

# **YOUNG ADULTS' ATTITUDES TO STANDARD AND NONSTANDARD ENGLISH IN AN ENGLISH-CREOLE SPEAKING COUNTRY: THE CASE OF THE BAHAMAS**

**Dr. Raymond OENBRING**

School of English Studies

The College of The Bahamas

[raymond.oenbring@cob.edu.bs](mailto:raymond.oenbring@cob.edu.bs) or [oenbrr@gmail.com](mailto:oenbrr@gmail.com)

Phone: 1-242-376-6463

**William FIELDING**

Director of Institutional Planning

The College of The Bahamas

[william.fielding@cob.edu.bs](mailto:william.fielding@cob.edu.bs)

Phone: 1-242-302-4311

## **Abstract**

The current piece is the first published empirical study looking at attitudes to Bahamian Creole English (BCE) and Standard English (SE) in The Bahamas. For the study, a web-based survey was taken by students in first-year English composition courses at the College of The Bahamas (COB), the country's only four-year college or university. When possible, the questions asked in the study follow those of previous studies of attitudes to nonstandard varieties of English in order facilitate comparison between datasets. As such, the study is an important addition to the research literature on attitudes to Creole languages in the Caribbean and nonstandard varieties of English more generally. In particular, the study focuses on: how contemporary Bahamian young adults view BCE; whether BCE remains stigmatised; to what extent BCE is a marker of identity among the respondents; which social groups the students identify SE with; in what social situations the students use BCE over SE; and in what social situations students use SE instead of BCE. The study pays particular attention to respondents' attitudes to the use of BCE and SE in the classroom. Among other results, the study finds respondents report relatively consistent rates of use of BCE from their grandparents' generation to their own.

**Keywords:** Language Attitudes, Bahamian Creole English, Standard English, Bahamas, Caribbean

## 1. Introduction

### *1.1. Attitudes to Standard and Nonstandard Varieties in North America and the Caribbean*

In the English-speaking Americas, attitudes toward the place of Standard English and nonstandard varieties both inside and outside of the classroom have taken distinct tracks in different regions. In the more economically developed nations of the United States and Canada, where speakers of nonstandard varieties (like African American Vernacular English) have remained largely on the economic margins, some progress has been made, specifically at the postsecondary level, toward meaningful acceptance of the strategic use of nonstandard varieties in the classroom as a way to engage students from marginalised groups. Indeed, in North America, despite the late 90s so-called '*Ebonics*' debate debacle that has seemingly put a stop to a serious discussion of how nonstandard dialects might be used strategically in primary and secondary curriculum, it is now commonly accepted by North American college composition (i.e., essay writing) instructors that allowing students from marginalised and minority groups to use their home language in their writing is part and parcel of progressive pedagogy. However, despite this progress in the realm of postsecondary education, traditional and uninformed opinions about Standard and nonstandard English prevail in much of the broader population in English-speaking North America.

Although the fact of the populations of Anglo-Caribbean countries largely speak English Creoles would seem to make these countries more open to serious discussions of the place of nonstandard varieties in the classroom and in their broader society, many in the former (and still current) UK colonies of the English-speaking Caribbean express a deference to Standard English (a term that is commonly used in the Caribbean to draw distinctions between Standard English and their local variety) that their North American counterparts, both scholarly and lay, lack. Indeed, many in the Caribbean seemingly still buy into the delusion that the people of their country *speaks nothing but the Queen's English*. These attitudes to the Creole and Standard English among the population of Caribbean countries have been noted in a number of studies, including Rickford (1983), Wassink (1999), Mühleisen (2001), and Hackert (2001 and 2004).

Moreover, although many academics and cultural writers in the Caribbean have worked hard to build students' and the general populations' esteem for their local Creoles, in many Anglophone Caribbean countries the pedagogical emphasis remains — from the primary up to

the postsecondary level — in large part on students' mechanical correctness in Standard English. Indeed, rather than viewing students' use of nonstandard varieties as acts of valuable and empowering transgression, many Caribbean college composition instructors, following Caribbean primary and secondary school teachers, have the tendency to view these acts as merely transgressions: errors. This somewhat surprising conservatism stems in part, somewhat understandably, from Caribbean teachers' anxieties that not preparing students to communicate effectively in international Standard English only serves to further marginalise their countries in the global economy. Nonetheless, there is clearly a good deal of 'colonial lag' in attitudes to Standard English in the postcolonial Anglophone Caribbean.

