

Chapter 4

The core meanings of (ING)

The central goal in this study is to explore the meaning of (ING) from the listeners' perspective. This involves both identifying the areas of social meaning influenced by (ING) and understanding how the different meanings are tied to one another. Through this process, we will illuminate the general structure of meaning in sociolinguistic variation. Chapters 5 and 6 will discuss the ways that variation among speakers and listeners influence the development of sociolinguistic meaning. The fact that such variation influences meaning provides support for the idea of indirect indexicality (Silverstein 1976; Ochs 1992) which was discussed in Chapter 1. This theory proposes that some of the social consequences of a given use of linguistic variation result not from a direct connection between the resource and the concept, but rather are mediated by concepts linked to both. For example, Ochs points out that in some communities women may use a form like *please* more often than men. This does not mean that the word itself signifies femininity. This connection is likely to be mediated by a meaning such as politeness which is associated with both the form and with women, at least in specific situations.

In order to explore this structure of linking meanings, we must first identify potential core meanings of the variable. Core meanings are those which are not mediated through other senses but serve as mediators themselves. The crux of indirect indexicality is the existence of partial or contingent meanings: those which are only triggered in certain situations or when used by certain speakers. In the process of

analysis, contingent meanings turn out to be relatively easy to locate. Locating core meanings, those which are not contingent on other aspects of the situation, is a more difficult process.

In a study of this kind, the ideal data indicating a core meaning would be an adjective rating or check box selection which increases based on (ING) across all the speakers and recordings. There are multiple ways in which this standard falls down in actual practice. First, it is likely to be too stringent. There may be meanings which are being triggered by the variable which will not show a difference in the ratings because the rest of the performance dampens the effect. So, for example, even if *-ing* is generally associated with higher estimates of education, this effect may disappear in recordings which explicitly discuss educational background or experiences, since listeners may rely on that information to make their judgments.

Conversely, a consistent effect across all of the data in my study (or any single study) will not necessarily hold up in other contexts. This study focused on region and the Southern/non-Southern divide in particular, so it is likely to have overemphasized associations with regional linguistic differences. The physical and social context of the study also highlighted issues involving education and the standard language market: the tasks involved evaluating speakers explicitly on their language, participants were students at competitive universities and the interviews were carried out in a university setting. All of these factors likely contributed to the large impact of (ING) on perceptions of education and articulateness which I will discuss in Section 4.1.

Various aspects of the recordings themselves were also likely to influence the results. The speakers spoke continuously for 15 seconds, relating primarily personal information or stories. These speech acts were less addressee oriented than, for example, several of the excerpts used in the pilot study described in Chapter 2. This may have served to shift the ways which (ING) was able to change perceptions, restricting situational variability (e.g. how well the speaker knows the addressee) and emphasizing personal qualities (e.g. how educated the speaker is).

Bearing these issues in mind, then, this chapter will explore potential core meanings for (ING). I found only two that were directly influenced by (ING) in all the

data combined: speakers were rated as more *educated*¹ when they used *-ing* than *-in* and were more likely to be described as *articulate*. I will document this first, then go through the list of potential loci of meaning derived from the (ING) literature as discussed in Chapter 2, namely: class, formality, gender, race and age. I will discuss what conclusions may be drawn concerning these topics on the basis of my data and evaluate each as a possible core meaning.

4.1 Education and the standard language market

Listeners believe that speakers who use *-ing* are more educated and more articulate than those who use *-in*. Survey listeners were significantly more likely to describe speakers as *articulate* when they used *-ing*, as Table 4.1 shows²). Listeners also rated the *-ing* guises significantly more *educated* than the *-in* guises, as Table 4.2 shows. Not only are these two concepts both influenced by (ING), but they are closely related to each other. In the survey data listeners rated speakers as significantly more educated when they also described them as articulate (2.76/**3.34**, $p = 0.000$).

| | % listeners selecting checkbox | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| | <i>-in</i> | <i>-ing</i> |
| <i>articulate</i> | 21 | <i>27</i> |

Table 4.1: *Articulate selections, by (ING) ($p = 0.037$).*

| | <i>-in</i> | <i>-ing</i> |
|-----------------|------------|-------------|
| <i>educated</i> | 3.81 | 3.98 |

Table 4.2: *Educated ratings, by (ING) ($p = 0.007$).*

The two tables give numbers of different types. *Articulate* was one of the check box

¹Descriptions in italics refer to responses on the matched guise survey, either checkbox or ratings or to exact quotes from respondents.

²In this and other tables, numbers in italics indicate the significantly greater value at $p = 0.05$. The numbers in bold indicate the significantly greater value at $p = 0.01$.

options on the survey. This meant that listeners could not indicate how articulate a speaker was, they could only select *articulate* or not. The resulting data was a binary variable: for each speaker/listener pair, its value was either yes or no. Table 4.1 shows what percent of the listeners hearing *-ing* selected this box and what percentage of those hearing *-in* did. The significance of this pattern is measured using a Chi Square test.

Educated was one of the qualities on which listeners were asked to rate the speakers. Each listener was asked to rate the speaker on a six point scale ranging from *not at all educated* to *very educated*. The numbers given in Table 4.2 are the mean values for *educated*, broken down by (ING). The degree of significance given in the table comes from an analysis of variance. This result corresponds to the result in the pilot study which also showed an impact of (ING) on how *educated* the speakers sounded. But where the effect size of that result was 0.57, this one has an effect size of only 0.16, which is quite small. This is not surprising, given that the changes in methodology from the pilot to the main study were designed to increase the realism and thus the variability of the listening task.

Interview participants also thought that *-ing* sounds more articulate and that people who use it are more educated. Participants said that *-ing* made a speaker sound more articulate, or as if they were trying to be more articulate, as in (1). This participant also shows the common division whereby sounding articulate is cast as a goal while being casual is simply accomplished. He does not mention whether she is successful at sounding articulate, however. This potential disconnect between what a speaker is trying to do and what they accomplish is an interesting issue that I will be discussing in Chapter 6. Participants also explained that *-ing* sounded more appropriate or natural in the speech of speakers who otherwise sounded articulate, as in (2). The discussions in the interviews concerning education followed very similar lines. Participants like the one in (3) explained that using *-ing* makes a speaker sound more educated than *-in*.

