

# Exploring the Grammar of Non-Standardized Languages: A Case Study of Hawai'i Creole

標準化されていない言語の文法研究：  
ハワイ・クレオール的事例

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INOUE Aya

井上 彩

言語の文法的変異と変化は産出される発話だけでなく、発話の認識にも当然起こっている。しかし文法認識における変異は産出された文法における変異よりも観察が難しい。ことに、標準化されていない言語は概して標準化されている言語よりも文法的変異が広範に見られるため、認識される文法の変異をとらえることは非常に困難である。

文法研究に有効な手法としては、母語話者による文法性判断が標準化されている言語の文法研究には有効であるが、クレオール言語などの変異の多い標準化されていない言語の文法研究には母語話者の言語外的要因によって判断が大幅に異なるためにあまり効果的ではない。そこで、このような言語の文法的変異を分析するためには自然な発話に現れる産出された文法使用を統計的手法を用いて分析することが多い。しかし、この手法では現在の話者によって頻繁に産出されない文法の使用に関しては十分な数の使用例を集めることができず、文法的変異を記述することができない。

本論では、ケース・スタディとして米国ハワイ州で使用されている英語系クレオールであるハワイ・クレオール (HC) のアスペクト標識である *stay* の認識に関わる文法的変異の研究で用いた方法論を紹介して、母語話者による文法性判断を用いた調査も、デザインの仕方によっては標準化されていない言語の文法特徴を記述する効果的な手法となりうることを示す。HC の継続相を示す標識である *stay* は HC に特徴的な文法としてハワイ州では広く知られている。しかし現在では実際の自然な発話では HC 話者によってあまり頻繁に産出されないことから統計的な手法でその変異の特徴を分析することが難しい状況にある。文法性判断を問う質問票を用いて収集したデータの分析を通して *stay* の文法的変異に関して得られた知見を明らかにし、文法性の認識における変異を探る方法論を提案する。

Keywords: Grammatical Variation, Grammaticality Judgment, Hawai'i Creole

文法的変異、文法性判断、ハワイ・クレオール

## 0. Introduction

Grammatical variation and change occurs not only in production but also in perception (Janson 1983:24). However, the variation in perception grammar is more difficult to elicit than the variation in production grammar, especially in the case of non-standard language with extensive variation. Previous studies of creole languages often mention the difficulty in eliciting grammaticality on a certain structure due to the speakers' attitude towards "non-standard" language. For instance, Velupillai's (2003:19) extensive work on the Tense-Mood-Aspect system of Hawai'i Creole notes that;

When in the field I am constantly faced with the opinion that HCE [Hawaii Creole English] is just a lazy way of talking English. Consequently, many questions about constructions will be answered with an "anything goes" type of statement. Since HCE is viewed as some kind of "lazy talk", it is often considered to be entirely without structure and questions relating to its structure are—from that perspective—hardly answerable (Velupillai 2003:19).

The grammaticality judgment survey which is often employed in the study of standardized languages is not considered to be very effective when it comes to the examination of the grammar of non-standard languages with extensive variation, which is often the case with creole languages.

What makes it difficult to use grammaticality judgment surveys for the study of creole languages? First, creole languages are generally involved with extensive variation, which is conditioned linguistically as well as socially. Second, when it comes to creole grammars, it is pointed out that a different level of prescriptiveness is applied by the native speakers. More specifically, people tend to be more permissive about accepting unfamiliar sentences. Third, creole languages are typically stigmatized and they often lack legitimacy as a full fledged language. Because of this, the attitudes such as "just any sentence is okay" is often observed as described above by Velupillai (2003).

