Teacher Language in Trinidad: A Pilot Corpus Study of Direct and Indirect Creolisms in the Verb Phrase[1]

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1. Introduction

Recent work on language use in Trinidad and Tobago (Youssef, 2004) indicates the emergence of a local standard variety of English alongside the English-based Creole spoken in the country. However, no systematic research into the features of this variety has as yet been undertaken. Another change in the language situation which deserves more attention is the increasing acceptance of Creole in schools and other public contexts (cf. e.g. Youssef and James, 2004: 513).

A new corpus of teacher language currently being compiled at the University of the West Indies in St. Augustine as part of a larger corpus of English in Trinidad and Tobago will provide a basis for detailed investigations of the actual language use of speakers who are important models for the generation currently growing up in the country. The teachers were recorded in the classroom and in conversations of a mostly semi-formal type – contexts which favour the use of English though a certain amount of Creole use is also to be expected (cf. also Mühleisen, 2001).

The present paper reports first findings from a subset of the teacher data (this subset comprises only data from Trinidad). It is exploratory in nature and aims primarily to show the potential of a digitized spoken language corpus in research on teacher language in Trinidad and, beyond that, on the use of English and Creole influence on it in the country more generally. This will also have implications for the larger Caribbean context, where corpus-based analyses have so far been limited to Jamaican English (Sand, 1999; Mair, 2002, 2007).

The paper looks specifically at grammatical aspects of the teachers' language use. The verb phrase has been chosen as an area of investigation because the differences between the grammatical systems of English and Creole are particularly pronounced in this area, making it especially suitable for a study of Creolisms.

The term *Creolism* has been defined in the anglophone Caribbean context as "a word, phrase, or usage 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" (Allsopp 2003: s.v. *creolism*). Of course, what may be perceived as errors may eventually become accepted as part of a new standard variety of English (cf. also Christie, 1989). With respect to grammar this is more likely to happen in the case of indirect influence of the Creole on the way an English form or construction is used (cf. Mair, 2002) than in the case of forms directly associated with Creole. The latter are often indicative of code-switching, at least if they are overt forms rather than what Allsopp (2003: lvi) has described as "morphological and syntactic reductions of

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English structure", i.e. forms like Ø –*ing* for progressive aspect, which tend to be more acceptable as part of informal spoken English (cf. ibid.). The present paper is concerned with both indirect and direct Creolisms and among the latter, overt as well as zero forms.

2. The Context of the Study

Trinidad and Tobago is the second largest anglophone country in the Caribbean after Jamaica. As is typical of the region, English is the language of official communication while an English-based Creole is widely spoken, which in the case of Trinidad and Tobago is mainly mesolectal, though a basilectal variety also exists in the smaller island. The situation is, however, not a simple bilingual or diglossic one, as pervasive variation exists between the English and Creole poles of the language spectrum, which has been described in terms of a continuum as found elsewhere in the anglophone Caribbean (e.g. Winford, 1992, 1993) or in terms of code-mixing (e.g. Youssef, 1996, 2004); Youssef has suggested that this code-mixing is often required stylistically in contexts which variously draw on Creole-appropriate and Standard English-appropriate situational features.

In this situation, the average child grows up to school age being mainly exposed to some form of Creole, as exposure to Standard English is usually limited outside the school context (Youssef, 1996: 3f.). The Ministry of Education recognized the Creole as a language in its own right in 1975 and introduced a policy of the type that has been described as "transitional bilingualism" (Craig, 1980), where the use of Creole is accepted until the children have acquired sufficient competence in Standard English (cf. Youssef, 2002: 190). One may assume that the transition to Standard English takes place at the primary school level and has been accomplished by the time children reach secondary school, but according to reports by teachers who provided data for the corpus to be analysed here, this is not necessarily so, especially perhaps because the school system often seems to fail to motivate students to acquire and use the variety (cf. also Youssef, 2005).

