

RALPH FASOLD, *Tense marking in Black English: a linguistic and social analysis*.
Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1972. Pp. 254.

With this book, it can reasonably be said that sociolinguistic analysis has come of age. Fasold's work establishes clearly the claims that we have been making for this type of research into linguistic structure: that it is convergent and cumulative, as opposed to other approaches which tend to be divergent and isolating. This work shows how issues on abstract linguistic structures can be settled by identifying in advance the kind of empirical data which will decide them, and analyzing the data by careful and accountable procedures. F.'s work is not perfect in these respects, but it provides us with the best model so far for the calm and objective analysis of disputed issues which is so badly needed in linguistics.

F.'s new data on tense marking in Black English is drawn from a study of 47 Black speakers in Washington, representing the lower two social classes from an original group of 95. The defects of the entire study are frankly and clearly set forth by F.; they illustrate the general problem that the CAL staff has had in making contact with the speech community over a period of eight years. There were eight interviewers (not identified) who carried out interviews 'in a variety or circumstances, all of them rather formal' (27). A standardized questionnaire began with a small number of abrupt extracts from the vernacular style of other sociolinguistic questionnaires and continued with a much longer section on formal linguistic testing.

It will not be surprising to find that the data shows us a stylistic level intermediate between the vernacular and the standard language.

These limitations indicate that we cannot use F.'s study to draw conclusions about the Black English vernacular at its greatest distance from other dialects; and the sociolinguistic data on class and style is too circumscribed to permit comparisons with the Detroit sample or the random survey of the Harlem study. But Fasold has successfully exploited the Washington data to illuminate our view of the linguistic constraints on a wide range of grammatical forms. The very great convergence of his studies with others on basic structural points allows us to follow his reasoning with confidence as he enters new areas of analysis. We must therefore conclude that the sociolinguistic factors operating on Black English are relatively independent of internal linguistic factors, and appear to govern linguistic behavior in the same way at various points in the style and class continuum.

Since the study is centered about a specific theme, 'tense marking', it achieves a unity which is missing from some of the more general reports on BEV. F. groups three topics under this heading: the past tense marker *-ed*, the present tense marker *-s*, and the invariant *be* without a tense marker. There is an illuminating chapter on the relations of grammatical and phonological processes, and a short discussion of sociolinguistic correlations which is necessarily limited.

REVIEWS

There are some drawbacks to this scheme: e.g., it removes the largest body of data on consonant clusters from the main focus of the book. And in the final summary, F. frankly admits that he has not found that 'tense marking in BE' is a unified phenomenon. It seems clear that such a unity must come from a consideration of the tense and aspect system as a whole. One advantage of F.'s organization is that the very diversity of the processes and categories illustrates the cross-cutting currents which flow together to form the uniform grammar of a BEV. Moreover, it moves from the known to the unknown, building on previous findings in a way that justifies the axiom, 'the more we know about something, the more we can find out about it'.

TABLE I. Agreement of four sociolinguistic studies on variable features of the Black English Vernacular

	Labov, Cohen, Robins & Lewis (1968)	Wolfram (1969)	Wolfram (1971)	Fasold (1972)
(a) Preterit //D// marker deleted more often				
before vowels than consonants	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
in ambiguous forms (<i>lost</i>) than in regular past (<i>tossed</i>)	Yes			Yes
after consonants than after vowels	Yes		Yes	Yes
in past participles than in preterits	Yes			Yes
after /l/ than after /r/	Yes			Yes
in unstressed syllables than in stressed		Yes	Yes	Yes
(b) Absence of third singular //Z// more often than present semi-categorically absent in <i>have, do, don't</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
shows no phonological conditioning: no less for [iz]	Yes		Yes	Yes
no effect of following consonant	Yes	Yes	(No)	Yes
more than possessive and plural	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
(c) Invariant <i>be</i> used more in formal speech	Yes			Yes
great individual variation	Yes			Yes
age-grading	Yes			Yes
(d) Class stratification found in deletion of postvocalic //D//	Yes	Yes		Yes
deletion of postconsonantal //D//	Yes	Yes		Yes
presence of third singular <i>s</i>	Yes			Yes
use of habitual <i>be</i>	Yes			Yes

Convergence. Even a quick glance at F's book will show its remarkable convergence with previous studies of Black English. The above table indicates the many variable relationships which have been confirmed.

