

## Copula absence in Hawai'i Creole: Social and linguistic constraints of variation

Copula absence has been extensively investigated in English-based creoles (EBCs) and African American Vernacular English (AAVE) (Rickford 1991). As Walker and Meyerhoff (2004) pointed out, however, a handful of EBCs (e.g., Barbadian, Jamaican, Trinidadian, Guyanese) have received most of the attention, and there is the need for more variationist analyses of copula absence in other EBCs. In this paper, I demonstrate a multivariate analysis of copula absence in Hawai'i Creole (HC), an English-based creole spoken in the islands of Hawai'i. The implication of the results involves a pan-creole tendency as well as a current decreolization process in HC.

Amongst the research in copula absence in EBCs and AAVE, the hierarchical ordering of the following grammatical environment has been reported as most significant. Rickford and Blake (1990) argue that if a prior creole origin were to leave its vestiges in a decreolizing or decreolized variety, we would expect to find the following patterns of copula absence.

\_ gonna > \_ V+ing > \_ Adj > \_ Loc > \_ NP

Previously, copula absence in HC was quantitatively investigated with distributional analyses some thirty years ago (Day 1973; Pearlman 1973). Day's (1973) study of HC provided one of the first substantive quantitative studies in a creole continuum. Day (1973) observed an internal implicational pattern within the use of null copula in 4 environments.

\_ V+ing > \_ Adj > \_ Loc > \_ NP

Perlman (1973) also found a similar hierarchy of the variability of copula in 5 environments.

\_ gon > \_ V+ing > \_ Adj > \_ Loc > \_ NP

The present study analyzed sociolinguistic interviews with rural O'ahu residents collected by the project *External Influences and Internal Variation in Current Hawai'i Creole* (PI Jeff Siegel) in 2001-2005. Compared with the outer islands, the island of O'ahu is reportedly where the most "decreolized" and therefore the most acrolectal varieties are found (Romaine 1994). Data from the twenty speakers stratified by age and gender were quantified and analyzed using Goldvarb 2001 (Robinson, Tagliamonte & Lawrence 2001). Tokens were coded for the following linguistic factors: grammatical person and type of subject, following grammatical category, and preceding as well as following phonological context.

Results indicate that the current HC speech clearly demonstrates an implicational pattern that implies a prior creole origin argued by Rickford and Blake (1990). However, evidence from social constraints shows that the creole pattern is observed similarly across age groups. Also, comparison with the previous studies (Day 1973; Perlman 1973) reveals that the probability of the occurrence of copula absence in 5 environments has not been changed largely in past thirty years.

It is suggested that as for the current HC speech in rural O‘ahu, the variation of copula absence in HC has been rather stable at least within the past thirty years. In sum, the present analysis seems to show that although variation in copula absence in HC spoken in rural O‘ahu has a pattern of a decreolized variety, it does not show evidence of decreolization currently in progress.

[Word count 500]

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