- (1) **Adam:** I agree with [other participant] to an extent. Once again, I didn't hear that much more difference, except maybe that, you know, one she was

trying to be more articulate and the other she was being more casual.

Group 14, UNC. In response to Bonnie, recording: classes, comparison phase.

- (2) **Sally:** I think she was pretty articulate with everything else she said, so the G, it kind of flowed better, I guess.

Group 14, UNC. In response to Valerie, recording: history, comparison phase.

- (3) **Jill:** Yeah, this [recording] definitely, because there's so many words that end like that, it really brings out, like in this case, I agree, it makes her seem like I don't know, maybe less educated.

Group 22, Stanford. In response to Tricia, recording: hiking, comparison phase.

Although these two qualities were the only correlates of (ING) over all the data, this does not mean that they correlate in all contexts or for all speakers or listeners. The study created environments and tasks in which standard language language and education were foregrounded. The setting was a university campus, the task involved explicitly evaluating people based on speech and the population was made up of students at prestigious universities. These factors and others, including the stylistic traits of the moderator, served to highlight education and the standard language market, of which the concept of articulateness is a crucial feature. In addition, the content of the recordings involved speakers talking about themselves and their experiences. It is likely that this selection of content placed a greater emphasis on the qualities and abilities of the speaker as opposed to, for example, the stimuli used in the pilot experiment described in Chapter 2, which were mostly conventional polite phrases. It goes almost without saying that these results would be different had the study been carried out in a different context and with different participants. This is not a methodological problem in this particular study, but a fundamental characteristic of all such work and, indeed, to variation.

This link between (ING) and articulateness is part of a more comprehensive linguistic ideology of careful pronunciation. Listener ideologies of (ING) include an imagined "G", as seen in the written form. The *-ing* variant is produced with this segment, correctly and fully pronouncing the word. The *-in* variant is created by

failing to do so (e.g. “dropping the G”) and is linked to other forms of shortening or deletion. Kroch (1978) discusses ideologies which align prestige forms with greater precision and resistance to linguistic change, change which he posits is itself motivated by concerns for ease of articulation.

Because of the connection with other types of reduction, *-in* was also linked ideologically to a general inability or disinclination to make the effort to pronounce words fully and/or properly. Not making the effort to pronounce one’s words was ascribed to different factors for different speakers, such as general laziness, as in (4) or a relaxed environment, in (5).

- (4) **Abby:** Yeah I agree with you I think the i-n-g puts more emphasis on the- the list that he’s talking about and that’s what he wants clearly emphasis, it’s such a hassle for him to get up

Moderator: So it sort of makes makes his point better about how much work it is or makes it sound like more-

Abby: Yeah.

Mary: I can kinda see that but also in a way since he is kind of a slacker I can kind of picture him just not wanting to do the effort of emphasis.

Group 19, Duke. In response to Ivan, recording: movies, comparison phase.

- (5) **Jill:** For me, the *-in* in this case it really made her seem more laid-back, like she was comfortable talking with maybe her friend or something. Like, yeah. I don’t see the laziness, but I think it’s more comfortable or laid-back.

Group 22, Stanford. In response to Tricia, recording: hiking, comparison phase.

Education and articulateness are both intertwined with ideologies about accent and region which will be discussed in Chapter 5. These ideologies tie *-in* to the South, Southern accents and rural areas. Participants explicitly linked accent with not being articulate and being from the South with lack of education. In example (6), the listener describes *-in* as strengthening the speaker’s Southern accent and connects that phenomenon explicitly with lack of education. She also relates her evaluation of the impact of (ING) to her own Southern identity, implying that her response is potentially disloyal.

- (6) **Alice:** There were several places that were um, the *-ings* I thought make- made the accent much less pronounced. So to me, unfortunately as a Southerner, it sou- she sounded more educated in the second [*-ing* guise].

Group 18, Duke. In response to Tricia, recording: work-school, comparison phase.

Her comments tie accent, the South, education and (ING) together into a single complex set of ideologies. Although the complexity of her comment is unusual, each of the individual links within that set were created and recreated throughout the interviews by many participants. The examples above document how listeners connect *-ing* to speakers sounding articulate and educated. It was also common for listeners to say that accents in general and Southern accents in particular caused speakers to sound less articulate and less educated, as (7) and (8) show.

- (7) **Brian:** I'm not sure necessarily it's the Southern, but it's also just the having a stronger accent. You know, like the, like you know, not just the Southern but also like you know, Boston, New York, You- I associate with stronger accents sort of less well educated, sort of more regional.

Group 3, Stanford. In response to Tricia, recording: work-school, -in guise.

- (8) **Scott:** Sounds like he's from the South

Dan: Obviously

All: (laughter)

Dan: That slower drawl thing going for him.

Laura: He seemed less educated to me just he didn't really explain himself as kind of, you know, sounded like George Bush. (laughter) Sorry.

Scott: I don't think he necessarily like what he was saying was less educated but I think a lot of us that don't aren't from the South, when we hear a person like that we automatically just kinda- that voice makes us think-

Laura: Yeah.

Scott: that they're less educated just cause of the way it sounds.

Kelly: Yeah.

Laura: Yeah.

Dan: Mhmm.

Group 18, Duke. In response to Robert, recording: investing, -in guise.

These two concepts are foregrounded not only with respect to (ING), but also across much of the discussion. The distribution of accents across the recordings brought out issues of education and articulateness, as did the explicit discussion of (ING). Education and articulateness were not only associated with the (ING) but participated in a much larger set of ideologies regarding region, accent and standard language. This topic will be explored in depth in Chapter 5.

4.2 Class and occupation

Recall from Chapter 2 that in most production studies, one of the most consistent and regular correlates of (ING) was the social class of the speaker. In the interviews, however, class was mentioned only sporadically and never directly in association with (ING). When class was mentioned explicitly in the interviews, it usually involved an observation that all of the speakers sounded educated and middle-class, as in (9).

