

The proposed paper links creole studies, which has focused on rural, basilectal varieties, with urban dialectology, which has concentrated on Western, Anglo-American societies. As a "post-insular" island speech community, the Bahamian capital, Nassau, represents a particularly interesting setting in which to test established sociolinguistic concepts. Urbanization has been both rapid and unusually extensive in the Bahamas, with over two-thirds of the country's population now concentrated in the capital. The Bahamas are largely dependent on American mass tourism and heavily influenced by American mass media and life-styles; yet, as will be argued, in terms of speech patterns, Western standards do not hold unqualified.

The paper draws on a corpus of sociolinguistic interviews with twenty speakers and employs Varbrul to investigate three variables connected with past temporal reference: inflection, preverbal *did*, and the copula. As for past inflection, a clear correlation exists between speaker behavior and the well-tested stratifying factors of age, sex, education, and social class, with patterns running in the expected direction at first sight. Thus, overall, younger speakers and women show more overt marking, seemingly indicating decreolization and stereotypically female standard-leaning behavior respectively. A second look, however, reveals that the biological variables age and sex mask the social factors education and class. Before independence in 1973, few black Bahamians were able to obtain a secondary education – a fact which is reflected in the sample's composition, where age correlates intimately with education. A comparison of chi square values for competing analyses statistically corroborates this finding. Gender and class interact in a similar way, with more female speakers represented in the higher-status categories. A reanalysis of the data with only working-class speakers shows that suddenly men exhibit the more norm-oriented behavior, which can be accounted for both historically and in terms of speaker accommodation qua audience design. Finally, interview patterns also affect seemingly group-specific speech behavior. All speakers' interviews contain four distinct discourse types, i.e., chat, narrative of personal experience, folktale, and generic narrative ("I used to ..."), which, for pragmatic reasons, evidence different rates of past inflection. Not unexpectedly, younger interviewees produced far fewer folktales and generic narratives – the two discourse types most prone to the absence of past marking – than older ones; this, however, means that the apparently more standard-like behavior of younger Bahamians has nothing to do with decreolization but with the contents of their interviews.

To sum up, in attempting to match linguistic variation and social variables in a creole urban environment, we must not forget that even though the post-colonial countries of the Caribbean now appear thoroughly Westernized in a number of ways, they have a history entirely different from that which has shaped European or North American speech communities; thus, established sociolinguistic distinctions must be supplemented by ethnographically appropriate categorizations.