

Abstract

ROWE, RYAN DAVID. The Development of African American English in the Oldest Black Town in America: Plural *-s* Absence in Princeville, North Carolina. (Under the direction of Walt Wolfram, William C. Friday Distinguished Professor)

The Anglicist/Creolist debate concerning the history and structure of English within the African Diaspora has been updated in recent years. New evidence from Early African American English (EAAE) was found by Poplack, Tagliamonte and Eze (2000) to indicate that all of the features of African American English (AAE) derive from earlier varieties of English. More recently, Rickford (2004) found contradictory evidence from a reanalysis of the Poplack et al. corpora compared to a wider range of pidgin and creole languages. From the research to date, there is only comparable quantitative data from EAAE and African pidgins and creoles for three common variables—copula contraction/absence, past tense marking, and zero plural marking (or plural *-s* absence). Of the communities considered in this debate, there has been no evidence presented from an extensive study of plural *-s* absence (e.g. *Lots of dog_*) within a long-standing African American enclave in the United States. This paper attempts to contribute to the scope of the evidence for the origins and development of English in the African Diaspora by analyzing plural *-s* absence as found across three generations of the oldest known, self-governed, African American town in the United States.

Princeville, North Carolina, was settled in 1865 by freed slaves who gathered on an unwanted flood plain along the Tar River. In 1885, this predominantly African American town, which now has a population of just over 2,000, became the first municipality incorporated by African Americans in the United States. Throughout its history, Princeville

has endured racial intimidation, economic and social isolation, and repeated flooding, but it has steadfastly persisted as a cohesive, monoethnic community.

Based on sociolinguistic interviews conducted with 35 life-long Princeville residents, this study analyzes the relative frequencies and internal conditioning factors on plural –s absence in Princeville speech over three generations. The data indicate a substantial presence of plural –s absence that is higher than those found in contemporary AAE and appears to be dissipating among the younger generation of Princevillians. While differences in approaches to the analysis of the internal conditioning of this feature reflect those of the overall AAE origins debate, this comparative analysis reveals patterns similar to those found in many early AAE varieties and evidence of the role of previously uncompared factors, such as nasal conditioning, that can be used to support and dispute both the Anglicist and Creolist hypotheses. Moreover, what also emerges from this analysis is the substantial influence of locally specific, intra-communal social conditioning of Princeville plural –s absence and the importance of considering the diversity of history and identity within each African American community in attempting to understand the development of AAE.

The Development of African American English in the Oldest Black
Town in America: Plural –s Absence in Princeville, North Carolina.

by
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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

ENGLISH

Raleigh

2005

APPROVED BY:

Chair of Advisory Committee

For Harriet Tubman and

*For my “Fam”
(you all know who you are)
—my beautiful reflections of Life,
and everything I know to hope for.
I am blessed beyond my dreams.*

*May you step out on Faith
and feel, in every moment
that you are
Love(d).*

Biography

Ryan Rowe was born on October 1, 1975 in Pontiac, Michigan. He attended Wayne State University in Detroit and completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature, with foci in Composition and Linguistics. After graduating *magna cum laude* in December 1999, Rowe worked for three years as a counselor to at-risk freshman and remedial writing instructor for the Division of Community of Education at Wayne. In the fall of 2003, he began his graduate study in Linguistics at North Carolina State University. With the completion of this thesis, Rowe fulfills the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in English with a concentration in Linguistics.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the National Science Foundation (Grant # BCS 0236838) and the William C. Friday Endowment at North Carolina State University for the important financial support they have provided for this research project and others like it. I thank Walt Wolfram for providing an unparalleled opportunity for students like me to learn “on the job” and contribute substantial research to the field of linguistics. I never once felt “dirty,” as you jokingly say, in my fieldwork because I was proud of being a part of a program that was so dedicated to benefiting the communities it does research with. As I’ve often said, you got this Northern city boy to move all the way to North Carolina because I believe this community-based approach is one of the most important in social science today. Even if I hadn’t started to actually like it down here, I would do it all over again. Thank you, Walt. I would also like to thank Erik Thomas for his shining example of integrity and humble genius, as well as for the well-timed kick in the pants that showed you care both personally and professionally. I want to make sure that David Herman and Christine Mallinson know how much I appreciated their help and guidance when I first came into the program and “hit the ground running” with my first conference paper. To the entire NCLLP crew, I would like to thank you for being the hard-working examples that challenged me to be at my best at all times. Specific thanks go to Drew Grimes for dedication and listening, Tyler Kendall for calm assistance, Kristy D’Andrea for adding a little glitter and to all three for long hours in the field. Most importantly, I thank the community members of Princeville, North Carolina. I have gained a lifetime of personal and professional lessons and memories as a result of your amazing openness to, and patience with, this outsider from NC State and all of his funny questions.

SPECIAL THANKS

A special thanks to Mayor, Priscilla Everett-Oates for her unending support and promotion of the project, to Town Manager, Samuel Knight, the man with a million hats, for constant and invaluable access to the town, and to the Princeville Advisory Board for volunteering your time and efforts to represent the voice and needs of Princeville. I've made many friends in North Carolina who have helped me personally, both directly and indirectly, along this process. In no particular order I would like to thank Xiomara Boyce, Preacher Won, my C.I.C. group, Drew Grimes, Little Brother, Frank Wong, Rita, Kelvin Torbert, Jim Fitzpatrick, Dael Orlandersmith and Carol Bruce. Along with the amazing Love of my parents and extended family, your patience/love/support/friendship/example inspired me to keep everything in perspective. Also, I would be remiss if I didn't thank mentor and friend Martha Ratliff for believing in my academic abilities and starting me on this journey. Last but not least, I would like to thank the Mayor again for telling me repeatedly (usually when we've arrived with just enough time to start filming an important Princeville function) what I often need to be reminded of—that I am, “always, right on time.”

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1. Introduction

In the ongoing study of the origins and development of African American English (AAE), the longstanding Anglicist/Creolist debate has been reinvigorated in recent years by studies that both challenge and find new support for the past claims of these two hypotheses. As the first well-established approach to this debate in modern sociolinguistics, the Anglicist position (Kurath 1949, McDavid & McDavid 1951) proposes that AAE is derived from the same British-based varieties as white vernacular dialects. The opposing Creolist position claims that AAE is derived from a Creole language that developed as a result of the contact among a diverse African slave population and their masters (Stewart 1967, 1968; Dillard 1972).

Recently, what has been called the neo-Anglicist position (Wolfram 2000) has been established based on evidence from studies in the expatriate enclave communities of Nova Scotia and Samaná (Poplack 1999; Poplack & Tagliamonte 1989, 1991, 2001; Poplack, Tagliamonte & Eze 2000) which indicate that earlier African American and European varieties of English were very similar in form. These and other studies propose that AAE's divergence from the European American English (EAE) norm is a recent development of the twentieth century (Montgomery, Fuller & Demarse 1993; Montgomery & Fuller 1996; Labov 1997). In contrast, new evidence from the study of the bi-ethnic enclave of Hyde County, North Carolina (Wolfram & Thomas 2002) shows both local accommodation of earlier AAE to regional EAE norms and the persistence of a small set of ethnically distinct features preserved from the earlier African-European contact situation. Wolfram & Thomas's (2002) substrate hypothesis supports the proposed similarity of earlier AAE to local, benchmark

EAE varieties. At the same time, however, it recognizes the co-existence of a durable maintenance of ethnolinguistic distinction by Hyde County African Americans, despite long-term isolation with only white Hyde County residents as models of potential accommodation.

In related studies of long-standing North Carolina enclaves similar to the Hyde County research, some substantial findings have emerged. These studies analyzed the AAE of communities such as Beech Bottom, where fewer than 10 African Americans, including only one teenager, remain from a once majority-Black community in the Northwestern Appalachian region of North Carolina; Texana, a long-standing African American enclave of 150 that is the largest of its kind in the Appalachian mountains; and Roanoke Island, an African American enclave that makes up about 10% of the predominately white surrounding community of Manteo within the Outer Banks. Despite the range of these studies in population, geography, and regional and cultural context—including the extreme cases of essentially ethnic communities of one—they all show varying degrees of a substrate effect. Furthermore, in light of the distinctive social factors of each community, these studies consistently reported that the set (e.g., 3rd person singular *-s* absence, copula absence, locative *to*, etc.), type (e.g., morphosyntactic, phonological, etc.) and frequency of features, as well as their change over apparent time, are unique to each community-specific demographic context. Moreover, the social factors that account for these variations go beyond the traditional groupings of gender and age to factors such as the community-specific social marking of a feature, the sociohistorical relationship to the surrounding community, ethnic identity, cultural values, communities of practice and individual variation (Wolfram,

Hazen & Tamburro 1997; Mallinson 2001; Mallinson & Wolfram 2002; Childs & Mallinson 2003; Carpenter and Hilliard 2003; Carpenter 2004).

To place this new evidence within the context of the African Diaspora and analyze its comparative significance with regards to the origins and development of AAE, studies of other pidgin and creole varieties, as well as other expatriate communities such as the African American settlement in Liberia, must be considered as well. Of the 9 features analyzed by Poplack and her colleagues in their analysis of Nova Scotia and Samaná (2001), only three variables are common in comparable studies across the Diaspora: copula absence, past tense marking and zero plural marking, or plural *-s* absence. Rickford (2004) focused on plural *-s* absence in reanalyzing Poplack, Tagliamonte & Eze's (2000) study of this feature in African Nova Scotian English (ANSE), Samaná English (SE) and the only known recordings of former slaves living in the United States, known as the Ex-Slave Recordings (ESR). In Rickford's re-analysis of these data, along with the addition of the early AAE variety of Liberian Settler English (LSE) and eight pidgin and creole varieties including the American Creole language of Gullah, Rickford found evidence that certain patterns of zero plural conditioning in early AAE are similar to those found in pidgins and creoles. Furthermore, of the communities studied in these comparisons of plural *-s* in the development of AAE, there has been no comparable quantitative evidence presented from a long-standing African American community in the United States that includes earlier and present patterns for AAE plural marking.

This study attempts to expand the range of evidence for the history and development of AAE by providing quantitative analysis of plural *-s* absence in a mono-ethnic, autonomous, socially isolated African American enclave of over 2,000 residents that is the

oldest of its kind—Princeville, North Carolina. Focusing on a variable that is comparable across a range of studies in the African Diaspora, within the unique context of the oldest Black town in America, provides an opportunity of unparalleled insight into AAE.

By contrast with other studies of rural Black enclaves like Texana, Beech Bottom, or Roanoke, the larger size of Princeville, as apposed to these small communities’ situation within predominantly white communities, allows for the examination of the effects of a consistently larger population on phenomena such as the durability of distinctive AAE features. And while the population sizes of the bi-ethnic enclave of Hyde County and Princeville are very similar, Princeville’s unique combination of being mono-ethnic and self-governed provides insight into how the inward focus of autonomy and social isolation may also affect factors such as resistance to local accommodation and class stratification. A comparison of comparable AAE field sites in North Carolina is provided in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Demographics of Comparable North Carolina Field Sites (Wolfram 2003)

Field Site	Percent AA	AA Population	Region
Princeville	98%	approx. 2,000	Coastal Plain
Hyde County	35%	approx. 2,000	Outer Banks
Roanoke Island	10%	approx. 200	Outer Banks
Texana	5%	approx. 150	Appalachia
Beech Bottom	1%	6	Appalachia

In addition, despite a long historical relationship with the neighboring white town of Tarboro, the fact that the county in which Princeville is located, Edgecombe, is 60% African American must also be factored into an understanding of Princeville’s regional norms for accommodation.

Moreover, while none of these comparable rural Black enclave studies looked at plural marking in detail, none of the comparable quantitative studies of earlier AAE, pidgins and creoles that have examined plural –s absence have been done on a long-standing community of speakers who have continually lived in the United States. To clarify, while the speakers of the Ex-Slave Recordings lived continuously in the U.S., they were from a wide variety of northern and southern communities. While the expatriate studies of Nova Scotia, Samaná and Liberia are said to have the advantage of preserving in isolation the forms of the late eighteenth century/early nineteenth century African Americans they descended from, they do not provide the opportunity that Princeville does to observe how these forms would have developed over apparent time in the original regional contexts that have proven so critical to the analyses of other enclave studies such as Hyde County, Texana and Roanoke. Clearly, in terms of contexts like Princeville’s, there is a gap within the full range of Diaspora varieties included in the study of plural –s absence and the origins and development of AAE. A list of comparable Diaspora studies of plural –s absence studies used in this analysis is found in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2. Comparable plural –s absence research in the African Diaspora

Diaspora Variety	Region	Description
African Nova Scotian English	Canada	descendents of expatriate AA community transplanted in early 19 th century; enclave
Samaná English	Dominican Republic	descendents of expatriate AA community transplanted in early 19 th century; enclave
Liberian Settler English	Liberia	descendents of AA expatriates transplanted in 19 th century; enclave
Ex-Slave Recordings	Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Texas, Virginia	12 speakers from 6 states; recorded in 1930s and 40s; speakers born between 1844 and 1861

As the data of this study will reveal, Princeville speakers have maintained a substantial frequency of plural –s absence that is much higher than the relative frequencies found in contemporary AAE. While differences in the approaches to the analysis of plural –s absence reflect on the overall AAE origins debate, comparative analysis with other Diaspora varieties reveal evidence of patterns in the internal factors of plural –s absence in Princeville speech that both supports and contradicts the neo-Anglicist and Creolist hypotheses. In addition, as plural –s absence appears to be dissipating among the younger generation of Princevillians overall, a more detailed analysis of the social make-up of Princeville reveals the interrelatedness of both internal and external factors in fully understanding the unique development of AAE in Princeville.

2. Sociohistorical Context.

2.1 Geography

The town of Princeville is located in the eastern Coastal Plain region of North Carolina, within Edgecombe County, on the south side of the Tar River. The location of Edgecombe within North Carolina can be seen on the map in Figure 2.1. The county seat of Edgecombe, Tarboro, borders Princeville to the north. The map in Figure 2.2. shows Princeville's location in relation to Tarboro and the Tar River.

Figure 2.1 Location of Princeville within Edgecombe County and North Carolina.

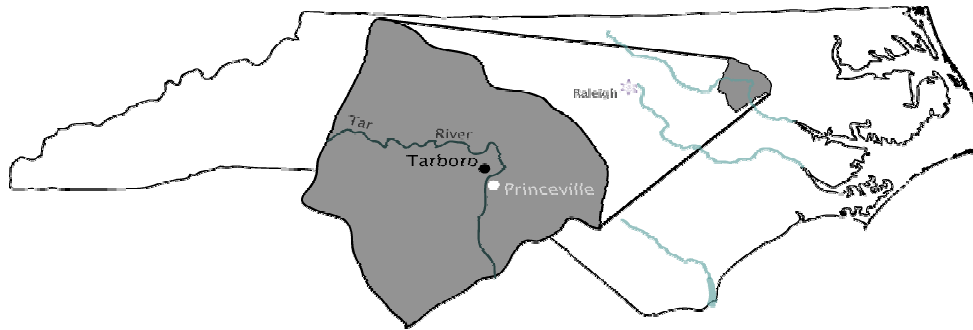
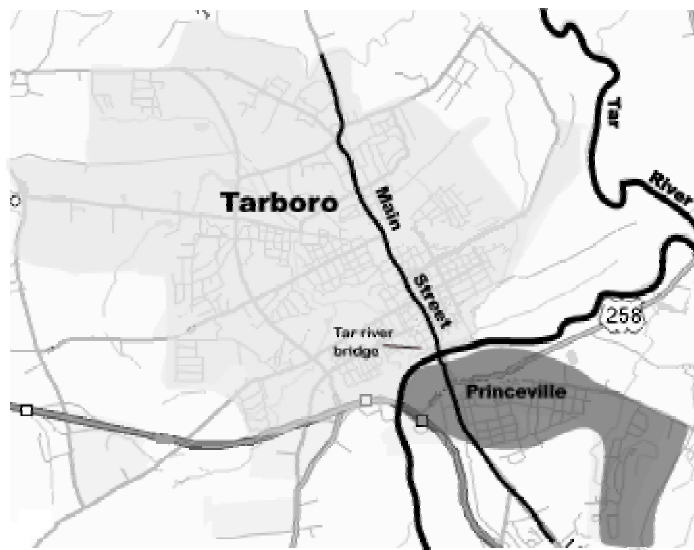


Figure 2.2. Geographical Context of Princeville, Tarboro and the Tar River.



South of Tarboro across the Tar River, Princeville is 1.6 square miles and lies on a floodplain that is much lower than surrounding areas. As one author described Princeville's precarious geographical location,

The [Tar] River starts in the highlands north of Durham, [North Carolina,] then drops a smooth 179 miles toward the coast below. Along the way it builds momentum and grows in size, and during the hurricane season it often roars out of control. Two thirds of the way to the coast, the river wraps itself around a boggy stretch of land called Princeville, where it often skids off course—pummeling the town like a runaway truck. (Halpern 2003: 11)

Due to the conditions created by persistent and periodically dangerous flooding, the land was essentially unclaimed and unwanted until its settlement by Princeville's founders in 1865. At that time, records indicate the land technically belonged to two white farmers. The area east of Old Sparta Road (now Highway 64) was registered to John Lloyd and the area west of Old Sparta was registered to Lafayette Dancy (Mobley 1994). However this ownership was apparently in name only. Stagnant water from even the minor floods caused sanitation problems and rampant mosquitoes. Subsequently, few buildings stood on the land, which was unfit for most farming and difficult for human living (Coles 1981). While minor improvements were made through the settlement of the Princeville land, the flooding and living conditions remained essentially unchanged until a dike was built along the Tar River in 1965 by the Army Corps of Engineers.

