

A DARE(ING) Hierarchy: Effects of Individuals on Variation

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The Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE, 1995-2013) includes 1,843 audio recordings of consultants made in parallel with gathering questionnaire answers. While many snippets exemplifying lexical entries are digitized as part of the online dictionary, no wide ranging grammatical analysis has been performed on free conversations to date because of the extensive time-cost needed for transcription. This paper examines a well-known variable and tests claims about its frequency across a broad number of DARE recordings from the US Mid-Atlantic region known for a confluence of accents (Kurath 1949, Labov, Ash & Boberg 2006).

The variable selected is the familiar “g-dropping” (in lay terms) or ING variable (/ɪŋ/: [ɪn]; *running ~ runnin’*). In contemporary global Englishes this variable can mark age, gender, social class, geography, and ethnicity (see Forrest 2015 for a recent summary), exemplify structured heteronomy (Weinreich, Labov & Herzog 1968; Labov 1966; Trudgill 1974), and be used for perception (Campbell-Kibler 2007, 2011). Because stress, phonologically adjacent sounds, word class and morphological processes all affect the variable, its realization is quite complex. Labov (2001) proposes a general hierarchy governing its appearance, shown from most to least likely: verbs > participles > gerunds > nouns > adjectives. We convert Labov’s hierarchy to Fig. 1, where words are first distinguished by whether they are derived or nonderived words (*to bring, a thing*); Fig. 1 accounts for speakers producing [ɪn] forms on words with orthographic “-ing” sequence absent a morphological boundary (*thin’*). Unlike Labov, we include compound forms (*everything, something*) as bare “underived” nouns; if speakers have [ɪn] on polysyllabic forms, they do likewise for monosyllables (*thing*). Next, parts of speech are arranged hierarchically. This new division permits stress to be important only to nonderived forms since forms derived with /ɪŋ/ will not receive primary stress. Plurality does not block variation for all speakers (*ceilin’s*).

This study analyzes conversations and “Arthur” passages of 91 white DARE speakers centered on Maryland, including speakers from neighboring states (DC, PA, VA, WV). The data reflect distinct dialect regions of variation (Hazen 2008). Preliminary results largely support the hierarchy in Fig. 1 but is informed by individual patterns. Bare nouns are more frequent than bare verbs, and more frequently [ɪn], although this is due to lexical frequency. Speakers exhibiting extensive use of the variable display greater or equal frequency in particles as progressives. Progressives/particles appear more frequently with [ɪn] than bare nouns, compound nouns (*everything, something, nothing*) and gerunds. For such speakers, gerunds modifying nouns are more likely than head-of-NP gerunds to exhibit [ɪn]. Rarely, some speakers use [ɪn] for the preposition *during*, but even more infrequently were adjectives as [ɪn]. Because of these findings, we adjust the hierarchy to reverse nouns above verbs. Examination of “Arthur” passages shows that—while some speakers insert nonstandard *warsh, onest* and *idear* into their reading—[ɪn] is rare with 4/13 opportunities for the heaviest users. We comment on the implications for language change and local variation, and on fieldworker accommodation to consultants’ use of [ɪn]. [490]