

# Earlier Southern Englishes in Black and White: Corpus-based approaches

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## 1. Introduction

importance of history for human identity:

knowing where we come from is an important element of knowing who we are

in linguistics: strong interest in recent history and emergence of varieties

(including creoles) in recent years

same for Southern English

problem of sources:

- tend to be few, unsystematic (chance retention), and of questionable reliability
- what kinds, where to find any? (early model for Southern English: Eliason 1956; literary data: Ellis 1994)
- need validation, assessment (Montgomery 1989; Schneider 1997, 2001)

problem of methods: need to get beyond anecdotal approaches

⇒ purpose of this paper:

- to suggest alliance of study of history of Southern English with Corpus Linguistics
- to present two existing corpora (one on white, one on black dialect),
- to illustrate possibilities, provide exemplary hints at linguistic issues that can be addressed

## 2. Background

### 2.1. Toward a history of Southern English

interest in history of Southern English, in black and white:

origins of black dialects / AAVE:

- debate on genesis: creole vs. anglicist (Schneider 1989; Poplack 2000; Poplack & Tagliamonte 2002; Rickford 1999; etc.)
- trajectory of change in recent history: AAVE as an identity carrier, resulting in "divergence" (Bailey & Maynor 1989, Butters 1989, Wolfram & Thomas 2002)
- issue of timing of innovations: recent origins of characteristic structures? (Cukor-Avila 2001, Kautzsch 2002)
- issue of sources (enclave communities: Poplack & Tagliamonte 2002; letters: Montgomery et al 1993 [LAVIS II paper!]; ex-slave narratives

[ESN]: Schneider 1989, 1997; ex-slave recordings: Bailey, Maynor & Cukor-Avila 1991, Schneider 1997; others / combination: Kautzsch 2002)

origins of (white) Southern dialects (survey of issues and sources: Schneider 2003):

- British input / transatlantic transmission (Brooks 1935; Montgomery 1989, 1997; Schneider *fc* 2004: systematic comparison with British dialect sources)
- timing of origin of white Southern English: Bailey 1997: relatively recent, post-Emancipation (driven by social changes, urbanization, identity crisis);  
⇒ distinction between two types of Southern English: "Traditional Southern" vs. "New Southern" (Schneider 2003, *fc.* 2004)?

## 2.2. Corpus Linguistics

- Compilation and systematic analysis of large electronic text collections: a "new" (?), vibrant sub-discipline of linguistics
- American roots & contributions: Brown Corpus: Kucera & Francis; ICE; S. Greenbaum (e.g. 1996), Meyer (e.g.) 2002
- European stronghold: ICAME <[www.hit.uib.no/icame.html](http://www.hit.uib.no/icame.html)>, ICAME journal and conferences

Central issues:

- Principles of corpus compilation (reliability, validity, size, ...)
- Principles of corpus analysis (inductive; concordances, collocation; frequency-based studies, via quantification and emphasis on stylistic variation (represented by text types, genres); inherent relationship with study of Language Variation and Change (Helsinki group; M. Kytö)

Enabling corpus applications:

- software: WordCruncher; WordSmith; Corpus Presenter; etc.
- existing corpora (Brown, LOB; British National Corpus. American National Corpus; ICE components; Helsinki Corpus; and many more)
- textbooks (McEnery & Wilson 1996; Biber, Conrad & Reppen 1998; Kennedy 1998; Meyer 2002)

## 2.3. On combining historical approaches and corpus research

Properties shared by both approaches:

- nature of texts that can be handled easily: character-based evidence; written data (rather than spoken)
- finite set of texts

⇒ attractiveness of corpus-based research for diachronic linguistics in particular; re-interpretation of ICAME ("International Computer Archive of Modern English") to include "and Medieval"

⇒ combination proposed for study of Southern Englishes

## 2. SPOC and BLUR: Two electronic corpora of earlier Southern Englishes

### 2.1. Earlier White Southern English: The Southern Plantation Overseers' Corpus

- Product of collaboration between Michael Montgomery (USC) and Edgar W. Schneider (U Regensburg)
- Nature of texts: hand-written letters by semi-literate plantation overseers to absentee owners, reporting on events on the plantation, nature of crops, etc.
- Keyboarded, checked (partly in consultation with historians) and proofread
- for description and preliminary analyses, see Schneider & Montgomery 2001
- example (original — transcript)

