DE FACTO SEGREGATION OF BLACK AND WHITE VERNACULARS

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1. A SEGREGATED CITY

Philadelphia is the fourth largest city in the U.S., the 10th largest city in the world, with one of the largest black populations: 38% of 1 3/4 million people. It is also one of the most segregated cities, and that segregation is growing. Table 1 shows the increasing segregation of the black population in Philadelphia from 1850 to 1970, derived from Hershberg et al.'s 1981 study of the history of Philadelphia populations. The "index of dominance" in this table is a measure of the proportion of a typical person's census tract that consists of the same group; the initial figure of 11 shows that if a hypothetical black person walked through his or her neighborhood in 1850, 11% of the neighbors encountered would have been black. This figure rises steadily from 1850 to 1950, and makes a sudden jump to 72% in 1960. In contrast, the Irish, German, Italian and Polish groups show a steady decline. This is in part due to the fact that the third and fourth generations of these groups are no longer identified in the census figures as members of "foreign stock", while succeeding black generations continue to be identified as black. This immediate identification of blacks does not predict the steady increase of residential dominance, which is a direct reflection of the increasing racial segregation of the cities.

Table 1. Indices of dominance for blacks and other ethnic groups in Philadelphia from 1850 to 1970 (Hershberg et al. 1981, Table 8).

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<th>1850</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

This trend continues in the census figures for 1980. In each of the three major areas of black concentration, in North Philadelphia, West Philadelphia and South Philadelphia - the number of census tracts with 75% or more blacks is growing, and the proportion of mixed neighborhoods with 50-75% blacks, is shrinking. The large areas with less than 5% blacks are intact, and the lines between the black and white areas are sharper in 1980. There is racial segregation in housing, in jobs and in education. It is true that a growing number of blacks are moving into upper working class and middle class positions, and moving into mixed neighborhoods adjoining
the central black areas. But the number of black residents in the segregated inner city is growing, and the relative position of the majority of the black community continues to grow worse.

Our research project is concerned with the linguistic aspects of segregation. The English spoken by black Philadelphians is quite distinct from that of whites, and the differences appear to us to be increasing. There is a close parallel between the residential segregation and linguistic segregation, and between residential segregation and educational failure. We don't pre-judge the causal relations between language differences and educational problems, but it is obviously important to find out about the causes of linguistic isolation and divergence. We want to know as much as possible about how linguistic traits pass across racial lines in the city of Philadelphia.

The Project on Linguistic Change and Variation (LCV) used Philadelphia as a laboratory for the study of change in progress. We found that white Philadelphia was a single speech community, defined by a single set of norms and a single, extraordinarily uniform structural base. Linguistic features passed freely across ethnic lines within the white community. But not across racial lines: black Philadelphians had nothing to do with these sound changes in progress. The black community appeared to use a form of the Black English Vernacular that was very similar to that studied in New York, Los Angeles and many other areas.

2. THE BLACK ENGLISH VERNACULAR IN PHILADELPHIA

Our current research on the influence of urban minorities on linguistic change has returned to the study of the Black English Vernacular with new techniques, building on the methods of Baugh in Los Angeles (1968) and Milroy in Belfast (1980). Our main field worker, Wendell Harris, had a great deal of personal experience in crossing social barriers, but he quickly came to appreciate the need for special techniques to attack the Observer's Paradox, especially in making recordings in the black community. We studied some mixed neighborhoods in the transition zones, but our major concentration was on an interconnected set of social networks in the black areas of North Philadelphia. Harris had already access to extended networks of family and friends that reached into every part of black Philadelphia, and had extensive contacts among Philadelphia musicians and political activists. He enlarged these networks steadily, so that we could get a view of the language of black groups with different degrees of contact with white society: citizens, boxers, musicians, professional thieves and confidence men, and union organizers. He visited Columbus, S.C., where there were many families with Philadelphia connections, and recorded several groups there. At the same time, we searched for any whites who showed knowledge of the black community, and Harris expanded the work among blacks to include many Puerto Ricans who lived intimately with blacks.

Harris confirmed our earlier finding that the first interview with a group or an individual is an invaluable source of information. But he never interviewed anyone until knowledge of the broader, shared social background allowed him to go deeper into the emotional and sexual life than sociolinguistic interviews had gone before, and to obtain samples of emotional interchanges that reached a high pitch of intensity.

We can give some idea of the range of speech styles in our data by quoting from some characteristic speakers. The following extract is from an interview with one of the most established citizens connected with our North Philadelphia network.

De Facto Segregation of Black and White Vernaculars

He is the director of a funeral home, the son of a prominent black politician and magistrate, and lives in a middle-class, integrated area. Here he is reminiscing of an incident in high school, when he was wrongfully accused of stealing some musical instruments:

"Well, I hadn't become a director at that time. This was prior to the - this was prior to my becoming a student director to the Student Patrol. It was in my sophomore year. (Are you scared when all this happened?) No, I wasn't scared because I knew I hadn't done anything! But it was getting somebody to believe you, that was the horridly thing, and you know, you just - when you're falsely accused, it was had to say how you feel, because you try to get people to believe that you didn't do this, and that's the hard thing to do."

