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The effect of Cajun status on kindergartners' use of five grammar structures

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EFFECTS OF CAJUN STATUS ON KINDERGARTENERS’ USE OF FIVE GRAMMAR STRUCTURES

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts

in

The Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders

by
Corrina Vogan Spedale
B.A., Tulane University, 2008
May 2013
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Finally, I’d like to extend my thanks to my COMD family, both the faculty and my peers. All of you inspire me to be a better student, a better researcher, and a better clinician. I feel truly blessed to have been part of such a genuinely supportive and intensely driven class.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between Cajun status, as defined by location, and five grammatical structures of Cajun English (CE): zero marking of past tense, zero marking of third person singular, zero marking of copula *is* and *are*, and was-leveling. The data were from 35 kindergartners, 14 from a Cajun status school, 21 from a non-Cajun status school; 15 were male and 20 were female. The data compared rate-based differences between the Cajun status and non-Cajun status children’s productions of the five CE structures in transcribed language samples.

Five independent samples t-tests revealed that the children’s Cajun status did not have an effect on their use of the five CE grammatical structures. Given this, a repeated measures ANOVA was performed using structure as the within-subject variable and the five CE structures as levels. These results indicated that when the percentages of the Cajun status and non-Cajun status productions were combined, CE structure use varied as a function of structure.

Additionally, a correlation coefficient was used to explore other possible factors that may have shared a relationship with the children’s productions of the five grammar structures. There was a strong negative correlation between the syntax subtest of the *DELV-NR* and zero marking of past tense. There was a moderately negative correlation between the *PTONI* and zero marking of third person singular.

These findings suggest that similarities exist between the children’s use of the five previously designated structures of CE despite their Cajun or non-Cajun status. Cajun status as defined solely by the location of a child’s school did not render significant differences in the kindergartners’ CE structure use.
INTRODUCTION

Though a large body of research exists detailing the distinct, nonmainstream morpho-syntactic features of child African-American English (AAE) and Southern White English (SWE), few studies have considered variation in these dialects that may be tied to the social-cultural history of an area. The current project focuses on SWE-speaking childrens’ use of five grammar structures as a function of their Cajun status. Initially, my interests in syntactic differences in non-mainstream dialects stemmed from my experience as a language-arts teacher in St. Bernard, a parish hugging the Mississippi River bordering New Orleans’ Lower 9th-ward. After only a few months of editing essays, it became clear that my red-ink splashed across my students’ hard-work wasn’t simply illustrating easy corrections; my edits were highlighting stark distinctions between our dialects. These insights sparked questions concerning dialect’s role in literacy rates and recognizing impairments – how could we label a child with a language or learning disability if we couldn’t fully explain their dialect? Eventually, these questions, coupled with my graduate experience, led me to pursue an examination of dialect difference within one geographical area with Cajun heritage influences. This exploration has allowed me to investigate the implications of socio-historical factors on dialect variation and has further underscored the necessity of understanding the specific structures of a given dialect, within and across communities.

My literature review is composed of three distinct sections. First, to determine characteristics that would qualify an area as Cajun or non-Cajun, I engage in a brief review of modern American ethnicity. Because the study aims to examine five grammar structures in kindergartners who do and do not present a defined Cajun ethnicity, a discussion of what constitutes ethnicity is necessary. The second section is devoted to outlining Cajun history and highlighting its influence in cultivating a dialect distinct from both French and English. In the
last section, I examine the morphosyntactic structures of adult Cajun English and provide a comparison of two studies that examined the use of these structures by adults and children. Finally, I conclude the chapter with the aims of the present study.
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Defining Ethnicity

Symbolic ethnicity, a theory developed by Gans (1979, 1992), posits that modern ethnic groups of third, fourth and fifth-generation Americans are chiefly symbolic in nature. The theory hypothesizes that Americans are losing interest in cultivating distinct linguistic ethnicities through the preservation of language and, instead, strive to maintain an ethnic identity that is expressed in the more symbolic manner of affiliating with a collective group. Symbolic ethnicity is expressed through a nostalgic celebration of the culture of the original immigrant generation. The culture is visible and clearly distinct from others in its expression of holidays, festivals and collective understanding of shared historical events; however, there is no objective measure to define how Irish, Italian or Cajun one really is. The ancestral language preservation of third, fourth, and fifth-generation Americans has been replaced with the “consumption” of ethnic symbols; modern Americans have swapped the solidly objective measure of ethnicity, the language of their forefathers, to define their ethnic identity by attending festivals, eating ethnic foods, and gathering collectibles and antiques that can tie them to the heritage of their ancestors.