The goal of this study is to develop a method of grammaticality judgment survey that works for creole languages. I focus on the following components in designing a survey. First, it is important to have a population sample that is stratified by the relevant social factors to see the effects of the social background of the speakers. I have chosen age and gender for my case study, but they can be other important social factors depending on the purpose of the study. As for the materials of the survey, since most of the creole languages are used primary as spoken languages, it is important to have audio stimuli. Also, if a certain population of the creole speaking communities may not be sensitive to the creole grammar, it is important to develop control stimuli to diagnose familiarity with the creole grammar. As for the survey design, the descriptions for the grammaticality were developed so as to be sensitive to the variability of creole language. More specifically, in a highly

variable language, there are several different forms that are grammatical. Each speaker may be familiar with all the variable forms, or s/he may be familiar with only some of the variable forms with different levels of familiarity. The descriptions in the survey must provide the choice that matches the level of familiarities with the form.

In administrating the survey, one on one sessions rather than collective administration may work better since in one on one sessions, the administrator can make sure that the participants understand the procedure and objective of the survey. Also, in order to collect meta-linguistic comments that may be critical for the results of the survey, the whole session was recorded. Details about the survey methodology are presented in section 2.

The present paper argues that grammaticality judgment can be an effective tool to investigate grammatical variation of creole languages when designed appropriately. The empirical base for this study is the examination of the aspect marker/copula *stay* in Hawai'i Creole (HC), an English-based creole spoken in the islands of Hawai'i. Since HC is locally known as "Pidgin" among native speakers, it is also referred to as "Pidgin" in speaker-oriented contexts of this paper. Description of the *stay* as an aspectual marker and a copula will be provided in section 1 below.

### 1. Aspect marker/copula *stay* in Hawai'i Creole

As a case study, I present the results of the grammaticality judgment survey I conducted on the use of aspect marker and copula *stay* in HC. The form *stay* which is pronounced as *ste* or *stei* has two major functions. One of its functions is as an aspect marker, and the other function is as a copula. It is not rare in creole grammar that the progressive marker takes the same phonetic form as the locative copula (Holm 1988:155-156). When it is used as an aspect marker, *stay* is mostly used as a progressive aspect marker as in (1) currently. *Stay* is also used as a copula with adjectival and locative phrases as in (2).

- (1) Aspect marker  
 Wi *ste* mekin da plaen.  
 ['We're making the plan.'] (Sakoda & Siegel 2003:60)
- (2) Copula
- a. Shi *stei* sik.  
 ['She is sick.'] (Sakoda & Siegel 2003:77)
- b. He *stay* inside da coffin.  
 ['He's inside the coffin.'] (Lum 1999:26)

Researchers and authors write HC sentences differently using different orthographies. The examples I present here reflect these different types of orthographies.

Both *stay* as an aspect marker and copula are currently involved with dynamic situations. Variability in creoles often explained as reflecting a range of language variation from the “basilect” to the “acrolect” (Alleyne 1994). The basilect refers to the variety that is most creole-like and most markedly different from the standard language (i.e., the standard variety of the lexifier), and the acrolect refers to the form of creole closest to the standard language. All the varieties that lie between the acrolect and the basilect are called mesolects. Certain grammatical features are associated with basilect. Variation in creole speech communities has also been traditionally regarded as reflecting a process of decreolization. Decreolization is typically interpreted as a development of the creole continuum in the direction of the standard variety of the lexifier, leading from basilect to mesolect to acrolect, with concomitant loss of the “earlier” forms (Escure 1997). The following paragraphs show how the variability of *stay* has been discussed in the previous studies on HC.

*Progressive vs. perfective meaning of stay with bare verbs*

*Stay* as a progressive aspect marker is involved with three different forms. It is sometimes used with bare verbs (*stay* + BV), sometimes with verb plus *-ing* form (*stay* + V *-ing*), and sometimes just the verb plus *-ing* form without the *stay* (zero + V *-ing*). Bickerton (1977) argues that the variable structure reflects a decreolization process. More specifically, Bickerton assumes that *stay* + V *-ing* represents “a semi-decreolized version” of the *stay* + BV, halfway between *stay* + BV and zero + V *-ing*. Velupillai (2003) argues that the three forms reflect different semantic meanings that each variant carries. But neither study provides quantitative evidence to support their arguments. HC speakers’ reaction to the three different forms of progressive *stay* was collected in this study but is not discussed here because it requires further data analysis.