3. The Corpus and Analysis

The corpus is being compiled using text categories and procedures of the International Corpus of English, ICE (see Greenbaum (ed.), 1996 and http://www.ucl.ac.uk/english-usage/ice/). The subset of data to be analysed here consists of 15 texts in the category "conversations" (text codes S1A 001–015) and another 15 texts in the category "class lessons" (text codes S1B 001–015).[4] The total amount of words in each category is about 30,000, each text having about 2,000 words.

The speakers are all secondary school teachers. Students' speech in the class lessons has been treated as extra-corpus speech, since, in keeping with ICE, we aim at representing the language use of adults who have completed secondary education or higher (cf. Greenbaum, 1996: 6).[5] The data are from fifteen different secondary

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[4] Final corrections of the transcriptions are currently being made by research assistants at the University of the West Indies. These could lead to minor changes in the quantitative results but will not affect the overall nature of the findings.

[5] The conversations contain a small amount of speech by student fieldworkers, which, for the purpose of the present paper, is not considered either.

schools (including government as well as denominational schools) in urban and rural locations all over Trinidad.

As mentioned above, the conversations are mostly semi-formal, with teachers giving their opinions on topics of interest in the school context that had been suggested by fieldworkers (e.g. corporal punishment, sex education, language use in the classroom). However, there are also a few more informal ones, where teachers simply converse with fellow teachers during the lunch hour, for example. The class lessons range from first to sixth form and cover a broad range of subjects, from mathematics to literature.

Three features have been selected for analysis: habitual *does,* use versus non-use of the auxiliary in present tense progressive forms, and the modal pairs *can/could* and *will/would* (including contracted and negative forms). Quantitative analyses across the whole corpus are combined with close examinations of contexts of use and meanings. Where relevant the corresponding texts from the British component of ICE have been used for comparison.

4. Findings

4.1 Habitual *does*

In Trinidadian Creole [TrC] present habitual aspect is expressed by preverbal *does* (with pronunciation variants [dVz], [@z], [z], and *doz* as a spelling variant; cf. Winer, 1993: 26f.). Youssef (1991: 91) has observed that "*[d]oz* and *go* [TrC future marker] lend themselves most readily to conscious suppression among adults", whereas "[t]he less overt markers, namely –*in(g)* for continuous and Ø for past, are less readily stigmatized in Trinidad society, which leads to their being used in a wider range of settings". In view of this, it is not surprising that habitual *does* rarely occurs in the present corpus. It is almost equally rare in the conversations (11 occurrences) as in the class lessons (7 occurrences).[6] When *does* occurs in the conversations it is mostly in the more informal texts or in contexts which, in Allsopp's (2003: lvii) terminology, can be described as "anti-formal". Consider, for instance, the following examples[7]:

(1)   I now finish Dip Ed so I now now gone through the whole set of crap that they **does** do <#> Cause they **does** preach one thing <,> do something totally different (Trinidad corpus S1A 002)

(2)   Boy me I not talking any Standard English you know <#> I talk Standard English when I have to talk Standard English <,> when the situation warrant it <,> but me I **does** talk me Creole <#> I is Trinidadian I always talking me Creole <,> you understand (Trinidad corpus S1A 007)

In one case it occurs in a short unguarded utterance inserted into the speaker's more careful speech:

(3)   I think <}> <-> people think it's uhm </-> <,> how you'**s** put it <,> <=> people understand better </=> </}> if they use the Creole (Trinidad corpus S1A 006)

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[6] Quantitative results presented here and in subsequent sections exclude occurrences in repetitions, hesitations or false starts (text enclosed by markup symbols <-> </->), uncertain parts of transcriptions (text enclosed by markup symbols <?> </?>) and quoted or imitative speech.
[7] For markup symbols used see Nelson (1996, 2002).

In class lessons it is mostly found in comments which do not directly concern the facts being explained or in personal remarks to the students, as in (4) and (5), respectively, while its use as part of ordinary explanatory discourse as in (6) seems to be exceptional.

