Chapter 5

Accent, region and the rural/urban divide

The previous chapter investigated a range of possible meanings for (ING), drawing on the social correlates uncovered by the production literature. While many of these topics showed connections to (ING), most of them were influenced by various aspects of context. This chapter explores the role of context in more detail, specifically that contributed by the speaker. One construct, accent, emerged in the data as the most salient quality distinguishing the speakers from one another. The idea of marked, potentially nonstandard speech was a recurring theme in the interviews and interacted in the survey with a wealth of other responses and with (ING). This chapter will explore the ways in which the concept of accent is constructed in my data and how it structures the role of (ING).

In the process, I will also explore language ideologies which structure the concept of accent in the U.S. and tie it to specific regions and to the divisions between the city, country and suburbs, a Division I will refer to as "community type". Although each of these concepts (accent, region and community type) refer to different aspects of a person, they are ideologically intertwined. Listeners associate accents primarily with the South and with rural areas. These concepts are then tied into the larger social matrix in a variety of ways, for example by linking both accented speakers and Southerners with lower intelligence or lack of education, as shown in Section 4.1.

(ING) is also implicated in this ideological network. Participants in both the interviews and the survey associated *-in* with Southern accents and rural residents. This association led to a complex relationship between (ING) and the overall conception of accent. Perceptions of how accented speakers were emerged in a variety of ways, including from (ING) use. Further, overall evaluations of accent shaped the role that (ING) played, including how and how much it influenced the strength of the perceived accent. In the case of Southern speakers, *-in* increased the percept of accent while in the case of the cosmopolitan bicoastal speaker, it is *-ing* which made him sound more accented. The role of (ING) in constructing or dampening an accent depended on the particular conception of accent at play, specifically in what direction a performance deviates from the cultural image of unmarked speech.

It is worth taking a moment to note what accent is. I do not use this term in any linguistic sense or to characterize a way of speaking. Rather, it refers to a social construct by which some speakers are marked as speaking non-normatively. The term accented in this chapter refers to the percept of listeners and the degree to which they feel a speaker differs from their own speech, from an imagined norm or both. By referring to a speaker as more or less accented, I mean that the listeners in my study heard him or her as having a stronger accent, a description which conveys no direct linguistic information as to the speaker, but instead references the social categories which these listeners assign that speaker to.

The listeners in my study conceptualize the South as the prototypical home of accent, a belief which results both from general language ideologies, documented by work in perceptual dialectology such as Preston (1999a); Preston (1999b); Long (2002), and from the structure of my study, which emphasized the contrast between Southern speakers (heard as accented) and West Coast speakers (heard as aregional and non-accented), while neglecting other recognized accents such as New York. Despite locating of accent primarily in the South, listeners did hear one of the non-Southern speakers, Jason, as moderately accented, albeit in a very different way. His accent was related to sounding like a city dweller, a wealthy New England resident or most often, gay. His accent is intensified by *-ing* rather than *-in*. This is not surprising, since he elicited responses closely tied to *-ing* (e.g. being articulate, well

educated, less casual and less masculine). The participants in my study recognize both of these styles (gay and wealthy/New England) as departing from the norm in a way which defines them ideologically as accents. As a result, in Jason's speech *-ing* increases his level of accentedness, although it dampens the accents of the Southern speakers.

In order to understand the role of (ING) in the perception of accent, I must first explain the overarching ideological framework of accent in use. Although the division between accent and non-accent implies an imagined norm, not every deviation from a "normal" way of speaking is labeled an accent. Accent is socially defined, rather than a linguistic object with social consequences. After describing the construction of accent in general and Southern accents in particular, I show where the speakers in my study fall on this landscape. The use of *-in* increases the percept of a Southern accent when used by a speaker who already is considered to have one, although it does not have this effect across all of the speakers. In addition, *-in* and Southern accents share an ideological link. In interviews, participants uniformly felt that *-in* belonged in the speech of the Southerners while *-ing* was natural to the West Coast speakers. This connection between *-in* and Southern accent was one of the most commonly discussed meanings of (ING) in the interview portion of the study.

Lastly, I describe the role of (ING) in the speech of Jason, the urban bicoastal Speaker and show that *-ing* enhances perceptions of him as gay, metrosexual and urban and that these perceptions are linked to how accented listeners think he is. *-ing* also produces an association between listeners finding him accented and listeners thinking he is wealthy and from New England, although it does not increase how often they select these descriptions overall. This complex tapestry of responses shows the flexibility of variation, allowing resources to aid in the construction of extremely different concepts, depending on the other linguistic and social information available.

5.1 The geographic landscape of accent

Perceptual dialectology, as discussed in Chapter 3, is the study of the conceptual boundaries that speakers form regarding regional linguistic variation. One of the

major techniques used to collect data in this field is to give speakers a blank map of, for example, the United States and ask them to indicate which areas contain people who talk the same way. This kind of project has been carried out by a number of researchers in many different areas and in studies in the U.S., the South has been consistently the region most often indicated by participants (Hartley 1999; Preston 1999a; Preston 1999b; Fought 2002; Lance 1999).

