

Gender and pronominal variation in an Indo-Guyanese creole-speaking community

JACK SIDNELL

*Department of Anthropology
Northwestern University
Evanston, IL 60208-1310
jsidnell@nwu.edu*

ABSTRACT

Drawing on data gathered during fieldwork in an Indo-Guyanese village (1994–96), this article shows that the gender patterns for variable pronominal usage are strikingly stable over time. In both this study and one conducted by John Rickford more than twenty years ago, women, compared with men, use more basilectal variants in the category of 1sg. subject (*mi* vs. *ai*), but fewer in the category of 3sg. objects (*am* vs. *shi/ii/it*). Rather than explain this variation as a “leveling out” (Rickford 1979), it is here suggested that variants must be understood in terms of their contribution to an unfolding interactional engagement. The conclusion remarks on the continuing confusion among sociolinguists regarding the analytical relevance of gender as an external constraint on variation. A more developed understanding of these issues depends on recognizing the way in which language variation serves as an indirect and constitutive index of gender. (Caribbean, creoles, discourse, gender, Guyana, variation, native speaker awareness)*

Although English-lexified, creole-speaking communities in the Caribbean have attracted a great deal of interest from sociolinguists, little of that attention has been paid to gender as a correlate of linguistic variation. Sophisticated models of grammatical description have been developed to account for the high degree of variation found in these communities, which are characterized as “creole continua” (Bickerton 1973a,b, 1975; Rickford 1979, 1987b). An important debate has emerged concerning the social implications of this variation from the perspective of a somewhat idealized (i.e. genderless) speaker capable of moving “up” or “down” the continuum, and possibly in other directions as well (Edwards 1983; Rickford 1986b, 1987a,b). Still, although researchers have been very sensitive to the possibility – even probability – of multidimensional variation (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985, Rickford 1987b, Garrett 1994), few if any have considered the use of linguistic variants as constitutive markers of gender. In some ways, then, the situation contrasts markedly with sociolinguistic research done in communities outside the Caribbean over the past thirty years. From its inception, sociolinguistic research in North America and Great Britain has taken

linguistic variation correlated with "sex" differences as a primary topic of study (Cheshire 1981; Labov 1970, 1980, 1990; Trudgill 1972a,b). However, as the switch in terminology is meant to indicate, this research has by and large been based on a model that sees linguistic variation as a direct correlate of sex differences (cf. the critique by Eckert 1989). Only recently have researchers begun to question the notion of a direct indexical link between linguistic variation and sex (Gal 1978, 1989, 1991; Eckert 1989; Friedrich 1989; Ochs 1992; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992). In a recent review of the literature, Eckert wrote:

Gender differences are exceedingly complex, particularly in a society and era when women have been moving self-consciously into the marketplace and calling traditional gender roles into question. Gender roles and ideologies create different ways for men and women to experience life, culture and society Despite increasingly complex data on sex differences in variation, there remains a tendency to seek a single social construction of sex that will explain all of its correlations with variation. This is reflected in a single coefficient for sex effects in variable rule or regression analyses of variation. THIS PERSPECTIVE LIMITS THE KIND OF RESULTS THAT CAN BE OBTAINED, SINCE IT IS RESTRICTED TO CONFIRMING THE IMPLICIT HYPOTHESIS OF A SINGLE TYPE OF SEX EFFECT OR, WORSE, TO INDICATING THAT THERE IS NO EFFECT AT ALL. (Eckert 1989:247, emphasis added)

One finds, on reviewing the sparse literature on gender-related variation in Caribbean creole-speaking communities, that researchers have often substituted sex for gender, and they have not found significant correlations. In the words of Rickford, "Basilectal pronoun usage in Cane Walk is strongly correlated with social class but is almost completely unaffected by sex membership" (1991:612). In the same volume, Escure remarks of the Belizean community she studied:

Most of the findings emerging from this study suggest that there is no consistent difference between women's and men's speech patterns: women do not overwhelmingly use more prestige variants than men; men do not especially favour vernacular forms; men and women do not systematically differ in the quantity of speech they produce. Such results are indeed interesting in that they reflect a society in which gender roles are less polarized than, say, in a white middle class context. (1991:604)¹

Escure's suggestion that a lack of linguistic differentiation is correlated with concomitant lack of polarization in gender roles, in Belize, is questionable on a number of grounds. First, there is no independent reason for supposing that social role differentiation necessarily leads to linguistic differentiation (cf. Schieffelin 1987). Second, the idea that gender differences should be consistent necessarily leads to the assumption of a one-to-one relation between linguistic form and social identity – when, in fact, it is possible for gender-based differences to show up at many different linguistic levels, or not at all. Recent work in ethnography, conversation

analysis, and social theory suggests that gender difference is complex and multi-dimensional; we might expect linguistic variation to show the same complexity, despite the fact that it may not "mirror" role differences at all times, in all contexts, or in all places (Thorne 1990, Goodwin 1990, McElhinny 1995). It certainly seems unlikely that gender roles will "translate" only into those variables that can be mapped onto a simple standard to nonstandard continuum. Third, once we see the ways in which the very language use under investigation is constitutive of the gender differences being reported, it is apparent that there is a kind of circularity to claims that see direct relations between them (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992).

In the following, I employ ethnographic and statistical models to investigate the ways in which language use is indirectly and constitutively related to gender differentiation in rural Guyana. The analysis focuses on the various meanings associated with variants in a verbal repertoire – and the way in which these meanings in turn become linked, through various forms of social practice, to local understandings of men and women as socially located actors. I argue that gender effects have been missed or misinterpreted largely because the notion of metalinguistic awareness has not been thoroughly theorized in sociolinguistics. I compare the analyses of Labov 1972, 1990, with that of Silverstein 1981; and I conclude that gender effects cannot be understood without taking account of the fact that metalinguistic awareness is conditioned by the referential and indexical attributes of the linguistic elements involved – attributes of linguistic form that are detectable only if one attends to discourse-level patterning.

SEX, GENDER, AND VARIATION IN ANGLO-CARIBBEAN CREOLES

Winford writes:

Very little work has been done on sex differentiation in language in the Anglophone Caribbean. Most of the primary sociolinguistic studies of the area, such as Winford (1972) or Edwards (1975), confine their sample populations to men, while others, such as Akers (1981), treat sex-based variation as incidental to other concerns, or rely on rather limited data. (1991:575)

This is a surprising situation, given the general acknowledgment in sociolinguistics that gender/sex-based differences in language use constitute a primary area of variability and change in progress (Labov 1980; Trudgill 1972a,b). It is unclear why gender has been so radically undertheorized in creolistics, especially since it has figured so prominently in other kinds of social-scientific investigation in the anglophone Caribbean (i.e. anthropology, sociology etc.; for an overview, cf. Trouillot 1992). While a few exceptions exist (Nichols 1983, Escure 1991, McWhorter 1998), gender has generally been written off as insignificant in accounts of variability within creole-speaking communities, as evidenced in the many studies that use "male only" sample populations. Those studies that have

not confined the sample populations to men have often reported no significant differences between men and women.

The classic study of sociolinguistic variation in Guyana is Rickford's 1979 thesis.² Rickford begins by showing that, when singular pronoun categories are lumped together, there seems to be little difference between men and women of the same class:

Within the EC, the women are slightly more basilectal than the men (.77 vs. .74), but only by a very narrow margin. In general, these statistics provide no support for the suggestion made in chapter four that differences in the socialization patterns of males and females might have their correlates in linguistic behavior. (1979:364)

Rickford then breaks up the categories in order "to demonstrate that the equivalence of the sexes shown ... is not merely a function of aggregating the various subcategories" (1979:366). Although he finds significant degrees of variation between men and women within some individual subcategories (to be discussed below), he concludes that "it is this constant balancing out of differences - where they do exist - which produces the overall impression of equivalence between the sexes" (1979:368). Such an argument is based on the assumption of equivalence between different subcategory variables within a single grammatical category, pronouns. However, we may find that different subcategories and the variants therein actually have different meanings for their users. Given this situation, we might hypothesize that men and women are using the creole-to-standard range differently. While maintaining the idea of a single more-to-less creole dimension, we want to investigate the peculiarities of each variable, thus revealing the various indexical meanings that are commonly attached to particular pronominal subcategories.