*Stay* as an aspect marker has a different function than when used as a progressive marker when it occurs with bare verbs. According to Siegel (2000), the use of *stay* as a perfect aspect marker is relatively rare, and only recently, is it clearly demonstrated that *stay* is also used to indicate perfect aspect, as well as progressive aspect, (and generally does not mark the habitual meaning in both modern and historical examples) (Siegel, 2000:227; Sakoda & Siegel, 2003:61). Based on a large corpus of attested historical examples since the emergence of HC, Roberts (2005) comes to the conclusion that *stay* is “normally attested as marking the progressive” in her corpus. Therefore, for this construction of *stay* + BV, *stay* is ambiguous between the progressive and perfect function, but previous studies asserts that the use of *stay* as a perfect aspect marker is very rare.

*Wen + stay construction*

The aspect marker *stay* can co-occur with the past tense marker *wen*, which I call *wen + stay* construction. This construction is used in basilectal HC to indicate past progressive, but its use is rare, and mesolectal and acrolectal speakers use *was + V -ing* instead of *wen + stay* construction. *Wen + stay* construction is very rarely observed in the production data, and often argued to be an obsolete feature in modern HC. Reaction to this construction reveals how current HC speakers recognize obsolete, unfamiliar sounding HC features.

*Stay copula with permanent and non-permanent adjectives*

Finally, when *stay* is used as a copula with adjectival phrases, there is a co-occurrence constraint involved. It is grammatical to use *stay* with adjectives that denote non-permanent quality, but it is not grammatical to use *stay* with adjectives that denote permanent quality. For example, the sentences “He *stay* free aswhy [‘Because he is free’]” and “She *stay* sick [‘She is sick’]” are both acceptable because *stay* is used before adjectives “free” or “sick” that denote a non-permanent, non-intrinsic quality. The sentence “Da wahine *stay* short [‘The woman is short’]”, on the other hand, is not acceptable because the adjective “short” denotes a permanent, intrinsic quality (Sakoda and Siegel 2003:77-8). Siegel (2008:259-264), reports the cases of “covert decreolization” where “the form of the creole remains but its function, or the way it is used, has changed from what it was originally, and the change seems to be in the direction of the lexifier English.” The HC copula *stay* is one of the features that Siegel demonstrates to illustrate covert decreolization. In HC grammar, *stay* is used before locatives and adjectives that denotes a temporally state, but not before NPs. Yet examples of recent UH use show that *stay* is being used before NPs in equational sentences. Siegel observes that it seems the HC copula *stay* is now being used in all the same contexts as the standard English copula *to be*. It is interesting to see if most of the current HC speakers are sensitive to the constraint of *stay* when used with adjectives since the standard English copula *to be* can be used with any adjectives including that ones that do not indicate temporally state.

One might wonder why we cannot analyze the variability in the use of *stay* using the standard variationist sociolinguistic methodology, such as multivariate analysis using varbrul program. It is not possible because *stay* is not used frequently enough in production data such as sociolinguistic interview settings. In Inoue (2008), interviews with eighty speakers are analyzed and more than 4,000 tokens of the usage of copula are extracted. However, only 103 tokens of *stay* out of 4,000 were observed; the frequency of *stay* is not enough to have statistical strength.

Yet although *stay* is not found frequently in current HC speech data, there is a good reason to believe that many people in the state of Hawai'i are still sensitive to the usage of *stay*. *Stay* is often mentioned as typical “Pidgin” features by native speakers. Its use is often observed in public sphere.