(4)   I'll give you all the definition for this just now right <,> <#> Ok let us just put <,> because in questions they **does** ask you to label the Born Haber cycle (Trinidad corpus S1B 013)

(5)   Well I **does** be like hog right through and <}> <–> you does </–> <=> you **does** </=> </}> get along with me (Trinidad corpus S1B 006)

(6)   In certain cases <,,> you might have plants <#> Like let's say <}> <–> like </–> <=> like </=> </}> let's use the example of <,> all right so one **does** use buds <,,> and one **does** use grafts <,> cause we know we could take a mango and put it in the ground and it will grow (Trinidad corpus S1B 007)

Clearly, *does* is largely restricted to certain contexts where speakers are less likely to suppress an overt Creole form and may even choose to consciously insert it.

4.2 Use Versus Non-Use of the Auxiliary in Present Tense Progressive Forms

As has already been mentioned, zero forms are more common among direct Creolisms than overt ones, and Ø –*ing* for present progressive is one such form. (In past contexts TrC has invariant *was* rather than Ø; see Winford, 1992: 50.) In the Trinidad corpus over a third (37%) of present tense progressives do not have an auxiliary. This overall percentage is about the same for both text categories, conversations and class lessons. However, in both categories there are major differences between individual texts, as shown in Table 1.

	Number of texts	
	conversations (S1A 001–015)	class lessons (S1B 001–015)
be –ing (near) categorical	4	5
be –ing > Ø *–ing*	4	5
be –ing ≈ Ø *–ing*	5	2
Ø *–ing* > *be –ing*	2	3
Ø *–ing* (near) categorical	0	0

Table 1: Approximate relation of the number of *be –ing* forms to Ø *–ing* forms in texts in the Trinidad corpus.

In the category conversations, both of the texts with a higher number of Ø *–ing* than *be –ing* forms (as well as one of the texts with equal or almost equal numbers of both forms) are of the more informal type. In the category class lessons the situation is more complex as several factors are likely to influence language use, including the type of school, the level and the subject, and a correlation between any single one of these factors and the extent to which the TrC form is used cannot be established on the basis of the present data.

While certain contexts such as comments and personal remarks (see (7), (8)) seem to favour Ø *–ing,* the two forms are widely found in similar kinds of contexts (or even the same context), as examples (9) and (10) show.

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(7) So this is what your statement will look like as you Ø now learning it you need to write it out until you know it Ø coming out your ears coming out your nose (Trinidad corpus S1B 005)

(8) <#> Form five <,> smoking <#> All all you smokers all you lips Ø getting black from that smoking <#> That's one of the worst habits all you can pick up you know <#> If all you Ø doing it all you should stop is the worst habit (Trinidad corpus S1B 006)

(9) a. and we **are** talking about sodium <,> so we just put sodium in brackets there
b. So Ø we dealing here with the ionic compounds now
(Trinidad corpus S1B 013)

(10) So we Ø paying cash <#> Well how **is** this cash coming out <#> We **are** not paying fully three thousand five hundred we **are** paying cash of thirty-four thirty (Trinidad corpus S1B 011)

Outright code-switching into TrC of course naturally entails the use of *Ø –ing* but on the whole the distribution of this form can be better explained in terms of style differences along a continuum (cf. Winford, 1992) or mixing of codes in varying proportions (cf. Youssef, 1996, 2004). The theory of varilingualism (cf. Youssef, 1996) would explain (9) and (10) above as demanding a solidarity relationship with the students on the one hand and topically related formality on the other in the requirement of a scholastic discipline.


4.3 The Modal Pairs *can/could* and *will/would*

Modal verbs have been widely identified as a major area of indirect Creole influence on Trinidadian English usage (e.g. Winer, 1993: 37f.; Winford, 1993: 174; Solomon, 1993: 106ff.; Youssef, 2004: 48; cf. also Hodge, 1997: 181ff. for a prescriptive viewpoint). Solomon (1993: 106) writes that "the stubbornness with which 'would' is substituted for 'will' (and 'could' for 'can' […]) is one of the most characteristic features of Trinidad speech at almost all levels, and the despair of English teachers (at least those who are aware of it)". These usages stem from the fact that TrC has *would* but not *will* (as an alternative to the future marker *go*), and *could* but not *can,* though it has negative [kja:], equivalent to English *can't* (cf. Solomon, 1993: 114). Hypercorrect use of *can* and *will* where *could* and *would,* respectively, would be expected in International Standard English has also been reported, mostly with examples involving indirect speech (Solomon, 1993: 129; Hodge, 1997: 183).[8] Since such contexts can be expected to be less common in conversation and classroom discourse than contexts requiring the non-past modal forms absent from TrC, one may expect the Trinidadian data to show higher frequencies of *could* and *would* compared to the equivalent texts (S1A 015 and S1B 015) in ICE-GB. Figures 1 and 2 show that this assumption is born out for *could* but not for *would.*

