

## **African American English in the diaspora: Evidence from old-line Nova Scotians**

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, we describe a new research project on African Nova Scotian English (ANSE), a variety spoken by descendants of African American slaves who immigrated to Nova Scotia in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Subsequent segregation from surrounding populations has created a situation favoring retention of the vernacular, in conjunction with Standard English. In addition to providing the first systematic linguistic documentation of ANSE, we detail the characteristics of the Canadian scenario that make it an ideal test of the creole-origins and divergence hypotheses: in particular, that, more clearly than other African American English varieties that evolved independently in the diaspora, the Canadian situation has featured no creole influence. This fact can effectively date the occurrence of any creole-like features in contemporary ANSE (and, by extension, other varieties of African American Vernacular English [AAVE]) to (at least) the late 18th century, an important time-depth characterization. We then present the results of a series of quantitative analyses of linguistically diagnostic features and compare them to those obtained for (1) another transplanted variety of African American English (Samaná English) and (2) a prototype variety (the Ex-slave Recordings), and note the striking similarities among them. The results militate in favor of a genetic relationship among ANSE and its counterparts as a common precursor of contemporary varieties, thereby providing the first methodologically consistent cross-linguis-

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tic comparison of three distinct vestiges of “early” African American English, and contributing missing links in the history and development of AAVE.

No dialect of English has received more sociolinguistic scrutiny over the past 25 years than African American Vernacular English (AAVE), as researchers have attempted to provide viable linguistic and sociohistorical explanations for the differences between the contemporary vernacular and other dialects of English. Whether these can be attributed to (1) distinct underlying grammatical structures derived from the original languages spoken by enslaved Africans (the “creole-origins” position) or (2) patterns acquired from contemporaneous English dialects to which they were exposed (the “anglicist” position), or (3) some combination of the two, is far from settled. Thus, the origins and evolution of AAVE (i.e., via creolization, decreolization, or autonomous change) and the sociocultural characterization of the contact situation through which it arose remain controversial.

The more recent “divergence” controversy (perhaps most clearly outlined by Bailey & Maynor, 1989; see also *American Speech* 62:1 [1987]; Butters, 1989; Wolfram, 1990) addresses AAVE’s present course of development. It holds that although black and white vernaculars may have been converging for many years, these varieties have in the recent past begun evolving independently. The divergence hypothesis is not, strictly speaking, a competitor to the creole hypothesis, nor to any other theory of the origin of AAVE—indeed, these debates are probably most appropriately viewed as independent. However, both are attempts to situate contemporary AAVE on the continuum between Standard English and creoles. Although this is not explicitly recognized in most of the relevant work, espousal of any position on either hypothesis inevitably implies a stance vis-à-vis some earlier form of AAVE. Creolization, decreolization, convergence, and divergence all involve change, and change cannot be assessed without knowledge of at least two discrete stages of the language.

In this article, we describe a new research project on African Nova Scotian English (ANSE), which we believe will contribute important insights into these ongoing debates. We first detail the key sociocultural characteristics of the Canadian situation that make it an ideal test case for the hypotheses described earlier, focusing on the fact that the informants for this study are descendants of African American slaves who immigrated to Nova Scotia in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Subsequent segregation from surrounding populations has created a situation favoring retention of the vernacular, in conjunction with Standard English. We then present the results of a series of systematic analyses of linguistically diagnostic features and compare them to those obtained for another transplanted variety of early Black English (BE) (Samaná English) and a prototype variety (the Ex-slave Recordings) and note the striking similarities among them. Now, more clearly than other transplanted varieties of early BE that have evolved independently in

separate locales (e.g., Liberian Settler English, Samaná English), the Canadian situation has featured no creole influence. This fact can effectively date the occurrence of any creole-like features that may be found in contemporary ANSE (and, by extension, other varieties of AAVE) to (at least) the late 18th century, an important time-depth characterization. This provides the first methodologically consistent cross-linguistic comparison of four distinct varieties of early BE. The results militate in favor of a genetic relationship among ANSE and its counterparts as a common precursor of contemporary varieties, thereby contributing missing links in the history and development of AAVE.

#### REAL-TIME EVIDENCE ON AAVE

Any attempt to explain the present state of AAVE relies crucially on knowledge of some previous state of the language. But for obvious reasons, truly reliable data on an earlier form of AAVE are difficult to come by. This is why most of the evidence on which the opposing positions are founded is based on inferences drawn from synchronic materials, with all of the attendant difficulties in inferring change in progress from synchronic age distributions (Bailey, Wike, Tillery, & Sand, 1991; Labov, 1981; Wolfram, 1987).

The last decade has also seen an independent rise of interest in analyzing the few historical representations of AAVE available: in particular, the “WPA Ex-slave Narratives” (e.g., Brewer, 1974, 1979, 1986; Pitts, 1981, 1986; Schneider, 1982, 1983a, 1989), a massive compendium of interviews conducted with elderly former slaves in the 1930s. Based on the assumption that informants did not make major adjustments to their vernacular over their lifetime, these materials are taken to reflect the BE spoken in the mid-19th century. A second source, the Hyatt corpus, collected around the same time and representative of approximately the same period as the WPA Ex-slave Narratives, has been analyzed by Viereck (1988, 1989).

The few existing examinations of these “early” materials, albeit not quantitative, appear to cast doubt on some of the synchronic evidence marshalled in favor of the divergence hypothesis. Viereck (1988) reported the widespread usage of *be*<sub>2</sub> as a durative/habitual aspect marker—the feature characterized by Bailey and Maynor (1985, 1987) and Myhill (1988) as a recent innovation in contemporary AAVE—in the Hyatt corpus. Similarly, the innovative specialization of verbal *-s* as a marker of narrative present (Myhill & Harris, 1986) had already been noticed by Roberts (1976) in Botkin’s (1945) *Lay My Burden Down*, excerpts from the Ex-slave Narratives.

Whereas it might seem tempting to dismiss the divergence hypothesis on the basis of such findings, serious questions have been raised about the authenticity and linguistic reliability of these transcripts. Wolfram (1990) provided a detailed critique of the transcription conventions utilized in the Ex-slave Narratives (which include “eye” dialect and linguistic stereotyping)

and questioned how linguistically untrained interviewers could have been expected to keep track of all the fine phonetic and grammatical detail necessary to represent variable processes in a host of features simultaneously, while at the same time attending to the actual conduct of the interview. Thus, we cannot overlook the possibility that the historical texts (and the analyses based on them) are as representative of the linguistic system of the transcribers as of the speakers themselves. Ideally, we would want access to a historically authentic *and* linguistically faithful representation of early BE, as would be obtained from appropriately collected audio recordings from an earlier point in time.

Such a corpus in fact exists: the Ex-slave Recordings are a series of mechanically recorded interviews with former slaves born in six southern states between 1844 and 1861 (see Bailey et al., 1991, for a number of studies based on the Recordings). This constitutes the only known audiotaped record of the speech of former slaves who had never left the southern United States, and we may consider it to represent a prototype variety of early BE. Unfortunately, it consists of only a few hours of audible speech. Thus, although an invaluable source for comparative purposes, these materials alone cannot provide sufficient data for systematic study of most grammatical structures of interest.

#### THE AFRICAN AMERICAN DIASPORA

Partially as a response to the problems characterizing earlier records of AAVE, researchers have recently begun focusing on the language of what may be termed the “African American diaspora”—synchronic recordings of *transplanted* varieties of African American English—as a means of shedding light on the diachronic status of AAVE. Two of the most widely discussed data sets are on varieties spoken in Liberia (Singler, 1984, 1986, 1989a, 1989b, 1991) and Samaná (Dominican Republic) (Poplack & Sankoff, 1980, 1987; Poplack & Tagliamonte, 1989; Tagliamonte, 1991; Tagliamonte & Poplack, 1988, 1991)—destinations to which escaped slaves and freedmen emigrated by the thousands in the early 1820s. This type of data can furnish much-needed historical insight into the current structure of AAVE, once we have established its relationship to (1) the language spoken by the original input settlers of these regions and (2) the varieties spoken by African Americans in the United States over a century and a half ago. Though language-internal evolution is a factor, it is the existence of *external*, or contact-induced, influences on these varieties (resulting in convergent *or* divergent change) that most threaten to invalidate them as evidence about early BE in the United States. For example, Poplack and Sankoff (1980, 1987) documented how Samaná English has been resistant to external linguistic influence, due in large part to the social, psychological, and religious separation of its speakers from the surrounding hispanophone population. For this as

well as independent linguistic reasons detailed in those articles, we concluded that this variety of English must be directly affiliated with varieties spoken by many African Americans in the United States early in the 19th century. Singler (1989b:48) likewise suggested from an examination of Liberian Settler and (indigenous) non-Settler English that the former has not “drawn extensively” from the latter.

These data are not without their problems. Perhaps the severest drawback to the use of the Samaná materials as a source on early BE is the lack of precise documentation of the social and geographical provenance of the ancestors of the speakers, in contrast to the extensive records kept on the Liberian migration. In neither locale, however, does it seem possible to establish the exact sociolinguistic and geographic origins of the founding community. The massive mortality rate in the early years of settlement in both areas complicates matters further. Nonetheless, explored within a proper comparative and analytical context, it seems clear that data such as these can provide an invaluable source of information on the precursors of contemporary AAVE.

Our research has shown that Samaná English displays remarkable resemblances to contemporary AAVE and, in some cases, to standard, dialectal, and/or historical varieties of (white) English, particularly at the core grammatical level. Within the verb system, the rates and, more important, the conditioning of copula presence (Poplack & Sankoff, 1980, 1987) have been shown to be quite similar to, and in fact even more conservative than, those characteristic of present-day AAVE, although differing significantly from English-based creoles. The (simple) past (Tagliamonte & Poplack, 1988) and the (simple) present (Poplack & Tagliamonte, 1989) tense paradigms are comparable in form and function to those attested for standard, dialectal, and/or historical varieties of (white) English and, again, were shown not to follow English-based creoles in the constraint hierarchies conditioning their variable occurrence. Even where the entire past temporal reference system is considered, encompassing the full range of morphological types (as opposed to simply focusing on consonant cluster simplification and *-t, d* deletion in weak verbs as is characteristic of the literature on this subject), the results point to an underlying tense-prominent system for marking each category of past time rather than an aspect-prominent system, as would be expected of a creole (Tagliamonte, 1991; Tagliamonte & Poplack, 1991). Systematic comparison with the Ex-slave Recordings reveals compelling correspondences with the Samaná materials (Poplack & Tagliamonte, 1989), thus supporting our contention that the latter must be representative of an earlier form of AAVE.

