

Theorizing Archival Insights and the Early Social History of Anguilla Talk

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Consisting of three parts, this paper discusses the origins and early history of Anguilla Talk (AT), the English-lexifier language central to the contemporary culture and identity of the people native to Anguilla, the most northerly of the Caribbean region's Leeward Islands. To this end, its first part offers a narrative that tracks the language's social history across three periods of social life between 1650 and 1850: (i) the founder period, (ii) the period of stability and cohesion, and (iii) the period of legal emancipation (Walicek, 2018).

Part two gives attention to prior hypotheses of genesis (e.g., Alleyne 1986, Baker 1995, Mufwene 2000, Chaudenson 2009), Anguilla's status as a "marginal colony" (Higman, 1995), and dynamics that characterized inter-individual and inter-group interactions involving the people of African, European, and mixed race ancestry who lived there. As Mufwene (2018) holds, the latter dynamics can yield insights concerning "how structures of language evolve toward new norms, how they speciate, and how they maintain or lose their vitality." Previously undocumented factors that appear to have impacted the emergence of AT (e.g., the mobility of enslaved Africans, patterns of intra-Caribbean migration, and access to formal education) assist in describing both the colony's sociolinguistic landscape and reasons that some of AT's structures differ from those of the languages spoken on neighboring islands. Questions about what constitutes reliable data, like the sociolinguistic theories of identity and context that are reviewed in part three, point to the need to rethink some of the goals and methods of sociohistorical linguistics.