This impressive agreement in the results of studies of language in use leads F. to confirm a number of general conclusions on the nature of the abstract elements in the tense system of BE. The *-ed* suffix is firmly established in the grammar as the mark of the past tense, deleted by a variable phonological rule: more often after a consonant than before a vowel, more often after a consonant than after a vowel, more often for regular verbs than for those that show vowel change in the past. Furthermore, this deletion is the result of the same rule which operates on final consonants which are part of the stem, where it functions at higher levels than with past tense signals.

F. is also led to confirm the view that variation in the third-singular *-s* is not the result of a rule of phonological deletion. The absence of phonological conditioning, the low level of *-s* for many speakers, and its irregular distribution when it does occur, all reinforce this important conclusion.

F. confirms the 'habitual' meaning of invariant *be* which he had proposed in earlier publications, along with others, and also confirms the view that this is not an obligatory feature of the grammar: that there are no contexts in which habitual *be* stands in full contrast with the inflected form or zero. Again, the irregular distribution of *be* lends force to this point of view.

The fact that F. finds himself in such general agreement with previous studies does not mean there is nothing new in this book. In each chapter, there are novel and important findings, with persuasive arguments to resolve earlier disagreements. As a striking example, we can consider the effect of a following pause [—##] on final consonant deletion. Labov *et al.* (1968) [L.] grouped —## with —K, Wolfram (1969) [W.] with —V. It is important to note that this was not a documented disagreement: our own decision was based on the inspection of unpublished exploratory data, and W.'s decision was also not supported by published data. F. resolves the disagreement with evidence: Table 15 shows that 'the effect of a consonant and the effect of a pause are virtually identical' (67).

It is not accidental that there was disagreement on the case of —##. General phonetic considerations lead us to expect that following consonants favor deletion more than following vowels; but there are several arguments pointing in different directions for the effect of —##: e.g., with no following vowel, the cluster cannot be broken up by re-syllabification, and this would favor deletion; but on the other hand, the second consonant can be freely released in —##, which is not normal before a following consonant. Our early explorations of consonant cluster simplification in other dialects began to reflect this diversity: for White speakers in the Southwest, for example, —## behaves like —V. Recent studies of Gregory Guy with the Cedergren/Sankoff variable rule program have demonstrated the important fact that —## is dialect specific: for

White Philadelphians, for example, —## is consistently the least favoring of any following environment, while in New York, it is aligned with —K among White speakers as well as Blacks. This sub-category may therefore take on even greater sociolinguistic significance in future studies, since it is one of the choice points available to convey social information.

The example just given should not convey the impression that F.'s refereeing consistently favors L.: on many points, the decision is awarded to W., as for example, in the investigation of the effects of the preceding consonant. F.'s final form of the deletion rule preserves some features of W.'s analysis along with L.'s.

1. It includes *-sp, sk* clusters with the basic rule (as does W.); this requires a complex constraint to exclude *-g* and *-b* (as in *bulb*).
2. It includes the heterovoiced clusters in *bent, belt* (as does L.), though F. has only low frequencies of deletion here; recent studies show that other dialects do delete this *-t* freely.
3. It includes the effect of stress (as does W.), on the basis of solid data showing that unstressed syllables favor the rule.
4. F. includes final single consonants along with clusters (as does L.), though W. felt he had found differences in the constraints operating for these two cases. Here F. may have been misled by a weakness of the NYC study: the *-VD* environments were studied for only a small part of the data. L.'s rule posited that the two sub-cases were controlled by the same constraints without sufficient data to prove the point. Further studies of BE may confirm W.'s view on this issue.

The final form of F.'s rule is dependent upon an attempt to analyze seven independent constraints by tabular arrangements. The data are obviously not rich enough to permit such a breakdown, and F. resorts to the pair-wise comparison of various constraints in order to resolve the ordering problems. It is obvious that this technique is subject to error whenever the other constraints are unevenly distributed to the pair being studied. The Cedergren/Sankoff program (1974) was designed to analyze multiple constraints on variable rules in exactly such cases, where the typical configuration of linguistic data makes the usual analyses of variance unsuitable: multiple independent constraints unevenly distributed into large, small, and empty cells. F. has pushed the older arithmetic methods as far as they can go: we would all profit from a further analysis of his data by the C/S program.