- (9) **Alice:** All these, all these women so far sound like White middle class to upper middle class.

Group 18, Duke. In response to Bonnie, recording: classes, -ing guise.

It was not unusual for listeners to discuss some of the speakers in terms that implicated class issues strongly. But as example (10) shows, most participants preferred to make such comments in terms of education or other traits, rather than invoking abstract and sensitive notions of class directly. Even in the discussion in (10), which focuses carefully at the potential skills of the speaker he is describing, Scott shows a fair amount of discomfort with the topic, increasing his use the markers *kinda*, *like* and *you know*. He personalizes the description by linking it to a specific individual close to him, which may be a move to avoid invoking a class discussion.

- (10) **Scott:** I think from the first conversation, like, most of us felt he was some type of young professional. But now I kinda get the sense he's some type- he reminds me of my sister's fiance kind of just graduated from high school, didn't go to college, didn't do anything. But got a job like at the local auditorium and really knows what he's doin' there knows how to kind of, you know, he could change the court from ice to, you know, to a basketball

court in half hour, you know, stuff none of us would have any idea about but he's not formally educated and he's really kinda excited, like, excited about his job.

Group 9, Duke. In response to Ivan, recording: crucial, -in guise.

In the survey, perceptions of class background were measured by three check boxes. Listeners could indicate whether they thought the speaker was from *a working-class background*, *a middle-class background* and *a wealthy background*. Since the three were checkboxes, listeners could select them in any combination and the phrasing of the question as “[The speaker] sounds like he/she might be from” encouraged them to select all appropriate descriptors.

| | | % listeners selecting checkbox | |
|------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | | <i>wealthy background</i> | <i>working-class background</i> |
| Southern speakers | Tricia | 4.0 | 34.7 |
| | Robert | 5.6 | 41.1 |
| | Bonnie | 10.5 | 15.3 |
| | Ivan | 14.5 | 16.1 |
| West Coast speakers | Sam | 16.1 | 13.7 |
| | Elizabeth | 19.4 | 5.6 |
| | Valerie | 24.2 | 7.3 |
| | Jason | 29.0 | 5.6 |

Table 4.3: Class selections, by speaker.

The first thing to note about class distribution is shown in Table 4.3: region was a major determining factor in selections of *a working-class background* and *a wealthy background*. All of the Southerners were less likely to be described as *wealthy* and more likely to be described as *working-class* than all of the West Coast speakers. This may relate to perceptions of the South or it may reflect other differences between the two groups of speakers. The interview site for speakers from California was a more prestigious and also more expensive university than that used to solicit North Carolina speakers and this may have contributed to this effect or interacted with region to do so. It is unlikely that the listeners are successfully reading class background from the recordings, however. Tricia was more likely to be perceived by survey listeners as

working-class than Bonnie was. In reality, Bonnie’s background was relatively modest, as the daughter of a hog farmer. Tricia was from a relatively well-off background: she was the daughter of a judge and had a grandmother living in a very large ancestral home.

| Checkbox label | % listeners selecting checkbox | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| | All Speakers | | Jason | |
| | <i>-in</i> | <i>-ing</i> | <i>-in</i> | <i>-ing</i> |
| <i>wealthy</i> | 14.5 | 16.3 | 65.5 | 34.5 |
| <i>middle-class</i> | 34.1 | 38.3 | 22.4 | 51.5 |
| <i>working-class</i> | 18.8 | 16.1 | 3.4 | 7.6 |

Table 4.4: Class selections for all speakers and for Jason, by (ING). Effect on *middle-class* for Jason $p= 0.001$.

I found only one strong effect of (ING) on class perceptions. Jason, one of the West Coast men, is significantly more likely to be described as *middle-class* in his *-ing* guise, as Table 4.4 shows. To understand why, we must look at what other perceptions are decreased when the *middle-class* percept is increased. Descriptions of Jason as *working-class* are minimal and increase with *-ing*. Contrary to what we might predict from the production data, *-ing* seems to be lowering Jason’s perceived socioeconomic status rather than raising it. In addition, the proportion of listeners who gave no class evaluation for Jason was greater in his *-in* guise. As a West Coast speaker, Jason was consistently identified by interview participants as someone who would normally say *-ing*. It may be that *-ing* serves to clarify his style, increasing listeners’ ability or willingness to assign him to a particular class background.

Although this is the only result which relates directly to (ING) and class, class selections are implicated in a range of interactions throughout the data. In particular, Section 4.3 discusses the ways that (ING) shifts the relationship between perceived class background and perceived level of formality.

4.3 Situational formality

Situational formality is, after socioeconomic status, the other major correlate of (ING) documented by the production literature. The formality of the speech said it is usually controlled in most interview studies using manipulations of the linguistic task the speakers engaged in. These were aligned along a continuum based on how focused the speaker was (or was presumed to be) on his or her linguistic performance. In reading word pairs, speakers were likely to be maximally conscious of their pronunciation and only slightly less so while reading a more complex passage aloud. Answering questions in a formal interview setting is less speech focused still while dramatic narratives or relaxed conversations with friends or family are classed as the most informal speech obtained in the interviews (Labov 1966:90-98).

One of the tasks In the survey was to rate the speakers on a scale of one to six, ranging from *very casual* to *very formal*. Needless to say, listeners are likely to be working with very different notions of formality than that described above. Eckert (pc.) has suggested that formality is in fact the central meaning for (ING), with *-in* signalling a casual stance and *-ing* a more formal one and that its correlation with class is a result of different classes having different orientations towards or stakes in formality. Supporting this point, she points out that well-educated and wealthy people may use the *-in* variant without invoking associations with other classes. Turning to literature as an example of what is possible and felicitous, she reminds us that Lord Peter Wimsey, a character in the mysteries written by Dorothy L. Sayers, routinely uses *-in* (e.g. “I think all that fuss was simply shockin’ (Sayers 1927:89)”). His use is made more emphatic by the fact that it is expressed in eye dialect and he uses it to perform a style described as typically aristocratic. In his case, the performance being enhanced by *-in* does not revolve around education (although he is, in fact, highly educated), but rather marks him as relaxed and entitled.