While studies validate the existence of symbolic ethnicity for the later generations of many American cultures including Italian Americans (Alba, 1985), American Jews (Zenner, 1985), and even Alaska Natives (Sprott, 1994), this theory cannot be so easily extended to contemporary Cajuns in Southern Louisiana. While some support exists detailing a Cajun identity shift from objective linguistic ability toward a more subjective allegiance to heritage (Dubois & Melancon, 1997), if linguistic measures exist as a primary objective marker of ethnicity, then the Cajun heritage of many Louisianans can be viewed as more than simply “symbolic.”
Henry and Bankston (1999) argue that while there are symbolic, subjective elements that define Cajun ethnicity, strong structural and objective measurements also exist that can define the Cajun population as being distinct from other Louisianans. Despite the decline of French as the sole language spoken by younger Cajun generations, the pair highlight French linguistic heritage as a major factor in defining Cajun identity. For the purposes of this study, a comparison will be made between kindergarteners’ language use in two schools, one located in an area defined as presenting Cajun identity and one area as not presenting this identity. Using Henry and Bankston’s conclusion that the French linguistic tradition still exists at the center of Cajun identity, this study uses data from the 2000 population census outlining the percentage of French-speaking individuals to distinguish Cajun status from non-Cajun status in each area.

**Defining Cajun History and Culture**

This study serves to examine the use of five grammar structures by kindergarteners enrolled in two rural schools, one deemed as Cajun, the other as non-Cajun. Both schools are located in Assumption Parish, Louisiana. Assumption Parish is located in Southwestern Louisiana in an area officially labeled “Acadiana” by the State of Louisiana in 1971 (Henry & Bankston, 2002). Exiled by the British from Nova Scotia in 1755, thousands of French-speaking Acadians migrated to this region of Southwestern Louisiana in two significant waves, the first in 1765, the second in 1770 (Brown, 1993). While the Acadians’ language closely resembled other North American non-standard varieties of French, geographic isolation and an increased contact with other French, Spanish, German, Irish and Italian immigrants led the language to develop distinct morphologic, phonologic and syntactic differences (Dubois & Melancon, 1997). While the Acadiana community maintained the use of Cajun-French throughout the nineteenth-century, by the onset of the twentieth-century, urbanization and the industrial revolution had shifted the
homogeneity of the previously isolated community toward integrating with other areas of Louisiana. The urban-landscape of Louisiana also changed during this time with the construction of railroads, steamboat commerce through bayous and governor Huey P. Long’s construction of roads throughout the state (Brown, 1993; Dubois & Melancon, 1997; Smith, 1992). Industrialization, paired with a devastating flood in 1927, introduced hundreds of English-speaking relief workers into rural areas of Louisiana pushing Cajuns to integrate with the rest of Louisiana. The Second World War and the conscription of young Cajun men further eroded the Cajuns isolation, prompting the younger generations to learn English out of pure necessity (Brown, 1993; Dubois & Horvath, 2002).

While these historical factors certainly helped to influence a linguistic shift from French to English on the Cajun population, none of them were more instrumental in damaging the preservation of French as 1921 state legislation establishing English as the only official language of Louisiana (Brown, 1993). This law mandated that English be taught in all Acadiana schools; children were not only legally required to speak English on school-grounds, but they were also severely punished if caught speaking French. A social stigma was applied to French speakers as English was considered the only language of economic and social success. Younger generations were mandated to learn and publically use English. French became a language of ‘intimacy’, spoken only in the home and primarily to older family members (Brown, 1993).

While the number of individuals speaking French today as a first language is falling dramatically, Dubois and Horvath (1998) attest that this language attrition has not yet fated French “death” in rural Cajun communities. Their research with adult speakers also demonstrate that there is a large enough Cajun population to study Cajun English (CE) – the vernacular of English spoken in Acadiana by both French/English bilinguals and English monolinguals.
(Dubois & Horvath, 2003c). The pair argue that the only linguistic measure to signal modern “Cajunness” now rests within the study of phonological and morphological distinctions within CE (1998).

**Syntactic and Morphological Features of Cajun English**

Although the Cajun French language shift to CE has been well documented (Dubois & Melancon, 1997; Henry & Bankston, 1999, 2002), few empirical studies exist examining the unique syntactic and morphological features of CE. Studies of CE phonology have taken priority over studies of syntax and morphology, perhaps because of the notable accent marking CE speakers. While multiple studies by Dubois and Horvath (1998, 1999) detail the Cajun phonological patterns of CE (e.g. /t,d/ substitution for /θ,ð/, /tɪŋk/ for think and /dɪz/ for these; nonaspirated /p, t, k/ stops in word initial position, issuing pat to be perceived, in standard English, as bat; and heavy vowel nasalization and monophthongization of /ɑɪ/, or /tra/ for try) as compared to other Southern White English (SWE) dialects, only one study exists outlining the morphological features of spoken adult CE. In this study, Dubois and Horvath (2003b) showed that there are five distinct morphosyntactic features of CE: -S absence, -ED absence, IS absence, ARE absence, and WAS leveling (see Table 1 for definitions). These patterns, all of which are frequent in CE are also documented (albeit at lower frequencies) within both SWE and Southern African-American English (AAE). The pair compared the use of the five structures below in speakers of SWE with speakers of CE.
Table 1. Features Studied in Dubois and Horvath (2003b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-S Absence</td>
<td>The absence of the third-person singular present-tense marker</td>
<td>The dog <em>watch</em> the cat/The dog <em>watches</em> the cat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ED Absence</td>
<td>The absence of the simple past-tense marker</td>
<td>I <em>stay</em> at my momma’s last weekend/ I <em>stayed</em> at my momma’s last weekend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS Absence</td>
<td>The absence of the copula ‘is’</td>
<td>She nice/ She <em>is</em> nice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARE Absence</td>
<td>The absence of the copula ‘are’</td>
<td>They gone/They <em>are</em> gone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAS Leveling</td>
<td>Replacing ‘were’ with ‘was’</td>
<td>They <em>was</em> fishing/They <em>were</em> fishing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dubois and Horvath (2003b) compared the use of these five structures in CE speakers with previously collected dialect samples of SWE speakers in Mississippi, Alabama, North Carolina and of AAE speakers in Southeastern Texas. Dubois and Horvath’s sample included 16 bilingual French/English male speakers, self-identified as Cajun, and who were living in one of three parishes in the heart of Acadiana: Lafourche Parish, Avoyelles Parish, and Vermillion Parish. According to census data published in the 2010 Modern Language Association’s (MLA) Language Map, 16.94% of the population speaks French in Lafourche Parish, 16.46% of the population in Avoyelles Parish is French-speaking, and 22.75% of the population in Vermillion Parish speaks French.