It is perhaps not surprising, given the controversial context of AAVE studies over the past few decades, that our conclusions contrast sharply with those drawn by Singler (1989b:47) for Liberian Settler English, which according to him, shows “definite signs of being . . . a vestigial creole,” displaying creolized as well as decreolized features. In a replication of Poplack and Sankoff’s (1987) analysis of copula usage in Samaná English, Singler (1991) posited an underlying zero copula (i.e., a “creole analysis”) for the speech

of at least one of the three Liberian Settlers he studied, in contrast to the regular environmental conditioning of both contraction and deletion characteristic of contemporary AAVE and Samaná English. Similarly, Singler (1989b:49) characterized the tense-aspect system of Liberian Settler English as creole-like in its propensity to mark temporal sequencing rather than tense, quite unlike past and present time reference in Samaná English (Poplack & Tagliamonte, 1989; Tagliamonte, 1991; Tagliamonte & Poplack, 1988).

The fact that West African pidgin was already spoken in the Liberian region prior to the arrival of the settlers (Singler, 1989b:48)—in contrast to the situation in Samaná, where Spanish was the dominant and official language since the late 1840s—may provide a partial explanation of these discrepant results. However, Singler maintained that “the primary source of current creolized and decreolized features is the English which some of the settlers brought with them, rather than subsequent contact with other varieties of English,” and that Liberian Settler English is primarily a “New World variety” (ibid.:47). If this is the case, we need to provide an alternative explanation for the predominantly (white) English-like characteristics of both Samaná English and the Ex-slave Recordings, at least in the areas of the grammar studied thus far.

The kinds of linguistic change that have taken place in African American English over the last century and a half, and the contribution of different contact situations to such change, are not well known. It is clear that more data are needed, preferably from a transplanted variety of African American English in a contact situation partially similar to and partially different from those already studied. We think ANSE is the ideal candidate to provide the comparative information necessary to clarify the status of early (and contemporary) BE.

#### THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC SETTING OF AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN ENGLISH

Though it is well known that during, and just after, the period of slavery thousands of slaves left the United States, it is not common knowledge that the majority (up to 60,000; Landon, 1920:22) emigrated to Canada (Clairmont & Magill, 1970; Grant, 1973; Hill, 1981; Walker, 1980; Winks, 1968, 1971). The bulk of this emigration came in three major waves into two different areas: Black Loyalist immigration into the Maritimes after the American Revolutionary War (between ca. 1783 and 1785), Refugee Slave immigration into the Maritimes following the War of 1812, and Fugitive Slave immigration into southwestern Ontario between 1815 and 1861.

Although the influx into Ontario was numerically greatest as well as historically most prominent, being a well-publicized terminus of the underground railroad, we focus in this project on the Canadian Maritimes and, in particular, the province of Nova Scotia, to which the majority of both the Black Loyalists and Refugees were sent (Cassell, 1972:153).<sup>1</sup> In fact, in the

late 18th century, Nova Scotia is said to have contained “the largest free black settlements anywhere in the world outside Africa” (Walker, 1980:31). Although many of the first immigrants made their way back to Africa, Nova Scotia continued to contain perhaps the largest population of former American slaves outside of the United States.

From the outset, however, these settlements were rural, remote, or urban-fringe (Clairmont & Wien, 1978:143; Clark, 1942:265; Winks, 1968, 1971), effectively reinforcing the segregation imposed by institutional racism in education, religion, and employment, and isolating blacks from whites in most areas of their lives (Abucar, 1988:3; Walker, 1985:44). Residents were forced to develop independent churches and schools, which suffered from underfunding and lack of materials. These were served by local black preachers and teachers, mostly community trained or appointed (Moreau, 1987; Pate, 1976; Rawlyk, 1968; Winks, 1968).<sup>2</sup> Infertile land allotments, small acreages (when land titles were granted), and skills that were unappreciated in the white community prevented the immigrants from attaining self-sufficiency or financial success.<sup>3</sup> From the time of their arrival in Nova Scotia, former slaves and their descendants have been characterized by a low degree of participation in mainstream political, economic, and social life (Clairmont & Magill, 1970).

Despite diminishing numbers in recent years, due in large part to the search for material advancement in less economically depressed provinces (Clairmont & Magill, 1970; Clairmont & Wien, 1978; Rawlyk, 1968), there remain some communities in Nova Scotia that are almost entirely populated by the descendants of these two waves of immigrants.<sup>4</sup>

#### CHOICE OF COMMUNITIES

Two such communities were the focus of our investigation (Figure 1). These are North Preston, located in the eastern central portion of the province outside of the Halifax–Dartmouth urban area, and a cluster of hamlets in the vicinity of the small town of Guysborough, located on the northeastern corner of peninsular Nova Scotia approximately 155 miles from Halifax. These sites were chosen on the basis of the following considerations:

1. Settlement dates back to the earliest significant in-migrations from the United States (i.e., 1783–1784).
2. The communities have remained both geographically and socially separated from surrounding populations since the time of original settlement.
3. The present population is predominantly, if not solely, old-line (Hill, 1981) black and is sufficiently numerous to retain strong in-group ties.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Guysborough*

Guysborough was one of approximately six or eight major places (Ferguson, 1948:2) settled by Black Loyalists during the first migration of African



FIGURE 1. Communities sampled in the African Nova Scotian project.

Americans into Nova Scotia (1783). Despite the existence in the area of communities already settled by whites, the immigrants were located outside the populated districts in settlements of their own. Unlike most other Black Loyalist communities of the time, Guysborough remained unaffected by the mass exodus to Sierra Leone, nor was its population augmented by the subsequent influx of Refugees.<sup>6</sup>

The homogeneity of both the original input settler cohort and their descendants over the course of ensuing generations is a unique defining feature of the Guysborough area. The settlers actually comprised three different groups: slaves of White Loyalists (who often were freed upon arrival in Nova Scotia) (Winks, 1971:38), escaped slaves from the southern states who had sought freedom behind British lines (Grant, 1973:254; Winks, 1971:38), and freed-

men from the northern states who, despite “free” status in the United States, were enticed by the British offer of lands in their colonies.<sup>7</sup> Most of the freedmen possessed specific skills and trades and had had experience in the service industry (e.g., as domestics, waiters, messengers, etc.). The former slaves have been characterized as “indoor” slaves (Winks, 1971).

Today, Guysborough county is the poorest in Nova Scotia, and the African Nova Scotians who reside there are considered “the poorest of the poor” (Clairmont & Magill, 1970:64). The settlements we sampled there are simply clusters of between 8 and 40 homes aligned along back roads. Stores, services, and recreational facilities are sparse in the county in general but are completely absent in these rural, nonagricultural areas. With the recent closing of the last public school, the churches remain the only public institutions. The scattered houses are surrounded by wilderness and are accessible only by private means. Conversations with white residents of Guysborough revealed that none had ever visited any of these communities despite their geographic proximity.

#### *North Preston*

The Preston area had a more heterogeneous settlement history than Guysborough, though it is likely that the ancestors of our informants were as cohesive a group as the Guysborough settlers. Originally settled at the same time as Guysborough (1784) by a mixed population of White and Black Loyalists (Abucar, 1988:9; Fergusson, 1948:38; Winks, 1971:36), blacks in Preston were at this time outnumbered 20 to 1 by whites. Here again, however, they were relegated to three small communities in the hinterlands of the township, where, as in Guysborough, they were generally segregated: North Preston, East Preston, and Cherrybrook (Abucar, 1988:19). Of these, North Preston is geographically the most remote. In any event, by 1792, most, if not all, of the Black Loyalists had sold or abandoned their properties in the exodus to Sierra Leone (Abucar, 1988:10; Fergusson, 1948). Shortly thereafter (1796), a group of 500–600 Jamaican Maroons was exiled to the Dartmouth–Halifax area. Some apparently eventually made it as far as Preston, but because of extreme dissatisfaction with their plight and repeated petitions to leave (fully endorsed by the white settlers with whom they entertained acrimonious relations), they were relocated to Sierra Leone by 1800 (Fergusson, 1948:4; Grant, 1973:259–260; Winks, 1971:81–93).<sup>8</sup> Preston was repopulated by Refugee Slaves in 1815. Though they in fact represent the third in-migration into the area, it is predominantly from these Refugee Slaves that current residents descend (Abucar, 1988:19).

The origins of these settlers can be traced to Maryland, Virginia, and to a lesser extent Louisiana and Georgia, the slave states on and closest to the exposed coastline of the southeastern United States. During the War of 1812, slaves, attracted by promises of freedom by the British, gathered on the coast, where they were picked up by the waiting British fleet (Cassell, 1972;

Winks, 1971).<sup>9</sup> The historical record indicates that most of the escapees had been field slaves typically characterized as having no specific training or skills (Winks, 1971:124).<sup>10</sup>

Today North Preston is the largest black community in Nova Scotia. Its population of 1,218 (Statistics Canada, 1983) is almost entirely old-line. Like Guysborough, it is a rural, nonagricultural settlement, though much more densely populated. Housing ranges from (very few) middle-income, single-family homes to meagre dwellings. The community, located approximately seven miles north of the city of Dartmouth via a poorly paved secondary road, is bounded by large lakes and uninhabited woodlands. There is no public transportation in or out of the area. Although there are a public school, a daycare center, and a senior citizens' home as well as a church, there are no visible commercial establishments nor any service or recreational facilities that would attract outsiders into the community. There is thus no apparent reason for a stranger to visit North Preston, and judging by the reaction of residents to an initial reconnaissance mission by the second author, the presence of whites in the community is unusual.

