

Grammatical Features of First Nations School-aged Children: Valuing Linguistic Diversity

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Acknowledgements



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Confidentiality



Retrieved from <http://skeenariverlodge.com/>

Plan for today

- Clarify the terms dialect, variety, standard English
- Talk (briefly) about how speakers of varieties are at risk for unnecessary pathologization
- Talk about the grammatical features I discovered as part of my research in a school in a small community in Northern BC: what they are, their frequency of use
- Describe what happens in their use over time
- Talk about MLU and use of complex sentences
- Look at some language samples of First Nations children to see if we can find examples of grammatical features; think about implications for standardized testing

Who am I?



Retrieved from
<https://touchandgotraveler.wordpress.com/2010/07/16/the-final-atlantic-province/>

This research is important



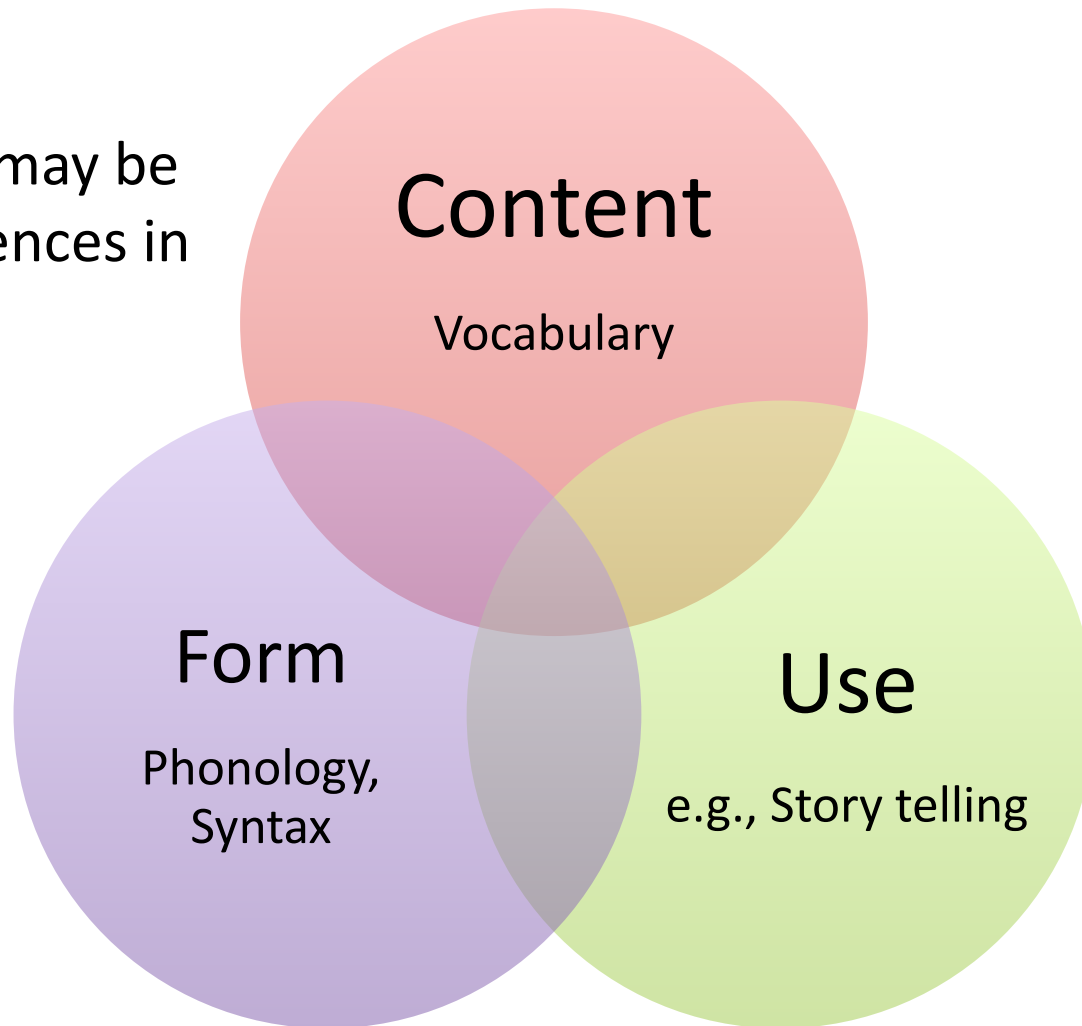
Retrieved from <https://whatsupyukon.com/family-learning/Yukon%20education/a-record-breaking-class-at-the-forty-third-annual-first-nati/>

Many people of First Nations, Métis and Inuit ancestry in Canada speak varieties (dialects)

<https://kaskadenacouncil.com/our-land/>



There may be
differences in



Danger of unnecessary pathologization for speakers of dialects



What is “standard English”

- The one that is codified in dictionaries, grammars, and usage guides (Trudgill, 1999)
- People with influence who are usually White, such as teachers and employers, decide what the standard is (Fought, 2006; Wolfram &



Standard English is a

MYTH

- There are as many versions of the standard as there are people who speak it (Lippi-Green, 1997)

What is a variety or dialect of English”?

- Technical definition: a given variety of language shared by a group of speakers
- Popular definition: a particular social or geographical variety of English that is not the ‘standard’ one.
- Vocabulary, grammar and social rules of varieties may differ
- Differences may affect reading comprehension, writing and oral language
- Varieties can be associated with class, status, age, social group, gender, regions, and ethnicity
- There is variation within a variety

How do varieties arise?

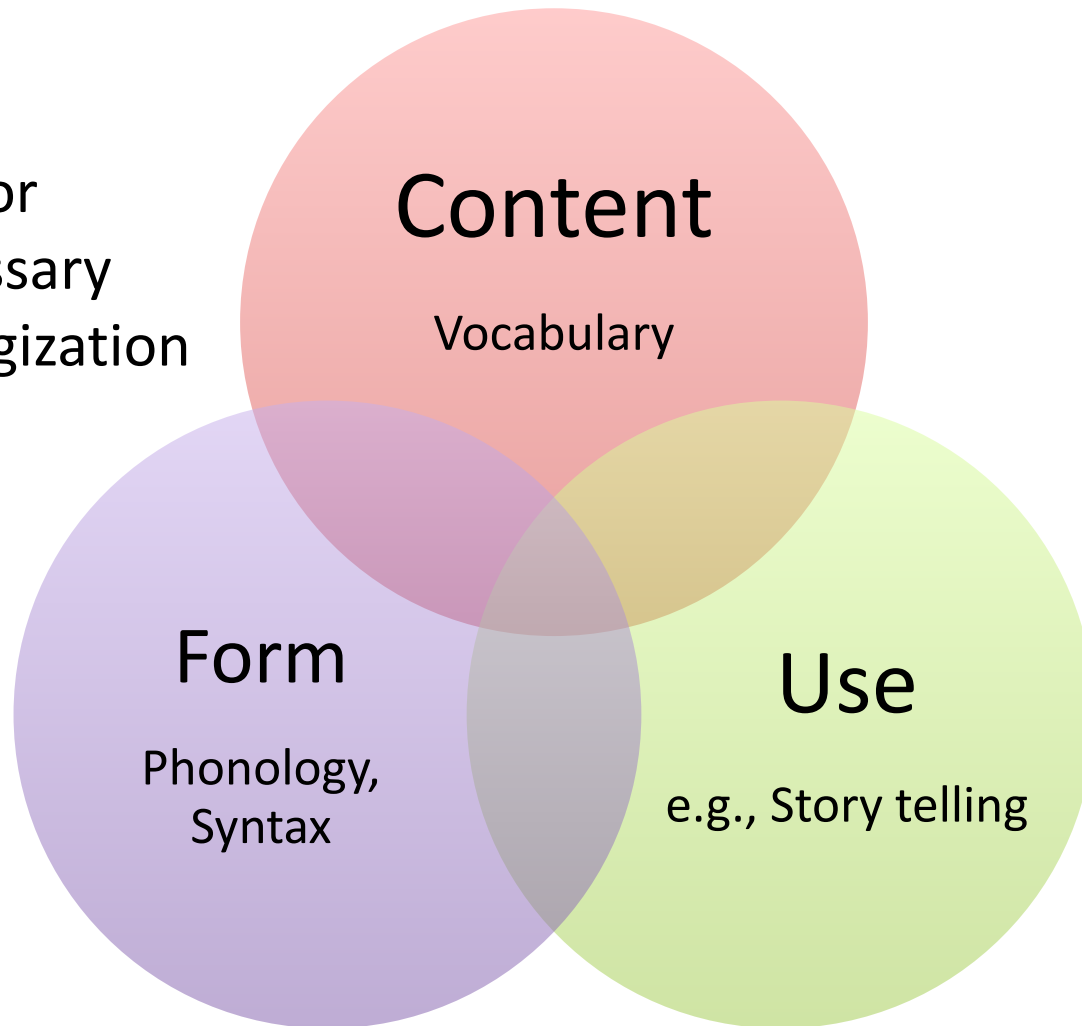
- British colonialism (Denis & D'Arcy, 2018; Schneider, 2007)
- Pidgins and creoles (McWhorter, 2018; Siegel, 2008; Wardhaugh, 2002)
- Whole communities shifting (Siegel, 2008)
- Second language learning (Fought, 2006)
- Grammatical simplification and phonological reduction; variety mixing; leveling (Leap & Stout, cited in Flanigan, 1987; Siegel, 2010)
- Features of the ancestral language carried over to the new version of English (Leap, 1987)

Why do varieties persist ?