Dubois and Horvath separated the participants into four groups based on their age (old and young) and first language learned (French or English). The Old/French group was
comprised of four individuals, aged 72 to 91 years, who learned Cajun French before English. The Old/English group was comprised of four individuals, aged 80 and 91, who learned English before French. The Young/French group was comprised of four individuals, aged 38 to 42, who learned French before English, and the Young/English group was born in the same decade as the Young/French group but learned English first. Native English speakers from Southern Louisiana interviewed each participant for 45 minutes to obtain a language sample by which to examine the CE participants’ use of five morphosyntactic structures. Dubois and Horvath then used Goldvarb, a statistical program in the field of sociolinguistics to analyze their data.

Dubois and Horvath (2003b) reported that the Old/French speakers used all five structures at a higher rate than the SWE speakers. Though Young/French speakers used the five structures at a lower rate than the Old/French speakers, their rate of use for three (ED-absence, IS absence, and ARE absence) was still higher than rates reported in the literature for adults who speak SWE. For Cajuns who learned English first, results were inconsistent. The rates for –ED absence and ARE absence were higher than they were for speakers of SWE, whereas the rate of IS Absence was comparable to the rates in other SWE dialects. Dubois and Horvath highlight that WAS leveling was the only variable of the five that they found to be used at a lower rate in CE than in SWE.

From these data, Dubois and Horvath (2003b) claimed that the high rate at which bilingual speakers of CE use the five morphosyntactic features distinguish CE from other forms of SWE. The pair argued that CE is a separate dialect, with a distinct history from SWE. While Dubois and Horvath’s documented results indicated a difference between bilingual CE speakers and descriptions of SWE in the literature, the study did not examine the morphosyntactic
structures of monolingual CE speakers, nor did they compare their data to SWE speakers living in Louisiana.

To further explore the relationship between CE with two other Louisiana dialects, SWE and AAE, Oetting and Garrity (2006) examined the five morphosyntactic structures explored in Dubois and Horvath’s study (2003b); however, their study used child speakers, both with and without SLI, who were perceived to present or not to present a Cajun or Creole influence within their dialects. Both groups of children resided in a community that is included in one of the 22 parishes of Acadiana, but the community is located on the far eastern border in an area where very few individuals claim to speak French. The data for the study came from 93 children (40 were speakers of AAE and 53 were speakers of SWE. To determine whether a sample could be classified as having CE influence, three doctoral students in linguistics independently classified the dialects of the children by listening to 1-minute excerpts from each child’s language sample. If one or more of the three listeners had identified the sample as having a CE/Creole influence, the sample was classified as having CE/Creole influence. Thirty-one of these samples were classified as having CE/Creole influence (18 of 40 SAAE speakers; 13 of 53 SWE speakers.

To determine the rate at which the children used the five morphosyntactic structures, Oetting and Garrity (2006) divided the number of times the child used the targeted structure by the number of opportunities the child had to produce the vernacular form. The pair concluded that for all five structures, the effects of CE/Creole influence were not statistically significant. They suggest that elevations in rate appeared more affected by the children’s primary dialect (whether SWE or SAAE) and/or their language abilities with or without a language impairment as opposed to the influence of CE/Creole status. Despite these findings, Oetting and Garrity also noted that, for certain structures, Dubois and Horvath’s (2003b) bilingual, white young - adults
used the structures at the same rate as the white CE-influenced child speakers. Table 2 provides a comparison of the two studies.