One of the good examples is the sign on the printer at a coffee shop in Honolulu. It says “Printer *stay* broke [emphasis mine]” which means the printer is broken. Another example is found in greeting cards that are popular among locals. On the belated birthday card, it says “ey dis card no *stay* late… *stay* on Hawaiian time [again emphasis mine, Hey, this card is not late… it’s on Hawaiian time].” *Stay* is also used in many products such as bumper stickers and T shirts made by many surf shops. These examples show that *stay* is one of the HC features that people in Hawai‘i can recognize. It would not be too much to state that for both speakers of HC and for those who do not speak HC themselves but are familiar with HC, *stay* is one of the icon features of HC.

## 2. Methodology

The present study analyzes grammaticality judgment survey questionnaire conducted in 2005 with twenty HC speakers stratified by age and gender who were born and raised in the island of Kaua‘i. In the present study, HC speakers who were born before 1965 and after 1965 are compared as the pre 60s group and the post 60s group. The speakers who were born and acquired their language after 1965 represent the population which was affected by the impact of American Statehood in 1959 and the change in attitudes towards HC. Statehood brought social impacts relevant to the linguistic environment in Hawai‘i, such as rapid development, industrialization of many urban areas on the island of O‘ahu, and a huge influx of new people. Compared with the other islands, the island of Kaua‘i is reportedly where the least “decreolized” and therefore the most basilectal varieties are found (Romaine 1994). In the survey with fifty one sentences, the speakers were asked to read and listen to the recorded HC sentences and to decide the grammaticality by selecting one of the scaled description ratings on a 6-point scale. The scaling descriptions are characterized with speakers’ own usage as well as speakers’ familiarity with other speakers’ usage.

### *Materials*

The materials are 51 HC sentences, I was also testing other features of HC, so 33 of them are relevant to this study. Fifteen sentences consist of control sentences. I used negative constructions as controls. In HC, the negative marker is *no* with verb phrases (VP) and *not* with noun phrases (NP) and adjectives (Adj).

- (3) a. My sista *not* one bus driver. (*not* + NP)  
          [‘My sister is not a bus driver.’]
- b. Da new teacher *not* nice. (*not* + Adj.)  
          [‘The new teacher is not nice.’]

- c. Dat girl *no* tell secrets. (*no* + VP)  
['That girl doesn't tell secrets.']
- d. \*Dea cat *no* cute. (*no* + Adj.)  
['Their cat is not cute.']
- e. \*My cousin *not* can do pushups. (*not* + VP)  
['My cousin cannot do pushups.']

Nine sentences are tested to see how speakers react to the *stay* + VB construction with progressive, perfect, and ambiguous contexts.

- (4) a. She *stay* clean da house. (ambiguous aspect)  
['She is cleaning the house.' or 'She has cleaned the house.']
- b. She *stay* clean da house awredi. (perfect aspect)  
['She has already cleaned the house.']
- c. She *stay* clean da house right now. (progressive aspect)  
['She is cleaning the house right now.']

Three sentences are tested to see how speakers accept the *wen* + *stay* construction.

- (5) I wen *stay* eat lunch when he wen come. (*wen+ste*)  
['I was eating lunch when he came.']

Six sentences are tested to see how speakers react to the copula *stay* with adjectives that denote permanent and non-permanent qualities.

- (6) a. My uncle *stay* mad. (non-permanent)  
['My uncle is mad.']
- b. \*Dat guy *stay* Japanese. (permanent)  
['That guy is Japanese.']

Participants are asked to choose one of the following scaling descriptions; (1) This is how I speak and how other people speak in Pidgin; (2) I don't speak like this, but I hear other people speak like this; (3) I don't speak like this, and I don't think people around me speak like this, but the sentence still sounds like good Pidgin to me and I understand the meaning; (4) I can somehow understand the meaning, but this sentence sounds weird to me; (5) Very weird; (6) Other (Please explain how the sentence sounds in your own words. [e.g., fake Pidgin, Haole Pidgin<sup>1</sup>, etc.]