- Varieties may entrench and persist when speakers of the variety become isolated, either geographically, economically, politically (Ball, Bernhardt & Deby, 2006) or socially (Eckert, 2008)
- Identity: The conscious or unconscious decision to speak in a certain way in order to maintain identity with a particular group may further perpetuate a variety

(Benor, 2010; Fought, 2006)

At risk for
unnecessary
pathologization



Language differences may negatively affect literacy acquisition and mathematics

http://www.sfu.ca/archive-sfunews/news/story_12030911.shtml



Bias in standardized assessments



Retrieved from <http://www.iheartradio.ca/ez-rock/ez-rock-terrace/prince-rupert-students-take-part-in-science-literacy-week-1.3305895>

Another reason this research is important...

“Dialects are important linguistic markers of Indigenous identity and solidarity” (Ball & Bernhardt, 2008)



Retrieved from <https://www.unbc.ca/aboriginal-resource-dati/first-nations-centre/first-nations-centre-spaces>



Viewing varieties as “broken English” or viewing grammar differences as “mistakes” can lead to:

- inappropriate teaching
- devaluing their English and identity

Time for reflection



S-LPs have opportunity and moral obligation

(Wolfram & Adger, 1993)

- ESD difficult to designate
- Very limited research

This research is a first step: Charting a course



Research questions

- 1) Are students speaking an identifiable local English variety?
- 2) If so, what are the **grammatical** features of their variety?
- 3) What changes occur in the children's use of features as they progress through the grades in a school where the language of instruction is standard English?

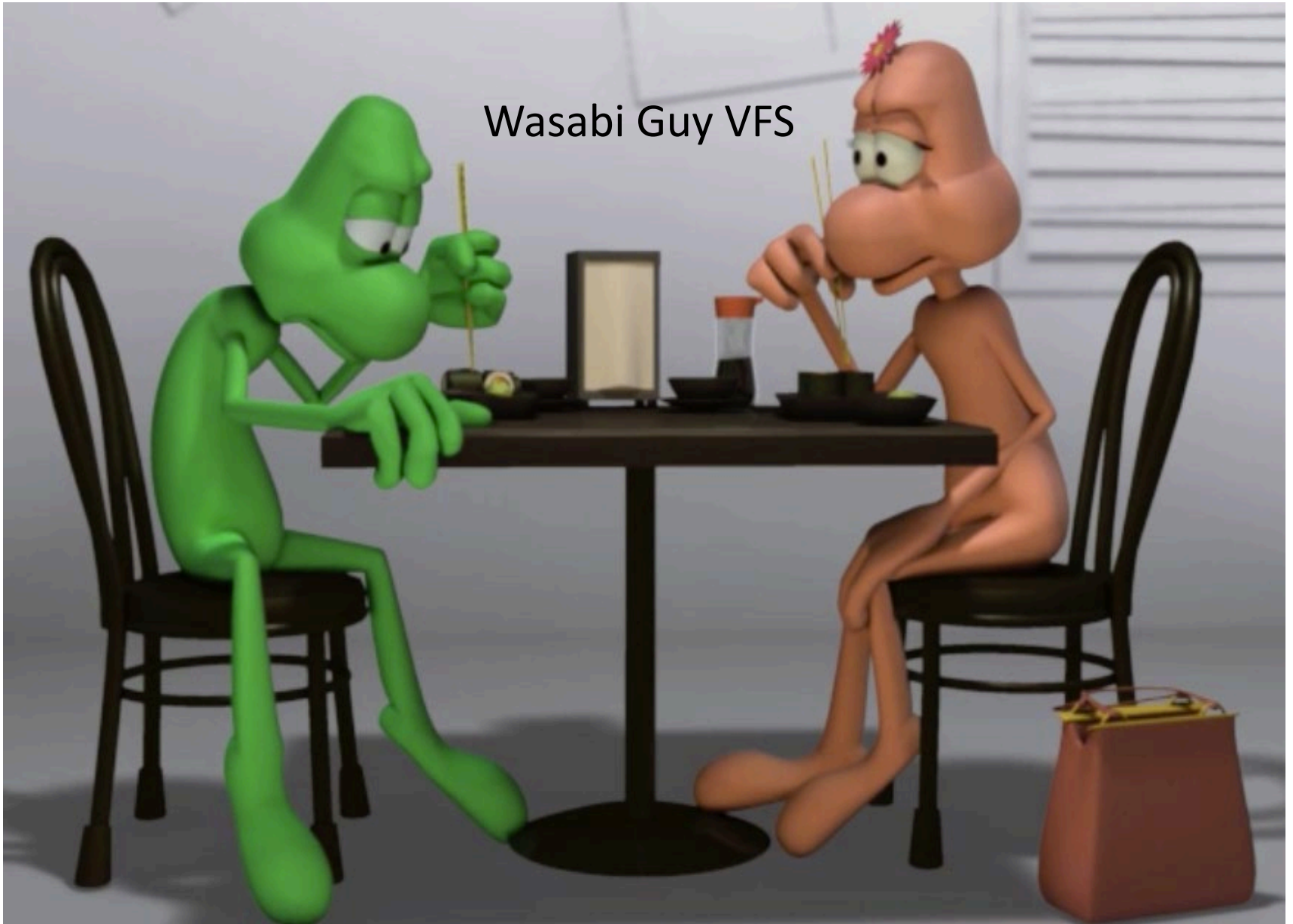
Study site and participants

- Bigton, a town in northern British Columbia
- 15/27 students designated as ESD
- 6 cis-gendered females; 9 males
- 14/15 identified as First Nations
- Ancestral language of most children was Dene
- Kindergarten to Grade 5
- All were receiving ESD services

Methods: Part 1

- I first compiled a list of potential features
- Retroactively analyzed language samples I had previously collected from Kindergarteners at school entry; refined my inventory after completing the longitudinal portion of the study
- Inter-rater reliability for transcription, identification of Complete and Intelligible verbal utterances, and features
- SALT for analysis

Wasabi Guy VFS



Results: Part 1

- 23 proposed grammatical features



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Verbs

Morphosyntactic Feature	Example	Indigenous American English	First Nations English	Adult First Nation English	Ancestral
Different Verb: Absent copula or auxiliary [DV:ACOPAUX]	<i>They ____ waitin'</i>	X	X	X	X
Different Verb: PresentPast [DV:PP]	<i>He look there yesterday</i>	X	X	X	X
Different Verb: Absent 3 rd person <s> [DV:A3S]	<i>He kick the ball</i>	X		X	X
Different Verb: Absent- <i>ing</i> [DV:ING]	<i>The girl is bounce all over</i>	X		X	X

Verbs continued

Morphosyntactic Feature	Example	Indigenous American English	First Nations English	Adult First Nation English	Ancestral
Different Verb: Regularization [DV:REG]	<i>Her blowed that; The balloon spinneded</i>	X		X	
Different Verb: Absent “to” [DV:ATO]	<i>She was waiting for the girl ____ come back</i>		X		X
Different Verb: Subject-verb agreement [DV:SVA]	<i>They was coming</i>	X		X	
Different Verb: gots/has [DV:GOTS/HAS]	<i>The woman gots a</i>		X	X	X

Pronouns

Morphosyntactic Feature	Example	Indigenous American English	First Nations English	Adult First Nation English	Ancestral
Different Pronoun: Undifferentiated Pronoun Case [DP:UPC]	<i>Her blew that to him; Them are in the lake</i>	X	X		X
Different Pronoun: Neutral Gender [DP:GEN]	<i>He/She is trying to catch it</i>	X	X	X	X

Determiners and Articles

Morphosyntactic Feature	Example	Indigenous American English	First Nations English	Adult First Nation English	Ancestral
<u>Determiners</u>					
Different Determiner: Use of <i>that</i> for <i>the</i> [DD:THE]	<i>Him got in that lake</i>			X	X
Different Determiner: Pronoun/ Determiner; Absent Determiner [DD]	<i>Them bees are going to get him; Then ____ bull breathe in her face</i>	X		X	X
<u>Articles</u>					
Different Indefinite Article [DART]	<i>He gots a glasses; a apple tree; The girl is tryin' get _apple/</i>	X	X	X	X

Prepositions

Morphosyntactic Feature	Example	Indigenous American English	First Nations English	Adult First Nation English	Ancestral
Different/Absent Preposition [DPREP]	<i>The girl got along/out of the way</i>	X	X	X	

Conjunction

Morphosyntactic Feature	Example	Indigenous American English	First Nations English	Adult First Nation English	Ancestral
Different Conjunction: <i>and here</i> or <i>then here</i> for <i>and then</i> [DCONJ]	<i>Then here he is bouncing all over;</i> <i>And here the bus came</i>		X	X	X

