A Variationist Approach to Question Inversion in Bajan

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1 Introduction

1.1 Question Inversion — In Theory …

Stipulative Descriptions:

• **Std English: Subject-Aux Inversion** (Huddleston & Pullum 2002:95)
  
  **Statement:** (1a) John*NP is*AUX at home.
  
  **Yes/No-Qu:** (1b) *Is*AUX John*NP at home?
  
  **Wh-Qu:** (1c) Where *Is*AUX John*NP?
  
  **Statement:** (1d) Robin*NP likes Barbados.
  
  **Yes/No-Qu:** (1e) *Does*AUX Robin*NP like Barbados?
  
  **Wh-Qu:** (1f) What *does*AUX Robin*NP like?

• **English-Based Creoles: Rising Intonation** (Holm 1988:212; Bickerton 1981:70)
  
  **Statement:** (2a) Jaan de hoom.
  
  **Yes/No-Qu:** (2b) Jaan de hoom?
  
  **Wh-Qu:** (2c) A we Jaan de? (cf. Winford 2008:29)

1.2 Question Inversion — In Practice …

• **US/UK English not always SAI** (Bolinger 1957, Visser 1969, Williamson 1971)
  
  (3) Your aim that evening, then, was to go to the discotheque?
  
  (Huddleston & Pullum 2002:868)

• **Creoles can invert**
  
  Jamaican: (4) *Iz it* dat dem laik unu av waar di ada komyuuniti dem?
  
  “Is it that they like you all to have war with other communities?”
  
  (JA22.315)

• **Mesolect, semi-creole, AAVE vary even more**
  
  Bajan: (5a) Ma, **could** I leff de corner now? (BA29.959, Dougie S.)
  
  (5b) So you **don’t** like it stir up? (BA26.1059, Clement D.)

  AAVE: (6a) *Is Patricia, Ladon sister?* (EPA8.293, Foxy)
  
  (6b) You **don’t** believe me? (EPA7.2100, Foxy)

1.3 Studying Question Inversion

• Quantitative work on standard, vernacular and creole Englishes rare/non-existent

• Present study: **Bajan**
  
  – **Rate** of inversion / non-inversion
  
  – **Factors** conditioning/constraining variation
1.4 Inversion in Early Modern English (EModE)

- Ellêgard 1953
  - Factors conditioning rise of auxiliary (periphrastic) *do*
  - 1400-1700

- “Inversion” in EModE: **Main-verb inversion**

  (7a) **Likes** Robin Barbados?
  (7b) By what adventure *com* ye hidir? (Malory 1480:75-10, c. Ellegard 205)

- Auxiliary *do* said to preserve SVO order

  (8a) **Does** Robin like Barbados?
  (7b) ... *doe* you speake this seriously? (Johnson, ca 1599:436, c. Ellegard 205)

- **Do** only, did not study copular/modal Qs


1.5 Inversion in New World Black English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes/No Questions</th>
<th>Wh-Questions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inverted</td>
<td>Non-Inverted</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>AAVE (NYC)</strong></td>
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<td>Labov et al. 1968:293-9</td>
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<td>DeBoe 1996</td>
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<td>Van Herk 2000:177,181</td>
<td>126/156</td>
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<tr>
<td>Van Herk 2000:177,181</td>
<td>126/156</td>
<td>30/156</td>
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</table>

Table 1

2 Bajan Study Methodology

2.1 “Don’t Counts” (DC)

- Fragments: (9) *Five o’clock a morning?* (TD, BA31.186)
- Fixed expressions: (10) *Ya know?* (JB, BA31.348); *You understand?* (JB, BA31.770)
- Questions with tags: (11) *You said secondary, right?* (BG, BA33.131)
• Clarification checks: (12) *If I know anybody that ever get rob?* (TD, BA31.186)
• Scripted questions: (13) *What is your name?* (RS, BA33.8)
• What if / What about: (14) *Wuh if I ain’t know?* (RS, BA33.138)
• Wh subject, full verb: (15) *And wha happen?* (TD, BA31:248)