The interview data confirms this perceptual salience of the South, not only in contrast to other regions but also to other qualities more generally. Three of the speakers (Bonnie, Tricia and Robert) are consistently recognized as Southern. In the case of these three speakers it was overwhelmingly likely for participants to identify them as Southern immediately after hearing the recording. (11) gives a typical example. The excerpt comes immediately following a recording of Robert and follows the typical pattern in that the first response consists of the description "Southern" or "from the South". This description is then confirmed by all or most of the other participants. It is also often greeted by laughter, which may mark the comment as self-evident, as sensitive or possibly both.

(11) **Moderator:** Any sense about Robert?

> **Tamika:** From the south.
>
> **Abby:** Definitely.
>
> **Tamika:** Below North Carolina and far west as Texas, probably.
>
> **Abby:** Yeah, anywhere from the South or from Texas.
>
> *Group 19, Duke. In response to Robert, recording: tailgating, -ing guise.*

This exchange is somewhat unusual in the degree of detail that one of the listeners offered regarding what constituted the South. Not only did listeners not offer geographic detail as a rule, they did not seem to feel it was expected. When unable to guess the location of origin for a speaker who was not from the South, listeners would explain their inability by referring to their lack of lack of skill in identifying accents or the generic sound of the voice. For Southern speakers, listeners made no such apologies for giving only the description "from the South", turning instead to other topics, for example the level of education or the degree of dynamism of the speaker.
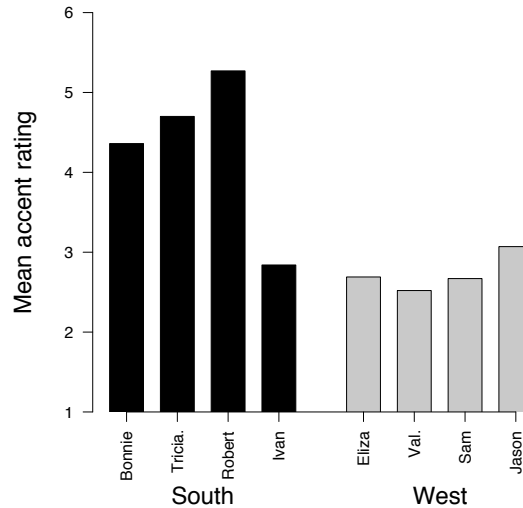
Figure 5.1: Accented ratings, by speaker (p = 0.000).

This pattern coincides with that found in work in perceptual dialectology, which has documented that not only is the South the most linguistically salient region for most Americans speakers, but that it tends to be conceptualized as a single monolithic region (Preston 1989).

Figures 5.1 and 5.2 showed the ratings for how accented listeners found each speaker and how often they were described as being from the South. The speakers most often identified as being from the South were also those described as most *accented*. One of the speakers, Ivan, was from the South but listeners in both the interviews and the survey did not perceive him as having a Southern accent. This is reflected in both his low accent ratings and his lack of Southern identifications. The link between accent and the South is further supported by a direct effect: listeners rated speakers as significantly more accented if they also marked them as being from the South (2.91/**4.79**, p = 0.000). No other region was positively associated with accent.

The salience of the South stood in contrast to the lack of regional identification for the non-Southern speakers. Participants only very rarely volunteered guesses about where a West Coast speaker was from. After asking other questions, I asked where
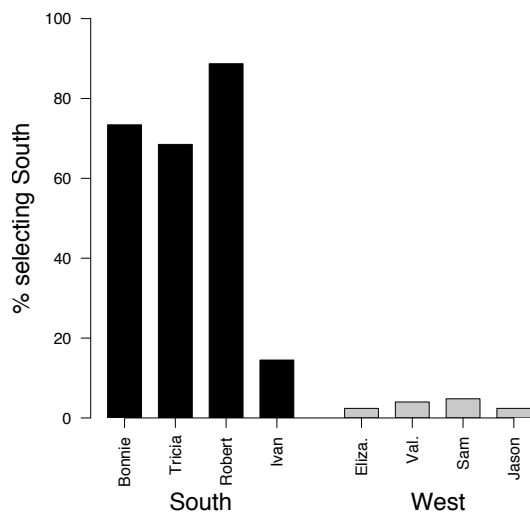
Figure 5.2: South selections, by speaker.

they thought the speaker might be from if it had not been mentioned. In (12), the participants from (11) give answered this question about Sam, one of the California men. The recording they heard deals with Sam's habit of going to parking garages late at night to skateboard down the ramps.

(12) **Moderator:** And any sense on where Sam might be from?

  (pause)

  Tamika: I'd say somewhere urban. As far as parking garages.

  Abby: I have no idea. There are malls everywhere.

  Mary: Wasn't a very distinct voice.