Non-verb related morphology

Morphosyntactic Feature	Example	Indigenous American Englishes	First Nations English	Adult First Nation English	Ancestral
<u>Possessive</u>					
Different Possessive [DPOSS]	<i>The bull horns are stuck in the tree</i>	X	X		
<u>Plurals</u>					
Different Plural [DPL]	<i>The bee are gonna come out</i>	X	X	X	X
<u>Negation</u>					
Different Negative [DNEG]	<i>I not know; now they're ain't; he never took his nose; he don't want him to see</i>	X		X	

Utterance-level features

Morphosyntactic Feature	Example	Indigenous American English	First Nations English	Adult First Nation English	Ancestral
Absent subject, verb or object phrase [APHRASE]	____ <i>waiting for her to come (the aux. is also absent in this ex.)</i>	X	X	X	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 clauses WI utterance; subject optional & not repeated but implied; no coordinating conjunction or • > 2 clauses WI utt; subject optional & not repeated but implied; optional use of coordin. conj. [STRING] 	<i>And then they come out then help and sit down and have more apples</i>		X	X	X

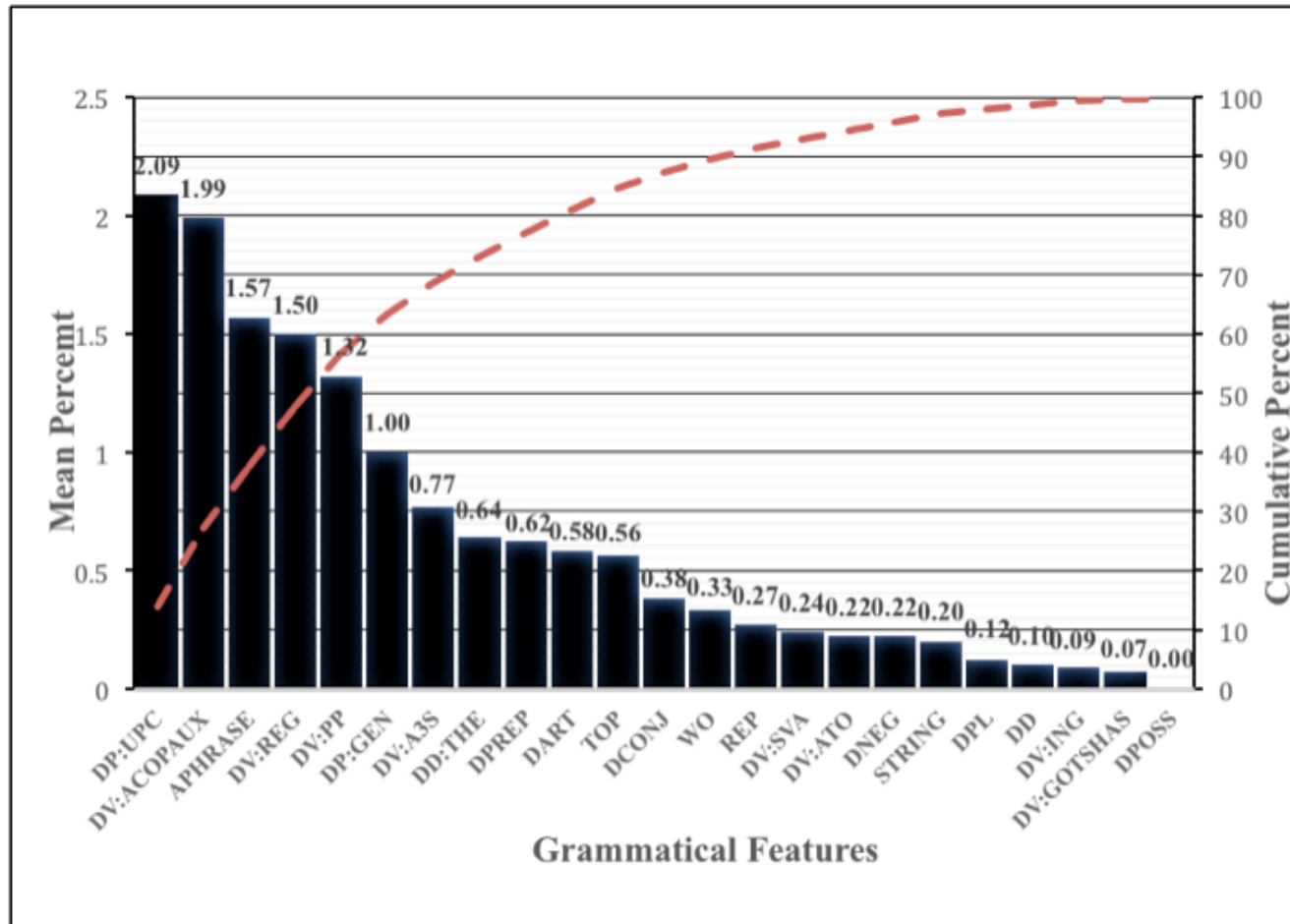
Utterance-level features cont.

Morphosyntactic Feature	Example	Indigenous American English	First Nations English	Adult First Nation English	Ancestral
Topicalization [TOP]	<i>That bull, he was mad</i>	X		X	X
Repetition for emphasis or continued action [REP]	<i>He got really mad and really, really mad; And jump, jump, jump on</i>			X	X
Different word order [WO]	<i>That you see she have a balloon</i>	X		X	X

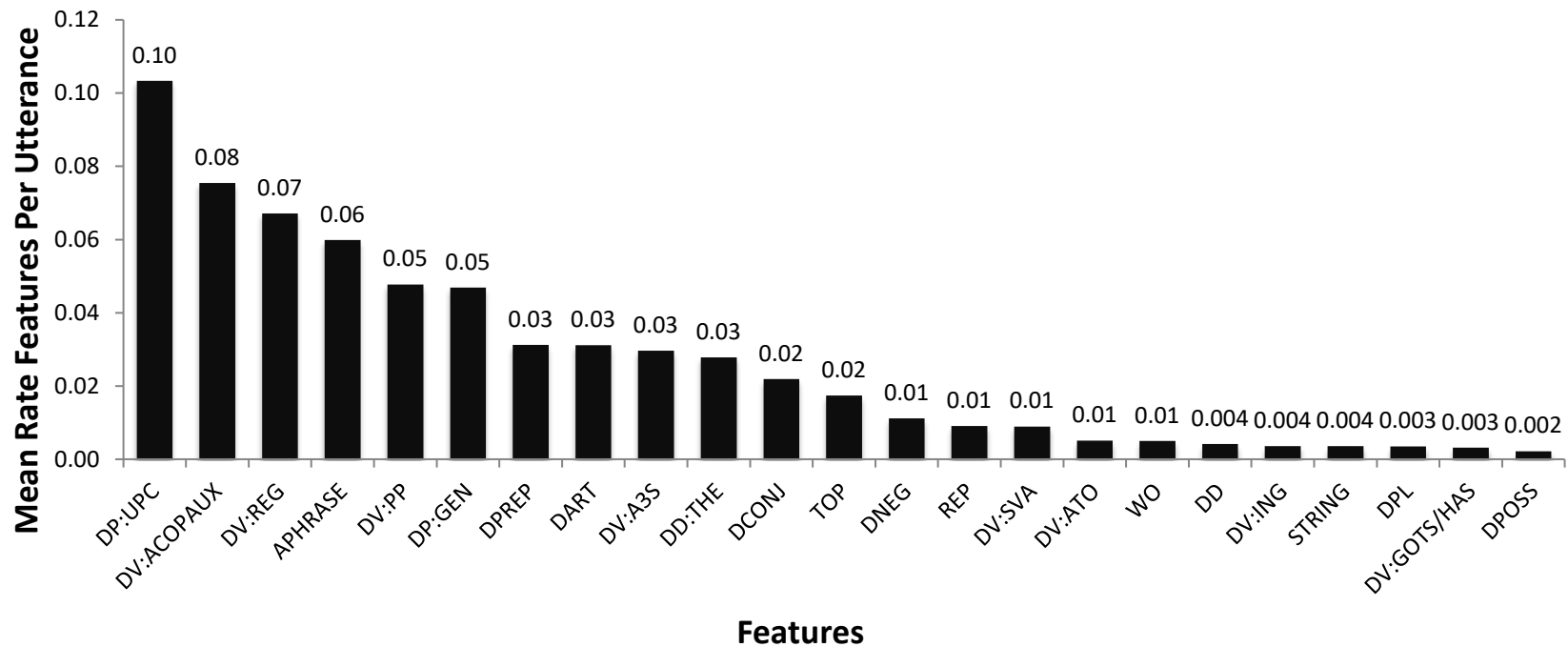
Other possible features not included in this analysis