In neither the Preston nor the Guysborough areas were blacks "isolated" in the strict sense of the term, as whites had also settled these areas. But segregationist land-granting policy and resulting patterns of settlement effectively led to this result (Winks, 1971:36). The confinement of residents to remote fringe areas, coupled with separation from surrounding populations for reasons of socioeconomic class, education, and ethnicity, all explain why the majority of African Nova Scotians have persevered through the present in a situation of relative isolation, despite the geographic proximity of mainstream population groups. These facts, in conjunction with evidence that synchronic varieties of ANSE are not participating in ongoing linguistic change characteristic of contemporary African American varieties, will be of use to us in demonstrating that contemporary ANSE may be used to reconstruct aspects of the original varieties the settlers brought with them.

Equally interesting for the present purposes is the essentially different character of the original input settlers of North Preston and Guysborough. They can be distinguished not only as to date of migration, but also according to their origins, geographic background, religion, attitude, and even social status. Many Black Loyalists had been freedmen, with some trades or skills in demand by the white populace. They were Anglicans and Wesleyans, who preferred going to white churches and who assimilated more readily to the mainstream community. Many had managed to establish themselves with some degree of success in society. The Refugees differed from those who had preceded them on several counts. All had been slaves; virtually none of whom were trained in any service or domestic skill. In addition, most had been field hands

who lacked the indoor slaves' incidental knowledge of domestic chores and who had not learned how to live side by side with white men. Originally from the

South, they suffered more than the northern Loyalist Negroes from their sudden injection into a new climate. Their ignorance . . . was profoundly greater. Virtually all were Baptists while most of their predecessors originally had been Anglicans and Wesleyans. (Winks, 1971:124-125)

Little wonder that the Black Loyalists, who were proud of being identified with the early settlement of the colony, did not wish to be associated with the newcomers and their stigma of slavery (ibid.:139-141). This had the effect of isolating the Refugees from other African American communities. Thus, whereas there appears to be some evidence that Black Loyalists and Refugees were not completely separated (Walker, 1985), we stress here that the majority of the settlers who established permanent residence in Guysborough originated in essentially different strata of the African American migrant population from their North Preston counterparts.

Perhaps one of the greatest problems plaguing students of the history and development of AAVE has been the precise location on the continuum of the dialect of AAVE under study. It is uncontroversial that the language of African Americans, whether contemporary or older, is not monolithic. However, the dearth of data, let alone data stratified according to the extralinguistic categories described earlier, has significantly impeded this type of inquiry. Although by their very nature, data such as these restrict our ability to assess the *exact* provenance of the ancestors of contemporary informants, we believe we have an unprecedented opportunity to compare two distinct varieties of early BE, which, at the present stage of our research, we can characterize only as more (Guysborough) and less (North Preston) "standardized."<sup>11</sup> Thus, not only can we be reasonably sure that the African Americans who migrated to Nova Scotia in general included the major population elements presumed to have contributed to the development of contemporary AAVE (i.e., slaves and freedmen, northerners and southerners, house and field slaves), but more specifically, the two waves of migration into Nova Scotia, as represented by the two communities we have sampled, contain those elements in significantly different proportions.

In sum, the relevant characteristics of the Canadian situation are as follows:

1. The first wave of migration from the United States (1783) predated those to other locales and continued through the period (1820s) during which African Americans first settled in the Dominican Republic and Liberia.
2. The historical record shows that the immigrants have remained generally isolated from surrounding populations since their arrival in Canada, subsisting in enclaves, similar in many ways to their counterparts in Samaná and in some parts of Liberia.
3. There is good reason to believe that the two varieties under investigation here may represent the descendants of two distinct social dialects.
4. The contact situation has always involved a superordinate variety of English that is devoid of creole features.

In sharp contrast to the situation in the United States, the existence of old-line African Canadians has been basically ignored by the wider Canadian population; it is thus perhaps not surprising that virtually nothing is known of their language. Given the parallels between African Nova Scotians and the Samanese (and to some extent African Americans) along sociological, economic, and political lines, it would not be unusual to find linguistic similarities in their speech. And indeed, the sole linguist to have considered an African Nova Scotian dialect (Dillard, 1971, 1973) characterized ANSE as fundamentally similar to AAVE. On the basis of anecdotal evidence, he stated that both, like other New World varieties, “reveal the characteristic structures of Pidgin English” (1973:508). We submit that only a systematic empirical analysis of primary data can provide the kind of detailed account of truly diagnostic linguistic features necessary to support this assertion. We return to this issue later.

In sum, data on ANSE can provide an important test case for the models of language change on which current controversies are based. Given the current state of our knowledge, these models must undergo further testing on the basis of empirical data from additional contact situations. The socio-historical characteristics of ANSE permit examination of the mechanisms of language change in yet another variety transplanted under comparable conditions. In conjunction with the Samaná English corpus and the Ex-slave Recordings, the Canadian corpora are a unique resource that provides an unprecedented opportunity to study four distinct varieties of BE in a methodologically consistent cross-linguistic comparison.

#### THE QUEST FOR THE VERNACULAR

The success of such a comparison, however, depends largely on the possibility of obtaining access to vernacular speech, perhaps our greatest challenge in this project. There are a number of reasons why this challenge was particularly difficult to meet. There is the well-known problem that in situations of asymmetrical status or power relations, one pole of the dialect continuum may be strictly reserved for use with in-group members in situations perceived to be appropriate. In the African Nova Scotian context, the vernacular, or what members refer to as the “dialect,” is so highly stigmatized that its use is restricted to intimate interaction with fellow *community*, let alone ethnic, members (Wayn Hamilton, personal communication).<sup>12</sup> Somewhat contradictorily, in view of the psychological and real segregation that has persisted until recently, virtually all African Nova Scotians also have at their disposal a variety of English that is very close, if not identical, to generalized standard Canadian or Nova Scotian English. The diglossic partitioning is so sweeping that most lay observers are convinced that there are no distinguishing features in ANSE (e.g., Donald Clairmont, personal communication). In

an effort to obtain at least some representation of vernacular features, without which we would simply have no basis of comparison with the other varieties we are investigating, we adopted participant observation techniques of data collection, with the condition that the fieldworkers themselves be community members and that the informants be participants in the fieldworkers’ own networks.

Virtually all of the North Preston and Guysborough interviews were conducted by a single individual native to each locale respectively over a period of 2½ months during the summer of 1991. The interviewers were trained in the administration of the sociolinguistic interview (Labov, 1984), the use of high-quality digital audio tape recorders and microphones, and the completion of interview reports containing demographic information on the informant subsequent to each interview. The second author, who coordinated the fieldwork on-site, met with the fieldworkers regularly to collect the tapes and interview reports, make suggestions regarding interview technique, and engage in general discussion and encouragement. Probably as much time was spent in establishing and maintaining personal rapport with the interviewers as they spent in interviewing informants.

#### *The informants*

Because the two African Nova Scotian communities sampled here were chosen specifically on the basis of (1) their relatively homogeneous racial and socioeconomic characteristics, (2) their presumed isolation from speakers of surrounding white varieties, and (3) the likelihood that their speakers could provide samples of vernacular speech, a sociologically stratified speaker sample was neither feasible nor necessary. Indeed, for reasons already given, it is more important that the data be representative than the speakers. Thus, no attempt was made to stratify the speakers for purposes of sample constitution either by socioeconomic class, age, or any of the other standard sociological indicators.<sup>13</sup> On the contrary, we focused on relatively insular older informants who had been born and who were raised in the community under investigation, for the following reasons:

1. During the time these informants were acquiring their language (1915–1940), the majority of schools available to African Nova Scotians were not yet integrated (Oliver, 1964; Pate, 1976; Rawlyk, 1968; Winks, 1971).
2. Elderly informants are less likely to be participating in ongoing linguistic change initiated by the younger generation.
3. Our research goals dictated that the sample be comparable with the Samaná English corpus and the Ex-slave Recordings, which are necessarily restricted to older speakers.

Our primary sample, depicted in Table 1, consists of 67 speakers, 29 from North Preston and 38 from Guysborough, ranging in age from 53 to 97 years

TABLE 1. *Distribution of primary sample members*

Age	North Preston		Guysborough	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
53-64	3	9	8	8
65-74	3	5	6	3
75+	4	5	3	10
Totals	10	19	17	21

TABLE 2. *Distribution of control group members*

	Inner-city Halifax		Younger North Preston		White Nova Scotians	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
12-24	1	3	1	1		
25-34				3		
35-44		1		2		
45-54			1	1		1
55-64		2				
65-74					4	
75+					2	7

and divided among 27 men and 40 women, a bias that is to be expected, given the male/female disproportion among the elderly, as well as our emphasis on social network methodology.

Level of education among the informants ranged from none at all to (one woman with) a university degree in education, with the majority having completed at least some elementary school. In general, the women in this sample tend to be more educated than the men. In terms of occupational status, most of the women were housewives at the time of the interview; several had formerly been employed as domestics. The men had mostly worked at odd jobs as laborers, largely in the area of caretaking and cleaning (North Preston) or in the woods, mines, or fisheries (Guysborough). These demographic characteristics reflect rather faithfully those of the African Nova Scotian population more generally, according to census data (Statistics Canada, 1983, 1987) and other sources (e.g., Clairmont & Magill, 1970; Jabbara & Cosper, 1988; Oliver, 1964).

For purposes of comparison, data from three small control groups were also gathered (Table 2). The first is a series of interviews with seven ANSE speakers (aged 12-63) from an inner-city neighborhood in Halifax, somewhat

more comparable to the informants on which the contemporary urban AAVE studies that characterize the literature are based. The second consists of interviews with 9 younger African Nova Scotian speakers (aged 20-46) from North Preston. Comparison with these data should allow us to assess the existence and direction of linguistic change, as well as to determine the extent to which our primary informants are participating in it. The final data set is a series of interviews with 14 older white English speakers local to the Guysborough and Halifax areas. Analyses of these materials will allow us to assess the similarities and differences between ANSE and the white vernaculars with which it coexists.

### *The data*

The result of our fieldwork is a primary corpus of 159 hours of natural(istic) taped conversations, ranging in length from approximately 1 to 5 hours. This is a singular documentation of African Nova Scotian speech, of which only one other taped record is known to exist (Jones, 1988), and this has apparently never been analyzed. Largely due to the skill and dedication of our fieldworkers, we can confidently say that we have accomplished our central goal of obtaining representations of vernacular ANSE. The interviews constituting our corpus contain a wealth of reminiscences, narratives of personal experience, and group interactions, testimony to their informal nature. Additional secondary corpora include 22½ hours of vernacular white English conversations, 9½ hours of data from younger North Preston speakers, and 5¾ hours from inner-city Halifax.

