

Velar nasal plus in the north of (ing)land

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Despite the breadth of work investigating (ing) across the English-speaking world (see Hazen 2006), the situation in northern dialect regions of England where competition exists between *three* variants, [ɪn]~[ɪŋ]~[ɪŋg], is comparatively understudied. This paper highlights the ways in which (ing) in the north west of England (NWE) departs from the previously attested patterns, and is the first thorough investigation of the non-coalesced [ɪŋg] form (termed ‘velar nasal plus’ by Wells 1982) that is exclusive to these varieties. This study also covers the behaviour of word-final velar nasals in stressed syllables (e.g. [sɪŋg]~[sɪŋ] ‘sing’), marking the first time that this has been studied under the variationist paradigm.

Through the analysis of spontaneous and elicited speech from fifteen sociolinguistic interviews conducted in the Manchester area (which yield over 3,700 tokens), this study first reveals that grammatical category plays no role in constraining (ing) variation in these varieties. This is particularly striking given the strength of this effect elsewhere, both in the US (Labov 2001) and elsewhere in the UK (e.g. Tagliamonte 2004 in York). It likely stems from the overall predominance of *-in* in conversational speech, where rates are consistently high across all speakers and remain so even in many contexts that typically disfavour this variant.

In stressed syllables, by contrast, language-internal factors play a crucial role in constraining variation; it is best modelled by positing a post-nasal /g/-deletion rule that shows sensitivity to the lifecycle of phonological processes (Bermúdez-Otero & Trousdale 2012). Social factors play no role here; its rate of application is predicted almost entirely by assuming cyclic application across stem-, word-, and phrase-level phonology such that the surface rate of deletion is a function of how many chances the rule has had to apply across this stratified phonological system (see Guy 1991 for a similar approach to t/d-deletion). /g/-deletion also shows unusual stylistic patterning, where the application rate is low in the word list but surprisingly high in the elicited reading passage; I interpret this as being reflective of speech rate rather than prestige, with the articulatory pressure of phrase-medial /ŋg/ clusters in a reading passage leading to high rates of application despite being formally elicited. Mixed-effects logistic regression confirms the importance of these internal constraints, as well as the absence of any social stratification.

The results here have implications for the homogeneity of sociolinguistic variables across communities, and touch upon important topics in phonological theory. They also suggest that, despite being subject to variationist study for almost sixty years dating back to Fischer’s (1958) seminal work in New England, there are still new insights to be gained from the study of (ing) variation.