- Use of Past Participles “seen”; “done” (e.g., I **seen** it)
- Present tense copula in contracted form, followed by a present or past regular or irregular verb (e.g., *She’s **smiles**; And the bull’s **opened** his mouth; The bull’s **came**; They’re **was***)
- Use of *him* or *hisself* for reflexive *himself*
- Use of genderless *it* for gendered *he* or *she*
- Coding of number or person, such as the use of *it* for *them* or *you*, *they* for *he*, and *this* for *these*
- Substitution of a definite article for an indefinite article or vice versa (e.g., use of *a* for *the* or *the* for *a*)
- Use of definite articles to modify body parts (e.g., **the** head instead of **his** head)

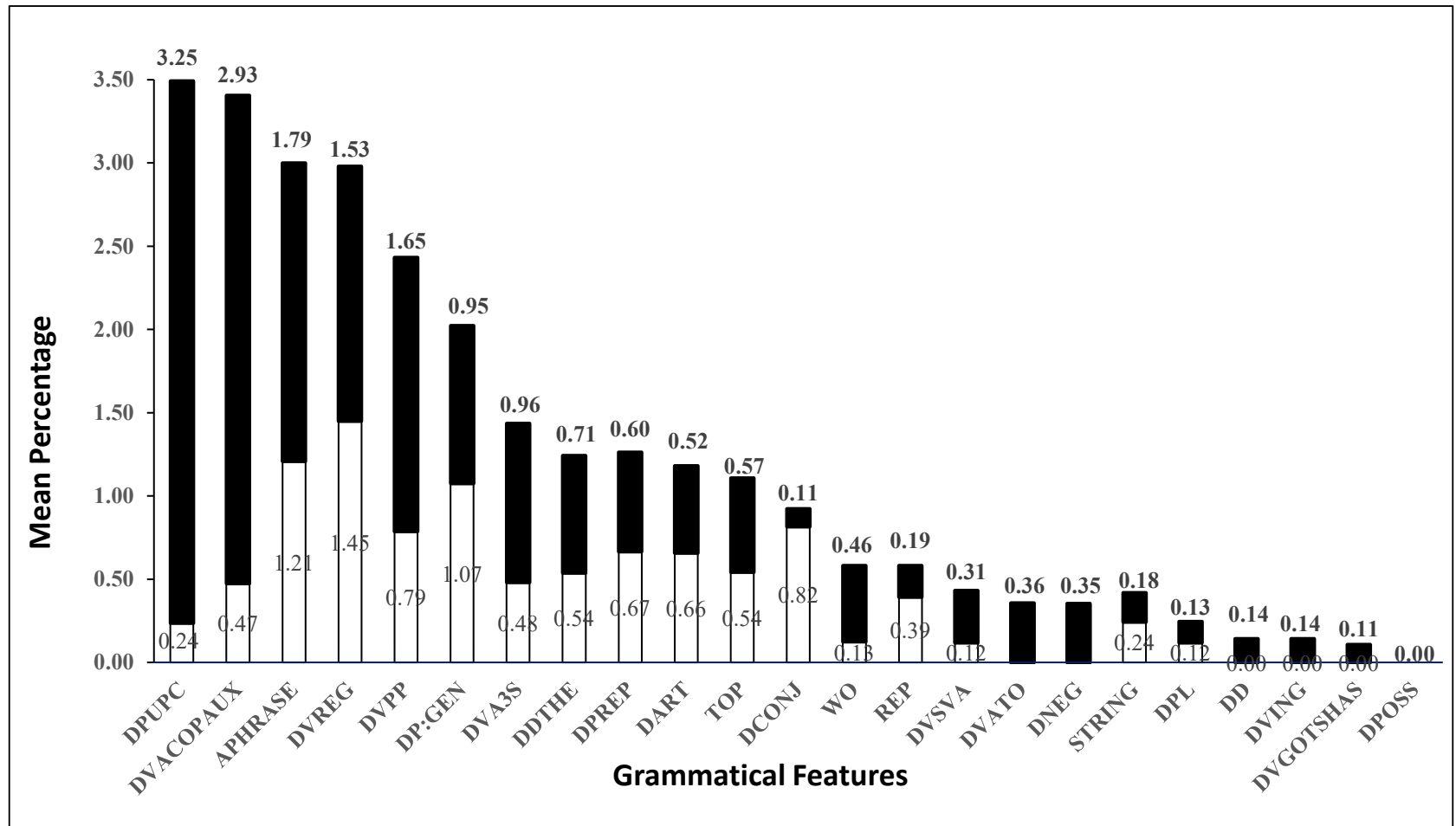
Mean percentage of words with features in the sample,
for each type of feature; cumulative percentage, all
Kindergarteners



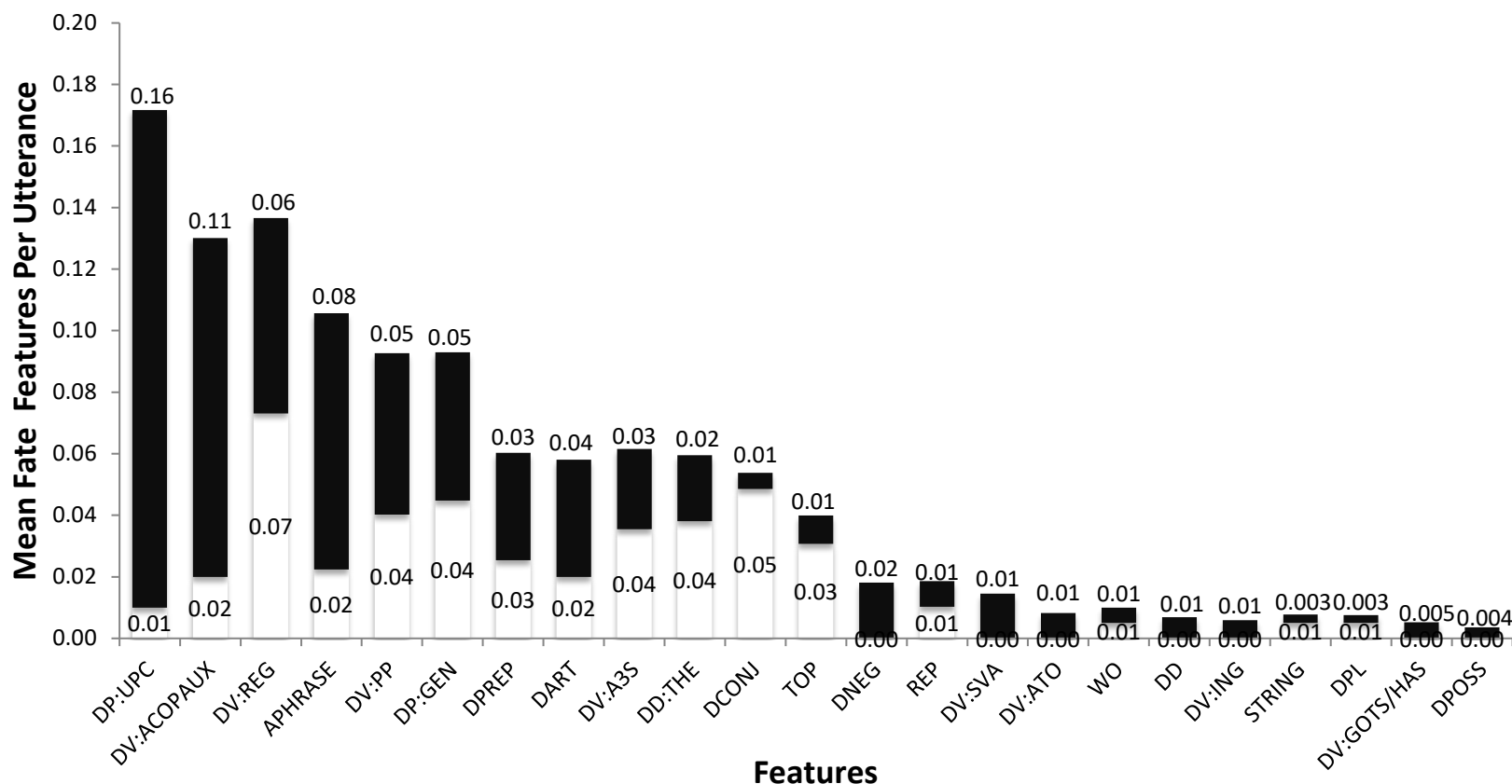
Mean features per utterance for each type of feature; all Kindergarteners



