Inherent Variability and Coexistent Systems:
Negation on Bequia

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Abstract

The robust linguistic variation observed on Bequia (St Vincent and the Grenadines) raises the question of whether there is a single variable linguistic system or multiple systems. We examine the distribution and conditioning of variable negation (*na*, *ain't* or *not/-n't*) in three communities distinguished by ethnicity and socioeconomic history. The variant *na* is restricted to one community and is conditioned by co-occurrence constraints, while *ain't* is conditioned by auxiliary context and temporal reference, which serve to distinguish between communities. Thus, although there is variation between communities and speakers, there is also evidence for overlapping but discrete coexistent systems. These results underline the importance of examining the distribution and conditioning of all features implicated in the linguistic system.

1. Introduction[*]

Bequia is the northernmost of the Grenadines, located just south of St. Vincent (see Figure 1). Despite its small size (just 7 square miles), this island features a surprising degree of linguistic diversity, apparent even to the casual observer. An array of apparently quite distinct linguistic varieties is spoken on Bequia, ranging from a relatively standard Caribbean English, through what is best described as a nonstandard variety of English (Williams 1987), to a more restructured variety showing affinity to other English-based creoles (Winford 1993; Aceto & Williams 2003), all of which are characterized by linguistic features found elsewhere in the Eastern Caribbean.

Such linguistic diversity presents a challenge to our models of the speech community and the linguistic system. A basic question that has continually confronted us in our research on Bequia is whether we can model the observed variation as a single, highly variable linguistic system or whether there are multiple coexistent systems. Indeed, this question has long beset the analysis of linguistic variation, especially in the context of language (and dialect) contact and creole-speaking communities. An early response in creole studies was the idea of 'polylectal' grammars (e.g. DeCamp 1971; C.-J. Bailey 1973; Bickerton 1975), in which apparent variation is viewed as an artifact of conflating different levels of a (post-)creole continuum: that is, the community is in the process of shifting from a basilectal creole system to a more acrolectal English system via several mesolectal stages. Although more recent work has abandoned the diachronic assumption of the continuum (e.g. Rickford 1988), the view that variation reflects a mixture of different levels of the continuum is still widespread. Yet our research has shown us