Table 2. Childrens’ and Adults’ Rate of Cajun Morphosyntactic Feature Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Morphosyntactic Feature</th>
<th>Childrens’ Rate of Use (Oetting and Garrity)</th>
<th>Young Adults’ Rate of Use (Dubois and Horvath)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+ Cajun</td>
<td>- Cajun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero -s</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero is</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero are</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero -ed</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was-Leveling</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, both groups demonstrated low rates of zero marking of third person singular (19% child and 16% -25% adult) and zero marking of is (14% child and 11-32% adult). In contrast, child speakers produced a higher rate of was-leveling (51% child and 16 -50% adult), lower rates of zero marking of past tense (9% and 29-48% adult), and lower rates of zero marking of are (41% child and 64% -73% adult). While interesting, these findings are difficult to interpret because the adult and child speakers differed on many levels: the adult speakers lived in the heart of French-Speaking Acadiana, while the children lived on the border; the adult speakers were bilingual and spoke both French and English, the children were monolingual, speaking only English; the adult speakers identified themselves ethnically as Cajun, while the children were assigned Cajun/Creole influence by a blind listener. Oetting and Garrity suggested
that additional comparisons of both adult and child CE dialects of speakers within and outside Acadiana are necessary to identify why the above differences in rates may have occurred.

Oetting and Garrity (2006) also argued that while the linguistic history of Louisiana makes studying Cajun dialects interesting, examining the features of CE have a much broader relevancy to the field of language studies because multiple dialects of English exist in a number of communities across the United States. Given this, the pair recommend that future language studies should focus not only on identifying contrasting morphological patterns between dialects to determine their boundaries, but should also aim to identify rate-based differences in structures that are shared among dialects. This would allow researchers to look at dialects as unified systems rather than as a collection of patterns.

Purpose

The current study serves to operate under the directive outlined by Oetting and Garrity (2006) by examining the frequency rate of the five CE structures in two new groups of children. Unlike previous studies, Cajun status is defined as place of residence. One group lives in a community deemed Cajun as defined by a high (38.8%) French-speaking population. The other group lives in a community deemed non-Cajun due to the low number (4.43%) of French-speakers within the population (MLA, 2010). Oetting and Garrity’s study included speakers within the same community and were classified as CE-influenced or non CE-influenced strictly from listener judgment. The present study is unique in that it seeks to explore the rate of five morphosyntactic features of two groups of children who reside in two distinctly different linguistic cultures.

This study’s purpose is to answer the following research question: Is there a relationship between children’s Cajun status and the rate at which they use the five CE structures (-S absence,
I hypothesized that there would be an effect of a child’s Cajun status and the rate at which they use five structures of Cajun English listed above when compared to children without Cajun status.
METHODS

Participants

Thirty-Five Caucasian kindergarteners, recruited from a larger study, contributed data for the present study. The participants resided in Assumption Parish and attended one of two primary schools located 31.1 miles apart. The first school is located in the city of Pierre Part, Louisiana, an area classified as Cajun in this study. Census data obtained from the MLA Language Data Map (2010) indicate that while 60.65% (n=1,865) of individuals over the age of 5 years declare English as their preferred language in Pierre Part, 38.86% (n=1,195) claim French as their preferred language. The second school is located in Morgan City, Louisiana, an area classified as non-Cajun in this study; 91.68% (n = 10,940) of individuals over the age of 5 years claim English as their preferred language, and only 4.43% (n = 529) consider French as their preferred language (MLA, 2010).

Fourteen children from the Cajun-status school and 21 children from the non-Cajun school were recruited and included in the study based on the following criteria: they had no personal or family history of receiving speech/language services and their performance on non-verbal intelligence, standardized language, and articulation tests was comparable to typically-developing children. Caregivers of participating students completed surveys to outline information about their child’s ethnicity, level of maternal education and speech/language history. Caregivers reported that neither their child nor the child’s family members had a history of receiving speech/language services. Participants included in the study were matched on the basis of age and level of maternal education. Table 3 lists the participants’ mean age in months and mean level of maternal education.
Table 3. Participants’ Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Cajun-Status M (SD)</th>
<th>Non-Cajun Status M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean Age in Months</td>
<td>66.42 (3.77)</td>
<td>64.76 (3.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Males</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Level of Maternal Ed.</td>
<td>11.86 (2.85)</td>
<td>11.76 (2.12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedures

All potential research participants were screened for eligibility prior to participating in the study. If the child met the inclusion criteria, he or she then took part in the study. The measures and methods used to determine a child’s eligibility, alongside the methods used for collecting language samples for the children are detailed below.

Measures for Determining Eligibility

To further document the children’s cognitive, language and articulation abilities, a battery of assessments was administered. Over three separate sessions, graduate students administered *The Primary Test of Nonverbal Intelligence (PTONI; Ehrler & McGhee, 2008)*, *The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test 4 (PPVT-4; Dunn & Dunn, 2007)*, *The Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation – Norm-Referenced Syntax Domain (DELV – NR; Seymour, et al., 2005)* and *The Goldman-Fristoe Test of Articulation – 2nd edition (GFTA-2; Goldman & Fristoe, 2000)*.

To ensure that participants displayed typical cognitive skills, the *PTONI* was administered to each participant. The *PTONI* is a standardized, non-verbal intelligence assessment that aims to assess the reasoning abilities of children between the ages of 3 and 9 years, 11 months. The test requires children to examine a set of pictures and point to the one
different from the others. The test was normed on a large, culturally diverse sample across the United States and thus considered an appropriate measure of intelligence for the study’s participants. A standard score of 100 (SD = 15) is considered to be within normal limits on the PTONI.

