

Social Status and Mobility in Urban Jamaican Patwa

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The correlation of social characteristics with features of linguistic behaviour is the descriptive foundation of sociolinguistics. If such an obvious statement may be permitted, it is only because the enterprise of correlation has been so often attacked, for both good and bad reasons. This is especially relevant in the Caribbean, where the correlational enterprise has been criticized often but rarely carried out. While one consequence of such criticism has been to help sharpen our understanding of methodology, the relative absence of such studies constitutes a gap in our knowledge of Caribbean sociolinguistic complexes.

This paper therefore undertakes such correlation, in a manner that I hope will take into account some of the refinements others have suggested. The community investigated is a mixed-class neighbourhood of Kingston, pseudonymously known as ‘Veeton’, whose patterns of language structure and use have been studied in more depth in Patrick (1999a). My goal is not only (1) to describe the distribution of linguistic behaviours across social space for a major Caribbean urban center, but also (2) to explore a key element of the creole continuum hypothesis – unidimensionality (Rickford 1987) – and (3) to see what such an investigation can contribute to our general understanding of urban dialectology and sociolinguistic variation and change.

The creole continuum model is one of several designed to test the idea that variation in linguistic behavior correlates with variation, and more especially *stratification*, along a social hierarchy. This idea assumes that one can construct both a social gradient (typically using social class or status) and a linguistic one, as is done here. The prime object of this investigation is to discover what, if any, systematic relation holds between the two dimensions for this speech community.

The original notion of the post-creole continuum, as DeCamp (1971) called it – reinforced by Bickerton – was allegedly asocial. Linguistic variation across the continuum was thought to exist on a creole-to-standard dimension which could be defined in purely linguistic terms. Later treatments of the idea, however, such as Rickford (1987) clearly recognize that there is indeed a social basis to this continuum. (I have argued elsewhere that though DeCamp’s (1971) famous illustration of covariation in Jamaican Patwa is indeed stated in terms of linguistic elements in an implicational le, it cannot be shown to result from internal grammatical requirements. Rather the co-occurrence restrictions are governed by conventions of style and appropriate speech which are necessarily socially defined.) That is, the notion of creole continuum is located firmly within a sociolinguistic framework.

Thus an important move in this investigation is to affirm that some sort of link exists between patterned linguistic choices and social structure. The question is, precisely what sort of link?

It is conceivable that the type of linguistic variation found in Kingston, Jamaica is different in nature from that found in non-creole urban areas. This is the fundamental issue which Rickford posed as (non-)discreteness – whether two (or more) discrete grammars may be shown to exist, or whether on the contrary there is continuous variation between the acrolectal and basilectal poles of the continuum. As I have shown (Patrick 1999a, 1999b) that the latter is roughly the case, I will not

address the matter today. Another fundamental linguistic question that arises is the issue of inherent variation: whether the linguistic behaviour found in the Jamaican mesolect is unsystematic, a product of alternation or vacillation between invariant grammars, or whether it shows a coherent grammatical structure. Again, I have already given the latter answer (Patrick 1996, 1999a). My conclusion has generally been that urban Jamaican Patwa, despite its particular features, resembles other urban dialects worldwide and does not diverge in type or degree of variation.

It is also conceivable, however, that the sort of *sociolinguistic* organization which holds in Jamaica (or perhaps in Caribbean sociolinguistic complexes more widely) is in some way unique. There are several sources one might cite for such a view. Early variationist work suggested this might be the case: Guy (1980) speculated that a creole continuum might contain a large variety of distinct norms governing speakers' linguistic output, instead of a relatively unified single group norm as had been found in e.g. New York City or Philadelphia. In a different vein, creolists such as Winford and Carrington, stressing the heterogeneous and manifold norms and varilingual competence found in Caribbean speech communities, have taken this as sufficient reason to reject the creole continuum model as descriptively inadequate.

My argument against such conclusions does not deny their basic premise. Instead, I contend (Patrick 1998) that on the evidence of not just creole communities but others as well – going right back to Trudgill's (1972) notion of 'covert prestige' (but see also Macaulay 1977, Milroy 1987) – basic sociolinguistic concepts such as 'speech community' must be enriched in order to accommodate a richer variety of normative practices. Creole societies would not then be unique – indeed, they might be more typical of world societies than New York or London – nor need the continuum model itself be at fault.

This brings us to the third possibility: that the type of social structure occurring in Kingston and Jamaica might be unique, and thus incapable of description in a correlational model. As with the others, I doubt very much that this is the case, but will present some sociological data below. My argument tends towards the conclusion that describing Veeton's sociolinguistic structure by means of a classic correlational model – suitably updated and localized – is both possible and useful. Moreover, the general point is that difficulties in applying standard sociolinguistic models and concepts to creole communities are not due to uniqueness on the part of creole languages or societies, but rather to parochialism or incompleteness of ideas which are purportedly general, but derived in fact from a handful of American or European urban studies.