2.2 Settlement and Incorporation

The oldest know inhabitants of the area that would eventually become Princeville were the Tuscarora. This Iroquoian tribe of about 4,000 resided in Eastern North Carolina at the turn of the eighteenth century and resisted European invasion west of the Roanoke River. After

this tribe was defeated in the Tuscarora War, 1711-1714, historian Alan Watson writes, “Albemarle residents” (assumably from the coastal region of the Albemarle Sound) and Virginians settled the area that, by 1722, would become one of North Carolina’s first counties—Bertie (Watson 1979). The settlement into Bertie County was so rapid that this large area would eventually be broken up into four smaller counties. In 1732, the first county to be formed from Bertie was Edgecombe County. It also quickly became one of the state’s most populous areas. The majority of Edgecombe’s residents were subsistence farmers, but by 1750 many had shifted to raising tobacco. The town of Tarboro was formed in 1760 as one of Edgecombe’s first permanent settlements. One of the first warehouses in the area was built there to serve as a central storage and shipping point for tobacco crops. Known as a “midland town” because it linked eastern and western North Carolina and had no access to a seaport, Tarboro became the county seat in 1764. With this rise in farming tobacco and other cash crops, a full-fledged and thriving plantation economy developed in Edgecombe—along with a subsequent influx of African American slaves as its foundational free labor force. The Black population of the area included as many as 70 free Black people within 11 families in 1790 and rose to 389 free Black residents by 1800. But by 1860, the number of slaves had swelled to over 10,000, constituting over 60 percent of the county’s population (FEMA 2000: 4-1). By the end of the Civil War, much like what was happening throughout the South, increasing numbers of escaped slaves began to congregate and seek refuge at a Union army camp located on the swampy lowlands just south the Confederate town of Tarboro on the opposite side of the Tar River. In the spring of 1865, Union soldiers went to a knoll near this camp to announce that the Confederacy had surrendered and that the slaves of the area were

now “freedmen.” To commemorate this event, the freed slaves named that spot of land, and later their village of freed-slave refugees, Freedom Hill (Mobley 1994).

However, having overcome tragic odds by surviving slavery, the freed slaves of Tarboro and the Edgecombe county area faced the immediate challenges of surviving poverty and homelessness on their own. Those who chose to stay on the Freedom Hill camp found themselves struggling to make a home on barely habitable, unfarmable and unwanted land that often flooded. Outbreaks of tuberculosis, dysentery, typhoid, malaria and other illnesses related to the stagnant water of the land added to the challenges of survival (Coles 1981). In those first few months of homeless freedom, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, known as the Freedmen’s Bureau, did provide initial supplies of food, clothing, medical supplies and transportation to the Freedom Hill squatters. However, in contrast to other documented settlements like Roanoke Island and James City, Princeville received very little in terms of any other form of government assistance. The Bureau’s minimal role ended entirely in 1869, leaving the Freedom Hill refugees to fend completely for themselves (Mobley 1994: 342-343). In these early days of the encampment, survival was a day-to-day struggle. Quickly they built crude huts for protection from the elements. In one account, Frederick Law Olmsted, a *New York Times* reporter who toured the South in the 1850s, reported that the cabins of Freedom Hill dwellers were “the smallest I had seen—I thought not more than twelve feet square inside. They stood in rows, with a wide street between them. They were built with logs—no opening at all except a doorway” (Halpern 2003). Despite doing little to assist with these dangerous and unhealthy conditions, in 1865 Horace James, Superintendent of Negro Affairs in North Carolina, did seem to understand some of the motivation for the goals of these freed people when he wrote in his annual

report: “To be absolute owners of the soil, to be allowed to build upon their own lands, however humble, in which they should enjoy the sacred privilege of a home, was more than they had ever dared to pray for” (Halpern 2003). And indeed, as freedom meant in part controlling one’s own labor and land, a few of the Freedom Hill residents acquired funds to purchase a few individual lots from Henry Shaw, who had purchased the land from John Lloyd and Lafayette Dancy. Due to the flood risk, the land was relatively cheap (Mobley 1994). Those who could not purchase land simply claimed the uninhabited land as their own (Blue 2000). By 1870, the Black community of Freedom Hill began settling lots along the Tar River bridge and Old Sparta road as they improved on the crude housing structures put up after the war or built simple one or two-room houses (Mobley 1994). As one author observed, “Almost overnight, the old slave encampment began to resemble a fledgling town.” Cabins, often with wood floors and windows, were built along wide streets (Halpern 2003). These efforts were the foundation for the businesses, churches, institutions and roads that would one day make a town of free Black people.

By 1885, the developing cabins and streets of Freedom Hill had already made great strides in growing from a refugee camp into a small Black-run town of businesses, schools and roads, right across the bridge from their former masters. A group of Freedom Hill leaders had emerged and came together to petition the state government for incorporation as a town. One of these community leaders, Turner Prince, was born a slave in the area in 1843. Like many others, Prince used the skilled trades he had honed in slavery to establish his family and other former slaves in freedom. In 1873 he bought a half-acre lot from Mary Shaw, a local white woman, and used his carpentry skills to build a “modest” house for his wife, Sarah, and their children Ephraim, Sarah and Cora. Overseeing the construction of several

homes in Freedom Hill, Turner Prince exemplified the struggle to move from slavery to self-sufficiency.

The former slave owners and other white residents of Tarboro and Edgecombe justified the Freedom Hill settlement as a means of keeping Black people separate but close enough to be accessible as cheap labor to sustain Tarboro's economy (Mobley 1994: 342). Indeed the need for Black labor was so strong, and the fear of the town residents migrating elsewhere so great, that Tarboro even attempted to scare Freedom Hill residents from leaving the area by publishing reports of disease and famine awaiting those who traveled outside the county (Mobley 1994: 351). *The Daily Southerner*, Edgecombe county's prominent newspaper and the voice of Tarboro's business class of former slave owners, printed editorials justifying Freedom Hill's incorporation as an act that would bring needed law and order to the Black settlement (Mobley 1994: 353).

In response to a petition circulated by community members, including Turner Prince, and signed by Black and white citizens in Edgecombe County, the State legislature passed an act of incorporation for Princeville on February 20, 1885. The act provided for a mayor, five commissioners, a clerk, treasurer, and a constable. In *The Daily Southerner's* endorsement of Freedom Hill's incorporation, they wrote:

We would...suggest to the good citizens there, and there are many of them, that they petition to the legislature...to have it incorporated. It should have a name, but let us have no boro or ville to the end of it. Let it be called Garfield. The name is good, and a slight tribute of appreciation will thus be paid to a great Man (Mobley 1994).

Despite the respected anti-slavery position of recently assassinated Republican President James A. Garfield, the freed slave community decided to name their new town

Princeville, after one of its Black founders, and someone who was involved in the building of so many of the community's first homes—carpenter, Turner Prince (Mobley 1994).

2.3 Social Structure

Despite the perseverance and achievements of incorporating the first self-governed, all-Black town in the nation out of the depths of Reconstruction's poverty, overwhelming challenges of growing white hostility and economic depression faced the members of this new town almost immediately after they officially became Princeville. By 1885 they had already established a social structure that was obviously radical for a Black community less than a generation removed from slavery. By contrast, more common situations of Southern rural Black towns were those like Trenton, North Carolina, where it was illegal for Black people to own land (Waggoner 2003) or Roanoke Island, where most of the 3,500 members of the "Freedmen's colony" were evicted when the original white Confederate owners laid claim to their former property (Carpenter 2002). Meanwhile, although historians have observed a lack of traditional class divisions in Princeville, the town had managed to establish what might be loosely defined as one of the first groups of a free Black "middle class." Black merchants and small business owners such as Orren James and York Garrett, who had learned their trades working under white small business owners in Tarboro, not only gained relative financial success but, as a group, made up most of the mayors and town commissioners of this period (Mobley 1994).

This relative success of Black business, along with the self-determination implied in incorporation, created one of the first bastions of Black political power—and thus one of the first groups of Black politicians. Starting shortly after Princeville's settlement, until shortly after its incorporation, 1867-1890, Princeville and Edgecombe County had taken advantage

of the large Black population of the area to play a major role in state and national politics. In 1867, at a convention considering the revision of the state constitution that was necessary for North Carolina to reenter the Union, Black voters from Princeville and Edgecombe outnumbered white votes against the revision by 1,191 votes to 234. Later as a part of the revision of the state constitution, Black voting rights and the 14th amendment were recognized in North Carolina. As a result, a majority Black voting district called the “Black Second” Congressional District was formed through which Princeville and Edgecombe voters sent eleven black men to the state legislature over fifteen terms as well as two Black representatives to the U.S. Congress.

However, before this new-found freedom and autonomy would have a chance to stabilize, the depression of Edgecombe County's cotton and tobacco-dependent economy caused many of the Black-owned businesses to fail, resulting in a major shift in the relatively less-dependent lifestyle of the Princeville citizen. As was true throughout the rural Black South, many Black-owned businesses in Princeville failed due to a lack of social and economic capital as well as an inability to offer the customer credit that was central to business success in economic depression. Lack of social capital also meant Black merchants received no credit from white wholesale suppliers in neighboring competitor Tarboro. Many small businesses in Princeville were able to withstand this challenge of capital at first, but when the area's economic dependence on farming led to a deep depression, only a few survived. As one historian stated it: “in a depressed economy where credit and capital were scarce but racism was prominent, black merchants were likely to be the last to gain from any economic improvement” (Mobley 1994: 357). Likewise, they were the first to suffer from economic downturn. Indeed, the reality of Princeville's economy was that it relied a great deal on the

success of its small Black businesses that were once a commercial center in the county.

Facing these rapid business failures, Princeville was forced to surrender much of its economic autonomy as its economy became dependent on the boom of factory and industrial related jobs in Tarboro. While some in Princeville benefited from securing some of the few industrial jobs available to Black people at that time, the majority of citizens worked as day laborers and servants for the white businesses and homes of Tarboro. As most of the town's men took the less consistent and financially unstable work of day labor, most of the jobs for Princeville women were the better-paying, hourly jobs of servants in the white homes of Tarboro. As one historian suggests, this may have played a major role in the rapid increase of female-headed households from 7 percent in 1880 to 30 percent in 1910 (Mobley 1994: 377).

2.4 Social Isolation

Closely related the lack of social capital and financial credit that led to the downfall of many Black businesses was the increasing atmosphere of "white supremacy" that sought to fully retract all rights and progress made by Black people in North Carolina. Gaining momentum since 1880, the "white supremacist" movement grew in numbers, rhetoric and organizational efforts to stir up fear of the equal status and political power of Black people. Seeking to turn back the gains of Reconstruction by overtly violent intimidation as well as political means, the ranks and activities of hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan and the "Red Shirts" began to grow in Edgecombe as they did throughout the South. These groups were particularly focused on intimidating Black voters away from the polls at election time (Mobley 1994: 370). Around the country, white terrorism of Black communities was on the rise. In Wilmington, North Carolina, white mobs drove Black political and economic leaders out of

town in 1898. And in 1921, a white mob of 10,000 burned down an entire Black district in Tulsa, Oklahoma (Blue 2000).

Although Princeville was never violently attacked on any large scale, with the sheer number of Black people to defend the town often cited as the deterrent (Coles 1981), the increasingly aggressive racist tone surrounding Princeville and its power structure during this period began to grow in Tarboro. One illustration of this was the extreme shift in the tone of the *The Daily Southerner*. Most of the Tarboro paper's articles cited from that period took a subtle tone of paternalistic racism, for example, in praising the education system of "our colored citizens" for adopting Booker T. Washington's emphasis on Black training for manual labor over academic curriculum. By the 1880s however, articles like this 1889 editorial became more common:

From now until election day North Carolina's political war will be waged upon the color line. White people must stand together in this election...or the negro will go one step higher in the political scales and whites lower. Protect your wives and children by voting for a white man's government. (Mobley 1994: 369)

The result of this campaign of racism and fear was North Carolina's enactment of Jim Crow laws and the Supreme Court's "separate but equal" doctrine of segregation. In neighboring Tarboro, it resulted in the growing concern that an autonomous Black town was a threat to white supremacy politics and, as a result, a movement to dissolve Princeville's charter.

Ironically, Tarboro's rationale for calling for the disbandment of Princeville and the annexation of its land and citizens to Tarboro was the same reason given for its separation decades earlier—law and order. The frenzied fear that was encouraged by white supremacists created suspicion that Black people living so close, in a large group unchecked by whites, might result in large-scale rioting or attacks against their white town (Mobley 1994: 371).

The disdain for Princeville was a part of a wide-scale attack against Black equality and power in the South. By 1890, the political power of Princeville and Black people throughout the South was essentially dissolved through violent intimidation and “extralegal measures” enacted by southern legislatures to circumvent the constitutional rights of Black people to vote. In 1901, minus the impetus of a Black vote, the Republican Party abandoned all efforts to support Black issues as “restoration of Black political rights was not to occur again until the rise of the New Deal and the liberal faction of the Democratic party” (Coles 1981). Having the reach of its economic and political influence stripped down to what lay inside its own borders, Princeville was once again forced to focus inward for a way to survive the mounting hostility of its environment.

Appropriately, a democratic reform process within its own ranks played a major role in Princeville surviving scrutiny and attacks on its political autonomy. With the Black vote taken away at state and county levels throughout the South, Black men in Princeville continued to vote in town elections. In fact, at the height of white calls for the dissolving of Princeville’s incorporation, the religious leadership of the town carried out a very democratic movement to change political leadership in Princeville. From its inception, Princeville established congregations and churches like its oldest, Mount Zion Primitive Baptist, as the centers of community social activities, political meetings and group unity. During this hostile time, Princeville’s inward focus took shape in the churches as they subsequently began to grow in membership and physical structure (Mobley 1994: 366-368). When community members perceived a conflict of interest in the merchant dominated leadership of the town, citizens met in local churches under the leadership of Reverend W.S. Everett and William Bridgers to lead a reform movement that brought local ministers into the political and social

hierarchy. The influence of merchant leadership like Mayor Orren James, who also owned a barroom, was seen as the cause of a lack of law enforcement for brothel-related crimes like public drunkenness and prostitution (Mobley 1994: 372). Reverend Everett's reform government soundly defeated Orren James in 1904 and may have been a major factor in the cessation of calls for Princeville's annexation. Given that Tarboro's primary rationale for dissolving Princeville was a lack of law and order, the sweeping reforms of Everett to remove prostitutes from the main streets and shut down a well-known gambling operation seemed to silence Tarboro's more extreme demands and specifically, the primary plaintiff, *The Daily Southerner* (Mobley 1994).

In addition to Princeville's political survival, Princeville's economic survival would require a shift to dependency on jobs in the white community that, ironically, stabilized its finances and resulted in the growth of the town's infrastructure like never before. After the Civil War and the end of slavery, a deep depression in the southern cotton-based agricultural economy had prompted a rapid shift to industrialization in towns like Tarboro, where textile mills and other manufacturing businesses became prominent. While many other rural Black communities tied to agricultural economies underwent rapid decline, an important characteristic of Princeville since its inception was its lack of dependence on agriculture for the primary employment of its residents. Of 379 inhabitants in the 1880 census, only 12 were farmers—mostly sharecroppers—and 43 worked as laborers on farms. The largest occupational groups were day laborers (30) and laundresses (25). By 1910 only 9 of Princeville's 636 residents had farm-related jobs and only 12 were sharecroppers (Mobley 1994). While they never shared in any of the direct benefits of the white-owned industrial boom, Princeville's citizens were able to secure steady and stable incomes working as day

laborers and servants in Tarboro. This in turn provided stimulus to the Black businesses in Princeville where these workers shopped. In 1885, only a few small businesses were in Princeville near the Tar River bridge. Over the next two decades Princeville would grow rapidly and reach its peak of development of institutions like schools, churches and locally owned businesses. Black merchants in large number ran small general stores and grocery stores. By 1900 there were ten Black grocery or general store owners in Princeville. By 1913 a cabinetmaker, cobbler, jeweler and three restaurant owners were also operating in Princeville's business district (Mobley 1994).

Schools also began to grow in scope and effectiveness in this era. Beginning with the American Missionary Association's summoning of Robert S. Taylor, who went on to be a prominent educator, town leader and state senator, education and particularly literacy rates began to increase in Princeville (Coles 1981). In a time when Black education in Edgecombe County and the South was described as "retrogressing" (Coles 1981), Princeville established a public primary school with Black principals from schools like Oberlin College and Yale University to increase the adult literacy rate to 50 percent. By 1912 the primary school added a high school and Princeville had established a Black southern education system, uniquely successful for that time.

As a result of this economic growth, Princeville was also able to expand its borders from the area surrounding the Tar River bridge to include new roads and land south and east of the river and Old Sparta Road. A 1905 Map indicates 109 residential and commercial structures in Princeville that year (Mobley 1994: 361). This new construction employed carpenters such as town co-founder, Turner Prince, and brick masons such as Stanley and Dallas Mathewson, whose family and decedents would hold a long-standing tradition of

entrepreneurial and town leadership. Though a modest and gradual growth compared to Tarboro, attractive new homes, new roads, and the overall improved appearance of this period in Princeville even prompted one *Daily Southerner* writer to describe Princeville as “a town of flowers” (Mobley 1994: 363). Princeville’s foothold in economic growth, infrastructure, and social organization, just two decades removed from slavery, was a far cry from the days of the inhumane internment of slavery or the impoverished abandonment of Reconstruction. Moreover, this physical and aesthetic growth represented a self-determined Black political structure that is radical by today’s standards, especially in light of the daily challenges of flood-prone land and Princeville’s immediate environment of social isolation, violent intimidation and systemic racism.