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[8] Due to the semantic mismatch between TrC *coulda* and *woulda,* on the one hand, and English *could have* and *would have*, on the other, the former are also a major source of indirect Creole influence. However, in the present paper attention is limited to modals in non-perfective constructions.
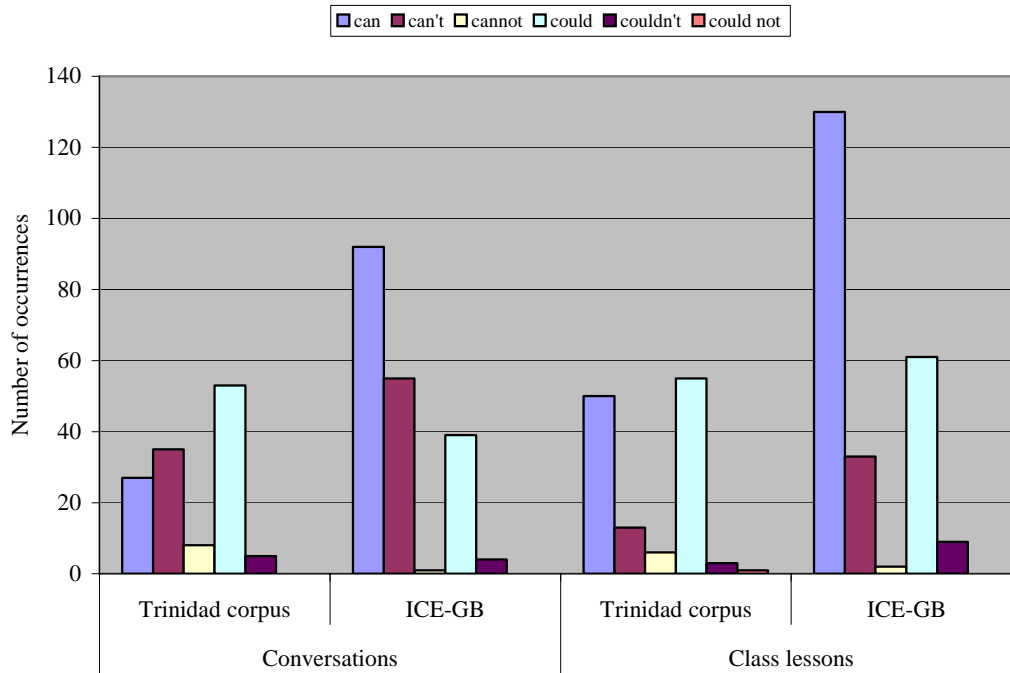
Figure 1: Frequency of *can/could* (including negative forms) in the Trinidad corpus and ICE-GB (S1A 001–015 and S1B 001–015).
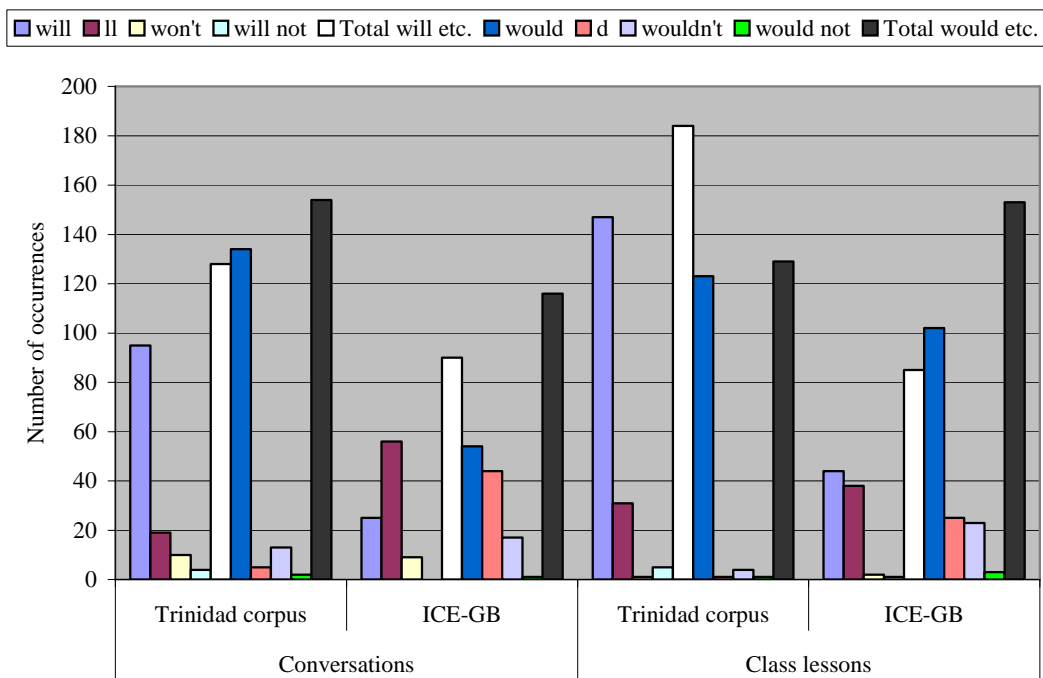
Figure 2: Frequency of *will/would* (including contracted and negative forms) in the Trinidad corpus and ICE-GB (S1A 001–015 and S1B 001–015).

