

The Evolution of a Vernacular: Insights into the Motivations for Linguistic Change through Longitudinal Case Study Research

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Longitudinal Case Studies

- Case studies are sometimes seen as less desirable than other approaches, but as this presentation shows, case studies enable researchers to generate hypotheses and explore motivations in ways other studies cannot
- The data for this longitudinal case study come from the Springville Project, a project that has at its heart a 31-year panel survey that began in 1988
- A detailed examination of the data from one of the panelists will:
 - show how data from individuals mirror data from the larger population
 - provide insights into the motivation for change
 - illustrate some of the pitfalls of analyzing data from individuals

The Springville Project - Overview

- Long term ethnolinguistic study of a rural Texas village (population c. 150 in 1988 and c. 105 in the most recent census)
- After preliminary interviews in 1986-87, the study began in the summer of 1988 and is still ongoing
- Fieldwork centered around a general store/post office that was the primary site of social interaction in the village
- The corpus includes recordings from 103 residents born between 1893-2002: 67 African Americans, 24 Anglos, and 12 Latinos
- The project includes a panel survey of 19 African Americans whose dates of birth range from 1912 to 2002, a cross-section of the population

Summary of Fieldwork

- Multiple interviews
 - over half of the speakers have been recorded on multiple occasions
- Group interviews
 - all but four of the speakers recorded individually have also been recorded in either group sessions or site studies
- Site studies (recordings at sites of linguistic interaction e.g., store, beer joint)
 - over a third of the A/A and white speakers have been recorded in site studies, many on multiple occasions
- Multiple contexts
 - over half of the speakers have been recorded in multiple contexts
- Extensive data
 - 2+ million word corpus transcribed word-for-word

INF	'88	'89	'91	'92	'94	'95	'96	'97	'98	'99	'00	'02	'06	'09	'10	'14	'15	'18	'19	STATUS
Mary b. 1912	+++			+			+													deceased 1996
Wallace b. 1913	+++ ++	+++ +	+		+	+				+										deceased 2002
Bell b. 1931														+					+	Springville
Slim b. 1932	++			+					+				++							deceased 2007
Newman b. 1934	+			++			+				+					+		+		Houston
Pinky b. 1936	++	+		+																deceased 2000
Elsie b. 1939		+			+						+							++		deceased 2019
Bud b. 1940												++						++	+	Springville
Bobby b. 1949	+++	++				+	+	+++ +	+		++	+	+					+++ +	+	Johnson
Vanessa b. 1961	+++ ++	+++ +++ ++	++	++		+	++++ +	+++ ++	+	+	+++ +			+++	+	++	+	+++ +		Granger
Lonnie b. 1965	+++ ++	+						+++ +										+		Johnson
AJ b. 1971							+	+			+	+								unknown
Sheila b. 1979	++	++	++	++			+++	+++	+		++			+		+		++		Houston
Anthony b. 1980	+	+	+		+	+	+++	+++ +	++	++	++					+		+		Granger
Brandy b. 1982	++	++	+		+	+	++++ ++++ ++++	+++ ++	++ ++ ++	++ ++ ++	+	++		++	+++	+	+	+++	+	Wilson
Samantha b. 1982	+					+	+	++	++ ++ +	++ ++ +								+		Wilson
Tina b. 1995								++	++		+++	+++		++	++	+	+			Houston
Keisha b. 1996											++	+++		++	++	+	+	+	+	Wilson
Jerica b. 2002														+++	+++			+	++	Wilson

Table 1:
Springville
Panel Study
Participants

The Longitudinal Case Study – Brandy

- The subject of this case study is one of the 19 panelists from the panel survey, Brandy
 - Born in 1982
 - First recorded in 1988 when she was six, and has been recorded 50 times over a 31-year period
 - 46 of the interviews have been fully transcribed
- Between 1988 and 2002 there were only five years when she was not recorded (1990, 1992, 1993, and 2001)
- After 2002 she was recorded less regularly, with a seven-year gap between 2002 and 2009 and a four-year gap between 2010 and 2014
- She was recorded in 2015 and then three years later in 2018, and a little over two weeks ago in 2019

DATE	INTERVIEW TYPE		DATE	INTERVIEW TYPE		DATE	INTERVIEW TYPE
7/18/88	Group		3/13/97	Group		7/7/09	Group
7/28/88	Group		3/14/97	Group		7/8/09	Group
2/27/89	Site Study		3/16/97	Individual		4/27/10	Individual
3/2/89	Group		8/30/97	Group		4/28/10	Group
1/12/91	Group		9/1/97	Community FW		4/29/10	Individual
7/27/94	Group		2/22/98	Group		7/12/14	Group
11/16/95	Group		9/2/98	Community FW		4/18/15	Group
3/1/96 (3)	Community FW		11/25/98	Community FW		3/15/18	Individual
3/15/96 (2)	Diary		12/8/98	Community FW		3/15/18	Group
4/1/96 (2)	Diary		1/1/99 (5)	Community FW		9/7/18	Individual
4/10/96	Community FW		1/6/99	Group		9/7/18 (2)	Group
5/15/96	Group		11/19/00	Group		8/23/19	Group
6/27/96	Individual		6/26/02	Group			
6/27/96 (2)	Group		6/27/02	Group			

Table 2: Dates and types of interviews for Brandy b. 1982

Brandy 3/2/1989

B: Papa gave me a dollar bill. Our oldes' Papa, Big Mama . . . [A. overlaps]

A: My mama helped her found it.

B: . . . my mama an' uh, Roberta. I had lots of dollars. I gave the dollars to Mama. We went to McDonald's. We went an' got – get some ice cream soda.

A: [to L. overlapping J.] You color that all too red an' stuff.

S: Well it's mine.

PCA: Oooh.

B: We played on those toys that they have outside.

PCA: Yeah.

B: We played on those.