THE COMMUNITY

All the speakers in this sample live in a village of just under seven hundred people, about forty-five minutes' drive from Georgetown in East Coast Demerara. The village, like its neighbors, is cut into two parts by the busy public road which winds its way to Berbice. The most prized houses line the road, while others are set farther back, either in the *pasture* 'sea side of road' or the *backdam* 'canal side of road.' Houses vary in size from the one-room wooden shelter, often raised about twelve feet off the ground to provide a *bottomhouse* 'porch-like structure beneath the main house', to the large cement-block houses of the richest sector of the community. Families vary in size and composition; most common is the nuclear-type unit comprised of a husband, a wife, and their children. Other houses are occupied by groups of unmarried sisters and their mother, or by a grandmother and her grandchildren, or occasionally by an unmarried man or woman. Most houses are situated on plots of land belonging to a patrilocal corporate group. The most important economic activity of the area is rice-growing,

and the patrilocal group was traditionally important for the organization of labor in this endeavor. Since the mid-twentieth century, small peasant landholdings with adjoining ricefields have gradually given way to a large-scale, highly mechanized rice-growing industry (Hanley 1979, Potter 1982). Thus wage labor has generally overtaken in importance the traditional modes of domestic labor organization. However, the patrilocal group has retained its importance in terms of ritual organization, inheritance, and everyday social relations based on reciprocity and asymmetric obligation (cf. Sidnell 1998a).

Generally, a married woman lives with her husband's family in one fenced *yard* 'unit of land belonging to patrilocal group'. This has effects for the operations of domestic power. Living in the same yard with a father and mother-in-law, as well as a number of other affines, a wife must exercise a certain care in how she comports herself. Very little escapes the watchful eyes of her in-laws. Married women thus face more restrictions in terms of movement; they are generally expected to spend most of their time in and around the house, doing domestic labor. Men are much freer to use the road not just as a thoroughfare, but also as a place to socialize with other men. Men have strong commitments to their peer groups which are often instrumental in the organization of wage labor in the form of work crews. Often, married men spend the majority of their time out on the road, at work, or in the rumshop; for several days, they may come home only to eat and sleep. Men who avoid their peers are often called *houseboy* (/housbai/), which implies that a man is not in control of his domestic affairs and must stay at home, either to do domestic labor or to watch his wife.³ Women have their own important peer networks; however, the relationships they establish tend to be more tenuous and short-lived. Alliances in women's social networks shift more rapidly than in the men's groups, and women do not overtly express the same kinds of sentiments of same-sex affection.⁴ Men's networks are often based in friendships stretching back to boyhood, while women's typically are based on some current association.

Although conflict is common in both male and female groups, women are more likely than men to be in a state of *not talking*. Such a situation often arises after one woman is reported to have been talking another's *name*. Women who are neighbors may go months without exchanging a word - although they will carry on informal campaigns against each other, issuing a series of charges and countercharges. Such conflicts usually reach a critical peak when one or the other is forced to defend herself against some charge (infidelity to a husband, theft etc.) At this point a *busing* 'big fight' or *quarrel* may occur (cf. Edwards 1978, Sidnell 1998b). Of course, women do have long-standing relationships with other women, often with a favorite female affine or a sister; but generally, women's networks are more diffuse, while men's are more focused. Men tend to draw a sharper line between their *partner* (/padna/, /pad/) or *buddy* (/bodii/) 'brother' vs. acquaintances, while women show less commitment to any one person or group in particular (except perhaps their own patrilocal group). Women are rather constrained,

then, both in terms of physical movement and in the quantity and quality of their social interaction. However, they do have strategies for mitigating such constraints. A husband who is too demanding, too lazy, or too often in the rumshop may be subject to public shaming by his wife. In the course of a domestic dispute, a woman will raise the volume and pitch of her voice to announce the many failings of her husband, ranging from being ignorant or lazy to being impotent or homosexual. After such incidents, a wife is usually able to exercise greater autonomy without having to fear her husband's retaliation.

Unmarried or widowed women also enjoy much greater freedom; however, unless they have some independent source of income, they face constant economic difficulty. A female domestic laborer – who may wash a family's clothes, sweep out a house, wash down the floors, and carry water all in one day – earns about one-fourth of the standard pay for unionized rice-laborers. Women without husbands often find themselves struggling to keep their domestic economies solvent.

Although the village is stratified in terms of access to socio-economic resources, the situation is rather less polarized than that described for former sugar plantation villages by Rickford 1986a,b and Jayawardena 1963. In such communities there is a well-recognized boundary between the Estate Class, who work in the fields, and the Non-Estate Class, who do not. Historically, advancement into the Non-Estate Class was associated with the adoption of the values and expressive behavior (including language) of the colonialists. However, the village where the present research was conducted was never associated with a plantation economy. The property, rather, was bought by thirteen formerly indentured East Indian men in 1883, and at that time rice was probably already being farmed there. Because of the labor requirements of non-mechanized rice farming, the patrilineal corporate group took on a great deal of importance for the organization of everyday life. Authority was structured along lines of kinship, rather than class, and those people who succeeded economically were never required to adopt the values and expressive behavior of the British colonials. According to current village inhabitants, this situation persisted until the 1960s. Nearly all adults remark that their parents and grandparents had no formal education, and only rudimentary literacy skills.⁵ Prestige and social power, then, were more associated with economic and agricultural success than with formal schooling. Although this situation is now changing, its effects are still quite evident. Most important for the present study is that fact that almost everyone in the village uses a basilectal to mesolectal variety of speech in everyday conversation. Even schoolteachers, both men and women, use mesolectal varieties when outside the classroom. The few people who prefer more acrolectal styles, and rarely speak in the local vernacular, are generally not well liked.

The sample for the present study consists of workers as well as a few teachers and shopkeepers (with fairly equal distribution of men and women). Each token

was coded for the class of the speaker (worker or non-worker). Effects for this parameter were of marginal importance, with non-workers showing a slightly greater tendency for mesolectal variants. However the worker/non-worker divide here is rather artificial, and patterns of interaction are not so much conditioned by socio-economic class. In at least one case, a shopkeeper and a worker were best friends.

There is another problem with the application of straightforward class analysis in this context. As Nichols 1983 has noted, occupation (the primary index of socio-economic class in most studies) is almost always a gendered notion already. (There may be some exceptions to this generally applicable statement, cf. Rickford 1986b on the "emic" status of class distinctions used in that study.) When sociolinguists assign class groupings across gender groups, e.g. to a husband and wife, a potential arises for misidentification – because it is often the case that work conditions differ considerably for each gender (cf. Nichols 1983). To explain some of the effects of class, age, and sex interaction, then, I have analyzed patterns for individuals rather than for members of particular categories.

VARIABLES USED IN THIS STUDY

Pronouns in Guyanese Creole (GC) – as Allsopp 1958, Bickerton 1973a, and Rickford 1979 have illustrated – show a kind of robust variation along a number of dimensions, and this makes them particularly well suited to variation analysis. However, the focus on pronouns in studies of variability in GC should not be taken to indicate that other areas of the grammar are more homogeneous; this is certainly not the case. Pronouns have been chosen here because they are easily identifiable and analyzable along both linguistic and social dimensions. "Copulas," the other grammatical category described in Bickerton's study (1973a), are a rather more problematic case, as Winford 1990 has shown.⁶

Basilectal singular pronouns contrast morphologically with corresponding mesolectal and acrolectal ones in a number of subcategories,⁷ as illustrated in Table 1. In actual usage, speakers in the sample did not approach the acrolectal end of the continuum in trinomial subcategories. We are thus left with binomial variables in each category. We can also exclude from our analysis those subcategories that show little or no variability, despite the potential for it. Genitives show variation when the Guyanese population is considered as a totality.⁸ However, the corpus used here is confined to relatively basilectal speakers, many of whom either do not command the acrolectal forms or do not use them with any great frequency. For this reason, I have included genitives in the analysis only at select points, because the variation is not robust enough to give a detailed analysis of this category. We are left with the variables isolated in Table 2.

The analysis that follows thus focuses on variability in two subcategories: 1sg. subjects and 3sg. objects.

TABLE 1. *Morphological basilectal, mesolectal, and acrolectal pronoun contrasts.*

	SUBJECT	OBJECT	GENITIVE	
1st	<i>mi</i>		<i>mi</i>	Basilect
	<i>ai</i>		<i>mai</i>	Acrolect
2nd			<i>yu</i>	Basilect
			<i>yor</i>	Acrolect
3rd	masc	<i>am</i>	<i>ii</i>	Basilect
		<i>(h)ii</i>		Mesolect
		<i>him</i>	<i>hiz</i>	Acrolect
	fem	<i>am</i>	<i>ii/shi</i>	Basilect
		<i>shii</i>		Mesolect
		<i>hor</i>	<i>hor</i>	Acrolect
	neu	<i>am</i>	<i>ii</i>	Basilect
		<i>it</i>	<i>its</i>	Acrolect

TABLE 2. *Morphological basilectal and relatively acrolectal pronoun contrasts adjusted to include only relevant categories.*

	SUBJECT	OBJECT	
1st	<i>mi</i>		Basilect
	<i>ai</i>		Acrolect
3rd	masc	<i>am</i>	Basilect
		<i>(h)ii</i>	Mesolectal
	fem	<i>am</i>	Basilect
		<i>shii</i>	Mesolectal
	neu	<i>am</i>	Basilect
		<i>it</i>	Mesolectal

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

If we take genitives, 3sg. objects, and 1sg. subjects together, and look for differences between men and women, then we find that men appear to use slightly more basilectal variants than women; see Table 3. However, if we break up the analysis into pronominal subcategories, the results are more complicated. With regard to 1sg. subjects (*ai/mi*), women appear more basilectal; see Table 4.