However, the frequencies certainly do not tell the whole story. Pending a detailed semantic analysis of all the modals occurring in the data (to the extent that that is possible, given the ambiguity of modal meanings; cf. Biber et al., 1999: 492ff.), Tables 2 and 3 provide an overview of the meanings associated with the different forms both in the Trinidadian data and the corresponding texts in ICE-GB in their approximate order of frequency (usages attested only once, or more than once but in the same sentence, appear in brackets). The classification of meanings is largely based on Quirk et al. (1985: 219ff.). Unless "past" is specified, the categories of meanings refer specifically to non-past contexts. The general category "past" comprises all contexts requiring a past tense form in International Standard English due either to past reference or backshift in indirect speech (with the exception of the separate category "past habitual" in the case of *would* and related forms). In the case of *can/could,* the whole Trinidad corpus has been taken into consideration, but negative forms have been excluded, since the problem of the absence of an equivalent form in TrC arises only in the case of *can.* In the case of *will/would,* negative forms have also been considered, but because of the large number of occurrences of *will/would* and their contracted and negative equivalents attention has so far been restricted to the conversations.

| | *can* | | *could* | |
	Trinidad corpus	ICE-GB	Trinidad corpus	ICE-GB
1.	possibility	possibility	possibility	possibility
2.	request (*can you ... ?*) ability	ability	ability	hypothetical
3.	permission	request (*can you ... ?*)	past request (*could you ... ?*)	past
4.		permission	permission hypothetical	request (*could you ... ?*)
5.			(past hypothetical)	

Table 2: Meanings of *can/could* in the Trinidad corpus and ICE-GB (S1A 001–015 and S1B 001–015) in order of approximate frequency.

Table 2 suggests that in the case of *can/could,* the differences between the Trinidadian and British data are along the lines expected. Beyond this rough classification of meanings, it needs to be noted that the tendency to use *could* rather than *can* apparent in the quantitative data from the Trinidad corpus is to be explained not only by the use of *could* to denote ability in non-past contexts, as in (11), but also by its more widespread use for possibility, even where the tentative element usually associated with *could* in non-past reference contexts in International Standard English (cf. Quirk et al., 1985: 233) is absent, as in (12). (In the latter example, the teacher elaborates on an earlier statement that he uses both "dialect" – meaning Creole – and Standard English in the classroom, so *could* is clearly not used in the hypothetical sense here.)