2.5 Contemporary Princeville as a Linguistic Field Site

Devastating floods in 1919 and 1924 combined with Black Northern migration led to a population decline from 636 to 300 between 1910 and 1924 (Blue 2000). In 1921, passage of a bond brought electricity and new home construction as well as Princeville’s first auto mechanic shop. Then, in the 1930s, the Great Depression took a toll on Princeville’s economy from which it never fully recovered (Coles 1981). One notable success, however, was Glennie’s Store, run by three generations of Mathewsons, some of whom served as mayors (Coles 1981). Northern Migration continued after World War II and, after another major flood in 1958, the town requested the construction of a levee from the Army Corps of Engineers to prevent further flooding in the town. The three-and-a-half mile levee around the town’s border with the Tar River was supposed to give Princeville 300 years of protection from flooding (Cain 2000). Life was still difficult after the levee was built, but living

conditions were modernized with the addition of water and sewer systems and paved roads in the 1970s.

In the 1970s and 80s the town also annexed surrounding areas in attempts to increase town revenue (Blue 2000). By the 1990s, Princeville had grown to a population of 2,100 with 37 businesses including auto mechanic and body shops, beauty parlors, barber shops, a lawyer's office, truck stops, restaurants and a car dealership (Blue 2000). The town had 40 streets and covered over 1.3 square miles, with three police officers, two fire trucks and an elementary school (Cain 2000). Unfortunately, the 300-year levee broke under a 500-year flood caused by Hurricanes Dennis and Floyd in 1999, wiping out the town completely under 10-15 feet of water (Blue 2000).

In the reconstruction that has taken place since the flood, Princeville has again made a miraculous recovery despite overwhelming odds and the encouragement of Tarboro to dissolve the town by accepting a government buyout not to rebuild (Halpern 2003). As noted by the task force appointed by former President Clinton to assist and oversee of the rebuilding of this American historical treasure, "The flooding caused by Hurricane Floyd is viewed as another major challenge to the community [of Princeville], but not one so great as to overcome the incredible sense of place that has passed down through the generations" (President's Council 2000: 3). Figure 2.4 provides a timeline summarizing major events and characteristics of Princeville's history over several eras from slavery to the present.

Table 2.1 Timeline of Population, Occupation, Town Status and Major Events from 1730 to Present

	1730 – 1865	1865 – 1885	1885 – 1920	1920 – 1945	1945 – 1970	1970 – present
Population	(Edgecombe) 1860: >10,000 slaves 60% of county	(Princeville →) 1880 : 379	1900: 552 1910: 636	 1923: 300	Not available	1990: 2,100 2004: 2,000
Job Types	N/A(slavery) fb: not avail.	Skilled workers; sharecropping	Growing professional class; sharecropping	Major shift to domestic/day-labor; sharecropping	Shift from sharecropping to plant work	Plant and textile mill workers; diversified professional
Town Status	uninhabited swampland	Freedom Hill: shanty town of homeless free slaves (1865) 1870: begin to buy land and build village	Princeville: incorporated as first “all-Black” town in U.S. (1885)	Still voting for town leaders during Jim Crow disenfranchisement	Slow recovery from loss of population due to Great Migration and WWII	Modernized growing population and land size after building of dike(1965)
Major Events	1764-1800 Tarboro becomes county seat and center of cotton economy in Edgecombe. 1860: peak of importation of slaves.	Survival as free village Growth and organization of town under leaders like Turner Prince. Petition for incorporation.	1887-1890: “Black 2 nd ” Congressional District of Edgecombe elects 11 state senators; 2 congressman. 1896: segregation laws Plessy vs Ferguson 1900-1915: Princeville Boom Period of Black businesses, churches and schools	1920s: depression of farm economy; county shift to industrialization; downfall of Princeville business = dependence on Tarboro employment peak of white supremacy; Jim Crow 1915-1950s: “Great” Black Migration North	End of WWII 1960s: Beginning of integration of workplace; schools Increased mobility of residents.	Fully integrated schools. 500 year floods wipes out town. National rebuilding effort brings attention to town’s history
Floods	Not available	Not Available	1887; 1919	1924;1928;1940	1958	1999

As the first town incorporated by Black people in the United States, the establishment and survival of Princeville, North Carolina, is one of the most unique stories of African American heritage and United States history. Its preservation from its first day to the present has always been a very public and controversial challenge for its residents. As a source of sociolinguistic study, its unique existence as a long-standing, autonomous, monoethnic community of African Americans provides a number of avenues for studying how these factors may have preserved a window into older forms of AAE as well as how those forms have been shaped by Princeville's unique intersection of social dynamics over time. Today, many of Princeville's residents trace their roots back to the original founding families of Freedom Hill and Princeville. Names such as Mathewson, Bridgers and Black are still icons of community leadership. And while major historical shifts of industrialization, depression, integration, and social mobility have shaped each generation in significantly different social and linguistic ways, Princevillians share a pride and solidarity not only from a shared history as the first African American town, but in the common experience of survival from the many times that the town has been damaged or destroyed by flood and rebuilt. Indeed, given the cyclical history of major flooding (e.g., 1919, 1924, 1940, 1958, 1999) every generation has at least one "flood story" to share. While the economic depression of this bedroom community and its dependence on outside economies is still evident, if not growing, today, a small group of relatively middle-class citizens in Princeville have the mobility to work for companies in the surrounding large towns, while the majority seem to be dealing with rampant unemployment and minimum wage jobs. At the time of the 2000 census, the average household income in Princeville was \$16,000. And it is estimated that 1 in 5 African Americans in Edcombe County lives in poverty (Sturgis 2005). With this economic situation,

modern social conditions of poverty such as drugs and gang activity have become increasingly visible in Princeville and surrounding towns in recent years. While, this history of social isolation and resistance to the influence of outsiders would certainly qualify Princeville as a social enclave, the extent to which this may transfer to a linguistic resistance, shaping a unique enclave of dialect in which older patterns of AAE are preserved, is an ongoing focus of this study.

3. Methodology

3.1 The Sample

The data for this analysis of plural *-s* absence are based on a corpus of sociolinguistic interviews conducted with 35 life-long Princeville residents. The 20 female and 15 male speakers in this study have been divided into three generational groups based on natural groupings in the corpus. These generational divisions are detailed in Table 3. 1.

Table 3.1 Generational Divisions for Subject Pool

Generation Group	Ranges in Years of Birth
Generation I (before 1945)	1918-1943
Generation II (1946 –1970)	1948-1968
Generation III (1970-present)	1971-1988

The oldest generation (Generation I) consists of those born before 1945 and the end of World War II (born from 1918 through 1943). The middle generation (Generation II) speakers grew up mostly after the end of World War II and before the integration of Princeville and Tarboro schools (born from 1948 through 1970), and the youngest generation (Generation III) grew up attending integrated schools (born from 1971 through 1988). Speakers were selected using modified versions of the friend of a friend social networking method (Milroy 1987). In general, a top-down approach was initially used by presenting the idea of the study to the town leaders and residents in attendance at one of the monthly town hall meetings. Some of the first interviews and referrals were made with and through the leaders and residents at that meeting. Outside of these networks, a substantial number of the interviews were initiated through “cold” introductions to community members in places of gathering like the town gas

station or barber shop. The distribution of speakers by generation, sex and age is detailed in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Subject Pool Demographics

Age Group	Speaker #	Sex	YOB
Generation I	101	F	1918
	102	M	1921
	103	M	1925
	104	M	1927
	105	F	1928
	106	F	1930
	107	M	1934
	108	F	1934
	109	F	1939
	110	F	1942
	111	F	1942
	112	F	1943
Generation II	201	M	1948
	202	F	1952
	203	F	1953
	204	F	1956
	205	F	1958
	206	M	1960
	207	F	1960
	208	M	1961
	209	F	1962
	210	F	1964
	211	F	1967
	212	F	1968
Generation III	301	M	1971
	302	M	1975
	303	M	1980
	304	F	1982
	305	M	1982
	306	F	1985
	307	F	1986
	308	M	1987
	309	M	1987
	310	M	1988
	311	M	1988

Interview questions often touched upon general themes that targeted the common experiences of Princeville residents such as the flood of 1999, community politics, childhood experiences, and the history of the town. Interviews were intended to elicit natural conversation and generally followed the guidelines of the traditional sociolinguistic interview (Labov 1966; Wolfram & Fasold 1974) with modifications similar to those outlined and referred to as “semi-structured conversation” in Alim (2004).

3.2 The Data

The environment for each potential case of the plural morpheme *-s* was then extracted and coded for four conditioning categories using a modified model of the zero plural studies of Poplack, Tagliamonte & Eze (2000). These modifications include additions to the set of phonological environments analyzed based on initial impressions from the interviews, corrections to factor weights as they were originally reported in previous studies, and a regrouping of language varieties, following the model of a recent review of the Poplack et al. (2000) work by John Rickford (2004). Specifically, after eliminating “don’t count” instances detailed in Poplack et al. (2000), including homorganic and semantically ambiguous contexts, I recorded approximately 90 potential cases of plural *-s* for 35 speakers, totaling 2,934 tokens, and coded them for potential cases within the four factor groupings of nominal reference, semantic classification, preceding phonological segment and following phonological segment.

The category of nominal reference is based on Poplack et al.’s (2000) category of noun phrase constituency. While their treatment of this category is divided into seven categories, for the purposes of this study, it has been collapsed into a binary distinction measuring whether or not there is a quantifier in the noun phrase. For this study, “plus

quantifier” is defined as an instance of any one of the four quantifier factors of [+numeric, +individuating], partitive quantifier, [-numeric, +individuating] and demonstrative delineated in Poplack et al. (2000), while “minus quantifier” is the absence of any one of these referents.

The factor group of semantic classification is also binary and designed to be fully comparable to Poplack et al. (2000) by distinguishing whether or not the noun of potential plural –s marking is one of weight or measure (e.g. *pounds, miles*).

The coding of preceding phonological segment is not only comparable with the many studies of plural marking in AAE, but in pidgin and creole varieties as well, in that it denotes the marking in the three commonly studied environments of preceding non-sibilant consonant, sibilant consonant and vowel. In addition to these environments, the factor of preceding nasal was added based on impressions from interviews and indications of its possible influence in Wolfram (1969). Liquids were added to consider any effect they might have as a conditioning environment.

The following phonological segment is comparable to the same range of studies on plural marking, in that it includes the common following segments of consonant, vowel and pause. Based on early impressionistic indications from the data, following nasal and following semi-vowel were added to this factor group.

In addition to descriptive statistical analysis, the statistical program VARBRUL, a probabilistic-based, multivariate procedure, was also applied to the data. VARBRUL is designed to indicate the relative contributions of different factor groups such as internal linguistic factors (e.g. preceding phonological environment) or external social factors (e.g. ethnicity, gender) to the overall variability of items (Cedergren & Sankoff 1974; Sankoff 1988). Weight values are assigned to each factor ranging from 0 to 1, whereby a factor

weighted more than .5 is considered to have a favoring effect on the occurrence of the factor, while a weight less than .5 indicates a disfavoring effect. A Chi square per cell score is also assigned to assess the “goodness of fit,” or the achievement of statistical significance, for the application. A Chi square value of 1.5 per cell or lower is generally considered significant (Young & Bayley 1996).

4. Internal Linguistic Factors

Plural *-s* absence has been found to be a prominent feature of earlier AAE that is still present in contemporary forms and may pattern distinctively from less frequent instances found in other dialects of English. While some studies of Southern White Appalachian English (SWAE) show a low frequency of this feature relative to AAE, these studies found that, unlike AAE, SWAE plural *-s* is restricted to use with nouns of weight and measure (e.g. *six pound*, or *many mile*) (Wolfram and Christian 1976, Montgomery and Hall 2004). However, direct comparisons with early and contemporary forms of Southern White Vernacular English (SWVE) and AAE indicate plural *-s* absence to be one of a small set of features that do not overlap (Cukor-Avila 2001). In studies of early and preserved forms of AAE, plural *-s* absence has been found to be a prominent feature, ranging from 24-36% (Poplack et al 2000; Rickford 2004). In studies of contemporary AAE, it has been found to be a less frequent yet persistent feature, ranging from 2-11% (Labov et al 1968, Wolfram 1969, Kessler 1972). As one of the few common features in studies of the African Diaspora varieties of AAE, creoles and pidgins, zero plural marking is often at the center of the debate over the origins of AAE as a possible link between AAE and the zero plural marking of West African languages and/or English (Spears 2004; Rickford 1986, 2004; Poplack et al 1994, 2000). This chapter reports the overall relative frequency of plural *-s* absence along with the specific patterns of internal linguistic constraints for the Princeville data. It then places these results within a comparative analysis of other similar studies of these factors for zero plural in early AAE and other African Diaspora varieties.

4.1 Princeville In Focus

In order to establish the frequency and internal constraints involved in the patterning of Princeville's plural *-s* absence, 2,934 tokens of potential cases of this feature, with an average of approximately 90 per speaker, were statistically analyzed for 14 different internal constraints within 4 different factor groups. The selection of constraints is based on similar studies of plural marking in the Diaspora but also reflects patterns found in initial impressions of the speech samples. To analyze the tendency to avoid the redundancy of marking plurality on the noun and in the noun phrase, the factor group of quantifier/non-quantifier codes each instance of absence for whether the noun is preceded by a pluralizing modifier. Quantifiers include number (e.g. *two shoes*), demonstratives (e.g. *these/those/them rocks*) and other non-numeric quantifiers (e.g. *some houses*, *many streets*). The second factor group is divided by whether or not the pluralized noun is one of weight (e.g. *six pounds*) and/or measure (e.g. *three dollars*) to look at the hypothesis that this semantic class of nouns tends to favor zero plural more than others in English (Poplack et al. 2000, Rickford 2004). To measure the influence of phonological environment, the tokens were coded for whether the phonological segment preceding the potential plural *-s* was a non-nasal, non-sibilant consonant (e.g. *plants*), sibilant (e.g. *houses*), nasal (e.g. *pins*), vowel (e.g. *shoes*, or [r-less] *corner*) or liquid (e.g. *tables*, or *pictures*). Likewise following phonological segments were coded for non-nasal, non-semi-vowel consonant (e.g. *plants can't*), semi-vowel (e.g. *houses were*), nasal (e.g. *rocks never*), vowel (e.g. *shoes about*) or pause (e.g. [sentence final] *pictures*.). The primary models for the selection of comparable constraints are the large-scale plural *-s* absence studies of Poplack et al (2000) and Rickford (2004). Nasal as a preceding phonological constraint was added for comparison with the contemporary AAE variety study

of Wolfram (1969), which found some influence of preceding nasal. It was also added as a constraint due to strong initial impressions from listening to the Princeville interviews, in which words ending in nasals such as “sometimes” and “things” seemed to be absent plural –s at very high rate relative to other environments. Other additions to the traditional set of constraints are preceding liquid and following semi-vowel, which were also added based on impressions from the interviews. Further explanations of omissions and other differences between this study’s set of constraints and those of the comparable Diaspora variety plural marking studies will be detailed later in this analysis. The results from a Variable Rule analysis of these internal factors for Princeville plural –s absence is found in Table 4.1. Factors in bold indicate constraints that favor plural –s absence. The degree to which a factor is above or below .50 indicates the degree to which that constraint favors or disfavors rule application respectively.

Table 4.1 Mean % of Plural –s Absence and Variable Rule Analysis of the Contribution of Phonological, Structural and Semantic Factors.

Input Probability = (.13); Total N = 2,934	Factor Weight
Nominal Reference	
Quantifier	.62
Non-Quantifier	.45
Semantic Classification	
Weight/Measure	.49
Non-Weight/Measure	.50
Preceding Phonological Segment	
Consonant*	[.44]
Sibilant	[.50]
Nasal	[.62]
Vowel	[.55]
Liquid	[.48]
Following Phonological Segment	
Consonant*	.60
Semi-Vowel	.58
Nasal	.69
Vowel	.38
Pause	.52
Factors Not Selected = Preceding Segment	
Chi-Square/Cell = 1.214	
Overall Mean % of absence = 15.4	

Input probabilities reflect the likelihood of rule application in each sample. Factor weights in bold are greater than .50 and favor rule application (zero plural). Empty square brackets [] indicate that the factor group is not statistically significant ($\geq .05$). Filled brackets [.54] indicate factor weights thrown out by VARBRUL stepwise multiple regression. “Consonant” in the preceding environment equals all non-sibilant, non-nasal and non-liquid consonants, and for following segment equals all non semi-vowel, non-nasal consonants.

The data indicate an overall level of absence higher than the 2-11% reported in contemporary AAE studies (Labov et al 1968, Wolfram 1969, Kessler 1972).

Following the table by each factor group, we see a more detailed view of this high level of absence in terms of the specific patterning of constraints. First, the data show that Princeville plural –s absence does favor noun phrases that have already been pluralized by a previous quantifier and thus show a tendency towards non-redundancy in plural marking. Second,

nouns of weight or measure do not appear to constitute a specific semantic class of nouns that favor zero plural. However, it should be noted that, impressionistically, measure words such as *dollar*, *cent* and *mile* were found to be more frequently plural –s absent than other words that may have taken quantifiers in the sample. This may be an effect of the re-classification or lexicalization of these specific words, as suggested in other contemporary studies (Labov et al. 1968, Wolfram 1969), due possibly in part to the common association of these words with quantifiers in the noun phrase. The seeming contradiction of the findings for the categorical influence of weight/measure and frequency of plural absence for these specific measure nouns may suggest that some alternative grouping or subclass of nouns of weight and/or measure is necessary to establish how these words may pattern.