that we cannot escape the fact of variation, even at the level of the individual speaker in the same social and linguistic contexts. Can we maintain a model of multiple linguistic systems while acknowledging the fact of inherent variability?
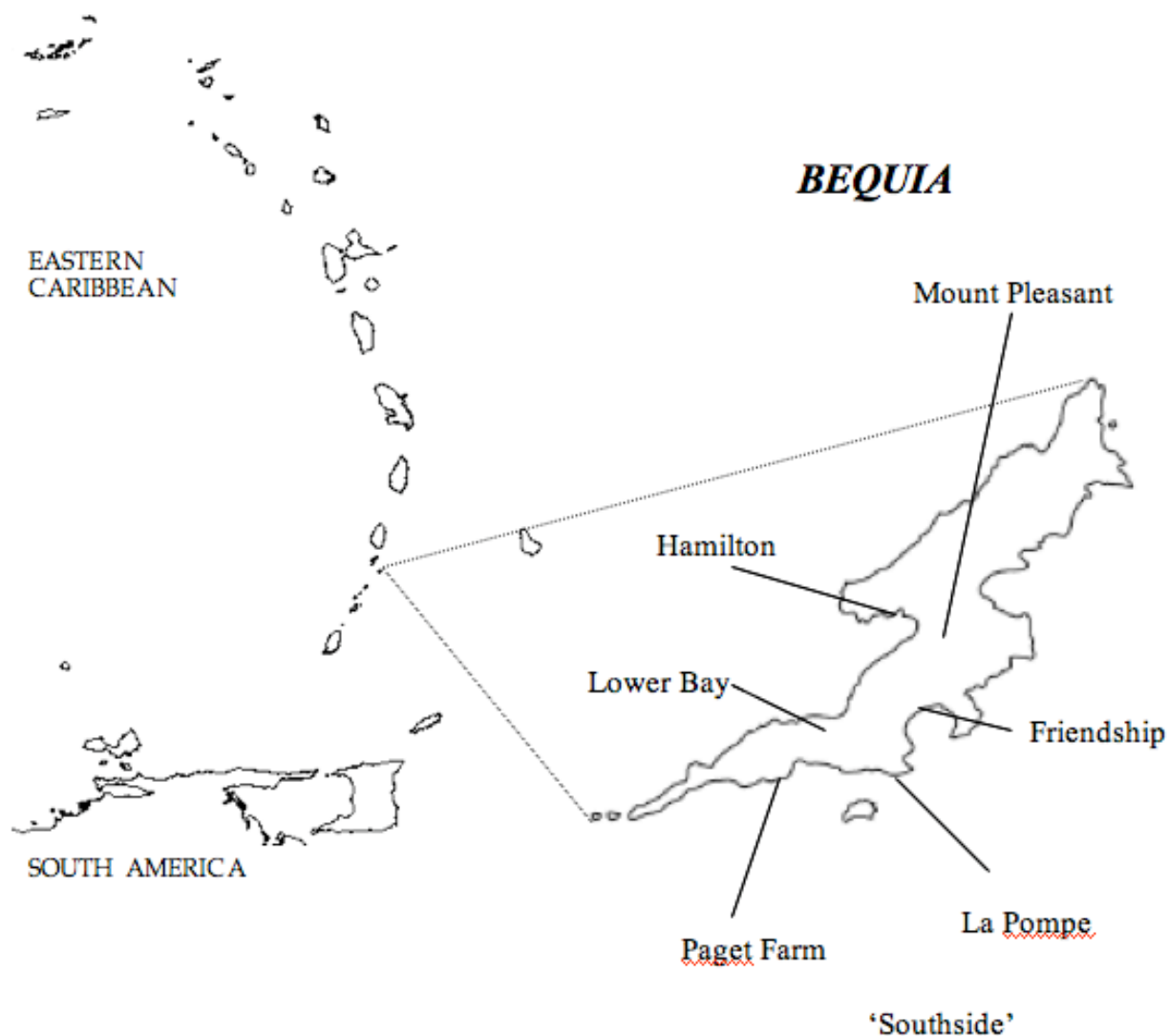

Figure 1: Bequia, St Vincent and the Grenadines

In the context of a similar discussion about African American Vernacular English (AAVE), Labov (1998: 139) proposes four conditions that would favour the recognition of coexistent linguistic systems, two of which are relevant to our research question. The first, *segregation of variants*, states that:

The variants of linguistic variables are not evenly distributed across texts or situations, but concentrated in long runs of the same value, so that extended stretches of speech show one value rather than the other (ibid.).

The fourth condition, *strict co-occurrence*, states that "rules show strict co-occurrence, so that one never applies without the other" (ibid.). Taken together, these conditions suggest that, wherever we find 'conspiracies' or co-occurring features that can be attributed to one linguistic system, and not to another, we may infer the presence of coexistent systems.

In our contribution to this volume, we make use of Labov's conditions in a quantitative analysis of verbal negation on Bequia to propose a partial methodological solution to the problem of studying linguistic variation in (potentially) polylectal communities. In brief, our argument is that, although we may observe considerable variation across communities and even individual speakers, we can nevertheless isolate partially overlapping yet discrete coexistent systems localized in different communities on the island. We begin by reviewing the literature on negation in English-based creoles, nonstandard varieties of English and African American English, with a view to identifying linguistic contexts which might be operationalized as factors to isolate different linguistic systems. Before detailing our analysis of variable negation and the factors conditioning the choice of negation, we provide some sociohistorical background on Bequia and our ongoing research there.

2. Negation in English, English-Based Creoles and African American Vernacular English

Variability in the expression of verbal negation is a longstanding feature of English. Postverbal *not*, which originated from an adverbial, began to compete with preverbal clitic *ne* in the period between Old and Middle English, gradually winning out by the end of the Middle English period (Strang 1970: 312; Mitchell & Robinson 1992: 101-2). In Early Modern English, *not* began to vary with its contracted form *–n't* (the first attestation of contracted *not* is given in (1a)), and *ain't* (spelled in different ways) made its first appearance as a contracted form of *have* and *be* (an early attestation is provided in (1b)).