The PPVT-4 was administered to measure the vocabulary abilities of all participants. The PPVT-4 is a standardized assessment of receptive vocabulary for both children and adults. After hearing a target word, the participant is required to select the picture that best represents the meaning of the word out of a set of four illustrations. The item sets are sequenced according to developmental difficulty and require the participant only to point to the correct item, a verbal response is not necessary. A standard score of 100 (SD = 15) is considered to be within normal limits on the PPVT-4.

The syntax subtest of the DELV-NR was also administered to the participants to measure performance in three syntax domains: comprehension of wh-questions, comprehension of passive sentences, and use of articles. Ten items on the DELV-NR syntax subtest address the child’s comprehension of wh-questions. The child is shown a set of pictures and asked to listen to a short story about the illustrations. Immediately after hearing the story, the child is asked a wh-question about the content. For example, a child is shown a picture of a father and a baby having lunch together, “Who ate what?” may be the question. The examiner is required to read the question exactly as written and to include emphasis on the italicized wh-words. To assess comprehension of passive sentence constructions, a child is shown three pictures and asked to identify the picture that corresponds to the passive sentence the examiner reads. This subtest includes ten passive sentences such as “The elephant was pushed” to measure the child’s comprehension of multiple constructions containing different passive elements. The DELV-NR
syntax subtest also measures a child’s ability to produce appropriate articles given a specific context. The examiner reads eight prompts that require a child to respond using either “the” or “a/an” such as “I’ll bet you have something hanging on the wall of your room. What is it?” and then records the child’s response. Scores from the three subtests are combined to form a standard syntax score. A standard score of 10 (SD = 3) is considered within normal limits.

The GFTA-2 Sounds in Words subtest is a standardized assessment tool for individuals from 2 to 21 years of age that measures a person’s ability to spontaneously or imitatively produce consonant sounds in the initial, medial, and final positions of words. On the GFTA-2, a standard score of 100 (SD = 15) is considered within normal limits.

To be considered eligible for the study, all participants were required to score within one standard deviation of the mean on each of the assessments to ensure that they were displaying typical development. Table 4 provides a summary of the students’ mean performance scores on each of these assessments.

Table 4. Mean Participant Performance Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Cajun-Status M (SD)</th>
<th>Non-Cajun Status M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PTONI</td>
<td>104.79 (9.53)</td>
<td>107.71 (15.75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPVT-4</td>
<td>104.64 (8.15)</td>
<td>105.00 (10.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GFTA-2</td>
<td>108.43 (7.23)</td>
<td>110.10 (4.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DELV-NR: Syntax Domain</td>
<td>9.21 (1.67)</td>
<td>9.95 (1.88)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Spontaneous Language Sample Elicitation

Research assistants elicited spontaneous language samples from the children through play-based interaction during a 15-20 minute session in a quiet room at each child’s school.
These language samples were used to examine the five CE structures. Both African-American and White examiners elicited the language samples; all but one examiner were female. The following toys were used during language sampling: gas station and cars, baby doll and bottle, miniature picnic set and family, and three to four Apricot picture cards (Arwood, 1985). The picture cards depicted children at a grocery store, children playing basketball, children fishing, and children in a fight.

**Language Sample Transcription and Morphological Coding**

Graduate and undergraduate students transcribed and morphologically coded the language samples following the general guidelines of Systematic Analysis of Language Transcripts software (SALT; Miller & Iglesias, 2004) and the Language Sample Transcription and Coding Manual of the Language Development and Disorders Laboratory of the Louisiana State University (Oetting, et al., 2011). In addition to transcribing the children’s utterances, the transcribers also coded 36 nonmainstream structures of African-American English (AAE) and Southern White English (SWE). The five grammar structures of CE, because they are also produced in AAE and SWE were coded as part of the 36 structures. For transcription and coding to be considered complete, each sample underwent three passes by at least two students. In the first pass, the student listened to the audiotape and transcribed all of the words and utterances. In the second pass another student listened to the sample while editing the transcription that was created after the first pass. During this pass the student also added morphological coding. Finally, in the third pass the first or third student listened to the audio and edited the transcription and added codes as needed.
Reliability of Language Sample Transcription

To determine reliability of the transcripts, examiners independently transcribed a one-minute excerpt from each of the samples. The transcription and coding followed the same procedures outlined in the original samples. A rate of agreement was determined as the number of agreements over the possible number of agreements for both utterance boundaries and for the transcribed morphemes in the excerpts. For decisions about where to determine an utterance boundary, the mean rate of agreement was 91%. For decisions concerning morpheme transcription, the mean rate of agreement was 95%.

Analysis of Targeted Structures

Graduate students used SALT to extract utterances with the five CE grammar structures. To do this, graduate students utilized the ‘Explore: Word List’ feature within SALT.

A Cajun feature cover sheet, shown in Appendix A, was developed for each of the printed transcripts to document and count the following past-tense forms: simple past-tense (“he kicked”), zero marking of simple past-tense (“yesterday he kick”), marking of verb is (“he is nice”), zero marking of verb is (“he nice”), overt marking of verb are (“they are fun”), zero marking of verb are (“they fun”), overt marking of third person singular (“he dances”), zero marking of third person singular (“he dance”), marking of verb were (“they were dancing”), and use of was-leveling (“yesterday, they was dancing”). Using the cover sheet and the printed transcripts the examiners recorded the line numbers of the structure on the cover sheet.