  Group 19, Duke. In response to Sam, recording: skateboarding, -in guise.

This excerpt is typical of the general inability to identify a region and also typical in that they explicitly link the issue to voice. Lacking linguistic cues, one participant drew on the content of the recording, speculating that since the speaker refers to "going to parking structures late at night" to skateboard, he might be living in an urban area. Other participants occasionally drew on content for pinpointing location. One man from Detroit who heard Elizabeth discuss her close-knit family suggested

that she too was from the Midwest because "we have a strong sense of family". These instances were unusual, however and most listeners seemed to feel that judging where a speaker was from was appropriately done on the basis of linguistic evidence, not message content. This contrasts with other kinds of information, such as profession or conversational context which were routinely "deduced" by listeners citing particular aspects of the recordings' content in explaining their theories.

So why do listeners believe for the most part that region is best identified linguistically, unlike other information? And how does this relate to the salience of the South? These questions revolve around the beliefs that these listeners and others have regarding the nature of accent and what Lippi-Green (1997) calls **the myth of the non-accent**. One of the core tenets of standard language ideology is that some speech is marked by the region, ethnicity or lack of education of the speaker, while other speech is simply regular or standard. Region is particularly implicated in accent:

> Accent falls into the domain of uneducated, sloppy, language anarchists. Those areas of the country which embody these characteristics most in the minds of a good many U.S. English speakers (the south, New York City), are the natural home of accent. Everybody else speaks standard English and as such, has no accent. (Lippi-Green 1997:58)

Among the speakers in my study, the Southerners were the only representatives of such "language anarchists" and represented the domain of accent juxtaposed against the unaccented, regionally unmarked speakers from the West Coast. The durability of the myth of the non-accent may be seen in (13), where one participant responds to another's challenge of the ideology, the only time any listener described a non-Southerner as having an accent. It is worth noting here that Linda, the one issuing the challenge, was the only linguistics major in the interviews.

(13) **Linda:** I don't know, I felt like she had a very distinct, like, accent, like the kind that I've heard here at Stanford.

    ???: California.

    Linda: or like when I [??] like at Stanford.

Megan: What is-

Karen: It's a non-accent.

Group 5, Stanford. In response to Elizabeth, recording: hair, -in guise.

Region is a central feature in the ideology of accented English but many other social structures are connected as well. Prominent among these is the idea I am calling community type, referring to the social baggage associated with living in the city, country or suburbs. Preston (1989) reports with some surprise that his respondents not only failed to distinguish Appalachia and the upper South from the rest of the South, but some applied the terms *hillbilly* and *hick* to the South as a whole. This kind of labeling not only erases (Irvine and Gal 2000) regional divisions within the South, it indicates an alignment of Southern accents overall with inhabitants of rural areas and the stereotypes associated with them. The data from my study reflected this alignment as well. In example (14), an interview participant explains the effect of (ING) by saying that *-in* enhances Bonnie's Southern accent and thus makes her sound more *country*.

(14) **Rob:** And as soon as she, also, it seems like after she said mixin', uh, "with the guys" seemed even more, like, country. Or more with the Southern accent. But when she said mixing with the guys it didn't seem as bad.

Group 10, Duke. In response to Bonnie, recording: seniors, comparison phase.

Survey participants were given the opportunity to indicate whether the speaker sounded like he/she might be from the *country*, from the *city* or from the *suburbs* by checking one or more boxes. Few listeners selected more than one box, although it was not unusual for them to select none of the three. Among those that did make a choice, there was an extremely strong pattern linking the country with both the South and high *accented* ratings. The Southern sounding speakers were also those most described as being from the *country*, while the others were overwhelmingly said to be from the *city* or the *suburbs*, a pattern we will see in more detail in Section 5.2. Table 5.1 gives the relationships across all of the speakers. If a listener thought the speaker was from the South, they were much more likely to describe the speaker as

being from the *country* and less likely to describe them as being from the *suburbs* or
the *city*.

	% listeners selecting checkbox		
	South	South	sig.
Checkbox label	not selected	selected	
country	6.7	**43.6**	0.000
suburbs	**27.0**	18.1	0.002
city	**30.0**	5.6	0.000

Table 5.1: Community type selections, by the South.

Community type had a similar relationship to perceptions of accent. When lis-
teners thought a speaker was from the *country*, they rated them as more *accented*
than when they did not. Conversely, when speakers were thought to be from the
suburbs and the *city*, they received lower *accented* ratings. Table 5.2 gives these rat-
ings. The relationship between *country* and *accent* seems to stem from the previously

	Checkbox	Checkbox	
Checkbox label	not selected	selected	sig.
country	3.23	**4.76**	0.000
suburbs	*3.66*	3.07	0.037
city	3.70	2.87	0.334

Table 5.2: Accented ratings, by community type.

mentioned alignment between *country* and the South. I have already demonstrated
that the South represents the strongest axis of accent in this data. The negative
relationship between the *suburbs* and *accented* could result from a general opposition
between the country and the suburbs. It could also reflect an association of the sub-
urbs with sameness and lack of accent. Montgomery (1997) invokes this association
when he speculates that "Among suburban teenagers in the South today there is
evidence of both the Northern Cities shift and the low back vowel merger and there
may be a good case for a modern day "suburbanization" or "genericization" or even
"McDonaldization" of American speech, just as suburban life everywhere is becoming

indistinguishable in ways commercial and otherwise. (p. 17)" There is moderate support for that connection in a weak effect linking being from the *suburbs* with being from *anywhere* (p = 0.042) while being from the *country* had a negative relationship to *anywhere* (p = 0.000).

