ICE Bahamas: Why and how?

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1 Introduction

The language of educated creole speakers has become a subject for linguistic research only recently. Creole studies, on the one hand, long focused on the basilect, i.e., that variety of any creole which is furthest removed from its historical lexifier and/or contemporary standard. The corpora that were compiled to represent contemporary English, on the other hand, concentrated first on British and American native speakers and only later included second-language speakers from other parts of the world as well as learners. In part, the lack of attention to the standard English of creole speakers may be owing to insecurity among researchers of World Englishes as to how to classify the varieties of the language spoken in the Caribbean (Kachru 1992: 3, for example, explicitly excludes them from his circle model); partly, it may have to do with the reluctance described by Youssef (2004: 43) of Caribbean linguists themselves to view standard English as a significant component of their communities' linguistic repertoire: "Speakers regard the Creole as their own language and the Standard as the property of the British and the American". Standard English corpora have been or are being compiled for two Caribbean countries, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, as part of the ICE project; the present article reports on the first steps in the direction of another Caribbean corpus of standard English: ICE Bahamas. It first outlines the history and current sociolinguistic situation of English and creole in the Bahamas before summarizing previous research into Bahamian standard English and arguing for the envisaged corpus. Before first results from preliminary analyses of the corpus are presented, issues in the compilation of ICE Bahamas are sketched.

2 English and creole in the Bahamas: History and current sociolinguistic situation

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas, as the country is officially called, comprises an archipelago of 700 islands and 2,400 cays covering 5,358 sq. miles and

extending between southeastern Florida in the northwest and Hispaniola in the southeast. Only thirty of the islands are populated. The country has slightly over 300,000 inhabitants, some 85 percent of which are black. The white population segment consists of native-born whites – mostly descendants of the first British colonial settlers or of American loyalists (cf. Section 2.1) – as well as expatriate British, U.S., or Canadian citizens. There are also smaller numbers of Asians as well as people of Greek, Spanish, or Portuguese origin. The 2000 census registered 21,000 Haitians, but some estimates including illegal immigrants put the current number as high as 78,000, or 25 percent of the population.

The Bahamas is one of the wealthiest Caribbean countries, its economy being largely dependent on tourism and offshore banking. The country is heavily urbanized, with roughly two thirds of all Bahamians living in the capital, Nassau. Freeport on Grand Bahama, the Bahamas' second largest city, has about 40,000 inhabitants. The three most populated 'Out' or 'Family Islands', Abaco, Andros, and Eleuthera, are home to about 10,000 people each; as one moves south, the islands tend to become less and less populated, with some of them having fewer than a hundred inhabitants now.

2.1 English in the Bahamas: From contact to creole

Even though Columbus first passed through the Bahamas in his discovery of the New World, the Spanish never settled the archipelago. They contented themselves with carrying off the indigenous Arawak population to the gold mines of Hispaniola, leaving the islands depopulated for over a hundred years. English was first brought to the Bahamas by a few dozen British religious dissenters from Bermuda in 1648. At first, the inhabitants of the small colony barely survived on salt raking, subsistence farming, fishing, or the salvaging of shipwrecks, all of which involved comparatively low numbers of slaves and close interaction between slaves and masters; thus, the blacks that had been brought to the Bahamas from the very beginning of the colony must have had ample access to the white settlers' dialects. Even though the black population increased substantially in the course of the eighteenth century (by 1773, it had grown to 54 percent; cf. Craton and Saunders 1992: 119–120), and the first large holdings were established, the Bahamian economy never turned into the kind of plantation economy typical of other Caribbean territories. This means linguistically that, despite possible local restructuring processes, the likelihood that a full-fledged creole was in general use among blacks in the Bahamas at the time seems small.

The creole spoken in the country today was imported at the end of the eighteenth century. It was brought by free blacks and the slaves of loyalist North

Americans, who had supported the British Crown during the American Revolutionary War and – after the Treaty of Versailles in 1783 – left the newly independent United States. Historical and linguistic evidence (Hackert and Huber 2007; Hackert and Holm 2009) suggests that the Gullah-speaking areas, and South Carolina in particular, played a prominent role as a point of origin for both white and black loyalists, which makes it highly probable that what was taken to the Bahamas was an early form of Gullah rather than of African American Vernacular English, as had been assumed earlier (Holm 1983; Shilling 1984).