One of the speakers whose language is reported below is "Walt", a 40-year-old carpenter who grew up in North Philadelphia. Remembering his early contacts with whites, he said:

"The Italians treated blacks better than the light-skinned blacks treated blacks - the darker blacks, you know. This is a fact. Hey man-n-n! There was a girl named Jeannie, I never will forget her. I can't think of her last name. Jeannie used to come to my house and carry my books to school. I'm tellin' you! She would come to my house and get me - and carry mah books to school! We had a family - my mother's name was Louise. There was a family lived across the street - her husband was a number banker - right across the street on Washington Avenue. They used to make recipes and trade dinners. His wife name was Louise - you know, eh, like my mother."

Walt's opposite number in the younger generation is "Robert", 19, who was raised in North Philadelphia with minimal contact with whites. Like Walt, he has done a great deal of hustling; here he is talking a small operation with tickets for the Larry Holmes fight:

"(You know what I thought you were gonna tell me was the best thing - the hook-up with the ticket dude.) Oh, well with the ticket duh, right? I'm tryin' to get with him now so I can get some Larry Holmes joints, right? But like (He got them all ready for you ...) Shit, if he don't! (They got them?) Yeah, they got the tickets! Do they got the tickets? Cause, they got tickets unreal! We goin' right to the joint and sell the tickets. That's right! My boh Pepsi had got hel of 1500 Ticketron tickets."

One of the core members of the North Philadelphia network studied by Harris is "Jackie", 16 years old. In this individual interview, she is talking about family conflict at home:

'Cause, like, my lil' cousin, right? He is like, six years old. They was playin', next thing you know, he come - the lil' boy he come
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De Facto Segregation of Black and White Vernaculars

community grammar: the possessive and verbal /s/ inflections, the negative prefix, the copula, and the treatment of relative clauses. The extreme character of the core Philadelphia BEV will be evident if the data we present here is compared to that reported for the Sets and the Cobras in New York City in the late 1960’s (Labov 1972). Further evidence is provided by Dayton’s long term observations of tense and aspect in the Philadelphia black community which has been reported to linguistic meetings (1981, 1983). The national black community thinks of Philadelphia as a deep country town, and people are not surprised to hear that Philadelphians are far out, linguistically speaking. But we also believe that Philadelphia reflects a national trend in the black community towards continued linguistic divergence.

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3. SOCIAL NETWORKS AND SOCIAL HISTORIES

Almost 300 people were interviewed in the course of our research. This report will examine a sub-sample of 34 speakers from the social networks of North Philadelphia, to see how their linguistic traits are mapped against their social relations. Figure 1 displays their social interconnections. The solid lines represent primary peer relations: people who see each other almost every day. The close dotted lines are family relations: kin and people who live in the same household. The wider spaced dotted lines are secondary relations: people who know each other, but whose connection is maintained primarily through a third person.

The central network at left center surrounds “Eddie”, a relative of Harris who is the center of a tightly linked set of relations with males from 20 to 45 years old, named here the “Youngbloods”. Connected with them is a group of younger women, from 16 to 20, labelled the “Youngbloods”. At least three distinct networks radiate from Eddie who is also linked with the kin structure at right. This central social structure includes speakers who are the prototypical exponents of BEV as it is used in North Philadelphia. Though North Philadelphia is in a bad way economically, the Youngbloods are not suffering from this situation: they are the worst off. These speakers are not lower class people without skills. Most of them have received government aid in one form or another, but the men are carpenters, roofers, shoe repairmen and painters. The young women are mostly living at home, with their parents; many of their parents own their own homes, and have steady jobs.

The streetwise “Senior Citizens” at upper left are selected from an extended study that Harris carried out at a Senior Citizens center in the area, not connected at all with the main networks. These older speakers are from the same social background as the main networks: they grew up in North Philadelphia. Most of them had unskilled jobs, because overt discrimination prevented them from holding better ones. They are tough, street-wise people who have kept their orientation to the values and styles of the street in their retirement.

The networks on the right are connected by lines radiating out from “WAH,”
an hit me, right? I hits him back, now. All the time my brother and me was hittin' each other an' everything, an' he start cryin' and runnin' away. My grandmother never said nothin'. But then, when he hit me and I went to hit him back an' he told my grandmother come snatchin' out on me, pick up the cane an' gettin ready to hit me with it, an' that's when my mother snapped out on her. Because my mom was tellin' her, "Well, if my brother can play with him an' hit him an' everything, you don't say nothin' to him, why you always got to say something to Jackie?"

Among the many recordings of the core group, none showed a greater level of intensity than a session with Jackie and her close friend "Pam." They met at Harris's house to record their denunciations of the sexual behavior of a man that they both knew. They also dealt with the fighting reputation of a number of other young women in the neighborhood:

Pam: They ain't do shit! They ain't do shit! And from that day on we been walkin' up their block, and they ain't do shit. Koko big rocks don't mean shit. Yeah, like my mom say --

Harris: A lot of big people don't -

Pam: And they LOOK TOO GODDAM BIG!

Jackie: But Koko know what to do with her hands, you best a believe it, Koko know what she do with her hands! 'Cause the day we was playin' -- don't you know Pam, I playin' with Sherah an' them team, I'm playin' on Warrock team, an' they ready to come fight me! But that's because I had the Courland girls around there. If I wasn't went and got the Courland girls to play the baseball game, right, then there wouldn't a been no game! What made it so bad, Warrock still beat the fuckin' game, they was ready to right, you know why? cause Sharon, right, you know Sharon, she be hangin' with the Dude Boys --

Pam: Yeah, she beat Koko ass!