As for phonological conditioning, preceding phonological environment was thrown out in the step-up, step-down VARBRUL analysis; however, some interesting observations and questions can still be reported. Most notably, the higher factor weight for preceding nasal would seem to indicate support for the “minor” influence of this factor found by Wolfram (1969). A more isolated re-examination of its role in this corpus will be detailed later in this analysis. In addition, the potential pattern of preceding vowel favoring zero plural and preceding consonant disfavoring plural –s absence would contradict those found in most contemporary studies. However, as this specific query of factors was thrown out in stepwise multiple regression analysis, we can make no speculation from this set of results from the quantitative data.

Following phonological segment, however, shows the definite significance of nasal, along with consonants, semi-vowels and pauses patterning in a similar tendency towards plural –s absence, whereas following vowels clearly have a disfavoring effect. The pattern of

consonant and pause favoring and vowel disfavoring zero plural supports a very consistent trend found in both contemporary and early AAE studies (Rickford 2004). The fact that semi-vowel and pause are lower in significance than consonant may indicate that they pattern as consonants, whereas the substantially higher significance of the nasal as a following segment indicates a specifically higher influence of this constraint.

4.2 Further Analysis of Nasal Conditioning

While the preceding segment factor group was thrown out in the VARBRUL step-up step-down analysis, the high influence of preceding nasal as a conditioning factor merits further discussion for two reasons. First, in one of the few large-scale quantitative studies that have looked at this factor (Wolfram 1969), preceding nasal was found to be a favoring conditioning environment. While Kessler's (1972) study of 12 speakers in Washington D.C. did not find this factor favorable based on descriptive statistics, neither Labov et al. (1968) nor any of the other large-scale, variable rule analyses compared in this study included nasal in their investigations of phonological constraints. Secondly, the unexpected disfavoring effect for preceding consonant found in the Princeville data may be due to the substantial influence nasal has in this preceding segment grouping. Furthermore, the item *sometimes* was excluded from this study due to the potential ambiguousness of its intended meaning as a plural referent (e.g. *some times* versus *sometimes*). *Sometimes* also may have been lexicalized in the manner of words noted in other studies (Labov et al 1968, Wolfram 1969) such as *dollar* and *cent* in that it also showed a much higher propensity for plural –s absence. Given this lexical items preceding nasal environment for the plural –s, its inclusion in the analysis would have increased the significance of preceding nasal much higher.

In light of this preceding nasal patterning, as well as the clear influence of the following nasal segment, a re-analysis of the preceding and following segment groupings was performed to further establish the nasal's effect on the distribution of the individual phonological factors. Made comparable to the consonant/sibilant/vowel grouping of preceding phonological segment and the consonant/vowel/pause groupings for following phonological segment commonly followed in similar studies (Poplack et al. 2000; Rickford 2004), the re-analysis of these collapsed factors is outlined in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 VARBRUL Analysis of Phonological Factors with and without Nasal.

Varbrul Results of Collapsed Categories		Previous Varbrul Results with Nasal	
Input Probability = (.14)	Factor Weight	Input Probability = (.13)	Factor Weight
Preceding Phonological Segment Consonant Sibilant Vowel	[.50] [.49] [.50]	Preceding Phonological Segment Consonant Sibilant Vowel Liquid Nasal	[.44] [.50] [.55] [.48] [.62]
Following Phonological Segment Consonant Vowel Pause	.60 .38 .52	Following Phonological Segment Consonant Vowel Pause Semi-Vowel Nasal	.60 .38 .52 .58 .69
Factors Not Selected = Preceding Segment		Factors Not Selected = Preceding Segment	
Chi-Square/Cell = 1.184		Chi-Square/Cell = 1.214	

The collapsed preceding and following phonological segment data reported here is taken from VARBRUL runs performed on all four factor groups including quantifier/non-quantifier and weight/measure. The results for those factor groups remained the same.

While this re-analysis shows a virtual non-effect of consonant and vowel as conditioning factors, it also shows the raising of the significance of consonants, and possible lowering of vowel significance, that one might expect, if the nasal does actually play a major role in the prominence of preceding consonant conditioning of plural *-s* absence. However here again, the preceding phonological factor group was thrown out in stepwise regression analysis. In addition, the re-analysis of the following phonological group shows an interesting contrast in that the collapsing of the nasal into the constraint category of consonant showed no effect at all on the remaining factors. This suggests that the role of the nasal may have a different effect as a preceding environment than as a following environment—one separate from the well established pattern of following consonant favoring plural *-s* absence—in which the nasal plays a large role in the influence of the consonant as a preceding conditioner of plural *-s*.

With the question still remaining as to the statistical significance of preceding nasal as favoring environment for plural *-s* absence, a VARBRUL run was used to weigh the significance of the nasal against all other preceding environments. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 VARBRUL Results for Preceding Nasal Against All Other Preceding Phonological Environments.

Input Probability = (.13); Total N = 2,934	Factor Weight
Preceding Phonological Segment	
Non-Nasal	.48
Nasal	.59
Factors Not Selected = none	
Chi-Square/Cell = .779	

These results for preceding phonological segment were analyzed in a VARBRUL run with factor groups of quantifier/non-quantifier and the simplified following phonological segment group of consonant/vowel/pause.

The data from this VARBRUL analysis of nasal versus non-nasal as a preceding conditioner were not thrown out in multiple regression analysis. The data indicate that preceding nasal is a statistically significant factor with a strong effect on plural *-s* absence. Its favoring weight may have been thrown out in previous analysis due to possible interactions with other constraints in the preceding category. These findings of the favoring effect of preceding nasal in Princeville plural *-s* absence raise the question as to what role the nasal may play in the constraint hierarchy of zero plural marking in overall AAE and its related varieties.

4.3 Diaspora Comparison

The Princeville data reveal patterns of plural *-s* absence such as the favoring effects of following consonant (Labov et al 1968) and preceding nasal (Wolfram 1969) that are consistent with other contemporary AAE studies. It also shows evidence that is inconclusive in terms of claims such as the semantic uniqueness of nouns of weight or measure, and new, previously unexamined trends such as favoring following nasal. However, understanding the origins and influences of these patterns requires comparison with other studies of similar constraints on early AAE and other possibly similar creole varieties. This section examines the overall relative frequency and the results of a VARBRUL analysis of internal constraints within the comparative context of similar data from studies of four early AAE varieties, the Ex-Slave Recordings (ESR), African Nova Scotian English (ANSE), Samaná English (SE) and Liberian Settler English (LSE), and one closely related creole variety, Gullah (Data Sources: Ex-Slave Recordings, Samaná English, African Nova Scotia English, Poplack et al:2000; Gullah: Rickford 1986; Liberian Settler English, Singler 1989).

The creole system of plural marking, detailed in Alleyne (1980), Bickerton (1981), Dijkhoff (1982), and Mufwene (1986) and summarized in Rickford (2004), has been established as the following: zero plural is marked for non-individuated nouns (primarily generics; e.g. *water is everywhere.*), and individuated nouns whose plural status is made disambiguous by either a demonstrative (e.g. *dem dog*), number (e.g. *two dog*) or other quantifier (e.g. *plenty dog*) in the noun phrase. Individuated nouns that are not made disambiguous, specifically those following a definite article or possessive (e.g. *de dog dem*, *me gyal dem*), are the only plural nouns in English-based creoles said to require the plural marker *dem* (Rickford 2004:2). This tendency to avoid the redundancy of plural marking the noun when plurality is already indicated in the noun phrase is a characteristic of both of the possible English and Creole influences on AAE (Rickford 2004: 9). The constraints in this analysis were selected to be comparable to other AAE plural studies that operationalize these elements of the creole plural system. For example, Poplack et al (2000) delineate the features of the creole system pertaining to nominal reference into a set of four quantifier constraints—[+numeric, +individuating], partitive quantifier, [-numeric, +individuating], and demonstrative—along with the factors of generic, definite article and possessive. This study includes only the quantifier constraints and combines them into one category in order to look at the overall influence of non-redundancy. Compared to extensive studies such as Poplack et al. (2000), the comparative analysis that follows is limited in terms of its range of constraints and number of varieties considered. While Poplack et al (2000) include a wider range of constraints, and Rickford (2004) expanded the comparison of these constraints to include seven additional creole varieties, this study's aim is to provide a preliminary example of the types of analysis that are possible given the new evidence from the Princeville data.

4.3.1 Relative Frequency

By comparison, Princeville's overall average of plural *-s* absence, at 14.2% (415/2934), and mean percentage of 15.4%, would seem to place Princeville somewhere between early and contemporary AAE. Poplack et al (2000) found the overall relative frequency of plural *-s* absence to be notably higher in the early AAE preserved in two expatriate enclave communities, Nova Scotia and Samaná, and the Ex-Slave recordings than any levels found in studies of contemporary AAE. While the Diaspora varieties of African Nova Scotian English (ANSE) Samaná English (SE), and the Ex-Slave Recordings (ESR) showed overall plural *-s* absence averages of 36.4% (492/1353), 23.7% (397/1672), and 26.9% (115/427), respectively (Rickford 2004), studies of contemporary AAE, such as Labov et al (1968:161) at 8% and Wolfram (1969:150) at 7.4%, fall within a range of 2 to 11% (Poplack et al. 2000).

However, as outlined in Table 4.4, an analysis of the mean percentage of overall plural *-s* absence over three Princeville generations along with the standard deviation and range of variation gives a more definite indication as to where Princeville lies along this AAE continuum.

Table 4.4 Mean, Standard Deviation, and Range Scores for Princeville Plural *-s* Absence.

Generation Group	Mean %	Standard Deviation	Range of Variation
Generation I (born: 1918-1944)	23.9	20.3	52.3 (2.2—54.5)
Generation II (born: 1945-1969)	13.2	9	29 (2.9—31.9)
Generation III (born: 1970-1988)	8.7	7.4	19.4 (0-19.4)

While the data show a consistent downward trend of plural *-s* absence across apparent time, the middle generation is still higher than all other contemporary AAE findings, and most notably, at 23.9%, the older generation would seem to be more comparable to the rates of the early AAE forms studied by Poplack et al. This indicates that, at least for the middle and older generations, Princeville's social isolation or other external factors may have resulted in the preservation of earlier forms of AAE comparable to the enclave situations of Nova Scotia and Samaná described by Poplack et al (2000) and the Liberian Settler social context described by Rickford (2004).

4.3.2 Morphosyntactic Factors

Drawing conclusions about underlying linguistic patterns, however, requires going beyond the comparison of relative frequency averages to a detailed statistical comparison of each variety's linguistic constraints. As Poplack et al. (2000) point out, comparison of constraint hierarchies between early AAE data and possibly related creole varieties is a more effective method for revealing underlying systems of origin. The results of a variable rule analysis comparing the statistical significance of conditioning factors in the plural *-s* absence of Princeville with those found in similar studies of early AAE and the Creole variety of Gullah are found on Table 4.5. Again, each factor weight found to be significant is in bold on this table and the degree to which a factor is above or below .50 indicates the degree to which that constraint favors or disfavors rule application, respectively.

Table 4.5 VARBRUL Analysis of the Contribution of Phonological, Structural, and Semantic Factors to the Probability of Plural –s Absence (Zero Plural) in Princeville Speech (PRVL), the Ex-Slave Recordings (ESR), African Nova Scotian English (ANSE), Samaná English (SE), Liberian Settler English (LSE) and Gullah

		Early AAE				Creole
	PRVL Princeville	ESR Ex-Slave Recordings	ANSE African Nova Scotian Eng.	SE Samaná English	LSE Liberian Settler Eng.	Gullah
Input Probability	(.13)	(.25)	(.34)	(.23)	(.30)	(.78)
Total N	2934	427	1353	1672	574	128
Nominal Reference						
Quantifier*	.62	--	--	--	--	--
[+numeric, + individuating]		.63	.62	.60	--	--
partitive quantifier		.59	.66	.54	--	--
[-numeric, +individuating]		.67	.55	.49	--	--
demonstrative		.62	.70	.46	--	--
Non-Quantifier	.45	--	--	--	--	--
Semantic Classification						
Weight/Measure	.49	[.43]	.40	[.42]	--	--
Non-Weight/Measure	.50	[.52]	.52	[.53]	--	--
Preceding Phonological Segment						
Consonant*	[.44]	.60	[.51]	.56	.64	.65
Sibilant	[.50]	.28	[.54]	.56	.37	.59
Nasal	[.62]	--	--	--	--	--
Vowel	[.55]	.41	[.48]	.44	.46	.27
Liquid	[.48]	--	--	--	--	--
Following Phonological Segment						
Consonant*	.60	.53	.71	.62	[]	.61
Semi-Vowel	.58	--	--	--	--	--
Nasal	.69	--	--	--	--	--
Vowel	.38	.37	.41	.46	[]	.30
Pause	.52	.65	.45	.43	[]	.60
Factors Not Selected						
Semantic Classification		X		X		
Preceding Phonological Seg.	X		X			
Following Phonological Seg.					X	
Princeville Chi-Square/ Cell = 1.214						

Input probabilities reflect the likelihood of rule application in each sample. Factor weights in bold are greater than .50 and favor rule application (zero plural). Empty square brackets [] indicate that the factor group is not statistically significant ($p \geq .05$). Filled brackets [.54] indicate factor weights thrown out by VARBRUL stepwise multiple regression. “Consonant” in the preceding environment equals all non-sibilant, non-nasal and non-liquid consonants, and for following segment equals all non semi-vowel, non-nasal consonants. “Quantifier” is a collapsed category that equals the four following factor groups of this table individuated for ESR, ANSE and SE. Data Sources: *Ex-Slave Recordings*, *Samaná English*, *African Nova Scotian English*, Poplack et al:2000:tables 3.1, 3.6; *Gullah*: Rickford 1986:51, table 3; *Liberian Settler English*, Singler 1989:table 8; Rickford 2004, table 1.

The data show that Princeville's favoring of plural *-s* absence for noun phrases that include a quantifier such as a number or words like *many* or *these* patterns similar to all of the other early AAE varieties. This non-redundancy factor is in line with the findings of each of the individual factors delineated under the nominal reference category of Poplack et al. (2000) for the Ex-Slave Recording (ESR) and African Nova Scotian English (ANSE) and Samaná English (SE), with the exception of the disfavoring effect of individuating and demonstratives in SE. The collapsed category of quantifier/non-quantifier for the Princeville data focuses on the distinction Poplack et al. (2000) refer to as disambiguation. The four nominal reference constraints from Poplack et al. (2000) delineated above in Table 4.5 represent classes of quantifiers that disambiguate the noun's ability to be pluralized. While, again, this quantifier group shows a consistent favoring of plural *-s* absence across all early AAE varieties compared here, the non-quantifier or "minus disambiguating" constraints of generic, possessive, and definite article measured by Poplack et al. (2000) were found to disfavor zero plural with the exception of definite article and possessive in the Ex-Slave Recordings (Poplack et al. 2000: 87, Table 3.2). The factor of disambiguation or non-redundancy would seem to be the most consistent of all the factors compared across these studies, although the origins of this pattern are still debated. Despite their selection of these nominal reference constraints to operationalize the creole plural marking system summarized above, Poplack et al. (2000) point to a similar rule in early English as evidence of English origins for this pattern. However, Rickford (2004) notes a "greater proclivity" of the non-redundancy factor in pidgin-creole varieties than in English in making his case for the creole origin of this pattern.

Future analysis of the Princeville data should include the constraints of generic, possessive and definite article to not only analyze the disfavoring effect of non-quantifiers in more detail, but also to compare the individual effects these factors found in comparable studies. For example, Poplack et al. (2000) refer to the fact that in two of the early AAE varieties (ANSE and ESR) generics disfavor zero plural and in two of the pidgin-creole varieties (Nigerian Pidgin English and Non Settler Liberian English) they favor it, as evidence of categorical difference in AAE and Creole constraint patterns. However, Rickford (2004) uses the generic factor data to argue against this proposed categorical difference by pointing out that five of the seven pidgin-creole varieties he compares (including the Poplack et al. data) and Samaná English show the generic effect to be statistically insignificant. In addition, other studies focusing on the specific Caribbean Creole patterns of AAE (Sabino 2004) indicate the importance of distinguishing between indefiniteness and definiteness in the noun phrase as conditioning factors. Future analysis of these data, made comparable to methods of these studies, may provide a more complete view of the underlying patterns of nominal reference in Princeville plural marking.

