1 Introduction

What is English in the Caribbean? This is by no means as obvious as it may appear at first sight, and after discussing a few examples of variation to set the scene, the present introductory chapter will therefore present some general considerations relating to this question; the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (Allsopp 1996) will provide a frame of reference for this discussion, and a central concept in the study of language variation in the Caribbean, the Creole continuum, will be introduced. The chapter will then zoom in on the specific concerns of the present study, standards and style in English in the Caribbean, providing an overview of existing research and highlighting central issues that need to be addressed. On that basis the research questions for the present study can then be formulated.

1.1 Variation, style and standards in Jamaica and Trinidad: introductory examples

The two examples below are both from the International Corpus of English (ICE), the first from the Jamaican component (ICE-Jamaica) and the second from the one for Trinidad and Tobago (ICE-T&T).[1] The example from ICE-Jamaica is from a conversation between several university-educated professionals that took place on the campus of the University of the West Indies in Mona, Jamaica,[2] while the one from ICE-T&T is from a text in the category 'class lessons', a tutorial in linguistics recorded at the Trinidad campus of the University of the West Indies (speaker A is the lecturer, speakers S and E are students).

(1) I prefer to call it as a Jamaican relaxed language rather than refer to it as a Patois because we all speak it <,,> uhm <,,> when **we talking** to

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[1] The transcription system is, thus, that of the International Corpus of English. The markup symbols that appear in these and subsequent quotations from the corpora are explained in Appendix A. For further details see Nelson (1996, 2002).

[2] This example is also discussed in the analysis of Jamaican conversations in Chapter 5 (Section 5.2.2).

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each other <,,> while we are speaking proper English <#> <}>
<-> It it </-> <=> it </=> </}> just depends on what we are
talking about as to whether we descend <,> <#> And I'm not
<unclear> two or three words </unclear> <}> <-> whether </->
<=> whether </=> </}> <mention> descend </mention> is a
correct word or whether we move across <,> into <,> Patois

<div align="right">(ICE-Jamaica S1A-002)</div>

(2)   <$A> . . . yes <}> <-> we we do </-> <=> we do </=> </}>
have a Standard in the Caribbean <#> Not everybody speaks the
Creole <,,> <#> Right or wrong

<$S< <#> **That correct** yeah

<$A> <#> So <}> <-> what are you looking <.> f </.> <.>th
</.> </-> <=> therefore what are you looking at </=> </}>
<#> What are you looking for in that Caribbean Standard <#>
There must be a set of <{> <[> core </[> features <,> all right
<,,>

<$S> <#> <[> Shared </[> </{>

<$E> <#> So for that **we looking** at phonological morphological
<,> syntactic and lexical

<$A> <#> Right <,> even semantic features <,> and <}> <->
you'll find of course you're gonna find some </-> <=> that's where
you're gonna find differences </=> </}>

<div align="right">(ICE-T&T S1B-020)[3]</div>

The content as well as the language of these examples point to central facts
about variation, style and standards in spoken English in the Caribbean
as exemplified by Jamaica and Trinidad. Standard English is used in the
Caribbean in distinctive ways, but what makes English in the Caribbean
even more distinctive is the variation that arises as a result of the coexistence
of Standard English with English-based contact varieties referred to as Cre-
oles, or, popularly, Patois (Jamaica) or dialect (Trinidad).[4] The term 'proper
English' employed by the speaker in example (1) in reference to the standard
harks back to a time when Creole was generally considered nothing more
than an improper form of English, but the speaker himself then goes on to
call into question the view that Creole is in some way inferior to English.
Indeed, not only have attitudes towards Creole in the Caribbean changed
considerably over the past few decades, but 'the easing of attitudes toward
the Creole has made for it encroaching on the various official domains where

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[3] Three backchannels by other speakers have been omitted from the last two speaker turns in
this example.
[4] In Trinidad the term 'Patois' designates the French Creole that was historically the island's
vernacular (see Section 2.2.2).

