Style Shifting in a creole-speaking Community
*Mudança de estilo em uma comunidade de fala crioula*

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**Abstract:** After a hiatus, the study of stylistic variation in speech has regained the attention of sociolinguists, but not so of scholars working on pidgin and creole languages, who tend to depend for data on intuitions, elicitations, or one-shot recordings in the field. In this paper I demonstrate the rich style shifting I encountered in a study of pronominal variation in a creole-speaking community in Guyana, South America. In accord with community-members’ views that addressee-based or situational style shifting was paramount, I used interactions with different interlocutors to study morphological variability. But I also found topic-based or metaphorical shifting, when participants and the general situation were held constant. Since our perspectives on the (socio-)linguistic competence of speakers depend so crucially on the styles in which we record them, I emphasize the importance of seeking out stylistic variation wherever we work, but especially in pidgin and creole speaking communities, where this approach is neglected.

**Keywords:** Stylistic variation, sociolinguistics, creoles.

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1 It is a pleasure to dedicate this paper to John Holm, thanking him for his sterling contributions to the study of pidgins and creoles over several decades, and for facilitating my fieldwork in Guyana in 1976 by serving as one of the ‘Expatriate Reinterviewers’ discussed in this paper. He was there for the inaugural meeting of the Society for Caribbean Linguistics, a historic event in itself.
Resumo: Após um hiato, o estudo da variação estilística na fala tem vindo a recuperar a atenção dos sociolinguistas, mas não a dos estudiosos que investigam línguas pidgens e crioulas e constroem o seu corpus a partir de intuições, elicitações ou gravações pontuais em campo. Neste artigo, pretendo mostrar a existência de um caso de alternância estilística detectada durante um estudo sobre variação pronominal numa comunidade crioula da Guiana, na América do Sul. Partindo da convicção dos membros da comunidade de que a alternância estilística situacional, com base no destinatário, era fundamental, recorri a diferentes interlocutores para estudar a incidência de variação morfológica. Deparei-me, no entanto, com alternância metafórica, com base no tópico, sempre que os participantes e a situação geral permaneciam constantes. Dado que a nossa percepção sobre a competência (sócio-) linguística dos falantes depende crucialmente dos estilos que falam quando os gravamos, considero essencial que seja dada atenção à variação estilística na recolha dos dados, muito especialmente nas comunidades pidgens e crioulas, nas quais esta abordagem tem sido negligenciada.

Palavras-chave: Variação estilística, sociolinguística, línguas crioulas.

1 Introduction

Despite enthusiasm for the topic in the first two decades of variationist sociolinguistics (Labov 1966, Bell 1984), the study of stylistic variation at the intra-individual level began to wane soon thereafter, as several researchers have noted (Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994, Macaulay 1999, Gadet 2005). The situation has begun to change since the turn of the century, with an interest in Speaker Design and other new approaches to stylistic variation (Eckert and Rickford 2001, Schilling-Estes 2002, Coupland 2007, Hernandez-Campoy and Cutillas-Espinosa 2012a). But within pidgin-creole studies, the situation remains as bleak as ever, with most researchers either remaining satisfied with elicitations or their own intuitions, or with data from a one-shot interview or recording in the field.

This is unfortunate, because the neglect of stylistic variation weakens the reliability and validity of our linguistic and sociolinguistic descriptions, and because this neglect deprives variationist sociolinguistics of the contributions that variation-rich pidgin-creole speaking communities could offer to the field. Creole continuum situations like those in the Anglophone Caribbean and Hawaii are especially interesting in this regard, as I hope to demonstrate in this paper by analyzing data from Cane Walk, Guyana, South America.
2 Topic and Addressee-influenced stylistic variation

Two approaches to the study of stylistic variation developed in the first two decades of variationist sociolinguistics. The first approach, exemplified by Labov (1966), distinguished between casual and careful speech in terms of attention paid to speech. The distinction was operationalized primarily in terms of topics that came up in the sociolinguistic interview. Speech about certain topics (e.g. danger of death experiences, or childhood games), when accompanied by recognizable channel cues (e.g. laughter, increased tempo or falsetto voice) was defined as casual. Speech in all other contexts — the bulk of the standard sociolinguistic interview — was defined as careful. However, there were concerns about the practical difficulty and theoretical value of distinguishing styles in this way (see Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994: 238-9 for a summary), and Labov et al (1968) and Blom and Gumperz (1972) among others, began to experiment with an alternative approach that focused on variation by addressee. Bell (1984) christened this alternative approach ‘Audience Design’ and developed it theoretically. One could also distinguish between the two approaches by using Blom and Gumperz’ distinction between ‘metaphorical’ and ‘situational’ switching, with the key situational element in the second approach being the addressee and other participants.