This relationship between class and formality is also a crucial point of inquiry for Finegan and Biber (2001), who contend that register-based variation is a fundamental, based on the different needs of different situations, particularly with respect to degree

of elaborations. Finegan and Biber argue that inter-speaker of variation follows logically from situational variation, given that speakers have different access to various registers. Although their theory is aimed at capturing the full range of variation, their discussion focuses primarily on the linguistic dimension of economy/elaboration. (See Dressler (1975) as well for a treatment of reduction in stylistic and dialectal variation.)

| Checkbox label | Checkbox not selected | Checkbox selected | sig. |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-------|
| <i>working-class background</i> | 2.82 | 2.49 | 0.002 |
| <i>middle-class background</i> | 2.73 | 2.82 | 0.307 |
| <i>wealthy background</i> | 2.71 | 3.05 | 0.002 |

Table 4.5: *Casual/formal ratings, by class selections.*

Listener reactions concerning the *casual/formal* dimension are not influenced directly by (ING) in the main study, in contrast to the pilot results. They are significantly tied to the selections of class background. As Eckert might predict, the class selections and *casual/formal* ratings are connected independently of (ING). Table 4.5 shows that listeners rated speakers as less *formal* when they also described them as *working-class* and as more *formal* when they selected *wealthy*.

Selections of *middle-class* bore no relationship to *casual/formal* ratings overall, which could indicate a lack of association between formality and middle-class identity, or more likely reflects the ideological role of the middle-class as a default and thus less socially informative category. Another likely possibility is that listeners are responding based on a cline of formality aligned with one of class, which fails to convey useful information about the middle of the continuum. Whatever the reason, Eckert's point about the relationship of class to formality is strongly confirmed: in the minds of these listeners working class speakers are less formal and wealthy speakers are more formal.

The next step is to place (ING) into this context. Table 4.6 shows that the selections of *working-class* and *middle-class* both changed their relationship to *casual/formal* based on (ING), although (ING) had no impact on the relationship between *casual/formal* ratings and the descriptor *wealthy*.

| Checkbox label | | Checkbox not selected | Checkbox selected | sig. |
|---------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-------|
| <i>working-class background</i> | <i>-in</i> | 2.84 | 2.29 | 0.025 |
| | <i>-ing</i> | 2.79 | 2.71 | |
| <i>middle-class background</i> | <i>-in</i> | 2.63 | 2.95 | 0.022 |
| | <i>-ing</i> | 2.83 | 2.69 | |
| <i>wealthy background</i> | <i>-in</i> | 2.69 | 3.03 | 0.857 |
| | <i>-ing</i> | 2.72 | 3.07 | |

Table 4.6: Casual/formal ratings, by (ING) and class selections.

The connection between casualness and working class turns out to be primarily driven by responses to the *-in* guises. There is only a minimal difference in *formal* ratings between perceived *working-class* and not *working-class* utterances containing *-ing*. In responding to the *-in* guises, listeners rated *working-class* speakers as significantly less *formal* than speakers they did not think were *working-class*.

The relationship between (ING), *middle-class* and *casual/formal* is more complex: in the *-ing* guise, the *middle-class* speakers are slightly less *formal* than those not described as *middle-class*. In the *-in* responses, the pattern is reversed, with the responses selecting *middle-class* having higher *formal* ratings. The most plausible explanation for this difference is that in the two guises the alternates to middle-class have shifted and with them the relative formality. In other words, the *-in* guise may involve speakers choosing between *middle-class* and *working-class* while the *-ing* guise makes them more likely to choose between *middle-class* and *wealthy*. As a result, associations between middle-class may change based on what it is being opposed to. This idea is merely speculation at this point, however.

Based on these data, we must reject the casual/formal continuum as a core meaning of (ING), at least for the moment. It is possible, however, that listeners are drawing on (ING) for information about class and formality in interaction. These data also definitively establish that class and formality are not independent and unrelated concepts. The production data on (ING) makes this a tempting conclusion, for example from Labov (1966), reproduced in Chapter 2 as Figure 2.3. These graphs showing the stepwise effects of both situational formality and class are compelling evidence that

the two are independently influencing (ING) production (Labov 1966:398). However, this regularity rests on severely elided contextual factors. In most of these graphs, the dimension of formality is restricted to four or five speech activities, aligned around attention paid to speech. Usually a good half of these are reading tasks, completely eliminating the speaker's control over content. The truth is that formality does not live in such a regimented world. My data show that listeners connect class and formality in complex ways. This may be due in part or completely to a disconnect between statistical realities of distribution and human perception. That is, the two factors may influence speech independently but listeners may have skewed perceptions, causing them to describe connections which do not exist to linguistic practice. The perception data may also reflect those realities of distribution, which are created by processes dependent on (among other things) the vagaries of human perception. Listeners' "skewed" beliefs are likely to operate in real situations as well as within a controlled study and influence the course of these linguistic situations. The relative importance of these factors can only be explored adequately by supplementing this perceptual work with the examination of naturally occurring speech, examination which takes into account the complexities of speech acts and the linguistic performances which accomplish them.

4.4 Gender

Gender stands out in the existing literature on (ING) as the correlate which has been addressed with the most attention to social nuance. Researchers have documented gender differences in the use of (ING), most often finding that men tend to use *-in* more than women, as shown in Table 2.8 in Chapter 2. In a few cases, analysts have gone beyond this simple observation to observe that different men seem to use (ING) differently and that this variation relates to particular kinds of masculinity. Fischer (1958) noted that a "typical boy" in his study used more *-in* than did a "model boy". Although he did not himself interrogate these terms, his descriptions are revealing: the model boy "did his school work well, was popular among his peers, reputed to be thoughtful and considerate (Fischer 1958:49)" while the typical boy was described

as “physically strong, dominating, full of mischief but disarmingly frank about his transgressions. (Fischer 1958:49)”. Kiesling (1998) pursued this further, observing that in the fraternity he studied, some of the men espoused a form of tough, working-class masculinity. Part of this performance included increasing their use of *-in* in relatively formal fraternity meetings, while other members decreased theirs.