The experiment was not designed to explore stereotypes about city dwellers in any great depth. As a result, I can only speculate as to the reason for the lack of a straightforward relationship between being from the city and having an accent. I suspect that it relates to the more flexible visions of class involved in images of the city. The city may conjure up images of cosmopolitan or urbane "people of the world", in the context of more wealthy city dwellers. In this case, they would be participating in an opposition against rural and therefore regional speakers, an opposition which would align the city with lack of accent. Interview participants often suggested that speakers lacking a Southern accent could still be from the South, if they were from a city. Working-class city dwellers, however, may be associated with accents, even strongly so. It is likely that the speakers in this study simply were not, for the most part, perceived as a working-class city residents. Selections of the speakers being from the *city* favored with them being described as from a *wealthy background* (p = 0.000) and from a *middle-class background* (p= 0.000) and correlated negatively with the speaker being described as from a *working-class background* (p = 0.040). Nonetheless, this class complexity may have led to conflicting associations with cities in the minds of listeners, increasing the variability of the responses regarding the relationship between accent and the city.

Instead of, or in addition to, these class issues, the lack of pattern may be explained by the fact that different cities also have very different relationships to accent. New York and Boston were both mentioned in the interviews as possible loci for accent, even though none of the speakers in my study were ever identified as being from either of those places. The hypothesis that the relationship between city and accent is complicated rather than nonexistent is supported by the fact that although there is no direct relationship between the two, there is an interaction indicating that the relationship between the two is different for different speakers (p = 0.035).

So far we have linked accent to community type and the constructed image of the

South. Other regions are also implicated in this set of ideologies. The participants in my study linked the South to the Midwest and also somewhat to the Southwest. The literature on perceptual dialectology shows disagreement among participants at different times and places regarding the Midwest. Preston (1989) documents his participants projecting an image of standardness on to the Midwest as a whole. Michigan residents especially are remarkable for the force of their conviction that speech of their area perfectly reflects standard American English (Niedzielski 1999). Fought (2002), however, working with students in Southern California, found a very different picture of the Midwest. Unlike Preston and Niedzielski's participants, Fought's informants disagreed about the status of the Midwest as a linguistically marked area. While two described it as heavily accented, two others said Midwesterners had no distinguishable accent. The bulk of the participants indicated it as a separate regional dialect, with little to no explicit linguistic characterization. Most of the descriptions centered around social images rather than linguistic ones, primarily revolving around the rural, such as *down-home*, *earthy*, *country*, *laid-back*, *hick* and *more rural pronunciation* (Fought 2002). These participants also had areas where they lacked specific images of accent. These tended to be more located in the mountain states and their lack of image did not result in a characterization of the speech as standard. Instead, respondents merely indicated their lack of knowledge through comments such as *unknown* or *do these people even speak?*.

The participants in my study shared a view of the Midwest closer to that reported by Fought than those documented by Preston and Niedzielski. Recall that the *Midwest* was one of the yes/no checkboxes that listeners could select indicating whether or not they thought the speaker was likely to be from that region. Survey listeners associated the *Midwest* with being from the *country* (p = 0.000). Characterizing a speaker as from the *Midwest* also favored (and was favored by) characterizing that speaker as being a *farmer* (p = 0.000), although not surprisingly, listeners who were themselves from the Midwest did not share the stereotype. The Midwest is also linked to the South: listeners were significantly more likely to describe a speaker as from the *Midwest* if they also selected the *South* (p = 0.001). Interview participants connected the South and the Midwest in social terms and even linguistic ones. Example (15)

shows a listener making reference to an imagined shared accent across both regions.

(15) **Mario:** I kinda like, I don't know, the Midwestern Southern type accent I generally associate with farms and sort like that I usually think about that. Not necessarily because people are actually living in farms but just because like a lot of movies, things like that you see.

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

The survey and interview data suggest that the listeners in my study have a dichotomy concerning region, whereby the Midwest and the South are aligned with each other and with the country, against other regions, particularly the coasts, and the suburbs and city. This opposition connects to a range of other social phenomena, including religion, politics and a variety of lifestyle assumptions. It has also been attracting increasing attention in the media and public discourse in recent years. The American Dialect Society annual meeting selected the phrase *red states* verses *blue states* as its 2004 Word Of The Year encapsulating this very phenomenon.