Brandy 1/6/1999

I think they signed a petition. Uh, they had a petition agains' him for uh, sayin' that he couldn', he couldn' spank people's kids unless they gave him permission to. But I think he was, uh, hittin' kids without askin' for permission even if the parents did sign that paper. 'Cause my, my step mama – when I was workin' over there durin' the summertime, that lady that was uh, teachin' my little brothers for summer school, she useta be mean to them. An' uh, one day me an' [name], an' we were all in the cafeteria workin', an' she got my little brother, she grabbed him by his arm an' jus' jerked him out by his arm like that. An' I didn' get a chance to see it. An' [name] say, she say, “Nuh uh,” she say, “[name],” she said, “Did you see that?” An' I was like, “What you talkin' about?” She said, “Did you see how that teacher did to your little brother?”

She said, “She ain’ got no right doin’ that to a little boy like that. He ain’ nothin’ but a kid.” Then I looked at her an’ I asked her, I said, “What you doin’ snatchin’ my brother?” An’ she said she ain’t snatch him. I said, “All right.” An’ I told my daddy an’ them on her. An’ [name] went over there an’ she told him that they better not ever snatch her kids like that. ‘Cause them kids, them ain’ no kids that they’re s’poseta be snatchin’ like that. An’ she, she was jus’ mean to ‘em.

Brandy 7/8/2009

An' I was in City Trend an' I saw this guy that I useta go to school with an' he was like, "Why you didn't come to the reunion?" I was like, "What reunion?" You know he was like, "We had, you know the past two class reunion." An' I was like, "I didn't know anything about it." I was like, "I didn't know anything about it, you know. Um, they had it an' I ain't even know they had it. An' I was, you know, I told him, I was like, "You know nex' time . . ." I had gave him my cell phone number. I was like, "Nex' time if yall, you know, call me an' let me know." 'Cause I didn't even know that they had had one.

Brandy 9/7/2018

B: OK so they let them go to this trail ride an' I don't like the trail rides anymore because like they've had shootin' at the trail rides, they have fightin' at the trail rides [Really?]. It's bad. It's not like a family deal anymore. An' I don't know how people take their kids to those things anymore.

PCA: Where was it?

B: Um, I'm not sure the one that they went to. But I know I think it was one either, either in H. or C. that they were shootin' at the weekend before she went to that trail ride. An' so I was like, "OK, why would you, why would yall let her go to a trail ride that yall were not there. Yall are the adults. Yall shoulda been there." I said, "Cuz if bullets start flyin' they don't have a name on 'em." An he's like, "Well Dale's fifty-two year old sister was there."

I said, “Well her fifty-two year old sister ain’t gonna be, when bullets go to flyin’ she not gonna be tryin’ to figure out where [name] at. She gonna be worried about her real nieces an’ nephews. She not gonna be worried about my child like that.” [Right, right]. So, an’ I told him, I said, “Yall should have asked me was it OK. Like I’m still her mama. Like she lives with me. I take care of her.”

Data from the Case Study

- The data from Brandy is extensive and includes:
 - 6954 present copula forms (including 2805 “deletable” forms)
 - 1342 third singular present forms
 - 387 invariant *be* forms
 - 1611 quotative forms (including 634 *be like* forms)

The Issue of Representativeness

- Perhaps the most obvious question about case studies regards their representativeness: representativeness must be established empirically, not assumed
- Brandy's representativeness of her age cohort in Springville (which includes 8 other speakers) can be established in two ways:
 - Through similarities in social history
 - All grew up as friends and interacted with one another on a regular basis
 - All went to the same school (total number of students = 60)
 - Four were raised by the same caregivers
 - Through similarities in the use of linguistic features