### 2.2. Earlier African-American Southern English: The Blues Lyrics collected at the University of Regensburg Corpus

- Product of research project funded by DFG (German Research Association), collaboration between Ulrich Miethaner (Principal Investigator), Andreas Müller (computing specialist), and Edgar W. Schneider (Project Director)
- nature of texts: transcripts of Blues lyrics, predominantly based upon early country blues recordings of the 1920s and after
- mostly based upon transcripts by Macleod and others; scanned, transferred (OCR software), checked, proofread and supplemented
- accompanied by Access database with biographical and discographical information on singers, songs, recording dates and locations, etc.
- example of text
- sample from database

### 2.3. Comparison of SPOC and BLUR

*Table 1: Features of SPOC and BLUR, compared*

	SPOC	BLUR
Ethnicity of speaker / writer	White (most likely)	African-American
Text type	Letters (plantation business reports)	Blues song lyrics (various topics)
Social status of speaker / writer	Plantation overseers, semi-literate	Blues singers, largely non-commercial
Regional origin	South, various regions (some centers of documentation)	South, practically all regions
Period covered	1794 - 1876	1920 - 1969
Size: no. of texts	536	7356
Size: no. of words	ca. 155.000	ca. 1.49 mio.
Style represented	Relatively factual to informal, largely non-standard	Informal (but possibly influenced by verse structure), largely non-standard

### 3. Exemplary analyses

#### 3.1. Verbal inflection in earlier European-American Southern English (SPOC)

The verbal *-s* suffix in Southern English has been shown

- to have been more widely spread in earlier varieties of southern English, both black and white; a feature of "Traditional Southern" but not "New Southern" (Schneider 1983; Bailey 1997; Cukor-Avila 2001)
- to be subject to structural constraints presumably carried over from northern British dialects ("Northern Concord Rule": "Subject-Type Constraint" + "Nonproximity-to-Subject Constraint").

Table 2: Verbal *-s* by grammatical person in the SPOC

gramm. person	sample (Schneider & Montgomery 2001)		full corpus (Trüb 2003)	
	n	%	n	%
1st ps sg	17/1.054	1.6 %	42/2734	1.5 %
2nd ps sg	0/47	0.0 %	1/211	0.5 %
3rd ps sg	754/784	96.2 %	2501/2629	95.1 %
1st ps pl	2/145	1.4 %	4/428	0.9 %
2nd ps pl	0/0	—	0/3	0.0 %
3rd ps pl	96/158	60.8 %	377/840	44.9 %

#### The Subject Type Constraint in the SPOV

Examples:

- (1) *the worms con tin urs* to come (SPOC; Carter 34)
- (2) *tha have de Stroied* thirty or forty barrels (SPOC; Carter 7)

Quantitative analysis:

Table 3: The Subject Type Constraint in the third person plural, SPOC

	sample (Schneider & Montgomery 2001)		full corpus (Trüb 2003)	
	-s	∅	-s	∅
NP ____	83.6% (92/110)	16.4% (18/110)	55.7% (285/511)	44.2% (226/511)
pro ____	8.3% (4/48)	91.7% (44/48)	3.2% (7/219)	96.8% (212/219)
total	60.8% (96/158)	39.2% (62/158)	40.0% (292/730)	60.0% (438/730)

### The Nonproximity to Subject Constraint in the SPOC

Examples:

- (3) *negros ar all well and has been well* (SPOC, Polk 18)
- (4) *I have finished the cotton crop and has delivered it all at the river* (SPOC, Polk 22)
- (5) *I have plan ted my corn & potatos & has taken in the balance & has got ...* (SPOC, McCauly 8)

Table 4: The Nonproximity-to-Subject Constraint in the SPOC, several grammatical persons (full corpus; adapted from Trüb 2003: 79)

		-s	∅
1st ps sg	adjacent	0.1% (3/2512)	99.9% (2509/2512)
	non-adjacent	17.6% (39/222)	82.4% (183/222)
1st ps pl	adjacent	0.0% (0/411)	100% (411/411)
	non-adjacent	23.5% (4/17)	76.6% (13/17)
3rd ps pl	adjacent	38.5% (235/611)	61.5% (376/611)
	non-adjacent	47.9% (57/119)	52.1% (62/119)