In his treatment of the present tense marker *-s*, F. brings to bear several ingenious arguments with new and important data. This is one of the central questions for understanding the relation between BE and other dialects, since previous studies indicate that there is no basis for subject-verb agreement in BE (except marginally in the copula). F.'s evidence confirms that the *-s* is more often absent than present in *have* and *do* as well as regular verbs, is irregularly distri-

buted, and shows frequent hypercorrection. Furthermore, he shows by an ingenious examination of conjoined verbs that variation in *-s* seems to be the result of a fatigue factor typical of speakers trying to maintain a recently acquired feature. But he also shows that for some speakers at least, the *is* may be regularly present and removed as a whole by a grammatical rule, and its occurrence is not entirely an importation from other dialects. It does occur much more often in third singular position than elsewhere, and cannot be randomly inserted.

F. demonstrates that the overall distribution of *-s* is clearly bi-modal. He concludes that the *-s* may be totally absent for some speakers, but present in the basic grammars of others and deleted by a morphological rule. This is supported by the striking evidence that the form with an epenthetic vowel [iz] is deleted just as often as the single sibilant (as opposed to the [id] form of the past tense). This position is consistent with the varied nature of his sample, which spans a wider range of BE speakers than the adolescent groups which L. used for conclusions about the status of subject-verb agreement in the vernacular. There remains one important issue, concerning the presence or absence of phonetic conditioning on *-s*. While F.'s adolescents show some phonological conditioning, his overall data for the phonological conditioning of *-s* in clusters agrees with the basic finding of W. and L.: no effect of a following vowel in favoring retention of the inflection. When *-s* is added to words ending in vowels, there seems to be some phonological conditioning, but this may be in response to the phonotactic factors which operate here to favor the unmarked CVCV pattern.

Though we must accept this evidence that some BEV speakers do have the present tense marker *-s* in their system, there is important evidence to show that F.'s sub-group without *-s* is most typical of the BE vernacular. Torrey's recent examination experiments with Black second-graders (1972) show that the *-s* is not tied to the third-singular position in their semantic system. While children do fairly well at interpreting *-s* as a sign of the present to contrast *He hit the dog* with *He hits the dog*, they are far below chance in interpreting it as a mark of the singular in *The cats splash* vs. *The cat splashes*; furthermore, this feature does not respond to training programs which improve performance on other grammatical inflections. We must conclude that in the BE vernacular, *is* can be inserted as a formal present-tense marker without any clear identification with the third-singular position.

I will not attempt to assess here the detailed treatment of invariant *be*. F. repeats some of his previous arguments and adds new ones to show that *be* is a tenseless aspect marker of 'intermittent distribution in time'. He agrees with the general view in this point, but he is more diligent and accountable than many others in wrestling with legitimate counter-examples from his own work and that of Henrie (1969). To these I can add one of several recent observations of *be* which clearly refers to permanent states: an older woman speaking about religion to a younger one in a hospital waiting room said, 'Her Father be your Father'.

REVIEWS

Faced with such counter-examples, F. has no recourse but to set them aside as only a small percentage. It is clear that he is still operating within the categorical view as far as semantics is concerned. We clearly need to apply variable rules and probability theory to the semantics of the tense and aspect system if we are to cope with the empirical data. Wald's study of Swahili tense markers (1973) is an impressive move in this direction. A fresh look at the relations of time and tense will show that the categorization of these linguistic elements follows the same general patterns that we observe in the operation of linguistic rules at the phonological and morphological level.

Since I first received a copy of F.'s book, I have returned to it many times for data and ideas about how to analyze linguistic variation. As our field is advancing at a reasonable pace, it is inevitable that some of the arguments are now outmoded. But it is an eloquent testimony to the cumulative force of quantitative analysis.

Wang cites a mathematician friend who gave him this interesting insight on the difference between two fields: 'You know, in mathematics we step on each others' shoulders; in linguistics, you step on each others' faces.' Fasold has taken a major step to reduce the painful contrast.

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