This is consistent with the results reported in Rickford 1979. In the subcategory of objects, again consistent with Rickford's analysis of Canewalk speech, men appear slightly more basilectal than women; see Table 5. But the relatively minor effect of speaker's sex is magnified if we consider only the most stigma-

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TABLE 3. *Distribution of basilectal subjects (1st), objects (3rd), and genitives by sex of speaker.*

	% of basilectal variant	Total
Men	85	428
Women	75	371

TABLE 4. *Distribution of basilectal 1st person subjects by sex of speaker.*

	% of basilectal variant	Total
Men	92	442
Women	97	251

TABLE 5. *Distribution of basilectal 3rd person objects by sex of speaker.*

	% of basilectal variant	Total
Men	58	178
Women	48	203

TABLE 6. *Distribution of basilectal 3rd person objects for animate referents only by sex of speaker.*

	% of basilectal variant	Total
Men	56	124
Women	37	158

tized forms in this group: the use of basilectal marker *am* for animate objects – see Table 6.

It is worth noting that the distribution of the variants described in this article seems relatively stable across time and geographic location. Rickford's 1979 findings concerning the distribution of variants between male and female groups match, in many respects, those reported here – despite the fact that the data were

collected more than twenty years ago in a rather different community. In both my corpus and that of Rickford (1979:367), men show a higher frequency of acrolectal variants than women in the subcategory of 1sg. subject (*ai*). Similarly, Rickford reports the same complex patterns of object variation that I discuss here (see below and Rickford 1979:368).

Now supposing that basilectal variants in each subcategory had similar pragmatic/indexical values in this community – i.e., that saying *mi* as opposed to *ai*, or saying *am* as opposed to *ii/shii/it*, amounted to essentially the same thing – then we might agree with Rickford 1979 that there is a leveling out of differences which gives the overall impression that gender is relatively insignificant. Alternatively, if we accept that different variables within the pronominal category may be associated with quite distinct indexical meanings, then we might still attempt to explain gender differences according to a single coefficient for sex, along traditional Labovian lines. Thus we might suppose that women lag in the use of variants that are stigmatized within the larger community (stable sociolinguistic variables), even though they lead in changes that carry local or overt prestige (changes in progress). But this explanation – what has traditionally, but controversially, been called the “gender pattern,” (cf. Fasold 1990, Labov 1990) – is not appropriate either. While *am* as 3sg. object might classify as a variant stigmatized in the larger community (see below), *ai* most definitely carries local overt prestige as opposed to *mi*. Women’s behavior in this community thus does not conform to the classic “gender pattern” (cf. the critiques of the “gender pattern hypothesis” in Coates & Cameron 1989, Eckert 1989, Haeri 1987).

Variation within and between categories

Why do men and women differ in their use of these variable categories? There are a number of possible explanations for the observed facts. We might, for instance, suppose that one of the variables does not correlate with a unidimensional creole-to-standard continuum. This possibility has never, so far as I know, been used to explain the kinds of gender-related facts we are dealing with here. However, the possibility that variation in “creole continua” is not restricted to a single dimension has been suggested on several occasions. Thus Washabaugh 1977 suggested that variation in Providencia could not be explained according to a single dimension; rather, it was necessary to take account of a distinct casual-to-formal dimension (a separate dimension of stylistic variation). Such a situation seems highly unlikely, given what we know about the relationship between social and stylistic variation; thus Bickerton 1977 and Bell 1984 argued convincingly that the variation discussed by Washabaugh could in fact be explained in terms of universal phonological processes. More convincing is the description of several communities by Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985; they argue that, within a single creole-speaking community, speakers orient themselves toward several distinct and often ethnically marked targets. While this is no doubt the case for commu-

nities like Belize and perhaps Guyana, such arguments do not, in and of themselves, detract from the persuasiveness of a theory that models some variants along a single more-to-less creole dimension shaped by both social factors (Rickford 1979, 1987b) and language-universal factors (Bickerton 1973a). Thus we might argue that one of the GC pronominal variants we are dealing with is actually a “gender marker,” and is therefore off the unidimensional continuum. However, such an explanation is ultimately inadequate for several reasons. First, as Eckert 1989 argues, there is no convincing evidence for a unique gender marker in other speech communities (despite the fact that the “iconic” values of particular variants such as “question intonation” might be indirectly correlated with gender; see also Ochs 1992). Second and more important, it appears, on the basis of native speaker interviews, that the creole-to-standard dimension is the salient one for the evaluation of both variables. To address this last kind of evidence, however, we need to examine the nature of metalinguistic awareness and its treatment in the sociolinguistic literature.

Metalinguistic awareness

The problem of what different variants mean to and for their users, within a community, has not been thoroughly theorized in variationist sociolinguistics (for an exception, see Lavandera 1978). The question can, I think, be addressed as two separate but related problems: (a) awareness, and (b) local significance or meaning. This is simply to say that, in order for variants to have distinct and analyzable indexical meanings (indicating class membership, region of origin etc.), users must be aware to some degree of the potential for variation within a particular category. The classic statement on the question of awareness in variationist sociolinguistics comes from Labov 1972, whose variable phonological rules depended on equivalence (i.e., “different ways of saying the same thing”). More precisely, phonological variables of the sort discussed by Labov 1972 are referentially equivalent but pragmatically differentiated. It was native awareness of the latter quality that Labov used as the basis on which to divide sociolinguistic variables into three categories:

Some linguistic features (which we will call INDICATORS) show a regular distribution over socio-economic, ethnic, or age groups, but are used by each individual in more or less the same way in any context. If the social contexts concerned can be ordered in some kind of hierarchy (like socio-economic or age groups), these indicators can be said to be STRATIFIED. More highly developed sociolinguistic variables (which we will call MARKERS) not only show social distribution over socio-economic, ethnic, or age groups, but can be ordered along a single dimension according to the amount of attention paid to speech, so that we have STYLISTIC as well as SOCIAL STRATIFICATION. (Labov 1972:283)

The third type of linguistic variable is called a STEREOTYPE, and is described as follows:

TABLE 7. Feature matrix for indicators, markers, and stereotypes.

	INDIVIDUAL AWARENESS	CONSCIOUS SOCIAL EVALUATION
Indicators	-	-
Markers	+	-
Stereotypes	+	+

A number of sociolinguistic markers rise to overt social consciousness, and become STEREOTYPES. There may or may not be a fixed relation between such stereotypes and actual usage . . . Most communities have local stereotypes, such as "Brooklynese" in New York City which focuses on "thoity-thoid" for *thirty-third*; in Boston, the fronted broad *a* in "cah" and "pahk" receives a great deal of attention. Speakers of the isolated Cape Hatteras (North Carolina) dialect are known as "hoi toiders" because of the backing and rounding of the nucleus in *high, tide*, etc. . . . Such social stereotypes yield a sketchy and unsystematic view of linguistic structure to say the least. In general, we can assert that overt SOCIAL CORRECTION of speech is extremely irregular, focusing on the most frequent lexical items, while the actual course of linguistic evolution, which has produced the marked form of these variables, is highly systematic. (Labov 1972:292)

The categorization is based, then, on a notion of differing levels of awareness (evidenced in the effects of attention paid to speech, i.e. style shifting). Working within a Labovian model, we could then distinguish each type in terms of its position on a feature matrix of the sort shown in Table 7.

To the extent that researchers have been attentive to this issue, they have generally taken Labov's categorization as a starting point; most work has unquestioningly accepted that markers are the variables best suited to sociolinguistic analysis, because they show regular distribution along two dimensions not affected by speakers' conscious attitudes toward speech varieties. The method has then paralleled, in some respects, the exclusion of native-speaker intuitions in Americanist and early anthropological linguistics, and it is potentially open to the same critique leveled at those schools (see Silverstein 1981, Woolard 1992).

Under the assumption that native speakers are aware that variation is a possibility for a particular category, and that the variants are accorded stylistic and social significance (i.e. that they are markers or stereotypes), then the referential peculiarities (lexical, morphological etc.) of the variable are left out of the analysis (cf. Lavandera 1978). In many cases, this seems to have been the direct result of dealing with phonological rather than syntactic or morphological variables. Also, discerning the effects of the referential and indexical characteristics of a variable requires the analyst to examine variants in their larger discourse context.