It can be seen that postulating *any* sort of a link between social and linguistic variation is rather a weak hypothesis. In fact the classic procedures require social *stratification*, defined as not just differentiation of social groups but ranking of them on some suitable scale. On the linguistic side, quantification is generally done by measuring the frequency of linguistic choices which may be opposed to each other as having ranked values: e.g. low/high, regional/national, or creole/standard. Correlation between such scales has been so often shown in urban studies of the last 35 years that what was once a radical idea has become a commonplace. Though often anecdotally asserted for creole societies as well, it nevertheless remains largely untested for urban creole-speaking populations; here it is the primary hypothesis. It is expected that a strong general pattern of correlation will be found, and further that significant deviations from it will also receive a plausible interpretation in terms of available social data.

A second goal will be to reflect on the unidimensionality hypothesis: the notion that a single social or sociolinguistic dimension is sufficient to constrain the majority of the linguistic variation in a creole continuum (Rickford 1987). A true test of this hypothesis would involve comparing the outputs of multidimensional analyses with those which assume a single dimension. No such test is made here, but the construction of an index ranking speakers in a single plane raises these issues productively. Finally, results of this effort ought to be fed back into the framework of general sociolinguistics, particularly into an evaluation of the correlational enterprise.

A number of significant criticisms of the practice of classic correlation studies have been made, both as they have actually been applied and as their critics fear they might be mis-applied in the Caribbean. There is not space for an extended discussion of these (see Patrick 1999a), but a brief listing may be helpful.

- a) *Demographic vs. ethnographic methods.* It is still often argued that correlation involves using ready-made classifications as pigeonholes which may fail to do justice to the more complex conditions that hold in a particular locality. Ethnographic techniques are typically recommended as a solution. There is no reason however that these cannot be combined; in fact, that is the norm in recent variationist work. In the present effort, ethnographic observations have been employed to develop locally-appropriate classifications.
- b) *Foreign models.* Similarly, small societies do not often generate native formal social theories for scholars to draw upon in studies, while as Nettleford has noted “alien models and analytic procedures...are not likely to lead to deep understanding of Caribbean societies” (1984:xii). Patrick (1999a) briefly surveys existing literature on Jamaican social and class structure, including a half-dozen native proposals, before adopting Derek Gordon’s occupational classification scheme, based on the 1984 National Mobility Survey, a 1% sample of the adult population, as the basis of the class and status analysis.
- c) *Class and status confused.* Quite a few sociolinguistic studies have confused these notions, typically using ‘class’ as a label for an evaluative dimension which should more properly be called ‘status’, and displaying vagueness about the difference and about reasons for selecting one model over another. Class and status may correlate but do not predict each other, a problem arising partly because of intervening variables such as geographic variation, ethnicity, etc. The two must be distinguished and considered separately in a proper analysis. Gordon’s (1987) model does so, but also provides for their integration. Employing it, I was able to use observable objective social information as an initial guide to social position, later assigning speakers to primarily status-based groupings once ethnographic work clarified local configurations of practice and evaluative norms.
- d) *Class and status: conflict vs. consensus.* Structuralist-functionalist perspectives, exclusively used in early correlational work, emphasize consensus and harmony across society, with shared ideals and targets of social aspiration. Contrarily, a Marxist view emphasizes conflict between groups with contrasting relations to production and differing aims – a plausible picture for a post-plantation society. The existence of social stratification, and the possibility of modelling it, does not require the analyst to hold functionalist views. The study from which this is drawn

investigates local notions of prestige and the ways in which language is mobilized as symbolic capital, and advances the notion of shared conflicting norms as a partial solution. (Patrick 2002 criticises revisionist sociolinguistic views of how this dichotomy has played out in the study of language change since Labov 1966.)

