

## ABSTRACT

JON ROBERT FORREST, JR. *The Times They Are A-Changin'*: (ING) Variation and Dialect Leveling in Raleigh, NC. (Under the direction of Professor Robin Dodsworth.)

(IN)/(ING) alternation is the prototypical “stable” phonetic variable in English. Rather than moving toward completion, it shows consistent internal factors. While it is normally shown not to be changing over time, the loss of other Southern features in Raleigh suggests that this feature may be undergoing change as well.

This study explores (ING) across apparent time in an urban Southern setting undergoing rapid growth. Three questions are addressed. First, are rates of (IN) decreasing for younger generational groups overall, and for any social groups in particular, as Southern identity fades? Second, what are the lexical category and coarticulatory constraints on the variable, and do they change over time in the community? Third, does the quality of the vowel in the (ING) morpheme play a role in perceptual identification as (IN) or (ING), and has the vowel changed over time?

The data is drawn from a preexisting corpus of conversational interviews conducted with native residents of Raleigh, NC. The sample of 57 speakers is balanced for sex and generation. The tokens of (ING), about 100 per speaker, were impressionistically coded as (IN) or (ING). Internal factors are phonetic environment, lexical category, and syntactic role, and social factors include speaker education and occupation. Vowel formant data was also collected for 15 speakers.

Results show significantly less (IN) usage among younger groups, especially in male speakers and speakers in the white collar occupation group, likely due to a changing of Southern identity coupled with the loss of cultural capital for (IN). The lexical category hierarchy and coarticulatory effects appear to be stable in all three generations, with expected coarticulation in pre-coronal and pre-velar environments. Lastly, speakers in the younger generations show

significant differences in F2 at vowel midpoint in addition to vowel offset, suggesting that vowel quality differences may be playing a stronger role in listeners' categorization of (IN) and (ING) than previously thought.