relationships less monolithic than those where the hegemony of the metropolitan standard has subdued all competitors (see, e.g., Santa Ana and Parodi 1998 for Mexico).

I do believe that these critics' recognition of the importance of individual motivations and orientations to identity is crucially important. (Of course, they follow LePage and Tabouret-Keller here, who were themselves driven to this by their Caribbean Creole data.) But variationists have shown time and again, beginning with Labov, that when confronted with rich and complex data, throwing up one's hands and retreating to cries of "Chaos!" is hardly the best approach.

Even small advances allow us to perceive order. The importance of individual speakers here is that they may draw in creative and contradictory ways on the shared resources available to them. Nevertheless there are a few general and powerful norms, and recognizable linguistic pathways for bringing them into play. It is not necessary, as the polylectal grammarians and others once believed, to link the grammars of many individual Creole speakers together with tiny stitches and proclaim the result a unique sort of sociolinguistic structure, opaque to the methods that have illuminated so many speech communities in the rest of the world. I do not think Caribbean Creoles are so unique, or so isolated, as that – if they were, they would not have been able to play such an important role in the development of sociolinguistic theory to date.

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[1] This paper was originally delivered 21st August 1998 to the Society for Caribbean Linguistics at the 12th biennial conference in Castries, St. Lucia, and later to the Center for Research in Linguistics of the University of Newcastle, on May 4, 1999. This revision was made March 2002.

[2] Hudson (1996:20-30), an exception, is a useful review of difficulties with the concept through the mid-1980s. A much fuller review and critique is given in Patrick (2002).

[3] See Patrick (fc.) on some ways in which the 'Acts' model's general limitations arise from its own empirical base.

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[4] This point is also made explicit in such native sociological analyses of Caribbean social structure as MG Smith's plural society theory (Smith 1965, 1984). Note that while it is an assumption of Labov's analysis of New York City, it is not an inherent part of his general model of the speech community.

[5] It is in fact directed against the Creole continuum model; however, I argue elsewhere (Patrick 1999) that this model can, indeed must, accommodate Carrington's objection. This point about relative lack of structural boundaries to language varieties can also be pressed too far, as in LePage's work.

[6] See Patrick (1999) for arguments that (TD)-absence does result from simplification – deletion from underlying clusters is not assumed, contra Devonish 1998, but is an outcome of the analysis. Similarly, arguments for the co-existence of pre-verbal TMA markers and English inflectional forms in a single mesolectal grammar are given.

[7] In Figure 2, Tamas too is exceptional, appearing to have gotten the task backwards.

[8] This passage contains some ellipses; tape number and recording date are given. The speech is transcribed in a modified version of the Cassidy 1962 orthography, indicating additional variation beyond the phonemic level but preserving phonemic contrasts.

[9] One consequence of this is that speakers of evidently high status, or who clearly are native standard speakers – the two of course often go together – are not perceived as 'speakin and spokin', no matter what sound pattern they produce. This shows that the style is socially as well as linguistically constituted.