My data suggest that among these young, well-educated informants, this sociopolitical division involves a perceived linguistic connection between the South and Midwest. In example (16), one listener discusses his own reactions linking the Midwest and the South through rural images, in this case farming. He also reports others mistaking his own speech patterns for a Southern accent although he is from Nebraska.

(16) **Scott:** I just felt like with this one I think of farms and what he talked about the second time, I think of the Midwest and not the South. Kind of, I take offense to when people tell me that- I'm from Nebraska -that I sound like a Southerner so (laughter) still think he's from the South but this conversation there, maybe picture something in the Midwest.

Group 9, Duke. In response to Robert, recording: small-farms, -in guise.

Even though my participants frequently linked the Midwest to the South, it lacked the linguistic markers that help to make the South "the Touchstone" as Preston (1997) calls it. I have already described the strong link between the South and the concept of accent. Interview participants occasionally referenced specific linguistic cues, most of them vowels, which distinguished the Southern speakers. There were no such displays of linguistic awareness regarding the Midwest, indeed no reference to a Midwestern

accent which did not also involve the South. It seems that while my listeners, like Fought's participants, did not think of the Midwest as standard, they had no clear idea of what is entailed linguistically in the region's distinctiveness. This lack of linguistic character may relate to *-in*'s ability to increase selections of the *Midwest* in response to male speakers, as discussed in Chapter 4. Without direct cues, listeners may increase their reliance on social information (e.g. toughness, casualness) to make these identifications.

The Southwest as a region was not mentioned in the interviews, although occasionally participants refer to Texas, explicitly distinguishing it from the South. In the survey the Southwest was linked loosely with the South and the Midwest. Listeners who described a given speaker as from the *South* were more likely to also select the *Southwest* (p = 0.000) and from the *Midwest* (p = 0.000). The *Southwest* also had a positive relationship with being from the *country* (p = 0.001), but none with the identity *farmer*.

The picture is much less clear concerning the other side of this opposition, the regions and communities which are opposed to the rural South, Midwest and Southwest. It's possible that this is because my listeners are less certain of or more diverse in their conceptions of the city, the suburbs and these other regions. It's more likely that my study simply did not draw the kinds of distinctions that would easily shed light on these questions. Because the structure of the study drew attention to Southern accents, already an extremely salient linguistic phenomenon, it is likely that it erased variability elsewhere, both geographically and sociolinguistically. Despite this, it is possible to gather some information on other regions.

Table 5.3 gives mean accent ratings and significance values for all of the regions. Speakers were described as more *accented* when they were also described as being from the *South*. But although selections of the *South* favored selections of the *Midwest* and *Southwest*, neither of these two regions were connected to *accented* ratings. All of the rest of the regions showed decreased accent ratings, although only those for *New England* and the *East Coast* are significant.

The relationship between region and community type is more complicated. While the South, the Midwest and the Southwest are all related to the country, there is not a

	Accented ratings		
	Checkbox	Checkbox	
Checkbox label	not selected	selected	sig.
South	2.91	**4.79**	0.000
Midwest	3.48	3.70	0.719
Southwest	3.48	3.93	0.110
North	3.59	2.70	0.054
New England	**3.62**	2.53	0.000
East Coast	**3.68**	2.69	0.001
West Coast	3.68	2.82	0.138
Anywhere	3.73	2.81	0.150

Table 5.3: Accented ratings, by region.

clear relationship between particular regions and the suburbs or the city. Indeed, the relationships between the three concepts themselves are not straightforward. Listeners were much less likely to describe a speaker as being from the *city* if they described them as being from the *country* (p = 0.000), a finding which is not particularly surprising given that these two concepts represent a fundamental opposition. Selections of the *suburbs* and the *city* favor each other (p = 0.000). There was no relationship, either positive or negative, between the *suburbs* and the *country*.

Table 5.4 shows the relationship between all of the regions and the three community type labels. Each region is represented by two lines. The first line, labeled "no", gives the percentages of listeners who selected each community type out of all the listeners who did not select that region. The second line, labeled "yes", gives the percentage of listeners selecting each community type out of listeners who did select the region. So, for example, out of all of the instances where a listener did not think the speaker was from the South, in 30 percent of those cases the listener thought the speaker might be from the city. In the cases where the listener **did** think the speaker was from the South, only 5.6 percent of them thought the speaker might be from the city. Using the Chi Square test, these two proportions were significantly different at p <0.01 and this is indicated by the bold font on the larger value.

