

“I’ve always spoke(n) like this, you see”: Participle leveling in three corpora of English

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INTRODUCTION

For some speakers, a set of English verbs with distinct preterite and past participle forms exhibits paradigm leveling, in which a single form plays two morphosyntactic roles (1–3):

- (1) I broke the door. Preterite
- (2) I’ve broken the door. Past participle
- (3) I’ve broke the door. Leveled form

GOAL

Previous accounts of participle leveling to the preterite form have been anecdotal^[1], focus on acceptability^[5], and do not address potential internal linguistic factors^[6]. We contribute the first detailed study of participle leveling to a verb’s preterite form from a variationist perspective.

CORPORA

- The Diachronic Electronic Corpus of Tyneside English (DECTE)^[2]
- The Philadelphia Neighborhood Corpus (PNC)^[4]
- Switchboard^[3]

DATA AND ANALYSIS

- 46 English verbs with prescriptively unique preterite and participle forms in a perfect construction
 - Coded for presence/absence of a modal, negation, and intervening material between the auxiliary *have* and the verb.
- Total data points = 6822
- Logistic regression of output ~ frequency in R
- Mixed effects regression of residuals for additional language-internal and language-external factors

FINDINGS

Predictor	Effect on leveling	Corpora with effect ($p < 0.05$)
Modal presence	Modal > Non-modal	Switchboard PNC DECTE
Negation	Negated > Non-negated	Switchboard DECTE
Intervening material (non-modal)	[none]	
Preterite/participle difference	see graph	Switchboard PNC DECTE
Verb frequency	Low-frequency > High-frequency	Switchboard PNC DECTE
Corpora	PNC, DECTE > Switchboard	PNC DECTE
Year of birth	Younger > Older	PNC
Sex	Male > Female	PNC
Social class/education level	Low > High	PNC DECTE

PRETERITE/PARTICIPLE DIFFERENCE

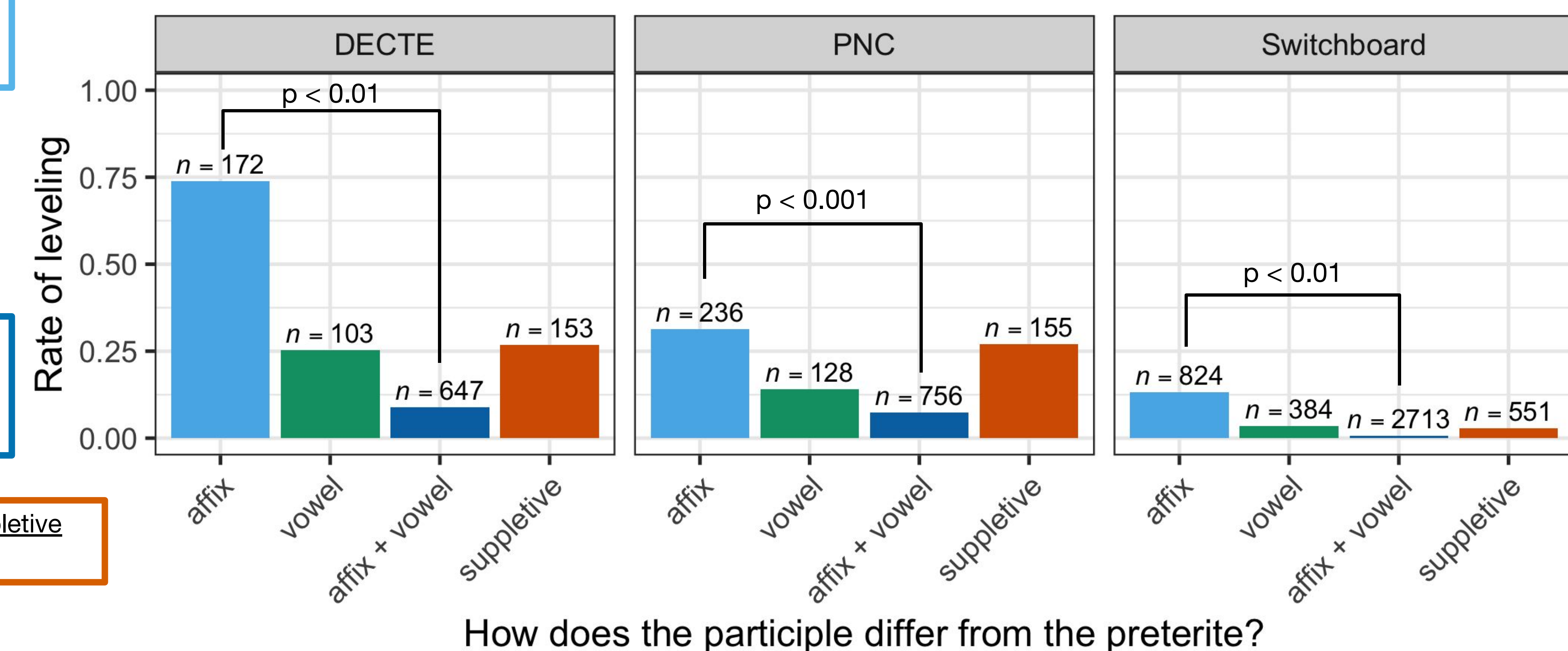
Verbs subject to leveling vary in how morphologically different their preterite & participle forms are:

Past participle = preterite + affix
e.g. *beat - beaten*
e.g. *froze - frozen*

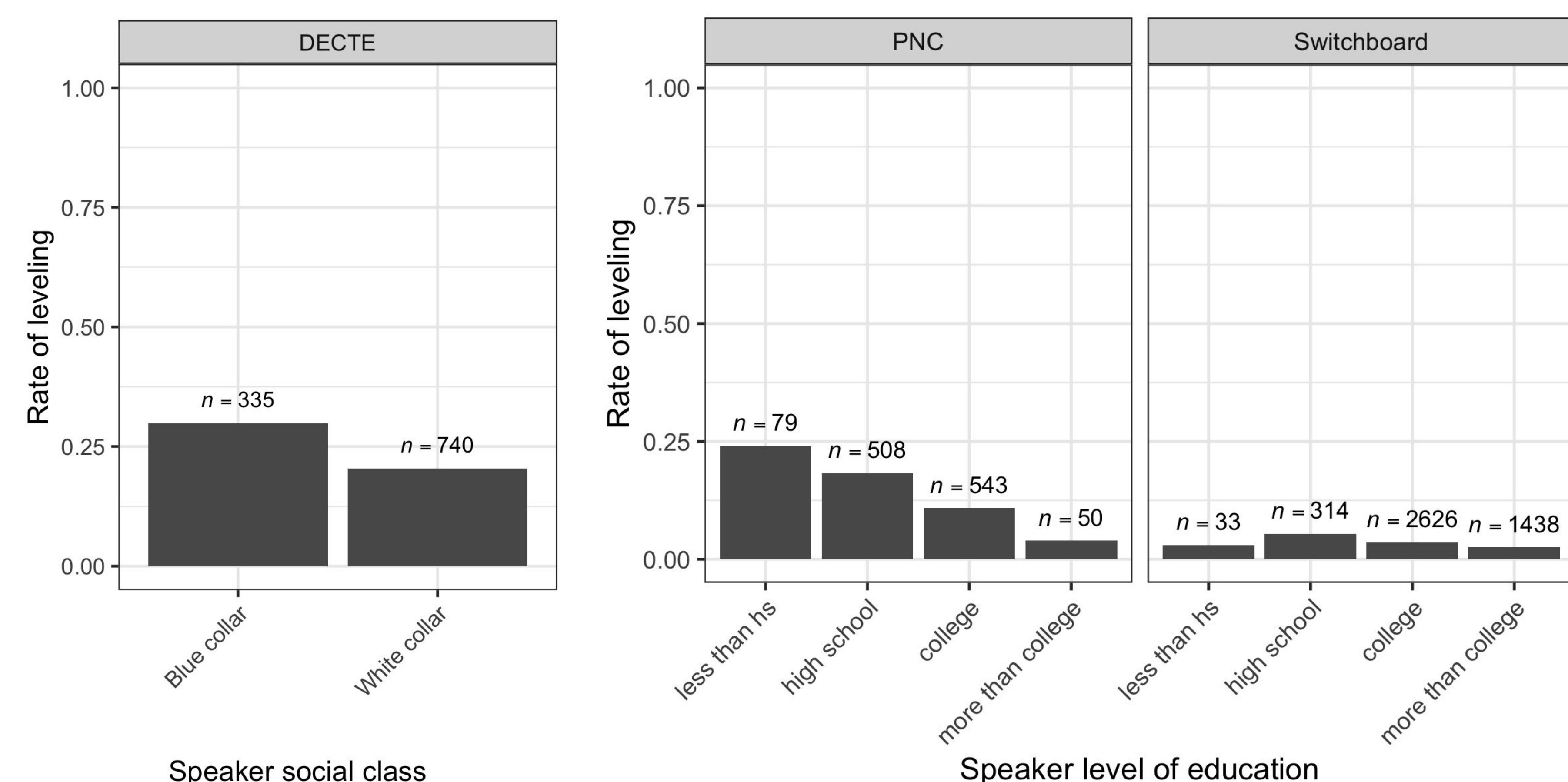
Past participle = preterite + vowel change
e.g. *began - begun*
e.g. *sang - sung*

Past participle = preterite + vowel change + affix
e.g. *knew - known*
e.g. *drove - driven*

