

ABSTRACT

The object of this study is variation - the variation that we know exists in the speech of individuals in the Jamaican speech community. For our purposes, the classroom oral and written English of a group of six first year students in the same faculty at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, was the test situation. The research showed that variation amongst the group can be directly traced to their being native speakers of Jamaican Creole and to a lesser extent to their urban or rural upbringing. However, the variation that was observed within the usage of a single individual - intraindialectal variation - could not always be traced to social background but seemed more influenced by the urban background or the rural background or both of the particular informant. Indeed this writer found the intraindialectal variation rather unpredictable and sees this as an area for further research.

From this study it was found that reductive pressures rather than analogical pressures of the Creole influence usage, particularly in the area of inflections; and that this may be observed in both speech and in writing. In speech, two features described as Creole Usage (the BE + Adjective Predicate construction and the Cleft construction for emphasis) were found to be essentially stylistic and their use was not limited to any particular social class. The latter feature however was closely allied to the rural background of the informants.

It was also noticed that in the oral and written work of the urban lower middle class informant, features considered non-standard in this thesis were numerically greatest, while in the idiolect of the rural

middle class informant, syntax was relatively undeveloped regardless of the stylistic context in which language was used. In addition, this writer found that, in many cases, the performance of the informants did not match the responses to the questionnaire which gave information on socio-economic background, and in one particular case both questionnaires linguistic and socio-economic provided responses which were at marked variance to the usage observed in the idiolect.

Finally the writer of this thesis does not lay claim to having described the variation that exists in the complete idiolect of any one informant, and she recognizes that in order to make adequate statements on this point, sampling will have to be done in other areas - both linguistic and situational - than those covered by the corpus used for this thesis.