We use the term Black English to describe all the forms of English illustrated here and more; that is, the full range of language used by Black people in the United States. The term Black English Vernacular [BEV] is a linguistic term, not a social term. It refers to the highly consistent grammar, pronunciation and lexicon that is the first dialect learned by most black people throughout the United States, and used in much the same way by adults in their most intimate home settings with family and friends. In its most consistent form, it is illustrated by the last three quotations from members of the BEV speakers in north Philadelphia. They are vernacular speakers in the sense defined by Baugh (1983): people who live, work, and play among speakers of the same vernacular.

The results of our analyses show a BEV that is more remote from other dialects than has been reported before. This is illustrated in the quotations just given, but it cannot be demonstrated by the qualitative examination of individual examples. An accurate portrait of this BEV emerges in the quantitative and accountable study of the

Community grammar: the possessive and verbal /s/ inflections, the negative preterit, the copula, and the treatment of relative clauses. The extreme character of the core Philadelphia BEV will be evident if the data we present here is compared to that reported for the Jets and the Cobras in New York City in the late 1960's (Labov 1972). Further evidence is provided by Dayton's long term observations of tense and aspect in the Philadelphia black community which has been reported to linguistic meetings (1981, 1983). The national black community thinks of Philadelphia as a deep country town, and people are not surprised to hear that Philadelphians are far out, linguistically speaking. But we also believe that Philadelphia reflects a national trend in the black community towards continued linguistic divergence.

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The networks on the right are connected by lines radiating out from "WAH",

De Facto Segregation of Black and White Vernaculars
Wendell Harris. All of his personal connections are not shown here; only those where he is the sole link. Most important for this analysis are the Activists, the Musicians, and the Puerto Ricans. The Activists are engaged in militant black politics, including a close relative Yasima, and Jim, a close associate of Eddie. Outside of these social networks is another activist, Linda, who is a functionary of Outreach, a black social service agency. The musicians are friends of Harris and of each other, all of professional stature, but not all equally successful. The Puerto Rican group is linked to Harris through marriage.

There has been much talk about the importance of such dense social networks in the transmission of linguistic traits (Milroy 1980) and early work in Harlem among the Jets and Cobras showed a correlation between position in social networks and the rules of the Black English Vernacular (Labov 1972). It seems reasonable to plot the linguistic data against the social networks, to see if these close associations account for similarities and differences in linguistic behavior.

3.1. THE THIRD SINGULAR /s/

BEV differs from other dialects of English in the presence of grammatical distinctions that are absent in other dialects, and in the absence of distinctions that are present in other dialects. Among those absent features, one of the most sensitive and significant is subject-verb agreement in the present tense, signalled by the presence of the /t/ in infinitives on verbs with third person singular subjects. Other dialects of American English consistently show the /t/ in *He run, John goes*, but speakers of BEV usually say *He run and John go*. When they do use an /t/, it is likely to appear in the plural, or with first or second person subjects, or in odd places like *He get hurt*. For these and other reasons to be summarized in section 4, we conclude that BEV has no systematic way of placing a mark on the third singular of the verb.

The core group recorded in North Philadelphia shows even fewer verbal /s’s than the BEV speakers described in previous studies. Figure 2 displays the degree of third singular marking for the networks of Figure 1: the heavy black outlines represent 75-100% absence; the medium black outlines, 61-74%, the double outlines 41-59%, and the thin outlines 0-40%. While there is some consistent grouping of third singular /s/ values, especially on the right, the main networks in the center show an erradic distribution: heavy black outlines are mixed with light outlines without any clear regularity.

While it is true that close social ties can intensify linguistic similarities, social networks mirror linguistic structure only when speakers share a common social history. This is not the case for everyone here. It is true for the Youngbloods, who are young women who have gone to school together in the same area of North Philadelphia. But it is not true for the Oldheads: some were born in the South, some are not much older than the Youngbloods, while others have ten or fifteen years of life on the streets and/or in prison behind them. We can re-arrange these networks to reflect first of all similarity in social histories as in Figure 3. Here we identify a core group of younger BEV speakers, raised in North Philadelphia, who have minimal contact with whites: four males and females, and close to the right round them four other speakers under 25 who are not socially very distant. Jean is another relative of Harris, married to Henry, who goes to an all-black college and participates in street life; Stan lives with the core group, but is thinking of going to college; Robert is the same age as the others but is a professional thief.

The core group of twelve speakers consistently show less than 50% 3rd
Figure 4. Absence of possessive attribution /s/ by social networks in the No. Philadelphia black community.

Figure 5. Absence of possessive /s/ by social networks in the North Philadelphia black community.
singer /s/ and most show less than 10%.
and Con-Man. These three men have considerable experience in various aspects of
credit, playing cards, verbal exchanges with whites, cashing checks, drawing
money from the bank, and selling drugs.

At lower right center is a group of older black men who are labelled "Hustlers" by the
police. These men have considerable experience in various aspects of
street life that include dealing in drugs, credit, various forms of
manipulation, and the deletion of the verb and auxiliary forms of to be
in sentences like He comin' over here. In general, there are high correlations among all
variables, from .80 to .94. Yet there are differences among them, and grammatical
variables are correlated more highly among themselves than phonological variables.