Lexical evidence has been adduced to research the regional provenance of the Bahamians' British forebears. In a comparison of 2,500 Bahamian expressions not used in contemporary standard British or American English with British regionalisms in the *English Dialect Dictionary*, Holm (ms.) assigns a full 43 percent of them to Scotland or the Northcountry, with another 25 percent from Ireland and the Westcountry. The Scottish bias of the Bahamian vocabulary has been questioned by Smith (1983: 113), who points out that "the vast majority of these items or usages are also evidenced from other forms of English". Conclusive evidence in this regard remains to be established.

2.2 Status and function of standard English and Bahamian Creole today

Native white Bahamians today speak a non-standard dialect of English which has been compared to that spoken on the North Carolina Outer Banks (Wolfram and Sellers 1998). The vernacular of the majority of black Bahamians is Bahamian Creole. As in other parts of the English-speaking Caribbean, public discussion of language issues is often characterized by a lack of distinction between the creole vernacular spoken by the majority of the population and the standard language. This lack of distinction obviously has an objective base. On the one hand, the bulk of the vocabulary of both varieties is identical; on the other, there is a continuum of gradual but patterned transitions between the most conservative creole and the most standard English. In short, "linguistic boundaries are unclear" (Bain 1995: 33) to the majority of the population; as a consequence, many creole speakers find it difficult to regard their variety as a language in its own right, claiming instead that they speak nothing but 'the Queen's English' or merely a dialect of English. The latter is evident in the Bahamian creole's popular name, 'Bahamian dialect', and most Bahamians are eager to distance themselves from anything 'creole', as that word is associated with Haitians and their speech.

Those who acknowledge the vernacular often regard it as 'bad' or 'broken' English (cf. Léger and Armbrister 2009: 31) and oppose it to 'proper', i.e., standard, English. They associate it with backwardness and a lack of education

and see it as an obstacle to the country's modernization and integration into the global economy. Nevertheless, most Bahamians are unwilling to abandon their 'dialect'. They are seconded in this attitude by a growing number of increasingly vocal proponents of the folk culture, who are pointing out that the creole is a vital aspect of the Bahamas' heritage and national identity. In spite of the popularity the 'dialect' has thus received, according to most Bahamians, it should remain restricted to certain domains and functions, such as to convey humor and social authenticity. If 'serious' topics are at hand, standard English is the form of speech called for.

As in other Caribbean countries, the standard has been subject to encroachments from the creole in a number of domains (cf. Hackert 2004: 56–64). In politics, for example, it has remained the language of parliamentary debate and of the administration, but political speeches evidence a substantial amount of "mixing" (Collinwood 1989: 18), the vernacular being used largely as an emotional rhetorical device. The mass media constitute another domain in which standard English is officially endorsed as the appropriate medium of communication but into which Bahamian Creole has made inroads. Newspapers are still largely in the hands of the standard; in cartoons or columns, however, the creole is employed as a stylistic device, creating realism and effect in the imitation of informal speech. On television, the role of Bahamian Creole is subordinate. There are local-relevance shows on national television, but their importance vis-à-vis the entire program is limited. The Bahamas' exposure to American television has had considerable influence on what is perceived as standard pronunciation. Even though both Bahamian Creole and standard English as traditionally spoken by educated Bahamians are non-rhotic, many younger Bahamians perceive r-full American pronunciations as 'correct' and imitate them (cf. Glinton-Meicholas 1994: 34).

The roles that standard English and Bahamian Creole play in the educational system must be seen against the backdrop of the development of most countries in the region from societies of the colonial type, in which the majority of the population received only a rudimentary education, to independent nations with diversifying economies based on tourism and other service-related industries. In the Bahamas, the years immediately following majority rule in 1967 and independence in 1973 saw a dramatic increase in educational spending, which, in turn, radically raised the number of public schools throughout the Bahamas as well as the number of children attending them and, most importantly, the number of trained teachers. The policy accompanying these developments was the Bahamianization of the educational system, whose most visible consequence was the gradual replacement of expatriate teachers, most of them British, who had accounted for the majority of secondary and a fair share of primary school teachers until the late 1960s.