Figure 1. Comparison of Brandy to her Age Cohort for Three Vernacular Features

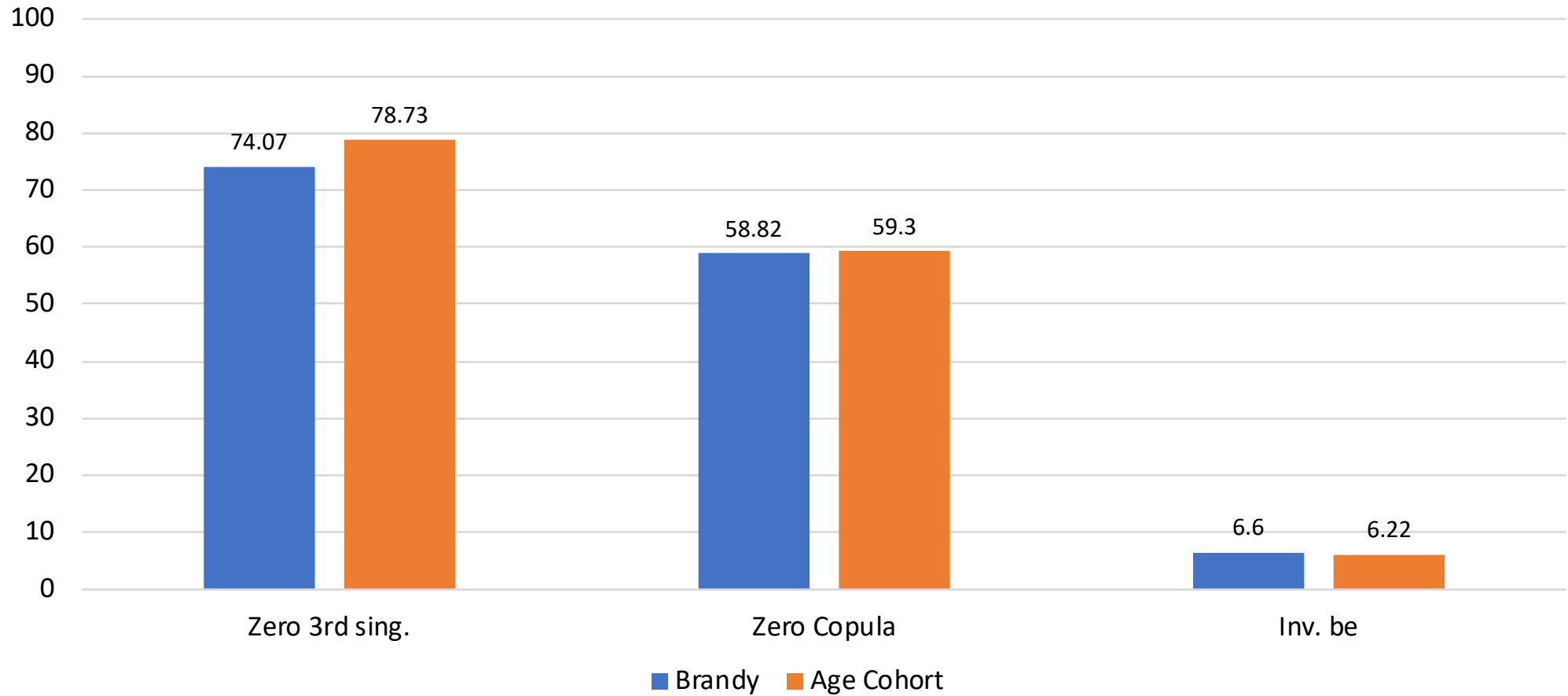


Figure 2. Distribution of quotatives in six age groups of Springville AAVE speakers
(Cukor-Avila, 2012)

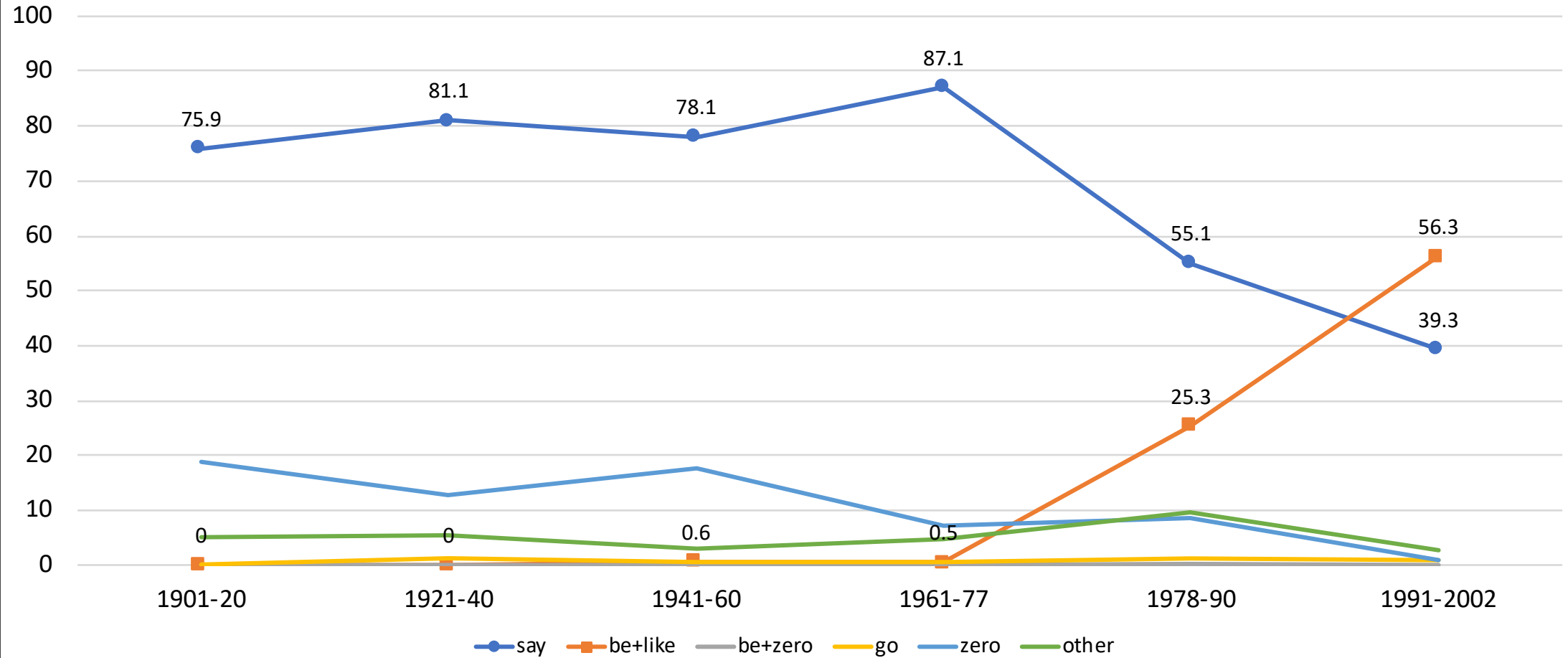
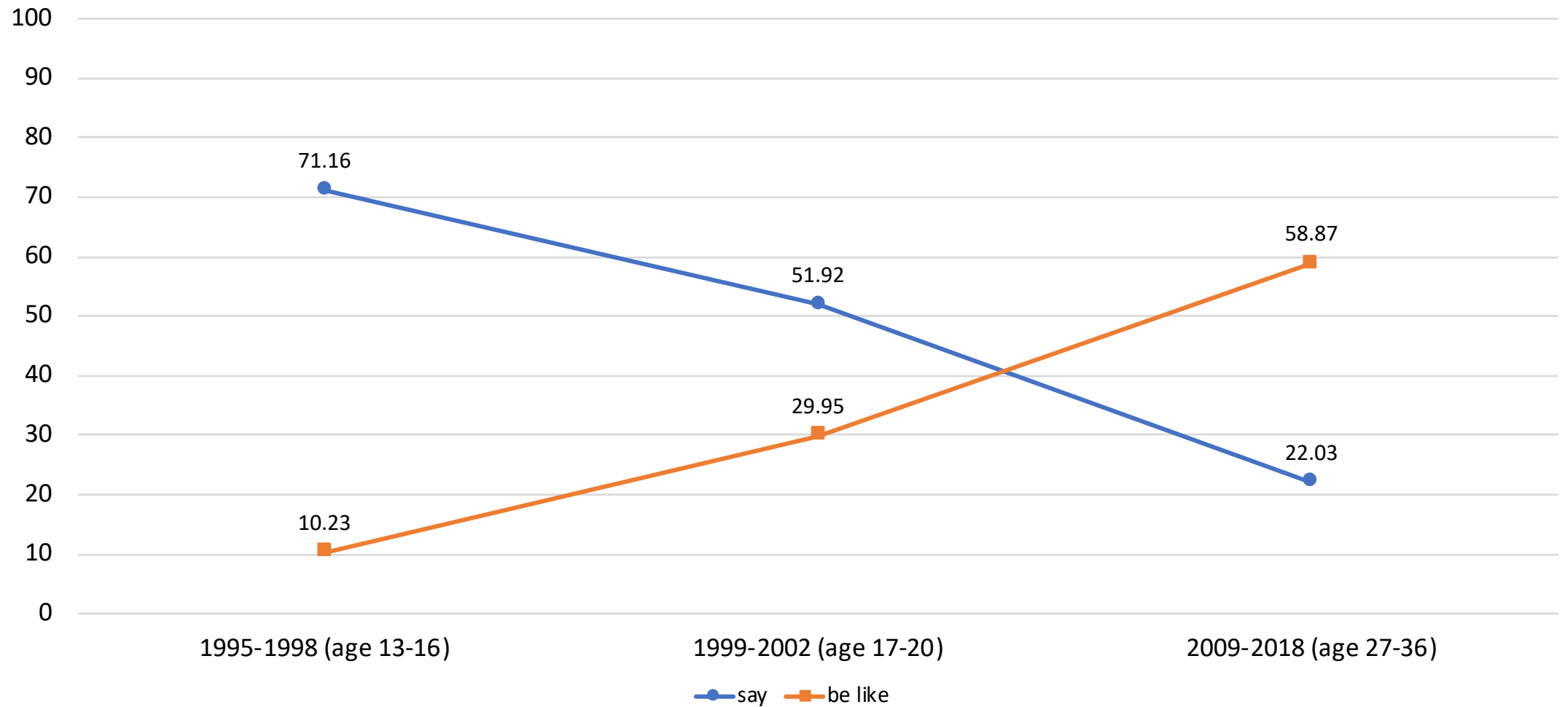