Table 2 shows the r-correlations of five BEV variables. The highest correlations are
between the third singular /s/ and possessive /s/, two grammatical variables, and
verbs and auxiliaries that are more closely associated with black
and white, which characterize in quantitative terms the position of each speaker.
In their study they appear even more clearly that the core group of black speakers
with minimal contact with whites are widely separated from the rest of the population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3rd sg. /s/</th>
<th>Possessive /s/</th>
<th>Ain't / didn't (R) vocalization</th>
<th>A/in</th>
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<td>.93</td>
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4. THE GRAMMATICAL RE-INTERPRETATION OF S

To this point, we have been discussing the third singular /s/ in quantitative terms, as
the absence of a feature present in other dialects. Figures 2 and 3 treat this /s/ as
variable of BEV, though as we have indicated, previous work leads us to think the
variable presence of /s/ registers the irregular insertion of an element that has no
systematic place in the BEV grammar. In this section we will summarize the
findings of Myhill that among younger core speakers of BEV in Philadelphia, the
verbal /s/ is being interpreted with a new grammatical meaning, which makes it even
more different from other dialects of English. (Myhill and Harris, this volume).
black who have had considerable dealings with whites, whites who have much contact with blacks, and the general white population, all show a consistent use of this grammatical feature.

Figures 2 through 5 illustrate the separation of these core speakers in their use of two grammatical variables. The same general picture emerges through the study of a number of other variables, like the use of ain't where other dialects use didn't as in He ain't do that, and the deletion of the verb and auxiliary forms of to be in sentences like He comin' over here. In general, there are high correlations among all variables, from .80 to .94. Yet there are differences among them, and grammatical variables are correlated more highly among themselves than phonological variables. Table 2 shows the r-correlations of five BEV variables. The highest correlations are .93 between the third singular is/ and possessive is/, two grammatical variables, and .94 between two phonological variables, the vocalization of it/ and the alternation of a and an before words beginning with a vowel. Ash and Myhill (this volume) examine this issue more precisely with the help of an index of contact between black and white, which characterizes in quantitative terms the position of each speaker. In their study it appears even more clearly that the core group of black speakers with minimal contacts with whites are widely separated from the rest of the population.

Table 2. r-correlations of five BEV variables (n = 35)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>3rd sing.</th>
<th>Possessive</th>
<th>Ain't/ didn't</th>
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<td>(R) vocalization</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A/\n</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. THE GRAMMATICAL RE-INTERPRETATION OF S

To this point, we have been discussing the third singular s in quantitative terms, as the absence of a feature present in other dialects. Figures 2 and 3 treat this s/ as variable of BEV, though as we have indicated, previous work leads us to think the variable presence of s/ registers the irregular insertion of an element that has no systematic place in the BEV grammar. In this section we will summarize the findings of Myhill that among younger core speakers of BEV in Philadelphia, the verbal s/ is being interpreted with a new grammatical meaning, which makes it even more different from other dialects of English (Myhill and Harris, this volume). 

Studies of BEV in New York, Washington, Detroit and Los Angeles all point
to the absence of a systematic verbal /s/ in BEV, and with it, a general absence of subject-verb agreement. These findings show that BEV use of verbal /s/ is not a constriction like the consonant cluster simplification, the vocalization of post-vocalic /r/, or the contraction and deletion of the copula. Five grammatical rule systems of the Black English Vernacular:

1. The very low frequency of realization in the most vernacular styles.

2. The absence of phonological conditioning. When a final segment phonetic processes, its retention is favored when the next word begins with a vowel, and disfavored when the next word begins with a consonant. No such result has ever been found for third singular s.

3. Hypercorrection. When a variable element is firmly based in the underlying grammar, speakers know where it may appear and where it may not. Hypercorrection is the idiosyncratic use of a form in words and constructions where it has no historical or synchronic basis. BEV speakers show a great deal of hypercorrection with third singular s: sentences like He can get his or He goes to do it.

4. Learnability. A variable element that is present in the underlying grammar is quickly acquired by children and appears in the same form in the adult language. Its use is also affected by training. For example, studies of Harlem second graders (see Fortey, 1938) show that the third singular s is radically different from other inflections in this respect. Ninety-five percent of the children favored the form the cat chased, and only ten percent the form the cat chases. While training improved the ability to interpret the third singular s as a mark of singular, there was no significant effect of training on the ability to interpret the third singular s as a mark of plural.

5. General absence of subject-verb agreement. The behavior of third singular s in regular verbs fits in a more general pattern of a lack of subject-verb agreement in BEV. The regular verbs quaintly besides the frequent agreement in BEV. In all cases, the frequency of the /s/ varies by degree. For example, the third singular do in all persons. We also find that regular do by the vowel used, as well as the s. Otherwise, we find that an /s/ is used in all persons without any alternation with were. The case of was and were is interesting, because single group of North Philadelphia speakers showed a very low level of third singular s in continuous speech, lower than we had observed before. The s is also used in with subjects other than the third singular. But in the course of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>S</th>
<th>he/she</th>
<th>NP sing</th>
<th>we</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jackie Narrative</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrator</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheila Narrative</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrator</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Narrative</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrator</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Narrative</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We see that six /s/ inflections were used: they were all in narrative context. In
study the absence of a systematic verbal /s/ in BEV, and with it, a general absence of
subject-verb agreement. These findings show that BEV use of verbal /s/ is not a
linguistic variable like consonant cluster simplification, the verbalization or
grammatical use of the Black English Vernacular:

The very low frequency of realization in the most vernacular styles.

Hypocorrection. When a variable element is firmly based in the
where it may not. Hypocorrection with third singular /s/ sentences like He can get

Lernability. A variable element that is present in the underlying
grammar quickly acquired by children and appears in the same
way in the adult language. Its use is also affected by training.