*Procedures*

For each sentence, participants go through the following process. First, they are asked to listen to the recorded sentence twice. Although the audio stimuli are the primary source, a written sentence is also available as visual stimuli to refer to on the survey form if necessary. Then, participants are asked to choose one of the ratings. After the selection, they are asked to provide the translation of the sentence in 'regular' English. This process is necessary to ensure they understand the HC feature in the sentence. If they rate the sentence "weird", or "ungrammatical", they are asked to provide the reason. Providing a reason is necessary to confirm if their judgment is based on the grammar or based on the other features such as vocabulary choice or the semantic content of the sentence.

**3. Results**

Only some key results are reported in the present paper. First, the reactions of the participants to the control sentences are demonstrated in order to see their reaction to grammatical and ungrammatical structures. Figure 1 provides the mean ratings for each speaker group.

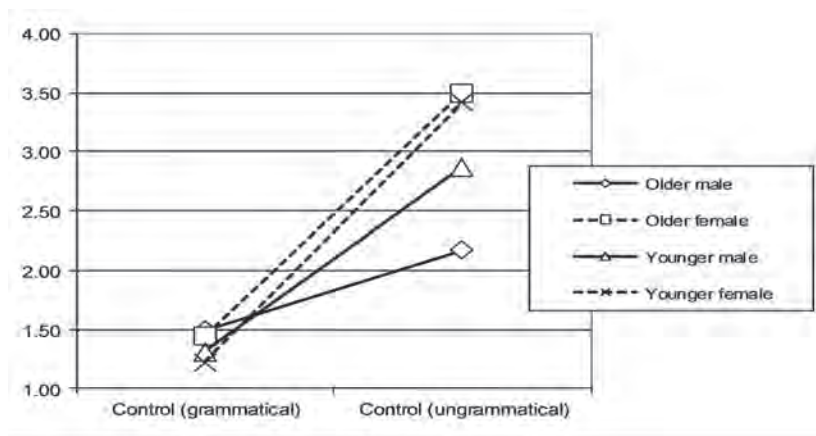


Figure 1. Mean ratings for the control sentences

<sup>1</sup> The word "haole" is used all over the state of Hawai'i mostly to refer to Caucasian population. When Caucasian non-locals who are non-native speakers of HC are trying to use HC, it is often referred to as "Haole Pidgin."



Note the range for the grammatical and ungrammatical control sentences. For grammatical sentences, speakers mean ratings fall between 1 and 2, which is expected. The rating 1 is “This is how I speak and how other people speak in Pidgin.” and the rating 2 is “I don’t speak like this, but I hear other people speak like this.” For ungrammatical sentences, speakers’ mean ratings fall between 2 to 4. Remember that the rating 3 is for the description that they don’t speak nor hear it but it still sounds like a good Pidgin. The rating 4 is the description for clearly weird, or ungrammatical sounding sentences. The four speaker groups’ reaction shows a wider range for ungrammatical sentences. Figure 1 also shows that the female speakers’ ratings which are represented with dotted lines, tend to rate ungrammatical control sentences as 3 to 4, while male speakers rate them as 2 to 3. The range of the grammatical and ungrammatical control sentences is compared with the range of the experimental sentences that contain the grammatical structures in questions.

Next, mean ratings for *stay* + bare verb construction is presented in Figure 2. This feature is tested in order to see how HC speakers comprehend *stay* + bare verb construction which is ambiguous between the progressive and perfect aspects.