### *Data manipulation*

We are presently engaged in the lengthy task of rendering these materials machine-readable so as to ensure maximum accessibility. This involves (1) transcription of the tape-recorded data directly onto computer and (2) correction and automation of the computerized corpus. Depending on the length of the interview, transcripts range from approximately 1,000 to approximately 6,000 lines. The transcription and correction protocols adopted are detailed in Poplack (1989). They essentially involve making use of consistent standard orthographic conventions to ensure optimal recoverability, while still preserving all the pertinent linguistic variation. Because we focus mainly on morphology and syntax in this research, our overall transcription strategy is to represent variants resulting from the operation of phonological processes in standard orthography, regardless of the actual pronunciation of the form. Where variant pronunciation affects an entire morpheme, it is represented as produced. Thus, a deleted plural marker is represented as *hat*∅; a realized marker as *hats*. All other alternates that cannot be analyzed as resulting from the operation of phonological processes, whether standard or nonstandard, are represented according to the way they were realized. Drawing on the experience gained in constructing the Ottawa-Hull French



“megacorpus” (Poplack, 1989), our ultimate goal, after several rounds of corrections, is the establishment of a computerized concordance of the data, using the same methods we have already applied to our other spoken-language materials.

Once all the corpora are data based, we will create an amalgamated concordance comprising the ANSE corpora, the Ex-slave Recordings, and the Samaná English corpus. This will ensure maximal accessibility of the morphological and syntactic forms to be studied, accelerate data extraction, and facilitate comparison among the three data sets.

#### SITUATING AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN ENGLISH

##### *Establishing the provenance of linguistic features*

On the basis of a limited number of examples culled from local color fiction and dialect writings of various periods, Dillard (1973) concluded that by the latter part of the 19th century, African Nova Scotians spoke Pidgin English. During this period, according to him, “the Black English picture of Nova Scotia would . . . have been approximately identical to that of Jamaica or of Surinam” (513). Though Dillard asserted that dialect writers are more accurate in representing nonstandard features than they are generally credited for (1973:512), we submit that the methodological caveat voiced by Wolfram regarding the Ex-slave Narratives applies here as well. Moreover, only a systematic empirical analysis of primary data can provide the kind of detailed account of unambiguously diagnostic linguistic features not possible from reports of secondary sources, which may be biased as to the features represented.

The hindsight afforded by the last few decades of systematic research on many of the specific features cited by Dillard for ANSE, and by other proponents of the creolist hypothesis for other BE varieties, shows that determination of their status as creolized, decreolized, or English-like is by no means as simple as these presentations would suggest. Critical analytical and methodological issues must be addressed regarding the identification and provenance of a linguistic form.

The key problem is that many of the features brought forward in support of the various positions surface in identical form in all of the language varieties under discussion. For example, absence of suffix markers, consonant cluster simplification, *r*-dropping, and lack of subject-verb agreement—all cited by Dillard (1973:508–516) as pidgin or decreolized features of ANSE—are widely attested in numerous varieties of white English that historically have been subject to no creole influence. Thus, in resolving the prior status of a form, it is not its current *existence* that is decisive, nor even its rates of occurrence, but its *distribution* in the language, as determined by the hierarchy of constraints conditioning its appearance.

A second basic analytical axiom is that to determine whether a present-day feature comes from historical variety A rather than B, it is necessary to show

not only that this feature was attested with the same conditioning in A as today, but also that it did *not* function in the same way in B. Much of the argumentation in these controversies has relied solely on the first of these premises. Thus, in a widely cited finding, Brewer (1986:148) reported that verbal *-s* marked durative aspect in the Ex-slave Narratives. This has subsequently been interpreted as evidence for a creole origin for this affix, as creoles are known to be aspect-prominent. Detailed examination of verbal *-s* marking in Samaná English (Poplack & Tagliamonte, 1989) revealed that *-s* marks durative aspect here as well, but it also marks punctual and habitual aspects, that is, precisely the aspectual information encoded in the present tense in Standard English and in languages of the world more generally (Comrie, 1985). In this context, equating *-s* inflection with durative marking provides only a partial account of the facts. It would seem that the only way to disentangle the sometimes competing, sometimes corresponding influences on a linguistic feature is through systematic comparison of its behavior in all of the varieties under discussion.

##### *Reconstructing diachrony from synchronic evidence*

We noted earlier that an inevitable consequence of our ignorance of the state of African American English at an earlier point in time is the resulting inability to assess either the nature and extent of linguistic change it has undergone or the contribution of different contact situations to such change. The present project has been specifically conceived to address these issues by assembling materials on four varieties of early BE that have in common that the ancestors of current speakers were resident in the United States in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Three of these varieties evolved independently in separate locales. These are:

1. Guysborough, populated in 1783 by Black Loyalists, mainly freedmen from the North and house slaves with service-related skills.
2. North Preston, settled three generations later, largely by field hands from the South.
3. Samaná, settled at approximately the same time as North Preston (1824), of which we know only that the input settlers included representatives of the major African American population elements.

The Ex-slave Recordings may be viewed as a prototype variety, featuring data from speakers who had never left the five southern states in which they were born and who presumably acquired their language some four or five decades after the ancestors of the Samaná informants.<sup>14</sup> The key difference between the migrations is that two led African Americans to the Canadian Maritimes, where no creole influence was known to have existed,<sup>15</sup> whereas the other led migrants to the Caribbean, where a number of English-based creoles are spoken. To the extent that the contemporary varieties investigated here result from contact-induced linguistic change, we would expect Samaná

English to differ substantively from ANSE in showing more creole-like features and to differ possibly from the Ex-slave Recordings, which may or may not have represented a prior creole. On the other hand, if the synchronic form of the varieties is informed more by internal evolution from a common stock, then it would not be unreasonable to expect all four to display common features. Assessment of which of these scenarios provides the best explanation of the contemporary linguistic facts is the major long-term goal of this project. As a first task in this context we attempt to situate ANSE linguistically with respect to Samaná English and the Ex-slave Recordings.

In the remainder of this article, we present a pilot comparison of three classic linguistic variables whose behavior is already well understood in Samaná English and the Ex-slave Recordings, as well as in other varieties of AAVE: contraction and deletion of the copula, past tense expression in strong and weak verbs, and verbal *-s* marking.

We refer the reader to the original analyses (Poplack & Sankoff, 1987, on the copula; Tagliamonte, 1991; Tagliamonte & Poplack, 1988, 1991, on past tense expression; and Poplack & Tagliamonte, 1989, on present tense marking) for detailed explanation of the hypotheses, methods, and results of these studies. Suffice it to say here that the analyses were designed to test competing hypotheses about the grammatical provenance, or system membership, of the forms under investigation. The ANSE materials were simply coded so as to replicate the earlier studies to facilitate comparison. The results we report in ensuing sections emerge from variable rule analyses using the Gold-Varb application for the Macintosh (Rand & Sankoff, 1990). We also provide cross-dialectal figures for overall rates of presence and absence of the variants under investigation, but because these rates will likely vary according to features of the situation, we stress here the hierarchy of constraints, revealed by the multivariate analysis. Our hypothesis is that if a variable phenomenon is conditioned by the same factors, which in turn are ranked in the same order across varieties, this will be evidence that they share a single underlying grammar.

Despite data sets on the Ex-slave Recordings and ANSE that are only one-fourth to one-third the size of the Samaná subcorpora, resulting in sparse distributions and statistical fluctuations (which may be at least partially responsible for the fact that consistently fewer factors were selected as significant in the former varieties), we demonstrate impressive affinities among varieties in the constraint ranking of factors selected as significant.<sup>16</sup>

#### ANALYSES

##### *The copula*

We turn first to an analysis of one of the best-documented features of BE, contraction and deletion of the copula, as illustrated with data from North Preston in (1).<sup>17</sup>

TABLE 3. Overall rates of copula expression in Samaná English (SE), the Ex-slave Recordings (ESR), and African Nova Scotian English (ANSE)

Copula form	SE		ESR		ANSE	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Full	22	107	10	21	15	83
Contracted	58	283	74	155	65	354
Deleted	20	99	16	33	20	108
Totals		489		209		545

(1) Full copula:

Florence *is* my good friend. (008/744)

Copula contraction:

There's ghosts around. (027/717)

Copula deletion:

She  $\emptyset$  always eating banana sandwich. (039/574)

Table 3 depicts the overall contraction and deletion rates across varieties. We first note that contraction is the norm across the board, with deletion not exceeding 20% in any of the data sets. In this regard, these materials appear quite conservative vis-à-vis published reports on contemporary AAVE (e.g., Labov, 1969; Rickford, Ball, Blake, Jackson, & Martin, 1991).<sup>18</sup>

In Tables 4 and 5, we assess the contributions of different factors to the probability that the copula will be contracted or deleted in different linguistic environments. The data configurations correspond to what Rickford et al. (1991) recently termed "Labov contraction" and "Labov deletion."

As can be seen in Table 4, the stepwise multiple regression procedure selects the same factors as significant to the probability the copula will be contracted, and more notably, in essentially the same hierarchy, in each of Samaná, the Ex-slave Recordings, and ANSE.<sup>19</sup> The direction of effects is by now familiar from Labov's original (1969) analysis, as well as numerous subsequent replications.

The deletion runs in Table 5 are also virtually identical to each other, as well as to Labov's (1969) original analysis of copula variability among peer groups in Harlem. They also turn out to be similar to many other studies of this variable in AAVE. They are quite different from the ranking found by Holm (1984) for Jamaican Creole and Gullah, with regard to the effect of following grammatical category, particularly as concerns the order of following predicate adjective versus locative complements. Holm suggested that the first, but not the second, should show high rates of "deletion," given that in creoles, as in the African languages from which they purportedly derive, predicate adjective is treated as a subclass of verb that requires no copula.