Thus most research, rather than examining the referential and pragmatic peculiarities of the variables in question, has circumvented the problem of what variants mean to and for their users, and has posited some kind of standard-to-nonstandard interpretive frame through which native speakers assess the social and stylistic significance of particular variants. Included here are oppositions of creole vs. English, basilect vs. acrolect, and vernacular vs. formal registers. One confusing aspect of all these oppositions is the degree to which they are informed by native (i.e. locally meaningful) categories vs. categories invented by the analyst. Most studies do not directly address the degree to which the analytic categories used are part of native-speaker metalinguistic awareness or discourse (for an exception, see Hill 1987). However, in order to make a convincing argument for change or variation as a result of "stigmatization" or "prestige," it is necessary to show that native speakers share, to some extent, the analytic categories adopted by the analyst.

In fact, Indo-Guyanese creole speakers DO tend to think of variation as aligned along a creole-to-standard continuum (cf. Rickford 1987b). The polar extremes are referred to as *raw talk* (/raa taak/) or *Creolese* (/krioliiz/), on the one hand, and *deep English* (/diip inglisch/) on the other. Native speakers often refer to more mesolectal varieties as *mix-up talk* (/miks-op taak/) or as *broken-down language* (/brooken dong langwij/). When queried as to why the creole end of the continuum should be called *raw*, most speakers respond by insisting that *it en gat noo english in it* 'it doesn't have any English in it.' So it would appear that native speakers do, at least in some cases, evaluate speech production in terms of a unidimensional continuum.

In the case of the variables discussed here, there is little doubt that villagers evaluate the variants according to a creole-to-standard dimension, and that they do not directly equate either variable category with men or women. Evidence for the saliency of the creole-to-standard continuum comes from native-speaker intuitions about the two poles of linguistic variation in their community. The variation between *ai* and *mi* is thus often exploited in cases where one person mimics or mocks another, the use of the acrolectal variants being strongly associated with acting like an *English duck* 'person trying to act English'. Variation in 3sg. objects is evaluated in similar terms; in this case, it is the basilectal marker that is marked. As Bickerton 1973a and Rickford 1979 have noted, *am* usage is associated with country origins and East Indian ethnicity. Bickerton writes:

Am is salient because it is the only basilectal form in the system which is not perceived to be present in the acrolectal system (allowing for phonetic alternation . . .). It therefore becomes stigmatized; it always occurs, for instance, in imitations by Africans of rural Indians, even though many of the latter have wholly or partially abandoned it. (1973a:659)

In interviews, people often give examples of *raw talk* which contain *am*. As one of the few elements that are not a part of the English system, *am* has perhaps become perhaps the salient marker of the creole variety. In Labovian terms, it is

a stereotype. Such observations by native speakers indicate that both variables are evaluated in terms of an emic creole-to-English interpretive frame. We thus do not need to postulate the existence of distinct, local, and non-referential indexical meanings. The explanation for differences in usage is rather to be found in the particularities of each variable at the referential and pragmatic level. If we look closely at the way these items function in discourse, we can account for differences in usage by men and women in terms of the categories themselves, and in terms of male and female strategies for interaction. Such an explanation is based on the realization that the variables are caught up in a number of functional subsystems simultaneously: They are locatable in terms of a standard to non-standard continuum, and at the same time they function as referential items in actual utterances. This leads us to adopt a rather different perspective on metalinguistic awareness from that proposed by Labov – one that takes into account the suggestions made by Silverstein:

For the native speaker, the ease or difficulty of accurate metapragmatic characterization of the use of the forms of his own language seems to depend on certain general semiotic properties of the use in question. That is, the basic evidence we have for awareness of the pragmatic dimension of language use, susceptibility to conscious native testimony, is universally bounded by certain characteristics of the form and contextually-dependent function of the pragmatic markers in speech. (1981:2)

The three factors Silverstein isolated in his study do not reveal significant dimensions of contrast for the variables discussed here;⁹ however, his suggestion that metalinguistic awareness is “universally bounded by certain characteristics of the form” is a powerful and useful supplement to Labov’s argument concerning the influence of regularity, systematicity, and ubiquity.

Traditional linguistic terminology – which lumps into a single category forms referring to 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person – conceals an important difference between deictic and non-deictic lexical items. As has been pointed out many times (Jakobson 1990), so-called 1st and 2nd person “pronouns” differ from 3rd person forms insofar as they make reference to an entity (usually a person) only by indexing a SHIFTING role in the speech event. By contrast, 3rd person forms do not rely on such speech-event variables in making referential sense. The implication is that the use of 1st and 2nd person forms (and their variants) is more indelibly bound to the way in which social actors occupy speech-event roles, whereas 3rd person forms are more bound to the way in which speakers make reference to entities “outside” the speech event. As it turns out, this difference has effects on the way in which speech is gendered in this community.

THE PRAGMATIC VALUES OF 1ST PERSON SUBJECTS

Because the 1st person is necessarily self-referential (i.e. referring to the shifting role of speaker), acrolectal variants take on special or foregrounded meanings in

this context. Specifically, the prestige meanings associated with acrolectal variants like *ai* are predicated of the speaker. *ai* usage thus involves not only an assertion of acrolectal competence, as do other elements of the idealized acrolectal code, but simultaneously a foregrounding of the assumed identity of the speaker.

Thus the explanation for differences here may involve the way in which men and women differ in interactional style, and specifically the way they assume positions as authoritative speakers. For men, the use of *ai* is associated with the presentation of self as respectable and removed from the rural or working-class lifestyle. Often this occurs in cases where the speaker is attempting to manipulate a hearer who might be sensitive to such forms of social distinction. The manipulation depends on assuming a position of respectability. Consider the following (elicited) example of a prayer to God.

- (1) NS: *if mi gu sit dong in mi alta nou – mi gu see mi noo fu taak tuu gad*
 ‘Now, if I go and sit down in my altar – I will say I know how to talk to God
mi mos kom – mi mos see oo gad ai wanch yuu protek mii,
 I have to come I must say “Oh God, I want you to protect me,
ai wan yuu giv mii helt an strengt, ai wan yuu protek mi hous,
 I want you to give me health and strength, I want you to protect my house,
protek mii pikniü dem,” yuu noo?
 protect my children,” you know?’

Women also use *ai* with manipulative predicates in request-type acts. Consider the following example, in which an aunt is requesting her three-year-old nephew to talk.

- (2) SS: *ai want yuu taak yuu mos taak le mi hiir hou i a taak*
 ‘I want you to talk you must talk let me hear how he talks.’

Men characteristically use *ai* when calling to women on the road. Usually the woman is someone not completely familiar with the speaker. The following is a reported example:

- (3) TS: *wel yu gu star prooch shi – yu noo – kyeer wan – kyeer english langwidj tuu shi –*
 ‘Well you will start to approach her – you know? Use a– use the English language
 with her –
see heloo, ai lov yuu beebii wats op – yu noo –
 say “Hello, I love you baby what’s up?” – you know?
ai laik di wee yuu wak –
 “I like the way you walk” –’

The particular effect of the acrolectal pronoun is, in this case, linked to its pragmatic and referential value. Because it is necessarily self-referential, the assumed acrolectal, cosmopolitan identity of speaker is foregrounded. Felicitous usages of *ai* index authority, respectability, and middle-class values generally. Especially important for men, I believe, is the way in which such uses are associated with idealized middle-class sex/gender relations based in romantic love.¹⁰ Women generally avoid the use of *ai* because such presentations of self are, for them, more likely to backfire. Women will often be challenged on their usages, and an

audience may contest the assumption of such an obviously non-rural identity. In one case recorded in my field notes, a young women who was taking basic secretarial lessons in the village called out to a friend across the fence:

- (4) Girl: *hai darling, ai goin in, ai gon sii yu leeta*
 'Hi darling, I'm going in, I will see you later.'

A group of young men overheard the call and proceeded to mock the girl. The boys shouted: *hai hai ai goin in ai goin in fo leson ai komin out leeta* 'Hi, hi I'm going in I'm going in for my lessons, I'm coming out later.' Women are much more likely than men to be challenged on such usages if people suspect that they may be assuming a role beyond their country origins. Similarly, women are more likely to be labelled *biggity* 'arrogant' in *talking-name* 'gossip' sessions, both by men and by other women. Although men are also subjected to this ridicule, it is less likely to have damning effects for their reputation – and it may go on for some time before they even become aware of it. Furthermore, young men often use *ai* in situations where the key is fairly playful. When calling to a girl on the road with *ai lov yu* 'I love you', a young man cannot expect to be taken seriously; there are too many co-occurring signs (such as dress and the location of the interaction) which indicate that he is not what he is pretending to be, and that his intentions are less than completely sincere. In this sense, the usage is perhaps playfully manipulative: The challenge is to persuade the girl or woman to play along by ratifying the speaker's pretense of being something other than a local, working-class male. (Of course, this is rarely successful.) Women who use *ai* are more likely than men to be interpreted as self-elevating; hearers often assume that these women actually believe themselves to be members of the class who habitually use *ai*.