Standard English previously held sway' (Youssef and Deuber 2007: 2). We can catch a first glimpse of this here: zero copula, a feature of both Jamaican and Trinidadian Creole, occurs not only in the relaxed conversational context of example (1), alternating with the Standard English copula; even the linguistics students discussing the topic of Standard English in class in (2) – certainly a context conducive to a high degree of linguistic awareness – do not shy away from using it. While, as the speaker in example (1) mentions, the topic is an important factor that may motivate the use of Creole as a stylistic choice in conversation, a classroom context such as the one in (2) constrains speakers' choices towards Standard English 'in terms of situation and setting as well as topic' (Youssef 2004: 45). However, the 'relational dynamic among speakers' (*ibid.*) may still allow for some use of Creole in such a context, a possibility that different speakers may or may not choose to exploit on different occasions (see *ibid.*). There are, thus, different aspects to stylistic variation involving Standard English and Creole in the Caribbean, especially in the present-day situation of increased linguistic tolerance. Such variation will be at the centre of interest in the present book, though the issue of the distinctiveness of Standard English itself will also be considered. Specifically, variation in spoken English on the levels of morphology and syntax will be analysed.

1.2 What is English in the Caribbean? Approaches to the Creole continuum

The *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* defines Caribbean English as 'a collection of sub-varieties of English distributed . . . over a large number of non-contiguous territories of which two, Guyana and Belize, are widely distant parts of the South and Central American mainland' (Allsopp 1996: xli). While Guyana and Belize form the periphery, the geographic core of the anglophone Caribbean is of course made up of those of the Caribbean islands which have English as an official language. The two largest among these are the islands that the present study is concerned with: Jamaica, in the Western Caribbean, and Trinidad, just off the coast of the South American mainland (see Figure 1.1).

Whereas the geographical definition of the anglophone Caribbean is clear,[5] on another level the question of what is English in the Caribbean entails analytical and descriptive challenges, as well as contentious underlying issues. As already described to some extent in Section 1.1, English typically coexists in the Caribbean with English-based Creoles in communities characterized

[5] The Caribbean region is actually somewhat ill-defined geographically. There is no general agreement as to which parts of the adjacent Central and South American coastal regions should be considered part of the Caribbean in addition to the islands (see Blouet 2002: 312). However, in linguistic studies it is generally understood that Belize and Guyana, as the only English-official mainland territories, belong to the anglophone Caribbean.
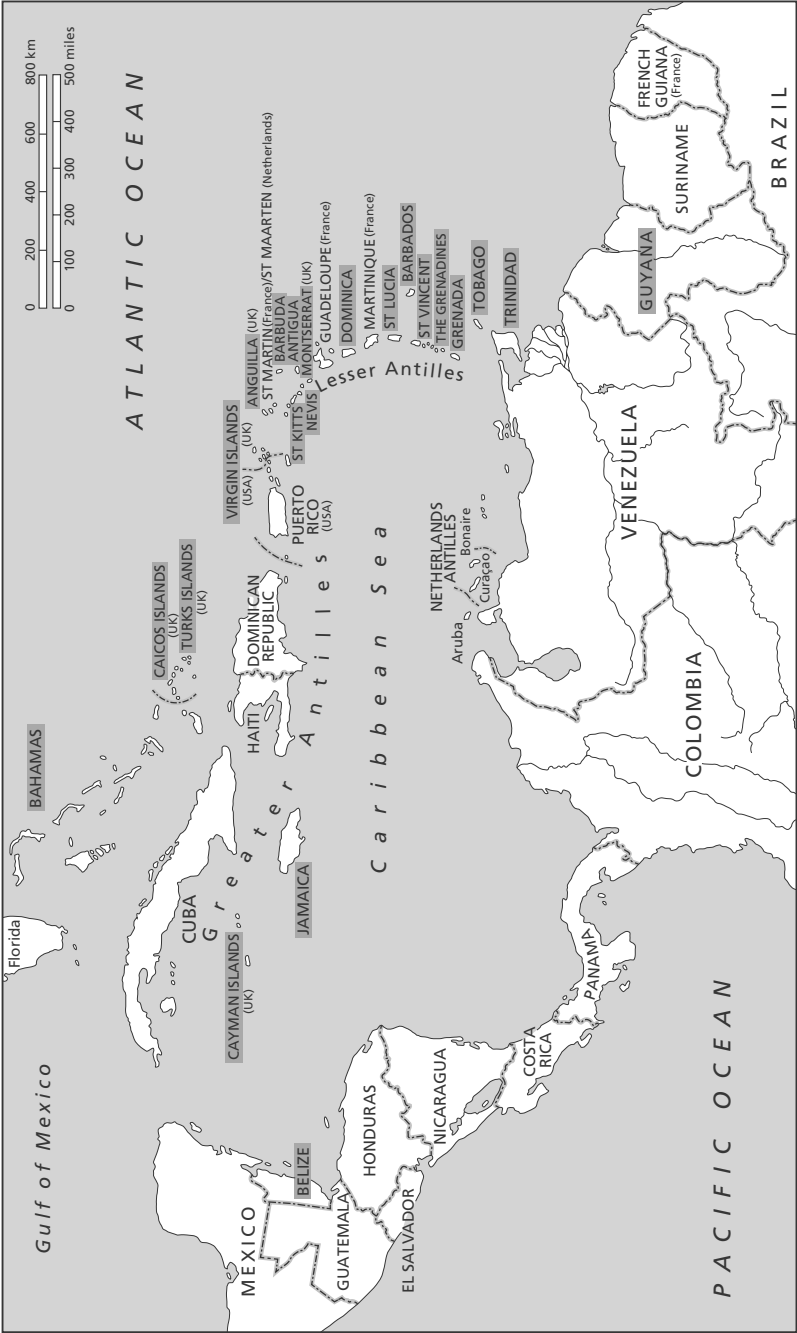
Figure 1.1. Map of the Caribbean showing anglophone territories (names highlighted)

