

Abstract

This dissertation investigates how (ing) variation is influenced by social factors within the internal constraints imposed by the grammar; it is the first thorough study of its kind in northern dialect regions of England where competition exists between three surface realisations, [ɪn], [ɪŋ], and [ɪŋg], and as such it makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the latter, non-coalesced variant. It is also the first systematic study of variation in stressed /ŋg/ clusters, in words like *wrong* and *sing*, which are invariably realised as /ŋ/ elsewhere in the English-speaking world.

Through the analysis of sixteen sociolinguistic interviews with informants from Manchester and Blackburn, this study reveals that the widely-attested age-graded pattern of [ɪn] and [ɪŋ] is present in these speech communities; however, the constraint of nominal and verbal grammatical categories is equally well-established in American varieties, and yet is markedly absent here. I also discover an effect of phonological conditioning, in the form of regressive homorganic assimilation with following velar consonants.

This dissertation also establishes the presence of morphosyntactic sensitivity in the variable rule of /g/-deletion, which is found to be a phonological process that applies in a cyclic nature across the stem-, word-, and phrase-level domains of a stratified phonological system. I also interpret the unusual stylistic behaviour of /g/-deletion as being reflective of an influence of speech rate, where the reduced articulatory pressure of /ŋg/ clusters pre-pausally and in slower speech rates actually inhibits application of the deletion rule.