THIRD PERSON OBJECT VARIATION

As already noted, women appear to be more basilectal than men in their use of 1sg. subjects; but in the subcategory of 3sg. objects, they appear more mesolectal. When we look carefully at the variants involved, the 3sg. objects present us with a rather complicated problem. As the basilectal pronominal system gives way to more mesolectal patterns, case distinctions are lost, while animacy and gender distinctions are added (Bickerton 1973a, Rickford 1979). In using the mesolectal terms, then, speakers must assess the referent's relative animacy and gender (for animates). Not surprisingly, then, we find that both the gender and the relative animacy of the referent have an effect on the frequency of variant pronoun usages.

The relative position of each variant on a more-to-less creole dimension is tied to the kinds of semantic and referential distinctions introduced. Thus *am* is most basilectal, and it is most infrequent when it is used as a referring term for feminine referents (see below). Again the peculiarities of the variable seem to have an effect on the way it is interpreted in terms of the more-to-less creole interpretive frame. Specifically, more and less favored environments exist for the use of *am*, and these depend crucially on characteristics of the referent.

TABLE 8. *Effects of animacy on the variability of 3rd person objects (percentage of am usage).*

	% of basilectal variant	Total
Animate	46	273
Inanimate	75	93

As it turns out, although we find men and women using *am* at only marginally different frequencies (Table 5), women overwhelmingly avoid using *am* in its most creole and stigmatized contexts (for animate referents; see Table 6). Another way to put this is to say that women lead in the change by which *am* becomes functionally specialized for reference to inanimate referents. The changes in the category of 3sg. object involve the introduction of important semantic distinctions (cf. Bickerton 1975): Here the salient functional dimension is referential, rather than pragmatic. The focus is on non-participants in the speech event, rather than on the values and qualities associated with any of the persons occupying participant roles. Speaking about the variable use of *am*, Rickford remarks that there is

some indication that it is acquiring (or has acquired) a certain degree of specialization as an appropriate form for neuter (or non-human) objects ... *am* is still a more stigmatized form than any of the corresponding subject or possessive forms in the basilect, but speakers seem to operate with a rule that says: if you are going to use it, use it more often for neuter objects than any other. (1979:359–60)

The data here confirm a tendency to reserve *am* for inanimate referents. This is clear from the results of a binary coding; see Table 8. However, the effect of the animacy of the referent is rather more complicated than this binary distinction suggests, since it interacts with gender-of-referent effects. In fact, if one uses a tripartite scheme – distinguishing male, female, and neuter entities – to code for the gender of the referent, then neuter (or inanimate) and male referents overwhelmingly favor basilectal marking, but female referents do not; see Table 9.

It is apparent that female referents favor the use of a mesolectal variant (*shii/ii*), while male and inanimate favor marking with basilectal *am*. What accounts for this strong dispreference for basilectal variants in the feminine subcategories? One possible explanation is that native speakers are more aware of the non-standardness or creole nature of *am* when it is used for female referents. Although Bickerton does not say this explicitly, we might expect this to be his position. According to him, change within the creole continuum is organized by the universal principles of PARTIAL SELECTION and LEAST EFFORT (cf. 1973a:644). Ap-

TABLE 9. *Effects of referent gender on the variability of 3rd person objects.*

Referent	% of basilectal variant	Total
Female	17	147
Male	80	110
Neuter	75	109

plying these principles, Bickerton suggests that change proceeds in an orderly fashion, and he attempts to show that diachronic change and synchronic variation are two sides of the same coin: The implicational relationships of synchronic variation are seen as mirroring the way in which change has spread throughout a subsystem like pronouns. He argues that the basilectal grammar has the following 3sg. forms:

(5) STEP 1

	subject			genitive		object		
	masc.	fem.	neut.	masc.	fem.	masc.	fem.	neu.
	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>am</i>	<i>am</i>	<i>am</i>

Change is said to occur first in the feminine subject, giving the following:

(6) STEP 2

	subject			genitive		object		
	masc.	fem.	neut.	masc.	fem.	masc.	fem.	neu.
	<i>i</i>	<i>shi</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>am</i>	<i>am</i>	<i>am</i>

The next mesolectal form introduced is the neuter object *it*:

(7) STEP 3

	subject			genitive		object		
	masc.	fem.	neut.	masc.	fem.	masc.	fem.	neu.
	<i>i</i>	<i>shi</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>am</i>	<i>am</i>	<i>i</i>

Bickerton then suggests:

At this stage gender differentiation is interrupted, as the change process "recognizes" the salience of *am* ... the principle of least effort ensures (a) that replacement will precede rather than accompany gender differentiation, and (b) that a form in the system will constitute the replacement. (1973:659)

The resulting system is:

(8) STEP 4

	subject			genitive		object		
	masc.	fem.	neut.	masc.	fem.	masc.	fem.	neu.
	<i>i</i>	<i>shi</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>it</i>

According to Bickerton, gender differentiation of the object is then completed by the transference of another existing form from the subject class:

(9) STEP 5

	subject			genitive		object		
	masc.	fem.	neut.	masc.	fem.	masc.	fem.	neu.
	<i>i</i>	<i>shi</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>shi</i>	<i>it</i>

The strength of Bickerton's analysis is in its apparent parsimony, and in the overall neatness with which it seemingly accounts for a wide range of facts. But in this case at least, his explanation is neither completely convincing nor comprehensive. Two questions remain unanswered. First, no explanation is given for why gender differentiation should proceed by the introduction of feminine rather than masculine or neuter forms (Step 2). Second, it is unclear why animacy distinctions precede gender distinctions in the subcategory of objects. More problematic, I think, is the statistical evidence that both Rickford 1979 and the present study bring to bear. In fact, on the basis of statistical distributions, the ordering of changes should go in just the opposite direction from what Bickerton suggests, given the relatively infrequent occurrence of *ii* and *it* in discourse.¹¹ In Step 3, Bickerton suggests that *ii* and *it* actually precede the introduction of *shii*. Given statistical evidence that has shown a very strong dispreference for basilectal variants in the feminine subcategories, this order seems highly unlikely.

Rickford 1979, discussing the problem of gender differentiation in 3sg. subjects (and suggesting that the same reasoning might be applied to the objects), attempts to explain the dispreference of basilectal variants in feminine subcategories:

We can infer that native speakers avoid the genderless forms not only because they are obviously non-standard, but also because they pose potential problems of reference and understanding of a particularly acute type ... if one speaker's *hi* is always masculine while the other's may be either masculine or feminine, the POTENTIAL for getting characters mixed up is very great. (1979:361)

According to Rickford, then, referential ambiguity is resolved by a general statistical tendency such that, in otherwise unmarked contexts, *am* refers to male and inanimate referents, whereas *shii* is the unique referential term for feminine referents. While this seems to fit the observed facts of statistical distribution, it does not explain the preference for mesolectal marking in the feminine subcategory.¹² The referential ambiguity could just as efficiently be resolved by a statistical tendency to take *am* as referring to feminine and neuter/inanimates, and *ii* as referring to male referents. In such a case we would expect to find the distributions reversed, with male referents favoring mesolectal marking more strongly than feminine and inanimate ones. So Rickford's suggestion – that the dispreference for basilectal variants in the feminine subcategories is the result of pressures to be referentially unambiguous – does not explain the original selection of the feminine subcategory as the one to be differentiated.

Perhaps, then, the explanation should be sought in the interaction of animacy and gender effects with sex-of-speaker effects. We have already seen that the variation is affected by the animacy of the referent, and that women are leading the change by which *am* acquires a specialized function as an appropriate referring term for inanimates only (Tables 8–9). Women avoid the use of *am* when referring to animate referents. At the same time, women and men favor mesolect-

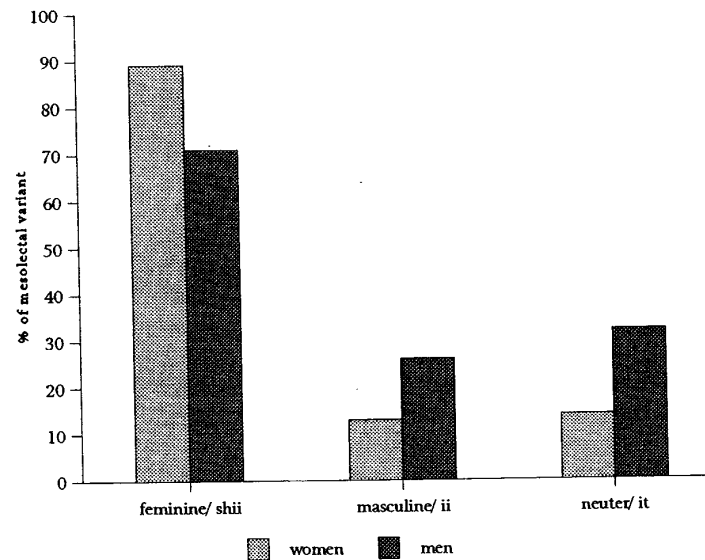


FIGURE 1: Effects of the gender of referent for male and female speakers (3rd person objects).

tal marking in the feminine subcategory (Table 9). This complex pattern of sex-based variability seems resistant to simple explanation. However, we might suppose that women have set a community norm here. Women, more than men, tend to reserve *am* for inanimates, and they prefer gender-marking pronouns for animates. If women lead in this general process, it is not too hard to imagine that they set a pattern in which mesolectal marking is preferred for feminine subcategories in particular.