Although it is tempting to limit studies of gender to simple binary comparisons, it is crucially important that we expand our understanding of how different people relate to masculinity and femininity. Recognizing the range of masculinities and femininities (e.g. Connell’s (1995) notion of technical and physical masculinity) also allows us to better understand the meaning of gender-linked variation. Since the choice to use a specific variant in English, for example, is unlikely to be a biological or cultural universal sex marker, understanding gendered variation requires a deeper understanding of gender overall.

A focus on different kinds of men and different kinds of women is particularly appropriate when looking at listener perceptions, since listeners are likely to rely on cues like pitch and voice quality when identifying speakers as male or female. Once the identification has been made, other variables are more likely to impact how well or in what ways speakers gender their performances. In keeping with this point about the complexity of kinds of genders, the first fact to note is that I found no patterns which distinguish the four male speakers as a group from the four female speakers. This contrasts with the many patterns which reference either real or perceived regional origin. It also contrasts with some findings which apply to male and female listeners, where they differ in their aggregate responses. It is important to note that this difference between speakers and listeners is an artifact of quantity (eight speakers against 124 listeners). It does not mean that listeners or the process of listening are simpler in general. In Chapters 5 and 6 I will introduce data which shows that the process of listening is as active and individual as speaking. Conversely, if I had conducted such a study with many more speakers, it is likely that some larger patterns would emerge across gendered categories, as greater numbers would allow patterns to emerge from the individual variation.

I will first turn to the role of (ING) in different kinds of masculinity. (ING) does

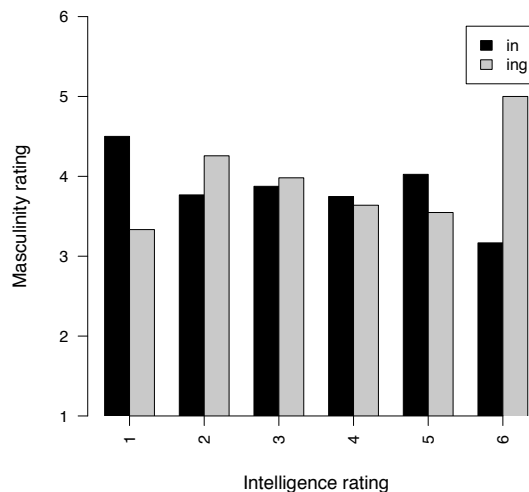


Figure 4.1: Masculine ratings, by intelligent and (ING) ($p = 0.001$).

not impact how *masculine* the male speakers are perceived to be across the board. This is not surprising, since the male speakers in my study, like Fischer’s model boy and typical boy, are different men presenting very different ways of being men. As a result, (ING) affects each differently. Across all the men, (ING) changes the relationship between intelligence and masculinity. Figure 4.1 gives the mean ratings for how *masculine* the male speakers were considered by listeners who selected the different levels for how *intelligent* the speaker was, separated for the *-in* and *-ing* guises.

The graph shows that (ING) shifts the two peaks of ratings for *masculine*. In the *-in* guise, the largest rating for *masculine* comes at the lowest level of ratings for *intelligent*, while in the *-ing* guise, this pattern is reversed, with the highest ratings for *masculine* occurring at the highest level of *intelligent*. (ING) has little impact on the relationship between *masculine* and *intelligent* for the large middle portion of the *intelligent* scale. But when listeners make extreme judgments about intelligence, the (ING) variant used by the speaker shifts the impact of these judgments on masculinity.

A second set of patterns reflect interesting ideas concerning masculinity and language in the Midwest. In the next chapter I will discuss perceptions and ideologies related to region at length, particularly the ways in which many listeners in my study at times connect the Midwest and South into a single cultural region, associated with the country and with farming. Unlike the South, the Midwest lacks specific linguistic cues salient to nonlinguists. As a result, I suspect that listeners turned more towards indirect cues in identifying potential Midwesterners. (ING), particularly in the case of men, provides just such a linguistically triggered social cue, indicating the type of masculinity related to this cultural region.

| Checkbox label | % listeners selecting checkbox | | | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|-------------|-------|-----------------|-------------|-------|
| | Male Speakers | | | Female Speakers | | |
| | <i>-in</i> | <i>-ing</i> | sig. | <i>-in</i> | <i>-ing</i> | sig. |
| <i>South</i> | 29.8 | 25.4 | 0.269 | 37.9 | 36.3 | 0.710 |
| <i>Midwest</i> | 21.0 | 12.1 | 0.008 | 19.0 | 19.8 | 0.820 |
| <i>Southwest</i> | 8.1 | 8.5 | 0.871 | 9.3 | 9.7 | 0.878 |
| <i>North</i> | 7.7 | 8.1 | 0.868 | 9.3 | 10.9 | 0.551 |
| <i>New England</i> | 8.1 | 9.3 | 0.632 | 10.5 | 10.1 | 0.881 |
| <i>East Coast</i> | 16.5 | 21.4 | 0.169 | 14.1 | 14.5 | 0.898 |
| <i>West Coast</i> | 21.4 | 28.2 | 0.077 | 11.7 | 16.9 | 0.096 |
| <i>Anywhere</i> | 22.6 | 23.8 | 0.750 | 21.0 | 25.4 | 0.242 |

Table 4.7: Region selections, by (ING) and speaker gender.

| Checkbox label | % listeners selecting checkbox | | | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------------|-------------|-------|-----------------|-------------|-------|
| | Male Speakers | | | Female Speakers | | |
| | <i>-in</i> | <i>-ing</i> | sig. | <i>-in</i> | <i>-ing</i> | sig. |
| <i>Country</i> | 22.6 | 15.3 | 0.039 | 18.5 | 18.1 | 0.908 |
| <i>Suburbs</i> | 24.6 | 23.4 | 0.752 | 22.2 | 26.2 | 0.294 |
| <i>City</i> | 25.0 | 25.0 | 1.000 | 21.4 | 16.9 | 0.209 |

Table 4.8: Community type selections, by (ING) and speaker gender.