Overall, the evidence supports the observations made earlier that the South stands alone in its linguistic salience. It also shows a ideological divide in which the South,

Region		city	suburbs	country
			Community type	
South	no	**30.0**	**27.0**	6.7
	yes	5.6	18.1	**43.6**
Midwest	no	22.7	23.1	15.0
	yes	19.1	28.7	**35.4**
Southwest	no	22.1	23.5	17.4
	yes	21.6	30.7	**31.8**
North	no	19.9	23.5	**19.8**
	yes	**43.8**	30.3	6.7
New England	no	19.2	22.3	**20.3**
	yes	**50.0**	**41.5**	3.2
East Coast	no	17.3	21.2	**21.9**
	yes	**46.1**	**38.8**	2.4
West Coast	no	17.4	19.5	**22.6**
	yes	**41.2**	**42.8**	2.6
Anywhere	no	23.4	22.6	**23.0**
	yes	17.8	*29.1*	4.3

Table 5.4: Region selections, by community type. Numbers give percent of listeners selecting that community type out of listeners selecting or not selecting that region. Italics indicate significance at p < 0.05, bold indicates significance at p < 0.01.

Southwest and Midwest are aligned with each other and the country. Against them stands both the coasts and an aregional anywhere or standard/general American way of speaking and being. Both of these are tied to both the city and the suburbs, although the relationships at this end of the divide have yet to be teased out in detail. Some of those relationships will be explored in Section 5.3, but for the most part, this study has only skimmed the surface of the issues in that domain.

Understanding the interplay of region, accent and the rural/urban divide is important groundwork in understanding the role of (ING) in the speech of Americans. As we will see, (ING)'s meanings depend on the position of the speaker in this landscape. The next section will go over the speakers in my study, how they fit into this picture and the impact of (ING) on the speech of each of them.

5.2   Placing the speakers and (ING)

The previous section laid out the patterns that emerged in my data concerning region, accent and the rural/urban divide. In this section, I will move from this abstract discussion to one grounded in the actual variable and speakers under discussion. (ING) is intimately tied to the regional divide which constructs the South as a region of rural and accented speakers. Many linguists and non-linguists believe that Southerners use *-in* more than other speakers, which is plausible but has not been formally established. This belief creates expectations that Southern speakers will use *-in* and "non-accented" speakers will use *-ing*. Those expectations combine with perceptions of specific speakers to give meaning to (ING) in context. While (ING) does have some impact on the deductions listeners make about region, for the most part region and accent function as part of the context which frames a given use of (ING). I will first discuss the overall relationship of (ING) to region, accent and the rural/urban divide, then describe where the speakers in my study fall with respect to these questions.

I noted in Chapter 2 that although no studies have explicitly compared (ING) use across U.S. regions, the literature holds many suggestions that Southern speakers use higher levels of *-in* than other Americans. My own experience collecting the recordings used for the main study also supports this. In the six hourlong interviews on the West Coast, there were only two tokens of *-in*, both from the same speaker in the same clause, clearly used for specific effect (the tokens were *sitting* and *watching* in the last line of Elizabeth's recording "theme-park", in which she says "and you're just sittin' there watchin' it all go by"). In contrast, the Southern speakers all used sizeable percentages of *-in*, though it was by no means categorical. Although there is not really any clear data on the question, it does seem probable that at least some Southern speakers use more *-in* than comparable non-Southern speakers. It is also possible, however, that (ING) is tied to a more general concept of accent, of which the South is a subset but which also implicates other regions, as well as class and community type.

Regardless of the actual distribution of (ING), the participants in my study associate *-in* with the South. Interview participants said that they associated *-in* with

accents in general and Southern accents in particular and with people who live in the country. This pattern held independent of where they themselves were from or what school they attended. Despite these associations, listeners did not base their region judgments on (ING). Interview participants did not change their guesses about region when presented with alternate (ING) versions of the recordings. This is due in part to discourse constraints; once participants have committed to an evaluation they may be reluctant to change their assessment on the basis of a single variable. However, survey participants also showed no consistent impact of (ING) on their guesses as to which region a speaker might be from. Some patterns were visible regarding individual speakers but no effect appeared across all of the data. Instead of (ING) influencing listener perceptions about region, the connection between the two was usually phrased in terms of fit or naturalness. The Southern speakers were described as sounding more natural when they use *-in*. In example (17), several listeners work together to explain how natural *-in* was in the speech of the two Southern speakers they heard. This opinion, including the word "natural", was reiterated throughout the interviews. Conversely, the *-ing* variant was consistently described as belonging naturally in the speech of the non-Southerners.

(17) **Sally:** The second one sounded more natural.

    Moderator: Okay.

    ???: Yeah.

    Sarah: I agree.

    Tom: It was kind of like the same situation as Tricia. Just went with how she speaks better.

    Moderator: Okay.

    Tom: It's natural.

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

Because listeners have a sense of which variant is more appropriate for certain speakers, region is important in influencing the ultimate role of (ING). Listeners make their judgments regarding accent based on other cues and these judgments

build expectations as to which variant of (ING) the speaker is likely to say regularly. These expectations then help to structure listener reactions to the variant a speaker actually uses. Example (18) is an unusually explicit discussion of this, where a listener explains Valerie's anomalous use of *-in* by suggesting that she is accommodating to a Southern audience.