### *1.2. The Case of The Bahamas*

The present study is about attitudes to Standard English and to the Creole in and out of the classroom in The Bahamas, a country that although certainly culturally in the Caribbean, straddles the boundary between North America and the Caribbean proper perhaps more than any other nation. Located Southeast of the US state of Florida and Northeast of Cuba, the Commonwealth of The Bahamas is an archipelago of approximately 700 islands and cays that are, technically, not geographically in the Caribbean sea. Somewhat unique among its Caribbean counterparts (with another notable exception being the Turks and Caicos, a group of islands geographically contiguous with the Bahamian archipelago, but still a UK protectorate), a large percentage of the current Bahamian population descend from the slaves of British Loyalist planters, who moved their plantations from the coastal regions of the Southeast United States to The Bahamas in the years after the American Revolution (see, for example, Craton & Saunders, 1992; Lawlor, 1996; Hackert & Holm, 2009). That is to say, with only a small number of the slave ancestors of contemporary Black Bahamians (some 90% of the country) having made their first landing in the Americas in what is now The Bahamas, and with Bahamians receiving most of their genetic and cultural endowment from erstwhile 'Americans', Bahamians have arguably greater cultural, historic, and linguistic affinities to Black Americans than any other Caribbean people do.

Accordingly, the first language of most Bahamians, known to linguists as Bahamian Creole English (BCE), is the closest extant national variety to proto- African American Vernacular English and/or Gullah. In fact, BCE is arguably a closer relative to American Black

English varieties than it is to other Caribbean English creoles (For more information on the relationship of BCE and Gullah, see Holm (1983), Hackert & Huber (2007), and Hackert & Holm (2009)). However, despite this unique situation, BCE has received comparatively little attention from international scholars in comparison to other Caribbean English Creole languages like Jamaican Creole English (JCE) and Guyanese Creole English (GCE).

Although studies of attitudes toward the Creole and/or Standard English among the local population have been carried out in several countries around the English-speaking Caribbean (e.g., in Guyana (Rickford, 1983); in Jamaica (Shields-Brodber, 1997; Wassink, 1999) and in Trinidad and Tobago (Winford, 1976; Mühleisen, 1993; Deuber, 2012)) and in many other countries around the world (e.g., in South Africa (Addendorff, 1993); in Cameroon (Wilt, 1994); in Singapore (Tan & Tan, 2008) and in Malaysia (Ngeow et al., 2003)), as of yet there have been no published academic studies of attitudes to the local varieties of English in The Bahamas. Indeed, Bahamian attitudes to BCE and its relation to Standard English (SE) is one of many areas of Bahamian life and culture where there remain lamentably few publically-available empirical academic studies.

While Léger and Armbrister's study of attitudes to Haitian Creole French (HCF) among college and high school students in The Bahamas briefly touches on students' attitudes to BCE (Léger & Armbrister, 2009: 31), most of the study focuses on the students' attitudes to HCF. To date the most substantial discussion of Bahamian attitudes to BCE is in Hackert (2004), the revised published version of Hackert's dissertation (Hackert, 2001). Hackert notes, for example, that "among those who display language consciousness, negative attitudes toward their own vernacular prevail. Thus, the Bahamian 'dialect' is often view as 'bad' or 'broken' English and opposed to 'proper,' i.e., Standard English" (Hackert, 2001: 70). However, in both publications, Hackert's analysis of Bahamian attitudes to language, developed out of extensive interviews with Bahamians, seems based in *conventional wisdom* and does not provide empirical measures to support its claims. Moreover, Hackert's study, in the interest of fleshing out more basilectal patterns of usage and attitudes to language, focuses more on working class, older people (the youngest interviewee was 25 at the time of the interviews in the late 1990s). Conversely, the current study is focuses directly on upwardly-mobile youth, the future professional class of the country: college students.

As previously suggested, the current study will be the first published empirical study of Bahamian attitudes (in this case, specifically among Bahamian college students) toward Standard English and their local variety(ies) of English. The specific issues that are focused on in the study include: how contemporary Bahamian young adults view BCE; whether BCE remains stigmatised; how students understand BCE to be unique from other varieties of English; whether students are proud of BCE; to what extent BCE is a marker of identity; what times and places they would use BCE over SE; and on what occasions the respondents use BCE. The study also attempts to get a sense of Bahamian young adults' ideas regarding Standard English, including: who they think speaks SE; where they use SE and BCE; and whether they are comfortable using SE. As previously intimated, the current study is particularly interested in attitudes toward BCE and SE among teachers — in this specific case, future teachers. The study is able to focus specifically on the opinions of future educators as it asks respondents to select their enrolled or planned major fields of study. It should be noted at this point that the institution at which the study was carried out, the College of The Bahamas, is the only 4-year college or university in the entire Bahamas and has for a number of years produced the vast majority of the country's teachers.

### *1.3. Sociolinguistic Situation and Language Attitudes in The Bahamas*

At the independence from the United Kingdom in 1973, British English served as the primary prestige dialect in The Bahamas, a preeminence reinforced in the years leading up to independence by the colony's largely British expatriate teaching force. While Bahamians have in the decades since replaced a large number of the expatriates in the teaching force (Hackert, 2010: 44), the UK-inherited legal system and other governmental institutions have served as a conservatizing force for maintaining British spellings (and a handful of lexical preferences) as the official standard. This occurred despite The Bahamas' geographical proximity to the United States (indeed, Nassau is less than 200 miles from Miami), and the growing flood of American media in the country. While British spellings remain the official standard, American spellings are often used interchangeably (see, for example, Bruckmaier & Hackert, 2011). This stalemate between the use of American and British Standard English spellings in The Bahamas is symbolised nicely by the orthographic preferences of the two major mainstream daily

newspapers in Nassau, with one more consistently using British spellings and the other more consistently using American spellings (Oenbring, 2010: 55).