Traditionally, Bahamian Creole was the home language of all black Bahamians; the school was the first place black children came into contact with standard English. This seems to have changed with increased opportunities for social mobility; numerous parents now encourage the use of the standard at home, even though the driving force behind their linguistic efforts may be less actual competence than attitudes and ambitions. Nevertheless, in Bahamian schools "**standard English is the expected language of the classroom** [emphasis in the original]" (Department of Education 1999: 2). The way Bahamian school children are introduced to the standard consequently often resembles a structured immersion program as it is used in bilingual contexts in that students talk to each other and the teacher in their vernacular but the teacher employs the standard in responding to them.

This complex situation is compounded by the fact that one external standard, the British, seems to be in the process of being superseded by another, which, as already noted, is American. Even though the teaching force is largely Bahamian now, many younger teachers have received their teacher training in the U.S. Textbooks are now largely American, and since the number of Bahamians attending college or university in North America is growing steadily, the number of students taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test in addition to the British-modeled Bahamas General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) is rising.

The long-standing contact between Bahamian Creole and standard English has obviously influenced the creole, too. Most Bahamians today speak a mesolectal form of it; basilectal constructions, such as the preverbal progressive marker *de* or the universal negator *no*, are now restricted to older speakers and/or isolated Out Island communities or have died out altogether. In sum, while the traditional rural creole is losing many of its distinctive features as well as speakers, the resulting urban creole has lost much of the stigma formerly attached to it and has begun to invade domains formerly reserved for standard English. As for the latter, the inherited colonial norm, British English, continues to be influential in public, formal situations, but many younger Bahamians' linguistic orientation appears to be toward the United States.

3 Studying standard Bahamian English: The need for a corpus-based approach

For the reasons sketched in Section 1, there has been a very limited amount of research into the standard English spoken in the Bahamas. The lexicon is arguably its best-studied level, with two large reference works describing it. The *Dictionary of Bahamian English* (Holm and Shilling 1982: iii) contains "over

5,500 entries for words and expressions used in the Bahamas which are not generally found in the current standard English of Britain and North America;" it is thus not a record of all that is English in the Bahamas but of all that is Bahamian in English. Lexical items from the Bahamas also figure in the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (Allsopp 1996), which is explicitly concerned with codifying a Caribbean standard English and therefore records acro- and mesolectal words rather than basilectal ones from the various countries.

Another area of research concerns the difficulties faced by Bahamian school children and college students in acquiring standard English. The most comprehensive study in this regard is Major (1993), summaries of which can be found in Bain (1995, 2005). In order to improve performance levels on what she identifies as the two most problematic language levels, i.e. morphosyntax and lexicon, Bain advocates recognizing standard English in the Bahamas as a second dialect (ESD) and resorting to contrastive and comparative teaching strategies (2005: 19).

Given the scarcity of research into standard Bahamian English, ICE Bahamas will be an invaluable resource in a number of respects. As is the case for every other ICE project, the corpus will greatly aid researchers interested in comparative studies of English worldwide. More specifically, it will help answer the question of whether standard English in the Bahamas resembles natively spoken varieties (ENL) or rather shares features with English as a second language (ESL) as spoken in other former colonies. Given the particular sociolinguistic setup in which it is embedded, a corpus of standard Bahamian English should also be able to contribute to the theory and methodology of data gathering and analysis in the ICE enterprise in general.

On a more regional basis, as the third Caribbean component of ICE, the corpus will permit more profound insights into the nature of standard Caribbean English. In view of the shared history and sociocultural foundations of the region as well as long-standing intra-regional mobility, it appears not unreasonable to assume, as Allsopp (1996: lvi) does, the existence of a pan-regional standard which, despite separate and recognizable national varieties, would consist of a "total body of regional lexicon and usage bound to a common core of syntax and morphology" and "aurally distinguished" from other standard Englishes "as a discrete type by certain phonological features". Such a unity cannot be taken for granted, however, but must be proved in actual description. With the completion of ICE Jamaica and the components for Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas under way, this issue should be resolvable eventually.