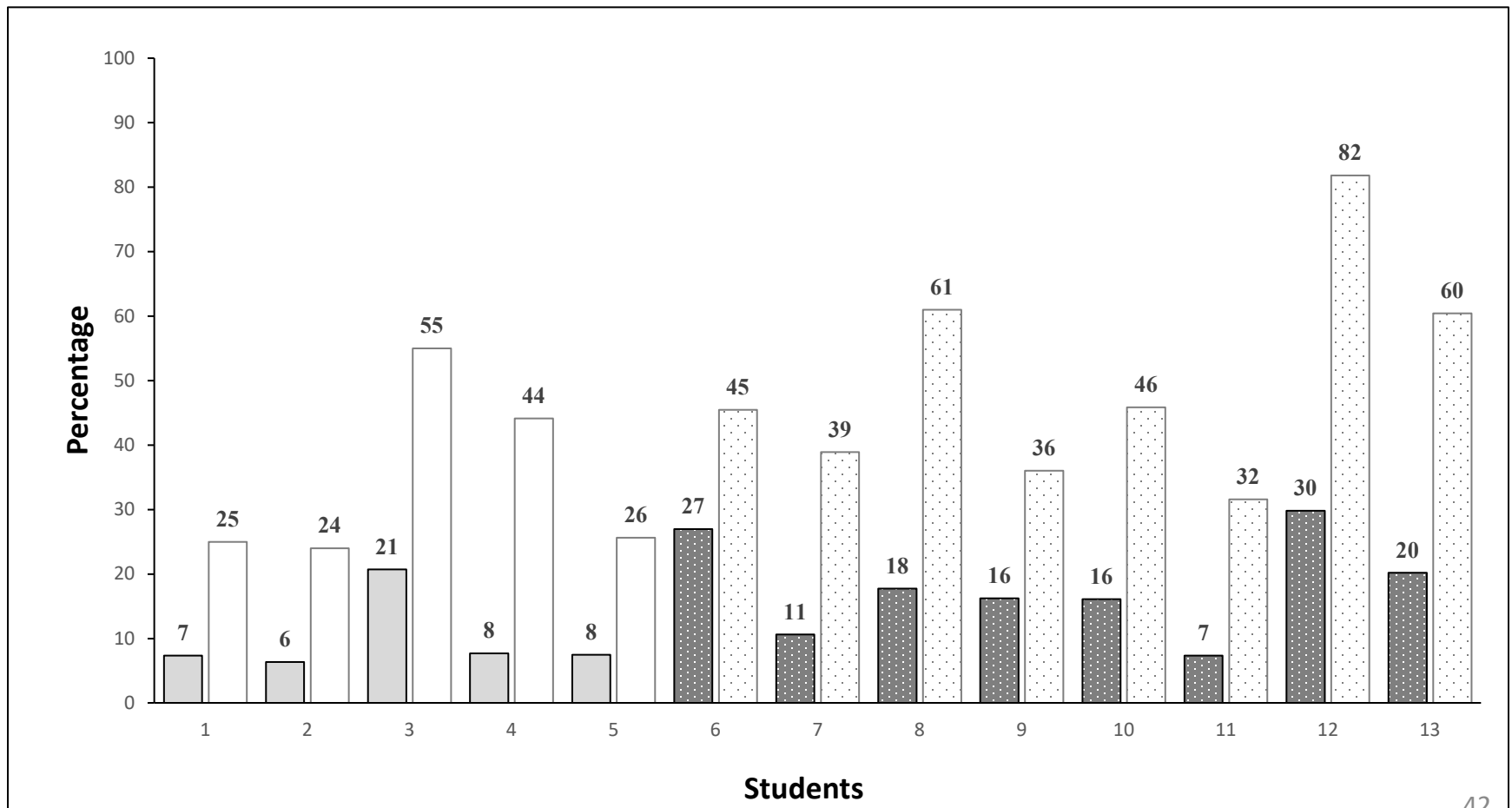
Mean percentage of words with features, broken down for each type of feature for NOSPED (no fill) and SPED (filled) Kindergarteners



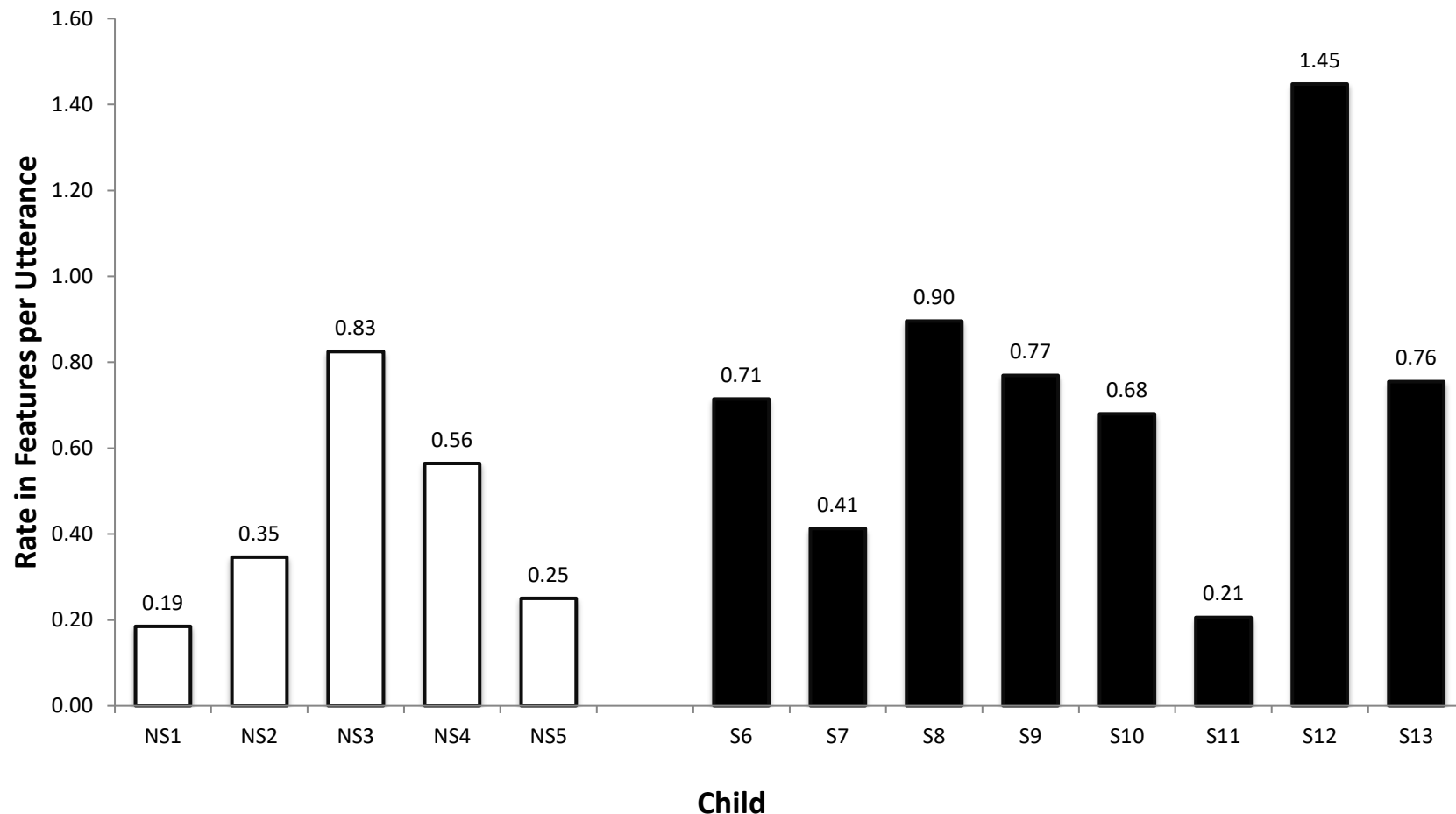
Mean rate at which features were used for each type of feature for NOSPED (bottom column) and SPED (stacked column) Kindergarteners; features per utterance metric



VDM expressed as a percentage of words with features
(left column) and percentage of utterances with
features (right column) for NOSPED (open columns) and
SPED (stippled columns) Kindergarteners



VDM expressed as features per utterance for NOSPED (open columns) and SPED (filled columns) Kindergarteners



Token

- Percentage words with features:

$t(11) = -2.04, p = .07$; effect size -1.17

- Percentage utterances with features:

$t(11) = -1.71, p = .12$

Type

- Percentage different **types** of features:

$t(11) = -1.96, p = .08$; effect size -1.12

Time for reflection



Methods: Part 2

Oral narrative					Written narrative			
Grade	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	<i>Total</i>	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	<i>Total</i>
K	1			<i>1</i>				
1	2	1		<i>3</i>				
2	4	2	1	<i>7</i>	2	2	1	<i>5</i>
3	3	4	1	<i>8</i>	3	3	1	<i>7</i>
4	2	2	4	<i>8</i>	2	3	4	<i>9</i>
5	3	2	2	<i>7</i>	3	2	2	<i>7</i>
6		3	1	<i>4</i>		3	2	<i>5</i>
7			3	<i>3</i>			3	<i>3</i>
Total	15	14	12	<i>41</i>	10	13	13	<i>36</i>