Nonetheless, the impact of American phonology is clear. Cutler et al. (2006) note, for example, the tendency of many Bahamians to adopt the perceived ‘correct’ American rhotic pronunciations, despite the fact that Bahamian English at all levels of the Creole continuum is largely r-less. Indeed, it seems clear that, due to the influence of the waves of American tourists that visit the country each year (more than 90% of the total number of visitors), and due to the ubiquitous flood of American media, American English has in recent decades supplanted British English as the most important variety of ‘foreign English’ in The Bahamas (see Roberts’ (1988) typology of the varieties of English in the Caribbean/West Indies).

Currently, most Black Bahamians speak BCE as a home language and have available some form of Standard English to use in more formal or less habitual occasions.

The variety of Standard English spoken in The Bahamas (that is Standard Bahamian English) has been the subject of a pair of recent corpus linguistic studies (Oenbring, 2010; Bruckmaier & Hackert, 2011) and has similarities with other Caribbean Standard Englishes (e.g., preference for formalisms like the legalistic *persons* over *people* or *individuals*). The socio-historical development of BCE has been the subject of a handful of studies, including Lawlor (1996 and 2012), Hackert & Huber (2007), and Hackert & Holm (2009).

Although long gone are the days of the mid 1980s, when BCE was briefly banned from local TV and radio (Hackert, 2001: 70; Cutler et al., 2006: 2069), BCE is still somewhat limited in official public domains in The Bahamas. Local television news broadcasts and current events interview shows – by far the most prominent forms of local television content in The Bahamas – while often displaying mesolectal features, are largely in (Bahamian) Standard English. Although BCE is more common among radio announcers (and very common among audience members on radio call-in programs), many radio announcers are indistinguishable from Americans in their pronunciation (Cutler et al., 2006: 2069). While BCE commonly appears in Bahamian music, in local Bahamian radio and television commercials BCE is often limited to the subordinate role of humour, and/or to serve as voice the ‘unsophisticated’ mindset that needs ‘correcting’ by an SE speaker.

While progress has been made in decades since independence to *Bahamianise* primary and secondary school curriculum in other areas of study like history and social studies, the

Ministry of Education and individual schools in The Bahamas have in the past few decades demonstrated surprisingly little enthusiasm regarding Bahamianising English Language curriculum. Indeed, Cutler et al. have noted that "after independence, a 'White Paper on Education' was drafted with the aim to reverse the traditional deculturization practices of the colonial administrators. While this partially accomplished with subjects such as History, Social Studies, and even Literature, the Bahamianization of the English Language curriculum was never seriously attempted" (Cutler et al., 2006: 2069). That is to say, Bahamian students' compositions are still assessed largely according to external (either British-inherited or broader Caribbean) models and rubrics for writing. Moreover, despite an active community of writers and academics working to legitimate the BCE in the past few decades, there remain very few broadly-distributed print-published creative works incorporating BCE. In this regard, The Bahamas may be somewhat behind a number of its Caribbean counterparts in accepting and promoting creative works in the local Creole. One notable exception to this pattern is Telcine Turner Rolle's groundbreaking play incorporating BCE *Woman Take Two* (1987), a piece read by both private and public school students in The Bahamas.

Like elsewhere in the English-speaking Caribbean, one factor that may be slowing broad recognition by the population of the unique value and systematicity of the Creole is the lack of an official state-sanctioned orthography. Despite the lack of an official orthography, scholars have noted the existence of normative regimes of spellings in Caribbean English Creoles (e.g., Deuber & Hinrichs, 2007) and even in BCE (Oenbring, 2013). As a number of scholars have noted (e.g., Hinrichs, 2006), a place where these normative, but non-standardised creole-phonology-inspired regimes of spelling propagate is in the realm of computer-mediated communication.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1. The Survey Instrument*

The current study is based on a survey the author conducted of first-year college composition students at the College of The Bahamas (COB). The web questionnaire, located at the popular survey website SurveyMonkey.com, asked students to complete both multiple choice

and short answer questions in order to get a sense of their attitudes to Bahamian Creole and Standard English. Students in college composition classes were asked to fill out the survey outside of class time for a small completion mark. Answers were logged by students in six different class sections of the COB's first first-year composition course (English 119) over three academic semesters from February 2010 to March 2011. After the data were collected, data analysis was done in SPSS. Results from the survey were regarded as statistically significant if the p-value was 0.05 or less. When means are reported, they are accompanied by their standard error.