TABLE 4. Contribution of factors selected as significant to the probability of copula contraction in *Samaná* English (SE), the *Ex-slave Recordings* (ESR), and *African Nova Scotian English* (ANSE)

	SE	ESR	ANSE
Total <i>N</i>	489 <sup>a</sup>	209	545
Corrected mean	.89 <sup>b</sup>	.95	.94
Following grammatical category			
<i>Gonna</i>	.90		1.00 [KO]
<i>V-ing</i>	.48		.84
Locative	.40		.43
Adjective	.35		.39
<i>Wh</i> -clause/NP	.24		.37
Subject			
<i>she/he</i>	.93	1.00 [KO]	.68
<i>it/what/that</i>	.85	.57	.67
<i>here/there/where</i>	.74	1.00 [KO]	.55
<i>I</i>	.45	.75	.46
<i>we/you/they</i>	.32	.46	.80
<i>those/them/these/this</i>	.13	—	.04
NP	.08	.03	.07
Preceding phonological segment			
Vowel	.62		.54
Consonant	.38		.47
<i>Factors not selected:</i>			
Speaker	X	X	X
Following phonological segment	X	X	X
Preceding phonological segment		X	
Following grammatical category		X	

<sup>a</sup>Totals for the variable rule runs may not correspond exactly with those for the calculations of overall rates because tokens were excluded from the variable rule runs due to knockouts ([KO]) – factors in whose presence there is no variation.

<sup>b</sup>The corrected means in the copula runs of the *Samaná* data, analyzed by VARBRUL 2S, are not directly comparable with the others because different variable rule programs weight the data differently. The factor weights, however, are directly comparable.

In our original study of *Samaná* English (Poplack & Sankoff, 1987), we made use of the results displayed in Table 5, as well as those in Holm (1984) to suggest that this variety was more English-like than creole-like, as it followed the original order posited by Labov. This order had been found by Labov to parallel the order for white English contraction, leading him to suggest that deletion was an extension of contraction. Since then, Rickford and Blake (1990) and Rickford et al. (1991) have challenged these interpretations on a number of fronts. First, they discredited Holm's (1984) study, concluding that his Caribbean data provided inadequate basis for comparison, thereby casting doubt on Poplack and Sankoff's suggestion that copula deletion in *Samaná* (and AAVE) was different from the creole/Caribbean pattern established by Holm.<sup>20</sup> Second, in a replicate analysis of copula contraction and

TABLE 5. Contribution of factors selected as significant to the probability of copula deletion in *Samaná* English (SE), the *Ex-slave Recordings* (ESR), and *African Nova Scotian English* (ANSE)

	SE	ESR	ANSE
Total <i>N</i>	374	188	462
Corrected mean	.54	.09	.14
Following grammatical category			
<i>Wh</i> -clause	.95	.85	.79
<i>Gonna</i>	.59	.78	.73
<i>V-ing</i>	.46	.72	.69
NP	.41	.39	.31
Locative	.23	.69	.49
Adjective	.19	.27	.46
Subject			
<i>we/you/they</i>	.90	.98	.91
NP	.81	.87	.89
<i>here/there/where</i>	.53	∅ [KO]	.37
<i>those/them/these/this</i>	.43	—	—
<i>she/he</i>	.28	∅ [KO]	.52
<i>it/what/that</i>	.06	.15	.29
<i>I</i>	.06	∅ [KO]	.16
Preceding phonological segment			
Consonant			.64
Vowel			.33
Following phonological segment			
Consonant	.64		
Vowel	.36		
<i>Factors not selected:</i>			
Speaker <sup>a</sup>		X	X
Following phonological segment			X
Preceding phonological segment		X	
Following grammatical category		X	

<sup>a</sup>The factor of speaker was selected as significant to the probability of deletion in *Samaná* English but as these figures are not relevant to the present argument, we do not provide them here.

deletion in mesolectal Barbadian creole, Rickford and Blake (1990) presented patterns largely comparable to those displayed in Table 5, most notably as concerns following grammatical category and in particular the place of predicate adjective, which ranks roughly the same as in *Samaná*. Because Barbadian creole does not show the "high adjective" or "creole" order, but rather the order evidenced in *Samaná* and numerous varieties of AAVE, it would follow that there is no specifically creole order, only an order shared by all AAVE varieties. This would, according to Rickford and Blake (1990:8), reinstate the creole-origins hypothesis for AAVE. This still leaves significant similarities between Standard English contraction and AAVE deletion unexplained. Rickford and his associates suggested that they are a mere artifact

of the way the data were divided. The contraction hierarchy “derives primarily from the high proportion of copula deletions or absences in the data; once these are removed, the hierarchy collapses” (ibid.:5). Moreover, they reported, two attempts at replicating Labov’s original contraction analysis (based on only eight white speakers) on other (small) groups of speakers failed to yield a pattern consistent with Labov’s or with each other, suggesting that there is essentially *no* Standard English contraction order with which AAVE should agree.

Though there is much valuable food for thought in these studies, we are not yet prepared to discard our original interpretation. Rickford et al. suggested that “there is a valid explanation for at least part of the deletion/insertion hierarchy if a prior creole ancestry for AAVE is assumed (creole *go/gon* is a future marker which NEVER takes a preceding copula, creole Noun Phrases always require an *a* or *d* copula, and so on . . .)” (1991:126).

Holm (1984:297) also contended that the copula deletion hierarchy reported by Labov is explicable in terms of prior creole origin.

As detailed earlier, our assumption in this research, perhaps most elegantly enunciated by Bickerton (1975), is that a prior creole origin should be detectable synchronically from vestiges it leaves in the decreolizing (or even decreolized) variety. Assuming the claims made in the literature for the behavior of following grammatical category with regard to copula presence in creoles (Holm, 1984; Rickford & Blake, 1990; Rickford et al. 1991) are true, those vestiges should take the form in (2a), or even in (2b) (abstracted from the hierarchy proposed by Holm), although it is unclear just how the “1:1 correspondence of copula form to syntactic environment,” even when “blurred” by decreolization (1984:295), translates into the particular relations of more or less that Holm posited.

(2) Copula behavior according to following grammatical category:

a. Categorical (or high frequency of)

copula <i>absence</i>	copula <i>presence</i>
<i>gonn</i>	locative
<i>V-ing</i>	NP
adjective	

b. *gonn* > *V-ing* > adjective > locative > NP

In this context, we reexamine the data in Table 5. *Gonn* and *V-ing* do in fact show the high rates of copula absence predicted by Holm, providing possible evidence of creole origins. On the other hand, these are precisely the environments that most favor contraction in (white) English (Labov, 1969; Meechan, in preparation), making this another case where the linguistic provenance of competing variants is ambiguous (see earlier discussion).<sup>21</sup> The remaining predictions do not hold. The deletion rates for copulas preceding adjectives are *not* several times greater than that of copulas preceding loca-

tives; they are the same. Moreover, following NP shows a different ranking in each of the data sets we examined, suggesting that it does not exercise a systematic effect across these varieties at all.

Recall that Labov’s original New York City data also showed considerable variability in the position of predicate NP as well as adjective and locative. The failure of predicate adjective to (1) show high rates of deletion or (2) pattern higher than predicate locative is also plainly evident in Rickford and his associates’ compilation of 10 studies of AAVE examining these factors, as well as in their own work on mesolectal Barbadian Creole and AAVE in East Palo Alto. If anything, locative and adjective agree in all of these studies in showing comparable *intermediate* effects, though inconsistently ordered with regard to each other, when according to the predictions in (2), they should be showing widely consistent *divergent* effects, one highly favoring and one disfavoring.<sup>22</sup> Notwithstanding their own empirical results, Rickford and Blake (1990) (following both Bickerton, 1971, and Holm, 1984) asserted that “adjectives . . . are really a subcategory of verb in creole grammars, and require no copula” (7). Does the fact that the copula is actually deleted *less* in preadjectival position than in any other context in mesolectal Barbadian Creole, as well as in most of the other Black English varieties examined, mean that none of them is a remnant of a prior creole?

We reserve judgment on this issue until more accountable studies of copula behavior in English-based creoles along the lines of Rickford and Blake (1990) are available, as well as more detailed studies of contraction in white English on a reasonably large speaker sample (see Meechan, in preparation). It may even be the case, in retrospect, that following grammatical environment is not a truly diagnostic indicator of system membership. In this context, we note that another important aspect of copula deletion and contraction resides in the role of preceding phonological environment. Labov’s original study and subsequent replications, including those presented here, concur in showing that a preceding vocalic segment promotes contraction but inhibits deletion.<sup>23</sup> He showed that this factor reversal should be interpreted as suggesting that the copula is cliticized onto the preceding noun phrase and subsequently deleted, which is in turn consistent with the claim that the copula is an element of underlying structure. The results reported here confirm that this was already the case in early BE. We conclude this section by stressing the parallelism shown by Tables 4 and 5 among these three varieties, a first indication that they share the same underlying grammar.

#### *Variable past time expression*

The past temporal reference system is an area of the grammar in which Standard English and English-based creoles are generally considered to differ substantially. The particular phenomenon that has attracted the attention of scholars of AAVE and English-based creoles is variability in morphological realization of past temporal reference, manifested by alternation between sur-

face morphological marks and zeroes, as illustrated with data from North Preston in both weak (example 3) and strong (example 4) verbs.

- (3) a. Bunch of us *walked* up the stairs and sat down and Caroline *looked* up. (039/735-6)  
 b. When I *look*  $\emptyset$  in like that, and I *look*  $\emptyset$  in that door, and I *look*  $\emptyset$  back in the corner, I seen them great big eye. (030/884-6)
- (4) a. I know I *stood* in the corner, but I can't remember gettin' any beatin'. (027/333-4)  
 b. I never *run* from nothing else no more. (039/1160-1161)

As detailed in Tagliamonte and Poplack (1991), the study of past tense marking represents yet another instance in which the mere presence of overt and covert (or zero) verbal marks in a given variety cannot, in and of itself, be used as evidence for system membership, because the same surface forms appear in English and creoles.