After recording all of the coded structures, the graduate students calculated a frequency count for each structure. While certain narrative contexts present some difficulty in determining the intended tense of unmarked forms (“she jump” could be determined as a zero-marked form of third person singular “she jumps” or past tense “she jumped”), the examiners used the context
in which the utterance occurred to classify the verb tense. Some structures may include errors and were flagged as errors of commission, not to be included in the frequency count. Finally, to determine the rate at which the targeted structures occurred, the frequency count of each of the targeted structures in each sample were divided by the total number of opportunities to produce each structure in each sample.

**Reliability of Cajun Feature Coding**

At least two examiners independently counted patterns in seven (20%) of the 35 printed transcripts. A percentage of reliability was calculated as the number of agreements divided by the number of possible agreements. Data was considered reliable if agreement is 90% or higher. The rate of agreement among the raters for the third person singular was 96.18% with a range of agreement from 88 – 100%. The rate of agreement among the raters for the past tense was 96.95% with a range of agreement from 85.94 -100%. The rate of agreement among the raters for *is* and *are* was 93.70% with a range of agreement from 70.54-100%. The rate of agreement among the raters for *was/were* was 96.95% with a range of agreement from 89.29-100%.
RESULTS

Between and Within Group Analysis

Table 5 displays the number of verb contexts in which the five CE grammar structures could be examined as a function of Cajun status. Additionally, there is a column displaying the combined total of both Cajun and non-Cajun status productions. The sum, or total number of contexts for each structure, is also recorded. The total number of regular past tense, regular third person singular, and *is* and *are* contexts were calculated by summing the children’s number of overtly marked and zero-marked productions. The number of opportunities to produce *were* structures was calculated by summing the number of overtly and zero-marked *were* structures and the number of *was* for *were* substitutions. Errors of commission, or ‘flags’, were not included in these counts.

Table 5 shows that the participants, regardless of Cajun status, produced regular past, regular third person singular and the copula *is* structures with much higher frequency than *are* and *were* verb structures.

Table 6 presents the rate at which the children produced a Cajun structure within each verb context. The two rows below each context represent the mean and standard deviations. For zero marking of past tense, regular third person singular, *is* and *are*, the rate of structure use was calculated as the total number of zero- markings divided by the total number of verb contexts. For was-leveling, the number of *was* for *were* substitutions was divided by the total number of *were* contexts.
Table 5. Means, standard deviations and overall sum of targeted structures within language samples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Cajun status</th>
<th>Non-Cajun status</th>
<th>Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total regular past</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>13.78</td>
<td>13.38</td>
<td>13.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>7.35</td>
<td>8.04</td>
<td>7.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total regular third</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>17.71</td>
<td>16.80</td>
<td>17.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>4.77</td>
<td>10.79</td>
<td>8.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total is</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>33.71</td>
<td>30.19</td>
<td>31.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>13.66</td>
<td>16.94</td>
<td>15.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>634</td>
<td>1,106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total are</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>4.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>3.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total were</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>2.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6. Percentage of Cajun feature use within language samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Cajun status percentage of use</th>
<th>Non-Cajun status percentage of use</th>
<th>Combined percentage of use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zero regular past Percentage</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero third person singular Percentage</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero are                   Percentage</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero is                    Percentage</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was leveling               Percentage</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, the percentages vary little between the two groups. Moreover, the large standard deviations, most notably for the children’s productions of zero regular third, zero *are* and *was*-leveling, indicate that there is a wide range of individual differences not captured by the children’s Cajun status. Nevertheless, to further examine these data, five independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the use of the five CE structures in both the Cajun status and non-Cajun status groups. There was no significant difference in the means between both groups’ zero markings of past tense; $t(33) = -0.434$, $p = 0.667$. Similarly, there was no significant difference between the group means of zero marking of regular third person singular; $t(33) = -0.087$, $p = 0.931$. There also was no significant difference in the means for zero marking the verb.
are; \( t(31) = -1.392, p = 0.174 \). Additionally, there was no significant difference in the means for zero marking the verb is; \( t(33) = -0.047, p = 0.962 \). Finally, there was no significant difference between the groups’ means of substituting was for were; \( t(24) = .592, p = 0.560 \). For all five grammatical patterns, the effect of Cajun status resulted in non-significant findings.

To further investigate the data, a repeated measures ANOVA was completed to determine if differences existed between the children’s percentages of marking as a function of the structure. The within-subject variable was structures and there were five levels (third person singular, past tense, is, are, and was-leveling). Results indicated that the children’s rate of zero marking varied by structure, \( F(4,31) = 11.25, p < .001 \); partial eta squared = .249. Post hoc tests using least significant differences with an alpha set at .05 revealed the following: zero was differed from zero past tense \( (p < .001) \), zero third person singular \( (p = .001) \), and from zero is \( (p < .001) \); zero past tense differed from zero are \( (p = .027) \) and from zero is \( (p = .022) \); zero-third person singular differed from zero is \( (p = .001) \); zero are differed from zero is \( (p = .001) \).