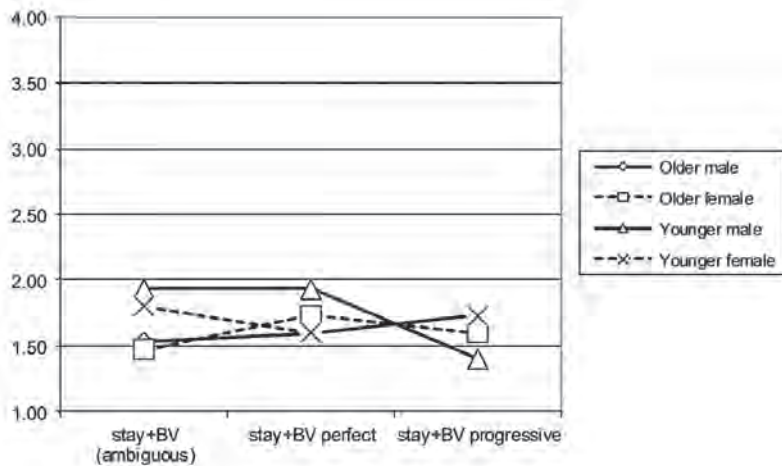


Figure 2. Mean ratings for *stay* + bare verb construction

This figure shows that the speakers generally accept all types of *stay* + bare verb constructions similarly as much as when they accept grammatical control sentences. The mean ratings fall between 1 and 2 for all three forms. This suggests that although the use of *stay* to represent perfect aspect is rarely found in the production data of current HC speech, HC speakers still recognize it as a good standing usage of *stay*.

Figure 3 shows the comparison of mean ratings for *wen* + *stay* construction and control sentences. This construction is tested to see if current HC speakers judge the combination of *wen* +

*stay* as in “He wen ste eat. [‘He was eating.]”as grammatical.

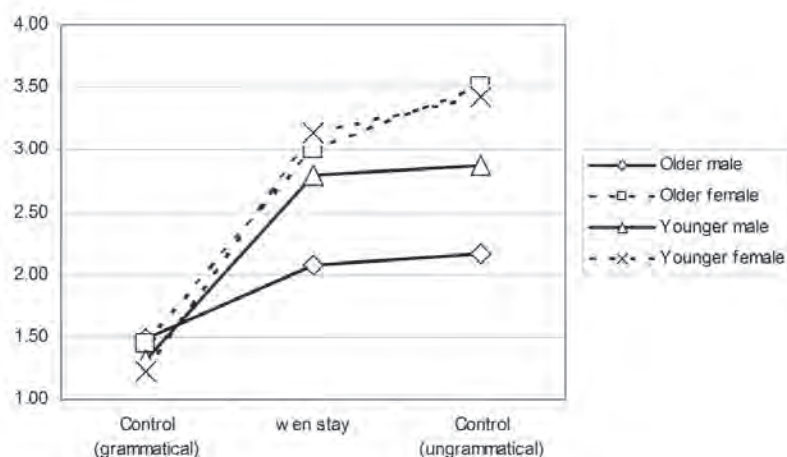


Figure 3. Mean ratings for *wen + stay* construction

When compared with the mean ratings for the grammatical control on the left and the ungrammatical controls on the right, the reactions to *wen + stay* construction is close to the reaction to the ungrammatical controls. As for the descriptions, female speakers have chosen between, 3 (not familiar but sounds like a good Pidgin) and 4 (sounds weird). On the other hand, male speakers mean ratings fall between 2 (I hear other people speak like this), and 3 (not familiar, but still sounds like a good Pidgin). Figure 3 reveals that for current HC speakers, *wen + stay* construction is an unfamiliar HC feature that sounds almost like an ungrammatical feature.

Figure 4 shows mean ratings for *stay +* adjectival predicate that denote permanent quality (ungrammatical usage) and non-permanent quality (grammatical usage). This feature is tested to see whether the current HC speakers are sensitive to the permanent and nonpermanent distinction of adjectival predicate as claimed in Sakoda & Siegel (2003).