In earlier studies of Samaná English and the Ex-slave Recordings, we sought to establish whether these varieties featured a prototypical creole system in showing aspect rather than tense prominence, observing a stative/non-stative distinction and using an anterior marker rather than a past tense morpheme. In Tagliamonte (1991) and Tagliamonte and Poplack (1991), we systematically reconfigured the same data sets to represent first a creole and then English. There was little in the results to suggest that the factors conditioning the appearance of surface morphology behave in ways predicted by the creole prototype. Accordingly, for the purpose of this illustration, we assumed that the processes operating in our data sets are suffix deletion from weak verbs, and verb-base, or nonmarking, in strong verbs.<sup>24</sup> In each analysis, however, we incorporate factors presumably relevant to past temporal marking in a creole-like system (e.g., stativity and anteriority distinctions), as well as others relevant to an English-like system (e.g., preceding and following phonological environments). This allows us to make use of the multivariate analysis incorporated in the variable rule program to assess which factors contribute a statistically significant effect to the observed variability when all are considered simultaneously.

The overall rates of zero marking in past temporal reference verbs in the three varieties, depicted in Table 6, reveal them once again to be quite conservative with regard to this variable. With the exception of weak verbs in Samaná English, verbs are marked with the preterite morphology appropriate to their class at least two-thirds of the time (more on strong verbs). Similarities among rates across varieties are remarkable.

*Suffix deletion.* Table 7 shows that the greatest and most robust effects conditioning suffix deletion in all these varieties refer to the nature of the preceding and following phonological environments, with the by now familiar finding that consonants or clusters favor deletion, and vowels disfavor. Another significant effect in Samaná English and ANSE is contributed by the

TABLE 6. Overall rates of zero marking in past temporal reference verbs in Samaná English (SE), the Ex-slave Recordings (ESR), and African Nova Scotian English (ANSE)

	SE		ESR		ANSE	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
Weak verbs (suffix deletion)	42	1,234	32	283	35	362
Strong verbs (verb-base)	23	2,445	23	499	23	517
Totals		3,679		782		879

TABLE 7. Contribution of factors selected as significant to the probability of suffix deletion in Samaná English (SE), the Ex-slave Recordings (ESR), and African Nova Scotian English (ANSE)

	SE	ESR	ANSE
Total N	1,234	283	362
Corrected mean	.40	.29	.32
Preceding phonological environment			
Consonant cluster	.81	.73	.78
Single consonant	.62	.57	.55
Vowel	.22	.31	.34
Following phonological environment			
Pause	.72	.82	.90
Consonant	.59	.65	.65
Vowel	.38	.32	.31
Mark on preceding reference verb			
Unmarked	.71		.76
Marked (present temp. reference)	.45		.50
Marked (past temp. reference)	.49		.43
Presence of temporal conjunction			
[+conj]	.63		
[-conj]	.48		
Presence of temporal adverb			
[+adv]			.79 <sup>a</sup>
[-adv]			.48
<i>Factors not selected:</i>			
Presence of temporal adverb	X	X	
Presence of temporal conjunction		X	X
Stativity/Anteriority	X	X	X
Discourse context	X	X	X

<sup>a</sup>Although the difference in factor weights is apparently large, this figure is based on a small number of [+adv] tokens and is, in fact, barely significant, having been the last factor to be chosen.

TABLE 8. *Contribution of factors selected as significant to the probability of verb-base morphology on strong verbs in Samaná English (SE), the Ex-slave Recordings (ESR), and African Nova Scotian English (ANSE)*

	SE	ESR	ANSE
Total <i>N</i>	2,445	499	477
Corrected mean	.21	.20	.09
Verb class			
$V_{\text{base}} = V_{\text{part}}$ ( <i>come/came/come</i> )	.73	.97	.97
$V_{\text{pret}} = V_{\text{part}}$ ( <i>bring/brought/brought</i> )	.46	.38	.52
$V_{\text{base}} \neq V_{\text{pret}} \neq V_{\text{part}}$ ( <i>take/took/taken</i> )	.40	.39	.29
Mark on preceding reference verb			
Unmarked	.69	.73	.88
Marked (past temp. reference)	.46	.48	.39
Marked (present temp. reference)	.35	.28	.44
Discourse context			
Narrative	.63		.67
Nonnarrative	.42		.41
Presence of temporal conjunction			
[-conj]	.51		
[+conj]	.43		
<i>Factors not selected:</i>			
Presence of temporal adverb	X	X	X
Presence of temporal conjunction		X	X
Stativity/Anteriority	X	X	X
Discourse context		X	X

factor of preceding mark. Here, we observe a processing or concord effect, whereby lack of marking on a preceding reference verb leads to a greater probability of nonmarking on the current verb, a type of formal parallelism that has been found by Scherre and Naro (1991) to be characteristic of many (unrelated) linguistic phenomena.

The existence of regular phonological conditioning, as shown in Table 7, is generally interpreted as evidence in favor of an underlying *-t, d*, which is subsequently deleted by rule. On the other hand, the fact that this type of constraint has been replicated in so many languages, including, most recently, mesolectal Jamaican Creole (Patrick, 1991), has led some scholars to suggest that they result from universal phonetic influences and thus can tell us little about past tense marking (Bickerton, 1975).

*Verb-base morphology on strong verbs.* In the next analysis, illustrated in Table 8, we examine the propensity of strong verbs, which are not subject to phonological conditioning, to receive an overt mark or to retain their base form.

Table 8 shows that the most significant effects conditioning the occurrence of the base form of strong verbs are (1) verb class, with cases where the verb base is equivalent to the past participle (*come/came/come* or *run/ran/run*) favoring most zero marking (exactly as found by Christian, Wolfram, & Dube, 1988, for Appalachian and Ozark English), (2) the concord effect reported earlier for weak verbs, and (3) in Samaná and ANSE, discourse context, where base forms are favored in complicating action clauses, sites where they may also be construed as non-3rd pers. sg. historical presents. Once again, despite dramatically reduced data sets in the case of the Ex-slave Recordings and ANSE, we observe extensive parallels in constraint ranking across varieties.

It is noteworthy that whether the process involved is construed to be suffix deletion from weak verbs or generalization of the base form in strong verbs, the appearance of the unmarked or zero form cannot be said to depend on underlying stativity and/or anteriority distinctions. Nor does it depend on other factors purportedly relevant to a creole temporal organization system (such as presence of a temporal adverb; see Bickerton, 1975; Mufwene, 1984) because, other than in the analysis of suffix deletion in ANSE, these factors were not even selected as significant to the probability of zero marking in any of the runs.

#### *Verbal -s marking*

A third area of comparison concerns verbal *-s* marking, encompassing variable absence of *-s* in 3rd pers. sg. contexts and variable presence of *-s* in non-3rd pers. sg. contexts, as illustrated in (5) and (6).

- (5) She *know* how my husband used to treat me. (007/589)  
That crow *sits* on that wire and *hollers* and everything. (039/1086)
- (6) After I *eat* that I *go* to sleep. (039/572)  
When they *speaks* to me, *say* "hello," I just *lets* it go, *go* on about my business. (016/25-6)

The behavior of *-s* has long been subject to controversy, having been variously analyzed as a hypercorrect insertion (e.g., Fasold, 1972; Labov, Cohen, Robins, & Lewis, 1968), an aspectual marker (Brewer, 1986; Pitts, 1986), a present tense marker (Schneider, 1983b), and a narrative present marker (Myhill & Harris, 1986). In an earlier study of *-s* marking in Samaná English and the Ex-slave Recordings (Poplack & Tagliamonte, 1989), we found that the occurrence of *-s* in both 3rd pers. sg. and other grammatical persons was subject to regular, parallel phonological and other environmental conditioning, leading us to suggest that verbal *-s* marking was a unitary process, involving both concord and nonconcord contexts. We also found that the few variable constraints on verbal *-s* usage reported throughout the history of English (type of noun phrase, definiteness of subject) remained operative in early BE. Together, these results suggested (1) verbal *-s* marking is not a random phe-

TABLE 9. Overall rates of verbal *-s* marking by grammatical person in Samaná English (SE), the Ex-slave Recordings (ESR), and African Nova Scotian English (ANSE)

	SE		ESR		ANSE	
	% [-s]	<i>n</i>	% [-s]	<i>n</i>	% [-s]	<i>n</i>
Singular						
1st	20	609	3	173	6	223
2nd	7	414	0	59	10	70
3rd	56	604	71	42	44	137
Plural						
1st	22	176	29	7	6	18
2nd	0	7	0	1	0	2
3rd	31	675	5	92	16	95
Total non-3rd pers. sg.	21	1,881	4	332	9	408
Totals		2,485		374		545

nomenon, but rather that (2) present tense marking via verbal *-s* (whether 3rd pers. or not) formed an integral part of the early Black English grammar, and (3) the contemporary pattern of variability could be interpreted as a synchronic reflex of the constraint ranking on *-s* usage in varieties of English that provided the linguistic model for the slaves.

In comparing the distribution of verbal *-s* across grammatical persons (Table 9), we observe that unlike contemporary AAVE, where *-s* has generally been reported to be absent from all persons (Fasold, 1972:133; Wolfram, 1969:138), it tends to be present much of the time in each of these varieties in 3rd pers. sg. and, to a lesser extent, in 3rd pers. pl. However, verbal *-s* in the ESR and ANSE is extremely sparse in non-3rd pers. sg. contexts in general, not exceeding 13 and 36 tokens, respectively.