by a high degree of variation in language use – so high indeed that it is often difficult to actually demarcate two varieties.[6] The situation is most often described in terms of a 'Creole continuum', but there has been resistance by some to the implications of this for the conceptualization of the range of variation and the status of the polar varieties, i.e. Creole and English. These are fundamental issues and the present section will therefore not only take a closer look at some of the facts of linguistic variation in the Caribbean but will also consider theoretical perspectives; several aspects of the concept of the Creole continuum will be explored, though the aim here is not to provide a comprehensive discussion, which can be found elsewhere (e.g. Rickford 1987; Winford 1997).

Introductory or overview descriptions of the range of language variation in a typical Creole continuum situation often present examples either from Jamaica or Guyana which consist of several versions of the same sentence ranging from the Standard English or acrolectal to the broadest Creole or basilectal one, with various intermediate or mesolectal versions in between (e.g. Allsopp 1958: 61; Alleyne 1980: 192; O'Donnell and Todd 1980: 52; de Rooij 1995: 54; Sebba 1997: 211; Meade 2001: 23; Hinrichs 2006: 9). Sebba's (1997: 211) Jamaican example of variation in the first person singular pronoun and the verb *eat* in the present progressive form reveals Ø V*ing*, the feature seen in the Jamaican example in Section 1.1, to be typically associated with the intermediate range:

(3)   /aɪ æm iːtɪn/

/a ɪz iːtɪn/

/a iitɪn/

/mi iːtɪn/

/mi a iːt/

/mi a nyam/

Allsopp (1996) adds an aspect to the long tradition of such examples that is of special interest for the present study by identifying the segment of the continuum that may be described as 'English', at least with a certain qualification. The sentences in example (4) below, apparently adapted from the example of language variation in Guyana Allsopp had presented much earlier (1958: 61), are taken from the entry on 'creolized English' in the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*. Creolized English is defined in the *Dictionary* as '[s]poken English that has retained some obvious structural characteristics of Creole (language) while it develops more of the features of

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[6] The linguistic situation is even more complex where additional languages are widely spoken, as in Belize (Spanish) as well as in Dominica and St Lucia (French-based Creole); see Winford (1991: 567) for an overview of languages in use in the different territories of the anglophone Caribbean.

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internationally accepted spoken English'. The three versions that have here been highlighted are those which Allsopp identifies as examples of Creolized English. By implication, the versions above and below the highlighted ones may be considered as (non-Creolized) English and Creole, respectively.