While Internet surveys remain a somewhat controversial research tool, with certain studies (e.g., Fricker & Schonlau, 2002) being more skeptical of the value and reliability of Internet questionnaires than others (e.g., Fenner et al., 2012), at least one study (e.g., Gosling et al., 2004) has found that, while Internet surveys may have biases, these biases appear to be no greater than other surveys that rely upon self-selected participants. However, as the students who filled out the survey in the current study all share the similarity of being college students enrolled in the same class, the sample of the current study is certainly more focused and principled than that of one involving entirely self-selected participants taken from the Internet population of The Bahamas at large. Indeed, as a small, still developing country, without extensive research funding or a totally reliable mail system, but with relatively high rates of Internet use and access, The Bahamas seems well-suited for carefully designed Internet-survey-based research. Accordingly, Internet surveys have been used by a handful of other published academic studies of Bahamian life and culture (e.g., Fielding et al., 2011); the current study is not the first. Nonetheless, the authors make no claim that the presented data are representative of the broader Bahamian population, or even all Bahamian young adults. However, the data do present the opinions of those students who participated in the study. In general, as there are so few scholarly studies of Bahamian language and culture in any form, the current study demonstrates a preference for the presentation of raw data, data that can be used by other researchers for meta-analysis, rather than using the data to interrogate prevailing academic theories.

While linguists' preferred term for the first language (L1) of most of the Bahamian population is *Bahamian Creole English* (BCE), to avoid confusion the survey instrument itself used the term *Bahamian Dialect* (BD), the term commonly used by Bahamians to describe their L1. Bahamians' preference for the term *Bahamian Dialect* seems to be based partially on the fact



that Bahamians are not totally convinced that their L1 is something other than English and partially because they associate the notion of *creole* with the stigmatised Haitian minority (For more on the stigma faced by the Haitian minority in the Bahamas, see Fielding et al. (2008)). Indeed, as Hackert notes "the majority of Bahamians are extremely eager to distance themselves from anything 'creole,' as that word is associated with Haitians and their speech" (Hackert, 2010: 70). While the current study understands these labels as interchangeable, the current study uses the term *Bahamian Creole English* (BCE) for its analysis.

A number of the questions in the survey were inspired by and/or directly follow previous surveys of attitudes to nonstandard and/or Creole varieties of English in order to facilitate comparison between the datasets. For example, the question that asks students how confident they are of their ability change to Standard English when they deem such a switch to be necessary is inspired by Trammell and Durnell-Uwechue's (2001) online survey of speakers of African American Vernacular English. Moreover, the questions in the study asking whether or not the respondent would use BCE in particular enumerated social situations and in particular forms of communication are directly inspired by Wassink's (1999) study of attitudes to Jamaican Creole English (Note that Wassink claims the survey instrument used in her study loosely follows that originally developed by Li (1994) (Wassink, 1999: 62)). However, the current study has updated the list to include digital forms of communication like email and Facebook wall posts. Furthermore, the questions in the study asking students to express whether they judge speakers of Creole or SE to be more trustworthy are inspired by similar questions in the Jamaican Language Unit's attitude survey (2005) and Rickford's classic study of attitudes to the Creole in Guyana (Rickford, 1983).

The survey instrument includes a small number of questions eliciting demographic data in to allow comparison between different social indicators (e.g., age, gender, college major, island of birth). Perhaps the most personal of these questions in the survey instrument is that which asks students whether they attended private or public schools during their primary and secondary education, a question meant to serve as an indirect indicator of socioeconomic class.

A number of questions asked students to respond using scaled answers to facilitate numerical comparison and statistical analysis. For example, students were asked to report the frequency of use of BCE by various members of their family and social groups and were given the options of *never*, *rarely*, *sometimes*, *often*, and *always*. In the data analysis, these responses

were easily converted to a 1-5 scale (with 1 = *always*, and 5 = *never*). Students were also asked to rate how much they agreed or disagreed with a variety assessments or assertions about BCE (e.g., *Bahamian Dialect is a form of 'broken English'*) with a quantitative-analysis-amenable scaled answer (with *strongly disagree* = 1, and *strongly agree* = 5). While most questions were designed to use a 1-5 scale, other questions used different scales. For example, the question *If you speak BD, how confident are you of your ability to switch from BD to SE?* used a scale from 1-4 (with 1 = *very confident*, and 4 = *not confident*). After the scaled question, most questions asked students to offer short answers explaining their response.