Results: Part 2

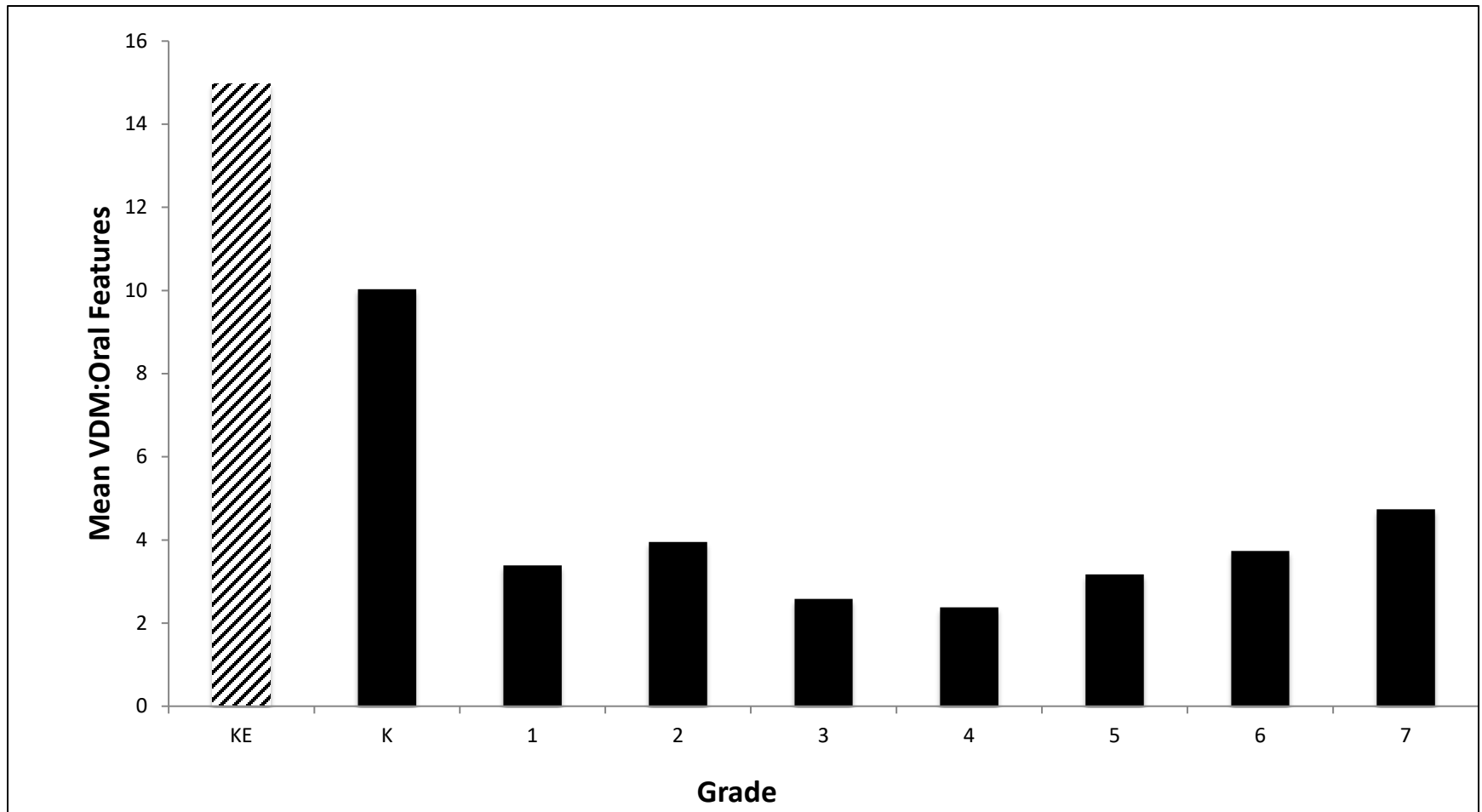


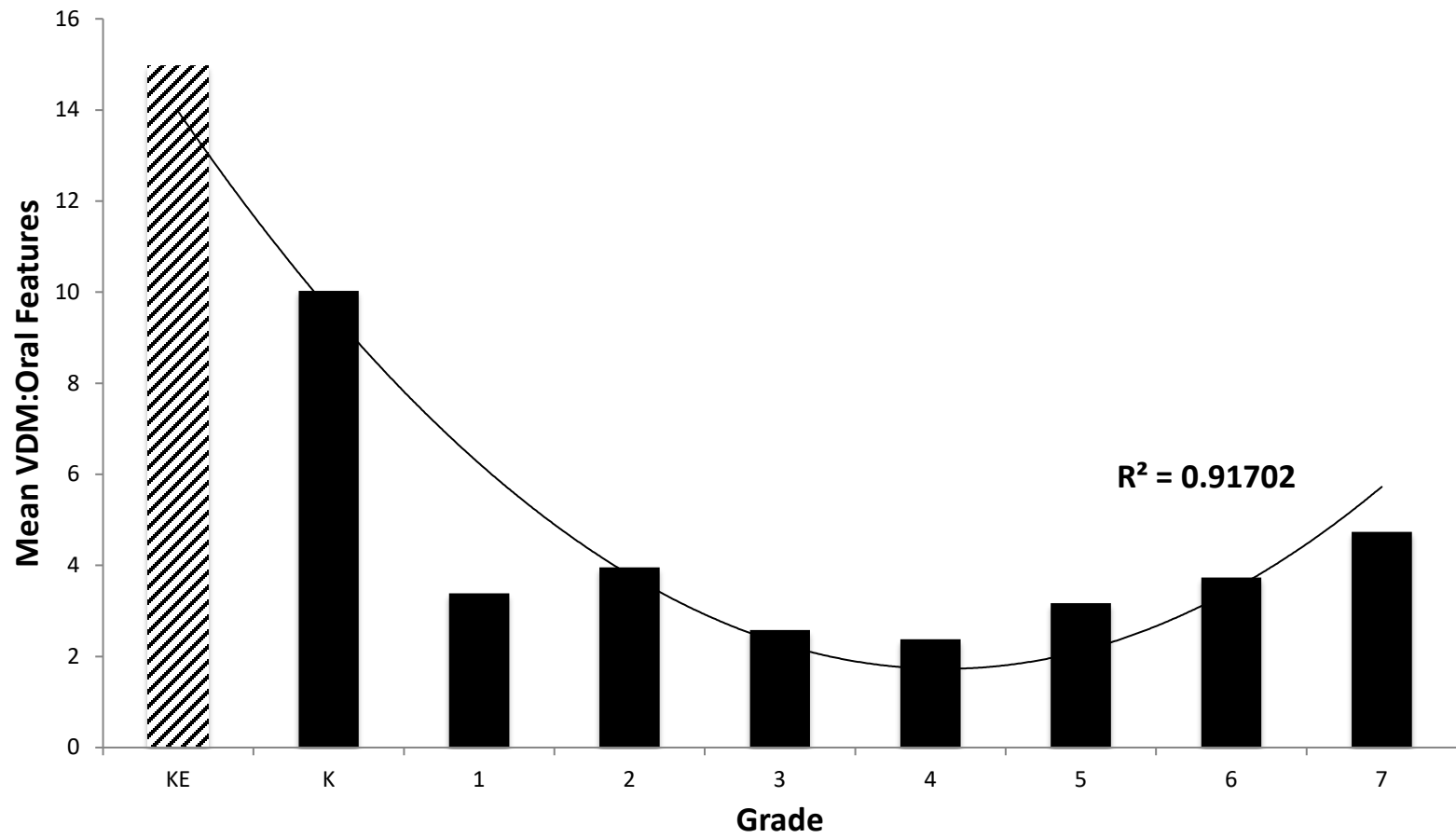
Retrieved from <https://www.macleans.ca/news/bella-bella-the-town-that-solved-suicide/>

Mean percentage of words with features, for each type of feature, Years 1, 2, & 3: (a) Grade K-2 cohort; (b) Grade 3-5 cohort