(4) *ai tould [h]im*
     ai told [h]im
     a told im
     a tol im
     a tel im
     mi tel im
     mi tel am

What are the 'structural characteristics of Creole' in Creolized English that Allsopp refers to? Since the present study deals with morphology and syntax, the following aspects are particularly noteworthy: while the second version shows a Caribbean accent feature, the monophthongal pronunciation of the vowel in *told*, it is only in the Creolized English segment that a grammatical Creolism appears. This is a case where Creole lacks a form present in English, inflection for past tense. Overt Creole forms, *mi* as subject pronoun and *am* as object pronoun, are reserved for the Creole segment. There is a further gradation in this segment in that the form *mi* also occurs in English though in a different function (object), whereas *am*, the most basilectal form according to this example, is peculiar to Creole (see also Bickerton 1973: 659).

Demarcating English in the Caribbean in the way illustrated above can only work on the level of the clause, however. This point is also made by Devonish (2003: 159), who observes that '[b]eyond the clause, speakers are free to shift language varieties as their linguistic repertoires allow and as social factors require'. From a discourse perspective it is therefore reasonable to assume that spoken English in the Caribbean not only 'comprises an upper-mesolectal range on the continuum' but 'additionally allows for occasional forays into more basilectal territory', as Mair (2002: 36) has argued with regard to 'educated spoken usage' (*ibid.*) in Jamaica. Thus, in dealing with spoken English in the Caribbean, one may in fact have to deal with the whole spectrum of forms and constructions that may be said to make up the Creole continuum, but one has to be aware of their stylistic connotations. Allsopp's *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* makes provision for this by recognizing an 'informal' and an 'anti-formal' level of usage in Caribbean English, which are defined as follows:

> [informal:] Accepted as familiar; chosen as part of usually well-structured, casual, relaxed speech, but sometimes characterized by morphological and syntactic reductions of English structure and by other remainder features of decreolization. (Allsopp 1996: lvi)

[anti-formal:] Deliberately rejecting Formalness; consciously familiar and intimate; part of a wide range from close and friendly through jocular to coarse and vulgar; any Creolized or Creole form or structure surviving or conveniently borrowed to suit context or situation. (Allsopp 1996: lvii)

A further complication on the discourse level is that even features consisting in 'morphological and syntactic reductions of English structure' such as zero copula or unmarking of past reference verbs can hardly be considered characteristic of Creolized English or informal English usage whatever the frequency of their occurrence. The results of Patrick's (1999) detailed analysis of past marking in urban Jamaican speech illustrate this. Urban Jamaican Creole has the overt past marker *did*, but this was insufficient to delimit Creole varieties in his study, as it was rare overall in the data and not used at all by several speakers. It was rather by their widely differing inflection rates that the ten speakers in the sample were most clearly differentiated. Patrick (1999: 201) divides the speakers into three groups based on their past inflection rates, a 'High' one in whose speech 71 per cent of past reference verbs were inflected, a 'Middle' one with an inflection rate of 36 per cent and a 'Low' one where past inflection occurred in only 10 per cent of cases.[7] The breakdown according to individual speakers (Patrick 1999: 232–6; see also Figure 1.3 below) reveals an even more finely differentiated range, from one speaker ('Roxy') whom Patrick regards as a speaker of acrolectal English to one ('Dinah') whom he places on the borderline between the mesolect and the basilect. A similar picture emerged in Winford's (1972) sociolinguistic study of Trinidadian speech. Very few of his urban informants used Creole *did* (1972: 305).[8] Use of inflectional past marking was widely differentiated according to social class and style, as Figure 1.2 shows. According to both studies, it is therefore more the degree to which English inflections are used than the use of overt Creole forms which distinguishes more English from more Creole varieties, but any cut-off point that one might try to establish would of course be arbitrary. On the one hand, thus, data from quantitative sociolinguistic studies provide some support for the notion of a Creolized English that incorporates some non-overt Creole features by showing that these do indeed cut across a broad spectrum of language use in a way overt Creole forms do not. On the other hand, they complicate the notion of such

[7] The situation is actually even more complex than the mere quantitative results reveal. As Patrick (1999: 265) shows, among the Low speakers past marking by verb inflection is subject to the same Creole constraints (anteriority, punctuality) as past marking by *did*, and these patterns gradually give way to English phonological constraints as the rate of inflection rises.