(11)   The children they **could** write <,> the children **could** write proper English you know <,> but when it come to talk they talk the broken English (Trinidad corpus S1A 007)

(12) In some classes you have to use more dialect than Standard English for the children to understand <#> In other classes you **could** keep up the use of <}> <–> <.> Stan </.> </–> <=> Standard </=> </}> English you know (Trinidad corpus S1A 001)

	will/'ll/won't/will not		*would/'d/would would not*	
	Trinidad corpus	**ICE-GB**	**Trinidad corpus**	**ICE-GB**
1.	"future" habitual predictive	"future"	habitual predictive	hypothetical
2.	present predictive	habitual predictive present predictive	hypothetical	tentative opinion/desire etc. (*I would say ..., I would like* ... etc.)
3.	(past habitual)		tentative opinion/desire etc. (*I would say ..., I would like* ... etc.)	past
4.			past habitual	past habitual
5.			present predictive	(habitual predictive)
6.			past	
7.			("future")	

Table 3: Meanings of *will/would* and related forms in the conversations in the Trinidad corpus and ICE-GB (S1A 001–015) in order of approximate frequency.

In the case of *will/would* and related forms, the results are less along the predicted lines. The "future" use of *would* which has so often been commented upon in the literature is marginal in the present Trinidadian data. The most salient aspect of *will* and *would* in these data is the widespread use of both in the type of context that Quirk et al. (1985: 228) have described as "habitual predictive":

(13) Like for example when we have the calypso competition you'**ll** have twelve contestants ten female two male <#> On sports day right after you have very few boys marching <,> <#> OK you have to uhm <,> persuade them <unclear> four or five words </unclear> vigorously to take part <O>laughter</O> in the actual event and so on and other things so that and the girls **will** <}> <–> <.> ready </.> </–> <=> readily </=> </}> step forward and so on (Trinidad corpus S1A 015)

(14) I **would** use mainly Standard English when teaching and even trying to get responses from the students <#> Uhm interestingly enough I use Creole more so when I'm teaching religion uh because I think uhm in terms of getting the students to uhm understand and accept who God is uhm to make it more real to them I **would** use Creole more so in that way but not in my formal subjects (Trinidad corpus S1A 006)

Whereas habitual predictive *would* is rather a Trinidadian phenomenon,[9] the habitual predictive use of *will* is of course also possible in British English. However, while in

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[9] The single example of *would* in ICE-GB S1A 001-015 that could be considered habitual predictive seems to be highly exceptional (note the occurrences of *'ll* and *will* in the same context): "Uhm <,> what is a common occurrence is you'**ll** have somebody coming into a college to do a workshop on work with the disabled or dance with the disabled and you'**ll** go along to that workshop and it **would** be full of able-bodied students <,> who are on the course wanting to find out how you do <,> this new thing <#> Uhm there **will** be no disabled dancers in the class" (ICE-GB S1A 001).

the Trinidadian data this use seems to be about as common as the "future" use of *will*, the latter predominates by far in the British data. Thus, the data do confirm that there is an encroachment of *would* into the domain of International Standard English *will* in Trinidadian English, but they also suggest an even more indirect type of TrC influence: the frequent expression of present habitual aspect in Trinidadian English by either *will* or *would* could result from the fact that TrC has grammaticalized a preverbal marker for present habituality which is too stigmatized for it to surface in the kinds of contexts in which habitual predictive *will* or *would* appears in the conversations – these forms are widely used even in the more formal texts and do not seem to have any particular stylistic effects.

In addition to their meanings, the forms of the modal verbs under investigation are also of interest. Figures 1 and 2 reveal differences between the Trinidadian and British data in the extent to which contracted forms are used. These are particularly apparent in the cases of *will/'ll* and *would/'d,* and to some extent *cannot/can't*. Uncontracted *will* and *would* are far more common in the Trinidadian data, and there are also more instances of *cannot,* which is almost absent from the British data. Furthermore, in the case of *will/'ll* and *would/'d*, contracted forms are clearly more frequent in the British conversations than in the class lessons, whereas the results for the Trinidadian conversations and class lessons are similar.