> (1) a. *But **mayn't** I Bar points, being the Challenged?*
> (1652: John Tatham, *The Scotch Figgaries, or a Knot of Knaves* IV, i; *Oxford English Dictionary*)
> b. *wee'l play heads or tails, who goes first, that's fair now, **e'nt** it?*
> (*The Mock-Tempest* IV.ii; Duffett 1674)

In modern standard varieties of English, *ain't* has all but disappeared, and *not* varies only with *–n't*. In nonstandard varieties *ain't* survives as a variant in contexts of negated *have* and *be* (Feagin 1979; Cheshire 1982; Christian, Wolfram & Dube 1988), though it occurs more frequently in *have* contexts (Cheshire 1991: 57).

Variability in verbal negation is also a well-known feature of the English-based creoles (EBCs) of the Caribbean. The prototypical creole negator is an invariant form (usually *no* or *na*) placed before the verb and any tense-mood-aspect markers (Bickerton 1975: 43; Holm 1988: 171; Rickford 1992; McWhorter 1996: 276; Schneider 1997: 1057; Greene 1999; Parkvall 1999:

38; Patrick 1999; Kephart 2003: 235; McPhee 2003: 34; but cf. Van Herk 2003). Another frequently-cited negator is *ain't* (which occurs in various phonetic forms, such as *e:nt*, *en* or *eh*; Rickford 1974; Bickerton 1975: 99; Winford 1983; Schneider 1997: 1057; Van Herk 2003: 255), though unlike the English form, it is said to occur across a wider range of auxiliary and tense contexts (Bickerton 1975: 99; Kortmann & Szmrecsanyi 2004: 1190) and in some cases its function resembles that of *no/na* (Schneider 1997: 1057). Other forms of negation include *neva*, *doon*(*t*)/*duon*, *di*(*d*)*n*(*t*) and the suffix *–n*, all obviously derived from English *never*, *don't*, *didn't* and *–n't,* respectively, though again these forms are said to differ in distribution and function in some EBCs (Bailey 1966: 90; Bickerton 1975: 95-6, 98, 101, 1996: 314; Holm 1988: 172-4; Schneider 1997: 1056; Greene 1999: 86, 88; Patrick 1999: 201; McPhee 2003).

Although variation among these different forms of negation is generally noted (Bickerton 1975; Winford 1983; Schneider 1997; Cutler 2003: 74; Kephart 2003; McPhee 2003), accounts differ as to the source of the variation. Some claim differences in meaning or selectional restrictions for the distribution of each form. For example, McPhee (2003: 38) notes that anterior marker *bi:n* and future marker *gə* can only be negated with *na/no*, whereas *dɪd* and *wʌz* are negated with a suffixed *–n*. More commonly, each variant is inferred as representing a different lect or level of the continuum. Thus, Bickerton (1975, 1996) and Winford (1983) argue that, as speakers shift from the basilect to the acrolect, forms are first relexified, taking on the properties of the replaced form, before being reanalyzed according to the English system. Under this view, *no* is first replaced by *ain't* or *didn't,* which, unlike the English forms, are unanalyzed (i.e. monomorphemic) negators, before being reanalyzed according to the English system (i.e. bimorphemic). Others are more agnostic about the diachronic nature of the variation, simply noting that speakers alternate between forms of negation from different levels of the continuum (e.g. Patrick 1999: 199; Cutler 2003: 74; Kephart 2003).

Despite the acknowledgment of this variability, there are very few quantitative studies of negation in EBCs. Winford's (1983) examination of *eh* (<*ain't*) in Trinidadian Creole English shows that it is sensitive to tense and aspect, occurring most frequently with present-tense nonstatives, less frequently with statives and least of all with past-tense nonstatives (Winford 1983: 207). In Bickerton's (1996) analysis of Guyanese Creole English, *didn* is the preferred variant in past contexts and *doon* (<*don't*) in the present (Bickerton 1996: 314-15). Almost all of the quantitative work on variation in negation has been conducted on the distribution of *ain't* in the context of the debate over the origins and development of African American Vernacular English (AAVE). In AAVE, *ain't* occurs not only in *be* and *have* contexts, but also in contexts of *did* and (more infrequently) *do* (Labov, Cohen, Robins & Lewis 1968: 255-7; Fasold & Wolfram 1970: 69; Labov 1972: 284; Weldon 1994), which has led some to argue that *ain't* in AAVE is an invariant negator like that found in EBCs (DeBose 1994:128). In addition to the auxiliary context, other constraints on the occurrence of *ain't* have been found, such as the presence of negative concord (Wolfram 1974; Weldon 1994; Walker 2005), non-habitual (DeBose & Faraclas 1993: 370) or punctual aspect (Bolton 1982: 323), and stativity (Weldon 1994; Howe 1997).