Past participle & preterite are suppletive
e.g. *went - gone*

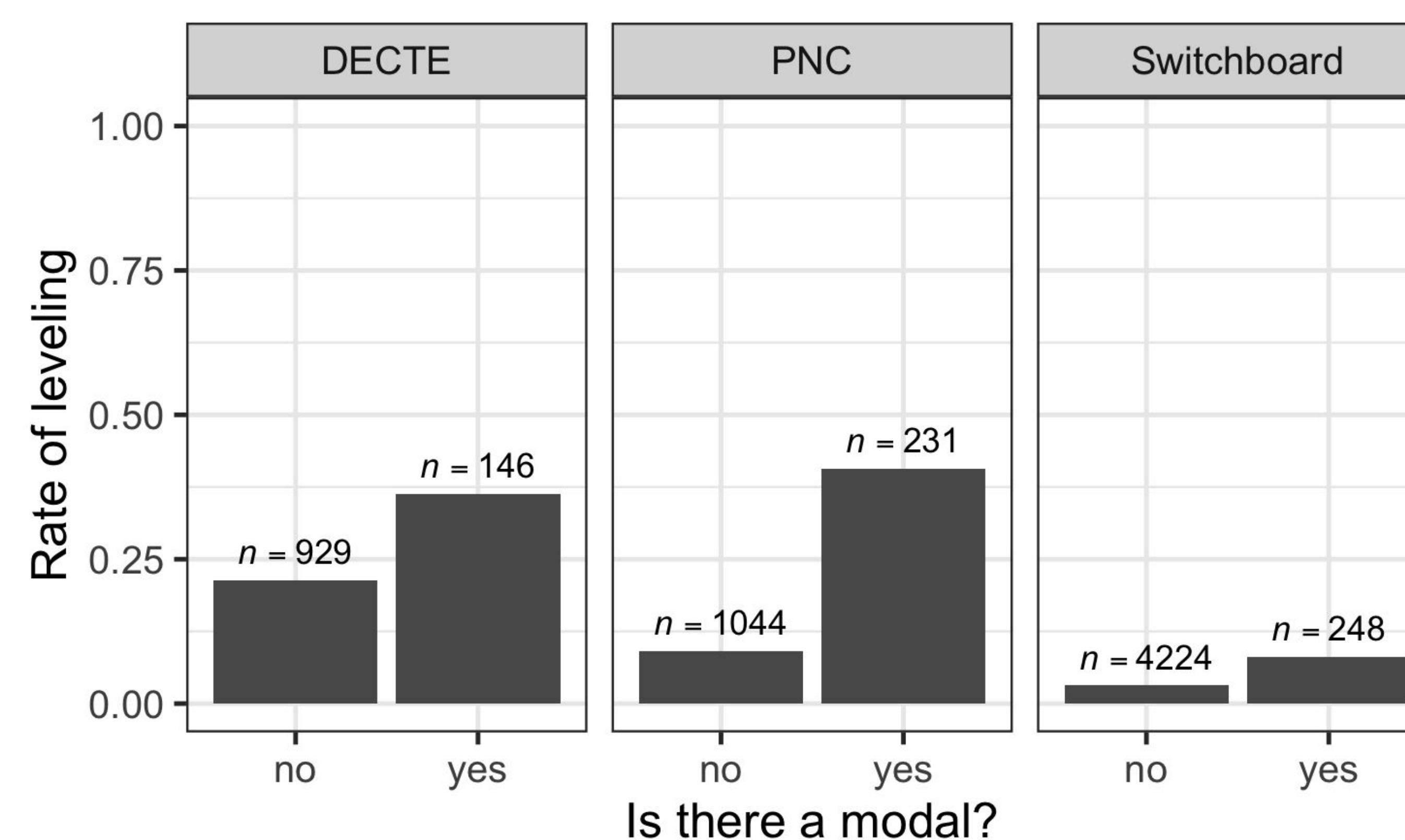


SPEAKER SOCIAL CLASS/EDUCATION LEVEL



PRESENCE OF MODAL

Does the participle appear in a compound verb with a modal or not?
e.g. I should’ve gone, I’d have gone vs. I’ve gone



CONCLUSIONS

1. Participle leveling is socially-evaluated variation affected by both syntactic and paradigmatic factors.
2. We find a striking degree of similarity between the U.S. and U.K. dialects.
3. Preterite/participle difference may shed light on abstract morphological structure.
4. Frequency and preterite/participle difference suggest analogical leveling, yet limited evidence of change over time.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bloomer, Robert K. 1998. You shoulda saw me: On the syntactic contexts of nonstandard past participles in spoken American English. *American Speech* 73:221–224. [2] Corrigan, Karen P., Isabelle Buchstaller, Adam Mearns and Hermann Moisl. 2012. *The Diachronic Electronic Corpus of Tyneside English*. Newcastle University. <https://research.ncl.ac.uk/decte>. [3] Godfrey, John J., and Edward Holliman. 1997. *Switchboard-1 Release 2*. Philadelphia, PA: Linguistic Data Consortium. [4] Labov, William, and Ingrid Rosenfelder. 2011. The Philadelphia Neighborhood Corpus. [5] Munn, Alan. 2015. Participle levelling in American English: Impoverishment and syntactic differentiation. Paper presented at Formal Ways of Analyzing Variation 2, University of Iceland. [6] Tortora, Christina, Frances Blanchette, Teresa O’Neill, and Steven Arriaga. 2015. Variation in Appalachian non-present verb forms. Paper presented at Formal Ways of Analyzing Variation 2, University of Iceland.