When I was doing my dissertation research in Guyana in the 1970s, I hedged my bets somewhat by using a version of Labov’s (1966) topic-based casual/careful approach to style for the analysis of phonological variation (e.g. vowel laxing in mi vs. ma as first person pronouns) and developing an alternative addressee and participant-focused method of style more similar to Bell’s for the analysis of morphological variation (e.g. between mi and ai as first person pronouns). The latter approach was the more innovative one so it’s the one I’ll begin by discussing, but I’ll also discuss some examples of metaphorical style shifting involving morphological pronoun variables.

In fact, only three of Labov’s casual speech contexts were topic based: ‘Speech not in Direct Response to Questions’, ‘Childhood Rhymes and Customs’, and responses to the ‘Danger of Death’ question. The other two (especially the second) were more addressee-based: ‘Speech outside the Formal Interview’, and ‘Speech with a Third Person’.

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Three addressee-based contexts for analyzing style shifting in Cane Walk, Guyana

In the course of my ethnographic study of pronominal variation in Cane Walk (Rickford 1979), I asked community members about the appropriate occasions for the use of ‘English’ vs. ‘Creole’ — the primary dimension of sociolinguistic variation in this community. Here is a sample of the responses I received:

(1) If yuh meet up to people who know the English, yuh got to speak it — at least if yuh know it. If yuh meet up to people who can’t talk in English, well, yuh got to speak dey way. (Dereck)

(2) [Use good English] when yuh meet nice people dat talkin’ proper. Creolese [term for the local Anglophone creole] when yuh meet dem old people. (Florine)

(3) Yuh use English when yuh meet important people. (Sultan)

(4) Well, when yuh meet up wid English people, and yuh know de lil twang, yuh a try wid am. But if yuh na know, how yuh go talk? Yuh talk yuh own ting, before yuh burs’ half-way and dem — dem laugh yuh! (Rose)

(5) Yuh got fuh be in the company, den yuh can talk dem correct English. De correc’ English is fuh dem correc’ person who educated. (Ajah)

(6) Talk the good English when yuh meet up people and so. A’ house (At home) yuh can talk anyhow. (Darling)

(7) When yuh reach up, when yuh deh in certain company, ... yuh got to pull up yuh socks. (Kihore)

(8) It depends. If yuh traveling and meet people in higher brackets [talk good English]. (Sheik)

(9) Well that would depend on the individual to whom you are speaking. Dey might be a person who doesn’t understand Creolese. Then you would have to talk proper English to dem. But if we are all Guyanese, den let’s talk Guyanese, let’s talk Creolese! (Seymour)

(10) When yuh meet dese big people dem, yuh talk like dem, right? And when yuh go to de other stage, yuh have to talk like de other people dem. Ah mean, yuh can’t always let yuhself down like dat. (Claire)

(11) When yuh meet the governor and so — speak proper English or else yuh let down your own. (Ustad)
(12) I suppose [you talk proper English] when you’re around the people who usually talk that way. But talk Creolese when you’re with people who talk Creolese all the time. I do that. (Bonnette)

As these responses indicate, Cane Walkers independently zeroed in on the ‘nature of the addressee’ as the most significant factor in their style-shifting, and did not mention topic, locale, goals nor the other etic constraints on stylistic variation that recur in the sociolinguistic literature (e.g. Hymes 1972). This is not to suggest that Cane Walkers do not display, at least some of the time, the metaphorical switching (Blom and Gumperz 1972: 424-6) associated with change in topic and similar factors. But an emic or ethnographic description of stylistic variation in this community would have to give greater prominence to the situational switching (ibid.) associated with the nature of the addressee and other participants, as the Cane Walkers themselves appear to do.

Inspired by these responses, I decided to distinguish between three addressee-based situations for my analysis of morphological style-shifting:

A. Peer-group recordings. (Interaction with family and peer-group members.)
This context includes all speech produced by individuals outside of the interview context proper, in interaction with family or peer-group members. In some cases, this interaction is merely a brief aside in the course of an interview, as when an interviewee breaks off to make a request of a family member, or to deal with an interruption caused by a visiting neighbor, customer, or friend. In other cases, this interaction is part of a more extended speech situation or speech event that is quite different from the conventional interview: a card game, a drinking session, informal *gaffing* (‘free conversation, small talk’) accompanying a routine activity, and so on. In both cases, however, I would expect to find what Labov (1972: 109) found: ‘the interaction of members overrides the effect of observation, and gives us a more direct view of the vernacular’[^3]. Following Van den Broeck (1977), I will define this context as ‘informal’.