Taken together, the above studies suggest a number of avenues to explore in quantitative analysis. The auxiliary context and tense appear to be the most important considerations, since the restriction of *ain't* to *be* and *have* contexts and to present tense appears to distinguish creole

from English systems. These considerations suggest that creole forms of negation (*na* and possibly *ain't*) should be distinguished from English forms of negation (*not/-n't* and possibly *ain't)* in differential distributions according to auxiliary context, tense and aspect.

3. Variation in Negation on Bequia

3.1. Sociohistorical Background

Except for occasional visits by the Caribs, Bequia was uninhabited before being acquired under the Treaty of Paris (1763) by the British, who developed sugar plantations and imported slaves from West Africa and elsewhere in the Caribbean. During the initial period of development there was also a steady influx of British (mostly Scottish) settlers from Britain or Barbados and St Vincent. By the mid-19th century, with the collapse of the sugar plantation economy and the abolition of slavery, the island's remaining inhabitants shifted to small-scale subsistence farming and maritime trade, such as fishing and (after 1875) whaling. Most of the current population of approximately 5,000 descends from freed slaves who had worked on the plantations, though a small minority descends from British indentured labourers, managers and landowners, as well as from French and Portuguese settlers during the mid-19th century (for a more detailed discussion of Bequia's history, see Meyerhoff & Walker 2006).

Our research project was initially designed to examine social factors maintaining an ethnolinguistic boundary between 'black' and 'white' varieties, but our first few weeks of field research in 2003 convinced us that such ethnic categorization is problematic on Bequia and that people are more appropriately categorized according to where they come from on the island. Our fieldwork, conducted between 2003 and 2005, concentrated on three communities (see figure 1): Hamilton, a predominantly African-descent community originating from a large plantation; Mount Pleasant, the traditional home of the 'Scottish' population; and Southside, a local term referring to a contiguous group of fishing and whaling communities: Paget Farm, La Pompe and Friendship. These communities are distinguished not only by different racial/ethnic mixes but also by different socioeconomic histories and circumstances (see Price 1988).

Our fieldwork combined ethnographic observation with sociolinguistic interviews (Labov 1984) conducted and recorded by trained local research assistants. The interview corpus comprises over 100 hours of recordings with 62 speakers aged between 41 and 100 years old (see Meyerhoff, Sidnell & Walker 2006). We draw on this corpus for the analysis presented in this paper, focusing on a sub-sample of 18 speakers, six from each of Hamilton, Mount Pleasant and Paget Farm,[1] evenly balanced for sex.

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[1] The Southside speakers in our interview corpus come from Paget Farm and La Pompe. In this chapter, we focus on speakers from Paget Farm because their interviews were among the first to be transcribed in at least two passes.

3.2. Defining the Variable Context

Our linguistic focus in this chapter is the variable realization of verbal negation, which on Bequia may be expressed by a preverbal negator *na* (2a), *ain't* (2b) or postverbal *not* (2c) and its contracted form *-n't* (2d).[2]

(2) a. All them we **na** bin cussing.   (H001:151)[3]
    b. You **ain't** know all the hardship.   (P024:655)
    c. And when he is old, he iz **not** depart.   (M002:158)[4]
    d. The dead do**n't** have no hope.   (H003:473)

The range of variation seen here is similar to that found elsewhere in the Caribbean. The variant *na* resembles the invariant preverbal negator found in other EBCs. As noted above, while *ain't* occurs both in EBCs and in nonstandard English, its distribution is different. Therefore it is not the mere presence of this feature which concerns us, but its linguistic conditioning.