Figure 3. be like and say as a Percent of all Quotative Forms for Brandy



More Insights from the Case Study

- An “adolescent peak,” in the trajectory of change has been identified by Labov (2001) for phonological features and confirmed for morpho-syntactic features by Tagliamonte and D’Arcy (2009).
- Labov has suggested that such a peak may be “a general requirement of change in progress” (2001: 454).

Figure 4. Adolescent Peak for Invariant *be* in Brandy's Speech Over Time

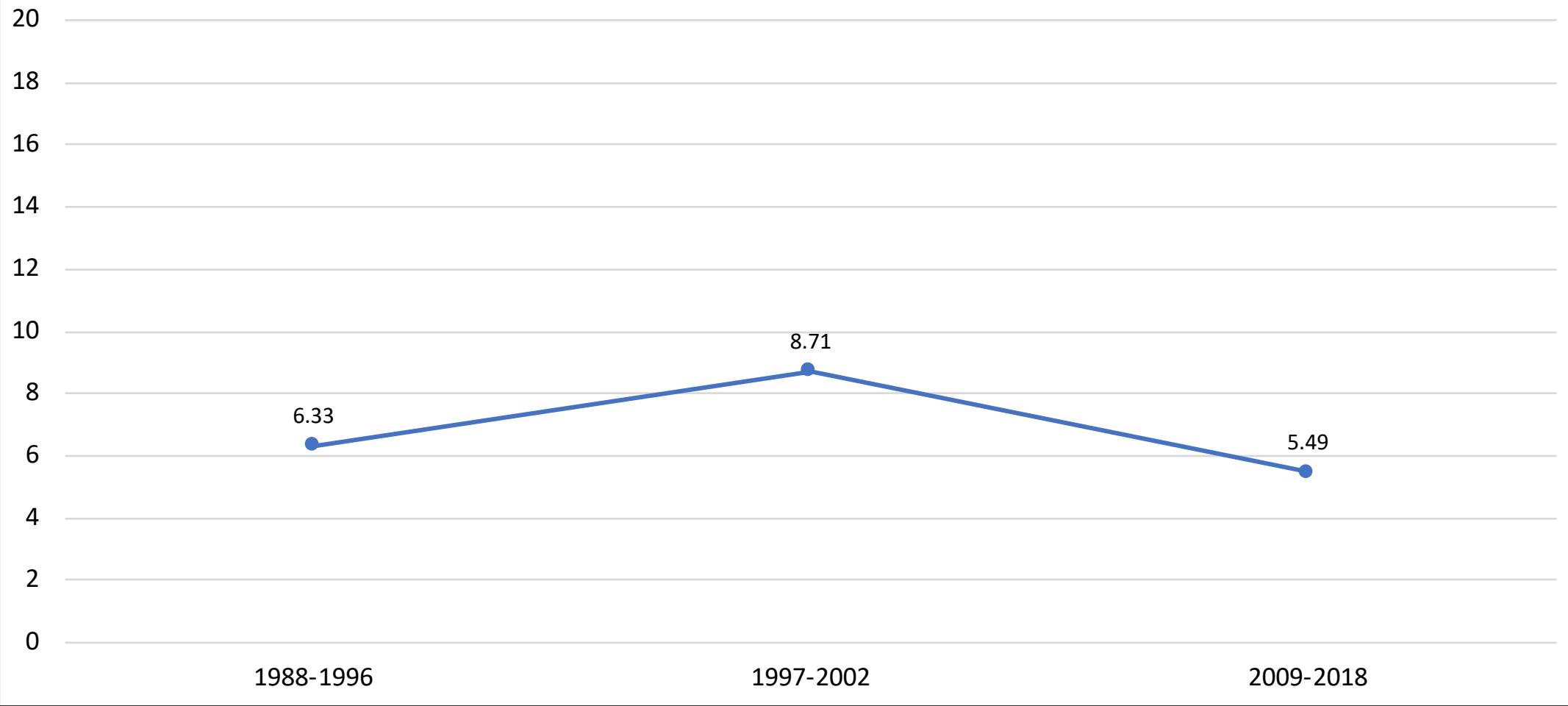


Figure 5. Adolescent Peak for Zero 3rd Singular and Zero Copula in Brandy's Speech Over Time