[8] Winford's (1972) study was based on two speaker groups, an urban and a rural one. However, some of his subsequent studies based on the same data set, including Winford (1980), where the results for several grammatical variables were first published, are limited to the urban sample.
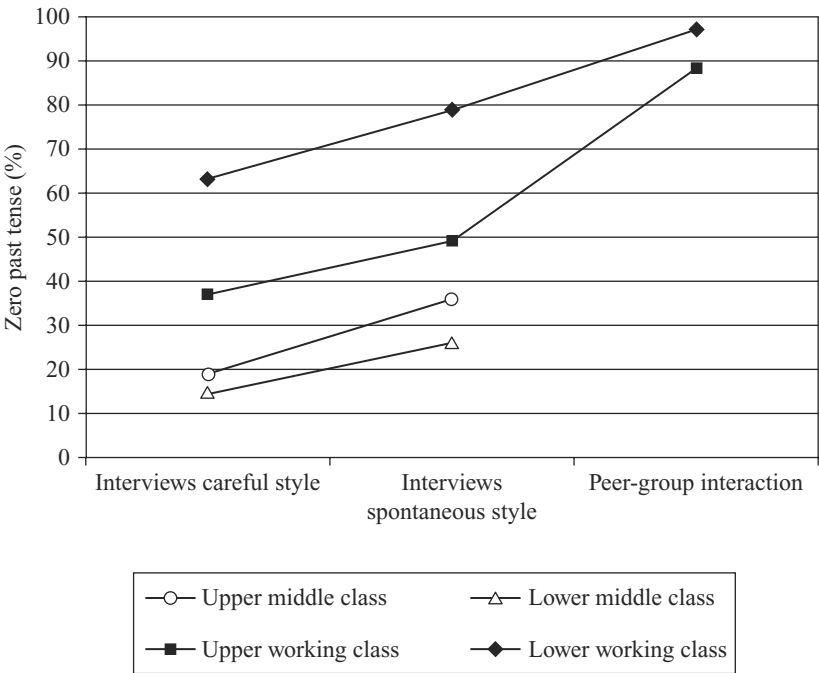
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Figure 1.2. Zero past tense in urban Trinidadian speech (based on Winford 1980: 57, 58/1997: 270)

a variety by raising the issue of delimiting it in terms of the frequency of occurrence of such features.

A question of a more theoretical nature is the status of forms like unmarked past reference verbs where they alternate with inflected forms. Is such variation 'inherent' in varieties such as mesolectal Jamaican (Patrick 1999: 9–11), or is it the result of speakers 'shifting' between the polar varieties? This question touches the very essence of the Creole continuum concept, at least in its narrow sense. In the form in which it was developed in the 1970s (DeCamp 1971; Bickerton 1973, 1975), the concept centres on the notion of the continuum itself as a system, 'a single, if non-homogeneous, unit' (Bickerton 1975: 14), and thus challenges the view that linguistic variation in Caribbean communities is brought about by the interaction of two discrete systems (Bickerton 1973: 641, 1975: 12). The latter view has been maintained, for example, by Bailey (1971) and Lawton (1980) for Jamaica and by Devonish (1998, 2003) for contact situations between English and English-based Creoles in the Caribbean more generally, with special reference to the cases of Guyana and Jamaica. However, though the view that there are two discrete systems invalidates the Creole continuum as the kind of theoretical

construct proposed by DeCamp and Bickerton, Bailey and Devonish retain it as a descriptive term for the range of variation that they explain in terms of such processes as 'shifting' between codes. The issue of the discreteness of varieties is revisited by Patrick (1999) in what is the most detailed more recent examination of the Creole continuum in the Jamaican context. Having found extensive – though not complete – continuity, or non-discreteness, across the language spectrum in his analyses of several linguistic variables, he affirms 'a moderate version of the pro-continuum position' (1999: 292), which holds that while the basilect is clearly separate from the mesolect, there is no such boundary between the mesolect and the acrolect.