In practical terms, it is hoped that ICE Bahamas will aid in language planning in the country, particularly in education, where, as outlined in Section 2.2,

two different exocentric norms seem to be competing. The corpus will provide teachers and other educators with a possibility of checking the actual usage of educated Bahamians not just in this respect but also with a view to the development of a possible endocentric norm. Finally, as pointed out by Youssef (2004: 48), the description of their standard variety is indispensable for a complete picture and revaluation of the linguistic competence of Bahamian speakers; hopefully, this description will offset the "strong tendency among Caribbean people to resist recognition of a local standard out of an inherent propensity for downgrading what is their own and upgrading the metropolitan model".

4 Issues in the compilation of ICE Bahamas

In addition to the usual problems of obtaining, recording, and transcribing particularly spoken language, the issues that have surfaced in the compilation of ICE Bahamas have so far had to do mostly with the selection of informants. Most generally, as stipulated by the design of the corpus, even though ICE investigates varieties of standard English around the world, the criteria for the inclusion of texts are based not on a specific language use but on who uses the language. Speakers or writers must be at least eighteen years old, and they must have completed secondary school (Nelson 1996: 28). The latter criterion is relaxed with regard to "other adults" whose "public status makes their inclusion appropriate" (Greenbaum 1991: 3), e.g., politicians, broadcasters, or business professionals. Moreover, informants must be "natives", i.e., they must have either been born in the country or moved there early in their lives and received their education through the medium of English there (Nelson 1996: 28). Owing to the peculiar post-colonial situation in the Bahamas, these criteria have a number of consequences.

First, the education requirement drastically reduces the potential number of older informants. As indicated in Section 2.2, before the late 1960s and early 1970s, only very few black Bahamians were able to obtain education past the primary level; thus, most older Bahamians never went to school past the then-general school leaving age of fourteen. Second, owing to the scarcity of facilities providing secondary education and the lack of tertiary institutions (the College of the Bahamas was founded in 1974), the majority of older educated speakers would have attended school and/or university abroad. At least at the tertiary level, this trend has continued, so that even today, with the College of the Bahamas admitting over a thousand students annually and a number of smaller, private institutions providing post-secondary and continuing education, many Bahamians leave the country, predominantly for the United States, but

also for Canada, Britain, or other West Indian countries, to obtain a bachelor's or master's degree. The exclusion of such speakers or writers from the sampling population on the grounds of the education-in-the-country criterion just described would not accurately reflect the reality of the educated user of English in the Bahamas.

Moreover, as already sketched for other countries (e.g., Youssef 2004 for Trinidad and Tobago; Sand 1999 and Deuber 2009 for Jamaica), educated users of English in the anglophone Caribbean show a baffling variety of speech forms depending on various situational factors such as topic or interlocutor. In general, standard English is employed only in the most formal public situations. In more informal and/or private contexts, speakers use the entire span of the continuum ranging from the high acrolect to the upper mesolect. This has repercussions particularly in the large text category of private conversations and telephone calls (in ICE terminology: S1A; cf. Greenbaum 1991: 10), which may include anything from semi-formal discussions about 'serious' topics such as language use and attitudes between teachers or journalists or interview-like exchanges involving a foreign researcher to excited exchanges about personal or even intimate topics between friends or family members. In quantitative sociolinguistic terms (cf. Labov 1972), language use in these situations varies from careful and thus more standard-like to casual and thus more vernacular, i.e., creole. In other words, if standard English is defined solely by its usage by educated speakers, it will contain numerous clearly non-standard features in its Caribbean varieties.

As for the inclusion of interviews with a foreign researcher in the corpus, even though interaction with a stranger to the community is obviously a much less frequent task than interaction with members of the speech community itself, it was decided to include such interviews, at least for the time being. After all, they represent precisely the kind of situation in which recourse to standard English or the upper lectal levels of one's linguistic competence is called for. Finally, as for the ethnic composition of the sample, so far only black informants have been included. This happened not only for practical reasons, but, as noted in Section 2.2, white Bahamians speak a vernacular which is very different from that of black Bahamians; the contact situations in which English exists among these two speaker groups are thus very different.

The compilation of ICE Bahamas is in its initial stages. Table 1 shows the number of 2,000-word samples collected as a fraction of the category total. All samples have been turned into .doc files; the ones that were employed for the preliminary analyses (cf. Section 5) were provided with basic ICE markup manually. For further markup, the Pacx software developed for ICE Nigeria (cf. Wunder *et al*. this volume) will be employed.

