WHERE IS SABA?
Saba is a municipality of the Netherlands located in the Eastern Caribbean thirty miles south of St. Maarten.

WHY RESEARCH SABA?
Language Contact: Although officially Dutch, Saba was settled by people of Dutch, English, Irish, and Scottish decent, and later of African descent following the start of the Atlantic Slave Trade. Inter- and intra-island isolation: Saba has maintained relative isolation from other Caribbean islands due to geography and technology; island did not see its first paved road, marina, or public electricity until the 1960-70s; four distinct communities maintained.

Research Questions:
1. What role do contact effects play in the construction of socioscientific varieties?
2. How does this variation compare with English in the Caribbean English diaspora and with North American English varieties?
3. To what extent is inter- and intra-community variation manifested in small, isolated populations?

WHAT DATA?
Data come from sociolinguistic interviews (avg. 55 min.) with 27 long term residents, conducted on Saba in June 2012.

WHAT METHODS?
Vowels
- 10 vowel tokens per vowel per speaker (>2000 total tokens)
- Measured F1 and F2 at 50% and 75% using PRAAT
- Vowel means & speaker normalization using NORM

Rhoticity
- Tabulated impressionistically using PRAAT to assess F3
- 100 tokens per speaker (>2000 total tokens)
- Coded for presence/absence, syllable type, stress, and preceding environment

Morphosyntax
- Variables used at least once by at least two speakers
- Nomenclature based on WAVVE

RESULTS
1. SABAN VOWELS: WHERE THEY’RE PRONOUNCED
Results suggest vowel stability across communities: a single Saban English vowel system. Inter-community differences include back vowels, pre-rhotics, pre-nasals, and pre-liquids.

How do Saban vowels compare to Raleigh vowels?
- Normalized vowel plot shows Saban speaker (male, b. 1942) versus Raleigh speaker (female, 1970, from Dodsworth and Kohn’s 2011 Raleigh corpus)
- Many speakers show evidence of the following preserved features:
  - BEER-BEAR merger
  - PUTPUT merger
  - FISH-HORSE distinction
- Inter-speaker variation for stressed syllabic /r/ (e.g. nurse, work)
  - Some speakers vocalize /r/ as [E]/ or [^r/], so “nurse” sounds like “nurse” or “nurse”
  - Others retain the /r/, pronouncing “nurse” as “nurse” or “nurse”
- Overall patterning differs from N. American and British r-less varieties
  - Typically, stressed syllabic /r/ is the environment must strongly disfavoring r-lessness
  - Typically, no split between front and back vowels
- Saban post-back-vowel r-fullness may be explained by ease of articulation

2. SABAN RHOTICITY: PRONUNCIATION OF ‘R’
- Less favored when following a front vowel (e.g. for, fern)
  - In unstressed syllables (e.g. fatting,.govment)
  - Indicated by F3 remaining level and high above F2
- Less disfavored when following a back vowel (e.g. fort, soart)
  - Indicated by the lowering of F3, very close to (pinching) F2
  - Lexical exceptions exist, including ‘nurse’ and ‘furn’

Inter-speaker variation for stressed syllabic /r/ (e.g. nurse, work)
- Some speakers vocalize /r/ as [E]/ or [^r/], so “nurse” sounds like “nurse” or “nurse”
- Others retain the /r/, pronouncing “nurse” as “nurse” or “nurse”

3. SABAN GRAMMATICAL FEATURES
- A-prefixing
  - “I was a fishin’ yesterday”
- Copula absence
  - “I know where you ___ from”
- Double-marked comparatives
  - “the last one”
- Invariant be
  - “how come I a without a walk”
- Invariant to
  - “When I go to sleep sometimes they sing me a song”
- Proposition by for at
  - “I slept in her house”
- Proposition omission preceding location
  - “I was born ___ St. Maarten”
- Subject-form for object-form
  - “He took ___ to The Bottom”
- Was leveling
  - “they was good, good teachers”
- Plural absence for count nouns
  - “about three mile”
- Question non-inversion
  - “What his name is?”
- Second-person plural
  - “You don’t have this in America?”

CONCLUSIONS
The study of isolated communities sheds light on language development, maintenance, and change. Our results not only help establish Saban English as a distinct variety of English, but also underscore the persistence of long-term language variation that can occur on small, historically isolated islands.

1. Overall vowel system is stable across communities, but differs from other dialects of Caribbean English
2. Rhoticity shows similarities to other Caribbean and with American English r-less patterns, as well as differences — particularly related to phonetic constraints.
3. Grammatical traits: many parallel uses in Southern American and African American varieties, highlighting the influence of founder effects; others suggest influence of Dutch substrate

REFERENCES

THANKS
I would like to acknowledge the William C. Friday Foundation, the North Carolina Language and Life Project, Dr. Walt Wolfram, and the people of Saba for their support.