While Patrick (1999) leans towards the view associated with the continuum model as developed by DeCamp and Bickerton with regard to the issue of discreteness, his concept of the continuum accords a different status to social factors. Whereas the earlier studies treated the Creole continuum 'first and foremost as a LINGUISTIC and not as a SOCIAL phenomenon' (Bickerton 1980: 124; emphasis original), Patrick integrates social factors into his analyses and finds the Creole continuum to be appropriate as a sociolinguistic model. The essence of this view of the continuum is summarized by Patrick (2004: 408) as follows:

> Social stratification in Jamaica is crucial to understanding the extreme variability of contemporary Jamaican speech. The complex linguistic situation can be related to an equally intricate web of social relations, using the model of the creole continuum.

Another important more recent examination of the continuum model is Winford's (1997), which takes a broader Caribbean perspective and re-evaluates the findings of several authors. Rather like Patrick (1999), Winford describes the Creole end of the spectrum as having its own grammatical system, citing as evidence his data from Trinidad, including the data for the past variable reproduced above (Figure 1.2). Overall, though, he takes a different stand from Patrick and advocates a coexistent systems approach, though one which allows for 'a certain degree of overlap between systems, and in particular for the sharing of certain forms by more than one system and some inherent variability within systems' (1997: 263). He does agree, however, with the sociolinguistic view of the continuum:

> From this purely sociolinguistic perspective, of course, there is no question that the continuum notion is valid. There is a complex pattern of variation conditioned by social and situational factors, in which the boundaries between creole and standard become quite blurred. It is one thing to recognize this, but quite another to claim that the variation is intra-systemic. Much of the controversy surrounding the nature of a creole continuum arose when creolists attempted to translate

what is essentially a sociolinguistic phenomenon into a formal linguistic construct. (Winford 1997: 258)

With this view, he is able to reconcile the Creole continuum with the diglossia model (Winford 1985); based on the functional differentiation of a High and a Low code, this has obvious appeal for the analysis of Caribbean sociolinguistic situations, but is rejected by the adherents of the continuum model in a stricter sense due to the underlying assumption of the existence of two separable varieties. Such a view now seems to be becoming increasingly common, as interest in the implicational paradigm introduced to linguistics by DeCamp (1971) and widely used up to the early 1980s for the study of linguistic patterns in Creole continua (see e.g. Bickerton 1973, 1975; Akers 1981[9]) has faded and more and more studies of variation in Creole continua are being conducted in a sociolinguistic framework. For example, Irvine's sociolinguistic studies of phonological variation in the Jamaican acrolect (2004, 2008) take both the continuum and diglossia as basic to the analysis of a situation 'where there is no sharp discontinuity between a functionally distinct JC [Jamaican Creole] and JE [Jamaican English]'.

To return briefly to the point of departure for this discussion, Allsopp (1996) in his dictionary entry for 'creolized' English notes that an alternative term preferred by some linguists is 'decreolized'. This terminological issue relates to different diachronic conceptions of the Creole continuum. DeCamp originally formulated the concept as that of a 'post-creole' continuum. The term reflects his assumption that the continuum represents a stage in the historical development of a Creole in which it gradually merges with the lexifier, as speakers orient towards standard structures and modify their speech in this direction to varying degrees, so that an earlier dichotomous situation dissolves. The relation between this process of 'decreolization', which was said to have started in the Caribbean with emancipation, and synchronic variation was emphasized in particular by Bickerton (1973, 1975, 1980). It is now generally understood, however, that a span of linguistic variation has characterized Creole speech communities in the Caribbean from a very early stage, and it is not clear in what way changes in Creoles should differ from ordinary language change (Mufwene 1994, 2001).[10] Patrick (1999: 19) therefore discards the idea of decreolization as a component of the continuum model. The issue is only of secondary relevance to the present study as a synchronic one, but to understand the context of present-day linguistic variation it is nevertheless important to note that the assumption resulting from the earlier continuum model of an ongoing uniform and unidirectional process of change with the acrolect as the target can no longer be upheld

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[9] Rickford (1979: 54) has a more comprehensive list of studies in the implicational framework.
[10] For further discussion of theories of the diachronic development of Creole continua, see the following chapter, Section 2.2.1. See also the historical documentation for Jamaica in Lalla and D'Costa (1990).