[^3]: Recordings of family and peer-group sessions have been reported in the literature before in the following works, among others: Labov et al (1968), Blom and Gumperz (1972), Labov, Yaeger and Steiner (1972), Winford (1972), Day (1973), Van den Broeck (1977) and Baugh (1983). In the earlier studies-up to and including Blom and Gumperz (1972) — the peer group sessions were arranged at the investigator’s request, but in most of the later studies (as in this one, too), the sessions were spontaneous events initiated by the members of the groups themselves at times and places of their own choosing.
B. *Spontaneous interviews. (Interaction with a Guyanese interviewer.*)*

These spontaneous interviews, conducted by me, are described in detail in Rickford (1979: 82-5), and the list of modules and questions that I used as a rough guide and stimulus in these interviews is provided in Appendix A to the same work (pp. 516-23). Regardless of varying individual responses to these questions — in terms of the amount of speech they elicited, or the degree of interest or involvement they generated—it is fair to say that interviewees were always aware that they were in an interview situation, interacting with someone who was not an everyday associate, but an outsider with an interest in the ways of life in Cane Walk. The fact that I was a fellow Guyanese and a fellow member of the Guyanese speech community — together with the fact that I was either family, acquaintance, or familiar visitor to most of the people I interviewed, would presumably result in more casual or informal speech being used to me than to the outsiders in the Expatriate Reinterviews in C. But I expect that this would still not be ‘... the everyday speech which the informant will use as soon as the door is closed behind us: the style in which he argues with his wife, scolds his children, or passes the time of day with his friends.’ (Labov 1972: 85). Following Van den Broeck (1977), I will refer to this context as ‘semi-formal’.

C. *Expatriate Reinterviews. (Interaction with an expatriate interviewer.*)*

The reinterviews were carried out by three white expatriates — Derek Bickerton (UK), John Holm (USA) and Michael Pye (UK) — with eight members of the Cane Walk sample after my spontaneous and controlled interviews with the latter had all been completed. In the history of Cane Walk and Guyana, the white expatriate has traditionally stood at the top of the socioeconomic and status hierarchy, occupying a niche apart from the highest ranked locals. This was still true in 1976, although ten years of independence from Great Britain had begun to erode the colonial orientation that created and sustained this hierarchy. The opportunity to talk to three representatives of this group was thus a special and unusual event for the Cane Walkers. The gap between interviewer and interviewee was greater than in any other recording context, and further removed from everyday interaction in Cane Walk life. Given these facts, and given the fact that the expatriates were speakers of ‘good English’ (to use the local phrase that recurs in community members’ talk about language), I will define this context as the most formal of all and expect it to show the most marked shifting away from the basilect and/or towards the acrolect.

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4 To get at the more spontaneous way of speaking that Winford (1972) always believed his subjects had than what they demonstrated in sociolinguistic interviews with him, he also recorded five of his thirty-three Trinidadian subjects in interaction with their peers, as I did in my peer-group recordings in Guyana.
My original intention was to present samples of speech in these three contexts for the eight Cane Walk speakers who participated in the expatriate reinterviews. After I had tabulated all the data from these reinterviews, however, I found that more than half of the individual speakers’ cells for the nine pronoun subcategories that display morphological variation contained less than five tokens each. Given the findings of other researchers (e.g. Guy 1980) that cells with such limited data tend to give an unreliable indication of linguistic behavior, I decided to remove them from consideration.

This had the effect, however, of removing the feminine subcategories altogether, since they had the least data of all (an average of only one token per speaker in the 3FObj and 3FPos subcategories), and of leaving several individuals with ER data in only one or two subcategories. Since a similar problem turned up with the ‘peer group’ data, I eventually decided to restrict my attention to Reefer and Ustad alone, who had the most data in all three contexts in their respective Estate Class (EC) and Non Estate Class (NEC) groups. Although this will reduce the comprehensiveness of our coverage of situational style-shifting, it will increase the reliability of the results. Furthermore, Reefer and Ustad are both recognized leaders within the EC and NEC respectively; quite apart from considerations of data size, it would be difficult to find two better representatives of these social classes in the sample.

The peer-group (PG) data for Reefer come from two card-game/gaffing sessions, and for Ustad from a spontaneous drinking/gaffing session. The spontaneous interview (SI) data for these focal speakers come from six hours of tape-recording each, more than for the average member of the sample. Their expatriate reinterviews (ERs) were conducted on the same day, but they differed somewhat in length and character.

The Expatriate Reinterview (ER) with Ustad, for instance, was relatively short (less than half an hour), since, as a Hindu pandit, he had to leave to officiate at a funeral. But it was a well-staged performance. Ustad hardly gave his three visitors a chance to talk, as he guided them through the history of the local Hindu church, outlined its patterns of worship, and emphasized

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As explained in Rickford (1986: 217): ‘The Estate Class (EC) is composed entirely of fieldworkers on the sugar estate: Cane-cutters, weeders, shovelmen, etc., the people who occupy the bottom rung of the sugar] estate hierarchy... The Non-Estate Class (NEC) includes drivers and field-foremen on the sugar estate, and clerks, shopowners, and skilled tradesmen who may have little if anything to do with the sugar estate.’
its difference from the local Madrasi Kalí Mai Puja group. He even chanted a prayer for them in the traditional Sankskrit version (‘If you no mindful, I could repeat the prayer’), and immediately followed this with a line-by-line translation into English. The visitors were impressed and intrigued, regretting only that he could not stay longer to say more.