Although we extracted the first 200 sentences with negative marking, wherever possible, from each of the speakers in the subsample, in this chapter we narrow the focus of our analysis to verbal negation. We excluded from the analysis several contexts that do not admit variation, such as imperatives, modals and semi-modals such as *used to*, which almost always occur with forms of *not* or *−n't*. In addition, other variable processes make it difficult if not impossible to distinguish between *not* or *na* in some contexts. For example, the variable occurrence of zero copula and the following phonological context together make the sentence in (3) ambiguous between preverbal *na* and *not* with a zero copula.

(3) That **not/na** true.   (H003:352)

All such tokens were excluded from analysis.

This yielded a dataset of 1,720 tokens of verbal negation, distributed according to community as shown in the final column of Table 1.

Table 1: *Distribution of verbal negation in three communities on Bequia.*			
	% na	*% ain't*	*% not/-n't*	Total N
Hamilton	12	29	59	626
Mount Pleasant	0 [N=2]	40	60	518
Paget Farm	0 [N=2]	16	84	576
Total:				1720

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[2] Our speakers also use *never*, but a preliminary analysis of its distribution suggests that it behaves more like an adverb than a verbal negator.

[3] All examples are reproduced verbatim from recorded interviews and are identified by the community (H = Hamilton; M = Mount Pleasant; P = Paget Farm), speaker number, and line number in the transcription.

[4] In this example, *iz* represents a reduced form of habitual *doz*.

3.3. Factor Groups Coded

In addition to noting the form of verbal negation (*na*, *ain't* or *not*/*-n't*) we coded each token for a number of factors that have been proposed to affect the choice of negation in English-based creoles, African American English and nonstandard English.

As noted above, a primary consideration in the analysis of negation, at least for *ain't*, is the auxiliary context. We therefore distinguish among *be* contexts (4a; that is, *ain't* varies with *am+not*, *are+not*, *is+not*, *was+not*, *were+not*), *do* contexts (4b; *ain't* varies with *does+not*, *do+not*, *did+not*) and *have* contexts (4c; *ain't* varies with *have+not*).[5]

(4) a. be *(*ain't *vs.* am*/*are*/*is*/*was*/*were+not)*
    Though the money right now ***ain't*** flowing.   (P023:368)
    The seed ***is not*** growing the same day.   (P014:285)
    That time no boat ***ain't*** working with engine or nothing.   (H006:490)
    Rum ***wasn't*** flourishing like now.   (H005:547)
  b. do (ain't vs. do/does/did+not)
    Me ***ain't*** want a whole entire argument.   (M301:715)
    Some of them, they ***don't*** want a man.   (M301:161)
    But them days long time you ***ain't*** have no help.   (H012:168)
    And long time they ***didn't*** have the preacher.   (H012:336)
  c. have (ain't vs. have/has/had+not)
    I ***ain't*** been to a doctor, you know.   (M302:588)
    I ***haven't*** seen the person up to now.   (P014:071)

If an English-like system is operative, we expect *ain't* to be preferred in contexts of present *be* and *have*, as in other nonstandard varieties of English. If a more creole-like system is operative, we expect the auxiliary context to be irrelevant.

We tested for the influence of tense and aspect on the choice of negation in several ways. First, we noted whether each token referred to a past (5a) or present (5b) event or state (tokens with ambiguous temporal reference were not retained for this factor group).

(5) a. I ***didn't*** school here, you know.   (P024:147)
  b. Your lifestyle ***na*** suit me.   (M301:714)

Following on previous work (Walker 2000, 2001, 2005), stativity was coded on the basis of the lexical verb, regardless of the aspectual nature of the sentence in which it occurred. We coded whether the verb indicated a state (6a) or activity (6b).

(6) a. They ***ain't*** <u>experience</u> nothing in the world.   (P014:630)
  b. Anglican ***don't*** <u>baptise</u>, them doz sprinkle.   (M302:953)

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[5] There were very few *had+not* contexts. In fact, differentiating between *have+not* and *did+not* contexts is made difficult by other variable processes such as (*t*/*d*)-deletion and morphological past-marking, which render the lexical verb bare.

Finally, we coded for the aspect of the sentence in which each token occurred, distinguishing among habitual (7a-b), continuous or durative (7c) and punctual (7d) aspect.