- e) *Dynamic social mobility versus static class assignment; age and life-stage.* Recognizing a diversity of local views on the possibility and desirability of upward social mobility (or, an absence of “unidirectionality” in the continuum, in Winford’s 1988 terms), and taking into account Gordon’s complex picture of both upward and downward mobility, we still have the problem of how to incorporate the dynamic dimension of mobility into correlational studies. The assignment of class and status has been typically handled in a synchronic, static descriptive frame, though such studies are generally also concerned with diachronic issues of language change. This problem is not wholly solved in the present study. The contrasting economic and social positions of different generations are recognized, however, and the fact that achieved status is more important to older speakers while ascribed status and social aspirations are more significant for the young.
- f) *Construction of social indices.* Correlational studies have been criticized for the construction of overall indices, combining and further reducing the quantified social characteristics of speakers in a mechanical way. This is essentially an anti-quantitative view. Such indices are useful tools for exploration, and if carefully developed may be quite valid (Labov 2001). What is important is that correlation of language behaviour with the individual axes (e.g., occupation, income, education) be also investigated. Whenever data reduction occurs, interpretation of results must be sensitive to the complexity of the underlying ethnographic picture.
- g) *Social factors are multidimensional, not unidimensional.* This is part of the objection to a general status index: it attempts to reduce the considerable complexity of social life to a single plane, while in reality the many important factors cross-cut each other and co-vary in intricate ways that must be discovered rather than assumed. In addition to correlation with a general index, each linguistic variable has been examined by means of a multivariate analysis (the Varbrul statistical program) capable of assessing the differing contributions of each social factor to the variation of the whole data set. As with other methods of quantitative analysis used in this study, the intent has been to discover patterns for interpretation in the light of ethnographic data, rather than to prove hypotheses based on a prescribed scheme. Note that multiple social dimensions might still influence linguistic behaviour in a common manner (the unidimensionality idea).
- h) *Social range.* In surveying a fragment of an urban population, and generalizing from it, it is important that the community studied be carefully selected, and in particular that a considerable range of social positions, significant within it and within the larger metropolis, be included. The selection of Veeton and its characteristics are described in detail in Patrick (1999a). The social range within Veeton is probably as great as in any Kingston neighbourhood. In terms of Gordon’s 16-level classification, though only a dozen speakers are examined in detail, 8 of Gordon’s levels, in all 3 classes, are covered. Three speakers studied were youngsters, not yet working, and could not be assigned to occupational and

class levels. Speaker sex was balanced; educational levels in the sample ranged from less than primary school to university graduate.

Other objections to the correlational enterprise might be raised, and perhaps answered, but I hope this is enough to show that description of this sort can be usefully attempted for Kingston. Next I present summary social information on key aspects of the Veeton neighbourhood, leading to a combined status index. This is subsequently correlated with several linguistic variables, and finally an interpretation of the resulting patterns is given.

Veeton is a once-prestigious community bordering on East Kingston, which itself, having been gradually formed by the outward expansion of the old city's core, has declined from middle-class suburbs to working class tenements to overcrowded slums and commercialized areas. This process has extended into Veeton as well, so that it now contains a number of sub-areas, ranging from a poor, densely-populated ghetto we'll call 'Gullyside' on the eastern margin, across a range of commercializing areas bordering the parish line and declining postwar bungalows being redivided or interspersed with squatters – areas I collectively refer to as 'Central Veeton' – to a quieter, middle-class district at the top of the prestige ladder, whose pseudonym is 'Elysian Fields'. Collectively, Veeton possesses an aging housing stock which has accommodated a dramatic increase in population over several decades. A social survey in the late 1970s (Knight and Davies 1978) ranked Veeton only slightly higher than neighbouring East Kingston districts in terms of its physical attributes (e.g. age and size of housing, land values), but when social factors such as educational attainment and occupational status were factored in, Veeton was ranked higher, as part of the "transition zone" (see Maps 3-6 in Patrick 1999a, Chap. 2).

It helps to see the districts of Veeton in comparison to Kingston and the island as a whole; Tables 1 and 2 give such data from the 1982 Population Census and other official sources for measures of population, unemployment, housing and education.

	Jamaica	Kingston urban area	Elysian Fields	Central Veeton ^a	Gullyside
<i>Population</i>					
Total pop.	2,190,000	524,000 ^b	2,847	11,063	2,508
Over 14 yrs. (Labor force)	1,407,500	346,200 ^b	2,106	7,723	1,526
% under 14 (dependents)	36%	34% ^b	26%	30%	39%
<i>Unemployment</i>					
Males over 14	16%	20% ^c	14%	20%	31%
Females over 14	38%	34% ^c	18%	29%	30%

	Jamaica	Kingston urban area	Elysian Fields	Central Veeton ^a	Gullyside
<u>Highest Education</u>					
Primary (0-6 yrs.) only	44%	<i>n.d.</i>	32%	45%	53%
Early secondary (7-9)	33%	<i>n.d.</i>	25%	23%	21%
Secondary/plus (10+)	23%	<i>n.d.</i>	44%	32%	25%

Table 1: Population, Unemployment and Educational Achievement in 1982

^aIncludes Elysian Fields ^bKingston Metro Area ^cSt. Andrew Parish

The population of Elysian Fields is comparable to that of Gullyside, but distributed over twice the area; the prestigious area's proportion of dependents to the labour force is considerably lower than that of the urban area and the island as a whole, while Central Veeton and Gullyside are more typical. Gullyside's male unemployment is twice the national rate, and over half of adults have only a primary education or less.

