'LINGUISTIC SHIFT - URBAN CREOLES AND THE BLACK CHILD IN EUROPEAN INNER CITY SCHOOLS'

Petronella Breinburg
University of Sheffield

Abstract

This paper explores the hypothesis that there is a linguistic shift in Language (dialect) of young black people in the inner cities of Europe. This shift is from the speech pattern of the parents, who are Creole speakers, to that of the lower working class indigenous population, and not that of the standard language indigenous population desired by the schools. There is also a movement towards a new form of the language of young black people. This new language I shall refer to as Urban Creole. There is also bi-dialectalism with the speaker moving from one speech form to another, depending on various factors. The main argument in this paper, however, is that the shift which is taking place is from Caribbean Creoles to local non-standard white speech. Generally speaking the items involved in this linguistic shift appear to be basically Vocabulary (lexical items in relation to Semantic), idiomatic expression and assimilations. The implication of this shift in relation to Education is a crucial one, since both parents and teachers pressurise the speaker into speaking what is called `proper English' (rejecting so called `backyard talk') and praise the speaker when a shift from the parents' speech has taken place. How much are teachers and parents aware that this `proper English' they so approve of and applaud is nothing but the low status speech of the lower working class indigenous population, which has itself for many years been considered a handicap in Education. This paper is purely descriptive and represents work in progress and does not come to a conclusion.

The Problem

It is fashionable now to talk about a `black dialect' meaning that Black people speak one dialect. What is more, That they speak is a `dialect' and not a language.

The first problem here is: who is `black'? Again it is fashionable now to call Asians `black', but only in certain contexts. For instance, when there is a post at senior level which involves the well-being of Afro-Caribbean people, and the said people complain that it is always Whites who are in control of planning and decision making, then an Asian person will be produced. In this context the Asian is `black'. When the context is that of underachievement of blacks, of black sportsmen, black muggers and so forth, then an Asian is not black. Then there is the speaker of 50/50, white/black

parentage. Such a person is also called black. But the said person may be living with his/her mother, who is white, and speaking non-standard white dialect (NWE); this speaker may not be in contact with his/her father, and may be living in an all-white environment. Does this person speak a black dialect? Then there is the class division within the black (Afro-Caribbean) community, as the association of black academics prove. The social class variable is totally ignored by white researchers who have a holistic view of blacks. Nevertheless this class variable does exist and many black people speak white British English, even though perhaps with a regional or geographical accent. There is the standard Caribbean English spoken and brought to Britain by middle class, including what is known as Colonial middle class, blacks. There are also the blacks who speak non-standard white dialects such as Cockney (CK), Sheffill, Bristolian, Stoke-on-Trent Pottery, etc. The control of this non-standard White English (NWE) by the black speaker is so complete that often we hear the phrase:

> 'I've heard then speaking and you can't tell that they are black.'

This phrase is uttered with pleasure by teachers, educationists, social workers and the layman alike. The same said teachers condemn Creole; hence we can say that NWE, of whatever variation, has a higher status than does CR.

But above all is the linguistic controversy - one asks within the linguistic framework, is what some black people speak a dialect or is it a language in its own right? This has to be ascertained if we are to argue on whether what we are dealing with in this paper is a `language shift' or a `dialect shift'. And is it a shift from one language to another, one dialect to another, or is it just a movement along a continuum?

The continuum argument may be possible if one is dealing with Creoles only. But even then, the difference existing between the Creoles constitutes a problem because there are many different influences on each variety. For example, Trinidadian Creole continuum would be influenced not only be European languages, other than English, but also by Hindi. In the St. Lucia or Grenada case there exists both Francophone and Anglophone Creole. It is even possible to hear a Grenada speaker use what is often referred to as Macaroni, in which French patois and English-lexical Creole is deliberately used in one sentence by Grenadian speakers (Kenrick 1982) as do Suriname people. In the case of the latter, the Dutch refer to it as `Mengtaal' (mixed language) (Breinburg 1982). Since French patois is from the Francophone family and English from the Anglophone, it would be difficult to place the Grenada speaker of Creoles on to one continuum. Would it be possible to place the speaker of London-based Creole (LCR) on a continuum with SE at one end

of it and Cockney (CK) of which there are many varieties, at the other? Or should these SE, CR and CK be placed in a triangle as in Figure 2?

NWE (CK) ---------- SE
Creole (?)

Figure 1

This continuum seems very unlikely.