Whereas statistical analysis did not indicate a significant effect of Cajun-status on the children’s use of the five grammatical pattern, this ANOVA indicated that the children’s percentage of zero marking varied by structure.

**Correlational Analysis**

To explore additional factors that may have shared a relationship with the children’s combined productions of the five targeted structures, a Pearson’s correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between each of the five structures and the following variables: the children’s mothers’ highest level of education, the children’s age in months, and the children’s standard scores on the *PTONI, PPVT, GFTA-2nd edition*, and the syntax subtest of the *DELV-NR*. The analysis indicated inconsistent correlations, significant only for the *DELV-*
NR’s relationship to zero marking of past tense and the PTONI’s relationship to zero marking of third person singular. There was a negative correlation between the syntax subtest of the DELV-NR and zero marking of past tense; \( r = -0.44, p = 0.008 \). There was also a negative correlation between the PTONI and the zero marking of third person singular; \( r = -0.34, p = 0.046 \). These correlations indicate that as children’s scores on the PTONI and the syntax subtest of the DELV-NR decreased, the children increased the rate at which they zero-marked third person singular and past-tense.
DISCUSSION

Often studies concentrate on contrasting morphosyntactic structures between dialects to distinguish them from one another. Conversely, this study attempted to examine shared features amongst two dialects of Southeastern Louisiana, CE and SWE, and to determine if rate-based differences existed between structures found in both dialects. Specifically, this study aimed to explore if there was a relationship between children’s Cajun status and the rate at which they use the five patterns identified as shared between CE and SWE (Dubois & Horvath, 1998, 1999, 2003b): zero marking of regular past tense, zero marking of third person singular, zero marking of is, zero marking of are, and the children’s use of was-leveling. While I hypothesized that there would be an effect of Cajun status on the rate at which the children used each of the five CE structures, five independent samples t-tests revealed that Cajun status did not have a significant effect on the children’s use of the structures.

Because statistical analysis revealed no difference between Cajun and non-Cajun status children, I posed an additional question: Did the children’s percentage of CE structure use vary by structure? Using structure as the within-subject variable and the five CE structures as levels, a repeated measures ANOVA revealed the following: zero was differed from zero past tense, zero third-person singular, and from zero is; zero past tense differed from zero are and from zero is; zero-third person singular differed from zero is; zero are differed from zero is. These results indicate that, when the percentages of both the Cajun and non-Cajun status children’s are combined, the CE pattern use varied as a function of structure.

Finally, I computed a correlation coefficient to explore other possible factors that may have shared a relationship with the children’s productions of the five grammar structures. There was a strong negative correlation between the syntax subtest of the DELV-NR and zero marking
of past tense. Additionally, there was a moderately negative correlation between the *PTONI* and zero marking of third person singular. These findings reveal that as the children’s scores on the *PTONI* and the syntax subtest of the *DELV-NR* decreased, the children increased the rate at which they zero marked third person singular and past-tense, respectively.

**Findings Related to Past Research**

Recall that two existing studies have compared the percentages of CE structures between Cajun and non-Cajun speakers. The first study examined the rate of CE structures use among adult, bilingual CE speakers who self-identified as Cajun. Their results indicated that the rate at which bilingual speakers of CE, especially those who learned French before English, used the five CE features was much higher when compared to other forms of SWE (Dubois & Horvath, 1999, 2003b). The second study compared the percentage of use of the five CE patterns between two groups of children: children whose phonology and morphology was perceived as Cajun-influenced and children whose phonology and morphology was perceived as absent of a Cajun-influence (Oetting & Garrity, 2006). Their findings did not reveal a significant effect of Cajun-influence on the percentage of CE pattern use which is consistent with the current findings.

Interestingly, the combined percentage of CE pattern use amongst all of Oetting and Garrity’s white speakers, both with and without Cajun-influence, is very similar to the children’s percentages found in the present study. Table 7 displays the percentages of the five CE patterns and their accompanying standard deviations for both the current study and Oetting and Garrity’s (2006) findings.
Table 7. Percentages of CE use by children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Morphosyntactic Feature</th>
<th>Current Study % (SD)</th>
<th>Oetting and Garrity (2006) % (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zero third person singular</td>
<td>17 (19)</td>
<td>17 (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero <em>is</em></td>
<td>5 (7)</td>
<td>10 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero <em>are</em></td>
<td>25 (33)</td>
<td>28 (28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero regular past</td>
<td>12 (16)</td>
<td>11 (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was-leveling</td>
<td>43 (44)</td>
<td>37 (46)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the differences in the children’s locations (Oetting and Garrity’s participants lived in a semi-rural parish on the border of the Acadian triangle, compared to the current study’s participants, who lived in a rural community centered more within Acadiana), their percentages of use are surprisingly comparable. Both sets of data do not show elevated rates of CE in either of these two distinctly separate areas of Louisiana. This may indicate that the grammatical markers of Cajun status have disappeared. In its place, the CE grammar profile appears to reflect a variety of SWE that is shared between other speakers in the South.