2.2 More Exclusions and Non-Exclusions

• Exclude as ambiguous...
  – Zero copula: (16a) *It (?) good?* (DS, BA29:880)
  – Zero auxiliary: (16b) *Where (?) she (?) livin now?* (TD, BA27a.347)

  **Copula/auxiliary inverted before/after deletion?**

• Keep (Do not exclude)...
  – Regular (finite) main verb, no *do* (17a) *You think dat I could go pon the man work today and talk like this?* (EH, BA26.1155)
  – Inverted: (17b) *Do you think dat I could go...?*
  – Non-inverted: (17c) *You do think dat I could go...?*

  **Non-inverted do here only on emphatic reading**

2.3 “Knockouts” – Categorically Non-Inverted

• 1003 Bajan questions after DC
  • 169 removed with “knockout” (invariant) auxiliaries/markers
    – *got* (18a) *Why yuh gotta run home?* (TD, BA27b.486)
    – *ain’t* (18b) *You ain’t see them?* (MT, BA11/12:1147)
    – *does* (unstressed, habit.) (18c) *You does use slang* (RS, BA33.1034b)
    – *did* (unstressed, past) (18d) *You did ever sick bad anytime?* (TD:BA26.919)

  **Characteristic Bajan forms categorically non-invert.**

• 834 questions left for variable analysis

2.4 Modeling Variation: Baseline factors Van Herk 2000, with additions

• Negation

  Negative: (19a) *You don’t help you self?* (BA31.975, non-inverted)
  Affirmative: (19b) *So, do you remember at school you friends and ting you had?* (BA26.361, inverted)

• Question type

  Yes/no: (20a) *Were you good at them games?* (BA27b.163, inverted)
  Wh-object: (20b) *What do you feel the fellas doing?* (BA29.214, inverted)
  Causative: (20c) *What you did frighten for?* (BA26.353, non-inverted)
  Wh-adverbial: (20d) *Where that did?* (BA26.94, non-inverted)

• Subject type

  Pronoun: (21a) *So what did they use to do then?* (BA29.772, inverted)
  Noun Phrase: (21b) *So how old de children is?* (BA31.265, non-inverted)
  Extended NP: (22a) *Any of them did any bad fight?* (BA26.583, non-inverted)
  Sentential: (22b) *The one who love you will make you happy?* (BA31.834, non-inverted)
• Transitivity

Intransitive:  (23a) You ain’ travel ø though? (BA27a.256, non-inverted)
Transitive with pronoun object: (23b) So where it would left you? (BA29.214, inverted)
Transitive with NP object: (23c) How would she get the money? (BA29.238, inverted)

• Auxiliary Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modals</th>
<th>(24a) Could I left the corner now? (BA29.959, inverted)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copular <em>be</em></td>
<td>(24b) That is you favorite? (BA27b.1480, non-inverted)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Verbal auxiliary <em>be</em></td>
<td>(24c) So he is going school still? (BA31.275, non-inverted)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Auxiliary <em>have</em></td>
<td>(24d) You ever had a real scary dream then? (BA27b.1151, ambig.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Auxiliary <em>do</em></td>
<td>(24e) Do you think that they should teach it to children in schools? (BA29.292, inverted)</td>
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2.5 Speaker Demographics

• Gender (M/F); role (interviewer, participant); SES (middle/working class); Age (33-85)

3 Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Appalachian</th>
<th>AAVE</th>
<th>Bajan</th>
<th>Jamaican</th>
<th>Guyanese</th>
<th>Samaná</th>
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<tr>
<td>Non-inversion</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>95.7%</td>
<td>95.8%</td>
<td>98.7%</td>
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4 Conclusions

• Bajan highly non-inverts, but ...
• Nonetheless systematic constraint-based variation
• Some common across varieties; some creole v. non-creole; some specifically Bajan
• Evidence of systemic Creole-AAVE relationship
5 Acknowledgments and Thanks

• National Science Foundation (#9545424)
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• Zoë Lidstrom—coding, varbrul preparation

6 References