> (7) a. We ***not*** telling you because if we tell you, you wouldn't come back to see us.
> (H027:1249)[6]
>   b. I ***don't*** go to Carnival. (H001:158)
>   c. But long time it ***wasn't*** so. (P023:1179)
>   d. They ***ain't*** catch it in time. (M101:109)

If a creole-like system is operative, we expect considerations of tense and aspect to be irrelevant to the choice of negator.

In line with Labov's criteria, we coded several factor groups to address the question of co-occurring constraints discussed above. First, we hypothesize that the presence of creole tense-aspect markers, such as anterior *bin* (8), indicates a creole system.

> (8) Them ***na*** <u>bin</u> have no engine. (H001:199)

We also hypothesize that the use of object pronouns in subject position (9) indicates a more creole-like system.[7]

> (9) <u>Me</u> ***ain't*** got no time with that. (M301:370)

However, since we found that this variation occurs only in 1st person singular (*I* vs. *me*) and 3rd person plural (*they* vs. *them*), we consider only these grammatical contexts. Finally, since negative concord is another feature highly associated with creole varieties (though of course it also occurs in many nonstandard varieties of English (cf. Kortmann & Szmrecsanyi 2004: 1186)), we coded negative concord as present if there was another negated element in the same clause (10a) and absent if there were other elements in the clause which could have been negated but were not (10b). Tokens in which there were no other elements in the clause that could be negated (10c) were not included in this factor group.

> (10) a. We ***didn't*** have <u>no shoes</u>. (M303:011)
>   b. I ***don't*** go <u>any place</u>. (P014:139)
>   c. When the wind ***na*** blow- remember, bin wind, no engine. (H005:335)

All of these factors were considered individually and together using GoldVarb X (Sankoff, Tagliamonte & Smith 2005).

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[6] Verbal aspect was coded on the basis of the discourse context rather than the form of the verb. For example, in this sentence, although the progressive is used, the wider discourse context makes it clear that the speaker is referring to a habitual event.

[7] As an anonymous reviewer points out, the use of object pronouns in subject positions is attested in three other (demonstrably non-creolized) varieties of English: Newfoundland and the North and Southwest of England (Kortmann & Szmrecsanyi 2004: 1185). While the ultimate source of this feature may thus be nonstandard English, invariant object pronouns are commonly considered a basilectal feature in the Caribbean context (Holm 1988: 201).

3.4. Results

Table 1 shows the overall distribution of forms by community. Note that, while all three communities feature robust use of *ain't* and forms of *not*, *na* is virtually restricted to Hamilton. This result confirms our impression of Hamilton as the most creole-like variety on the island. On the basis of this restricted distribution, we restrict our analysis of *na* to Hamilton, before we proceed to an analysis of the linguistic conditioning of *ain't*.

3.4.1. na

An examination of individual speaker patterns of use within Hamilton revealed that, while all speakers used *na* to various degrees, two speakers almost never used it. Because including such speakers in the analysis of *na* might skew the results, they were excluded from subsequent analysis of this variant. The remaining data was subjected to multivariate analysis, the results of which are shown in Table 2.[8] Because auxiliary context showed interaction with stativity and has not been claimed to be relevant to the distribution of *na*, this factor group was not included in the analysis.

Note that none of the factor groups intended to test the effects of tense and aspect (temporal reference, stativity and aspect) are selected as significant, suggesting that *na* does indeed represent a tense- and aspect-neutral negator like that found in other EBCs. Only two factor groups are selected as significant: the presence of a tense-aspect marker, which favours *na*, and the form of the pronoun, with object forms and *they* favouring (stated conversely, with subject *I* disfavouring). In light of Labov's (1998) conditions of segregation of variants and strict co-occurrence, discussed above, the highly favouring effect of these two creole-like features on *na* suggests that at least some of the observed variation is organized into small systems that we may call a 'lect'.

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[8]   In Tables 2 and 3, each set of three columns shows one variable-rule analysis using GoldVarb X (Sankoff, Tagliamonte & Smith 2005), with factor weights, percentages and total number of tokens for each factor. The factor weight represents the probability that each factor contributes to the occurrence of *na* (Table 2) or *ain't* (Table 3): the closer to 0, less likely; closer to 1, more likely. The 'input' indicates overall probability. The multiple-regression feature of GoldVarb (binomial stepup/stepdown) considers all factors simultaneously and assesses the statistical significance and relative contribution of each (see Guy 1993; Young & Bayley 1996; Paolillo 2002).