Table 2 shows household size and density; Gullyside is one of the most crowded areas in Eastern Kingston, and this population has fewer rooms to live in than the rest of Veeton. (This fact is understated in the table: the norm is closer to two rooms for a four-person household.) The oldest housing is in Central Veeton; but the newer houses here and in Elysian Fields are far less likely to be built out of perishable materials than in Gullyside, where modern facilities are considerably less common.

	Elysian Fields	Central Veeton ^a	Gullyside
<u>Household Size</u>			
Persons per household	3.29	3.60	3.97
Households with 5 or more rooms	14%	14%	6%
Total no. of households	716	2,498	509
<u>Housing Quality</u>			
Aged 20+ years (pre-1960)	52%	76%	39%
Aged 10-20 years (1960-1970)	29%	12%	45%
Built of perishable materials	9%	11%	34%
Uses pit toilets	0%	3%	18%
Shares toilet or has none	12%	28%	43%

Table 2: Household size, crowding, and housing quality in 1982

^aIncludes Elysian Fields data

Rank	Speaker	Neighborhood	Housing Age	Tenure & Type
1	George	Elysian Fields	new	owns house
	Roxy	Elysian Fields	new	owns house
2	Rose	The Gardens	old	owns house
3	Roasta	(Portmore)	new	rents house
4	Macca	East Veeton	old	owns house
“	Walker	East Veeton	old	owns house
“	Tamas	East Veeton	old	owns house
5	Sista	Elysian Fields	new	rents apt.
6	Matty	The Gardens	old	rents house
“	Mina	(rural)	old	owns house
7	Noel	The Gardens	old	rents room
8	Dinah	Gullyside	poor condition	rents in yard
“	Olive	Gullyside	poor condition	rents in yard
“	Opal	Gullyside	good condition	rents in yard
“	Bigga	Gullyside	poor condition	rents in yard

Table 3: Residential status ranking of Veeton speakers

Class	Occupational Group (description)	Occupational Title (example jobs)
<i>Middle Strata (=MS)</i>		
MS-1	Higher managers/professionals	Civil engineer, attorney
MS-2	Lower managers/office supervisors	Loan or personnel officer
MS-3	Lower professionals, technical, sales	Nurse, technician, salesman
MS-4	Secretarial & accounting clerks	Typist, bookkeeper, bank clerk
MS-5	Other clerks (not sales)	Keypunch operator, filing clerk
MS-6	Sales clerks	Shop clerk, betting clerk
<i>Petty Bourgeoisie (=PB)</i>		
PB-1	Owner-employers	Gas-station owner, large farmer
PB-2	Artisans	Mechanic, dressmaker, taxi
PB-3	Traders	Street vendor, hairdresser
PB-4	Small Farmers	Root-crop farmer, fisherman
<i>Working Class (=WC)</i>		
WC-1	Foremen & Higher Service Work	Line-supervisor, police, chef
WC-2	Craftsmen & Operatives	Machine operator, trucker
WC-3	Other Service Work (not WC-4)	Guard, waitress, messenger
WC-4	Unskilled Manual Work	Longshoreman, construction
WC-5	Domestic Workers	Household helper
WC-6	Agricultural Laborers	Cane-cutter, fruit-picker

Table 4: Class categories and occupational groups (from Gordon 1987)

Clearly, the social range within Veeton is less than than the top and bottom extremes to be found within Kingston, but it is considerable. Residential sub-area does make a difference to social life in Veeton, and the proximity of these districts makes their contrast more vivid and frustrating. Taking such differences into account, as well as residence tenure and housing type, I have constructed a scale of residential status for the speakers studied here (Table 3). Note two anomalies: Roasta, recently married, moved into a bedroom community across Kingston Harbour, comparable to good-quality housing in The Gardens or lower Elysian Fields; while Mina, who lived part of the year in her sister's older house in Elysian Fields, owns and lives in her own older home in rural Clarendon, for which I have downgraded her status a point.

Derek Gordon's labour-force study provides both a class analysis (given in Table 4 with sample occupations) and a status analysis taking into account income, education, etc. Table 5 articulates the two, combining Gordon's occupational levels (including the income information he gathered on these) and the proportion of secondary school graduates island-wide at each level – Gordon's data thus fills the first five columns – with the particular Veeton speakers I studied, and their years of schooling (columns 6-7). This allows us to make use of both macro and micro levels of data, and to examine the fit between them.