### **3.2. Aspects of verb complementation in earlier African-American Southern English**

BLUR (data drawn from Miethaner forthcoming 2004) features a number of noteworthy verb complementation structures that are of interest and require historical or structural interpretation. Some of these have been documented and commented on in earlier investigations; others have been observed only rarely. All seem to be worthy of further, comparative investigation.

for to-infinitives (also as NP and Adj complements):

- (6) *I stopped for to rest my head* (BLUR; J. Jackson, I Heard the Voice of a Pork Chop)
- (7) *Ain't no way for to treat me* (BLUR; C. Patton; Heart Like a Railroad Steel)
- (8) *She ain't too old for to shift them gears* (BLUR; H. Leadbetter, Borrow Love and Go)

Bare infinities (where *-ing* forms or *to*-infinitives would be expected):

- (9) *No use to keep everybody wait.* (BLUR; M. Wallace, Field Mouse Stomp)
- (10) *You have also heard about the wall fall at Jericho* (BLURrel; F.W. McGhee, A Dog Shall Not Move His Tongue)
- (11) *I don't want no woman walk the road* (BLUR; P. Brown, Piggly-Wiggly Blues)
- (12) *Lord, I want you take it easy, baby* (BLUR; Sonny Boy Williamson, Doggin' My Love Around)
- (13) *You know, it's tough lose everything you got* (BLUR; R. Sykes, Lost All I Had)

(14) I dos this *keep* from starving (BLUR; Jolly Jivers, Hungry Man's Shuffle)

*to + V-ing, esp. after inceptive verbs* (remarkably frequent in BLUR!):

(15) He *begin to thinking* about his people and he begin to feel sad (BLUR; J Kelly, President Blues)

(16) She *start* her motor *to running* (BLUR; Prince Moore, Ford-V-8 Blues)

(17) He *started to dancing* (BLUR; The Brown Bombers of Swing, Gitar Swing)

### 3.3. Comparing earlier Southern Englishes in black and white

#### 3.3.1. A selection of nonstandard verb forms

Varieties compared and sources:

19th c. European-American Southern English (SPOC; based upon Trüb 2003)

19th c. African-American Southern English (ex-slave narratives, from Schneider 1989)

early 20th c. African-American Southern English (BLUR, from Miethaner fc. 2004)

Table 5: Nonstandard verb forms in earlier black and white Englishes

verb	past tense forms			past participle forms		
	19th c. white (SPOC)	19th c. black (ESN)	20th c. black (BLUR)	19th c. white (SPOC)	19th c. black (ESN)	20th c. black (BLUR)
<i>begin</i>	<i>began</i>	<i>begun</i>	<i>begun, begin, begun</i>	<i>begun, began</i>		<i>begun</i>
<i>blow</i>	<i>blowed, blown</i>	<i>blowed, blew</i>	<i>blew, blowed, blow, blown</i>	<i>blown, blowed, blew</i>	<i>blown, blowed</i>	<i>blown, blowed</i>
<i>break</i>	<i>broke, brake, broked</i>		<i>broke</i>	<i>broken, broke, brokened</i>	<i>broken, broke</i>	<i>broken, broke, breaked, broked</i>
<i>buy</i>		<i>bought, buyed</i>	<i>bought</i>			<i>bought, buyed</i>
<i>catch</i>		<i>caught, ketched, cotch, cotched</i>	<i>caught, catched, catch, caughten</i>		<i>caught, ketched, cotch, cotched</i>	<i>caught, catched</i>
<i>drink</i>		<i>drank, drunk</i>	<i>drank, drunk, drink, drinked</i>			<i>drunk, drink, drinked, drank</i>
<i>drive</i>		<i>drove, driv, druv</i>	<i>drove, driv, driven, drivened</i>	<i>drove</i>	<i>drove</i>	<i>driven, drove, droven</i>
<i>fall</i>			<i>fell, falled</i>			<i>fallen, fell</i>
<i>give</i>	<i>gave, give</i>	<i>gave, give, gived, gin</i>	<i>gave, give, gived, given</i>	<i>given, give</i>	<i>given, give</i>	<i>given, give, gived, gave</i>