Thus, we do not make cross-dialectal comparison involving the factors selected as significant in the following analyses. The paucity of data in the latter two data sets is likely responsible for the fact that most factors are rejected in the analyses involving them. Instead, we focus on the direction of factor effects, using as a basis the factors selected as significant in the more copious Samaná English corpus. In the following tables, we present the results of two variable rule analyses examining the factors contributing to the probability that *-s* will be *deleted* in 3rd pers. sg. contexts and *inserted* in non-3rd pers. sg. contexts.<sup>25</sup>

Table 10 shows that two factors contribute to the probability that *-s* will be absent from 3rd pers. sg. verbs in Samaná English: verbal aspect and underlying phonetic form. In all three data sets, we observe a clear distinction between punctual and habitual contexts, with most deletion occurring in the former, whereas durative/continuous contexts occupy an intermediate position. This effect could be interpreted as showing that *-s* tends to mark ha-

TABLE 10. Contribution of factors selected as significant to the deletion of 3rd pers. sg. *-s* in Samaná English (SE), the Ex-slave Recordings (ESR), and African Nova Scotian English (ANSE)

	SE	ESR	ANSE
Total <i>N</i>	604	42	137
Corrected mean	.43	no VRA <sup>a</sup>	.57
Verbal aspect			
Punctual/Instantaneous	.57	38%	.69
Durative/Continuous	.56	30%	.28
Habitual/Iterative	.33	14%	.37
Underlying phonetic form			
[s]	.56	33%	[ .41 .55 ∅ [KO] ]
[z]	.51	23%	
[əz]	.08	—	
Factors not selected:			
Definiteness of subject			
Nondefinite	.54	29%	.45
Definite	.49	29%	.51
Type of subject			
Pronoun	.52	27%	.51
Noun phrase	.51	27%	.49
Noun phrase + relative	.32	31%	
Preceding phonological segment			
Consonant	.51	33%	.50
Vowel	.43	11%	.49
Following phonological segment			
Pause	.57	—	.23
Consonant	.53	29%	.56
Vowel	.45	30%	.48

<sup>a</sup>We were unable to carry out a variable rule analysis of 3rd pers. sg. *-s* in the ESR due to the fact that there were only 42 3rd pers. sg. contexts in the corpus.

bitual aspect (and we did, in fact, argue for such an association in Samaná English [Poplack & Tagliamonte, 1989], though not in the other corpora; see Table 11). But we believe that the cross-dialectal result is better explained by the fact that most punctual contexts in these data occur in complicating action clauses, where simple pasts, which may undergo an independent process of phonological deletion (see the section on suffix deletion), coexist with historical presents and are largely indistinguishable from them. An additional effect is contributed by the underlying phonetic form of verbal *-s*. Contrary to previous reports on AAVE that found that phonetic shape had no effect on retention of *-s* (Fasold, 1972), in all three varieties when the phonetic form is complex (i.e., [əz]), it is deleted less often.

As far as *-s* inflection in other than 3rd pers. sg. is concerned, in an earlier study we found that the constraint ranking in Samaná English and the Ex-slave Recordings was basically identical in concord and nonconcord con-

TABLE 11. *Contribution of factors selected as significant to the presence of verbal -s in non-3rd pers. sg. contexts in Samaná English (SE), the Ex-slave Recordings (ESR), and African Nova Scotian English (ANSE)*

	SE	ESR	ANSE
Total <i>N</i>	1,881	332	408
Corrected mean	.22	.03	.06
Verbal aspect			
Habitual/Iterative	.68	[.30]	.46
Durative/Continuous	.44	[.50]	.38
Punctual/Instantaneous	.39	[.71]	.67
Definiteness of subject			
Definite	.56	.62	[.45]
Nondefinite	.39	.20	[.60]
Type of subject			
Noun phrase + relative	.91	—	sparse data
Noun phrase	.67	.94	.78
Pronoun	.48	.45	.47
Underlying phonetic form			
[əz]	.67	[∅ [KO]]	[∅ [KO]]
[s]	.53	[.61]	[.62]
[z]	.46	[.44]	[.40]
Preceding phonological segment			
Vowel	.62	[.61]	[.56]
Consonant	.48	[.47]	[.48]
Following phonological segment			
Pause	.60	[∅ [KO]]	.68
Vowel	.55	[.47]	.70
Consonant	.47	[.51]	.36
<i>Factors not selected:</i>			
Verbal aspect		X	
Definiteness			X
Underlying phonetic form		X	X
Preceding phonological segment		X	X
Following phonological segment		X	

texts. Comparison of Tables 10 and 11 shows that this is generally also the case for ANSE except where sparse data are responsible.<sup>26</sup> The one exception is the factor group of aspect, which shows an apparent effect in ANSE (and the Ex-slave Recordings), suggesting that *-s* will tend to be deleted from 3rd pers. sg. verbs with punctual aspect, but inserted on *non*-3rd pers. sg. verbs with punctual aspect. We have no ready explanation for this effect, which we believe to be spurious. Note that although the three varieties agree in showing punctual aspect to inhibit deletion of 3rd pers. sg. *-s* (for reasons we believe to be coincidental to the semantics of the verb phrase, as detailed earlier), the ranking of verbal aspect differs for each of Samaná English, the Ex-slave Recordings, and ANSE. Moreover, when we separate the speakers

in our Nova Scotia sample, we find the ranking to diverge wildly, with no more than two of the nine informants showing interspeaker agreement, unlike the robust result for 3rd pers. sg. *-s*. This may well be due to the fact that we have far less data in these corpora, or that there is far less *-s* overall, and very little in *non*-3rd pers. sg. contexts. Until these results can be corroborated by analyses of a larger corpus, we reserve interpretation of the aspectual effect.

#### DISCUSSION

In a number of independent analyses of three distinct variables in Black English verb phrase morphology, we have found extensive parallelism across varieties not only in variable *rate* of occurrence of the different morphological variants examined, but also, and more tellingly, in the constraint hierarchies conditioning their occurrence.

It would be remarkable enough to find such resemblances with regard to one variable, given that these varieties have evolved independently in widely separated parts of the world for at least a century and a half, if not more. The fact that they are replicated for each of the variables investigated, however, would invalidate chance as an explanation for the observed correspondences. It may be objected that at least one of the shared patterns we presented (e.g., the phonological conditioning of suffix deletion) is universal, thus rendering it less powerful as a diagnostic for determining similarities or differences.<sup>27</sup> However, others (e.g., the constraints on verbal *-s* marking) are specific enough to rule out this possibility. We thus conclude that Samaná English, the Ex-slave Recordings, and ANSE are genetically related.

The method by which we establish this relationship—cross-dialectal comparison of linguistic variability and the factors constraining it—is not new in creole or in AAVE studies. In addition to our own previous comparative work on Samaná English and the Ex-slave Recordings, it has been implicitly or explicitly adopted by a number of creolists (e.g., Holm, 1984; Rickford & Blake, 1990; Singler, 1991) for the identical purpose of revealing underlying similarities. The only difference concerns the parent language that is reconstructed from observed synchronic variability and the nature and extent of the evidence deemed necessary to achieve such reconstruction.<sup>28</sup>

The hypothesis informing this project is that underlying grammatical structure can be discerned from examination of the distribution and conditioning of synchronic variability. We consider at least three possibilities: that the observed variability can be explained by processes derived from (1) English grammar (whether standard or dialectal, early or modern), (2) creole grammar (whether basilectal or mesolectal), or (3) both. Invocation of one explanation or another rests not on casual correspondences between varieties, but on robust results emerging from corpus-based research using accountable methodology. The fact that the three varieties investigated here would



have at the time of data collection been highly decreolized, if they in fact derived from a prior creole, should not diminish the possibility of inferring the underlying system from the surface distribution of variant forms. According to Mufwene (1984:199), despite the fact that a creole continuum will typically feature a number of levels, each will share the same underlying system. This is also the sense of Bickerton's (1975) caveat that the patterns attested in contemporary AAVE may be masking the primordial grammatical factors conditioning (past tense) acquisition in decreolization. In applying this method, we arrive at the inescapable conclusion that the three varieties examined here are all vestiges of a system that likely gave rise to AAVE. We have referred to it for convenience as early Black English.

Based on the synchronic evidence provided by our analyses, we may conclude that the precursor variety showed the following characteristics:

1. It featured an underlying copula that was variably present in all grammatical environments and whose deletion is systematically related to (white) English contraction, as found by Labov (1969) in Harlem.
2. It featured a robust system of past tense marking variably affected by regular suffixation of *-ed* on weak verbs and appropriate "irregular" morphology on strong verbs, whereas the stative/nonstative distinction characteristic of creoles was irrelevant.
3. Present tense marking via verbal *-s* was an integral part of the tense system, particularly in 3rd pers. sg. position, unlike the present situation in AAVE, where *-s* is absent much of the time.

In sum, the precursor variety was, at least as far as the variables investigated here are concerned, manifestly more conservative than what is generally reported for contemporary AAVE. Not only is it clear that the variables considered already formed an integral part of the early BE grammar, but there is ample evidence that the constraints on this variability were consistent with what has been attested for standard, dialectal, and/or historical varieties of (white) English.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, variability is not constrained by factors characteristic of creoles, where these are known. The compelling correspondences of ANSE to the other two varieties, despite having evolved in isolation from them since the late 18th and early 19th centuries, inevitably raise the question of the type of sociolinguistic scenario that may have led to the current state of affairs.

The demographics of the African Nova Scotian situation, in which physical segregation obtained until fairly recently, and psychological segregation is ongoing, in conjunction with what we know of the preconditions for contact-induced linguistic convergence (including physical contact, frequency of interaction, prestige, and other factors; see, e.g., Pousada & Poplack, 1982; Thomason & Kaufman, 1988), would lead us to expect ANSE to be relatively impermeable to influence from surrounding white vernaculars. But minority status and intense cultural pressure from the dominant group would militate in favor of rapid assimilation to its linguistic varieties. The latter factors

are surely responsible, at least in part, for the fact that many African Nova Scotians control standard and vernacular varieties of English (not considered here) that are literally indistinguishable from those of their white Nova Scotian neighbors. At the same time, they have clearly maintained a very distinct vernacular, portions of which have been investigated in this article.

What environmental factors have contributed to the maintenance of that vernacular? We can rule out any more than casual contact with creoles after immigration. The only known creole speakers—Jamaican Maroons—were in Nova Scotia no longer than 4 years (see, e.g., Fergusson, 1948, and the earlier discussion on North Preston), a time span far too brief to have resulted in structural modification (i.e., creolization) of ANSE (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988:41), even if contact between the groups had been intense enough to permit this. However, according to the historical record, this was not the case (Winks, 1971).