The Expatriate Reinterview (er) with Reefer and his cane-cutting compadres was also a performance staged for outsiders, but considerably longer than Ustad’s, and covering very different issues. Reefer, Sultan and Raj, active and angry militants on the side of sugar workers’ rights, welcomed the opportunity to share the trials of their industrial and political situation with people from outside. For almost two hours in the night, seated under Reefer’s bottom house around a bottle of rum, they spoke agitatedly about workers’ conditions, the inadequacy of transportation facilities, favoritism in high places, and related themes. Their awareness and understanding of international events (as revealed by their references to President Tito in Yugoslavia and the situation in the Soviet Union) impressed the visitors. But as they became more involved in their subject, they also spoke more rapidly and excitedly, and parts of their message were perhaps lost on the visitors (less likely so with Bickerton, who had years of prior fieldwork experience in Guyana).

Although these and other Expatriate Reinterviews varied in their length and character, they were all marked by an awareness on the part of the Cane Walk interviewees that they were talking to white expatriates — people who were similar to the managers and supervisors they were familiar with from the sugar-estate environment, and people who were presumably as important as these (‘big people dem’, in the words of (10) above), if not more so. If, as suggested by the responses above, stylistic variation in Cane Walk is fundamentally influenced by the nature of the addressee and his/her language, we would expect to see some marked linguistic effects when we examine the data from this context.

4 Morphological pronoun shifts in the three addressee-based contexts

Table 1 presents a quantitative view of the outputs of Reefer and Ustad in these three contexts. The N’s for Table 1 are provided in Table 2.
If we consider the number of subcategories that show statistically significant ‘upshifts’\textsuperscript{6} in their relative frequencies of non-basilectal pronoun forms between adjacent stylistic contexts (symbolized by asterisks to the right of the relative frequencies in Table 1)\textsuperscript{7}, we can see that Ustad shifted upwards between the PG and SI contexts and between the SI and ER contexts, but more between the former two (in two out of five possible categories, or 40%) than between the latter two (in one out of four possible categories, or 25%)\textsuperscript{8}. By contrast, Reefer showed NO statistically significant up shifts between his PG and SI interviews, but he did shift significantly in two of his six pronoun subcategories (or 33%) between his SI and ER stylistic contexts. The difference between the absolute levels of non-basilectal usage displayed by these two speakers is considerable, but they generally confirm the native-speaker view that who you talk to affects how you talk.

The mean relative frequencies of non-basilectal variants per speaker and stylistic context, across all six personal pronoun subcategories, are interesting, too, confirming the impressions we get from looking at the pronoun subcategories individually. Reefer, for instance, shows a significant shift in his overall mean between the SI and ER contexts (from .04 to .15, $p<.0001$), but shows no shift at all in his mean between the PG and SI contexts. By contrast, Ustad shows a statistically significant shift both between his SI and ER contexts (from .84 to .95, $p=.0223$), and between his PG and SI contexts (from .65 to .84, $p<.0001$). These overall means are primarily a reflection of the statistics in the 1SUB subcategory, which, as Table 2 shows, account for approximately half the total number of tokens for each speaker in each

\textsuperscript{6}Statistical significance was measured by Fisher’s Exact Test (two-tailed). As with all such tests, sample size does influence results, and the relatively low sample sizes for Reefer’s PG context (49 tokens) and Ustad’s ER context (59) contexts are worth noting.

\textsuperscript{7}Basilectal forms are deep creole forms, furthest from Standard English in the Anglophone creole continuum. Acrolectal forms are closest to Standard English. And mesolectal forms are in between, relevant in categories that include three morphological variants, like third masculine object, with basilectal \textit{am}, mesolectal \textit{(h)i}, and acrolectal \textit{(h)m}.

\textsuperscript{8}Reefer’s shift between .00 (SI) and .33 (ER) in the 3rd masculine possessive subcategory is marginally significant, at $p=.0789$. Of course, it seems like a qualitative shift too, from no use of the non-basilectal or English variant /iz/ to some use of it (one third of the time). A similar argument could also be made for Ustad’s shift from 83% SI use of /i/ and /im/ in the 3rd masculine object subcategory to categorical (100%) use of these variants in the ER, but this is much further away from significance, in statistical terms ($p=.2890$).
I do not have comparable data on the performance of other speakers in all three contexts (the data on both the ER and PG contexts being more limited than the SI context), and therefore cannot document the structure of their style-shifting in the same way that I did for Reefer and Ustad. However, I do have some striking examples of situational or addressee shifts between the PG and SI contexts for some of the other members in the sample, and I wish to discuss a few of these briefly now.