This connection between (ING), the Midwest and masculinity may be seen in Table 4.7, which shows that (ING) has an impact on how likely men were to be described as being from the Midwest. This occurs across all four of the men, while

only one female speaker (Bonnie, one of the Southern women) had any strong trend in that direction. The connection between this region and *-in* is reinforced by Table 4.8, which shows that *-in* also increases the likelihood of male speakers being identified as from the *country*, although it has no such effect on female speakers or on either men or women with respect to the other two community types.

The discussion above suggests that *-in* forms part of an image of rural masculinity, a finding which supports the existing literature which connects *-in* to working-class (Kiesling 1998) or rebellious masculinities (Fischer 1958), all associated with the notion of “physical masculinity” as developed by Connell (1995). This is not to suggest that all of these masculinities are the same. They do, however, have similar associations with toughness, physical strength, class and a casual stance.

The production literature on (ING) has little to say on the relationship of femininity to (ING). In cases where gender differences have been observed, women tend to show more frequent use of *-ing*. However, we have just demonstrated that the relationship of (ING) to masculinity is a good deal more complex than such a difference would predict, so it is likely that the relationship of (ING) to femininity will be similarly complex. In this case, the relationship seems to be influenced by the school attended by the listener.

As Table 4.9 shows, listeners attending Duke rate women as more *feminine* in their *-ing* guises. Stanford listeners, in contrast, tend to rate women as less *feminine* for using *-ing*, although this trend is reversed in the cases of Elizabeth and Valerie (the West Coast female speakers) when listeners describe them as *articulate*. This

| | <i>-in</i> | <i>-ing</i> |
|----------|------------|-------------|
| Duke | 4.13 | 4.26 |
| Stanford | 4.13 | 3.91 |

Table 4.9: *Feminine ratings, by (ING) and listener school (p = 0.031).*

suggests that different types of femininity may have different relationships to (ING). It is possible, for example, that the students at Duke associate *-ing* with culture or status which they viewed as more feminine, while Stanford students find the relaxed quality of *-in* to be more feminine, as in Trudgill (1974). The exception made in the

case of Elizabeth and Valerie is particularly interesting. It suggests that Stanford students recognize a particular style of articulate and educated speech, in which *-ing* is a helpful part. In the case of this particular performance of educated femininity, *-ing* enhances the femininity of their speech.

Gender, like the other meanings discussed here, has a set a fascinating interconnections to (ING) but little in the way of straightforward answers. There are clear points of contact at which (ING) has a significant impact on how or how successfully a given speaker performs gender, but exactly which points these are depend on a range of other aspects of the performance and listener.

4.5 Race

In constructing the study, I did not include speaker race as a factor. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is evidence of differences in (ING) use based on race in that Black respondents typically use more *-in* than White respondents do (Anshen 1969; Labov 1966). There have not, to my knowledge, been any studies examining other aspects of race or ethnicity. Because I could not adequately investigate this factor, all the speakers in my study were White. The first two group interviews were conducted with an Asian-American woman as one of the West Coast speakers. California interview participants easily identified her as Asian (needless to say, she was a native speaker of American English). I became concerned about the effect of this difference and replaced the speaker with Valerie for the remainder of the study. This phenomenon in itself is worthy of study at a later point, as is the larger question of the role of race and ethnicity in the interpretation of (ING) and other widely used variables.

In the interviews, participants generally identified the speakers as White when they mentioned race at all. Because of this consistency, I felt comfortable leaving questions concerning perceived race or ethnicity off of the survey in order to allow room for other, more central questions. Listeners were asked to indicate their own ethnic identifications at the beginning of the survey. The distribution of listener race and ethnicity identifications is given in Table 4.10. It shows that the majority of respondents were White, followed by Asian and then Black.

| | |
|-----------------|----|
| White | 67 |
| Asian | 35 |
| Black | 10 |
| Other | 7 |
| Latino | 4 |
| Native American | 1 |

Table 4.10: Distribution of listener ethnic identifications.

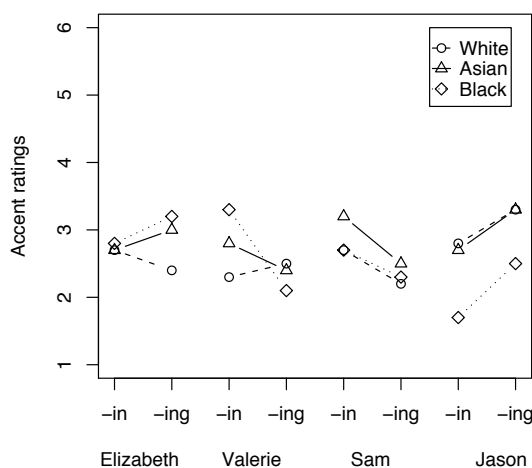


Figure 4.2: Accented ratings, by listener race and (ING), West Coast speakers (Interaction across all speakers significant at $p = 0.005$).

There was only one significant finding tying race and (ING), which influenced how *accented* each speaker sounded. There was an effect on the *accented* ratings based on a three-way interaction between the speaker, the race of the listener and (ING). The breakdown (including only the White, Asian and Black listeners) is given in Figures 4.2 and 4.3.