Following an ongoing tradition in sociolinguistic research of directly asking informants about their attitudes to language rather than eliciting markers of attitude indirectly (e.g., Deuber, 2012), the current study, as it is based on an Internet questionnaire, is obviously designed to measure explicit attitudes rather than implicit attitudes to language varieties. Although relatively little is known about how well explicitly elicited attitudes about language varieties reflect implicit attitudes, at least one study has cast doubt on how well explicitly expressed attitudes to language reflect implicit attitudes (e.g., Pantos, 2010). Nonetheless, the current study views web questionnaires as a valuable, practical research tool for eliciting large samples of language attitudes data. Indeed, interrogating how well self-reported web questionnaires can be used for studies of phonological distinction, Dollinger affirms their value as a research tool, noting that "self-reports in the form of [web questionnaires] are not likely to go away in the information age; on the contrary, new technologies could help revitalize them. As this study suggests, if applied consciously, there is no reason to throw out this tool. The sheer range of speakers one can reach with an online questionnaire is unparalleled" (Dollinger, 2012: 103).

### **3. Results**

#### *3.1. Respondents*

At the end of the study, responses from 95 students were retained for analysis. Responses from students not yet 18 years old, or legally adults in The Bahamas, were precluded from consideration. The remaining sample of students had average of age of 19.8 years (standard error: 0.28). Although the sample size of the study is not as large as might be desired, the number

of respondents for the study is nearly twice the size of that in Wassink’s study of attitudes to the Creole in Jamaica (N=51; Wassink, 1999). While the disparity in numbers of respondents between genders in the current study is striking (80.2% female), this percentage is actually fairly consistent with enrolment and graduation rates at the College of The Bahamas (e.g., Thompson, 2011). 71.6% of students reported New Providence, where the capital and major population centre of The Bahamas, Nassau, is located, as their home island; this is consistent with Bahamian population patterns: approximately 70% of the total population of the Bahamas live on the island of New Providence. Conversely, 28.4% of students reported their home to be a rural ‘family island’ (an island other than New Providence in The Bahamas). 37.5% of students reported attending private schools for their primary and secondary education. 38.5% reported attending purely public institutions. The remaining 24.0% reported attending at least one of each in their primary and secondary education. Table 1 presents the breakdown of students by their enrolled or intended major.

Table 1: Students’ Reported Major Field of Study

Major	N	Percent
Science and Technology	23	24.0
Business	19	19.8
Nursing and Allied Health Professions	17	17.7
Education	15	15.6
Law	10	10.4
CHMI	7	7.3
Small Island Sustainability	2	2.1
School of Communication	1	1.0
English	1	1.0

### 3.2. Reported Use of Bahamian Creole

Table 2 presents the frequency of use of BCE that respondents reported for key members of their immediate social environment. Respondents were also given the option of selecting N/A if the relative(s) in question were deceased or the students do not intimately know

the person (e.g., absent fathers or mothers). Despite the fact that popular ideology in The Bahamas routinely associates frequent use of BCE with older and rural speakers, students reported relatively similar levels of use of BCE among their grandparents' generation and their own. Students reported higher frequencies of BCE use than for their grandparents (mean of 2.8), themselves (mean of 2.3), and their siblings (mean of 2.4) (Wilcoxon signed ranks test,  $z=-2.12$ ,  $p=0.024$ ,  $n=33$ ). In fact, students reported the highest rate of use of BCE for their friends (mean of 2.1). These results suggest that students can without difficulty include both what they may perceive to be rustic 'island' talk of older generations in the youth slang of their peers under the overarching category of '*Bahamian Dialect*'.

Table 2: Reported Frequency of Use of BCE by Members of Social Environment

Person(s)	Never 5	Rarely 4	Sometimes 3	Often 2	Always 1	Mean	Standard Error
You	0.0%	9.5%	26.3%	49.5%	14.7%	2.3	0.09
Your Siblings	0.0%	14.0%	21.0%	38.0%	27.0%	2.4	0.13
Your Friends	1.0%	4.0%	18.0%	33.0%	44.0%	2.1	0.11
Your Mother	4.2%	21.1%	27.4%	27.4%	16.8%	2.8	0.13
Your Father	3.2%	17.9%	22.1%	26.3%	21.1%	2.8	0.15
Your Grandparents	3.2%	18.1%	10.6%	20.2%	34.0%	2.8	1.8

As is well established in the sociolinguistic literature, studies of numerous language communities around the globe have found women to use nonstandard features less frequently than men (e.g., Trudgill, 1972; Milroy, 1976; Gordon, 1997), a pattern that manifested itself in a limited manner in the current study. First of all, female students reported slightly less frequent use of BCE (mean of 2.3) than male students did (2.4). However, this difference was not statistically significant. Moreover, mothers used BCE less than respondents (Wilcoxon signed ranks test,  $z=-3.20$ ,  $p=0.0001$ ,  $n=94$ ). Furthermore, students were more likely to report female members of their social environment to be the primary driving force for their negative attitudes to the Creole, if those negative ideas are present. Indeed, students were seven times as likely to

report that their negative attitudes to BCE came primarily from their mother (n= 11) rather than their father (n=2) (see Table 3). Students also identified primary and secondary school teachers (still a primarily female group in The Bahamas) as an important source of their negative attitudes to BCE (n=19). Conversely, only a small number of students reported receiving negative attitudes toward the Creole from their siblings (3%), or friends (3%).