(18) **Greg:** So I think it sounds more natural for her to say *-ing*. Hiking. Hikin' just- it just doesn't mesh well with the rest of the sentence. But I mean if she did, if she were, if I did have a true situation in which she was saying- which she was saying hiking or sorry hikin' with i-n on the end of it? It would sound as though she's trying she's maybe around somebody Southern and she's trying to be Southern or trying to be a little bit too laidback relaxed linguistically.

Group 21, Duke. In response to Valerie, recording: backpacking, comparison phase.

Valerie has other aspects of her speech that reveal information about her background, regional and otherwise. Although Valerie is from California, Greg had previously guessed that she was from Colorado. From this estimate and other evaluations of her linguistic performance, he determined (as did the other listeners who heard Valerie) that she was someone who would normally say *-ing*. Knowing this, he looked for possible interpretation of *-in* in her speech. He drew on the connection between *-in* and the South to suggest that she is trying to invoke or adapt to a Southern norm.

A crucial message of this study, then, is that listeners conceptualize some speakers as naturally saying *-in* and others naturally saying *-ing*. This forms part of the structure within which the meaning of (ING) is evaluated. The impact of a given use of (ING) will depend, among other things, on where listeners think a speaker is from and how accented they think the speaker is. In order to understand why the results regarding (ING) differ for these particular speakers, we must examine how the speakers fall within this landscape. The role of (ING) in the performance depends on (among other factors) the overall place of the speaker along the three bundled topics discussed above: region, accent and the rural/urban divide. The speakers in my study may be broken down on the basis of region into two groups of three and two individuals. I will go through these in turn: Southern speakers, anywhere speakers,

Ivan and Jason. For each I will describe listener impressions with respect to region, accent and community type, then note where (ING) has an impact.

As discussed in Chapter 3, survey participants were asked to select one or more possible regions of origin for each speaker. They were given the options of the South, New England, the Midwest, the West Coast, the East Coast, the Southwest, the North and *anywhere*. The structure of the survey was intended to contrast four speakers with identifiable Southern accents (Bonnie, Tricia, Robert and Ivan) against four with accents from the West Coast (Valerie, Sam and Jason are from California and Elizabeth is from Seattle). In practice, Ivan, one of the speakers from North Carolina, was not perceived as having a Southern accent. Instead, the regional assessments divide the speakers into two groups of three and two individuals. Bonnie, Tricia and Robert are Southern speakers, both in fact and in perception. Elizabeth, Valerie and Sam, from Seattle and California, are most often described as being "from anywhere". Ivan, who is in fact from North Carolina, is primarily identified as being from the West Coast, while Jason, the remaining Californian, exhibits a pattern of his own. I will address each group in turn.

The three Southerners (Bonnie, Tricia and Robert) were described as being from the South well over 60% of the time. They were also the three speakers with the highest accent ratings, as shown in Figure 5.1. Figure 5.3 shows the frequency with which listeners selected each region or community type for each of these three speakers. All three were most likely to be described as sounding as though they were from the *country* and not from the *city*. Tricia and Robert also had low levels of being identified as from the *suburbs*. Bonnie was more likely than the other two to be described as being from the *suburbs* and although her (ING) guise may have some impact on those attributions, the trend does not reach significance (p = 0.095). Tricia was marginally more likely to be described as being from *anywhere* in her *-ing* than her *-in* guise (p = 0.046).