The semantic classification of the noun as denoting weight or measure was also found to be consistent with the ESR, ANSE and SE findings and was not studied in LSE and Gullah. Here we see a consistent pattern of near equal weight, indicating that this distinction did not have a significant impact on the conditioning of plural *-s* absence. As Poplack et al (2000) point out, any evidence of plural *-s* absence in white varieties of English, specifically in studies of American English (Fries 1940; Marckwardt 1958; McDavid and McDavid 1960, 1964; Mencken 1971), British English (Hughes and Trudgill 1979; Wakelin 1977), Appalachian English (Wolfram and Christian 1976), East Tennessee Folk Speech (Pederson

1983), Cockney (Wright 1981:115), and white Nova Scotian Vernacular English (Poplack and Tagliamonte 1991, 1994), has been limited to a specific list of nouns of weight and/or measure (Poplack et al. 2000: 86). Although no analysis of constraint systems or statistical significance is provided for these reports of relatively low levels of zero plural in white varieties of English, if AAE is of English origin, one might expect at least early AAE forms to show a favoring effect for the weight/measure noun factor. However, neither Princeville nor any of the early AAE varieties compared here show any favoring effect for this factor. This would seem to indicate a distinct difference in the constraint patterning of plural marking in English and in AAE. While a certain set of words did seem to be noticeably higher in the frequency of zero plural marking in Princeville, this potentially lexicalized set of words (e.g. *sometimes*, *time*, *mile*, *thing*) expanded beyond the class of weight/measure. Future analysis of these words may shed more light on impressionistic findings from the Princeville data that suggest a trend of generalized final /s/ absence (e.g. *terrace* and *house*) and that may also reveal possible interaction between phonological and semantic factors in terms of which words are lexicalized in at least the Princeville data. In terms of the set of words found frequently across plural marking studies in early and contemporary AAE, including Princeville, the differences in which words are lexicalized may be specific to each community due to the socio-regional development of a substrate of common phonological constraints.

4.3.3 Phonological Factors

The Princeville data add to both the support and inconclusive findings for some of the phonological patterns in the comparable early AAE and Gullah studies, while providing

strong evidence for the need to re-evaluate the significance of preceding and following nasal in AAE and Creole plural marking systems. While the preceding consonant and vowel factor weights contradict the findings of all the other studies, with the vowel actually slightly favoring plural –s absence, the fact that preceding nasal was found to be significant in the previous re-analysis leads to some interesting indications as to the role of this factor in AAE. Would the addition of preceding nasal to the set of constraints in the comparable AAE/Creole plural studies reveal a different pattern for preceding consonant and vowel? Moreover, it would seem unlikely that preceding nasal would be specifically isolated to only the seemingly distant AAE varieties of Detroit (Wolfram 1969) and Princeville AAE. If preceding nasal is not a recent and/or regionally specific constraint, the more important question then becomes how this factor patterns in other early and contemporary AAE and creole varieties.

The factors of the following phonological segment are quite consistent with almost all other varieties in this comparison as well as with other contemporary AAE studies such as Labov et al's (1968) study of New York City adolescents. With the exception of the non-significance found for Liberian settler English, the data show support for an apparently consistent trend of following consonants favoring, and following vowels disfavoring, plural –s absence. However, it should be noted that Gullah is not representative of the trend for following consonant for the seven other creoles compared by Rickford (2004), which all either disfavored zero plural or were statistically insignificant. In addition, all of the creoles (with the exception of Jamaican Creole) were consistent with the data of this study in vowel disfavoring zero plural.

The favoring effect of following pause is consistent with the factor weights of the Ex-Slave Recordings and Gullah as well as the findings of Kessler's 1972 Washington DC study which also found a strong favorable effect of a following pause on plural *-s* absence. None of the Diaspora varieties is observed to have this effect for pause. Princeville's favoring of following pause bolsters the observation made by Rickford (2004) that the "US Black varieties" (previously Gullah and ESR) are the only early AAE varieties to favor following pause and show *-z* retention after vowels. While he states that these trends are only indications of needed further study, he goes on to suggest that perhaps this pause pattern is caused "by allowing the *-z* to resyllabify and serve as the onset of the following word" (Rickford 2004: 6).

Again, for following segment, we see the nasal as having a much stronger weight than all other phonological constraints of its factor group. However, as opposed to the support for preceding nasal given by similar findings from Wolfram (1969), following nasal has not been quantitatively measured in any comparable study. Further research would then seem not only necessary but worthwhile in determining whether the favoring effect of this constraint is unique to Princeville or whether it is an example of an important but relatively unexamined factor in the patterning of plural *-s* absence in early and contemporary AAE as well as their possible creole and/or English substrate varieties.

Overall, this comparative analysis shows evidence for the treatment of Princeville AAE as an earlier form of AAE both in the frequency of plural *-s* absence for its older speakers and in the constraint ordering of this feature. Princeville plural *-s* absence shows favoring effects of factors such as preceding nasal and following pause that lend support to other studies (Wolfram 1969, Labov et al. 1968) that indicate these environments to be

consistent factors of contemporary AAE. However, whether or not these constraint patterns suggest that Princeville AAE is of Creole and/or English origin is of course debatable. From the creolist perspective, one could view the tendency of Princeville plural *-s* absence to favor non-redundancy as evidence of the influence of this same pattern in creole varieties. Likewise, the non-significance of nouns of weight or measure could be viewed as evidence of a major difference between Princeville AAE and the white varieties that have shown plural *-s* absence. One could also argue that the downward trend of plural *-s* absence is due to the decreolizing of this feature over time in Princeville—possibly due to decreased isolation. However, a neo-Anglicist might also argue that English also has its own rules of non-redundancy and that, with the exception of Gullah, patterns of phonological environments such as following consonant show categorical difference between the early AAE analyzed here and other comparable Creole varieties. Likewise, the neo-Anglist might propose that the overall decrease of this feature is evidence of Princeville’s participation in a recent national trend of AAE divergence. And while many other perspectives might take points from both sides in making a case for the influences of both early English and West African Creole in the origins and development of Princeville AAE, the focus of this study is not to conclusively determine the origins of the AAE of this speech community. Rather, what is more important to consider is what the Princeville data can lend to overall investigation of the origins and development of AAE. As a case study of a U.S. early AAE variety, as it has developed over apparent time, within its original regional context, the Princeville data provide a missing piece of a more complete continuum of documented sources for the comparison of AAE and all possible AAE-related varieties of the African Diaspora. The most noticeably relevant evidence to come from this preliminary investigation of the internal factors of Princeville

plural marking appears to be the needed re-analysis of the role of preceding and following nasal as a conditioning environments within continuum of AAE studies. However a complete picture as to what the Princeville data can contribute to sociolinguistic study must come from further study not only of comparable internal factors, but also from a comprehensive analysis of the specific development over time of this distinct AAE feature within Princeville's unique context of external factors.

5. External Linguistic Factors

While the examination of Princeville speech in terms of its internal linguistic constraints may reveal new information about the development of AAE, understanding Princeville as a case study requires the analysis of how its community-specific social context interacts with these linguistic patterns. Understanding this specific social context also requires going beyond the popular notion that, as linguists such as Robin Sabino have reminded us, assumes the history of the African American population to be homogeneous and “ignores the fact that Africans and African Americans were free, and freed, as well as enslaved, that they were professionals, entrepreneurs, and highly skilled crafts people, as well as domestics and agricultural workers” (Sabino 2004: 1). This is especially relevant given what other linguists have pointed out as a general lack of class-based studies of AAE since the 1960s (Rickford 1999, Schilling-Estes 2000). Indeed, neglecting to take into account both the historical and current diversity within specific African American communities severely limits a full understanding of the linguistic systems of uniquely stratified communities. Studies like Schilling-Estes (2000), of the Lumbee Native American community, demonstrate the importance of examining language variation and change not only across, but within ethnic groups—especially in socially isolated communities. The intra-group variation of the insular Lumbee community not only exemplifies how local social divisions affect community-specific language variation, but also how important the consideration of this type of community-specific variation is to overall sociolinguistic study of varieties like Lumbee English and AAE.

The socially insular community of Princeville is certainly no exception when it comes to the universal tendency towards intra-group social distinctions. However, given its history

as one of the longest existing examples of Black self-determination and social isolation, examining the social factors involved in this community's linguistic variation becomes one of the most important elements of understanding what Princeville reveals about the development of AAE. As the oldest incorporated Black town in America, ethnic differences stemming from racial isolation from the white community have been highlighted throughout Princeville's history. This history includes its survival as a freed-slave refugee camp, exploitation as a labor force, intimidation as the target of Jim Crow segregation and disenfranchisement, and the present conditions of socio-economic disparity. However, during this same time, an internal social structure formed and developed throughout a history of unique and changing social dynamics. These unique social factors included an elite class of town leaders and boom-era businessman, the gender division between stable domestic jobs for women and unstable day-labor jobs for men, the de-gendering of the industrial workforce after World War II and the current growth of unemployment and influx of town outsiders moving into subsidized housing.

As noted in the previous chapter, each Princeville generation is also marked by unique levels of plural *-s* absence—the older and middle generations possessing levels much higher than levels found elsewhere in contemporary AAE. Given that the levels of this historically exclusive AAE feature are comparable to those found in early AAE forms, along with the historical record of Princeville's social isolation, these patterns may be evidence of the development of preserved patterns of AAE in Princeville. However for each of the three generations of this study, and especially for the oldest generation, there exists substantial bimodality in the pattern of individual rates of plural *-s* absence. Analyzing this variation within each generation requires going beyond the traditional external examination of age to

those related to social and individual identity. This study details qualitative and descriptive quantitative analysis of the external social factors involved in the frequency of plural –s absence in Princeville. The results show that the unique patterns of each generation reflect specific socio-historic events and changes related to factors such as gender, class and, at least for the youngest generation, distinct differences in individual identity construction in terms of accommodation or resistance to perceived local norms.

5.1 Background of Major External Factors

5.1.1 Generation: Change Over Apparent Time

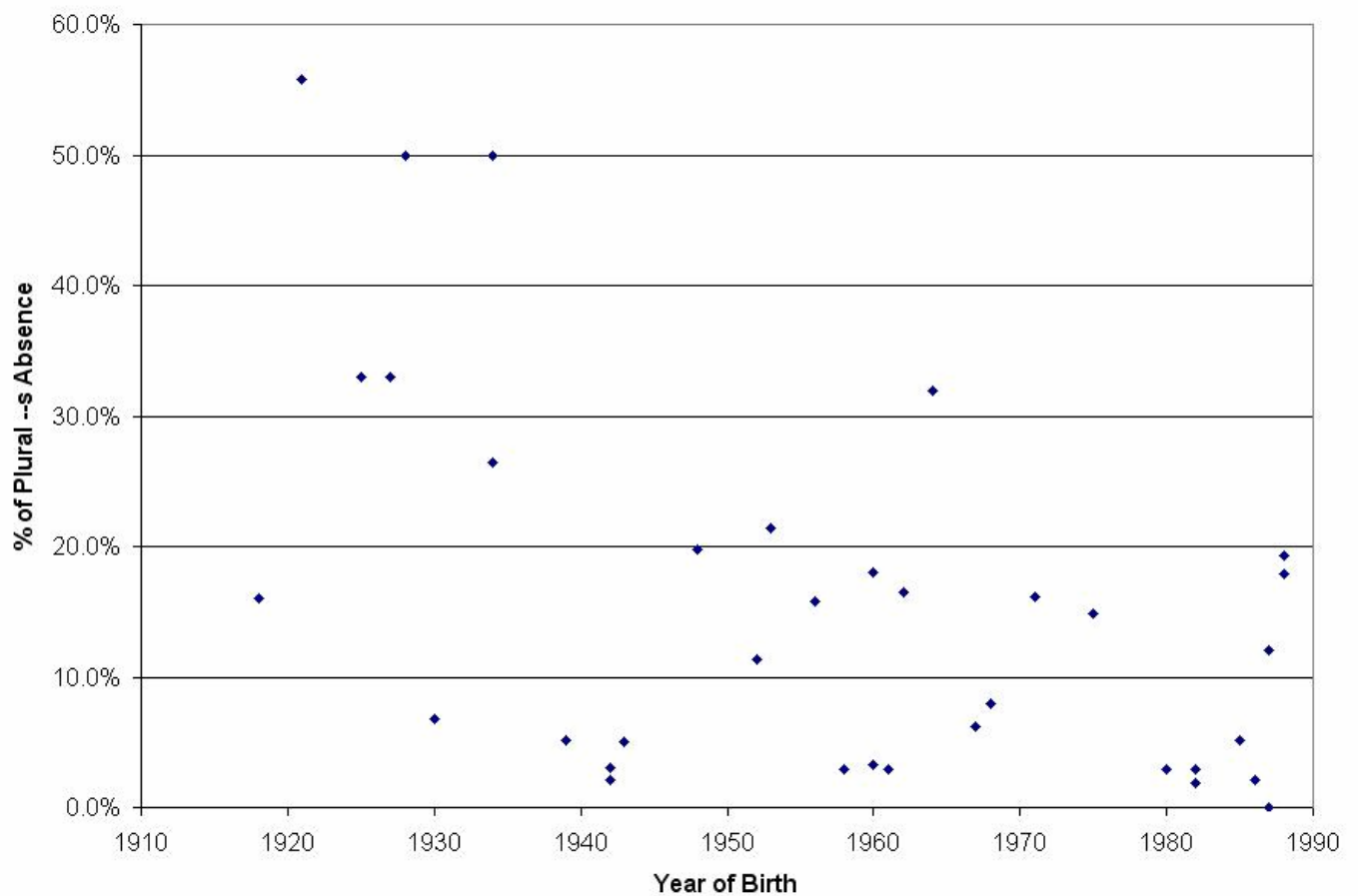
As established in the previous chapter, Princeville plural –s absence occurs at levels much higher than contemporary AAE. However, it dissipates substantially in each generation, with a downward trend that would suggest either the eventual extinction of this pattern or a leveling to the 2-11% range of contemporary AAE. The details of mean percentage, standard deviation and range of variation for Princeville plural –s absence are repeated here in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Mean, Standard Deviation, and Range Scores for Princeville Plural –s Absence.

Generation Group	Mean %	Standard Deviation	Range of Variation
Gen I (born: 1918-1944)	23.9	20.3	52.3 (2.2—54.5)
Gen II (born: 1945-1969)	13.2	9	29 (2.9—31.9)
Gen III (born: 1970-1988)	8.7	7.4	19.4 (0-19.4)

While potentially contested by some, one explanation for this overall trend would be that the extreme social isolation of Princeville's past may have created the conditions necessary for Princevillians born prior to 1945 to preserve a level of plural *-s* absence indicative of early AAE, and that decreasing psycho-social distance with surrounding white communities, along with increased citizen mobility and integration of places of occupation, has resulted in the decrease of this distinctively AAE feature over apparent time. A scatterplot of individual levels of plural *-s* absence by year of birth is provided in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 Individual Percentage of Plural *-s* Absence by Year of Birth



As seen in the range of variation in Table 5.1 and the gaps in individual groupings of speakers in Figure 5.1, varying levels of bimodality exist in each generation. This range of individual levels is widest in the oldest generation and gets narrower over apparent time. However, there do seem to be two distinct groupings within the youngest generation for those born after 1980. This bimodality would also suggest that there are factors other than age affecting the external conditioning of plural *-s* absence in Princeville. The analysis of this chapter is based on information gathered from the same corpus of interviews used for the previous data on internal factors. As detailed in the methods chapter, these interviews focused on themes of everyday life that elicit casual conversation. In addition to the information gathered regarding social dynamics, a follow-up survey was conducted to gather information regarding specific social factors that may have been missing from the interview. Included in the appendix, this survey asks a series of seven questions related to potential social factors such as education, family lineage and church affiliation. The categories for these questions came from the preliminary analysis of the interviews and conversations with town members that included direct questions as to how they and others define class in Princeville. Both the quantitative descriptive data and qualitative data collected from the interviews and survey suggest that these external factors center around gender and the community-specific definition of class in Princeville.

5.1.2 Gendered Class

The most substantial evidence from the distinction of gender in Princeville's social structure is the long history of the most stable and higher-status jobs going to the women of the town. From the time shortly after Princeville's incorporation in 1885, when the first schools were

started in Princeville, women were preferenced for the high-status job of teacher or “teacher’s aid.” Given that Princeville School would eventually become, and remain, one of the largest employers in Princeville outside of the few small businesses in town, this was one of the highest status jobs a Princeville woman could hold. However, the gendering of occupation in Princeville reached its height in 1910 when the industrialization of the area had split the majority of jobs available into the female-oriented position of domestic worker and the male-dominated work of the day laborer. With the incomes for the female occupations of teacher and domestic worker much higher and more stable than the market-sensitive, day-labor jobs for men, the split between male and female income, and in many cases education, became wide. As historian Joe Mobley points out, this time was also marked by a drastic increase in the number of female-headed households and a “definite and growing tendency toward a matriarchal society in the black town in those years” (Mobley 1994: 376-377). This trend of gendered occupation continued until the increase of women in industrial jobs began during World War II and continued to equalize through the 1960s and 70s when the racial integration of the plants of the area also saw more black women enter this job force.

Today the trend of woman teachers, or those trained at the local community college as teacher’s aids, continues at what is now Princeville Montessori School. And while not the highest, it remains one of the higher status jobs in the community. Increased mobility for some women allows them to find professional jobs in nearby cities like Rocky Mount. But the majority of Princeville women born after 1945 report holding either health care or domestic-related jobs, such as working as nurses aids in the many local nursing homes, or working as laborers in one of the local assembly or textile plants. For the youngest generation of Princeville women, this segment of the corpus may show a disproportionately high level

of education. All but two of the Generation III speakers were related to one particular social network in the town. And all of the young women sampled were either college educated or on their way to college from high school. We will return to the social significance of education level in Princeville; however, this high level education may indicate the continued status and expected occupation level for at least some of the women of Princeville.