***Table 2: Factors contributing to the occurrence of* na *(vs.* ain't *and* not/-n't*) in Hamilton, Bequia.*[9]**

			%	N
Total N:		429		
Input:		.068		
Form of Pronoun				
me		**.96**	60	20
them		**.92**	56	18
they		**.76**	16	49
I		.20	2	113
	Range:	76		
Tense-Aspect Marker				
Present		**.96**	84	19
Absent		.46	14	420
	Range:	50		
Lexical Stativity				
Stative		[.50]	18	267
Nonstative		[.50]	17	162
Negative Concord				
Present		[.55]	21	66
Absent		[.47]	15	104
Temporal Reference				
Past		[.52]	19	175
Present		[.48]	16	251
Aspect				
Habitual		[.42]	12	137
Durative		[.54]	18	217
Punctual		[.53]	23	73

[ ] = Not selected as significant.

3.4.2. ain't

We turn now to a consideration of *ain't*, which occurs at robust rates across all three communities and therefore lends itself to cross-variety comparison. As Table 1 shows, there are quite different rates of *ain't* in the three communities: most in Mount Pleasant, less in Hamilton (though here *na* also figures), least in Paget Farm. However, rates of use can fluctuate for a

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[9] Excludes two speakers (N=197) with low use of *na*. Factor weights ≥ **.50 favour** *na*, while factor weights < **.50 disfavour**.

number of (non-linguistic) reasons. More important is the hierarchy of factors conditioning its occurrence.

However, a problem confronting anyone who studies *ain't* is determining its variable context. If the interpretation of decreolization is correct, and *ain't* constitutes a relexification of *na*, it should occur indifferently across all tense-aspect contexts. If it represents part of an English system, we must restrict the analysis to present-tense contexts of *have* and *be*. Rather than biasing the analysis by assuming one system or the other, we allow the hierarchy of conditioning factors to indicate which underlying system is operative, analyzing *ain't* against all other forms of *not/-n't* (excluding *na*). If English-like restrictions on the choice of auxiliary are relevant, they should emerge from the analysis. While we acknowledge that this decision itself may bias the analysis in other ways, we believe that it minimizes bias more than an approach that assumes one system or the other *a priori*.

As noted above, the type of auxiliary is potentially a paramount restriction on the occurrence of *ain't*, but it interacts with stativity. For this reason, in the analysis of *ain't,* we include auxiliary context but do not include statitivity.

Table 3 shows the results of multivariate analysis of the contribution of these factors to the occurrence of *ain't*. Most factor groups selected as significant do not distinguish among communities. In all three communities, object pronouns in subject position and tense-aspect markers both tend to correlate with *ain't* (though the latter factor group is either not selected as significant (Paget Farm) or contains knockouts (i.e. occurrences of 100%) and therefore cannot be included in multivariate analysis (Hamilton, Mt Pleasant)). These effects parallel those of *na* shown in Table 2 and suggest that *ain't* may function in some respects like *na*, a universal negator. The presence of negative concord also favours *ain't* across all communities, a finding reported in studies of AAVE (Wolfram 1974; Weldon 1994; Walker 2005).

The main differences between the communities emerge in auxiliary context and temporal reference. Both Hamilton and Mount Pleasant show a clear distinction between *be*, which favours *ain't*, and *do,* which disfavours (the small numbers for *have* make it difficult to make claims about this context), while in Paget Farm, auxiliary context is not selected as significant.[10] Temporal reference is selected as significant only in Mount Pleasant.[11] Taken together, the results for Mount Pleasant suggest that *ain't* is favoured most in present *be* contexts, likely the legacy of a nonstandard English system. In contrast, the temporal and auxiliary constraints are less restrictive in the other communities and *ain't* appears to behave more like a tense-neutral negator, likely a creole legacy.

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[10]   Not only is this factor group not selected as significant, but the factor weights and the percentages for *be* and *do* are also virtually identical.

