BAHAMIANS' BRITISH ROOTS TRACED

By John Holm, Ph.D.

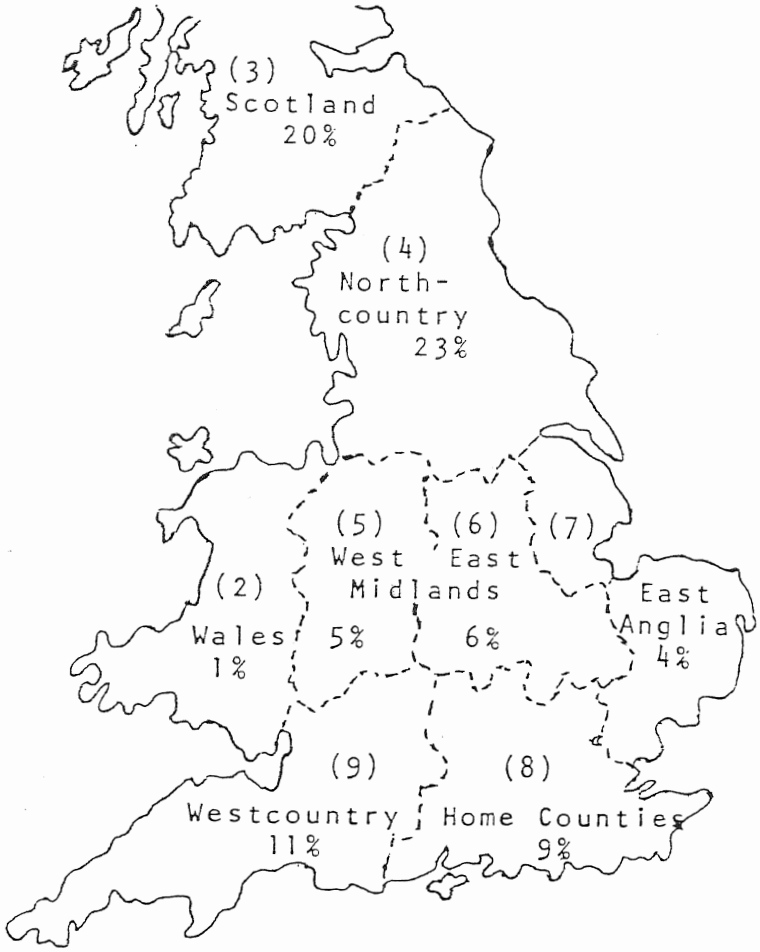
EDITOR'S NOTE: *Dr. John Holm is a Lecturer in Linguistics in the Humanities Division of the College of The Bahamas.*

Where did the Bahamians' British ancestors come from? Almost as little is known with certainty on this topic as on the local origins of the Bahamians' African ancestors. The majority of the people who came here from the Old World during the colony's formative periods were labourers, who, like their contemporaries elsewhere, were unable to read or write and leave behind any records other than the oral traditions of their descendants. There are scattered references to these in the literature on the Bahamas, e.g. "The Bahamian whites were split mainly in two groups — the Government House crowd, composed principally of people of Scottish extraction . . . and the REST (Dupuch, 1967:37)." "Some 200 years ago, seventy adventurous Britishers, men of Devon and Bristol and the imaginative Westcountry, soft in speech and hard as a blade in action, were granted land in Andros (Forbes, 1940:194)."

Another oral record, hitherto unexplored, which can provide some clues on the local origins of the Bahamians' British ancestors, is the variety of English spoken by many Bahamians, containing dialect words from England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland which are not usually found in written English. For example, Britishers have been undecided as to whether they should **ax** or **ask** questions for at least one thousand years: Old English had both **acsian** and **ascian.** The form **ax** is still found in Scotland and Ireland, so the frequency of the form here in the Bahamas suggests that early settlers from these areas may have predominated here when the local dialect was being formed.