Table 3: Primary Driving Force of Negative Attitudes to BCE, if Present in the Student

	N	Percent
Teacher	19	47.5%
Mother	11	27.5%
Father	2	5.0%
Other Adult	6	15.0%
Friends	1	2.5%
Siblings	1	2.5%

Students who had exclusively attended private school reported slightly less frequent personal use of BCE (mean of 2.39, standard error: 0.140) than those who attended public schools (mean of 2.31, standard error: 0.131) or both private and public schools (mean of 2.17, standard error: 0.937), but again these differences were not significant. Similarly, the study found no significant difference in average reported rates of personal use of BCE for students originally from rural ‘family islands’ in The Bahamas (mean 2.19, standard error: 0.160) versus those originally from New Providence island, where Nassau is located (mean 2.33, standard error: 0.101). Interestingly, students also reported a high degree of confidence in their ability to switch between BCE and SE when they deemed such a switch necessary (according to a 1-4 scale<sup>1</sup>; mean of 1.82, standard error: 0.102).

Table 4 presents students’ responses to a series of *Would you use BD to ... ?* questions, a set of queries inspired by a similar list in Wassink’s of attitudes to Jamaican Creole English (JCE) in Jamaica (Wassink, 1999). Most of the students’ responses follow expected patterns of language and register choice, with students reporting decreased use of BCE in school and work

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<sup>1</sup> The scale for the question asking students how confident they are in their ability to code switch is: 1 = very confident; 4 = not confident.

environments and increased use of BCE in informal situations, including interactions with friends and in online environments. Perhaps the most striking finding in this part of the study is the relatively low percent of respondents who affirm that they would consciously use BCE when answering the telephone (26%). This number is, however, higher than that reported by Wassink, which found in Jamaica that only 8% of respondents would use JCE to answer the telephone (Wassink, 1999: 72). Also of note when comparing the findings of the current study to Wassink's is the differing rates at which respondents would use the local Creole in a job interview; while only 1% of the Bahamian students in the current study indicate that they would use BCE in a job interview, 18% of the respondents (admittedly on average a more rural and less educated group) indicate that they would consciously use JCE during a job interview (Wassink, 1997: 72).

Table 4: Reported Social Situations in which Students Use BCE

<i>Would you use BD to...</i>	Yes Percent	Not Certain Percent
<i>... write a post on a Facebook wall?</i>	86.3%	8.4%
<i>... describe a news or sports story to a friend?</i>	81.1%	3.2%
<i>... write an email to a friend?</i>	76.0%	6.3%
<i>... speak to a parent?</i>	70.5%	5.3%
<i>... speak to a grandparent?</i>	66.3%	8.4%
<i>... write a poem?</i>	63.2%	13.7%
<i>... write a letter to a friend?</i>	46.9%	8.3%
<i>... write a short story?</i>	33.3%	11.5%
<i>... answer the telephone?</i>	26.0%	9.4%
<i>... address a teacher?</i>	20.8%	5.2%
<i>... teach a class of children?</i>	11.6%	3.2%
<i>... write an essay?</i>	6.3%	7.4%
<i>... write an email to a supervisor?</i>	3.1%	0.0%
<i>... address a supervisor?</i>	4.2%	0.0%
<i>... conduct a job interview?</i>	1.0%	0.0%

### 3.3. Attitudes to BCE

Table 5 presents the breakdown of respondents' answers to a number of assertions about BCE. As the table suggests, it is clear that the students have very conflicting and nuanced attitudes to BCE. While a substantial majority agreed with the statement that *BD is a form of 'Broken English'* (mean of 2.9),<sup>2</sup> a substantial number also agreed with the statement *I am proud of BD* (mean of 3.0), and *I enjoy speaking BD* (mean of 2.7). All of this suggests that BCE/BD has a substantial amount of what sociolinguists refer to as 'covert prestige' (a concept stemming originally from Labov (1966) and Trudgill (1972)). As Rickford long ago noted, "the impression that Caribbean populations have nothing but loathing for their native Creole and nothing but longing for the Queen's English is certainly a mistaken one" (Rickford, 1987: 36). Indeed, as a whole the respondents were equivocal as to whether *Standard English is better than BD* (mean of 3.12, standard error: 0.125).

Table 5: Students' Responses to a Number of Assertions about BCE

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Standard Error	p-value <sup>3</sup>
	1	2	3	4	5			
<i>I enjoy speaking BD.</i>	4.3%	6.4%	31.9%	31.9%	25.5%	3.68	0.109	<0.001
<i>BD is a form of 'broken' English.</i>	5.2%	3.1%	11.5%	55.2%	25.0%	3.92	0.100	<0.001
<i>BD is a different language from Standard English.</i>	4.2%	20.0%	25.3%	36.8%	13.7%	3.36	0.111	0.002
<i>I am proud of BD.</i>	4.2%	1.0%	22.9%	34.4%	37.5%	4.0	0.104	<0.001
<i>BD should be the</i>	24.0%	28.1%	21.9%	16.7%	9.4%	2.59	0.130	0.002

<sup>2</sup> This number seems to agree with the findings of Léger and Armbrister where 53% of COB student respondents agreed with the statement that *Bahamian Dialect is bad English* (Léger & Armbrister, 2009: 30).