De Facto Segregation of Black and White Vernaculars

Table 3. Use of verbal /s/ in narrative and non-narrative contexts for five core BEV speakers from North Philadelphia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Non-Sing</th>
<th>We</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheila</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The significance of these figures can best be understood by examining a single
context, like the use of verbal /s/ with singular noun phase subjects by Jackie:

/s/ 0

Narrative 6 6
Other 0 55

We see that six /s/ inflections were used: they were all in narrative context. In
to the absence of a systematic verbal /s/ in BEV, and with it, a general absence of subject-verb agreement. These findings show that the BEV use of verbal /s/ is not a linguistic variable like consonant cluster simplification, the vocalization of construction of post-vocalic (r), or the contraction and deletion of the copula. Five types of empirical evidence lead to the inference that verbal /s/ is not present in the grammatical rule system of the Black English Vernacular:

1. The very low frequency of realization in the most vernacular styles.

2. The absence of phonological conditioning. When a final segment has a firm foundation in the grammar, but is variably deleted by phonetic processes, its retention is favored when the next word begins with a vowel, and disfavored when the next word begins with a consonant. No such result has ever been found for third singular /s/.

3. Hypercorrection. When a variable element is firmly based in the underlying grammar, speakers know where it may appear and where it may not. Hypercorrection is the idiosyncratic use of a form in words and constructions where it has no historical or synchronic basis. BEV speakers show a great deal of hypercorrection with third singular /s/; sentences like He can get /hurt/ or He gone to /do it/.

4. Learntability. A variable element that is present in the underlying grammar is quickly acquired by children and appears in the same form as in the adult language. Its use is also affected by training. But Torrey's experimental studies of Harlem second graders (reported in Torrey 1983) show that the third singular /s/ is radically different from other inflections in this respect. Ninety-five percent of the children interpreted the sentence The cat splashes to refer to two cats rather than one cat, since the only interpretation they could give to the verbal /s/ was a plural. While training improved performance on other tests, there was no significant effect of training on their ability to interpret the third singular /s/ as a mark of the singular.

5. General absence of subject-verb agreement. The behavior of third singular /s/ in regular verbs fits in with a more general pattern of a lack of subject-verb agreement in BEV. The irregular verbs can show subject-verb agreement by other differences in their forms besides the presence or absence of the /s/. For example, the third singular does differ from do by the vowel used as well as the /s/. But in BEV we find regular do in all persons. We also find have in all persons. The case of was and were is interesting, because here we find an /s/; but there is no third singular marking, since was is used in all persons without any alternation with were.

The core group of North Philadelphia speakers showed a very low level of third singular /s/ in spontaneous speech - lower than we had observed before. The /s/ is also used widely with subjects other than the third singular. But in the course of studying the North Philadelphia speakers, Myhill observed that the /s/ tended to appear much more in narrative than in non-narrative contexts. It gradually appeared that the core group as a whole treated /s/ in this way. Table 3, taken from Myhill and Harris (this volume), shows the figures for five core BEV subjects: Jackie, Pam, Sheila, Henry and Walt.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
<th>hesho</th>
<th>NP sing</th>
<th>we</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jackie Narrative</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam Narrative</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheila Narrative</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheila Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Narrative</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walt Narrative</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walt Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Narrative</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The significance of these figures can best be understood by examining a single context, like the use of verbal /s/ with singular noun phase subjects by Jackie:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>/s/</th>
<th>zero</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We see that six /s/ inflections were used: they were all in narrative context. In
non-narrative context, there were none with this type of subject, and only eight out of 471 for all subject types put together. It appears that these speakers have re-interpreted the /s/ of the third person singular, and are beginning to treat it as a mark of the narrative past.

The situation is perhaps even more extreme than these figures show at first glance. The regular past tense /ed/ is variably deleted in BEV as in other dialects, so that some of the zero inflections in narrative are not to be interpreted as absence of /s/, but rather absence of /ed/. At the bottom of Table 2, the over-all percentages are in the past tense.

No such use of third singular /s/ has previously been reported for any English dialect, black or white. Over the past two decades, a number of papers have addressed the sporadic use of third singular /s/ in Black English. Labov, Cohen, and Labov (1968), Wolfram (1969) and Fasold (1972) found occasional and present, which appeared to be hypercorrect insertion. In a study of Atlanta non-concord positions, almost all motivated by syntactic factors. Scott (1975) and hypercorrect but carried a durative meaning. Brewer (1986) shows that verbal /s/ is indeed an innovation in the social nucleus, that there is no specialization to third singular distribution in the data suggest that this durative-type /s/ is an innovation in the concentration in narrative contexts in the examples given. Reviewing the literature have pointed to a durative meaning within the semantic range of the general present.

The specialization of this innovation for the narrative past by Philadelphia speakers is the opposite of such a durative interpretation.

The Philadelphia data discussed by Myhill and Harris involves speakers from 16 to 35 years old. A much wider range was covered in the Philadelphia research, found to use the pattern of /s/ distribution that favors the narrative. The age grading time cannot be correlated with studies of first person narratives and other phenomena because people on black speakers extensive enough to make the comparison. In the present data, there is no trace of this specialization of /s/ to narrative contexts. We conclude either that the Philadelphia pattern is a new different from New York, one that is confined to younger people and that narrative /s/ is an innovation. But how widespread it remains to be seen.