Class	Income (monthly)	Income rank	Secondary graduates	Educ'l. rank	Veeton speakers	School (years)
MS-1	\$1533	1	77%	1	n.d.	
MS-2	\$ 914	2	27%	5	George 16	
					Rose	11 ⁺
MS-3	\$ 789	3	41%	3	Walker 11 ⁺	
					Matty	12 ⁺
MS-4	\$ 660	6	48%	2	Olive	12 ⁺
MS-5	\$ 537	7	38%	4	Noel	11 ⁺
MS-6	\$ 281	12	16%	8	n.d.	
PB-1	\$ 766	4	19%	7	n.d.	
PB-2	\$ 323	10	4%	12	Mina	6
					Tamas 3	
					Sista	3
PB-3	\$ 263	13	3%	13	n.d.	
PB-4	\$ 183	14	1%	14	n.d.	
WC-1	\$ 725	5	21%	6	Macca 6	
WC-2	\$ 446	8	8%	9	Roasta 12 ⁺	
WC-3	\$ 353	9	7%	10	n.d.	
WC-4	\$ 310	11	4%	11	n.d.	
WC-5	\$ 157	16	1%	15	Dinah	3
WC-6	\$ 168	15	<1%	16	n.d.	

Table 5: Income and education for occupational categories
Columns 1 to 5 from Gordon (1987), 6 and 7 from Patrick (1999a)

My neighbourhood study generated life-stories, information on migration, residence and work histories, family and social networks, ambitions and self-evaluations, as well as linguistic data and tests, and my own ethnographic observations on dress, housing and tenure, and local divisions and attitudes to different social positions. Taking into account such qualitative information alongside Gordon's quantitative data and class analysis, I created the ranked scale of occupational status in Table 6. (The italicized entries for Roxy, Opal, and Bigga represent plausible guesses at their future occupational levels, not facts.)

Table 7 gives in greater detail the educational achievement of each speaker. Problems in comparing the education level of different generations are here glossed over in favor of a simple status ranking by year and level.

Rank	Speaker	Class	Occupation
1	George <i>(Roxy)</i>	MS-2 <i>(MS-2?)</i>	Civil servant <i>(still in school)</i>
2	Rose	MS-2	Head nurse (ret.)
3	Walker	MS-2	Headmaster, small school (ret.)
4	Matty	MS-3	Photographer
5	Macca	WC-1	Police detective (ret.)
6	Olive	MS-4	Accounts clerk
7	Noel Roasta <i>(Opal)</i>	MS-5 WC-2 <i>(MS-5?)</i>	Clerk-trainee Toolmaker <i>(graduated, looking for work)</i>
8	Tamas Mina Sista <i>(Bigga)</i>	PB-2, WC-2 PB-2 PB-2 <i>(WC?)</i>	Shoemaker, factory worker Dressmaker Self-employed actress, activist <i>(still in school)</i>
9	Dinah	WC-5	Domestic helper

Table 6: Occupational status ranking of Veeton speakers

Rank	Speaker	Years	Type of School and Training
1	George (Roxy)	16 (9, cont.)	university graduate (on university track)
2	Matty	12 +	secondary grad. + arts/professional
3	Olive	12 +	secondary grad. + business
4	Roasta	12 +	secondary grad. + tech./industrial
5	Rose, Walker	11 +	secondary grad. + on-the-job (nurse, teacher)
6	Noel, Opal	11	secondary grad.
	Bigga	10...	secondary (one year left)
7	Macca, Mina	6	primary
8	Tamas, Sista, Dinah	3	less than primary

Table 7: Educational status ranking of Veeton speakers

Overall Rank	Speaker	Occupation Ranking	Education Ranking	Residence Ranking	Rank Score
1	George	1	1	1	3
	Roxy	(1)	(1)	1	(3)
2	Rose	2	5	2	9
3	Walker	3	5	4	12
	Matty	4	2	6	12
4	Roasta	7	4	3	14
5	Macca	5	7	4	16
6	Olive	6	3	8	17
7	Noel	7	6	7	20
	Tamas	8	8	4	20
8	Opal	(7)	6	8	(21)
	Mina	8	7	6	21
	Sista	8	8	5	21
9	Bigga	(8)	6	8	(22)
10	Dinah	9	8	8	25

Table 8: Overall status ranking of Veeton speakers

Finally, I have combined these various scales into a single overall status ranking. While admitting that information is lost at each stage of simplification and reduction, the move of abstraction to a general socioeconomic hierarchy is required in any investigation of the creole continuum, and applies the strictest test to that model. It also brings creole data into comparability with the body of urban dialectological studies.

I apply an equal weighting to each scale in Table 8, but clearly the overall ranking reflects occupation most strongly. (Rankings based on incomplete social information, due to the youth of the speakers, are given in parentheses; names in italics are speakers for whom not all linguistic variables are analysed below. Where two rank scores tie, the higher occupation score is listed first.) These variables are the major stratificational ones recommended by Labov (1990:209) for correlation, except that income is absent. This information was not easily available to me, and there is reason to think that the unofficial Jamaican economy makes straightforward calculation and relation of wages to standards of living and consumption problematic.