5.1.3 Locally-Constructed Social Class

The markers for class divisions in Princeville vary according to the defining events of each generation; however, the common factors of occupation type, level of education, and association with Princeville businesses, churches and/or schools appear to play a continued role in Princeville's community-specific manifestations of class. While unusual success in these areas marks Princeville's early history, the fact that not all Princeville residents participated in these successes indicates a long history of intra-community social stratification. Despite a boom era for the business district in which Princeville residents were less dependent on outside employment, the majority of men and women have always worked as either farm laborers, sharecroppers, domestics or, later, plant workers. However, there has always been a group of Princeville business owners who, in its early history, did well serving the Black farmers of the area and also made up the majority of mayors and commissioners in the town's leadership. As historian Joe Mobley writes of this "middle class" of Princeville, "Princeville voters apparently supported such men out of admiration for their financial success and respect for their practical business experience" (Mobley 1994: 356). During a reform process, however, church pastors lead a movement in which the center of Princeville power transferred more to the community churches. Many of these pastors then became

elected as town leaders. As mentioned above, teachers and administrators also held a high status in the community and, in combination with town pastors and businessmen formed a successful upper class of professionals and politicians. One example of this elite class in Princeville was Senator Robert S. Taylor. Educated at Oberlin, he was asked to come to Princeville by the American Missionary Association to help build what would become a very successful education system in Princeville relative to surrounding Black communities. He served as a town leader and went on to serve in the state senate in 1885 and 1887.

Today these social factors remain, to varying degrees and in different forms, prominent influences in the formation of class divisions in Princeville. The laborer versus professional distinction is now in the form of factory workers and minimum wage or “working poor,” in contrast to a small number of people who either work as teacher’s aids or a wide range of professional jobs in the larger towns and cities of the area. These professionals, along with the pastors of the most prominent churches, still make up the majority of town leaders and a small number of Princeville business owners rent their store spaces from one or two Princeville business-property owners. These groups still make up most of the relative upper and middle classes in Princeville. For Generation II, however, which now make-up the majority of the most active town leaders and professionals, there seems to be less disparity in income and education level between the classes as compared to Generation I.

Another external factor that arose from the qualitative data of the interviews and survey was mobility. An increasing number of Princeville residents in Generation II either have worked outside of the area, in cities like Rocky Mount or Raleigh, or have lived outside of Princeville for an extended time. While this mobility does not appear to be a status marker

in Princeville, these speakers show more affiliation to broader communities and social networks—often in northern urban areas.

As for the youngest generation, a definite gap seems to be emerging in terms of social networks. Specifically, the majority of speakers of this study that were born after 1980 are connected to one of two social networks generally defined by church affiliation and gang membership. With the exception of one female speaker, who attends one of the prestige churches in Princeville and was headed to college at the time of interview, and one male speaker, who is also planning to attend college to play football, the church network, or “choir kids,” are all either related to or customers of a local beauty shop owner. They are all members of one of two gospel bands that tour gospel festivals as far as Detroit and New York. And they all either are attending college or have completed a bachelors degree. The gang network, or “gangsters,” are all self-identified members of local Princeville gangs. Gang activity in the community, especially between Princeville youth and rival gangs from the Black section of Tarboro, has been increasing in visibility in recent years. The “gangsters” are three young males who were in grades 10, 11 and 12 at the time of their interviews. Both the “choir kids” network and several older speakers identify the cause of what they perceive to be increasing crime and drug activity in Princeville to “outsiders” who moved into Princeville after the flood to take advantage of the available low-income housing. One of the “choir kid” speakers, born in 1982, who is college educated, a member of a local gospel band and the daughter of a successful beauty salon owner who moved to Tarboro after the flood, sums up the salient divide between these two groups.

It's crazy. It is. I think it's that younger crew that—that think they gangsters and don't even know how to spell it. It's kind of—it's crazy. You have a lot of people that moved out of Princeville because of that or didn't move back to Princeville because of that. A lot of people changed where they were living once they did move back to Princeville because there's areas of Princeville that are more prone to violence than others.

The young males of the “gangsters” network do live in subsidized housing or in one of Princeville’s trailer parks. And they come from some of the poor and or “labor” families of the community that do not trace their histories back farther than one generation in Princeville. However, as life-long residents, they and their families have lived in Princeville long before the flood. Based on the information from the interviews, while there may be influence on this network from “outsiders,” this stigmatized “violent” element of Princeville consists mostly of Princeville residents who have lived there for at least one generation. Overall the class division exemplified in the Generation III speakers of this study is more similar to the wide gap found in the older generation than in the more socially diverse Generation II.

5.2 Descriptive Statistical Analysis of External Factors

Given the sociolinguistic assumption that group and individual variation is interrelated with linguistic variation, the question remains as to which elements of Princeville’s social structure and/or locally important social divisions may play a role in the external conditioning of AAE in Princeville. What follows is a descriptive statistical analysis of the external factors of gender and community-specific class overall and within each generation. While the quantification of social factors can be problematic, the goal of the following analysis is to provide preliminary indications as to the external factors most likely to be

interacting with the frequency of plural –s absence in Princeville. As detailed above from the qualitative data, these factors intersect differently in each generation and therefore potentially interact with plural –s absence differently for each generation. As a result, what follows the overall statistical analysis of class and gender is a detailed examination of how these two factors pattern for individuals over apparent time.

5.2.1 Plural –s Absence and Gender.

While the overall percentage of plural –s absence for Princeville males is slightly higher than for Princeville Females, whether or not this reflects upon gender as a substantial external factor requires more detailed analysis. As shown in Table 5.2, plural –s absence is five percent higher for males overall.

Table 5.2 Overall Mean Percentage of Plural –s Absence by Gender

Gender	Mean % of Absence	Overall Absent/Total Tokens
Male	18.3	(201/1188)
Female	13.3	(214/1746)

Given the socio-historical context of class difference that may have resulted from the gender division in domestic jobs for women and day labor jobs for men, a higher level of absence in males may be indicative of gendered class divisions. However, exploring this hypothesis requires a more detailed analysis of how the socio-economic context of each generation may have effected the interaction of language and class. And this type of analysis requires an operational definition of class in Princeville.

5.2.2 Plural –s Absence and Community-Specific Class.

This study's definition of class in Princeville is based on a combination of insider and outsider expertise. Outsider linguistic expertise of non-community members is drawn upon when education and parent occupation or "social lineage" are considered, due the evidence of studies that indicate these factors play a prominent role in the external conditioning of linguistic features (Labov 1966). However, the elements of Princeville social distinctions that are most salient to the insider expertise of Princeville residents, based on the qualitative data, are considered equally in the definition of factors and analysis of the data.

Based on the qualitative data from the interviews, six social factors related to Princeville class were established and operationalized. The factor group of home type was originally included based on responses from Generation II speakers referring to home ownership, especially after the flood, as a symbol of higher income and social status. There is a unique situation in Princeville in terms of housing options that have been available after the flood in which returning residents could either afford to rebuild a house or they moved into one of the many new subsidized apartment complexes. According to two town council members, 95% of the apartments in Princeville are low-income housing. However, among several potential problems with the reliability of home type as a factor, there is a lack of reliable quantitative and qualitative data in terms of specifically how home ownership marks status or class in Princeville—especially within three generations with very different access to home ownership. Considering the need for further definition of this factor, home type was not included in this analysis. The five remaining factors that were included are defined as follows:

- **Education.** As mentioned above, Labov (1966) and other studies have commonly found education level to be a substantial external factor. The three categories for education level in this study are *college*, those who have an associate's degree or higher; *high school*, those with a high school diploma; and *less than high school*; those with less than a high school diploma, including a G.E.D.
- **Occupation Type.** As detailed above, the distinction between the professional and labor class has been a long-standing division in Princeville that may have had a bearing on several other external factors such as education and general social status. As is commonly the case, those in the lower paying jobs may have less financial ability to pursue a college education. It should also be noted that the binary distinction between professional and laborer is deemed appropriate for Princeville, and specifically for this corpus, based on demographics and qualitative data that indicate the national norm for "skilled laborer" would often fall into the professional category relative to Princeville's economy. For example, a Princeville resident who may work as a customer service telemarketer making just over \$25,000 a year at the local Sprint telephone company would be a professional relative to the low-wage jobs and high unemployment common in Princeville and rural Edgecombe county.
- **Social Lineage.** Related to the historical gap in occupation groups, social lineage distinguishes between the professional or laborer status that the speaker's parents and grandparents belonged to. Again, this distinction mirrors other studies (Labov 1966) that indicate that parents' occupation and income can have a greater bearing as an external factor than the occupation of the speaker. In Princeville, social lineage may overlap the factor of education to some extent. Just as income level may affect higher

education attainment, the laborer category for this group includes farmers, who, at least for the oldest generation, were less likely to send their children to school. Of the many speakers interviewed who report growing up on farms, many relay stories of being pulled out of school to work on the farm and watching other Princeville children walk to school.

- **Church.** This category is based on the documented prominence of church affiliation in Princeville (Mobley 1994), observations of present day Princeville which confirm its continued role as the center of social structure, and the substantially common response of speakers identifying this as a salient marker of Princeville social status. Given the central role of this social factor in Princeville, many residents, including those who do not attend, report that the majority of Princeville belongs to a church and that those who do not attend risk some degree of social stigmatism. This analysis makes a binary distinction of those who attend a group of prestigious churches in the area and those who do not. While the large number of area churches makes church affiliation difficult to quantify as a factor group, the prestige category distinction is based on extensive survey information and community observations in terms of what residents identify as the larger, more “middle class” churches of the town. These more prestigious churches include St. Luke’s Baptist in Princeville and most of the churches in Tarboro, including integrated churches such as St. Luke’s Episcopal. With the exception of a few small, less affluent, “store front” churches in Tarboro, the remaining less-prestigious churches are the large number in Princeville that are commonly described by town members as “store front” churches. These churches have smaller-sized memberships consisting of the town’s “lower” or working class

and are usually held in multi-purpose buildings or someone's home. It should be noted that these class distinctions in this predominately poor rural town may seem very subtle in comparison to national standards or the class divisions of towns and cities with larger populations.

- **Mobility.** While it is uncertain as to what extent it is a marker of class in Princeville, there is a potential difference in the social networks and construction of Princeville-related identity for those who have lived outside of Princeville for more than five years. This mobility is seen to increase for the members of Generation II—the generation after World War II that included increasing industrial jobs and integration of the workplace. We will return to the assessment of the factor of mobility as a class factor, and/or separate external factor of linguistic exposure, later in this analysis.

The relative frequency of absence for each of these factors was determined by calculating the mean percentage of absence for speakers in each factor category. Each factor group was also tested for statistical reliability by Chi square analysis. Table 5.2 details the frequency of plural –s absence for the categories of each of these external factor groups along with whether they were found significant in Chi square analysis.

Table 5.3 Mean Percentage and Chi Square Significance of Plural –s Absence for Social Factors of Education, Occupation Type, Social Lineage, Church and Mobility.

Social Factor	Mean % of Absence	Overall Absent/Total Tokens	Chi Square Score	Probability ($p \leq$)
Education			456.043	.001
College	8.2	(103/1538)		
High School	11.9	(117/812)		
Less than High school	35.1	(195/389)		
Occupation Type			134.623	.001
Professional	8.2	(144/1775)		
Laborer	23.1	(271/1159)		
Social Lineage			20.036	.001
Professional	8.6	(44/463)		
Laborer	16.6	(371/2056)		
Church			64.864	.001
Prestige	11.4	(157/1405)		
Non-Prestige	18.8	(258/1114)		
Mobility			19.112	.001
5 or more years away	10.1	(81/836)		
Less than 5 years away	17.3	(334/2098)		

The data indicate that the distinctions of each of these social factors do play some role in the frequency of plural –s absence. Chi square p values for each factor group’s raw numbers of plural –s absence were consistently “less than or equal to .001.” While these scores would indicate some statistical “goodness of fit,” a more detailed analysis such as VARBRUL on a larger number of speakers per category would likely be necessary to establish any statistically significant causal relationship.

As descriptive statistics, these percentages of absence do reveal trends in the linguistic data that correspond to several community-specific social categories related to class. The strongest patterns of plural –s absence are related to the factor groups of education,

occupation type, and social lineage. All show substantial differences in the frequency of plural –s absence for each level of education and for whether the speaker and the speaker’s family belong to the category of professionals or laborers. In fact these three factor groups show indications of being closely-related and/or overlapping categories via the strong parallel of frequency for the higher status categories. Princeville’s college educated professionals and those from professional families have essentially the same, lower frequency of plural –s absence when compared to their social counterparts. In addition, the factors of Church and Mobility show less extreme yet prevalent lower mean frequencies for residents who attend the more prestigious churches and those who have lived outside of Princeville for more than five years.

In order to evaluate the overall factor of class for plural –s absence and in relation to other factors such as age and gender, a Princeville-specific class index was established based on the combination of these factor groups. Given the likely overlap of education, occupation and social lineage, these factors would seem to easily be combined. Based on the strong quantitative data, the factor of church affiliation was added to test whether and to what extent it may also be a class-based factor. Mobility, however, was not included due to the possibility that it may be a factor separate from class. The decrease in plural –s absence for those who have extensively lived outside of Princeville may indicate outside linguistic influence and/or outside social influences on the individuals in terms of community affiliation or other elements of individual identity construction. This may especially be true for those residents who lived away from Princeville in their younger, more linguistically formative, years and/or those who lived in urban areas. We will return to mobility as a separate external factor later in this analysis.

Within this class index, the three classes of upper, middle and lower are used as class categories. With regards to the four remaining factors of education, occupation, social lineage and church, the classification of speakers was determined as follows. Speakers who are members of any three or four of the four social factors are ranked as upper class. Those who are members of any two of the four are middle class. And those who were found to be members of one or none of the four social factor groups were categorized as lower class. Of the 35 speakers in this study, this delineation of class was distributed as 11 upper class , 8 middle class and 16 lower class speakers. Table 5.3 lists the overall mean percentage of absence for these three class groups.

Table 5.4 Overall Mean Percentage of Plural –s Absence by Class.

Class	Mean % of Absence	Overall Absent/Total Tokens
Upper	4.8	(53/1098)
Middle	12.1	(86/652)
Lower	24.4	(276/1184)

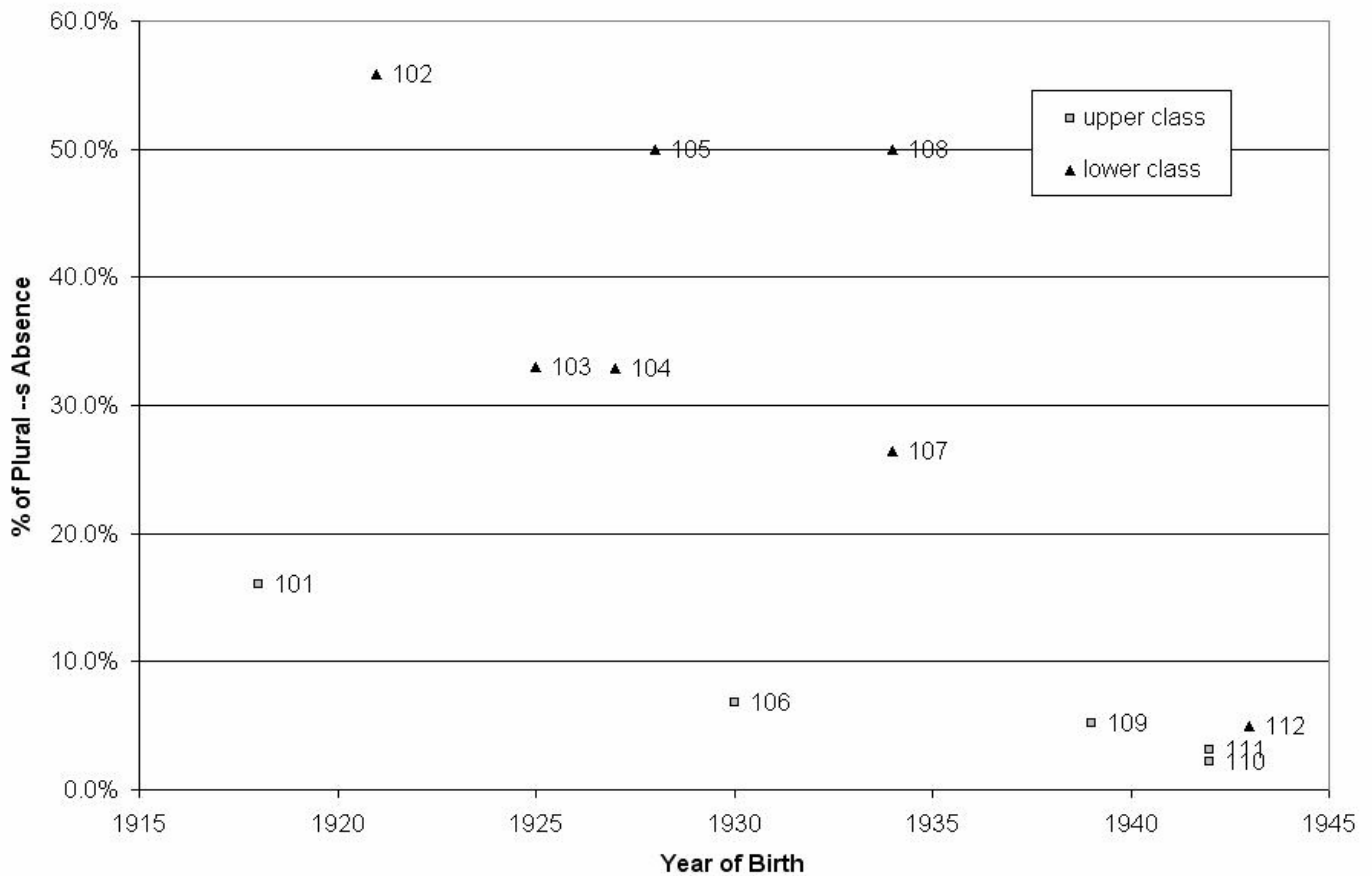
The data show a sharp distinction in plural –s absence based on this definition of class. The differences in overall frequency of absence for each Princeville class are even greater than the distinctions by generation. The lower class frequency is slightly higher than the oldest generation’s rate of absence, and the upper class is considerably lower than the youngest generation. This analysis indicates that, while direct correlations of specific demographics may not be clear, class as a general category is a substantial external factor in the conditioning of plural –s absence in Princeville. However, exploring claims as to the

relationship between Princeville socio-historic context and variation trends requires a more detailed analysis of individual rates of this feature within the specific social context of each generation.