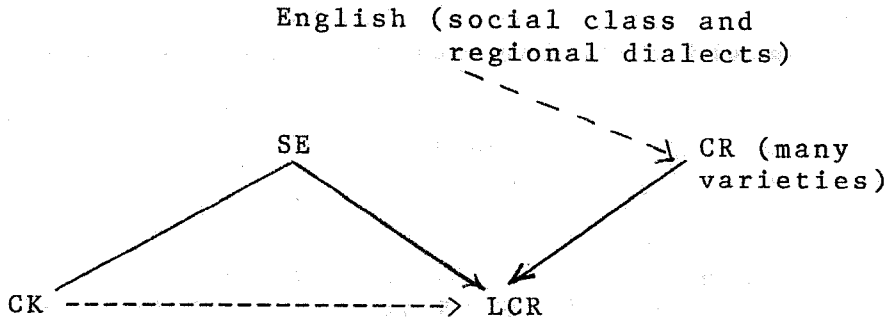

Figure 2

Or shall it be a hierarchical ladder with SE at the highest point and CK in the middle, seeing that the shift from CR to CK is highly praised, as in Figure 3.

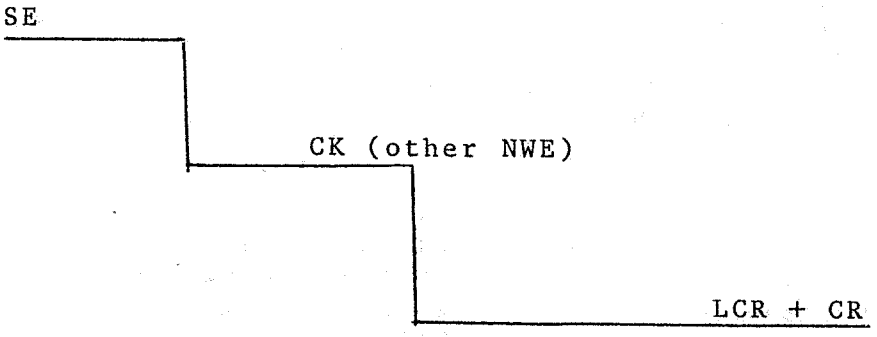

Figure 3

The case that Creoles are languages in their own right, and not dialects of another, has been dealt with by Breinburg (1981), Dalphinis (1982); and shall not be duplicated here. Nor shall I enter into discussion on the black people who speak SE (with or without a non-white middle class accent) or the LCR speakers. Instead I shall concentrate my effort on the blacks who speak NWE.

The questions to be asked are:

a) Is there evidence of a shift <u>from</u> the parents' CR (ignoring the parents who may be speaking SE). Here the term 'shift' suggests that the speaker spoke CR <u>before</u> he/she shifted to NWE.

b) Is it a complete shift, in which case the speaker uses NWE all the time in all situations, and in both mediums (i.e. spoken and written).

c) Is it a case of bi-dialectalism.

d) Does the speaker remain a semi-speaker, or is he/she bilingual only in the sense that he/she understands both languages or dialects, but cannot (or does not wish) to speak one of them.

e) If the shift is incomplete, what is being shifted from, and when.

f) What are the educational implications.

Characteristics of the data

Data was (and still is being) gathered from 14 to 16 year olds at school, 16 to 18 year olds out of school at youth centres; both white-controlled and black-controlled youth centre groups are included. Data also comes from 18+ university students of Caribbean (black) background. Attitude to language data is from black youth and black parents, white teachers and white lecturers in Education and in Social Work, also from community educators such as tutors in Adult Education. The cities covered are London, Amsterdam and The Hague and to a lesser extent to date, Brussels in Belgium, Bristol and Stoke-on-Trent in the Midlands. The data for this present short paper comes from Great Britain: London, Bristol, Sheffield and Stoke-on-Trent, to be specific.

The background of the speakers in the sample for this particular paper is; Jamaican parents, one Jamaican/one Guyanese parent - in which case the speaker hears two different types of Creoles at home, when relatives and friends visit. Left out at this stage is the sample of a Trinidad mother/Nigerian father. Included are the cases of white mother, NWE speaker, and black father, Creole speaker, with the offspring living in a predominantly white working class (NWE) area.

Abstract of sample

SPEECH (untaped) One London family

a)	i. Mother (CR)	bring im come dja (bring him come here)
	meaning:	bring him here
	ii. Son (LCR + CK, 15 years)	hih! yoh ere wha(-t) mam say, bring im ...!
	iii. Daughter (CK South East,	He ain waanna ...

13 years) meaning: He does not want to.

b) iv. Black boy (LCR, 16 years) Na waan of dem
meaning: It is one of them

v. Girl (NWE, 16 years) I sarer it, it wa(-s) cool
meaning: I saw it, it was cool

vi. Girl (LCR + CR, 15 years) He put wanj nja he put wanj dja - so ...
He put one here he put wan here so ...