The evidence for increasing diversity in Philadelphia is supported by parallel invariant be in the speech of older rural blacks in Texas with younger urban black clear semantic differentiation; the typical use of be for habitual /s/ in the younger speakers. Preliminary work by Myhill (1985) finds evidence for the same development in Philadelphia, supporting the view that the use of habitual be with the progressive has increased drastically in frequency in this century for

De Facto Segregation of Black and White Vernaculars

speakers of BEV.

The route to such a re-interpretation may lie through the historical present used in other dialects. BEV speakers of Harlem actually used less historical present than speakers of white dialects. The Philadelphia development might then represent the gradual adoption of the historical present. But the important fact is not the appearance of /s/ in narrative contexts, but rather its high concentration in those contexts. It is on the way towards being a marker of the narrative past.

Myhill points out several other facts that indicate the special status of verbal /s/ in BEV. Where speakers of other dialects must often use /s/ in the historical present with the verb say, as in "He says," or "I says." This is one context where BEV speakers are least apt to use it. Furthermore, we can observe a radically different pattern in discourse like the following quotation from Pam (relevant verbal forms in capitals):

... ooh, jus' like that day Jackie went in the hospital an' Andre came over, so I said, "C'mon, Andre, let's go to Gino's or let's go to McDonald's." So, Verne was gonna go wit us. So I said, "Shit, she don' gotta go, we go." So we went to Gino's, COMES back. So the second night, Lev - we said, "C'mon, let's -" I said, "Let's go to McDonald's again." So, we GOES to McDonald's again. So, we ain' go to McDonald, wen' to McDonald, then we wen' to the bar, so Andre set in the bar an' said, "Pam." I SAID "What?" he say, "You know, I think this a setup." I SAY, "I don't know," he SAID, "cause it's two nights straight LaVerne spocta wen' wit us an' didn' go." I said, "Well I don' know." Jackie COMES out the hospital, here COMES LaVerne with the mou', "Blubla blubla blubla blubla blubla." Jackie GOES back an' TELL Andre that, yeah, the whole time that she was in the hospital me an' him went out.

The last sentence shows the regular pattern of /s/ with conjointed verbs: it appears on the first verb but not on the second. Another example:

(2) This guy RUNS behin' me, this white guy RUNS behin' me an BEND down, SAY, "Hold it!" -- Henry, PC251

(3) She TAKES your clothes out, and LEND them to people, and then SWEAR then that they not supposed to know that's - they your clothes. -- Sheila, PC247

We have never observed white speakers using such constructions. For speakers of white dialects, the use of /s/ with conjointed verbs is always symmetrical. This pattern reinforces the evidence that the development of narrative /s/ in Philadelphia BEV speakers is a new grammatical intervention. The young black child in North Philadelphia, who brings such a system to the school room situation, is even more remote from the grammar of the schoolroom then the children who have no third singular /s/ at all in their system.

5. DIFFERENTIATION IN THE SOUND PATTERN

The increasing separation of grammatical patterns is only a part of the divergence of black and white vernaculars. At the outset, we pointed out that the black population
of Philadelphia does not participate in the rapid evolution of the white vernacular (Labov 1980). As the sound pattern of the Philadelphia white community becomes more and more different from the speech of Boston, Chicago and Fort Worth, it is also becoming more and more different from the sound pattern used by Black Philadelphians. We find the same situation in all the large Northern cities: Boston, New York, Detroit and Chicago as well as Philadelphia. The local white accents show rapid divergence from each other, while the black communities remain afloat. Instead of increased differentiation, the black sound pattern shows a generalized Northern black phonology, neutralizing the many differences in vowels and consonants found among Southern blacks.

Research on the social origins of these sound changes in the local white community indicate that the most advanced patterns are to be found among the people with the highest prestige: draftsmen, bank tellers, school teachers, politicians, block captains and local influential (Labov 1980). A comparison of sound changes in many cities leads us to the conclusion that they serve as symbolic claims to local rights and privileges: to jobs, housing, special ordinances and exceptions that form the background of local business and local social life. Blacks and most Hispanics are shut out from these rights and privileges, but increasing pressure from minorities leads to an accommodation of these symbolic claims of local identity in the white community.

Most of the Philadelphia vowel sounds are involved in the process of change, and many of the consonants. For a closer examination of the social significance of these changes, we focused on three parallel movements of the Philadelphia vowels which can be described phonetically as "fronting". The most important of these is the fronting of the diphthong /aw/ in out, house, about, south, etc. The older and more conservative Philadelphia white speakers use a vowel that begins with the same sound as bar and pass, while the younger and more innovative Philadelphians use a vowel beginning with the same sound as where or day. The diphthong also moves in a new direction, so that the new Philadelphia pronunciation of double can be imitated by pronouncing the word day rapidly followed by ought.

Black speakers use diphthongs in out, double, and south that are quite distinct from any of the white Philadelphia sounds. The nucleus begins back of center, to the vowel of father than any other, and it moves up towards the vowel of too, as in most Northern dialects. General principles of sound change allow us to believe that the small difference between conservative white pronunciation and the black pronunciation is an important structural difference, a type of continental divide in the vowel system (Labov, Yanger & Steiner 1972). We therefore decided to test the social significance of this difference with new techniques that allowed us to focus on such small differences in the sound pattern.