Instead, we find the following paradoxical situation. On the one hand, institutionalized segregation persisted until very late, one result of which was the allocation of black preachers and teachers to positions of local prestige (where they presumably constituted linguistic models for members). In addition, remote settlement locales, poor socioeconomic conditions, lack of opportunity, and the dissociation from blacks of white and other mainstream populations all conspired to create circumstances in which African Nova Scotians were maximally separate, thereby providing optimal conditions for retention of the vernacular. However, the fact that many speakers also control the standard pole of the English continuum does not jibe with the situation of isolation just described. One explanation may be that segregation is largely unidirectional. Given the nature of the African Nova Scotian settlements, almost all residents must seek employment outside of the community, whereas there is little reason for strangers to enter. This has the double effect of preserving the appropriate conditions for use of the vernacular within the community, while at the same time rendering use of the standard infelicitous in this same context. These conditions of diglossic separation are surely responsible, just as they have been shown to be in bilingual contexts, not only for the maintenance of the vernacular in the face of massive cultural pressure against it, but for its continued co-existence with the standard. In any event, contact with white English vernaculars, even in excess of what can be inferred from the materials we have consulted, would seem irrelevant to the behavior of the phenomena examined here. This is because the white vernaculars do *not* feature the same type of variability in copula or verbal *-s* expression in terms of inventory of forms,<sup>30</sup> and whatever phonologically determined variability exists in past tense expression may well be universal. Moreover, we have at least one piece of evidence that the diaspora varieties are not participating in ongoing linguistic change characteristic of AAVE.

Table 12 shows that the innovative specialization of verbal *-s* as a marker of narrative present, reported by Myhill and Harris (1986) for Philadelphia AAVE, is not shared by either Samaná English or ANSE.<sup>31</sup> The high rates

TABLE 12. *Percentage of verbal -s in each grammatical person in narrative and nonnarrative clauses in AAVE, Samaná English (SE), and African Nova Scotian English (ANSE)*

	Singular				Plural				Totals			
	<i>I</i>		<i>he/she</i>		<i>we</i>		<i>they</i>					
	% [-s]	<i>n</i>	% [-s]	<i>n</i>	% [-s]	<i>n</i>	% [-s]	<i>n</i>	% [-s]	<i>n</i>		
AAVE (Myhill & Harris, 1986)												
Narrative	32	50	59	54	55	31	61	18	—	0	50	153
Nonnarrative	1	458	7	241	9	96	2	45	—	0	4	840
SE (Poplack & Tagliamonte, 1989)												
Narrative	0.5	188	0.3	215	3	35	6	18	0	41	2	497
Nonnarrative	16	669	50	418	57	203	21	180	30	721	27	2,633
ANSE												
Narrative	10	31	3	30	0	23	0	3	0	8	4	96
Nonnarrative	5	203	64	44	53	60	7	14	18	98	20	491

of 3rd pers. sg. -s presence in complicating action clauses of AAVE narratives in Philadelphia, particularly as compared to their virtual absence in nonnarrative contexts in the same grammatical person, are not replicated in our data. If anything, we observe a reversal. Narrative complicating action clauses quite consistently show *less* 3rd pers. sg. -s marking than other contexts. We have already explained (Poplack & Tagliamonte, 1989:71) this phenomenon as resulting from a combination of the concentration of (1) past temporal reference verbs with deleted affixes and (2) *verba dicendi* (which are particularly resistant to inflection) in this context. This result, given strong support by the consistent, remarkable resemblances among the diaspora varieties and the Ex-slave Recordings, leads us to conclude that contemporary ANSE is a remnant of the system the migrants brought with them. As such, ANSE can provide valuable evidence about the state of BE at the beginning of the 19th century.

#### NOTES

1. A number of factors led us to exclude Ontario from this phase of our study. The movement to Ontario represented the final major migration wave, largely as a response to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, under whose provisions slaves who had fled to free states within the American union could be reclaimed by their former masters. The vast majority of these Fugitive Slave immigrants returned to the United States after emancipation, leaving only scattered and sparsely populated settlements behind. The language of present residents of these areas has apparently largely assimilated to surrounding white vernaculars (e.g., Prieto & McTair, 1987), thus affording less opportunity to engage in cross-dialectal comparison.

2. In Nova Scotia, the principle of segregation in the school acts operated until 1954 (Pate, 1976:79), and segregated school districts were still in existence in 1964 (Winks, 1969).

3. With few exceptions (see later discussion), most individuals with skills valued by the mainstream populace are reported to have been recruited for the colonization of Sierra Leone in 1792 (Winks, 1971).

4. According to census reports (Statistics Canada, 1987), African Nova Scotians numbered only 7,915 in 1986.

5. "Old-line" refers to the original migrants from the United States and their descendants, as opposed to more recent immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa, who are not the focus of this study.

6. Although John Clarkson, agent of the Sierra Leone company, recruited settlers from many of the remote Black Loyalist settlements (e.g., Birchtown, Shelburne, Annapolis, etc.), no mention is made of the Guysborough communities (Grant, 1973:258; Winks, 1971:71).

7. During the American War of Independence, the British offered emancipation to all slaves who volunteered to serve with their forces. In so doing, they hoped to gain thousands of laborers and to disrupt the southern economy (Winks, 1971:29).

8. According to Winks (1971:92), "not one Maroon was to be permitted to remain in Nova Scotia. Thus warned, Wentworth [Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia] set out to account for every Maroon. Two families had gone to Windsor, on the far side of the province . . . and they too were ordered back."

9. In 1814, the British once again issued proclamations promising choice of military service or free transportation to one of their colonies in North America or the West Indies to those individuals who found their way to a British ship or military post (Winks, 1971:114).

10. Wood (1974:104–105) and Piersen (1988) pointed out that the field slave populations did in fact possess a multitude of skills, but these were either non-essential in their new locale, or not utilized for independent sociocultural reasons.

11. In fact, preliminary examination reveals that Guysborough speech contains far fewer features presently associated with contemporary AAVE than that of North Preston. This is consistent with a scenario whereby the original Guysborough settlers were exposed to more standardizing influences, as would be the case for freedmen residing in the north, house slaves, and so on, whom we know to have constituted the majority of its input settlers. Whether the difference in original settlement patterns can in fact account for the apparent linguistic differences is a research question that will be examined systematically in future analyses.

12. The climate of racial tension in Halifax during the fieldwork phase was another source of difficulty.

13. In any event, there are no sizable *geographic* concentrations of African Nova Scotians characterizable by extralinguistic factors not represented here. All of these factors, where availability of information permits, will be incorporated as independent variables in forthcoming multivariate analyses of linguistic variability. We do point out, however, that given the fact that the data were collected by group members among peers, detailed demographic and sociolinguistic information is not available for all speakers. After all of the interviews have been processed, we will make use of existing demographic data on each speaker to create an index measuring the key extralinguistic axes of variation in the communities.

14. The five states are: Virginia, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, and Alabama.

15. As mentioned earlier, virtually all of the 500 to 600 Jamaican Maroons who arrived in Halifax in 1796 had sailed for Sierra Leone by August 1800 (Fergusson, 1948:4).

16. The reduced number of tokens in the Ex-slave Recordings represent an exhaustive compilation of all variants of each variable in that data set. The ANSE data presented here refer to North Preston English only, as these were the only materials available for analysis at the time of writing. Fieldwork in Nova Scotia was completed only 2 months prior to the inception of the analyses, at which time the data from Guysborough had not yet been processed. Future research will include the full data set.

17. Codes in parentheses identify the speaker and line number in the ANSE corpus. The ANSE data in these pilot studies come from nine informants, six women and three men, ranging in age from 65 to 87 years, and having completed anywhere from 2 to 6 years of formal education. On the basis of informal assessment, we consider seven of these interviews to represent vernacular speech styles, whereas the others are somewhat more formal in nature. The data from the other corpora are exhaustive, with the exception of the copula analysis in Samaná English, which was based on 489 tokens from eight speakers. As noted in Poplack and Sankoff (1987:311, n. 6), however, these analyses passed the rigorous test of replication on an additional data set of 500 tokens from four informants not in the original sample. The results were virtually identical.

18. Rickford and Blake (1990:9, n. 6) suggested that the “relatively low” frequency of copula deletion in Samaná (which they mistakenly reported as 26%—in fact, it is even lower; see our Table 3) may be due to the fact that the Samaná data are not representative of the vernacular. In this context, it is interesting to note that the ANSE materials, collected in their entirety by in-group interlocutors in the course of informal interactions, show an identical overall deletion rate.
19. The hierarchy of constraints is identical across varieties even where a factor group is not selected as statistically significant in one run or another, testimony to the remarkable similarities among them.
20. According to Rickford and Blake, Holm made inappropriate analytical and counting decisions, did not examine copula contraction, and provided data for following grammatical environment only (Rickford & Blake, 1990:1–2).
21. This effect may simply reflect the copula/auxiliary disjunction that Rickford et al. (1991:124) suggested to be characteristic of Standard English contraction, but this possibility does not detract from our argument.
22. The factor of adjective ranks higher than locative in three of the studies, lower than locative in another three, and the same as locative in the remaining four, differences that are entirely consistent with statistical fluctuation.
23. This effect recurs in our data even where the factor was not selected as significant.
24. See Tagliamonte and Poplack (1991) for detailed justification of this assumption.
25. Given the data configuration in Tables 10 and 11, the interpretation that a factor shows the same effect in 3rd pers. sg. and non-3rd pers. sg. contexts emerges from a result whereby that factor, for example, *favours* “deletion” in 3rd pers. sg. and *disfavours* “insertion” in non-3rd pers. sg. contexts, as these two analyses are inversely related.
26. For example, the reversal of ranking of definite versus nondefinite subjects vis-à-vis the 3rd pers. sg. analysis and the other corpora is due to the fact that lexical nondefinites (e.g., *somebody*, *everything*) do not appear in the ANSE subcorpus.
27. The constraints on this variable in surrounding white vernaculars remain to be determined. If they differ, this will confirm the validity of this variable for purposes of comparative reconstruction.
28. For example, Holm (1984:301) noted with regard to Jamaican and Gullah that “it is the African origin of many features common to these varieties that accounts for their similarity and points most unambiguously to their common ancestry.” Yet from examination of the rates of copula absence according to the factor of following grammatical environment depicted in his Table 2, one is struck more by the dissimilarities among the dialects than the similarities.
29. We refer the reader to the references cited in the section on reconstructing diachrony for detailed justification of this claim.
30. We refer particularly to the “deleted” variants that have been the focus of this article. This claim is presently being verified empirically (Meechan, in preparation).
31. The dearth of narratives in the Ex-slave Recordings precludes replication on this data set. In any event, if narrative marking is indeed an innovation in AAVE, we would not expect to find it attested in the Ex-slave Recordings, as indeed we do not in the other data sets.

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