One such speaker is Mark, a Non-Estate Class youth (son of a book-keeper and salaries clerk) at the time he was recorded. In his SI interviews with me (his cousin!), over several months, he used the basilectal or Creole first person subject pronoun mi only 14% of the time (24/169). But the extract below is from a conversation he had with Florine, his good friend, about 15 or 20 feet away from an interview I’d been conducting with Florine and his sister Magda. Florine had grown bored with that interview, which had become focused on Magda, and, still wearing her microphone, she drifted off to a corner of the room in which Mark was working over a sewing machine, complaining about customer ‘D’ to his dad, producing this close family/peer group interaction:

(13) MARK: You don’ fin’ fault. But D. always fin(d)in’ some bloody fault! ... he always fin(d)in’ some [fault]. He [is] like dem masquerade!

FLORINE: Who cut out?

MARK: M. do am. Me does wuk pocket.

FLORINE: Mark, dis machine na ah stitch good. Come see. Watch how e ah stitch.

MARK: Ah see da’! ... Me do de wais’, e too fat. Me tek am in, e deh good. Den, wais’ ban’ too long. Me do again, pocket down too low. He — he ah de wo(r)s’ body!

FLORINE: De bobbin done.

MARK: Oh shit! ... He always fin(d)in’ fault. Me na go sew fuh he no mo. Too botheration! Das why uh tell M. don’t sew one shit! Too bloody botheration!

—Note that the morphological variants, represented orthographically in extract (13) and other citations, but phonemically in IPA script in Table 1, have phonological variants of their own. For instance, acrolectal ai often undergoes monophthongization, with its most common realization being a. And, under stress, i becomes hi, iz becomes huz. And mi is subject to vowel laxing: sometimes being realized as mī.
In this extract, Mark’s use of first person *mi* climbs to 71% (5/7), and although the sample size is small, the contrast with his percentage use of *mi* in his Spontaneous Interviews with me (‘Semi-Formal’ in the terminology of Table 1) is still significant (p=.0017, Fisher’s exact test, two-tailed). Of course, there are other indications that his language has shifted in this peer-group encounter. For instance, his morphophonemic condensation increases, and he starts using expletives, something he had not done before.

A similar example is provided in Rickford (1987:152-4), in which Granny, who always used mesolectal *(h)i* for third masculine objects in hours and hours of spontaneous recordings with me (even including a dramatic danger of death narrative), shifted to basilectal *am* when discussing with her daughter, *sotto voce*, whether to grant a customer part-credit for a bottle of rum he wanted to buy from her shop.

In introducing these ‘anecdotal’ examples of style-shifts between the PG and SI contexts for Mark, and Granny, I noted that the data on style-shifting for these speakers was more limited than for Reefer and Ustad, and could not be handled as the latters’ was in Table 1. However, it should be noted that an example like Granny’s, although it shows a major shift in only one subcategory (3MOBJ) is quite recognizable as a style shift on this basis alone (although other parts of the grammar are also affected). It was certainly noticed by me, as a very dramatic shift, when it actually occurred. Examples of this type are valuable indicators of how powerfully situational or addressee-based switching can operate, even though these examples are less systematic and detailed than the evidence of displays like Table 1.
Tab. 1: Relative frequencies of non-basilectal, English-like morphological pronoun variants for Reefer and Ustad in three recording contexts$^{10}$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Stylistic Context</th>
<th>Means, all 6 categs.</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>VII</th>
<th>VIII</th>
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<td>1POS</td>
<td>1SUB</td>
<td>3NSUB</td>
<td>3MOBJ</td>
<td>3NOBJ</td>
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<td>ER (formal)</td>
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<td>.33</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<td>.26</td>
<td>.47*</td>
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<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.12</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ustad</td>
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<td>.83</td>
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<td>.87*</td>
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$^{10}$ - Cells with less than five tokens each. * = Statistically significant up-shift in non-basilectal frequency from stylistic context below; in ‘Means’ column, bolded frequencies are significantly higher than frequencies in stylistic context below; ER = Expatriate Reinterview; SI = Spontaneous Interview; PG = Peer-Group session; 1, 2, 3 = First, second and third person; M= Masculine, N=Neuter; Sub=Subject, Obj=Object; Pos=Possessive.
Tab. 2: N’s for Table 1. [Parenthesized cells have less than five tokens each, and, following Guy (1980), their corresponding relative frequencies are not included in Table 1.]

<table>
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<th>Speaker</th>
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<th>Total</th>
<th>I</th>
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<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>VII</th>
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<td>1SUB</td>
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<td>74</td>
<td>7</td>
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Metaphorical or topic-based style shifting

I have focused on examples of situational switching so far — conditioned by changes in occasion and addressee — for two reasons. Firstly because these allow the researcher to escape the problems of indeterminacy and subjectivism, which usually plague discussions of ‘style’ in linguistics, and secondly because the members of the sample themselves describe situational shifting as more salient. However, even within the same situational context, a certain amount of metaphorical switching — relating to functions, speech acts, or topics (Blom and Gumperz 1972: 425) — is also evident. It seems appropriate to introduce some examples of this type now, in order to demonstrate that it exists.