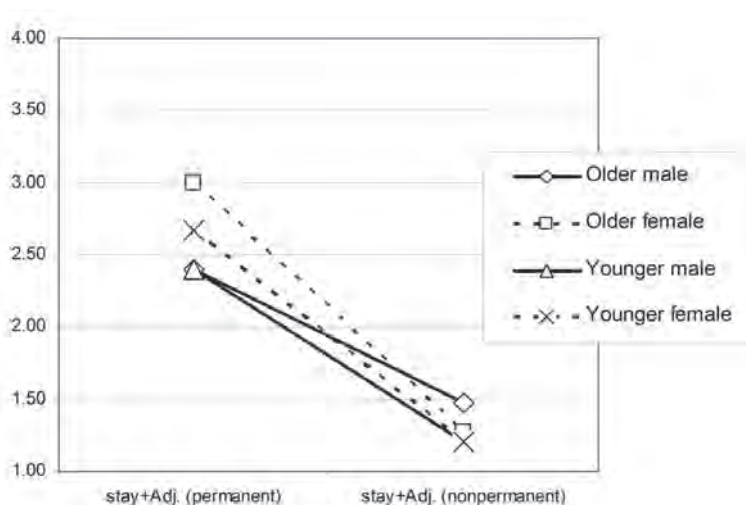


Figure 4. Mean ratings for *stay* + permanent and non-permanent adjectives

As for the co-occurrence constraint with adjectives when *stay* is used as a copula, speakers rate between 2 and 3 for ungrammatical use of *stay* with permanent adjectives. Their mean ratings fall between 1 and 2 for grammatical use of *stay* with non-permanent adjectives. Therefore, the results suggest that in the island of Kaua'i, HC speakers are still sensitive to this constraint of the use of *stay* in HC.

Overall, the results for the four HC features show that the selection of the description is sensitive to the target grammatical phenomena, and therefore, the survey design successfully reflects the variability in perception/interpretation of targeted grammar. Although the social factors are not discussed in the present paper due to limited space, the results also seem to be suggesting that gender plays an interesting role in perception grammar; female speakers are repeatedly selecting higher scale for ungrammatical or unfamiliar sentences.

#### 4. Discussion

Results show that the design of a grammaticality judgment employing a 6-point scale is effective enough to elicit speaker's grammatical perception/interpretation on the target grammatical complexity in HC. Results indicate that the current HC speakers in the island of Kaua'i; (1) do not distinguish the three variants of progressive marker *stay* claimed by Velupilai (2003); (2) accept use of *stay* in progressive and perfective context similarly; (3) are sensitive to the permanent and nonpermanent distinction of the adjectival predicate; and (4) tend to reject the combination of *wen* + *stay*. Results also imply that the age and gender of the speakers are not relevant to their interpretation.

The survey results suggest that current HC speakers in the island of Kaua'i accept the use of *stay* in progressive and perfect context similarly, and they are sensitive to the permanent and the non-permanent qualities of adjective phrases when co-occurring with copula *stay*, and they tend to react to *wen + stay* construction similarly as they do to ungrammatical sentences.

Interestingly, HC speakers react differently to the two features that are both rarely used in current production data; *stay + VB* as a perfect aspect marker, and *wen + stay* construction. For *stay* as a perfect aspect marker, HC speakers' reactions were similar to those for grammatical control sentences, whereas for the *wen + stay* construction, the HC speakers' reaction were similar to those for ungrammatical control sentences. More research is needed to explain the reason for different reactions for the equally rarely produced features.

As stated above, although some interesting tendencies were observed concerning the role of social factors, especially about the gender of the speakers, the effect of the social factors in this study is not discussed here. The discussion will be included in a separate project that is currently ongoing.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, I argue that grammaticality judgment survey can be an effective tool to investigate grammatical variation in perception in creole languages when designed and administered appropriately. The method used in this study was sensitive enough to reveal gender differences for the ungrammatical/unfamiliar grammatical features. The methodology for the survey questionnaire discussed here would also be effective for investigating the grammatical features in endangered languages. Unlike creole speaking communities that tend to be permissive about the grammaticality of creoles, speakers of endangered languages can be very strict in accepting unfamiliar sounding grammatical structures. Since it is the relative acceptability of the structures that we are depending on in this methodology, this would also work with speakers that have different attitudes towards grammaticality.

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