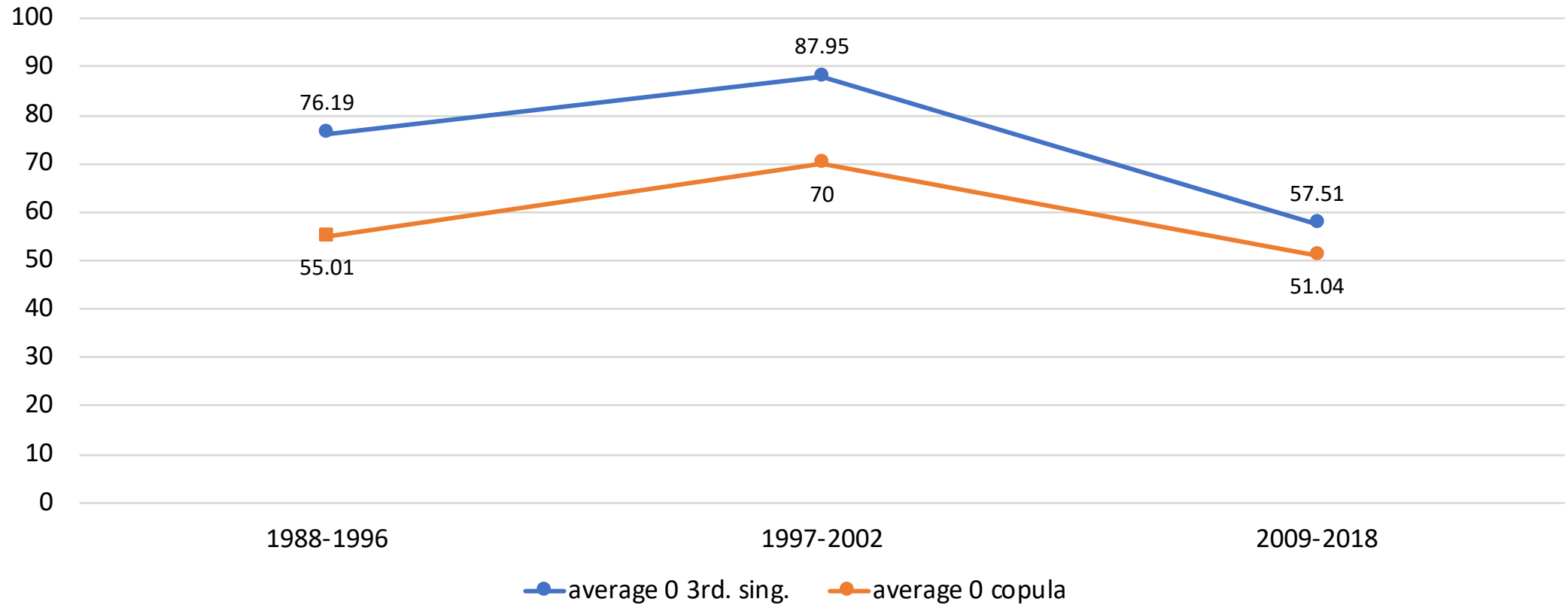
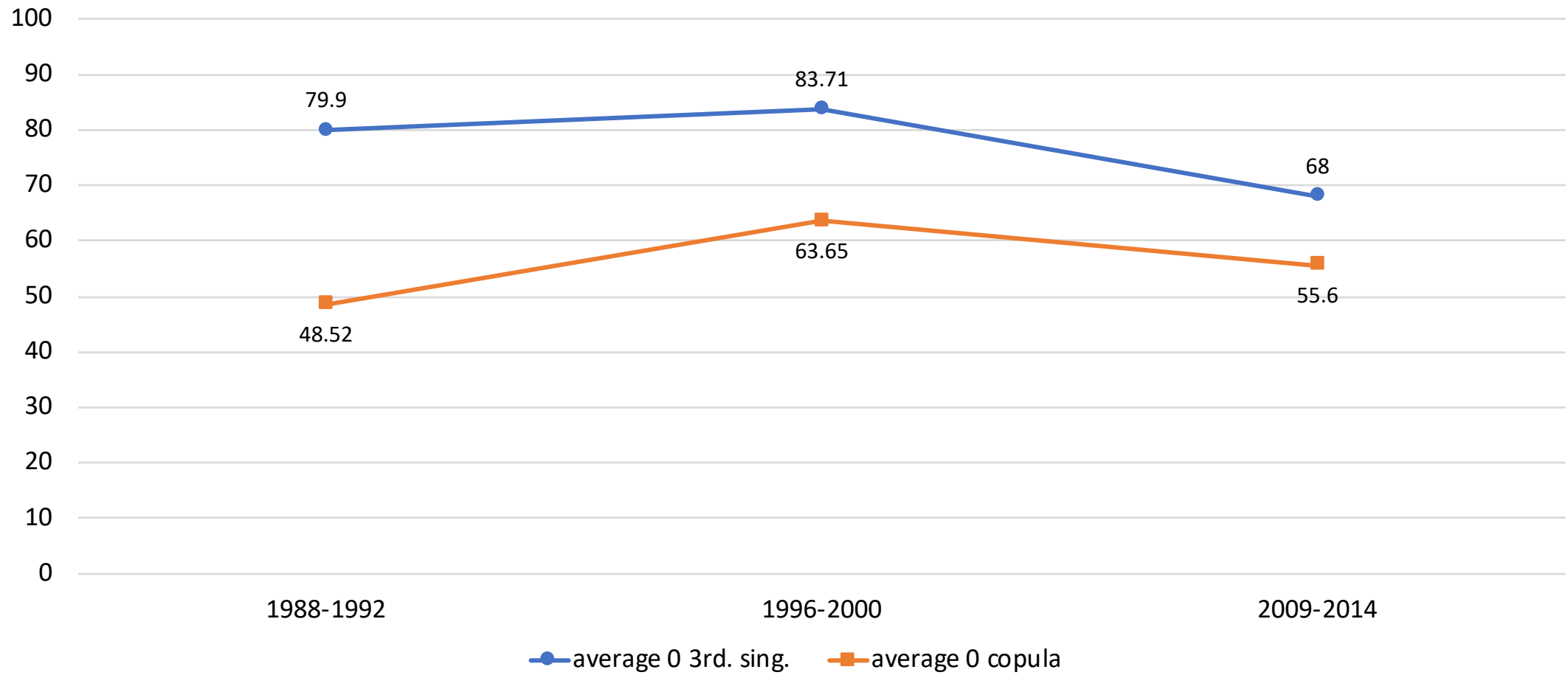