(KYA)	(TD)	(DID)	(-ED)
<i>George</i>			
Roxy	Rose	Roxy	Roxy
Rose	Roxy	Rose	Rose
Noel	Olive	Noel	Noel
Olive	----- Noel	Olive	Olive
Opal	Tamas	Opal	-----
	Matty	Bigga	Matty
	Opal		Opal
-----	----- Bigga	-----	----- Tamas
<i>Walker</i>	Mina	Matty	Bigga
<i>Sista</i>		Tamas	Mina
<i>Macca</i>	-----	Mina	-----
Mina	Dinah	Dinah	-----
----- Tamas			Dinah
Matty			
<i>Roasta</i>			
Dinah			

Table 9: Discontinuities in the distribution of four linguistic variables

I will be much briefer in ranking the speakers according to their use of the 4 linguistic variables examined here. Each of these variables is treated in detail in a chapter of its

own in Patrick (1999a). First is (KYA), a case of phonolexical variation: the presence of palatal glides after velars and before low vowels in words such as *car* /kya(r)/, *garden* /gyaadn/. Since it turned out that speakers only contrasted in the historically pre-rhotic AR environment, only those items are considered here. (TD) is the absence of morpheme-final consonant clusters, a phonological variable with both phonetic and grammatical constraints. The third variable is the absence of (DID), past tense-marking with the pre-verbal forms *did* or *neva* (the negative equivalent). The last is (-ED), past tense-marking via the presence of regular verb inflection in /-t/, /-d/, /-əd/.

These variables are here counted in their presence or absence so that maximum usage approximates to the acrolectal standard, i.e. absence of (KYA), presence of (TD) clusters, absence of (DID), and presence of (-ED). In this way they can be correlated directly to the social status rankings, testing the assumption that higher-status speakers favour acrolectal speech more often. Particular constraints on each variable have been identified and analysed, refining the definitions of the variables, removing some spurious patterns and explaining the variation as well as possible; at present it is simply their rate of occurrence across the population we are interested in.

(This section of the paper, while still unpublished, was misinterpreted by one scholar who quoted it as offering a characterization of the acrolect. It is no such thing; given the detail in which I have characterized the mesolect elsewhere, this should be obvious. Any sensible discussion of the values of the linguistic variables discussed below should not stop, or indeed begin, here, but rather go to the full and careful treatments given or referred to in Patrick 1999a. This paper merely sketches the complex linguistic variation detailed there, for the present purpose of examining covariation with social mobility factors.)

Table 9 shows this linguistic stratification for each variable. Solid lines within a column represent sharp differences of quantitative patterning, while dashed lines represent minor distinctions. Patterns of categorical presence or absence are enclosed by a box: thus we can see that roughly the top half of the sample show categorical absence of (KYA) in AR words, and essentially the same speakers almost never use (DID) to mark past-reference. It is worth noting that these are the two Creole-valued variables, the two which distinctly mark speech as Patwa; and also that while (KYA) crosses age lines, with young speakers on both sides, (DID) is only used by older speakers in my sample. (Names in italics are speakers for whom only (KYA) was analysed; they will be left out of the general comparison to come.)

Finally, Table 10 brings this all together, performing a qualitative correlation on a quantitative set of rankings. The two central columns give the relative rankings of each speaker on the language scale (derived from Table 9) and the social status scale (from Table 8). A few speakers who appeared earlier are left out here; data on only one or two variables was analyzed for them, and the purpose of this table is to make the broadest comparison possible. On each scale there are a number of tied rankings; these speakers occupy the same box (e.g. “Roxy and Rose” at the top of the linguistic scale, “Noel and Tamas” in the middle of the social scale).

Linguistic Variables:				Overall	Overall	Social Variables:			
(KYA)	(TD)	Did	{-ed}	Ranking: Language	Ranking: Status	Occup.	Educ.	Resid.	
...	Roxy and	1	Roxy	...	...	...
...	Rose	2	Rose	...	Matty	...
...	Noel and	3	Matty	...	Olive	Tamas
...	Olive	4	Olive	...	Rose	Matty
...	Tamas	...	Matty	Opal	5	Noel and	...	...	Mina
Mina	...	Bigga	Opal	Matty	6	Tamas	Opal	Opal	...
...	Opal	Matty	...	Tamas	7	Opal and	Tamas	Bigga	...
Matty	...	Tamas	...	Bigga	8	Mina	...	...	Olive
...	Mina	9	Bigga	...	Tamas	...
...	Dinah	10	Dinah	...	...	...

Table 10: Linguistic and social rankings compared

These generalizations are supported by the individual rankings, with the linguistic variables to the left and the social ones to the right. Agreement between a speaker's position on one of these individual scales, and on the generalised scale, is represented here by 3 dots; only where agreement fails are the names of the exceptions given. This arrangement highlights the overall pattern of agreement, and focuses our attention on the exceptions which need explanation.