[11]   In Hamilton, although the factor weights are close to .5, the range of percentages is greater than that in Mount Pleasant. However, the direction of results is opposite to that of Mount Pleasant and to patterns observed in nonstandard English. In Paget Farm, the factor weights for temporal reference are very close to .5 and the percentages are virtually identical. It might be argued that the overall low input value for *ain't* in Paget Farm (.133) is responsible for temporal reference not achieving significance, but this does not prevent other factor groups from being selected as significant.

Table 3: Factors contributing to the occurrence of ain't *(vs.* not*/-*n't*) in three communities on Bequia.*[12]

	HAMILTON			MOUNT PLEASANT			PAGET FARM		
Total N:	449			516			542		
Input:	.516			.417			.133		
		%	N		%	N		%	N
Form of Pronoun									
me	.70	74	19	.90	80	5	.91	67	12
them	.49	44	9	KO	100	2	.92	63	8
they	.51	49	57	.56	41	90	.45	14	81
I	.47	42	132	.44	27	133	.45	14	179
Range:	23			46			47		
Tense-Aspect Marker									
Present	KO	100	4	KO	100	6	[.83]	50	4
Absent		40	445		39	510	[.50]	16	538
Auxiliary Context									
be	.72	60	99	.75	62	131	[.51]	16	144
do	.44	35	339	.41	31	370	[.50]	17	380
have	.27	20	5	KO	100	2	[.46]	13	8
Range:	45			34					
Temporal Reference									
Past	[.55]	46	198	.38	34	182	[.48]	16	175
Present	[.46]	36	249	.57	42	333	[.51]	16	366
Range:				34					
Aspect									
Habitual	.46	36	149	.53	44	160	.53	19	151
Durative	.47	38	221	.46	36	326	.46	14	356
Punctual	.67	56	77	.78	50	30	.72	29	35
Range:	21			32			26		
Negative Concord									
Present	.70	61	77	.70	58	98	.85	44	45
Absent	.36	28	109	.36	34	141	.41	10	218
Range:	34			34			44		

[ ] = Not selected as significant; KO = Knockout (100%).

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[12] Excludes tokens of *na* and two speakers with no use of *ain't*.

5. Conclusion

Our analysis of the variable expression of negation on Bequia suggests differences between communities. The creole-like preverbal negator *na* is virtually restricted to Hamilton and is conditioned by the presence of tense-aspect markers and the use of object pronouns in subject position. The use of *ain't* is conditioned by a number of factors, two of which (auxiliary context and temporal reference) appear to distinguish between communities. We suggest that these patterns result from the historical development of the different communities on Bequia. The people of (primarily) Scottish ancestry living in and around Mount Pleasant inherited a nonstandard English system in which *na* was absent and *ain't* functioned as a tensed negator in *be* and *have* contexts, a pattern that clearly persists until the present day. On the other hand, the people of Hamilton and Paget Farm appear to have incorporated *ain't* into a grammar in which verbs are negated by an invariant, tense-neutral marker. Thus, the use of *ain't* in past contexts may reflect a process of extension or relexification, in which *ain't* alternates with *na*. These results demonstrate not only the complexity of the system of negation on Bequia, but also the necessity of considering the conditioning of variation rather than simply the presence of a particular form.

Finally, what do these results say about the question posed at the beginning of this chapter, the nature of multiple linguistic systems and inherent variability? There seem to be two systems operative on Bequia: a more creole-like system and a more English-like system. However, with the possible exception of *na*, these systems are not distributed categorically or uniformly across the island, but are reflected in differential conditioning of variation within each community. We suggest then that there is a complex set of constraints that work together to aggregate features into something we could call a lect. This emerges in the collocational effects in which a number of features co-occur: the presence of tense-aspect markers, the use of object pronouns in subject position and the use of the negator *na*. While one of these features on its own would suggest the presence of a creole-like system, the co-occurrence or collocation of these features strengthens such a conclusion. These results constitute a quantitative illustration of Labov's criteria of co-occurrence, providing strong evidence for the presence of coexistent systems. They also call into question our ability to isolate discrete lects on the basis of categorical distribution, and suggest instead that we must examine the distribution and conditioning of all features implicated in the linguistic system. As such, this study provides a direction for the study of variation in polylectal speech communities.

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