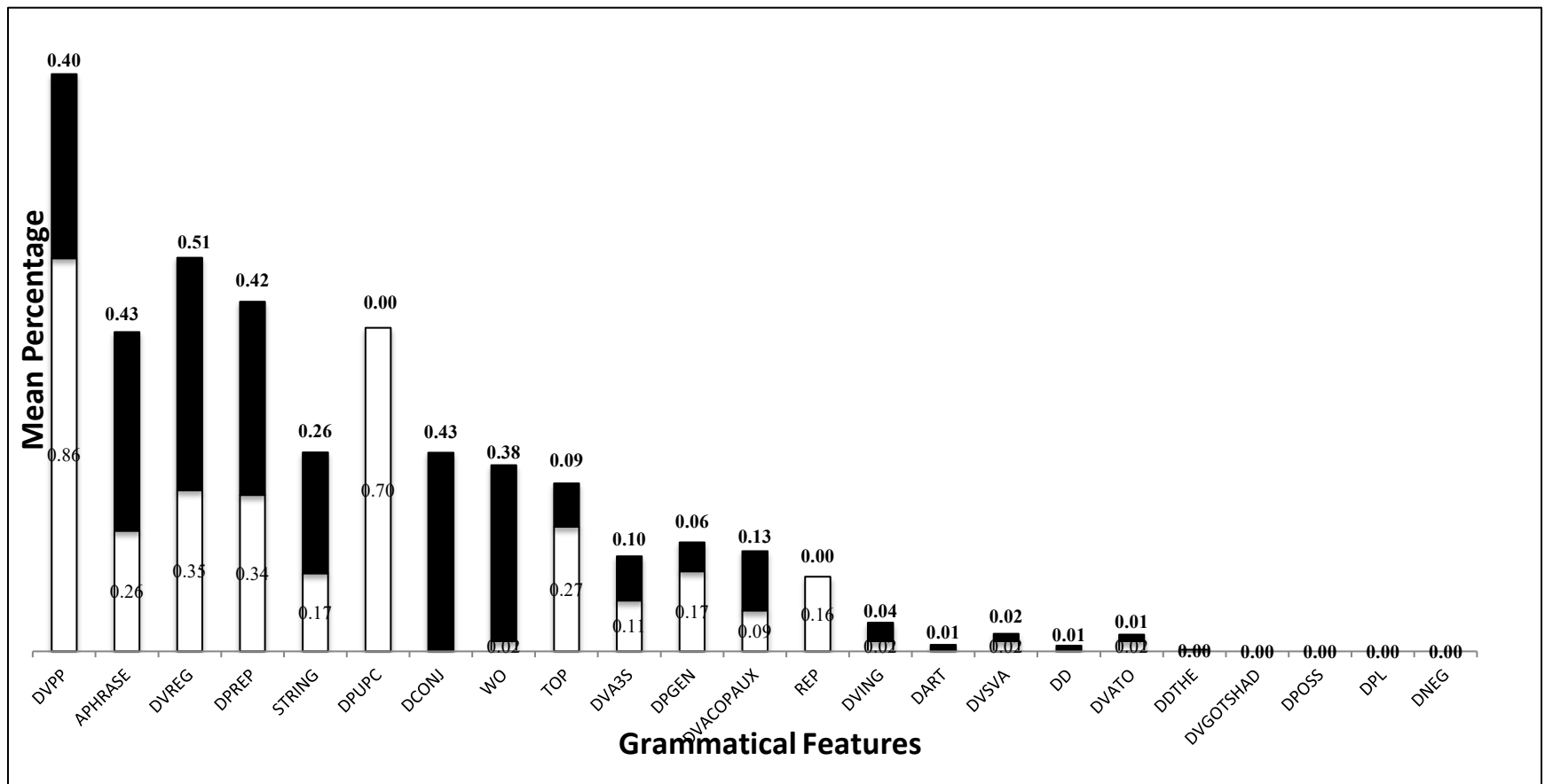
- Overall reduction in use of features
- Some features declined; some features fluctuated
- Some features increased: Present for Past, String, Topicalization

Mean oral VDM, calculated as a percentage of words with features, at Kindergarten Entry (zebra-striped bar), and Grade, all 3 years (K-7; filled bars)

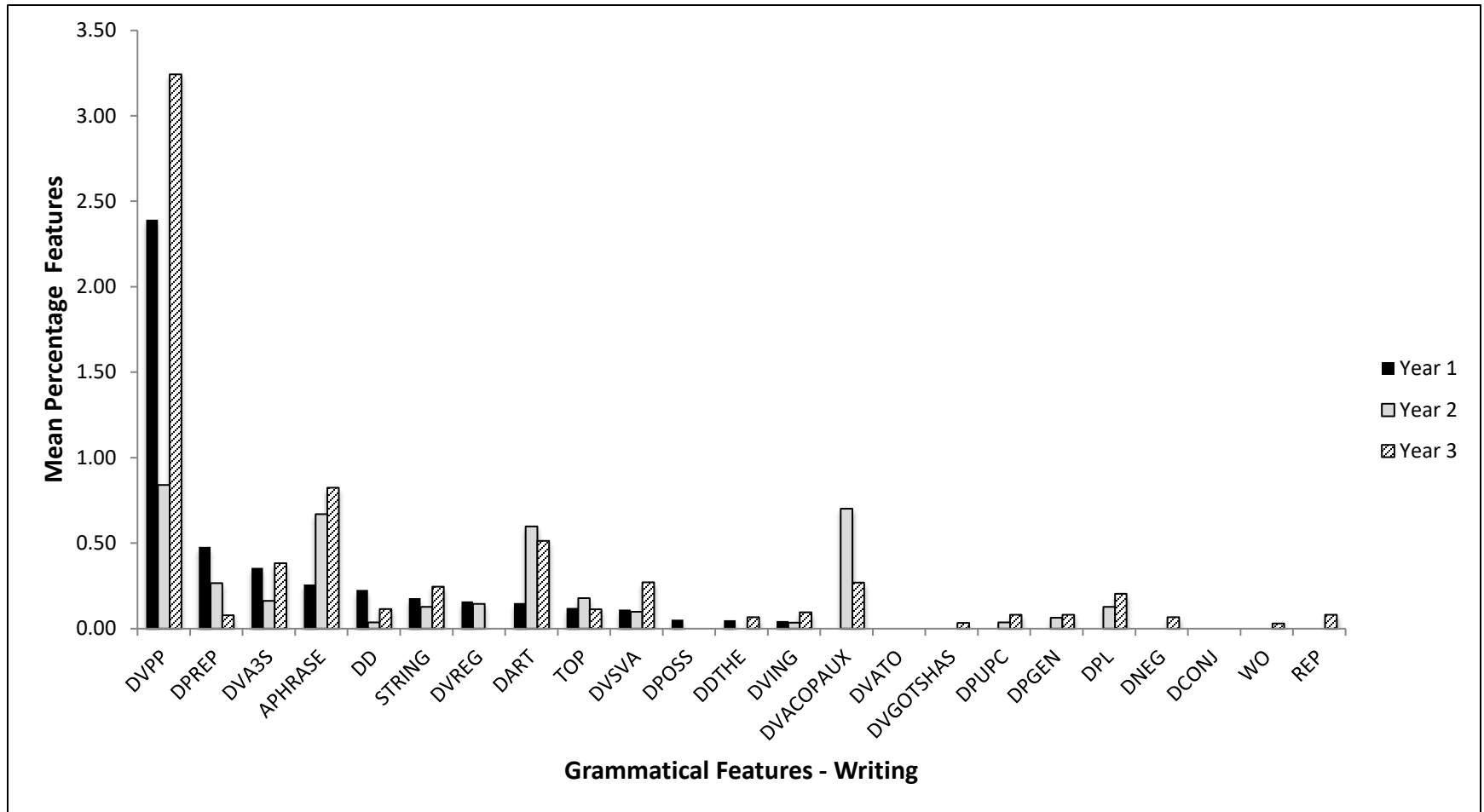




Mean percentage of words with features, for each type of feature produced by NOSPED (bottom column) and SPED (stacked column) students who had attended Kindergarten at Bigton School, Year 1

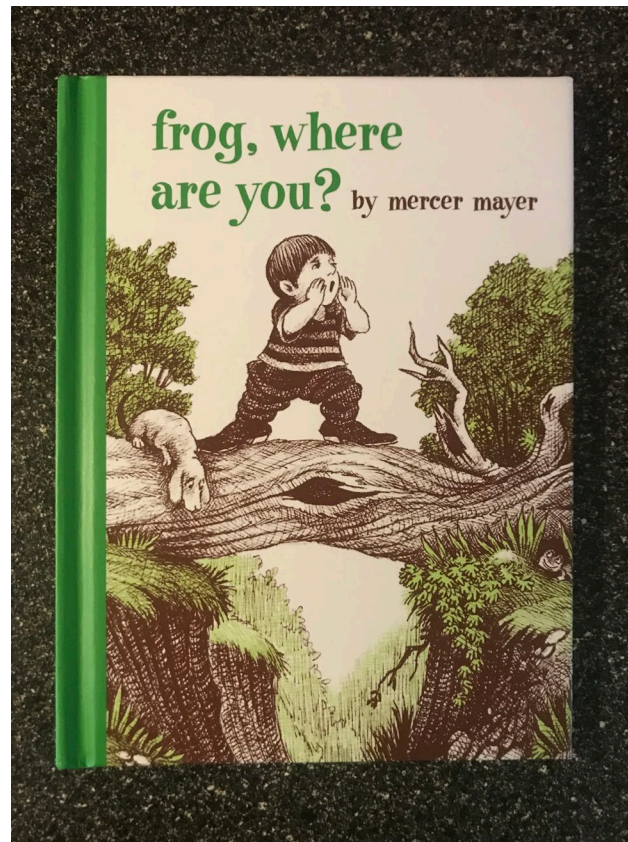


Mean percentage of written words with features, for each type of feature, Years 1, 2, & 3