The meaning or meanings of this interaction are not immediately apparent. It is possible that it reflects real differences in backgrounds of the listeners, which are being influenced by idiosyncrasies of the individual speakers. The pattern is complex and lacks supporting data from elsewhere in the survey or the interviews, making

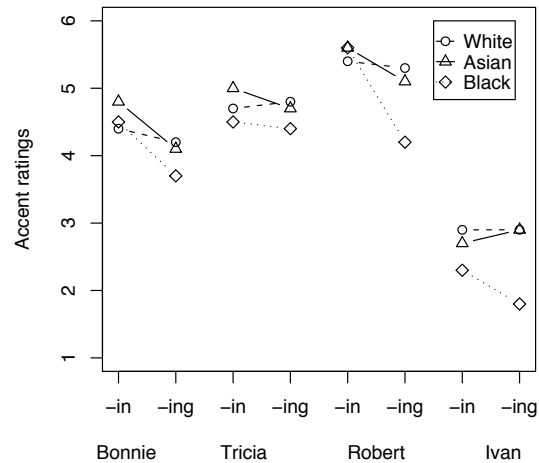


Figure 4.3: *Accented ratings, by listener race and (ING), Southern speakers (Interaction across all speakers significant at $p = 0.005$).*

it impossible to interpret without more data. Other effects involving race are not forthcoming given the data available. From the interviews, there was some suggestion that Black listeners were more conscious of the effects of (ING), particularly seeing *-in* as more stigmatized than the White or Asian participants did. Two of the Black participants were the only ones to report having been explicitly warned against using *-in* by school teachers, although this question was not an explicit part of the interview process so it is possible that others had also experienced such warnings and not mentioned them. These topics, both the effect of race in general, and the potential for an increased awareness on the part of Black speakers and listeners, are a crucial area for future study.

4.6 Age

The production literature has reported that younger speakers tend to use more *-in* than older speakers. As noted in Chapter 2, it is not clear whether this reflects age grading or linguistic change, but the former seems more likely, given the long history

of stable variation documented for (ING).

The actual age range of my speakers was quite limited; seven of the eight were college students between the ages of 18 and 23. Elizabeth was a graduate student in her early 30s. The perceived age range was a bit broader. Robert, Tricia and Elizabeth all were frequently taken to be in their 30s or over 40.

The age selections, like those for class, were provided as individual yes/no checkboxes: *teenager*, *college-aged*, *under 30*, *in his/her 30s* and *over 40*. Listeners were required to select at least one option. Using check boxes instead of a forced choice system allowed listeners more freedom in indicating exactly the age categories they felt described each speaker. This freedom could potentially have negative consequences, for example, if listeners selected unusual combinations of age categories it could be difficult to interpret exactly what cues they were responding to. On the other hand, if listeners were likely to select discontinuous categories (for example, selecting both *over 40* and *teenager*, but none in between), it would be useful to find this out rather than assuming a more conventional pattern without verification. Despite this flexibility, almost all responses were selections of a single age categories or two adjacent categories (for example *college-aged* and *under 30*). Also, as Figures 4.4 and 4.5 show, the distributions for each individual speaker fell in roughly a normal curve, suggesting that each speaker has a reasonably intelligible perceived age.

(ING) had different effects on the perceived ages of different speakers. The two extremes are represented by Valerie, who is described as younger when she uses *-ing*, as shown in Figure 4.4 and Robert, shown in Figure 4.5, who is heard as older in his *-ing* guise. The other six speakers show smaller differences. Bonnie and Sam matched Robert in sounding older with *-ing*, while Ivan, Jason and Tricia follow Valerie and sound older with *-in*. Elisabeth shows a less consistent set of changes, with *-ing* favoring descriptions of *in her 30s* and *-in* favoring the other four.

The meaning were behind the effect of (ING) on the perceived age of speakers is not clear. I suspect that it relates to the connection between age and other social meanings. It is tempting to see age as a great leveller, since people of all backgrounds go through different ages. Nonetheless, the age categories in my data are tied to other meanings, such as class. The descriptions *college-aged* and *middle-class* favored each

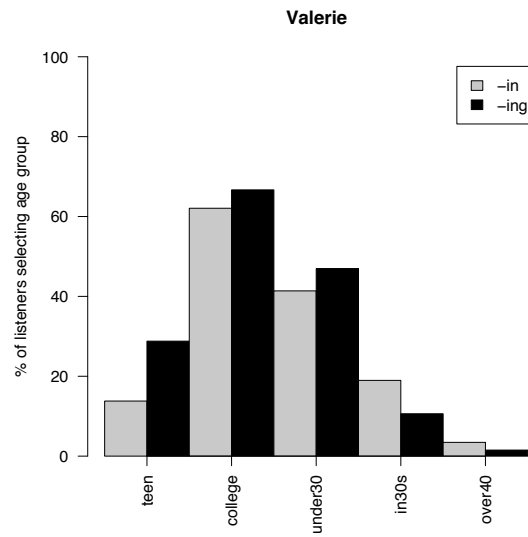


Figure 4.4: Age distribution for Valerie, by (ING).

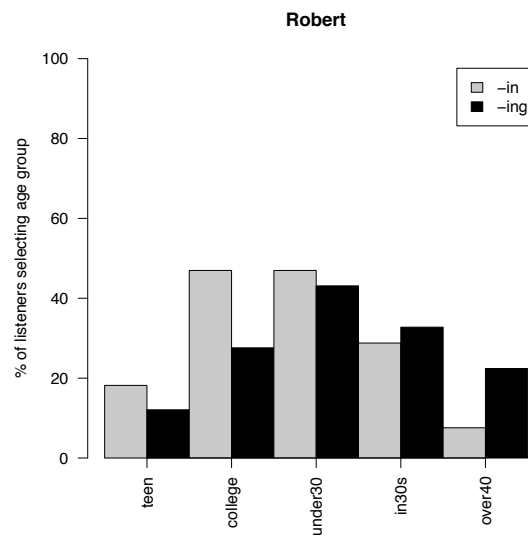


Figure 4.5: Age distribution for Robert, by (ING).