The examples I will discuss are all drawn from interviews in which the subjects were primarily interacting with me (si, or semi-formal context). These interviews provided the bulk of my data on each speaker, and allowed for the enactment of a wider range of relationships between the participants (interviewer and interviewee and bystanders) than either the peer-group sessions or the expatriate interviews. As Blom and Gumperz (ibid.) have observed, metaphorical switching is most prominent where the situation allows for the enactment of a wide range of relationships among participants rather than a narrowly constrained one.

Some of my neatest examples of metaphorical switching occurred in my interviews with Magda, turning on the variable interpretation of my role as academic researcher/interviewer asking questions, and familiar (second) cousin involved in mutual conversation. As long as the tape-recorder was running and Magda was wearing the microphone, the occasion was defined as the interview type, and Magda’s speech rarely became as spontaneous or basilectal as that which I observed and recorded on my more informal visits for

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11 Blom and Gumperz (1972) make two relevant points. One is that, among two of their four Hemnesberget peer-groups, metaphorical switching was significant, while for the other two — whose members most strongly endorse local values and view the local dialect as strongly distinct from the standard — metaphorical switching was either limited or non-existent. Given these findings, the existence of metaphorical switching cannot be assumed to be universally applicable; its existence in specific communities is an empirical matter. The second point made by Blom and Gumperz is that metaphorical switching is often below the level of consciousness, and may be independent of overt intentions and expressed attitudes. It is thus important to look beyond the fact that Cane Walkers do not explicitly mention metaphorical constraints on style switching, and examine their actual behaviour to determine whether they do switch metaphorically or not.

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food, drink, or ‘purposeless small talk’ (Malinowski’s ‘phatic communication’). However, Magda’s speech varied further away from or toward this latter type depending on the extent to which the topics were less or more like those that characterized our most informal interactions, and depending on the extent to which the questions I asked were more or less like those a stranger from the outside might ask.

Here, for instance, is her response to my question about what she does everyday, which becomes particularly formal and over-elaborating when I indicate that her cursory initial response is not satisfactory. Note the didactic ‘Start from the beginning’ — characteristic of teachers, parents, policemen, and the like — that I use here. Note too that the question is so alien to anything a fairly close relative might ask in informal conversation that Magda does not even appear to understand it at first:

(14) J.R.: Well, M., tell me wuh yuh does do everyday.

MAGDA: Everyday ... wuh?

J.R.: Wuh yuh day does be like?

MAGDA: Sew, sometimes read.

J.R.: Start from the beginning — when yuh get up.

MAGDA: When uh get up, ah brush me teeth [nervous laughter], I go and take my tea, right? And ... wuh... clean up and so. Wuhever time uh wake up!

J.R.: Wuh yuh like most fuh tea?

MAGDA: We-ell, I like bread, and cheese, and so.

Note that the relative informality of my language (consonant and vowel reduction, use of habitual does, non-inversion of questions and so on) does not detract from the formality that their content and tone define. Magda responds with careful, measured phrases, a reduction in ellipsis, and one of the only two examples of my/maı as 1POS pronoun that she used in a total of twenty-two tokens across all recordings.

Similar to (17) was her speech in the following extract where I was pursuing the normal interview questions about the interviewee’s father (‘old man’), mother (‘old lady’) and the like. The difference this time was that Magda’s father was my first cousin, whom I had known even before she had, being twelve years older than her. When I claimed that ‘I never meet ’im’, this could only therefore have been mock seriousness, and Magda responds with an equally mock-serious imitation of the very standard and formal speech that might have been appropriate with an alien interviewer who had never — in actual fact — met her family:
(15) MAGDA: I got uh nice old man [father]!
   J.R.: Eh-heh? I never meet ‘im. [Clearly, not true.]
   MAGDA: Oh yes? Would YOU like to meet HIM?

The *him/him* in this stretch of discourse is the only one used by Magda in a total of thirty one tokens of the 3MOBJ subcategory across all recordings.

Quite dissimilar to her speech in the above sections of the interview is Magda’s speech in response to my ‘Danger of Death’ question. The response will be given in some detail, to establish that the resulting ‘casual’ or ‘spontaneous’ speech is not simply a function of the question itself — which at first elicits a negative response — but a function of her reinterpretation of me as another one of the intimate friends and family-members around, and the situation as the normal everyday one in which such associates relate exciting events that have befallen them in the form of narrative. This reinterpretation of our relationship and the kind of situation it was, in turn depended on the intervention of Ajah, Mark (her brother), and Florine. Their comments helped to remind her that she was not talking to a stranger, that her denials were not appropriate in the company of friends and family, and that she would lose the floor if she didn’t get cracking with a narrative interesting enough to justify her holding it:

(16) J.R.: Yuh ever bin in a situation where yuh thought yuh gun dead? [Pause] Something happen to yuh an’ yuh thought yuh was gun dead?
   MAGDA: Me?
   MAGDA: Nooooo [drawn out, with low-rising intonation] ... I . . .
   J.R.: Yes! From how yuh tek so long to answer, I know i’s yes!
   MAGDA: [Nervous laughter] Naaaaw — I ain’ bin in no situation that I thought I would dead.
   AJAH: You na get no sickness or so?
   MAGDA: Only bad sickness I had is when I had duh abscess in me nose, an...ting. An — ah fall off cycle one day an’ bruise up me face bad-bad.
   J.R.: An yuh thought yuh did gone!
   MAGDA: Naaaw, I didn’t thought I did gone!
   MARK: [Teasing now — apparently tired of Magda’s attempt to play cool] She don’ think she go dead!
   MAGDA: I never think I gon dead!
MARK: I know yuh don’ think yuh gon dead!