5.2.3 Individual Plural –s Absence by Class and Generation.

A more detailed examination of individual rates of plural –s absence by generation reveals trends that align with the specific socio-historic context of each generation and indicate that class may be a stronger linguistic factor for the oldest and youngest Princevillians. In Generation I, we see a clear split between the upper and lower class rates of absence that parallels the historical record of social disparity in the early years of Princeville. The scatterplot in Figure 5.2 shows the individual rates of absence by each speaker's class and year of birth.

Figure 5.2 Individual Rates of Plural –s Absence by Year of Birth for Generation I



The most noticeable detail from this illustration may also be the most significant, in that there is no middle class for Generation I. And, with the exception of speaker 112, there is a wide gap between the absence rates of the upper and lower class. This indication of a linguistic split based on class parallels the history of early “boom era” years from 1885-1910 in which successful businessman, along with other town leaders, ministers, teachers and school administrators, formed an upper class of higher-educated, professional residents (Mobley 1994). In fact, the birth of the oldest speaker of the study in 1918 (speaker 101) marks the beginning of a depression era for Princeville business and the surrounding farm economy in

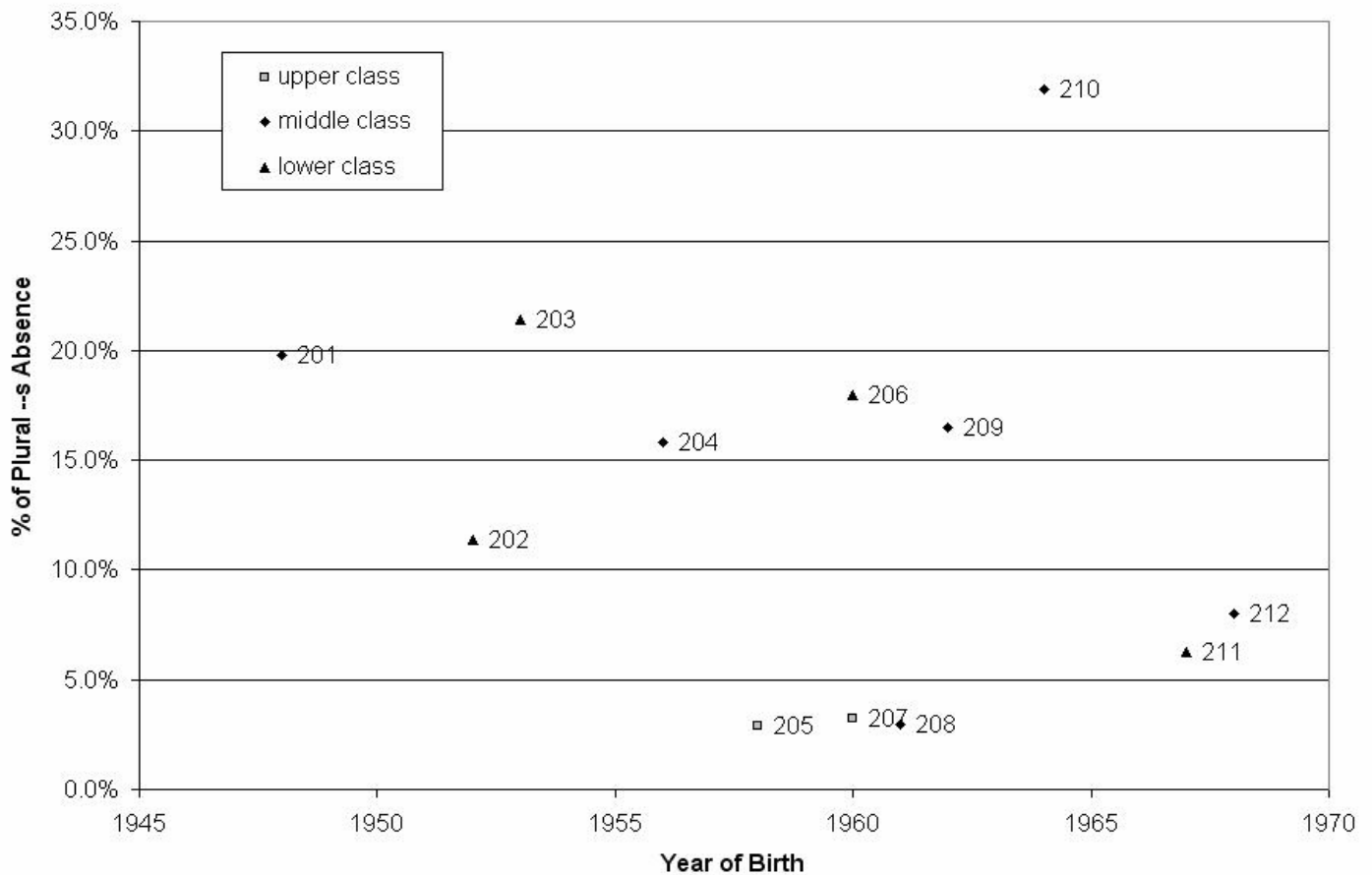
general. Thus the era from 1918 to 1945 may have seen an increased disparity in terms of the social divide between a lower class in growing poverty and a shrinking upper class. The apparent lack of a middle class and the data on social lineage also indicate the stability of this class system in that the educated professionals of Generation I descended from the educated professionals of Princeville's boom era and the poor farmers also descended from similar lower-class social lineage. Moreover, the markers of this wide and consistent class gap seems to have included language—in at least the AAE feature of plural *-s* absence. The extent to which this feature was reduced for the upper class may be due in part to the prescriptive standard English norms to which the more educated elite had greater access. This elite also had greater daily interaction with the white business community of Tarboro as compared to the socially isolated farmers and laborers. Therefore, it is also likely that, beyond education, this linguistic marker played some role as a salient marker of individual identity construction related to class. Indeed it is possible that just as close proximity of the white Tarboro community did not mitigate severe ethnic and social isolation, the close proximity of Princeville residents did not prevent it from forming a sharp socio-linguistic divide based on class.

As mentioned earlier, the one exception to this trend in Generation I is speaker 112, who appears to be the only lower class speaker with plural *-s* absence rates similar to the upper class speakers. However, speaker 112 shows a unique combination of elements in her social make-up. First, speaker 112 is female, and, as mentioned above, female speakers are slightly lower in frequency of plural *-s* marking—albeit possibly as a correlate to class. Secondly, while only having a high school education and not attending a higher status church, she was a city council member at the time of the interview and seems to project an

image that might at least be deemed middle class, in terms of her status in the town. Possibly of most importance, this speaker falls within the mobile category and lived in Virginia for over seven years through adolescence. It is possible, then, that speaker 112's unusual linguistic patterns are due to the influence of the peer group she was exposed to during her time away from Princeville. We will return to the discussion of mobility as a secondary external factor when we discuss its prevalence in Generation II.

More evidence for the hypothesis of class as a strong external conditioner of Princeville plural *-s* absence is provided in the data from Generation II. Here the historical evidence of an extreme social shift after World War II that brought decreased disparities in education and occupation is paralleled by the linguistic evidence of extreme variation in plural *-s* absence by class. Figure 5.3 shows the individual rates of absence for Generation II.

Figure 5.3 Individual Rates of Plural –s Absence by Year of Birth for Generation II



First, relative to Generation I, the data show the introduction of a large number of middle class speakers in Generation II—much larger than the upper class speakers. Moreover, we see no clear pattern in terms of a sociolinguistic class divide, with the exception of the fact that the plural –s frequencies of the two upper class speakers remain low. This relatively wide variation in plural –s absence by class seems to parallel the historical context of this Generation in which an increasingly integrated workforce and other opportunities for Black people allowed for an unprecedented ability to transcend one’s social lineage. Indeed several

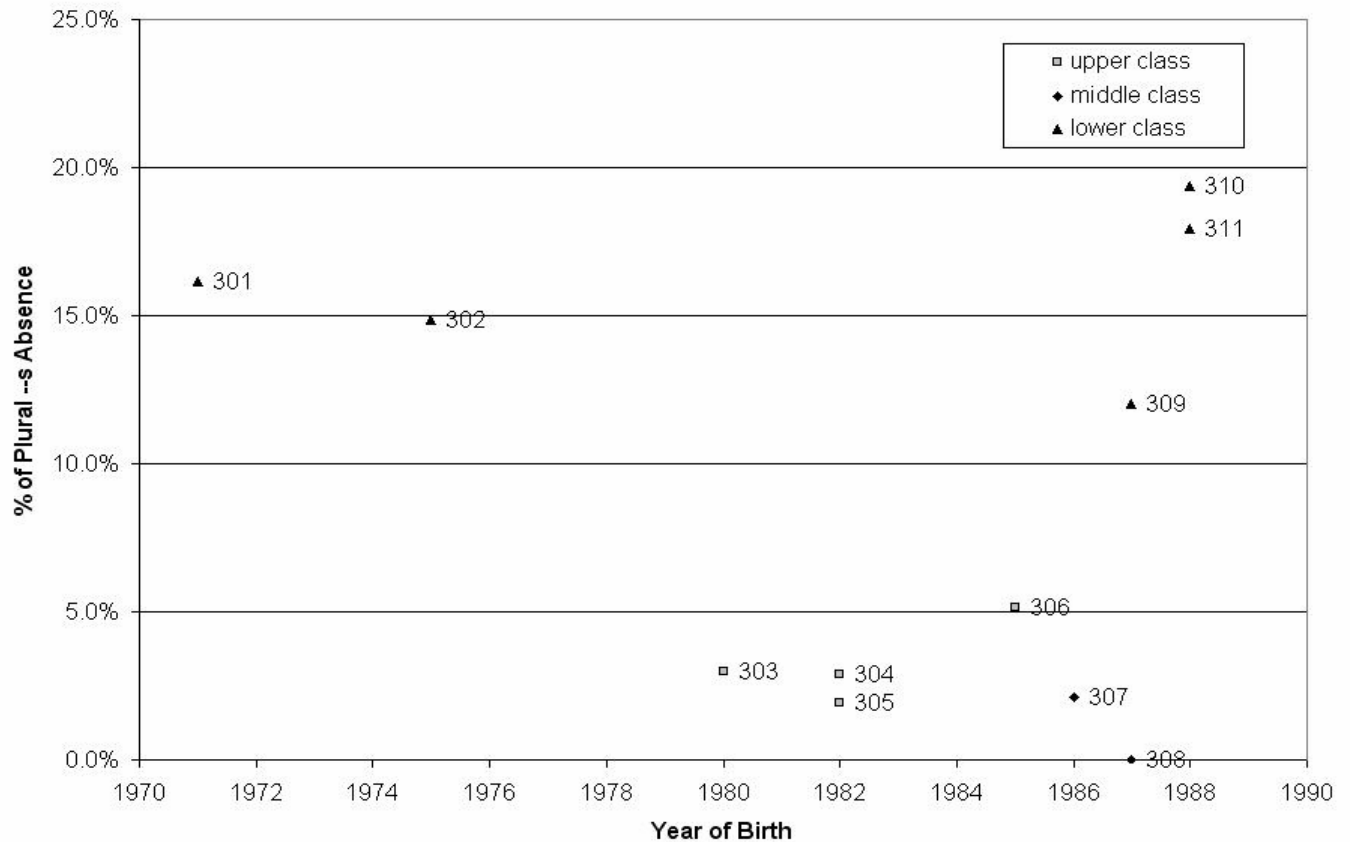
of the middle and upper class speakers of Generation II are college educated with professional jobs but report childhoods of sharecrop farming with their parents.

The analysis of Generation II is not complete, however, without considering the additional factor of mobility. With the exception of one speaker in Generation I, all of the mobile speakers of this study—those who lived and worked outside of Princeville for five years or more—were born in Generation II. Indeed, of the twelve speakers in Generation II, eight are in this mobile group. This mobility may be related to the increased job opportunities mentioned above. It may also be related to the newly extended family networks in northern and urban areas as a result of the Great Migration of Black people to the North that marked the generation prior to theirs and ended around 1945. The possible linguistic effects of this mobility are many but, as mentioned above regarding speaker 112, may include identity-related issues such as association with the town or an added dimension of higher class status. It is also likely that this factor operates separately from class in the traditional manner in which exposure to separate linguistic systems for extended time, especially during younger years, affects a speaker's set of linguistic features. Whatever the specific correlation between mobility and plural *-s* may be, when this factor is added to the individual patterns for Generation II represented in the scatterplot in Figure 5.3, a general pattern does emerge. While a future analysis of this feature is needed in terms of a more detailed delineation of length, nature, and life period of the time away for these mobile speakers, the three speakers of Generation II who are not mobile—speakers 206, 209, and 210—have some of the higher frequencies of plural *-s* absence in this generation. More specifically, all of the non-mobile speakers are substantially above the 12% level found overall for middle and upper class speakers, while six of the nine mobile speakers fall below

this threshold. Most importantly, this dramatic increase in mobility found in Generation II may mark a break in the social isolation has been proposed earlier in this analysis as a possible cause for the preservation of the early AAE feature of plural *-s* absence. This possible decrease in the social isolation of Princeville may explain the extreme increase in the variability of the sociolinguistic conditioning of this feature in Generation II. It may also be related to the general downward trend for the frequency of plural *-s* absence found in this and the following generation.

Analysis of the individual rates of plural *-s* absence by class for Generation III reveals the reemergence of class-based linguistic divide that parallels Generation I and seems motivated by a generation-specific response to a similar social context. While the class division in the oldest generation is derived from an earlier cultural distinction between farmers and business owners, in at least the youngest of Generation III, the upper/lower class division revolves around affiliation with certain social networks. This Generation III sociolinguistic division is illustrated in the scatterplot in Figure 5.4 which shows individual rates of plural *-s* absence by class and year of birth.

Figure 5.4 Individual Rates of Plural –s Absence by Year of Birth for Generation III



As illustrated, the division between lower and upper class rates of absence, relative to the range of this generation, is as wide as, if not wider than, the same gap in Generation I. In further detail of individual comparison, the two oldest speakers, 301 and 302, are factory workers with high school educations and are separate from the social networks of their younger counterparts. With the exception of these two, the remaining Generation III youth are divided into social networks described above as “choir kids,” speakers 303 through 308, and “gangsters,” speakers 309-311. Again, as the choir kids represent the more-educated, church-affiliated, children of middle to upper class professionals, and the “gangsters”

represent the poorer, non-college bound, gang affiliated lower class of Princeville, the rates of plural –s absence consistently parallel these social divisions. Specifically, as in Generation I, the upper-class youth have considerably lower rates of this feature than their lower-class counterparts. As with the other generations, education remains a strong factor of class, with all of the college-educated or self-identified, college-bound youth belonging to “choir kids” network. Church obviously plays a central role in the network of “choir kids” and their family’s ties to the more prestigious churches of the area. Occupation as a factor was less clear for youth, with the exception of the two oldest speakers. However, social lineage played a unique role in Generation III. Unlike the consistent class inheritance of Generation I, and to a lesser extent Generation II, Generation III speakers showed a unique movement up and down the class scale relative to their parents and grandparents. For example, while speaker 301’s grandmother is from the upper class group of female school teachers in Generation I, he now has a high school education, works at a local factory and, outside of his social lineage, is solidly lower class. By contrast, the core of the choir kids network, speakers 303-306, show movement up the class scale in that all of their parents are middle to lower class and all report having grandparents from the lower class.