Figure 6. Adolescent Peak for Zero 3rd Singular and Zero Copula in Sheila's Speech Over Time



A Word of Caution in Drawing Conclusions

- The “adolescent peak” as a more general feature of late adolescent/young adult speech is appealing – BUT – we cannot rule out other factors that may be creating the peak such as:
 - Gaps in contact
 - Interview type
 - Number of tokens

Figure 7. Variation in the Use of Zero Copula 1988-2018 for Brandy

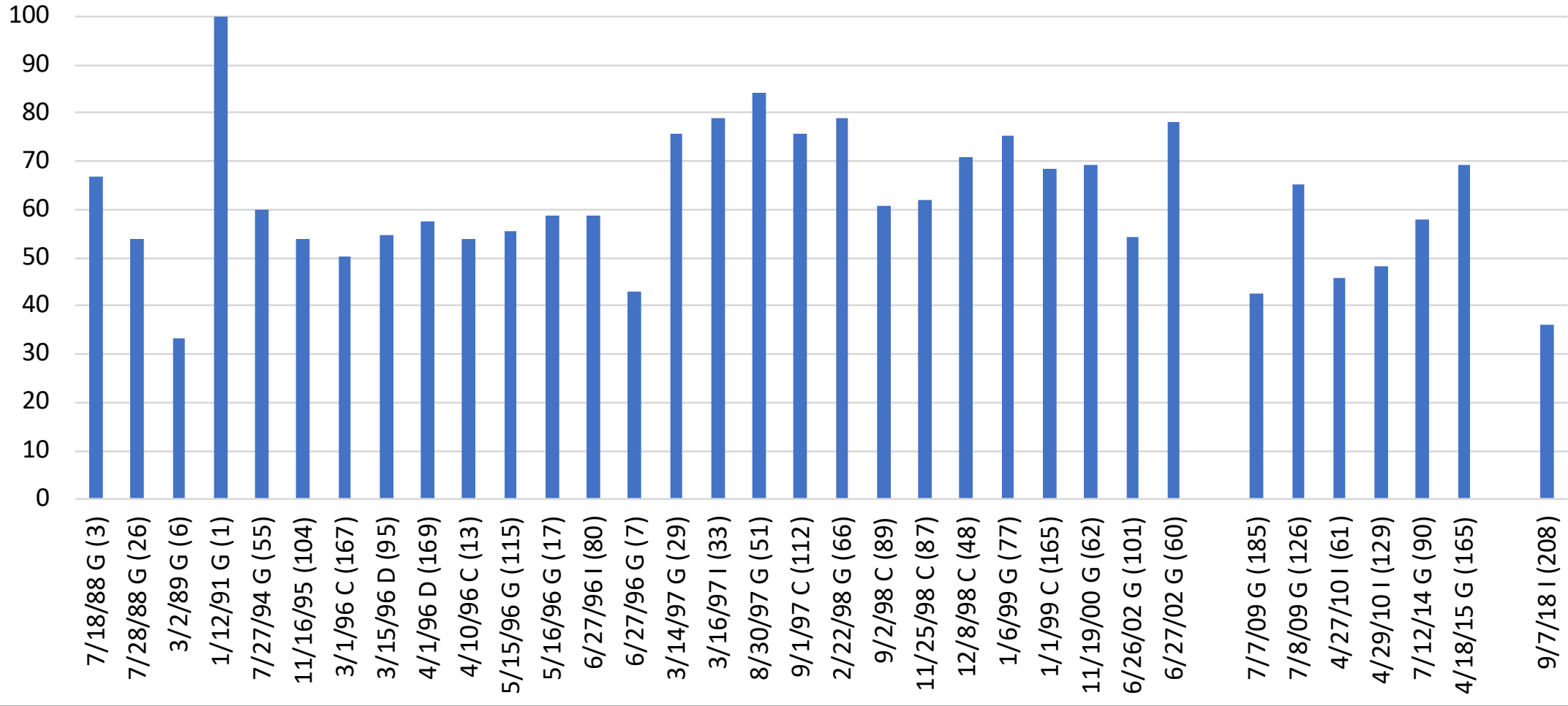


Figure 8. Variation in the Use of Zero 3rd Singular -s 1988-2018 for Brandy

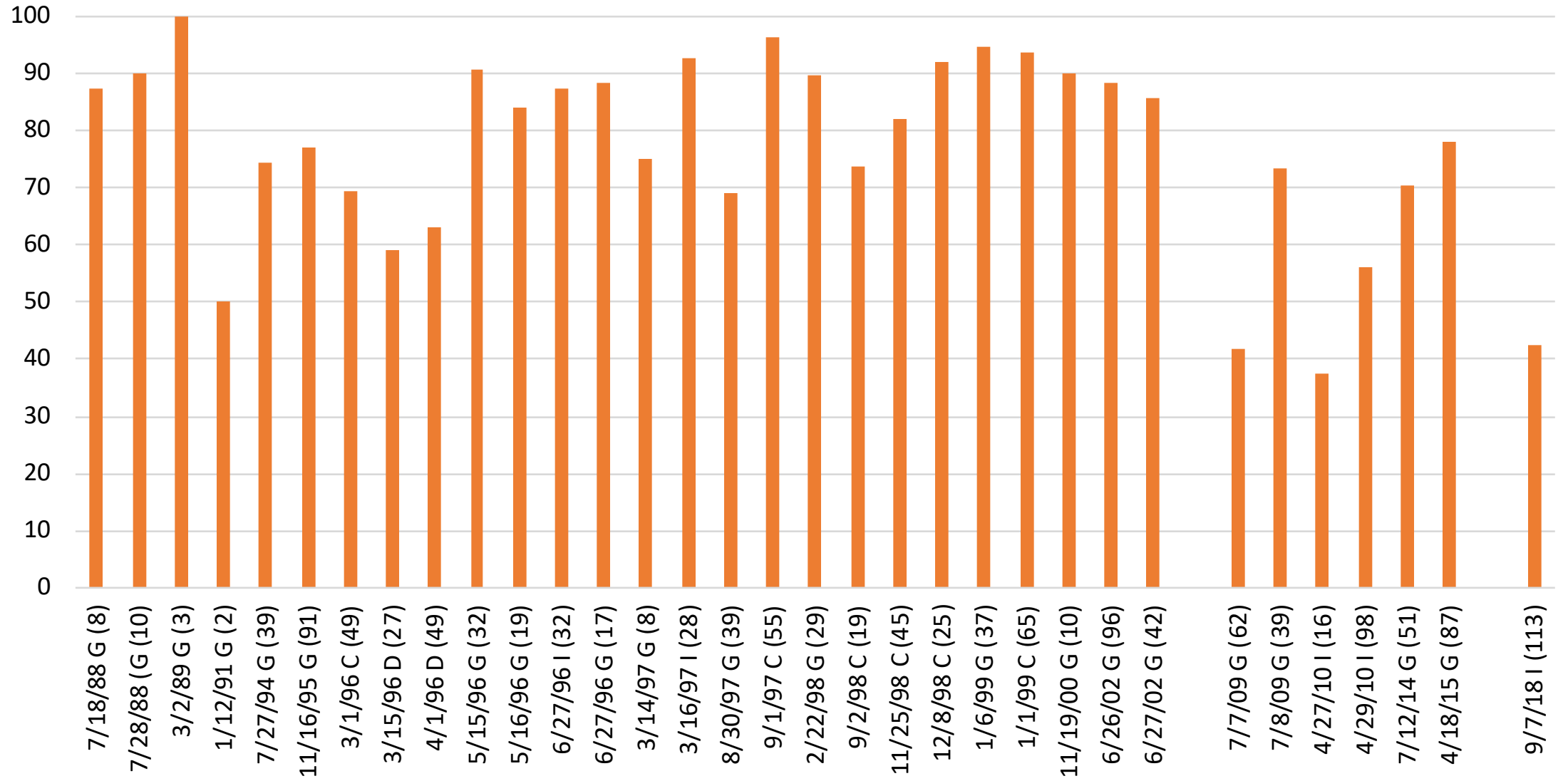
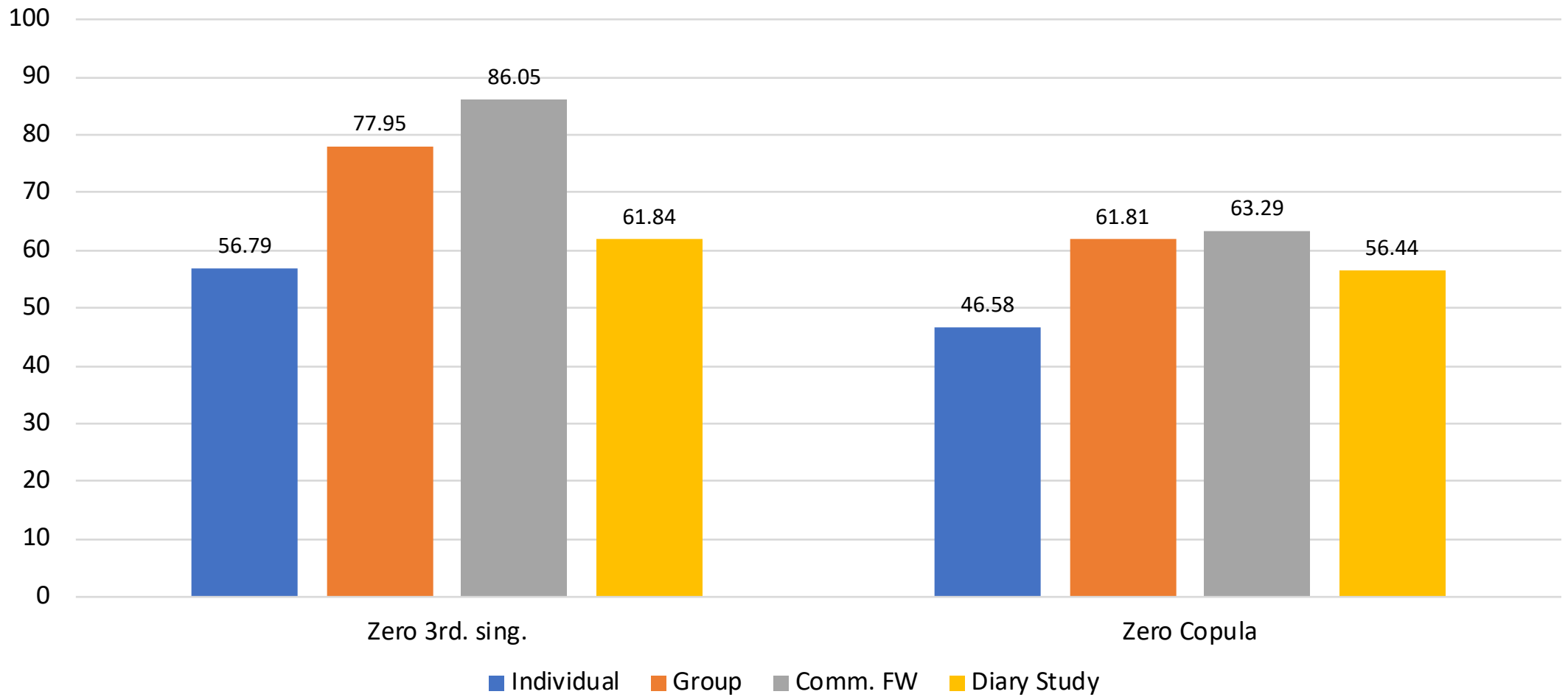