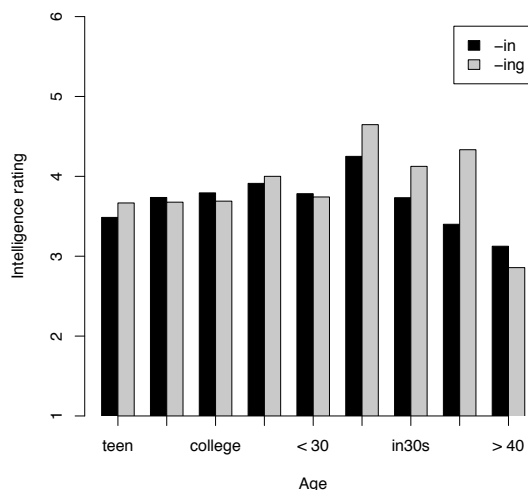


Figure 4.6: Intelligent ratings, by age and (ING) ($p = 0.000$).

other ($p = 0.000$). This is not particularly surprising, given the class implications of college attendance. It is quite possible that this relationship is triggered were strengthened by the phrasing. Given the educational backgrounds of the listeners and their assumptions regarding most of the speakers, it is also possible that the effect comes from a more general pattern. Support for this latter suggestion comes from the fact that descriptions of the speaker being *in his/her 30s* interact positively with the speaker being described as *working-class* ($p = 0.006$).

Digging deeper into this latter pattern, we find that (ING) influences the relationship between *in his/her 30s* and *intelligent* as well as the relationship between both of these qualities and *working-class*. Figure 4.6 shows the relationship between age and *intelligence*, broken down by (ING). The scale for age shown in this graph was made by combining the individual age variables into a single factor. Because nearly all responses involved a single age category or two adjacent ones, they made nine categories: the five checkboxes, interspersed with instances where the listener selected two adjacent boxes. The graph shows that the interaction between (ING) and the descriptor *in his/her 30s* is unique to this description and not a result of a more general pattern involving age. The three categories that include this selection

stand out by having higher intelligence ratings in both guises, but most remarkably so in the *-ing* guise.

| | <i>-in</i> | <i>-ing</i> |
|---------------------------|------------|-------------|
| not <i>in his/her 30s</i> | 3.75 | 3.73 |
| <i>in his/her 30s</i> | 3.88 | 4.24 |

Table 4.11: Intelligent ratings by (ING) and *in his/her 30s* ($p = 0.006$).

| | | <i>-in</i> | <i>-ing</i> |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------|-------------|
| not <i>in his/her 30s</i> | not <i>working-class</i> | 3.86 | 3.73 |
| | <i>working-class</i> | 3.22 | 3.74 |
| <i>in his/her 30s</i> | not <i>working-class</i> | 4.00 | 4.45 |
| | <i>working-class</i> | 3.50 | 3.65 |

Table 4.12: Intelligent ratings by (ING) and *in his/her 30s* and *working-class* (Interaction $p = 0.023$).

Table 4.11 shows this pattern in more detail, demonstrating that the *-ing* guise strengthens the positive relationship between the age category *in his/her 30s* and perceived intelligence. Breaking this pattern down further, Table 4.12 shows the interaction between (ING) and *in his/her 30s*. In this table we can see that (ING), *working-class* and *in his/her 30's* all have independent relationships with *intelligence*: for the most part, *-ing* ratings are higher than *-in* ratings; ratings for speakers described as *working class* are lower than others; and ratings for speakers described as *in his/her 30s* are higher than others. Each of these effects combines to enhance the others when the three come together, however. The two highest and lowest values stand out as much further from their closest neighbors than the rest of the means. When the speaker uses *-in* and is described as *working class* and is not described as *in his/her 30s*, their intelligence rating is remarkably lower. Likewise, when the speaker uses *-ing* and is not described as *working class* and is described as *in his/her 30s*, their intelligence rating is remarkably higher than all other categories.

This pattern has important implications regarding the nature of variation. Linguists tend to examine variables individually, but their meanings are not simply

added up in practice. While each of these effects exists to at least a small degree, the three in combination highlight particular styles or areas of social meaning. At these points, the combination of the three qualities is much more than the sum of its parts.

4.7 Looking for a place to stand

Looking over these potential candidates for central core meanings, it is impossible to seize upon one (or even two) and name it “the meaning of (ING)”. We do have two (closely linked) meanings which show a broad influence in the current study. Listening to these speakers, in these contexts, both the interview participants and the matched guise survey listeners thought that *-ing* made speakers sound more articulate and more educated. As noted earlier, however, the setting of the study was one that brought education to the fore and this connection may not hold up in other contexts.

I have more confidence in the finding concerning articulateness than in the one concerning education. The ease with which participants recognized the variable in my description confirms that (ING) functions as a stereotype— a linguistic variable which has become so salient that its use is a subject of overt comment and discussion (Labov 2001:196). In other words, speakers and listeners are aware of it *as a linguistic trait* and they craft their performances and interpret those of others accordingly. Articulate is the only meaning discussed here which relates to listeners’ consciousness of speech as a performance. Due in part to this connection, I hypothesize that it may be a true candidate for (ING)’s central meaning. This meaning would include both “articulate”, a quality describing people over the long term which focuses on ability and perhaps habit, as well as “being articulate”, a quality describing people in the short term which focuses on effort or a performance in a given situation.

This is not to dismiss these other factors under discussion. In privileging meaning, I do not reject “social significance” (Labov 1966). The distribution of variation with respect to large social categories is a fact of language and speakers are aware of this. The point of this theoretical reframe toward social meaning is that speakers in different categories use language differently because they learn it differently but also because they use it in different situations, to different interlocutors and for different

purposes. Further, speakers (and listeners) are aware of *this* too. Speaker/listener knowledge concerning these parts of language do not take the same form as that of professional linguists. Speaker/listeners, as they engage in their regular social business, observe language in different settings than linguists. They also attend to different aspects, put their knowledge to different uses and structure it relative to different ideologies. Social significance, the distribution of language across the social world, is a critical fact of variation. It is just not the only fact. It forms a piece of a complex system linguistic equation influencing how, among other things, listeners interpret tokens of a specific variable such as (ING).

The distribution of (ING) across different regions of the United States is a case in point. Interview participants in my study showed a robust belief that Southern speakers use *-in* more than those in other regions, a distributional theory which is unproven, although plausible. The effect of this ideology on the responses is quite intricate and tied to myriad other bits of ideology, knowledge and opinions. the next chapter explores this relationship between (ING) and ideologies concerning region, particularly its connection to accented speech and the rural/urban divide.