To see if any clear pattern would emerge in the British origin of Bahamian dialect words, which in turn might cast light on early migration patterns, I first collected some 2,500 Bahamian terms not current in standard British or American usage. These were collected from a variety of sources, both oral (e.g. Bahamian friends and C.O.B. students) and written (i.e. the dialect literature recorded by anthropologists and

references passim by travellers, historians, naturalists, etc. dating back to Catesby, 1731). These Bahamian terms were



The Provenance of British Regionalisms in Bahamian English

(G) General, 7% (1) Ireland, 14%

then compared with the British regionalisms in Wright's **English Dialect Dictionary.** Cognates (i.e. Bahamian and British dialect items with parallel divergences from the standard in form or meaning) are listed (see table attached at back) indicating the region in Great Britain where they were still found when Wright's dictionary was compiled at the end of the last century. To tabulate a composite picture of which regions

contributed most heavily to Bahamian dialect, a count was made of each column for region (i.e. G, 1, 2, 3, etc.) to see how many tokens of a word's presence it contained, and what portion this represented the total number of tokens (rather than words — necessary to account for words found in more than one region). These sums and percentages found at the end of the table are the basis for the map on the first page. **The Provenance of British Regionalisms in Bahamian English.**

It is interesting to what extent this map corroborates local traditions regarding the regional origins of the Bahamians' British ancestors. A full 43% of the regionalisms come from Scotland and the Northcountry, with 14% from Ireland and 11% from the Westcountry.

Yet it must be asked how closely this map indicates actual migration patterns. Several complicating factors must be carefully examined before attempting to draw any conclusions.

First, some words (e.g. **bubby** or **from**) are not only regionalisms but also archaisms (once — but no longer — part of the standard dialect). There is no way of knowing whether the conjunction **from**, for example, was brought to the Bahamas when it was still current in the standard in the seventeenth century or brought later on by Scots after it had become a regionalism. Secondly, these figures are only as reliable as the works on which they are based and there is indication that contributions to the **English Dialect Dictionary** were spotty indeed: a few enthusiastic vicar-philologists in one area and the lack of same in another could make a word actually found throughout both regions appear to occur in only one. A third factor to consider is that outlying areas (e.g. Scotland, the North-country, and Ireland) may only appear to have contributed a higher proportion of regionalisms to Bahamian English simply because of the greater likelihood of archaisms being retained longer and farther from the standard language's political, economic, and cultural center of gravity in London. A fourth consideration is both the relative and absolute population figures for each region. Thus Wales, very thinly populated

until the advent of large-scale coal mining in the last century, appears to have contributed fewer regionalisms than any other area. Finally, it is by no means certain where this particular brew of regionalisms was in fact distilled: in the Bahamas? in the American South? in the West Indies? at sea? in the baracoons of West Africa? It is likely that the English spoken in all these places played some role in determining the lexical composition of what became Bahamian English, and British regionalisms may have arrived in the Bahamas indirectly, obscuring patterns of what are presumed to be direct importations.

The provenance of regionalisms in genetically related varieties of creolized English, e.g. that of Sierra Leone (Hancock, 1971) and Nicaragua's Miskito Coast (Holm, 1978) is strikingly similar. These similarities could well point not to parallel migration patterns from Britain but rather to the spread of words by the mobile populations of these maritime colonies.

Yet, in conclusion, despite all the above caveats and cautions, the map shown would still seem to cast some needed light on regional British migration patterns to the Bahamas, if only because of the darkness on this subject to date.

References

Catesby, Mark. **The Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands, etc.** (London, 1731).

Dupuch, Etienne. **Tribune Story** (London, 1967).

Forbes, Rosita. **A Unicorn in the Bahamas** (New York, 1940).

Hancock, Ian F. **A Study of the Sources and Development of the Lexicon of Sierra Leone Creole** (Ph.D. thesis, School of Oriental and African Languages, University of London, 1971).

Holm, John A. **The Creole English of Nicaragua's Miskito Coast: Its Sociolinguistic History and a Comparative Study of Its Lexicon and Syntax** (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1978).

Wright, Joseph, ed. **The English Dialect Dictionary.** 6 vols. (London, 1898-1905).

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness for help on some of the theoretical problems connected with the above paper to Prof. R. B. Le Page of the University of York, co-author with Prof. F. G. Cassidy of the **Dictionary of Jamaican English.** Responsibility for any errors, however, remains solely my own.

BAHAMIAN DIALECT DICTIONARY

Dr. Holm is currently collaborating with Dr. A. Shilling, also of COB, in producing a dictionary of Bahamian terms, to which end Dr. Holm was recently granted $2,500 by the U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities. About 5000 terms have been collected from New Providence, Abaco, Andros, Eleuthera, Exuma, Inagua, Mayaguana, Long Is., Crooked Is., and Ragged Is. The entries are now being checked for regionalisms and for historical links with African languages and other English dialects.