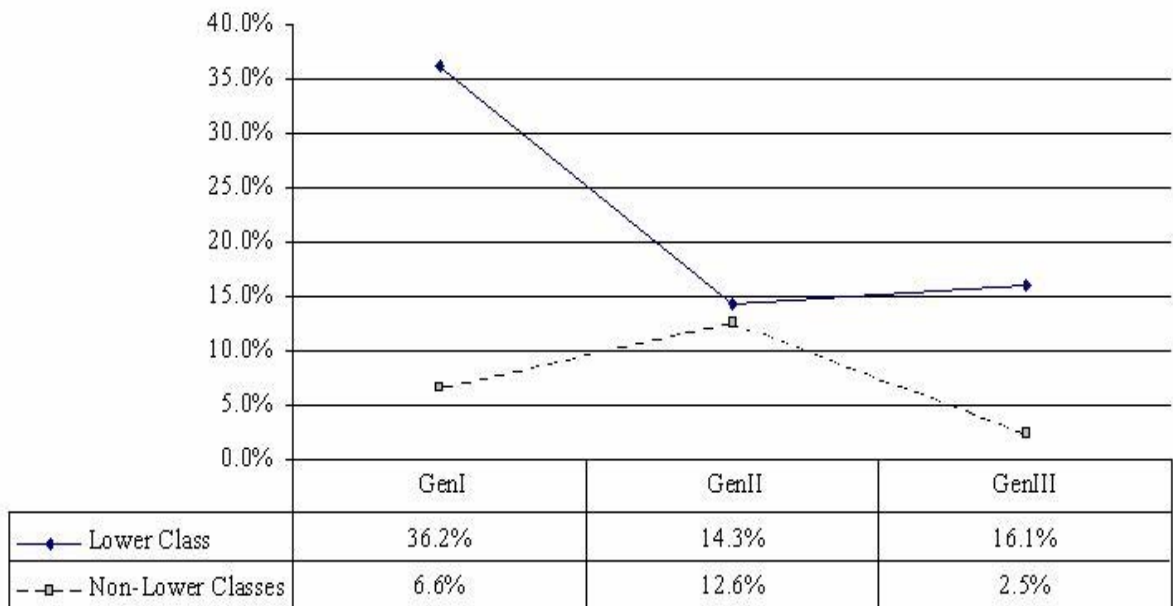
The major distinction between the choir kids and gangster networks appears to be two separate perspectives on affiliation with Princeville. While the choir kids essentially have re-interpreted the social markers of the traditional Princeville, church-centered, professional upper and middle class, the gangster network can also be interpreted as showing strong alignment with an alternative set of Princeville norms and symbols of town identity. The three young gang members often refer to the “streets of Princeville” that they represent and defend from rival gangs in neighboring Tarboro. This model of town representation,

however, is fashioned after a more trans-regional urban model often associated with hip-hop or “street” culture of predominately Black and poor urban neighborhoods. Evidence of a trans-street identity is not only seen in the mannerisms, clothing, music and cultural references of these youth, but also in their discourse and linguistic features. An entire range AAE features, from the use of trans-regional and local lexical innovations, or “slang”, associated with Hip Hop culture (e.g. *Where you get them kittens [shoes] at, Yo?*) to frequencies of features associated with supraregional norms such as post-vocalic *r*-lessness (Rowe and Kendall 2003, D’Andrea 2005), is found at rates that are much higher, or that do not exist, in the speech of the choir kids network. What stands out the most, however, is the selection of plural *-s* absence within this “gangster” alignment. Studies like Wolfram and Thomas (2002) show the supraregional alignment of younger African American speakers in Hyde county to be marked by the decrease in local features and increase in core, supraregional AAE features. By stark contrast however, the “gangsters” linguistic construction of a supra-regional model of local alignment recruits the reinvigoration of a local feature at levels indicative of their grandparents’ and great-grandparents’ generation. By the same token, one could argue that the choir kids network parallel the trend in young Hyde county speakers by aligning with the lower, trans-regional levels of contemporary AAE. Indeed, while done through different forms and new cultural definitions of group affiliation, the lower-class “gangster” networks’ re-establishment of high levels of plural *-s* absence, and the choir kids’ trend movement towards lower contemporary levels, may have re-invigorated this feature’s linguistic divergence as a marker of growing class disparity.

5.2.4 Overall Trajectories of Plural –s Absence by Class and Mobility.

The trajectories of plural –s absence by class, gender, and mobility over apparent time conclude this chapter. Any effect gender has on the conditioning of plural –s absence appears to be due to its interaction with class. However, class and mobility appear to be substantial external factors for the patterning of and retention of this distinctively AAE feature. Figure 5.5 details the trajectory of Princeville plural –s absence by class over apparent time.

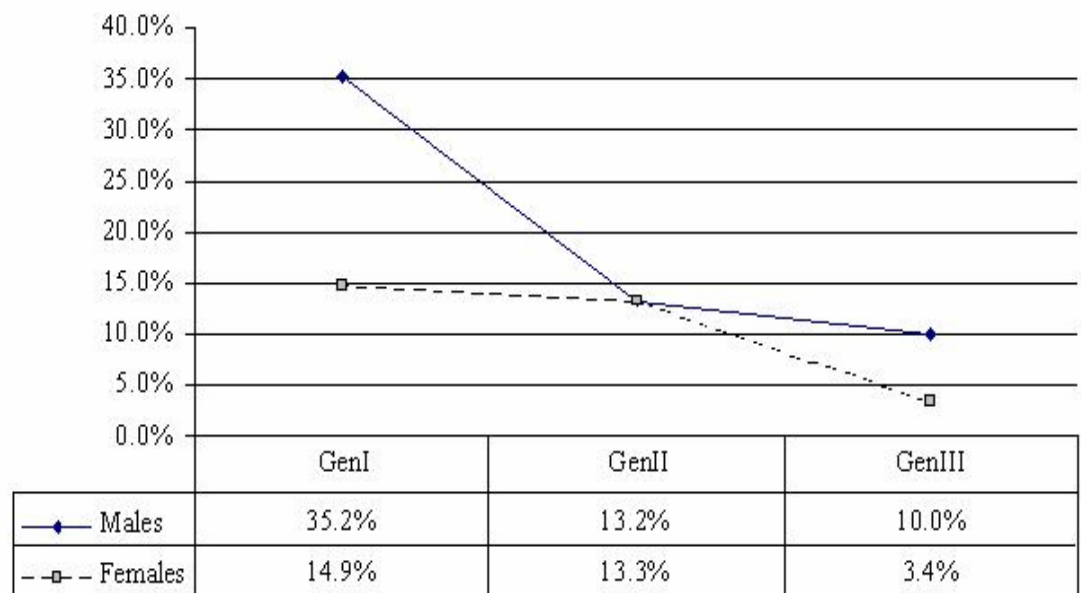
Figure 5.5 Princeville Plural –s Absence by Class Over Apparent Time.



As the line graph illustrates, a class-based linguistic distinction marked by plural *-s* absence parallels the socio-historical context of each generation. An intra-communal, psycho-social distance marked by a community-specific definition of class almost completely converges in the generation after World War II by way of decreasing class disparity and the possible dissipation of this feature as a salient marker of class. The evidence of Generation III points to former explanation however, in that, as clearly marked boundaries of upper and lower class networks arise amidst increasing economic disparity, the dramatic convergence of plural *-s* re-emerges as a linguistic marker of this division.

In terms of gender as a possible external factor, Figure 5.6 shows the trajectories for Princeville males and females over the three generations and demonstrates how any link between plural *-s* absence and gender is likely a result of the underlying factor of class.

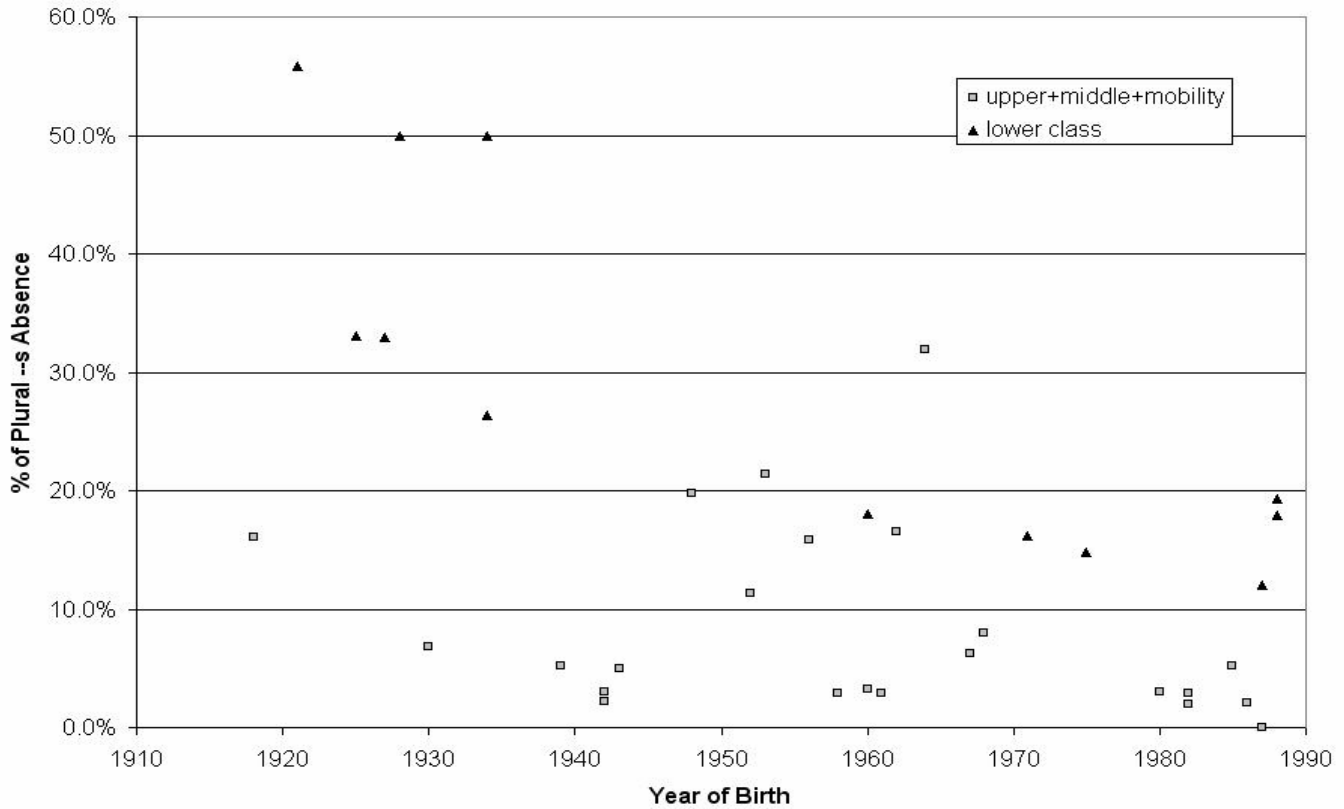
Figure 5.6 Princeville Plural –s Absence by Gender Over Apparent Time.



This line graph reveals trajectories of plural –s absence that are strikingly similar to those of class. This would seem to indicate that there is a gendering of class in Princeville by which women are more likely to be more educated, hold more stable, higher status jobs and subsequently are more likely to affiliate with the distinctions of the upper and middle classes of Princeville. What is interesting to note is that, while this gendering of class is well noted in the historical literature on the domestic/day-laborer split of the 1920s, this trend of upwardly mobile females and less affluent males seems to have re-emerged both socially and linguistically in the youngest Princeville residents. This would seem to lend support to historian Joe Mobley’s claim that Princeville, at least after the 1920s, is essentially a matriarchal community (Mobley 1994). Again, linguistically, this may explain why class and gender appear to be so closely linked in Princeville AAE.

What arose within this analysis is the substantial effect mobility has had within Generation II. The predominance of mobility in this generation, along with the extreme shift in linguistic variation by class relative to the other generations, indicates that mobility is also a strong external factor in the conditioning of Princeville plural *-s* absence. Indeed the increasing integration and opportunities for Black people that marked this generation may have triggered an apparent shift away from the linguistic and social isolation that had preserved early AAE levels of this feature for previous generations. However, the sociolinguistic convergence of the youngest generation may indicate that this feature has never fully dissipated for the poorest and lower class residents of Princeville. Indeed, the evaluation of external social factors for plural *-s* absence in Princeville would seem to require the examination of the distinction between the upper and middle classes, along with the most mobile residents, and those of the lower class in Princeville. The scatterplot in Figure 5.6 details the pattern of individual rates of plural *-s* absence for these three combined groups against the lower class.

Figure 5.7 Individual Percentages of Plural –s Absence for Upper Class, Middle Class and Mobile Speakers Compared to Lower Class Speakers.



Though there remains a wide variation in frequency for the middle generation, the lower-class speakers consistently have some of the highest levels of absence of their respective age groups. Again, while an overall downward trend would indicate Princeville's decreasing linguistic isolation, the substantial lowering of this feature for the youngest upper class speakers, and the equally substantial raising of this feature for the youngest lower class speakers, may indicate the resurgence of the prominence of plural –s absence as a marker of new but familiar forms of social disparity in Princeville.

6. Conclusion

While it may be contested by some, the evidence of Princeville's socio-historical context as a socially insular community, its levels of plural *-s* absence and the pattern of internal constraints for this feature lend support to the case for Princeville speech as preserving earlier forms of AAE. Like the enclave AAE communities of Nova Scotia, Samaná and Liberia, a unique set of social circumstances, that include economic exploitation, racial intimidation, and Black self-determination amidst national disenfranchisement, may have created the necessary conditions of psycho-social distance and sociolinguistic isolation of Princeville for it to preserve levels of plural *-s* absence substantially higher than contemporary AAE. Wherever the speech of this community is situated, however, it is clear that Princeville is a mono-ethnic, social enclave in the United States that demonstrates the development of one of the three features available for widespread AAE/Creole comparison, zero plural marking, over apparent time in its original regional context. As such, it fills a gap in the continuum of African Diaspora communities available for this cross-comparison in the study of the origins and development of AAE.

From this preliminary analysis of the internal conditioning factors of Princeville's plural *-s* absence, the data show that preceding nasal and following pause significantly favor, and following vowel significantly disfavors, plural *-s* absence in Princeville. These findings support those of the contemporary studies of Wolfram (1969) and Labov et al. (1968), respectively. This study's replication of the findings of these contemporary studies would seem to address concerns raised by scholars like Poplack et al. (2000) regarding what they have previously described as a lack of replicated findings for consistent patterns of plural *-s* absence in these and other contemporary AAE studies.

Furthermore, when Princeville's internal constraints are compared to a similar set of constraints in four early AAE varieties and the creole of Gullah, with few exceptions, Princeville plural *-s* absence patterns similarly to the early AAE forms in the factor groups of nominal reference, semantic classification and following phonological segment. In terms of nominal reference, Princeville's tendency towards non-redundant plural marking in its favoring of quantifiers as a factor parallels the same tendency found in the early AAE of ANSE, SE and the Ex-Slave Recordings. The semantic classification of weight and measure nouns also parallels the patterns of these early AAE varieties in that they all find this factor either insignificant or slightly disfavoring. The following phonological segment factors of consonants favoring and vowels disfavoring in Princeville plural marking, when compared here and in the broader comparisons of Poplack et al. (2000) and Rickford (2004), were found to pattern similarly to all early AAE forms and dissimilarly to all compared creole forms, with the exception of Liberian Settler English and Gullah for following consonant and Jamaican Creole (2003) for following vowel. While these data from the comparative analysis of the nominal reference and semantic factors might be used to support the Creolist position, and the following phonological segment data might be used to support the neo-Anglicist position, all three trends have been used to support both positions in similar analyses. The most substantial new contributions from the Princeville data to the study of AAE, however, are not in its ability to settle any disputes in the ongoing Anglicist/Creolist debate, but rather what this previously unexplored segment of the AAE continuum can reveal about new approaches in this investigation. In regard to the internal conditioning factors of plural *-s* absence, Princeville's significant favoring of preceding nasal and the previously

unexamined following nasal segment raises the important question as to their role in the constraint patterning for this feature throughout the AAE Diaspora.

With regard to external social factors, the Princeville data constitute an important reminder that such cases of unusual social isolation not only play a role in the preserving of internal linguistic patterns, but also in creating unique social contexts of external conditioning factors that are equally important in understanding the language patterns of these AAE communities. In Princeville, the gendering of class via the historical preferencing of women for certain higher-status jobs appears to have made the different patterning of plural *-s* absence by gender a secondary effect of its interaction with Princeville's sociolinguistic division by class. Subsequently, in both the overall percentages of plural *-s* absence by gender and by class we see an essentially identical pattern of a linguistic divide for the oldest and youngest generations of Princevillians. The strong underlying factor of class in Princeville is a result of its history of intra-communal, locally significant, divisions between an upper class and lower class. Princeville's upper class is distinguished as consisting of the highest educated professionals, who come from a professional lineage and generally attend the same high-status churches. The lower class consists of those who continue a lineage of less-educated laborers and attend "store front" churches or do not attend church at all. The internal psycho-social distancing that is potentially at the core of this socio-linguistic divide appears to be mitigated, at least in part, by the high rate of mobility in Generation II. When Princeville's upper and middle classes and mobile speakers are combined, there is a clear division between this group and Princeville's lower class, for which the individual rates of absence are consistently the highest in their respective age groups. While the

quantifying of social factors is intrinsically problematic, this study has used extensive quantitative data and insider expertise in generally defining and descriptively quantifying Princeville-specific class divisions. This social analysis shows strong indications that the social factors that make the community of Princeville unique have also uniquely shaped its linguistic patterns.

Future refining of the focus of this study would benefit from the additional analysis of internal constraints comparable in Diaspora and creole studies such as generic nouns, noun animacy, and definiteness as well as the investigation of internal constraints within each generation. However, the potential for linguistic study in the oldest Black town in America appears abundant. With the ongoing investigations related to this study such as the development of AAE via plural *-s* absence and generalized *-s* absence, the linguistic dynamics of intra-communal identity and stylistic variation in individual identity, along with other new studies that range from Princeville discourse practices to its other features of AAE such as *r*-lessness and 3rd person singular *-s* absence, the contribution of Princeville to the investigation and understanding of the development of AAE and language in general should continue for some time.

7. References

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Appendix

Princeville Social Factors Survey

General Preliminary Questions:

- What are the social groups in Princeville?
 - Is there a high, middle, working and/or lower class?
 - What are some of the defining characteristics of those classes in Princeville?
 - Who are some of the people (or what type of person is) in each of those social groups?
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Survey

1. How much education were you able to get?
 2. What was your longest held job?
 3. Did you move away from Princeville at any time? For how long?
 4. What type of home do you live in?
 5. How far do you trace your family back in Princeville? (Generations)
 6. What did your parents/grandparents do (for work)?
 7. Do you attend church? Which one?
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