MAGDA: [Getting heated now by Mark’s teasing, which has modified the statement she made in relation to a particular event into a general statement about life and death] I don’ bother if I dead. Yuh got to dead, yuh got to dead! I ain’ frighten dead. I could dead now an’ all! [All said very quickly].

MARK: [To J.R., still teasing Magda] She don’ study dead...

MAGDA: Me ain’ frighten fuh dead! I don’ study [i.e. ‘worry about’] dead at all! [Clears throat; shaken up by this brief exchange, and preferring to change from this general topic to her specific experiences] Ah — how uh fall off de cycle?

J.R.: Mm-hm. [Acknowledging her right to the floor].

MAGDA: [Falsetto] A night me an’ Tony went fuh a ride, an P. an Q. — we did racing, right? We turn [laughs] — we did drink Domino [wine] — wen we turn, we see two Jagdeo dog pun de road, we ain’ see it, an we — kankalang! — fall down!

FLORINE: Yuh run over [the dog]!

MAGDA: [High pitched voice, breathless] No — he ain’ dead! I nearly dead, not de dog! [Breaks into laughter. As I turn now to ask Florine whether she had had any similar experiences, Magda is clearly not ready to give up the floor, and breaks into one new story after the other] ... Oh, plenty thing happen to me, man. Ah tink ah woulda dead hey fuh truth [note how she says this before giving the details to verify that her forthcoming narrative is of the required type, and thus deserving of being heard before anyone else’s] — wen uh — cut me vein hey wid razor blade!

J.R.: An it start to spurt out?

MAGDA: Wuh! If yuh see blood! Plenty plenty blood! ... Uh did cuttin’ someting fuh he [pointing to her brother, T.] — uh did small, like she [pointing to small sister], an he T. — T. tell me, ‘Gi’ me leh me cut it fuh yuh’. Uh say, ‘No, yuh gon cut yuh han!’... [Other details about how she cut her hand] Ah went over to de dispensary an get it stitch up. An den a time uh had a...
Note the way in which — by the end of this extract — she is providing all the juicy details without prompting, adding direct quotations and onomatopoeic expressions ('kangkalang!') for dramatic effect, claiming to have an unlimited store of such narratives, and beginning a new story as soon as the old one is finished to retain her right to the floor. There are many features that document that Magda is operating in a different style by the end of this extract than the one she was in at the beginning of it, or the one she was in in (17) or (18), but of most immediate interest to us here, perhaps, is the fact that my/maı gives way to me/mi as 1POS marker, and him/hım gives way to he/hi for 3MOBJ.

Examples of metaphorical switching — like the one just examined — are rather long, and to prevent this paper from going on interminably, I will give brief summaries of what some of the other examples were like, emphasizing the general factors that were involved, and the shifts in pronoun usage that took place.

Darling is a member of the oldest Estate Class age-group in my sample, and she varies between the basilect and mesolect in normal speech. In the 3F Pos subcategory, she varies between basilectal i (7 tokens or 41%) and mesolectal ji (10 tokens or 59%). In different sections of her spontaneous interview, however, the relative frequency of these variants changes considerably. In her responses to the demographic questions that began the interview, about where she grew up, who her parents and grandparents were, and so on, she used three ji tokens and one i (75% and 25% respectively). However, towards the end of our first hour of recording, she went into a very emotional account of the time she was hurt by a married daughter who was staying at her home while her husband was away, but kept writing to the husband to complain about the ill treatment and inhospitality she was receiving. Darling herself discovered this by stumbling across a letter her daughter had written, and was so grieved by the allegations that she herself assumed all the symptoms of severe physical sickness. This is the period of her life in which she felt she came closest to death, and her account of the incident was accompanied by a drop in the volume of her voice, and a hoarse emotional delivery that recaptured all the suffering she went through. It seems trivializing to turn from this to the frequency of her 3FPOS variants in this section of the interview, but this was affected too: not a single ji possessive was produced here — all five occurrences of this subcategory were realized by i. (As a glance of the overall figures given in the second sentence of this paragraph will indicate, she used only two other tokens of basilectal i in this subcategory in all the other sections of her interviews.)

