

Scientific myth, cultural bias and the comparative study of nonexistential *BE* in Black English and various Creole and African Languages

Henri Wittmann

Presses universitaires de Trois-Rivières

- JENSEN, Arthur R. 1969. "How much can we boost IQ and scholastic achievement?" *Harvard Educational Review* 39.1-123. [This article revived arguments for genetic explanations of low school performance by Black and other lower-class children.]
- LABOV, William. 1969a. "Contraction, deletion, and inherent variability in the English copula." *Language* 45.715-62. [Pub. of 1967 LSA paper. A quantitative study finding that American Black English has a definite pattern for deleting the copula in varying syntactic environments (variable rule). A high-level rule of base-generation (Chomsky 1965) or insertion (Bach 1967) followed by a low-level variable rules of contraction and deletion. Dialects of a language are apt to differ from each other in low-level rules, adopted from Chomsky. Grammatically variable constraints with phonologically variable effects.]
- LABOV, William. 1969b. "The logic of non-standard English." *Georgetown Monographs on Languages and Linguistics* 22.1-44 (reprinted in: Williams, Frederick. 1970. *Language and poverty: Perspectives on a theme*. Chicago: Markham, 153-89) [There is no verbal deficit to be explained.]
- STEWART, William A. 1968. "Continuity and change in American Negro dialects." *Florida Foreign Language Reporter* 6:1.3-14. [Attacks Labov 1969a even before publication, trend best summarized by Dillard 1972.]
- STEWART, William A. 1971 (1967). "Sociolinguistic facts in the history of American Negro Dialects." *Black-white speech relationships*, ed W. Wolfram & N.H. Clarke, 74-89. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. ["... quite objective and innocently-made statements about dialectal differences between whites and Negroes might be interpreted by white racists as evidence of Negro cultural backwardness or mental inferiority, or even seized upon by black racists as evidence of some sort of mythical Negro "soul".]
- Linguistic Society of America. 1972. "Statement and resolution on language and intelligence." *LSA Bulletin* 52.16-22, 53.14-16, 54.24-26. [Views such as Jensen's have no scientific basis.]
- DILLARD, Joey Lee. 1972. Review of *Language and poverty*. *Language* 48.479-87. [Resumes 482-83 fn. 3: "Grammatical deficit theory asserts that sentences like *It a truck* have no syntactic structure. In this respect, its adherents are opposed both by the Labovians and the Creolists (and by any conceivable group of linguists). The two non-deficit groups differ, however, in their conceptions of the syntactic structure. Labov 1969 asserts that the underlying syntactic structure (in about the sense of Chomsky 1965) is the same as that of the Standard English copula sentences, except that phonological rules of contraction and deletion have applied. [...] The Creolists have argued that, in varieties like Haitian Creole and Sranan Tongo, the zero copula (and, in this case, the *be*-auxiliary) should not be accounted for as the output of phonological reduction rules. Rather, *the underlying category is different* [...]].
- ALLEYNE, Mervyn C. 1971. "Acculturation and the cultural matrix of creolization." *Pidginization and creolization of languages*, ed. Dell Hymes, 169-86. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [173: "The predicative use of adjectives in expressions such as *mwen malad, mi sik*, can be shown to have West African models: Ewe *gli la keke* "the wall is broad". There are in fact African models for the precise "creole" dissection of "to be" into (i) "to be a quality", (ii) "to be", as copula, (iii) "to be" locational (see Turner 1949)." For bonification of this, see Holms 1984, 1988, DeBose & Faraclas 1993.]
- HOLM, John A. 1984. "Variability of the copula in Black English and its Creole kin." *American Speech* 59.291-309. [1988.1:174-82: Creole and African languages often use quite different words for "be" depending on whether the following element is a noun phrase (equative "be"), an adjective (adjectival verb), an indication of location (locative "be"), or a highlighter (with examples from Yoruba, Mandinka and 8 Creoles). Comparable homomorphisms.]
- HOLM, John A. 1988. *Pidgins and Creoles 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- WILSON, André. 1995. "Les copules en six langues ouest-africaines." *Journal of West African Languages* 25:2.85-106.
- WITTMANN, Henri. 1999. "Nonexistential analogues of the verb *to be* in West African Languages, in Haitian Creole and in Magoua French.." 9th International Conference on Creole Studies, Aix-en-Provence, June 24-29, 1999. <<http://www.superdoc.com/aidel/iecf/colloque>>