The social evaluation of speech patterns cannot be assessed accurately by direct question. Responses are greatly exaggerated, or focused on a small number of salient words that have become stereotyped symbols of a local accent. The new and vigorous changes are usually well below the level of social awareness. The "matched guise" technique developed by Wallace Lambert of McGill University has been most successful in tapping the uniform and powerful social evaluations that lie below the surface (Lambert 1967). Subjects hear a series of tape recorded extracts, and they are asked to rate the speakers on scales of intelligence, honesty, job suitability, friendliness, etc. They assume that all the speakers are different, because they sound different; but in reality, many of the speakers recur in the series in different "guises": speaking different languages or dialects. The speakers on the tape are drawn from people who are generally judged to be balanced bilinguals or bidialects. From the comparison of ratings given to the different guises of the same speakers shows that most communities register a consistent and powerful tendency to evaluate one form of speech as superior to the other on almost every dimension. Surprisingly enough, these attitudes are shared by speakers of both languages and dialects.

Linguistic adaptations of these techniques have tried to focus on the social significance of particular sounds by concentrating many examples in one sentence. Social attitudes towards pre-vocalic /t/ can be tested by reactions to variant readings of such sentences as "He dared out about four feet before a car, and he got hit hard." (Labov 1966, Appendix A). But these are not well controlled experiments, because other sounds will vary at the same time. Our current technique allows us to compare passages spoken by the same person, which differ by only a single physical dimension. Spontaneous speech is digitized and then analyzed for its various acoustic parameters. A single dimension can be changed, and the rest of the information kept as it was. When the vowel is re-synthesized, it sounds quite natural. The original and the new form can be paired so that they both sound like medium-fidelity recordings of spontaneous speech.

We used this technique to alter the phrase "No doubt about it" and "I've got to get out of the house" as spoken by black Philadelphians. They were altered so that the diphthongs in doubt, about, out and house had the same beginning as with conservative Philadelphia white speech: identical to the vowel of a.

The pairs of sentences were then randomly mixed with other sentences that represented experiments with two other sentences that represented experiments with two other vowels, and others that showed the variation found in the natural style shifting of white and black Philadelphians. This included pairs of sentences, from the white speakers who had shown the widest range of style shifting across ethnic styles. One speaker alternated regularly between the white Philadelphia style of "I was just as crazy then as I am now" to the black style of "The lady called the police to come see what was happening." These shifts involved the choice of words, intonation, grammar and pronunciation.

Subjects were asked to judge each passage on two scales: a seven-point scale that registered how black or white the person sounded, and a simple two-point decision: "Was he actually black or white". Harris obtained seventy individual responses from black, white and Puerto Rican members of the North Philadelphia community. For the crucial test of black /aw/ in out and house, we find the following results:

| Stimulus as rated | White | Black | Hispanic | Speaker identification
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>more W</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>more B</td>
<td>W-B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| white            | 21     | 15    | 9        | 21 11 3
| black            | 15     | 10    | 5        | 10 0
| hispanic         | 9      | 5     | 3        | 4 10 3

We observe a massive shift of black judges on both scales in the direction that indicated extreme sensitivity to the pronunciation of this diphthong. The effect is almost as great as that which we found with the natural style shifting. The reaction to /aw/ is specific to the black/white interface. The 17 Puerto Rican judges showed only a slight shift in the expected direction. Yet they had no difficulty in responding to the large scale, multi-dimensional style shifting. 90 student judges at the
University of Pennsylvania also responded to the natural style shifting in the expected way, but only those who had been to high school with 10% or more blacks showed a significant recognition of the ethnic value of /aw/ at the .05 level.

We conclude that the Philadelphia community has developed a high degree of sensitivity to the phonetic dimensions that separate black and white speakers. This is not conscious: we have observed many recordings of blacks imitating whites, and this effect is not always present. This reinforces our view that the local vowel system is an important symbol of the claim to local rights and privileges, which blacks are not prepared to make. As the white sound system evolves, the net result is a further widening of the linguistic distance between the two groups.

6. WHAT IS HAPPENING AND WHY

The Philadelphia speech community is entering into two distinct speech communities: white and black. They share a large part of the general English language, and a number of local words as well. They use some linguistic variables in the same way for stylistic and social stratification: like the difference between working and workin' or between first person and first person. But the number of differences between them in grammar and pronunciation seem to be growing steadily greater.

In the first section, we pointed out that the conditions for such divergence are present for the steadily increasing residential segregation of blacks and whites. Nevertheless, many observers find it surprising that white and black vernaculars are growing more different. They feel that the forces of convergence and assimilation are greater than the forces of divergence. Chief among these assimilating forces are the effects of the mass media. Since we all listen to the same standard English on radio and television, it should follow that our linguistic differences will gradually diminish.

To understand what is happening, we have to take into account four general principles that have emerged from research in the speech community over the last twenty years. The first is the fact that linguistic traits are not transmitted across group boundaries simply by exposure to other dialects in the mass media or in schools. This finding appeared in the first study of social stratification in New York City (Labov 1966). The influence of radio and television could be seen in the self-conscious correction of the New York City vernacular in formal styles. But the fundamental changes in the vernacular continued in spite of this correction, and spread gradually from the upper working class and lower middle class to other groups. In Philadelphia, sound changes spread steadily outward from the innovators, the highest prestige people in the local community (Labov 1980).

Our basic language system is not acquired from schools, teachers or from radio announcers, but from friends and competitors: those who we admire, and those we have to be good enough to beat.

In the black community of Philadelphia, the core group remains apart, and is probably drifting further apart, in spite of the fact that members hear standard English dialects spoken four to eight hours a day: on television, radio, and in the schools. On the other hand, those speakers who engage in structured interaction with whites, where they use language to negotiate their position or gain advantages, show a profound shift of their grammatical rules.