SPEECH (taped) (i and ii from one family, iii a friend visiting)

c) i. Mother (CR) Sje com fi teach die child but sje aksing mi bout mi bisinis en how much chi'dren mi got, how old dem is, is dem dem all same father.

ii. Son (WNE + ?) Tha(-t) a tju, she was not doing wha(-t) she come fo(-r). She come to teach me but she asker me mam t(-h)ings.

iii. Girl (WNE, 14) I aint don nofing ...
(I haven't done nothing)
meaning: I haven't done anything.

WRITTEN

d) i. Same girl as (c.iii) - white mother/Jamaican father They was talking and sir shout at me, I say I aint done nofing ... but sir look is fag ou(-t), the hidiot.

ii. Boy, 15 (WNE Bristolian) He oussn't be able to see.

Analysis in brief

In a.i, the tell tale item is `come'. This is typical of Jamaican and Guyanese Creoles (and there are no doubt regional varieties). This is also a feature of SRANAN (again there are regional, social class and ethnic varieties). A Sranan natural speaker would have said:

'Tjaring kon dja'
(Tjari in kon di ja)

The tjari (to take) is structurally from Dutch, since there the term brengen (to bring) refers to both taking and bringing. Similarly, the bringing in Jamaican tends to refer to both bringing and taking. But this bringing syndrome is also typical NWE (especially so a variety of Cockney).

a.ii, the son's, is also complex since `ere' is South East Cockney, but `im' could be Jamaican (CR) as well as Cockney (CK), since in both the `H' syndrome is present. In Breinburg (1983) the `H' syndrome is dealt with to show how NWE drop `H'.

a.iii, the daughter's, like her brother's is complex. She uses `aint' (Cockney) since in CR, at least in Guyanese, she would have said `int'.

b.iv, the 16 year old youth, used definitely South East LCR, in which terms such as `waan' (want) are a fusion of CR and CK into LCR.

In b.v, we see our gutteral stop in evidence. This stop is very common in NWE (of which there are, as has been pointed out already many regional varieties). In Cockney and some other NWE, the last letter of the word is often left out, and the vowel shortened, i.e. was becomes wa(-s), out becomes au(-t). Here we must note the (a) instead of (o) in out. No doubt a phonologist would find this of interest.

b.vi is perhaps the most interesting of the samples, because here we have a typical LCR but with clear evidence of items from CR. We note that the girl said `he put' instead of `im' as in proper Jamaican CR. At the same time, her nja (here) is puzzling since it is almost like the `dja' (here) in one variety of Sranan.

Perhaps the purist form of NWE (Bristolian) is seen in c.iii and d.ii. When the boy produced `he oussn't be able...' the investigator completely misunderstood the meaning, as was the case in c.iv. The investigator interpreted oussn't to mean ought not when it really meant would not. Here is a clear example of semantic aspect of a language or speech pattern.

Summary and discourse

In a short paper of this kind it is impossible to analyse in full detail even this brief sample of the speech and writing of blacks in Europe. Often there is what one can call macaroni, in which two or even three dialects, i.e. CR, LCR, and NWE, are mixed into one sentence. Sometimes there are fusions of two dialects. At times there is what Fishman (1972) refers to as `Domain variance' in bilingualism, which simply means 'language use depending on situation and social context'. It has been found for instance that black youths

speak NWE when with their peer group, LCR when with their black peer group, and a secret LCR when wanting to keep adults - white officials out. This secret language is especially noted amongst Surinam youths in Amsterdam and black youths in the Pittsmore area of Sheffield.

The difficulties in proving that a shift has taken place remain unsolved in this short paper because detailed study of language acquisition within a sociolinguistic model would have had to be undertaken to establish that the speaker had at one time 'acquired' CR, and if he/she did, was he/she a semi-speaker (meaning that he only has a limited control of it) or a full speaker before shifting to NWE?

The implication for education is one which will emerge as this study, by a natural speaker of Creole, progresses. For the moment it can be stated that educationists, teachers and even some black parents prefer NWE to LCR or CR. This is evident in the manner in which black children who are speakers of NWE are highly praised, while those speaking LCR are considered to have educational `problems'. Paradoxically, Bernsteinian (1977) argument that language of the working class handicaps him educationally, refers specifically to whites, hence NWE.

Conclusion

There is ample evidence that a large number of black youths in European cities, including those of Britain, speak not CR (whatever variety), nor Standard English (or whatever the standard language is in a particular European country), but Non-standard white dialect(s). Since CR is considered a handicap and said to be one of the causes of educational failure amongst British black youth, we can now study the black NWE speakers' educational attainments. This present study would assert that black youths, whether CR, LCR or NWE speakers, are at the bottom of the educational ladder, and in CSE (Certificate of Secondary Education) groups, where with luck they will obtain a low grade, perhaps CSE grade 4. Since the CSE is of very little value because employers and institutes of higher education sneer at it, it can be said that CSE is not considered to be of any academic merit or status. What has to be undertaken now is a survey comparing the academic success of black NWE and CR speakers.

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