Again we have the question of interpreting the motivation for this metaphorical switch. It is not merely the fact that this is the classic response
to a ‘Danger of Death’ question—complete with the involvement that distracts
the subject from self-monitoring and allows spontaneous speech to emerge—but
also the fact that the lady has been talking to me for nearly an hour, in
the presence of her husband, and feels comfortable enough at this point to
relate to me as a fellow Guyanese and human being who might be expected
to understand and empathize with such an experience. Most interviews are
marked by some increase in comfort and good relations between interviewer
and interviewee as time wears on — unless the interviewer (or interviewee!)
really puts their foot in their mouth — and this is frequently marked by a
somewhat more informal style of speech on the part of both parties. This is
the reason why questions about the ‘Danger of Death’ are not usually asked
right at the beginning of an interview and this is also the rationale for the
convention established by some researchers (Edwards 1975, for instance) of
taking samples of formal speech from the first ten minutes of an interview,
and samples of informal speech from later sections.

While Magda is mid-mesolectal, and Darling the second most basilectal
speaker in the sample, Bonnette is the second most acrolectal speaker in
the sample. However, her three-hour long spontaneous interview includes
examples of metaphorical switching too. Most striking was the shift which
accompanied her account of the time the news was brought to her that her
husband had been involved in a car accident on the public road near their
home. In this long first-person narrative, dramatically enacted, and told in the
presence of her husband, mother, sister, and daughter to my wife and myself
as co-interviewers, Bonnette produced the first 3 tokens of \textit{mi} as 1POS that she
had used in nearly two and a half hours of speech up to this point. (Her overall
figures for this subcategory are: \textit{mi}=4, \textit{mai}=44, showing that all but one of her
\textit{mi} tokens were produced in this section.) Phonologically, this section of her
interview is also marked by a higher degree of morphophonemic condensation
or phonological reduction — monophthongization of \textit{ai}, loss of initial \textit{h} in \textit{hm},
loss of final \textit{t} in \textit{it} — than the earlier sections\textsuperscript{12}. The controlling factor is
again not just the topic, but the point in the overall interview at which it
occurred, and the fact that Bonnette was able to relate to my wife and myself,
not merely as interviewers, but as a married couple who could appreciate

\textsuperscript{12}Bonnette and Katherine, the closest-to-acrolect speakers in the sample, tend to
indicate style-shifts in the si’s primarily by phonological and not morphological or
syntactic variation. This is particularly true of Katherine, whose si data presents
a picture of morphologically invariant acrolectal forms, but whose shift towards
the informal end of the style spectrum is accompanied by sharp increases in
\textit{h}-deletion, vowel-reduction, and the like.
the anxiety a person would experience if something like that were to happen to his or her spouse. Certainly, as my wife told me later, showing her own involvement beyond the interview as an ‘interview’: ‘Thank goodness I never had to receive news of you being in an accident like that!’ (These may not have been the exact words, but they are the exact sentiments.)

What I have tried to show, then, is that most of the Cane Walk speakers demonstrated an ability to engage in metaphorical or topic-based shifting within the same general situation even though they did not single out this kind of switching when asked to verbalize the external constraints on their variation.\(^{13}\)

6 Conclusion

In the preceding pages I have introduced data from several Cane Walk speakers to demonstrate that they have more than one style of speech, and that they share similar norms about the appropriateness of these styles with different addressees or in different situations, and according to different topics. Addressee-or situational shifting seems to be the more conscious and perhaps dramatic type, but topic-based ‘metaphorical’ shifting also exists. Both types are open for re-interpretation as initiative, or situation-shaping rather than responding (Bell 1984, Schilling-Estes 2002), or as a form of strategic social action or stylization in the frameworks of Coupland (2007) and Snell (2010). To some extent, the lens we use to analyze style-shifting in the Guyanese creole continuum and other speech situations is less important to me, right now, that the fact that we expect and analyze such style shifting, which, as noted above, is not usually the case in descriptions of pidgin or creole-speaking communities. Note how different our impressions of the linguistic competence of Reefer and Ustad, not to mention Mark, Magda, Granny and Bonnette would be if we did NOT have the benefit of the style-shifts displayed and discussed in this paper. And how potentially \textsc{wrong} our characterizations of their diachronic or synchronic significance (in terms of the effects of age, class, gender, and so on) might be (cf. also Rickford and Price 2013). I would recommend to my colleagues in pidgin-creole studies AND sociolinguistics the strategy of multiple interviews with different addressees that I and others have used. But whatever

\(^{13}\)The evidence of fairly strong metaphorical switching in Cane Walk points up one weakness of Bickerton’s (1975) assertion that there are a number of style-shifts in his Guyanese data that seem to be unexpected or unexplainable because they occur within the same situation or context. The weakness of the argument is that Bickerton does not consider the role of metaphorical switching.
the strategy, let us not assume that our speakers are single-style speakers, or that what we gain from a single recording will constitute an adequate characterization of individual or community competence. Labov (1966), not to mention Fischer (1958) and Ferguson (1959) should have led us away from such assumptions and approaches long ago.

References


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