For example, no-one ranks lower than Dinah, or higher than Roxy, on any social criteria, nor on any linguistic ones; thus there are no exceptions to the first and tenth ranks in either direction. On the other hand Olive's residence index is lower, and her education index higher, than her overall status rank – she lives in Gullyside with her mother Dinah, but has a high degree of education (secondary graduate plus business school). Thus her name appears in the eighth rank for residence and the third for education – but not in the occupation column: her respectable job occupies the expected fourth rank. (In Table 8, Olive's occupation was ranked 6th, but above her were Walker and Macca – here left out of comparison, since only (KYA) data were computed for them. In their absence, her occupation occupies the 4th rank.) Similarly, Tamas's name appears in the fifth rank for (TD)-deletion, since he deleted less often than Opal and Matty, who are ranked above him overall in the linguistic index.

The linguistic rankings cohere very strongly. There are few exceptions, and all but one are off by only one or two ranks; while they are confined to the center of the scale. Upper- and lower-mesolectal speakers are thus quite stable. Across a range of variables, the speech community shows good agreement on covariation. Their frequency of use of one feature is generally a good predictor of their frequency of use on another: not in absolute terms of percentage, but in terms of behavior relative to their peers and near neighbours. Whatever may be the dimensions that structure this linguistic variation, in terms of speaker ordering it is quite regular.

When we turn to consider the social dimensions on their own, this is much less true. Occupation is quite a strong predictor of overall social status, showing exceptions only for Opal and Tamas (recall that Opal is one of the teenage speakers who had not yet found work; her occupation was only projected, and might indeed not be out of order here at all.) Both residence and education are sensitive to generational differences, however, which are not taken into account in a synchronic, static ranking.

Tamas and Mina rank high for residence because, over the decades, they have improved their situation: despite their low-ranked occupations, they are property-owners. Education is strikingly poorly correlated with status, and even with occupation. This is because within the lifetime of the older speakers (Rose, Tamas), the amount of formal education expected for a high-ranked occupation has risen dramatically; while for the young (Bigga, Opal), advanced schooling is necessary but no longer sufficient to guarantee a good job or high social status. The fact that the three dimensions do not agree closely suggests that it may be inappropriate to rely on a unidimensional model for the continuum; but the fact that occupation makes excellent predictions of status allows us to proceed with the overall scale, keeping in mind that it is really primarily occupational status we are relying on.

The true test of the creole continuum's explanatory sociolinguistic value, however, lies in its ability to correlate the two planes of variation, linguistic and social, represented here by the two central columns. In fact there is a direction of influence involved: a synchronic sociolinguistic survey asks the question, How do social characteristics explain patterned linguistic choices? In terms of Table 10, and Figure 1 which derives directly from it, we shall be reasoning from right to left.

The initial impression is one of stability at the extremes of the mesolectal continuum – with Dinah at the basilectal border, and Roxy and Rose at the acrolectal end, firmly in place – but considerable movement in the middle, where only Olive maintains her position. These four stable speakers are all female, it is true (though so are Opal and Mina), but otherwise they have nothing in common in terms of our explanatory social dimensions. Considering the six speakers whose linguistic ranking does not agree with their social status ranking, we notice that several of them are off by two or even three places; furthermore, there does not appear to be a single, simple explanation for their variance, since they range across the spectrum in social class, education, age, occupation and residence. It appears that the ability of such social factors to explain linguistic patterning – so well attested in other urban speech communities – founders when confronted with the Jamaican creole continuum.

On closer inspection, however, a pattern emerges – one that is related to age, and can be interpreted dynamically in terms of social mobility and speaker attitude towards community norms. Figure 1 indicates the pattern.