Limitations and Future Directions

The results of the present study indicate that there is not a relationship between children’s Cajun-status, as defined by location, and the use of the five CE structures patterns; however, limitations within the study may have influenced these findings. Defining the children’s Cajun status solely on the basis of the location of their school may not have been comprehensive enough to distinguish the two groups. While self-identification as Cajun was not plausible given the age of the participants, a caregiver questionnaire probing the presence of Cajun heritage, the number of French-speaking family members, and their family’s geographic history may have
proven to be more appropriate in defining children as Cajun or non-Cajun. Additionally, the number of participants (n = 35) may have been too small. Furthermore, the study only recruited children from two schools. The small number of participants from only two schools may have led to a selection bias. Results may have differed if children were recruited from other communities who identified as Cajun.

**Future Directions**

Given the limitations of the current study, future endeavors examining children’s use of CE should aim to define Cajun status using more than location. Efforts to define Cajun ethnicity should include a targeted questionnaire that details the child’s familial heritage including whether their family identifies as Cajun and the family’s specific linguistic and geographic history. This information may lead to a clearer distinction between children who can confidently be considered Cajun and those who cannot. A larger number of both Cajun and non-Cajun child participants, recruited from a number of different schools, is also recommended for future research.

Further studies may also consider including bilingual children or children who are enrolled in Cajun-French immersion programs. While the present study excluded children who were French-speaking or who were enrolled in the school’s immersion program, including these children into a larger study of children’s use of CE features may provide more insight into the morphological patterns of the CE dialect.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: FREQUENCY COUNTS FOR EACH STRUCTURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CE pattern</th>
<th>Line Number</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*/ed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(He danced)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*/*ed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Yesterday, he dance)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flg /ed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(He is funny)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*IS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(He funny)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flg IS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(They are funny)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*ARE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(They funny)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flg ARE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*/3s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(She dances)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*/*3s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(She dance)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLG /3s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WERE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(They were scared)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAS/WERE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(They was scared)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Project Report and Continuation Application
(Complete and return to IRB, 131 David Boyd Hall.
Direct questions to IRB Chairman Robert Mathews 578-8692.)

IRB#: 2792 Your Current Approval Expires On: 9/12/2012
Review type: Expedited Risk Factor: Minimal
PI: Janna Cottin Dept: COMD Phone: (225) 678-3832
Student/Co-Investigator: see below
Project Title: Tense and Subject-Verb Agreement in SAAE and SWE by Dialect Density and SLI Status
Number of Subjects Authorized: 500

Please read the entire application. Missing information will delay approval

I. PROJECT FUNDED BY: NIDCD LSU proposal #: 33813

II. PROJECT STATUS: Check the appropriate blank(s); and complete the following:
   1. Active, subject enrollment continuing; # subjects enrolled: 30
   2. Active, subject enrollment complete; # subjects enrolled: ___
   3. Active, subject enrollment complete; work with subjects continues.
   4. Active, work with subjects complete; data analysis in progress.
   5. Project start postponed
   6. Project complete; end date ___/
   7. Project cancelled: no human subjects used.

III. PROTOCOL: (Check one):
   X Protocol continues as previously approved
   _ Changes are requested:
      * List (on separate sheet) any changes to approved protocol.

IV. UNEXPECTED PROBLEMS: (did anything occur that increased risks to participants):
    ➔ State number of events since study inception: 0 since last report: 0
    ➔ If such events occurred, describe them and how they affect risks in your study, in an attached report.
    ➔ Have there been any previously unreported events? Y/N
      (If YES, attach report describing event and any corrective action).

V. CONSENT FORM AND RISK/BENEFIT RATIO:
   Does new knowledge or adverse events change the risk/benefit ratio? Y/N
   Is a corresponding change in the consent form needed? Y/N

VI. ATTACH A BRIEF, FACTUAL SUMMARY of project progress/results to show continued participation of subjects
   is justified; or to provide a final report on project findings.

VII. ATTACH CURRENT CONSENT FORM (only if subject enrollment is continuing); and check the appropriate blank:
   ____ 1. Form is unchanged since last approved
   ____ 2. Approval of revision requested herewith: (Identify changes)

Signature of Principal Investigator: _______ Date: 7/11/12

IRB Action: L Continuation approved; Approval Expires: 7/13/13
Disapproved
File closed

Signed: _______ Date: 7/11/12

Form date: April 16, 2008
VITA

Corrina Vogan Spedale was raised in Edmonds, Washington, a small suburb outside of Seattle. She graduated from Tulane University and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature, minoring in history. Directly following graduation, Corrina served for two years as a Teach for America corps member in St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana. She then enrolled as a master’s student in Communication Disorders at the Louisiana State University. There, she worked as a research assistant under an NIH grant exploring the nonmainstream English use of Louisiana kindergartners. Corrina began her thesis under Dr. Janna Oetting as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts degree. Upon graduating, Corrina hopes to gain a clinical fellowship position as a pediatric speech-pathologist working with a preschool population.