Some support for this suggestion comes from the way in which men and women differ in their use of *am* and the mesolectal variants. Although basilectal variants are strongly dispreferred for both men and women in the feminine subcategories, men are more likely than women to use *ii* for male referents, while women are more likely than men to use *shii* for female referents. Such patterns seem to indicate an area of contestation between men and women: When men talk about men, they use the term marked for gender and animacy more often than women do; and when women talk about women, they use a term marked for gender and animacy more often than men do.

Figure 1 shows that the influence of gender and animacy-of-referent effects is partially collapsed for men but not for women, with differences between the

categories being relatively contracted for the male group. For men, the variation seems to be between more and less creole (or basilectal) ways of saying the same thing. That is, for men, the alternation between *am* and its mesolectal variants is determined more by the social, rather than the referential, significance attached to each variant. As noted above (and in much other work on the problem), *am* is strongly involved in the expression of working-class solidarity and local values. Social and stylistic factors no doubt affect women's usage of the variants too. But for women, another, referential, dimension becomes particularly salient. In avoiding the most stigmatized uses of *am* in reference to animates, they set up an association between this form and inanimates. Furthermore, women show a strong preference for mesolectal marking for members of their own sex-based category. This acts to highlight or foreground the animacy of the referent in discourse. It appears, then, that women and men are using the variability of the pronominal system quite differently. For women more than men, characteristics of the referent, in addition to the social and stylistic factors, play a major role in determining patterns of variability.¹³

The following is an example showing the general preference for mesolectal marking (*shii*) for feminine referents, and basilectal marking (*am*) for neuter/inanimate referents. S is complaining to her sister-in-law (Sh) that a young girl who lives next door was climbing on her fowl pen to pick plums, and subsequently broke it, but would not tell her mother (Miss):

- (10) S: *shi a pik plom. wen mi aks shii yestodee see shi na tel mii se shii brook am dong*
 'She was picking plums. When I asked her yesterday why she didn't tell me that she broke it down,
shi na ansa - shi klaim pon di fowl pen an brook am dong ...
 she didn't answer - she climbed on the fowl pen and broke it down ...
shi aks mi at hou (inaudible) den mi se shi na big iinof fu tel Mis
 She asked me if () then I asked if she wasn't big enough to tell Miss
da shi klaim pon-
 that she had climbed on
 Sh: -oo yea
 oh yeah
 S: - am brook am. mi na gu tel shii
 - uhm broke it. I'm not going to tell her
koz shi gu kos. shi don bina kos dis maarnin mi en noo fo wa
 because she will curse. She was already cursing this morning for what I don't know.'

The next example illustrates the alternation between the mesolectal term for feminine referents (*shii*) and the basilectal term for masculine ones (*am*). Kavita (Kav) is telling me how she, her mother, and her aunt had been playing with a three-year-old girl, Mando, who was also present at the time this report was given. During the course of the telling, Kavita's brother Kumar (Ku) asks Mando to repeat her performance from the day before. Kavita tells Mando to curse Kumar, her brother, switching to the basilectal pronoun (*am*) in doing so:¹⁴

- (11) Kav: *yestodee Mamii tel antii Beebii fu tel shii toch mii*
 'Yesterday Mama told Auntie Baby to tell her "Touch me"

an shi toch shi so an mi tel shi toch mi so an shi toch mi
 like this and I told her "Touch me" like this, and she touched me.
abiü tel tel shi don noo hiir shii mü don noo (laughs)

We told to tell her "Right on," this is what she said, "Right on."

Ku: *toch mi de Mando*
 "Touch me there Mando."

Kav: *sok yu teet pon am kos am tel i le i gu beed i doti skin*
 'Suck your teeth on him – curse him – tell him to go and wash his dirty skin!'

INTERPRETATIONS OF COMPLEX GENDER-BASED PATTERNS OF VARIABILITY

I have demonstrated that the two variables discussed show significant but seemingly inconsistent effects for the sex of the speaker. I argue that these inconsistencies do not result from the effects of a multidimensional continuum; i.e., neither of these variables directly indexes gender or any other social category. Instead, they tend to be evaluated by native speakers in terms of their position on a single creole-to-standard continuum. To explain differences in their use by men and women, I have suggested that it is necessary to look at the internal structure of each variable, particularly the way in which speakers reach metalinguistic awareness through an understanding of pragmatic and referential qualities. In the case of *ai/mi* alternation, I argue that differences between men and women are a result of different interactional strategies. Specifically – because these are deictic forms, indexing speech act variables – they have rather specific indexical entailments: *ai* usage foregrounds an assumed identity for the speaker, one that is relatively more difficult for women to sustain than for men. In the case of alternation between *am* and its mesolectal variants, I have suggested that women show a rather different kind of sensitivity to the referential or semantic distinctions involved, in addition to social and stylistic factors. Patterns of use with feminine, masculine, and neuter referents (Fig. 1) indicate that men and women employ different strategies in marking animacy through the use of pronominal variants. Having discussed the importance of the referential and pragmatic peculiarities of each variable, I will now consider the general implications of sex differentiation in relation to recent work on the relationship between speaker's gender and linguistic variation.

In the situation I have reviewed here, it is not possible to characterize women as either significantly more standard or more creole than men. Both of these explanations, however, might have been offered, given either emic or etic intuitions. Native speakers sometimes remark that women are more basilectal (more creole-speaking) than men. A variety of reasons are suggested for this, ranging from a moralistic insistence on the effects of teenage pregnancy and removal from the educational system, to normative ideas about the dominance of male members in rural Guyanese households.

By contrast, it might be surmised that women are more sensitive to overt prestige, and men to covert forms – especially given the importance of male solidarity networks and crews, which has been well documented (Abrahams 1983; Wilson 1969, 1973). For instance, Wilson 1969 argued that men in Providencia

were much more oriented toward local reputation, as opposed to supra-local values of respectability. Men's networks tend to be more embedded in informal associations between villagers than in the institutional structures of church and school. Although Besson 1993 has criticized this work for its one-sided interpretation of institutions like the church in the Caribbean, few ethnographers have challenged Wilson's central argument concerning the pivotal role of informal and local associations in the organization of men's daily activities. Though women are involved in local social networks, such associations tend to show less commitment to the covert values attached to speaking creole. Creole speech – associated as it is with unruly behavior (Abrahams 1983) and with certain kinds of peer relations – seems to be more strongly tied to the male networks than to female ones.

However, since both explanations posit uniform effects for the sex of the speaker, neither is sustainable in view of the facts of variant distribution (cf. Eckert 1989). This leads me to suggest an alternate explanation, one that I think explains the distribution of variants as a result of social forces at work in the community. Women seem to be more open to charges of acting *biggity* 'arrogant', and therefore they are more likely to avoid forms such as *ai* which foreground the speaker. At the same time, women are also frequently characterized as "country," stupid, ignorant, and perhaps most important, uneducated; and creole speech is often taken as an index of such personal qualities.¹⁵ Women are thus likely to avoid *am* and other highly stigmatized markers. For men, the extreme basilectal end of the continuum is used as a sign of solidarity and allegiance to an oppositional value system; women can also participate in this, but they face the possibility of misinterpretation by others (cf. Rickford & Traugott 1985). For men, the real symbolic payoff comes from an ability for "bilectalism," i.e. a display of competence in both basilectal and mesolectal or acrolectal varieties. For the competent bilectal speaker, creole (basilectal) usages – what community members recognize as real *raw talk* – are interpreted as strategic choices rather than the necessary expression of a lack of education and resultant illiteracy.

This becomes clear once we look at the patterns for individual speakers. In general, speakers can be grouped, on the basis of their usage of both variables, into four categories: acrolectal, mesolectal, basilectal, and mixed-code users.