<sup>3</sup> The t-test tests the mean value against a value of 3 in order to indicate differences from neutral reactions.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Standard Error	p-value <sup>3</sup>
	1	2	3	4	5			
<i>national language of The Bahamas.</i>								
<i>Standard English is better than BD.</i>	12.8%	11.7%	43.6%	14.9%	17.0%	3.12	0.125	0.350
<i>BD is my mother tongue.</i>	10.5%	18.9%	23.2%	31.6%	15.8%	3.23	0.127	0.070

Léger and Armbrister’s study of attitudes to HCF reported numbers that seemed to suggest that students attending private schools in the Bahamas demonstrate comparatively worse attitudes to BCE than their public school counterparts (Léger & Armbrister, 2009). Specifically, the study reported that 72% of private school students surveyed (N=100) agreed with the statement *Bahamian Dialect is bad English*. Conversely, only 53% of public school students surveyed (N=165) agreed with the same assertion (id.: 31). However, the current study finds no evidence of this pattern. In fact, COB students who had attended exclusively private schools in their primary and secondary education (N=36) reported on average less agreement with the assertion *Bahamian Dialect is a form of ‘broken English’* than their counterparts who had attended only public schools (N=37) (mean of 3.95 (standard error: 0.160) for public school students versus a mean of 3.88 (standard error: 0.157) for private school students), but again this difference was not statistically significant.

As Table 5 also suggests, students expressed mixed attitudes as to whether *BD is a different language from Standard English* (mean of 3.36), whether *BD should be the national language of The Bahamas* (mean of 2.59), and whether *BD is their mother tongue* (mean of 3.23). Furthermore, Table 6 presents the students’ assessments of the assertion *I trust those who can speak BD more than those who can’t*, a statement that students on average generally disagreed with (mean of 2.13).



Table 6: Students' Responses to the Assertion: I trust those who can speak BD more than those who can't

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	Mean	Standard Error
31%	31%	34%	3%	1%	2.13	0.097

### 3.4. Attitudes to BCE in the classroom

Table 7 presents students' responses to a series of questions about whether or not BCE should be used in primary, secondary, and postsecondary education. Students expressed clear disagreement with the idea of actively teaching BCE in the classroom instead of Standard English (57% selecting *strongly disagree*, 34% selecting *disagree*, with an overall mean of 1.53). On average, students expressed a more neutral attitude toward teachers strategically using BCE to explain concepts to students and/or to manage the classroom (mean of 1.5). What is more, a number of students agreed with the proposition that BCE be taught in addition to Standard English in school (20% selecting *agree*, 10% selecting *strongly agree*, with an overall mean of 2.7).

Table 7: Students' Responses Regarding the Teaching of BCE in School

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	Mean	Standard Error	p-value <sup>4</sup>
<i>BD should be taught instead of Standard English.</i>	57.3%	34.4%	7.3%	0.0%	1.0%	1.53	0.074	0.10
<i>BD should be taught in addition to Standard English.</i>	27.1%	21.9%	19.8%	21.9%	9.4%	2.66	0.137	<0.001
<i>BD should be to explain used by teachers to explain concepts to students and/or run the classroom.</i>	21.0%	21.0%	27.4%	24.2%	6.5%	2.87	0.156	0.011

<sup>4</sup> The t-test tests the mean value against a value of 3 in order to indicate differences from neutral reactions.

An interesting result is that education majors at COB, on average, expressed some of the most conservative attitudes toward the use of BCE in the classroom and some of the most negative feelings toward BCE as a whole. Specifically, for the use of BCE in the classroom, education majors' responses averaged 1.20 (standard error: 0.107) for the use of BCE *instead* of SE, and a mean of 1.93 (standard error: 0.345) for the use of BCE *in addition* to SE and *to explain* concepts to students, mean 2.00 (standard error: 0.333). Each of these results was significant at the 0.05 level or less (t-test).

### 3.5. The Scope of Standard English

Table 8 presents the results of the question where students were asked whether a variety of nationalities and social groups speak Standard English. When asked which groups of people speak Standard English, 86.2% of respondents surveyed checked *yes* for British and 50.5 percent chose *yes* for white American. A similar number (49.5%) of respondents chose *yes* for Canadians, but students also expressed a greater degree of uncertainty, with 29.0% selecting they are *not certain* whether Canadians speak Standard English. Conversely, students were in general agreement that Black Americans, Black Bahamians, Barbadians, and Jamaicans do not speak Standard English (respectively, the percentage for *yes* being 18.9%, 14.1%, 10.1%, and 3.3%). However, a substantial majority were of the opinion that some black Bahamians at the acrolectal end of the spectrum (e.g., Bahamian news anchors) can and do, in fact, speak Standard English (see Table 8).