The findings from the British data for modal verb contractions are of course entirely as expected. In native varieties such as British English, contractions generally are a strong indicator of formality, being highly favoured in conversation and, at the other end of the spectrum, almost absent from academic writing, for example (cf. e.g. Biber et al., 1999: 1129). The situation is different in second language contexts such as India, where English is generally associated with formality and uncontracted forms are frequent even in conversation (cf. Mair, 2007). Jamaican conversations from ICE analysed by Mair (2007) showed a frequency of contractions (*be*-contractions, specifically) somewhere between native and second language usage. In the case of the present Trinidadian data, the absence of a clear difference between the conversations and class lessons is not unexpected, the conversations being mostly of a more formal type than the ones in the British corpus, but the overall high frequency of uncontracted forms still needs to be explained. Certainly, as in Jamaica, English is associated with formality in a situation where Creole is the majority first language and the language of choice in informal communication. This alone could very well account for the results, but, depending on the particular form in question, there are additional factors to be considered. For example, in the case of *would,* the alternating short form in TrC is *wu* (cf. James and Youssef, 2004: 476), which means that in the Trinidadian context semi-formal speech falls in between a Creole and a formal English variety neither of which favours *'d.* (The same would apply to *be*-contractions, which are also disfavoured in Creole; cf. Winford, 1992.) In the case of negated forms the Creole does support the contracted forms, but distancing from overt forms associated with TrC could lead to an increased use of uncontracted forms in the more formal range of styles, exceeding their use in varieties such as British or American English. Certainly, contractions await further investigation once more texts representing different genres have been added to the Trinidad corpus. However, in a situation where the primary correlate of informality is Creole use, it may be that a feature like Ø *–ing* versus *be –ing* – where categorical use of the former represents the Creole/informal end of the language spectrum and categorical use of the latter the English/formal one – is a better indicator of stylistic level than contractions, where coincidences and contrasts between Creole and formal English usage and the

possibility of variation in the latter could give rise to complex patterns of either reinforcement or avoidance of uncontracted forms.

5. Conclusion

This paper has used a corpus of teacher language in Trinidad to demonstrate the potential of a spoken language corpus in research on the use of English in Trinidad and Tobago and the way it is influenced by the local Creole. Although the corpus is as yet relatively small, it has proven useful for an analysis of the extent and ways to which direct Creolisms such as habitual *does* and *Ø –ing* occur in the classroom context and mostly semi-formal conversations. In the case of more indirect Creole influence the corpus has turned out to be particularly illuminating. We were able to confirm that under the influence of a Creole modal system lacking *can* and *will,* the semantic distinctions between these forms and their past tense counterparts have been eroded to a certain extent, as has often been observed in the literature. The most interesting finding in this area, however, was that a usage which is possible in British English but did not appear very often in the comparative British data used, namely habitual predictive *will,* had apparently been extended in the Trinidadian context, presumably under the influence of a Creole system which has a preverbal marker for present habitual aspect. In addition, contractions have been identified as a potentially complex area of variation which requires further corpus-based research.

It will be interesting to compare some of the findings of the present study to data from the only Caribbean ICE corpus so far, ICE-Jamaica. For example, as Jamaican Creole makes a distinction between the modals *wi* 'will' and *wuda* 'would' and lacks a marker for present habitual aspect, we would not expect our findings for habitual predictive *will* and *would* to be replicated in a study of the use of *will* and *would* in ICE-Jamaica. Ideally, we should also be able to study another Eastern Caribbean variety of English whose Creole substrate has a present habitual marker, e.g. Barbadian English, but a comparable amount of data as we now have for Jamaican English, with ICE-Jamaica close to completion, or even as we will soon have for Trinidad, where we plan to add at least another 100,000 words to our corpus over the next few months, is not likely to become available soon for any other variety of English in the Caribbean. There can be now doubt, however, that corpus-based research has much to contribute to the study of Caribbean English usage.

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