- (12) ACROLECTAL: 5% or higher rate of non-basilectal usage in subject
 50% or higher rate of non-basilectal usage in object
 MESOLECTAL: 5% or lower rate of non-basilectal usage in subject
 50% or higher rate of non-basilectal usage in object
 BASILECTAL: 5% or lower rate of non-basilectal usage in subject
 50% or lower rate of non-basilectal usage in object
 MIXED-CODE: 5% or higher rate of non-basilectal usage in subject
 50% or lower rate of non-basilectal usage in object

Although the dividing points seem somewhat arbitrary, this division of speakers into relatively focused groups (three categories: acrolectal, mesolectal, basilec-

TABLE 10. *Categorization of speakers according to frequency of non-basilectal variant in two subcategories.*

	SEX	AGE	OCCUPATION	SUBJECTS % of non-basilectal variant	OBJECTS % of non-basilectal variant
ACROLECTAL					
Moses	m	24	teacher	75	67
Gigi	f	32	worker	15	63
MESOLECTAL					
Shanka	f	41	worker/housewife	0	82
Rita	f	38	teacher	4	67
Zinii	f	35	shopkeeper	0	56
Kavita	f	9	none	0	70
Kumar	m	7	none	0	70
BASILECTAL					
Mama	f	30	housewife	0	17
Seeta	f	33	housewife	3	45
MIXED CODE					
WeWe	m	17	worker	40	50
Kota	m	47	baker	18	50
Ashan	f	41	shopkeeper	14	44
Gobin	m	34	worker	8	40
Nancy	m	37	worker	6	33

tal) and relatively diffused (one category: mixed-code users) does seem to correlate with salient social categories in the village; see Table 10.¹⁶

Notice that the women, with only one exception, fall into the focused categories, along with the children. We should note the apparent anomaly of the female worker Gigi, who falls into the acrolectal focused group. Gigi is well traveled, and in fact currently lives outside the community in question. Her husband is frequently called away to work for extended periods, and at such times Gigi travels both to town and to visit her family who reside in the village. Her rather acrolectal patterns reflect this extensive travel – especially her familiarity with the capital, which is unmatched by anyone else discussed here, with the possible exception of Ashan. As an aside, it is instructive to note that villagers who had known Gigi since she was a small girl often suggested that she had forgotten where she came from and who she really was. Moses, the other member of this acrolectal category, however, is highly respected and is considered exceptionally intelligent by many of his fellow villagers.

The basilectal users, Mama and Seeta, are both married and living with their husbands' patrilocal groups. As such, they face the most severe restrictions on their movement (patrilocal group "honor" being partially dependent on their "rep-

utation"). Another set of women is in the mesolectal group. Obvious social differences distinguish these women from those in the basilectal group. First, mesolectal speakers Rita and Zinii are employed, and thus they are not restricted to the house in the same way as women like Mama and Seeta. Second, neither lives with her husband's patrilocal group. The other mature woman in this group, Shanka, is not permanently employed; however, she no longer lives with her husband, and she maintains a good deal of personal autonomy with respect to her patrilocal group. Unlike other poor and working-class women in the community, Shanka is free, in many contexts, from the surveillance of men and from the social sanctions that can be imposed by a patrilocal group.

In contrast, all but one of the mixed-code users are male. It is revealing to note that the one exception is an unmarried shopkeeper who is the undisputed head of her family of four resident sisters, their mother, and one child. (Note that men in the village frequently commented on ways in which Ashan was "unwomanly," and to them, unattractive sexually.) She has a wide range of contacts and has traveled extensively (to England and also all over Guyana). Ashan derives a great deal of local social power not only from her extremely secure economic position, but also from the domestic unit she heads, which is one of the most highly respected in the village. Kota, a baker who sells his product up and down the road from Rosignol to Mahaicony, is also well traveled both locally (with his everyday work) and regionally (having worked in Brazil, Suriname, and Trinidad).

To some extent, then, language use seems to correlate with actual and potential opportunity for travel. However, such correlations break down when we consider the bulk of the mixed-code users: the male workers. They have little experience of any place other than the village and its environs, and so their usage does not seem to correlate with extensive travel. Although not restricted to the home as are their wives, they have neither the resources nor the opportunity for extensive travel. What unites them with the other mixed-code users is their position within their own nuclear kin groups and domestic units. All these people are the generally acknowledged public heads of their domestic units. They thus have the authority, at least in some contexts, necessary for the felicitous use of *ai*. They also have local standing or reputation enough for the felicitous use of *am*. Even the youngest member of this group (WeWe), who is only seventeen, is the only employed member of his nuclear family, which includes his grandmother and two of his cousins. With the exception of the acrolectal group members, all the focused users, including the children in the mesolectal group, are relatively disempowered within the context of their own families in comparison with the members of the mixed-code group.

CONCLUSION

I do not want to overstate the dominance of men in the symbolic marketplace, because many women do use both the basilectal and relatively acrolectal varieties

in some contexts; however, statistical analysis seems to indicate a situation in which women are more tightly constrained in their use of the symbolic resources potentially available. Thus the situation resembles that described by Hill 1987 for Nahuatl-speaking women. She remarks of the Nahuatl women in her sample:

It seems likely that women may experience active exclusion from male patterns and that this is the reason they are at once both less *Mexicano* and less Spanish than men ... I might propose that women in *Mexicano* communities are, in fact, marginal to major social arenas dominated by men: the system of community offices, with which power coding is associated, and the system of *compadrazgo* and male friendships with which the solidarity code is associated ... They [women] are clearly sensitive both to stigmatizations that emanate from the norm of speaking *Castellano* and to stigmatizations that emanate from solidarity-code purism about speaking *Mexicano* ... Rather than think of the speech norms of women as marginal to a core of male norms, we might instead think of women's speech as highly constrained within a narrow range of possibilities, at the same time less *Mexicano* and less Spanish than men's speech, whereas men are able to use the full range of code variation. (1987:158)

The situation discussed here contrasts rather sharply with that of Detroit High School students described by Eckert. She argued that, "deprived of power, women must satisfy themselves with status. It would be more appropriate to say that women are more status-bound than men" (1989:256). She goes on to suggest: "Whereas men can justify and define their status on the basis of their accomplishments, possessions, or institutional status, women must justify and define theirs on the basis of their overall character." According to Eckert, then, "symbolic capital is the only kind that women accumulate without impunity." The evidence I have discussed here, particularly in the light of findings by both Hill 1987 and Eckert 1989, thus points to some interesting points of cross-cultural variability:

(a) The distinction between doing and speaking, between power and prestige, between power and the symbolism of power (symbolic capital) is a cultural one, and is thus susceptible to a variety of local interpretations. We can expect that some communities will be more attentive to the action in talking, and they will therefore not show the same kinds of gender differences in this regard as are described for Detroit teenagers.

(b) The distinction between action and talk is likely to collapse in communities that have experienced large-scale disenfranchisement. In a community where EVERYBODY is relatively disempowered, vis-à-vis a larger metropolitan center or colonial metropole, symbolic distinction, instantiated in part through language use, will take on increased significance, and it may in fact be dominated or jealously guarded by men. In such a situation, symbolic resources cannot be accumulated with impunity.

I have argued that the sociolinguistic situation in this rural Indo-Guyanese community should force us to re-examine previous sociolinguistic descriptions of anglophone Caribbean creole communities, as well as explanations of gender-based difference in general. The situation described, in terms of the statistical distribution of variant forms across male and female groups, is remarkably similar to the one described by Rickford 1979. This leads me to conclude that we are dealing with fairly stable patterns, probably common in many predominantly East Indian communities in rural Guyana. I have attempted to explain the differences in terms of enduring gender roles and the particularities of each variable. Once the particulars of the variables themselves are taken into account, it is possible to see a general pattern emerging: Men (particularly a certain subset of working-class men) tend to use a greater range of the continuum with regard to pronouns. Women, by contrast, seem to be more restricted to a focused area of the continuum. Women and men differ in their use of the forms themselves. In the case of 1sg. subjects, women favor the basilectal variant. At the same time, in the case of the 3sg. objects, the change in which women lead (toward a specialization of *am* for inanimates only) takes a rather definite direction: a preference for mesolectal marking in the feminine subcategory. In both cases, women and men show complex (yet sometimes quite diverse) kinds of variability that indicate a great sensitivity to the values of particular referents along a number of different social, referential, and pragmatic dimensions.

The situation I have discussed is significantly different from that described for Detroit teenagers by Eckert 1989. In that investigation, both male and female speakers seem to have fairly equal access to the symbolic resources embedded in language. This situation no doubt reflects the common ideological separation of "practical" and linguistic or symbolic action in many Western speech communities (the distinctions between language and action, power and prestige, etc.; cf. Rumsey 1990). In the GC community discussed here, language and linguistic styles seem to be much more closely associated with "real" power, and they are thus more jealously guarded. In this case, impunity is no more guaranteed in the symbolic realm than in the economic or political ones. Given this situation, women restrict their speech productions to a focused variety in the continuum – presumably, one they feel best suits their standing in the local community. Men, however, are more like to range over several styles, drawing on the symbolic markers thus available. At the same time, there is evidence that women – while leading in the change that brings in the less "solidarity"-marked basilectal variants, and therefore perhaps in some ways excluded from expression of local identity – are perpetuating a linguistic categorization that foregrounds their own animacy in their use of 3sg. object pronouns. We should also be aware of the possibility that a restriction to a certain speech style, indicated by a relatively narrow use of the variation available, may itself indicate a concern for the accumulation of symbolic capital. In fact, it is not possible to equate a greater range of linguistic variation directly with a greater concern for, or greater investment in, the vagaries

of the symbolic marketplace. In some situations, there may be a greater symbolic payoff in using a narrow range. In fact, I have argued that women in the village considered here ARE motivated, in their linguistic behavior, by a concern to present an appropriate image of themselves. This motivates their rejection of both the most stigmatized variants and the most prestigious ones; they are walking the thin, and relatively safe, middle ground. This should not be taken to mean that men are not concerned with the moral persona they present through various symbolic practices, including speech production. They too are motivated by a concern to display themselves symbolically. However, it is the men who have more invested in displaying multiple group or community memberships through their use of linguistic variants. I have suggested that this is in part the result of specific political and economic factors that have affected rural people in the anglophone Caribbean (i.e., a situation of relative disempowerment vis-à-vis a metropolis).