Figure 9. Percent of Zero 3rd singular and Zero Copula by Interview Type for Brandy



The Effect of Number of Tokens

Figure 10. Effect of Number of Tokens on Group Variation for Zero 3rd sing. in the Springville Corpus (Cukor-Avila and Bailey, 2015)

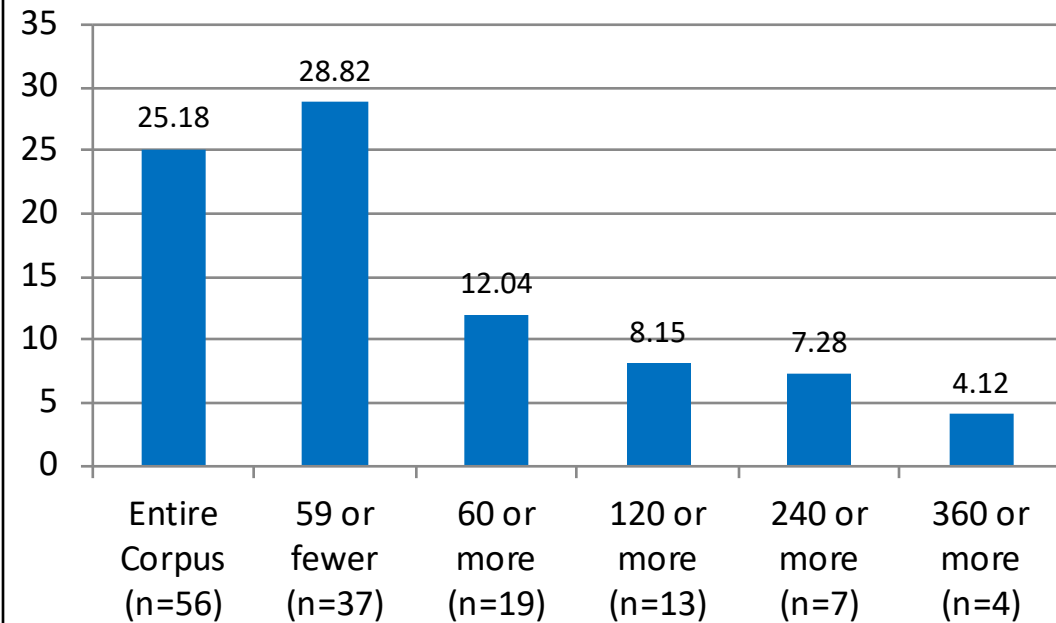
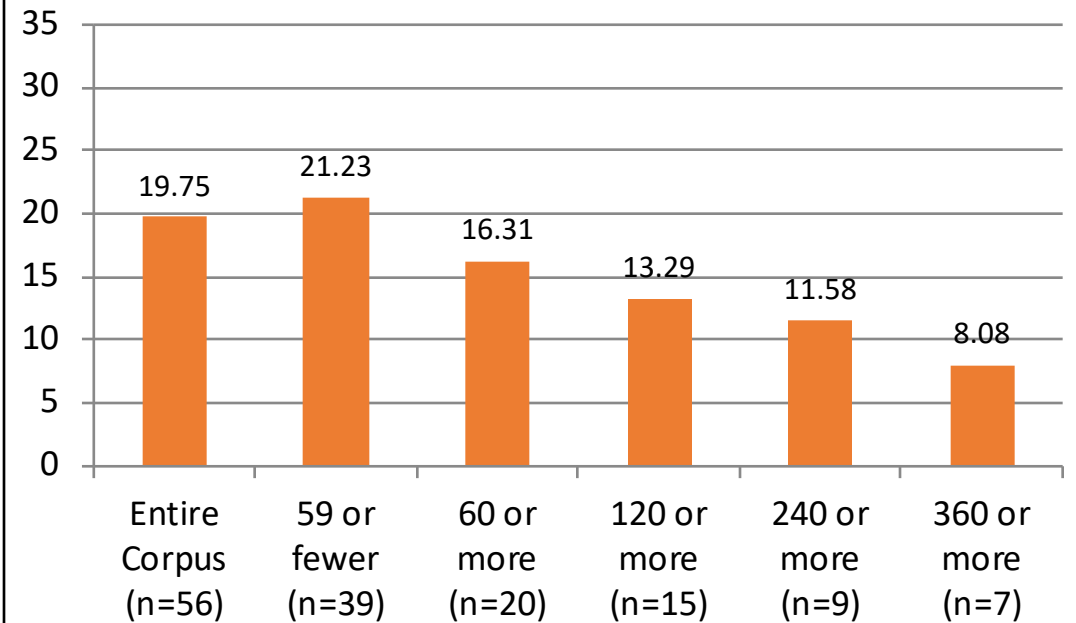


Figure 11. Effect of Number of Tokens on Group Variation for Zero copula in the Springville Corpus (Cukor-Avila and Bailey, 2015)



Conclusions

- Longitudinal case studies are an important part of the spectrum of methods available to LVC researchers
- The data from Brandy suggest that longitudinal case studies can be enormously insightful
 - Case studies can help clarify the motives for language change and show exactly when and how change takes place
 - Case studies can also shed light on basic issues such as the “adolescent peak”
- As the data from Springville show, conclusions from studies of individuals (and similarly from studies of groups of speakers) must always take into account the possibility that the results may be a consequence of methodological effects on the data and not indicative of actual change