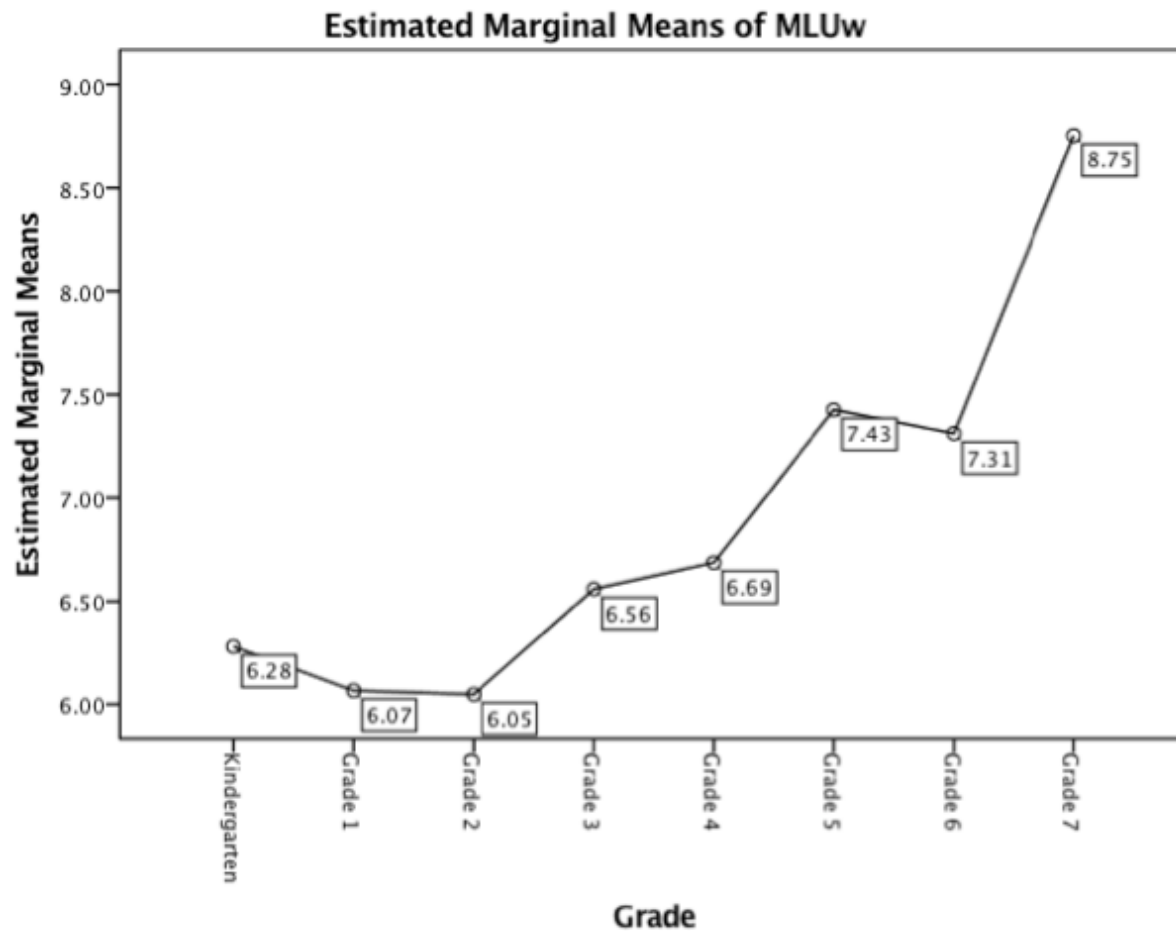


Sentence “complexity”

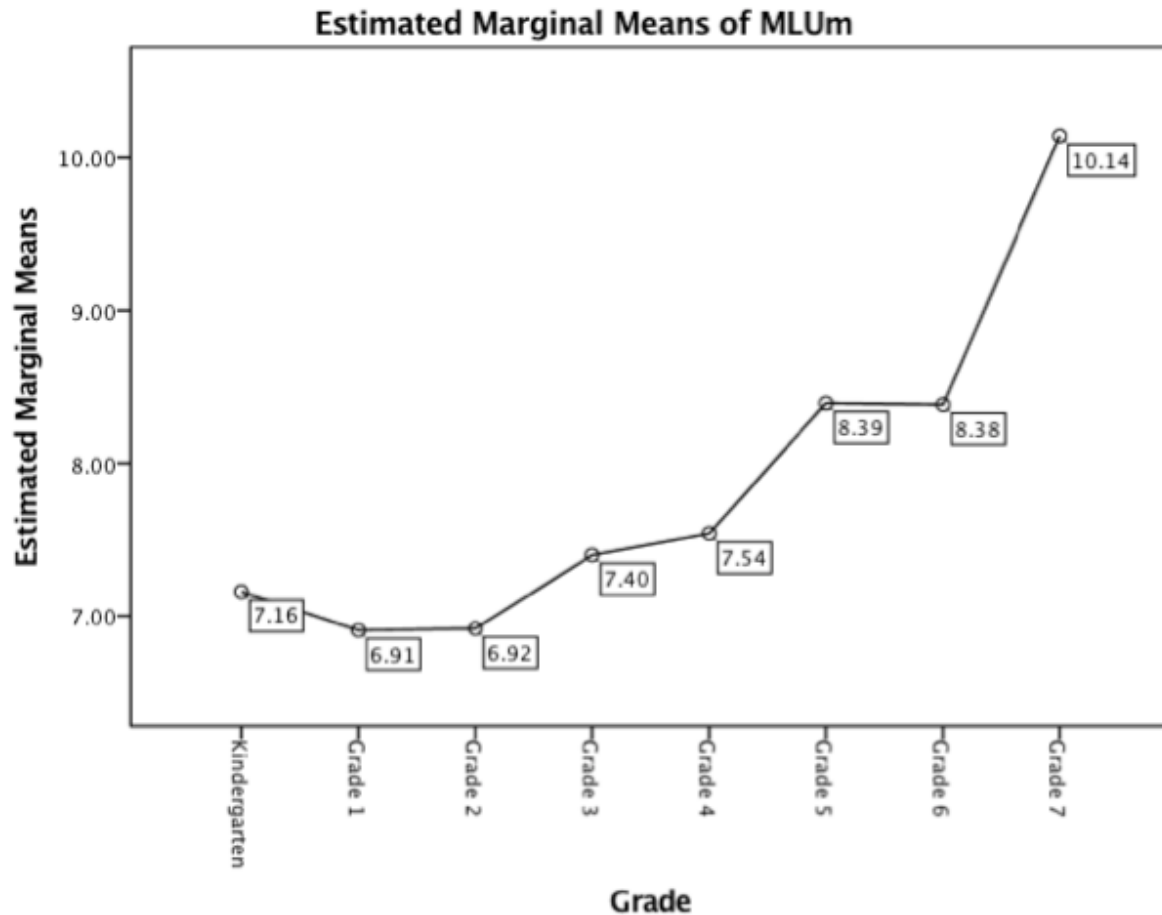
- MLU shorter than age-matched peers
- SI score less than age-matched peers



Mean Length of Utterance in words (MLUw) per Grade, all 3 years



Mean Length of Utterance in morphemes (MLUm) per Grade, all 3 years



Going forward

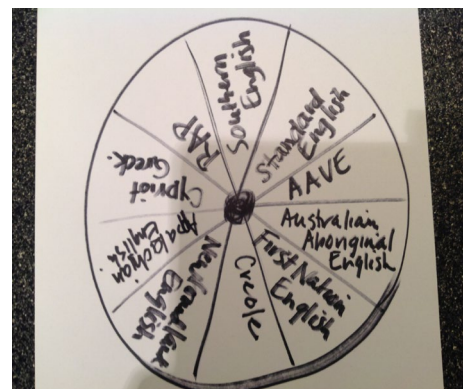


Teaching

- Verb tense may require direct instruction
- Respectful teaching

Recasting

Contrastive Analysis & Code Switching



Assessment

- Culturally appropriate assessment (e.g. dynamic assessment; non-word repetition task)
- Avoid using norms for MLU and SI
- Become familiar with local features
- Avoid under diagnosing

Stop using the word “Mistake”

- Rather we should use the word “difference” unless we specify that the difference is not the way an idea is expressed in more formal standard English.

Research!!



Let's Look for Linguistic Bias



Retrieved from <https://afn.ca/2019/05/09/afn-national-chief-bellegarde-urges-committee-support-for-federal-legislation-focused-on-first-nations-jurisdiction-for-care-of-children/>

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada, and by the faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Victoria

7-year-old female (CELF-4)

- Forgot: ... to bring my hat with me. [APHRASE]?
- Car: These kids are getting picked _____ Three of the kids are running **inside** the car. [DPREP]?
- Gave: These kids a **gaved** cereal. [DV:REG]?
- Never: These kids are walkin' on the road and the grandpa is picking them up with the dog for a walk to pick up his daughters on the way back **of** school [DPREP]?
- Running: The kids are **running and see** who will win, the red team or the blue team. [DV:ATO]? BF [DV:ING]? BF

7-year-old male (CELF-5)

- Quickly: Quickly the girl ____ going out ____ soccer. [DV:ACOPAUX]? BF Infinitive BF
- When: When he **got fall** down on the bike.
- Best: The best is people, both of them. [TOP]?
- Car: The car is dropping ____ the boys. [DPREP]?

8-year-old female (CELF-4)

- Children: The childrens are playing video games. BF ex: all the cattles
- Car: The childrens are going to the car to get picked up from the school
- Gave: The man gave the food for the boy. [DPREP]?
- And: It'd and my granma and grandpa and they bringed the dog to the garden. [DV:REG]
- Before: I went at this store before. [DPREP]

9-year-old female (CELF-4)

- Before: Before they're done scanning, the old lady can scan her food
- Until: Until the shop opens, she can buy a bicycle
- Otherwise: Otherwise, instead of paying, his friends pay for the food
- Neither: Neither... I don't know
- However: However, the students are doing a project with their science teacher

LOTS TO BE DONE!!!