The second general observation is that the linguistic influence that takes place under these conditions is asymmetrical. Speakers of the dominated dialect acquire unconsciously the rules of the dominant dialect. But the reverse does not happen.

Musicians, activists, politicians, athletes and confidence men all show a deep-seated influence of other dialects as a result of their dealings with members of other dialects. But whites who are accepted in the black community, and are identified as black by their speech, do not show any important shifts towards the BEV grammatical system.

This situation is only possible because of a third general fact about language: Abstract linguistic structure has little or no social impact on members of the community. The interface of language and society is narrow, and primarily on the surface: the words and the sounds of the language. Abstract discontinuous formal elements like the verbal /s/ are not perceived in a systematic way by ordinary listeners, and have almost no influence on judgments of ethnic identity. As a result, there is a great distance between the social definition of a dialect and the linguistic description. A person can be perceived as speaking "Black English" or the "language of the street" when in fact the linguistic features used are quite removed from the majority pattern. We have seen that speakers with very different social histories are central members of the social networks of the black community, and no one is sensitive to the linguistic differences that are the result of those histories.

This leads to the fourth observation, concerning the social units that are most closely correlated with linguistic behavior. Social networks are useful organizing units in field work, for locating speakers and getting recordings under conditions of normal social interaction. It's also true that long and close interaction can produce linguistic convergence. Members of the same social network usually share a common ideology and common experience, which leads to the same directions of style shifting and the same attitudes towards other dialects. We have found that small linguistic rules and lexical items that are shared by members of primary networks. But on the whole, social networks have little explanatory value for individual differences in linguistic systems. It is the social history of the speakers that must be taken into account: the kinds of social experience they have had in dealing with members of other groups, the way they have used language in their life.

If this is so, the present trend can be reversed without serious disruption of the local community. Many educational programs have the effect of changing children's social behavior so that they can no longer keep the friends they used to have. This happens when children change their pronunciation and their social interaction, and become socially marked as different from the rest. If we turn our attention away from these superficial details, and consider the relations of the underlying system, it should be possible to bring children closer to the systems used by other dialects without changing their personalities and their friendship patterns. From everything we have seen so far, this kind of deep-seated change can happen if white and black youth are in contact in the early years. The way they will then be open for the group to shift as a whole, with the convergence that is the result of mutual influence. If the contact is a friendly one, and we achieve true integration in the schools, the two groups may actually exchange socially significant symbols, and black children will begin to use the vernacular of the white community. But even without such a thorough integration, we can expect that children will learn from each other, and the present trend towards separation may be reversed.

We approached this increasing diversification within the framework of our research on the influence of urban minorities on linguistic change, which focused on the transmission of linguistic traits across the black/white American boundary. But the segregation that lies behind this effect is not only a matter of race: it is also a matter of class. In earlier periods, working class black youth were in close contact with middle-class black youth who had considerable command of the standard...
The upward mobile black middle class has grown, but middle class blacks have moved out of the inner cities in recent years in response to housing, banking and educational policies that have made it difficult for them to get the housing and schooling they want. The problem then is not one of white/black segregation, but rather the separation of inner city youth from all of the resources that they need to solve their problems.

Cause or effect? So far, we have been looking at the divergence between black and white dialects as an effect of residential, economic and educational segregation. Can this language difference also be a cause of further separation of the black and white population? Our research so far doesn’t give us any clear answer to this question.

The first research we did on Black English was for the Office of Education, to find out whether the reading problems of the inner city could be related to the differences in black and white dialects. We found enough differences to describe the two dialects as “separate systems”, but it did not seem to us as if they could be great enough to account for the failure in teaching reading. Instead, we pointed to the political and cultural conflict within the school as the major problem (Labov and Robins 1967; Labov 1982). Language differences seemed to serve as a symbol of that conflict, more than a cause of it. Since that time, many linguists have looked at the problem, but we still do not know how abstract differences in language structure can interfere with the process of learning to read. The fact the black children do not interpret the final /s/ in the verb in the same way as white children can hardly be a major factor.

The results reported here raise the possibility that misunderstanding across dialects may be greater than we thought before. We find that misunderstanding is rarely the result of any one factor. Differences in pronunciation alone, or differences in grammar alone, do not usually prevent one speaker of English from understanding another. We have begun to collect data on comprehension and miscommunication across dialects, and we find that it is almost always a combination of differences in the sound pattern, the grammar, vocabulary and knowledge of the culture that lead to failures in communication. We also find that misunderstandings are more common than people think, because we seem to forget them very soon after they happen.

The research that we are now beginning is aimed at the study of comprehension across geographic and social dialects. We would like to know how much of the teacher’s speech the child in the first grade understands, and how much the teacher understands of what the child has said. The answers to this question may tell us whether linguistic divergence is a cause of further problems in the school and in the community, or simply a reflection of those problems. We will then be in a better position to make concrete suggestions for the curriculum, and apply our knowledge of language differences to the long range goal of giving every child an equal opportunity in the educational system. But the main result of our present research is clear. Young black children from the inner city who must deal with the language of the classroom, are faced with the task of understanding a form of language that is increasingly different from their own.

NOTES

1 At the same time, the ‘s is used to mark the possessive relationship in absolute position when there is no following noun: this is yours, this is my brother’s, and duplicating the possessive /s/ in mine, This is mine.

REFERENCES


Hersberg, Theodore et al. 1981. A tale of three cities: blacks, immigrants and