Table 1: The current state of ICE Bahamas

Category	**Number of samples collected / category total**
Spoken	
private dialogues	14 / 100
public dialogues	15 / 80
unscripted monologues	2 / 70
scripted monologues	14 / 50
Written	
non-professional writing	0 / 20
correspondence	0 / 30
academic writing	15 / 40
non-academic writing	18 / 40
reportage	20 / 20
instructional writing	6 / 20
persuasive writing	10 / 10
creative writing	4 / 20

5 Standard English in the Bahamas: First results

Even though ICE Bahamas is by no means complete, initial analyses employing subsections of the corpus have already been conducted. Two research questions have guided these analyses. First, to what extent does standard English as used in the Bahamas today exhibit features of British English, to what extent does it show the influence of American English? Employing the thirty texts constituting the press section of ICE (twenty press news reports from category W2C and ten editorials from category W2E), supplemented by another 40,000 words from Bahamian newspapers' online archives, also balanced for genre according to ICE guidelines, Bruckmaier (2009) traces British and American influences in Bahamian newspaper language. She finds that lexis is predominantly American, with distinctly British words such as *lorry*, *pavement*, or *trousers* conspicuously absent from the corpus. Spelling is more variable, with the British variants still predominant. Even though the American forms *-ize* or *-ization*, for example, occur more frequently than forms with *-s-*, British *-our* and *-re* spellings as well as the doubling of *-l-* in, e.g. *travelling* clearly constitute the preferred variants. Grammar, finally, appears to be strongly influenced by American forms such as

the mandative subjunctive. Verb complementation patterns are again modeled on British usage. In sum, Bahamian newspaper language currently shows an almost equitable mix of British and American features, these features being distributed not individually but by linguistic level. It will be interesting to monitor the development of this distribution given that, as outlined in Section 2.2, one exocentric norm, the British one of former colonial times, appears to be in the process of being replaced by another exocentric norm, the American one now being propounded via television and other mass media.

A second research question concerns the influence of the local creole on standard English as spoken in the Bahamas. As outlined in Section 4, the text category in which this influence is most likely to occur is S1A. A preliminary analysis of a 30,000-word subcorpus from this category conducted as part of a larger research project (Deuber *et al*. 2009) looked at the modals *will* and *would* and at future markers. The verb phrase being the grammatical area in which differences between standard English and creoles are particularly pronounced, it was expected that creolisms, defined by Allsopp (1996: 178) as "word[s], phrase[s], or usage[s] borrowed from the particular CREOLE (language) of a territory but used for convenience or in error in the formal spoken or written English of that territory", would occur. With regard to modal usage, these creolisms were of an indirect type (cf. Mair 2002); i.e. forms which are identical in the two varieties were used in ways which show creole influence. In this case *will* for (present) habitual and *would* for (past) habitual situations both occurred significantly more frequently than in standard British English. This usage is clearly modeled on Bahamian Creole, which possesses an overt preverbal marker of habitual aspect, *does*, as in *We does go to church every Sunday.* Direct creolisms also occurred but were restricted to private, informal conversations; thus, whereas in semi-formal discussions and interviews speakers employed *will* and *going to* for future temporal reference, the former also contained the creole future marker *gon*', as in *I gon' do this*, used without a preceding auxiliary. Whether and which creolisms occur in other text categories and in what way they can be related to the formal, informal, and "anti-formal" styles postulated for Caribbean English by Allsopp (1996: lvi-lvii; cf. Deuber 2009) and the sociolinguistic continuum evident in the Bahamas (cf. Hackert 2004: 117–219) remains to be investigated.

6 Conclusion and outlook

The present article has described the beginnings of ICE Bahamas. It has outlined pertinent sociohistorical and sociolinguistic matters as well as issues in the com-

pilation of the corpus itself. It has also shown that with even a small amount of data insightful preliminary analyses can be conducted. As the corpus grows, it will take its rightful place in the ICE family and not only contribute to the study of English worldwide in general and Caribbean English more generally but also shed a bright light on the full spectrum of linguistic competence of Bahamian speakers.

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