<i>hang</i>		<i>hung, hunged</i>	<i>hung, hanged</i>		<i>hung, hunged</i>	<i>hung</i>
<i>make</i>			<i>made, maked</i>		<i>made, make</i>	<i>made, make, maded</i>
<i>ride</i>	<i>rode</i>	<i>rode, rid</i>	<i>rode, rid, ride</i>	<i>road</i>		<i>rode</i>
<i>ring</i>		<i>rung</i>	<i>rang, rung, ringed, ring</i>			
<i>rise</i>	<i>rose</i>	<i>riz</i>	<i>rose, risen</i>	<i>rise</i>	<i>riz</i>	
<i>run</i>	<i>ran, run</i>	<i>ran, run, runned</i>	<i>run, ran, runned</i>	<i>ran</i>	<i>run, runned</i>	<i>run, runned</i>
<i>shine</i>		<i>shined</i>	<i>shone, shine</i>			
<i>steal</i>		<i>stole, stoled</i>	<i>stole, stoled, stolt, stealed</i>		<i>stoled, stole</i>	<i>stolen, stoled, stole</i>
<i>take</i>	<i>took, taken, tuck, tak, toke</i>	<i>took, taken, tuck, tak, token, tok</i>	<i>took, taken, take, tuck, taked</i>	<i>taken, took, take, tuck</i>	<i>taken, took, token</i>	<i>taken, took, take</i>
<i>wake</i>		<i>woke, waked</i>	<i>woke, waked, woked</i>			<i>waked, woke, woked, wake</i>
<i>win</i>		<i>won</i>	<i>won, winned, win</i>		<i>won</i>	<i>won, winned</i>
<i>write</i>	<i>wrote, write</i>	<i>wrote, write</i>	<i>write, wrote, writ</i>	<i>wrote, write, written</i>	<i>wrote, write</i>	<i>written, wrote</i>

⇒ all major nonstandard types (zero forms, regularization, double formation, past form for participle, participle form for past, deletion of final –en, nonstandard vowel changes) attested throughout;  
slightly more regularization and invariant forms in BLUR?

### 3.3.2. A selection of perfective verb structures

Perfective structures which have been objects of earlier research and deserve closer, comparative investigation:

#### perfect with *be* as auxiliary

With intransitive verbs, an old Germanic pattern preserved into the recent past in nonstandard varieties; e.g.

- (18) Lavenia *is gone* to the farm (SPOC; Allston 60)
- (19) my new ground corn *is come* aup verry well (SPOC; Polk 8)
- (20) he *is run* away (SPOC; Hutch 15)
- (21) I used to be a wildcat, this woman *is tamed* me down (BLUR; Blind Blake, Jump Man Blues)
- (22) There's only three places that *I'm never seen* (BLUR; Charlie Jackson, Blues Monday Morning Blues)

perfective "three-verb pattern" (aux + *done* + pp), observed in earlier but not present-day AAVE (Schneider 1989: 123-124), presumably the source of perfective *done*:

- (23) 'Cause, sweet mama, the cook *is done gone* mad (BLUR; P. Anderson & S. Dooley, Papa's 'Bout To Get Mad)

periphrastic *did* with past reference: (affirmative, not emphatic, not habitual): analytic tense marker, comparable to (mesolectal) Caribbean creoles; not uncommon in earlier Southern Englishes (cf. Schneider 1989, 1997):

- (24) I *did thinke* that they all woulde of stayed (SPOC, Polk 6)  
 (25) that you *did want* them to go up (SPOC; Allston 84)  
 (26) I *did mak* a terrible mistake (SPOC; Johnson 10)  
 (27) Listen, listen, how mournful that whistle *did blow* (BLUR; Elzadie Robinson, Arkansas Mill Blues)  
 (28) Why, they sure *did treated* me dirty (Sonny Boy Williamson, Sunny Land)

### 3.4. Suggesting elementary problems: Identifying units and structures

Methodological requirement of corpus-based, quantifying research: demands clear-cut categorical distinctions

But: Real-life examples (e.g. from corpora) teach us that reality is frequently blurred and messy, defies neat categorizations; ⇒ force us to re-think our categories and descriptive tools

Example (cf. Hierl *fc.* 2004):

- (29) we air all well but Suckey She is very poly (SPOC, Carter 21)  
 (30) the negros is all well only maria she has bin in bad helth since the first of march (SPOC; Polk 24)  
 (31) all are well except John he has ty foid fever (SPOC, Wyche-Otey 13)

to be analyzed as: coordinate main clauses / left dislocation / relativization with personal pronouns as relativizers??

⇒ fuzzy boundaries! Principles considerations, comparisons with similar structures necessary.

## 4. Conclusion

⇒ union of Corpus Linguistics and historical study of Southern English promises new insights, challenges, and research avenues



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