Table 8: Students Reported Rates of Use of Standard English by Various Social Groups

Group	Yes Percent	No Percent	Not Certain Percent
British	86.2%	8.5%	6.3%
Bahamian News Anchors	64.2%	25.3%	10.5%
White Americans	50.5%	31.6%	17.9%
Canadians	49.5%	21.5%	29.0%
Bahamian Politicians	39.4%	44.7%	16.0%

White Bahamians	35.1%	43.6%	21.3%
Black Americans	18.9%	61.1%	20.0%
Black Bahamians	14.1%	71.7%	14.1%
Barbadians	10.1%	59.6%	30.33%
Jamaicans	3.3%	82.6%	14.1%

As a whole, these numbers are interesting in that they suggest that although American English may have become in the decades since independence the de facto most socially important variety of *foreign English* according to Roberts' typology (Roberts, 1998), British English still reigns in popular ideology in The Bahamas as the clearest example of Standard English.

#### 4. Discussion

Despite many Bahamians' frequent lament that their culture is on the verge of being lost due to foreign influence, the current study demonstrates clearly that, insofar as language, Bahamian culture remains vigorous and vibrant. Indeed, the current study demonstrates clearly that Bahamian Creole is very well entrenched in Bahamian society. In fact, students reported relatively flat degrees of use of BCE from their grandparents' generation to their own. While a number of the features of the BCE of older, less educated, more rural generations may be less common and/or stigmatised among current generations<sup>5</sup>, the students participating in the study clearly understand the speech of older generations and the speech of their peers as all fitting without difficulty into the category '*Bahamian Dialect*'. Moreover, students from different geographic regions of the Bahamas and different socioeconomic classes reported, on average, relatively similar use of BCE.

Moreover, the public domains in which BCE is found and permissible in The Bahamas continue to increase as the years go on. In particular, new digital technologies are allowing Bahamians to express themselves and communicate with each other in their first language (L1) in many ways not available to previous generations. Web forums, social media, and texting, for

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<sup>5</sup> Two examples of traditional features of BCE that are less common in youth are the exchanging the labio-velar approximant [w] by voiced labio-dental fricatives [v] (i.e., replacing [w] with [v] and [v] with [w]) and the replacement of [əɹ] with [əj] (e.g., so that *learn* becomes [ləjn] and *first* becomes [fəjs]).

example, allow Bahamians the opportunity to attempt to approximate the phonetic patterns of their L1 through eye dialect spellings. Digital music technologies allow easier production and distribution of locally produced music, music that often involves BCE. What's more, increasingly affordable digital videography and streaming video technologies are allowing more and more Bahamians to participate in video production, with the end product often involving BCE. In fact, 2012 saw the start of the first Bahamian produced television drama series: *Gippie's Kingdom*.

However, the current study does show that many negative attitudes to Bahamian Creole English do persist in the Bahamas. Disturbingly, a primary exponent of these negative attitudes appears to be current Bahamian primary and secondary school teachers. While the study also finds that a number of current education majors at COB, that is the future generation of teachers in the Bahamas, similarly hold negative attitudes toward BCE, it should be noted that the study is of students near the beginning of their time at college. We can hope that a number of students who come to COB with negative attitudes toward their home language leave college with a greater esteem for their L1. Indeed, students majoring in English education are required to take at least two linguistics classes (a number considerably less than in years past), classes designed in part to inoculate future English teachers them against uniformed folk attitudes about standard and nonstandard varieties. As Wassink (1999) has found in the case of Jamaica, and as Mühleisen (2001) has found in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, traditionally negative attitudes to the Creole among the population of English Creole speaking Caribbean countries appear to be changing in recent decades – or are at least becoming less ubiquitous. However, it is clear that, at least on the postsecondary level, Caribbean English instructors are somewhat behind their North American counterparts in accepting students' use of their home language in their writing. Indeed, it seems that encouraging acceptance and promotion of Caribbean English Creoles by educators in the Caribbean will be a similarly long and complex task to building acceptance of nonstandard language varieties by educators in North America.

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**The authors:**

**Raymond Oenbring** received his PhD in English Language and Rhetoric from the University of Washington, Seattle. He is currently an Assistant professor in the School of English Studies at the College of The Bahamas. His research interests include rhetoric and composition, corpus linguistics, Caribbean rhetoric, and digital humanities.

**William Fielding** is a member of the International Society for Anthrozoology and a Fellow of the Royal Statistical Society. Since 1998, he has been investigating animal-human interactions in New Providence. He co-authored *Potcakes*, published by Purdue University Press (2005). His current research focuses on the links between the harm of children and animals. He is an adjunct member of faculty and works in the Office of Planning at The College of The Bahamas.