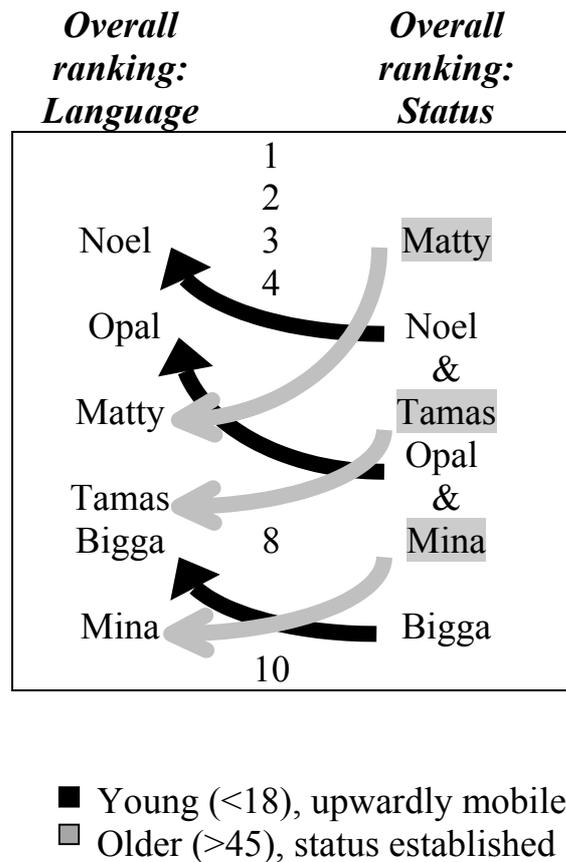


Figure 1: Age and social mobility patterns in ranked data

The influence of social position on linguistic behaviour shows a contrast by age, regardless of social class or status, gender, education or residence. All the speakers whose linguistic ranking is higher than their social status are young: Noel, Opal and Bigga were all 17 when recorded. All speakers whose speech rank is lower than their social status are over 45 (Matty 49, Tamas 70, Mina 75).

The youth all speak optimistically about their chances for social mobility, whether through an apprenticeship in business (Noel), further education in secretarial and accounting school (Opal) or sport (Bigga). Their language attitude interviews display earnest and careful language use in a formal style, referring explicitly and prescriptively to media standards and “proper English”. Opal contrasts her own “pretty English” with the opinions of some “vulgar girls” that she is “talkin’ speaky-spoky” or “goin’ on stoosh”.

Reflecting on the employment pressure on young people, who despite their greater amount of schooling must often compete with older adults of wider experience for entry-level jobs, it is not surprising that some of them choose to manipulate all the symbolic resources available to them. Careful use of language projects an image of respectable, educated youth who are deserving of opportunity. Ethnographic descriptions of class ideology in Jamaica (Foner 1973, Kuper 1976, Austin 1984) stress that working and middle classes agree on the importance of “education” – possibly to the detriment of the working class, since this concept means not just

“proper schooling” but also a range of behaviours and manners, a public face with moral and symbolic value prescribed and supported not just by the school system but also by the labour economy and the moral authority of the church and official media.

“Proper English”, then, is a key component of this public face, and attention to speech is one way to mobilize symbolic capital in support of upward social mobility. This is responsible for the upward curve in Figure 1 representing contrasting relations between status and language among the youth. There is certainly an element of choice here, and as it happens all the young people in this study conform to the pattern – except Roxy, who at 14 is already a member of the middle-class elite (daughter of a dentist and schoolteacher) and need not adjust her speech; and Olive, who at 24 has already begun to achieve this mobility, as a result of her educational efforts and strategic social choices. She lives in Gullyside still with her mother, but has moved up from poor jobs to better, changed churches and cut off relations with many of her childhood friends in the neighbourhood, and is saving on rent to purchase a house. It is possible – indeed, expected – that other attitudes to social mobility, and other choices of class values, exist for young adults, but the sociolinguistic pressure exerted by the alignment of school, economy and moral institutions is powerful.

What of older speakers? The desirability of social mobility is related to life-stage: Tamas and Mina, elderly and retired homeowners, do not share the motivation of young speakers to advance their status in life through symbolic means, though Tamas undoubtedly felt similar pressures during his years as a factory worker in England. Mina spends most of the year in the country, and makes little effort to accommodate to her higher-status urban sister (a retired nurse, not analysed here) when staying in the latter’s Veeton home, where I recorded her.

Matty, the photographer, is the exception that proves the rule. His financial situation is precarious, but his education and middle-class contacts earn him local status with his Gullyside neighbours. He projects an ideological commitment to vernacular culture and speech, both in his topic and style of discourse, yet he also displays an eloquent command of the standard, and an almost academic preference for precise and erudite word-choice in the language attitudes interview. Matty is motivated to display the breadth of his competence and experience, in order to underline the point that his stylistic preferences are freely chosen for their symbolic value. The affirmation of conflicting values which underpins speech community practices is not, or at any rate not always, a compromise forced on speakers due to the limits of their language abilities – it may be a deliberate political and cultural stance.

This paper demonstrates that it is possible to apply ethnographic methods and locally-relevant concepts to correlational sociolinguistics in the Caribbean; and that the outcome may do more than prove what we’ve assumed all along, may even reveal unsuspected patterns in the distribution of linguistic behaviour in social space. These patterns require us to attend to dynamic factors: social mobility, generational change in the constellation of societal pressures, and the existence of a variety of strategies for the use of speech across a wide social range. Finally, just as multiple social dimensions appear necessary for the detailed modelling of the creole continuum, so too must we recognize that multiple evaluative norms, positions and attitudes are available to speakers in a Caribbean sociolinguistic complex such as Kingston.

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