In the village, there is a generally held belief that women should spend more time than men at home; and in many ways their movement is restricted. However, to take this as the reason for sociolinguistic differences would be a mistake. Lack of exposure cannot be used to explain the dispreference for a variant like *ai* which is widely known in this community. Furthermore, to equate restrictions on movement with sociolinguistic patterns is to miss the ethnographic generalization that women must be careful both in how they move through the community (who they interact with, etc.) and in how they talk – both concerns that emanate from a common community-based construction of gender roles. As Eckert 1989 has reminded us, ultimately it is power that motivates and constrains linguistic usage; and in the case discussed here, this power takes very local forms. Wide ranges of linguistic usages, such as those evidenced by the people I have labeled mixed-code users, require that the speaker occupy a certain social position to be effective. The generally observed pattern in which women are more focused on a particular variety reflects the exclusion of women, with some exceptions, from such positions of local, kin-based authority.

NOTES

*For financial assistance, I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the Ontario Graduate Scholarship Program, and the University of Toronto Alumni Travel Grant Program. For detailed comments on earlier versions of this paper, I thank Jack Chambers, Hy Van Luong, and Bonnie McElhinny. Inspiration for this paper originally came from a seminar on Language and Gender which Bonnie McElhinny conducted at the University of Toronto. I also thank Bill Bright, Hubert Devonish, and Sally McConnell-Ginet, all of whom made very useful comments on an earlier draft. For encouragement and support at various stages of the project, I thank Don Winford, John Rickford, and Ralph Premdas. Finally, I would like to recognize the invaluable support and friendship of the Guyanese villagers who contributed to this paper in one way or another. None of these people should be held responsible for any remaining inadequacies.

¹Escore (1991:602–4) argues, however, that a certain group of women (the middle-aged group) are developing what she calls a “bipolar” repertoire, reflecting their role as brokers between multiple levels and multiple values of the society.

²Bickerton 1973a, 1975, includes no discussion of gender differentiation.

GENDER AND PRONOMINAL VARIATION

³Local terms with distinctive pronunciation are given in italics, followed by a rough phonemic rendering. For the sake of simplicity, readability, and consistency, in-text phonemic spellings and transcript excerpts are represented using the phonemic transcription system originally devised for Jamaican Creole by Cassidy 1961, and elaborated by Rickford 1987b. Most of the characters are equivalent to IPA symbols. Exceptions that occur in the transcripts here are listed below (adapted from Rickford 1987:7–9):

<i>j</i>	[dʒ]	voiced alveo-palatal affricate
<i>sh</i>	[ʃ]	voiceless alveo-palatal fricative
<i>ch</i>	[tʃ]	voiceless alveo-palatal affricate
<i>y</i>	[j]	palatal approximant/semi-vowel
<i>ii</i>	[i]	high, tense, front, unrounded
<i>i</i>	[ɪ]	lower-high, lax, front, unrounded
<i>ee</i>	[e]	mid, tense, front, unrounded
<i>e</i>	[ɛ]	lower-mid, lax, front, unrounded
<i>a</i>	[a]	low/open, short, central, unrounded
<i>aa</i>	[a:]	low/open, long, central, unrounded
<i>ai</i>	[aɪ]	falling diphthong
<i>o</i>	[ə]	short, central, unrounded, unstressed; or [ʌ] short, back, unrounded, frequently (but not always) stressed
<i>ou</i>	[ʌʊ]	falling diphthong
<i>oo</i>	[o]	long, mid, back, rounded
<i>u</i>	[ʊ]	lax, lower-high, back, rounded
<i>uu</i>	[u]	tense, high, back, rounded

⁴While Guyanese express contempt for *auntyman* ‘gay and transgendered men’, avowedly heterosexual males often engage in ritualized homosexual behavior. Small boys are often stimulated by an uncle or a close family friend. During weddings, men from the husband’s side go *barriating* – a ritualized journey to fetch the wife from her father’s family and bring her to the new residence. When they arrive at the bride’s father’s house, they dance in all-male couples and groups. The dancing, though taken as an expression of heterosexual masculinity, is rather plainly homoerotic.

⁵There are exceptions. Also, according to contemporary villagers, the older heads were often quite competent in either Urdu or Hindi (or both). Much education went on in the religious institutions, which were outside the colonial bureaucracy, at least to some extent.

⁶Elsewhere, Winford writes:

In the case of Guyanese singular pronouns as analyzed by Bickerton (1973) and Rickford (1979, 1980) there is perhaps little controversy involved in assuming equivalence between forms like *mi* and *ai* (both represent 1st pers. sing. subj.), *am* and *it* (3rd pers. neut. obj.), *am*, *shii*, and *hor* (3rd pers. fem. obj.), and so on. The semantic content and syntactic functions of such forms are fairly easy to specify. The picture is not so clear in the case of the preverbal particles which function in basilectal varieties and their postulated equivalents in mesolectal and acrolectal varieties. (1984:275)

I agree in part with this assessment; however, Winford does not take into account here the range of issues in determining equivalence of pronominal forms across basilectal and mesolectal varieties. It is true that one can establish the semantic equivalence of forms such as *ai* and *mi* for 1sg. subj., but the case of the 3rd pers. obj. is far more complicated. The analysis that I have presented here takes into account one of the complicating factors – differences in terms of the presence or absence of the semantic feature [animate] in basilectal vs. mesolectal pronominal paradigms. But this opens up a series of questions and concerns that lie beyond the scope of the present report. The alternation of *am* and *ii/shii/it* is an alternation between systems of pronominal anaphora; and pronominal anaphora works quite differently in basilectal and mesolectal varieties of GC. Thus the idea that *am* and *ii/shii/it* are in some way equivalent forms is seriously complicated. The issue of pronominal anaphora in GC is taken up in Sidnell 1998c; the issue of defining equivalence between basilectal, mesolectal, and acrolectal forms in creole continua is discussed by Winford 1984, 1988, 1990, 1993.

⁷I have purposely excluded variants which differ at a phonological level, since such cases require levels of explanation that are beyond the scope of this article. Rickford 1979, 1981 gives comprehensive accounts of vowel laxing, *h*-deletion, and *t*-deletion in pronoun forms. Vowel laxing produces the alternation between forms such as *mi* and *mii*, *shi* and *shii*.

⁸There were a few exceptions to this rule. Genitives are included only in the calculations that assess overall variability for all pronoun subcategories (Table 3), in part to make the results comparable with those reported in Rickford 1979.

⁹Silverstein 1981 isolates the following factors: unavoidable referentiality, continuous segmentability, and relative presuppositional quality.

¹⁰The idea of romantic "love" between a man and woman – a kind of equal partnership based on mutual respect – is not part of the dominant village and creole idiom. More often, gender relations between married adult men and women are conceived of as a power struggle and a hierarchical ordering. (The "proper" hierarchy is to have the man as boss, but this is frequently not the case; men who cannot control their wives are the butt of a great many jokes among other men.)

¹¹Bickerton's implicational scales are rife with "rule conflicts" and "deviances" in this area (1973a:660–61). See Pavone 1980 for a discussion of some problems with implicational scaling.

¹²Rickford himself remarks (1979:359) that he is unsure whether his suggestions should be taken as an explanation.

¹³In accounting for such a situation, we might suppose either that men are not attending to the relative animacy of the referent, or that they are purposefully characterizing all referents as unremarkable with regard to animacy.

¹⁴It is likely that *am* in this example is marking affect. The interactional routine that the children refer to here as *toch mi* and *don noo* are themselves affect-marked. When one friend says to another *toch mi*, the two make fists and touch lightly. The significance of the gesture is highly contextual, but it usually indicates agreement or approval of something said immediately before the routine was initiated. The expression *don noo* (completive + 'know') often accompanies such a gesture; it also marks agreement, approval, and/or interactional alliance.

¹⁵Of course, all of these are false attributions. In general, and in this sample, women in the village have as much formal education as men.

¹⁶I have included here only those speakers for whom a sufficient number of tokens was available to get a sense of their patterns as individuals, rather than as member of sex-based groups.

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