Apparent time change in Bequia creole. Evidence for dialect leveling.

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The paper focuses on dialect leveling among the younger generation of speakers in creole speaking Bequia (St. Vincent and The Grenadines). Previous work (Daleszynska 2008) examined past tense marking among older generations of speakers in three different villages on the island and found robust differences in variation between them with different rates of constraints which would suggest the co-existence of multiple linguistic systems on the island. It was also observed that older speakers’ perceptions of language in Bequia suggest dialect leveling among younger Bequians. To test this, we contrast the data obtained from older speakers with the newly collected corpus of Bequians under the age of 25. Preliminary results indicate leveling in the form of a reduction of creole variants. Results of the multivariate analysis will inform whether the ongoing language change also leads to increased uniformity in the constraints of the surviving variants.

The analysis is based on c. 5000 past tense clauses obtained from the two datasets and focuses on the alternation between bare verbs [1] and inflected verbs [2]. For older speakers, the strongest constraints of variation include anteriority and stativity in Hamilton and Paget Farm, suggesting the creole origin of these varieties, and morphological class in Mount Pleasant, which is in line with other varieties of English (Tagliamonte and Poplack 1993). This result is interesting in the light of the different economic and demographic development of these villages: the first two of which emerged as slave-labour plantations and the latter, as a hub of British settlers. The study addresses the issue of apparent time change in an English-lexified Caribbean creole and looks into leveling (or decreolization ?) as one of its outcomes. It also provides further insight into the discussion about whether the model of variation in Bequia represents a single highly variable system, or a set of co-existing ones (Labov 1998).

[1] He follow we home, cause we come out late in the morning. 09Hi0
[2] They were together when she came here and then she went back and then I don’t know what happened. 19Mf3

References
Daleszynska, Agata. 2008. Constraints of variation in Bequian creole: Focus on past tense. Paper presented at NWAV 37, 6-9 November, Rice University, Houston, TX.