Regional British Dialect Usages Found in Bahamian English

Key: G General; 1 Ireland; 2 Wales; 3 Scotland; 4 Northcountry; 5 West Midlands; 6 East Midlands; 7 East Anglia; 8 Home Counties; 9 Westcountry.

armhole 'armpit'	1 456 8
at 'to'	1 4
ax 'ask'	G1 3
back 'carry on back'	8
backways 'backwards'	4
belly-work 'diarrhoea'	4
best 'had better'	G1
blow 'rest'	34
bro' 'male peer'	7
bruck 'break'	1 3

bunky 'buttocks'	9
buck 'butt'	1 45 8
buckmouth 'buck teeth'	1 34
bubby 'breast'	3
by 'by the time that'	3
doctor fish 'fish sp.'	3
carry 'take, escort'	1 4
clean 'clear off land'	1 6
company 'give company'	3
cranky 'unstable (boats)'	4 6 8
doctor fly 'insect sp.'	34
drudge 'dredge'	1 89
drugs 'dregs'	9
duff 'kind of cake'	1 89
evening 'afternoon'	1 5 7
fass 'meddle, disturb'	1 34
favour 'resemble'	G1
first 'immediately'	45 9
from 'since (conj.)'	1 3
frowzy 'musty'	G1 3
full 'to fill'	34
gaulin 'heron sp.'	3
gal, gyal 'girl'	G 78
grain 'unit (peas)'	1 34 8
'gree 'get along'	4 7 9
goddy 'godmother'	34
hall 'livingroom'	4 9
hear 'understand'	7
high 'rise (of tide)'	4 6 8
hoggish 'quick-tempered'	6
hot 'heat up (food)'	G
junk 'chunk (of meat)'	34 9
just now 'soon'	
learn 'teach'	G1 3
leff 'leave'	1 9
lick 'a blow'	G1 3
loose 'unfasten'	1 3
loss 'to lose'	1 34 9
look 'to search for'	1 5
man 'term of address'	3
mannish 'impudent'	4 8
mash 'crush, destroy'	4 6

matter 'care about; heed'	4 9
middle-day 'midday; noon'	5 7 9
mines 'mine (pronoun)'	3
mug 'pitcher; jug'	4 78
natural 'entirely, quite'	9
nose-hole 'nostril'	4 6 8
old-wife 'fish species'	4 9
onliest 'only'	4 89
out 'put out (fire)'	8
out 'oust; eject'	34
partner 'companion'	4
pop 'to strike'	3 8
poppy-show 'foolish'	3
present 'give (a gift)'	4
rank 'bad-smelling'	4
reach 'arrive (absolute)'	345
rhyme 'joke; anecdote'	12
settin'-up 'wake'	34
shadow 'reflection, ghost'	1 4
shoove 'shove'	3456
score 'slash sb. (razor)'	3
soon 'early'	34
stay 'reside'	4
study 'steady'	9
study 'ponder; grieve'	4 9
swinge 'singe'	G1
them 'they'	4 6 8
them 'those'	G
them-there 'those'	456
them-here 'these'	G
teeth 'tooth'	3
titty 'sister'	34
trust 'lend (money)'	34 89
turn 'turn into; become'	3
to 'at'	23 56 9
walk 'excursion; journey'	9
whe 'that; which; who'	4
worser 'worse'	G1
worsest 'worst'	G
year 'ear; hear'	34
yeye 'eye'	9

G General: tokens	13	or	7%
1 Ireland	27		14
2 Wales	2		1
3 Scotland	37		20
4 Northcountry	44		23
5 West Midlands	10		5
6 East Midlands	11		6
7 East Anglia	7		4
8 Home Counties	17		9
9 Westcountry	21		11
total	189		100%

ON THE NATURE OF QUANTUM WAVES

By L. Ellam, B.Sc.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Mr. Ellam is a Lecturer in the Applied Science Division of the College of The Bahamas.*

Synopsis

Technology majors, when introduced to quantum concepts, invariably encounter difficulties in the understanding of matter waves. Further, de Broglie waves are usually considered to be different from the waves inherent in Schrodinger's equation. The purpose of this paper is to clarify the nature of quantum waves and to pursue the implications of wave-particle duality.

Introduction

Although the particle properties of waves were discovered in 1905, two decades were to pass before the converse was speculated. Then in 1924 de Broglie[1] employed Planck's law, the mass/energy equation, and an intuitive faith in the symmetry of nature to postulate that a particle of relativistic mass (m) and moving with a velocity (v) has an associated wave of wavelength.

$$\lambda = \frac{h}{mv}$$

where h is Planck's constant. Known as the de Broglie