I discussed above that in the data overall (ING) had no effect on how accented the speaker sounded. However, these three speakers were rated as more *accented* in their *-in* than their *-ing* guises (p = 0.012). This suggests that although (ING) does not consistently influence perceived region across all of the speakers, *-in* does, in fact,
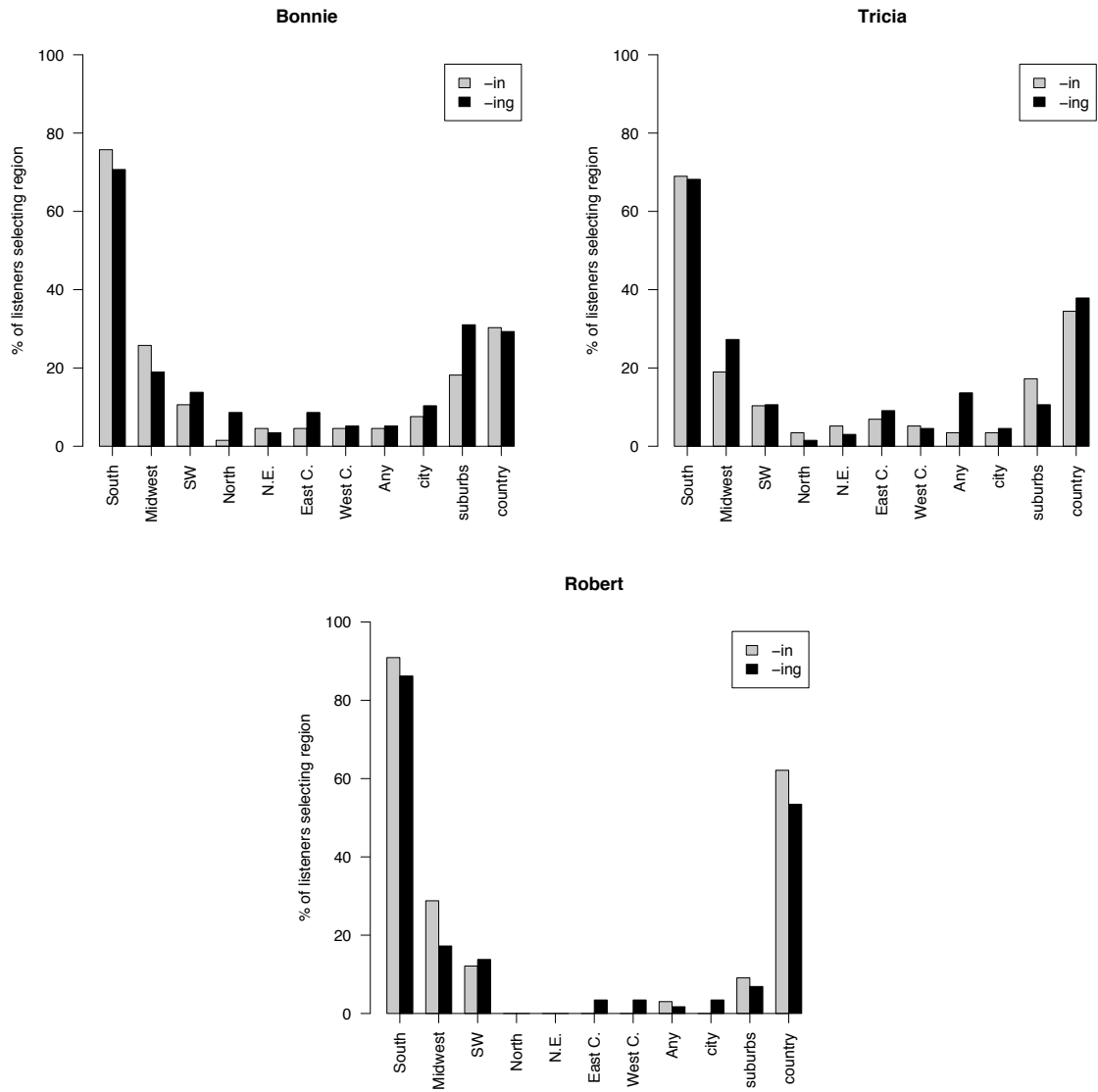
Figure 5.3: Region and community type selections for the Southern speakers, by (ING)

perceptually enhance (some) Southern accents. Even in this restricted set, however, (ING) has no influence on the likelihood of a speaker being described as being from the South. Although it may influence how Southern the speaker sounds, that effect is apparently no where near the threshold level for identification.

I refer to the next three speakers as the "anywhere speakers" and their regional profiles can be seen in figure 5.4. Elizabeth, Sam and Valerie are from the West Coast. For all three, selections of the descriptor *anywhere* top 35% and all other regional descriptions are under 30%. All three have relatively low ratings for *accented*. They are only rarely described as being from the *country* but are more frequently said to be from the *suburbs* or *city*, the opposite pattern from the Southerners. Elizabethmay be more likely to be described as being from the *city* in her *-in* guise than in her *-ing* guise (p = 0.070). Sam was significantly more likely to be described as being from New England (p = 0.004) and from the East Coast (p = 0.037) in his *-ing* guise.

The remaining two male speakers show individual patterns. Figure 5.5 shows that Ivan, the North Carolina speaker with low accent ratings, is most often described as being from the West Coast. This is followed closely by the East Coast, followed by the Midwest and *anywhere*. Like the anywhere speakers, Ivan is described more often as being from *suburbs* or the *city* and less often from the *country*. Ivan also shows an effect of (ING) on how rural he sounds. He is significantly more likely to be described as being from the *country* when he uses *-in* (p = 0.021), although even so this attribute lags behind the other two.

The remaining speaker, Jason, also is primarily identified as being from the West Coast and secondarily either the East Coast or *anywhere*, as seen in Figure 5.6. When he uses *-in*, it is the East Coast. In his *-ing* guise, his East Coast ratings drop slightly and he is more often described as being from *anywhere*. The effect on how likely Jason is to be described as from the East Coast is not significant (p = 0.099). He is significantly more likely to be described as being from New England in his *-in* guise of (p = 0.003), a pattern which is the opposite of that shown by Sam. Jason is unique in being overwhelmingly identified as an urban person: he is more likely to be described as being from the *city* than either of the other two options. Jason also has higher accent ratings in his *-ing* guise than his *-in* guise. This seems
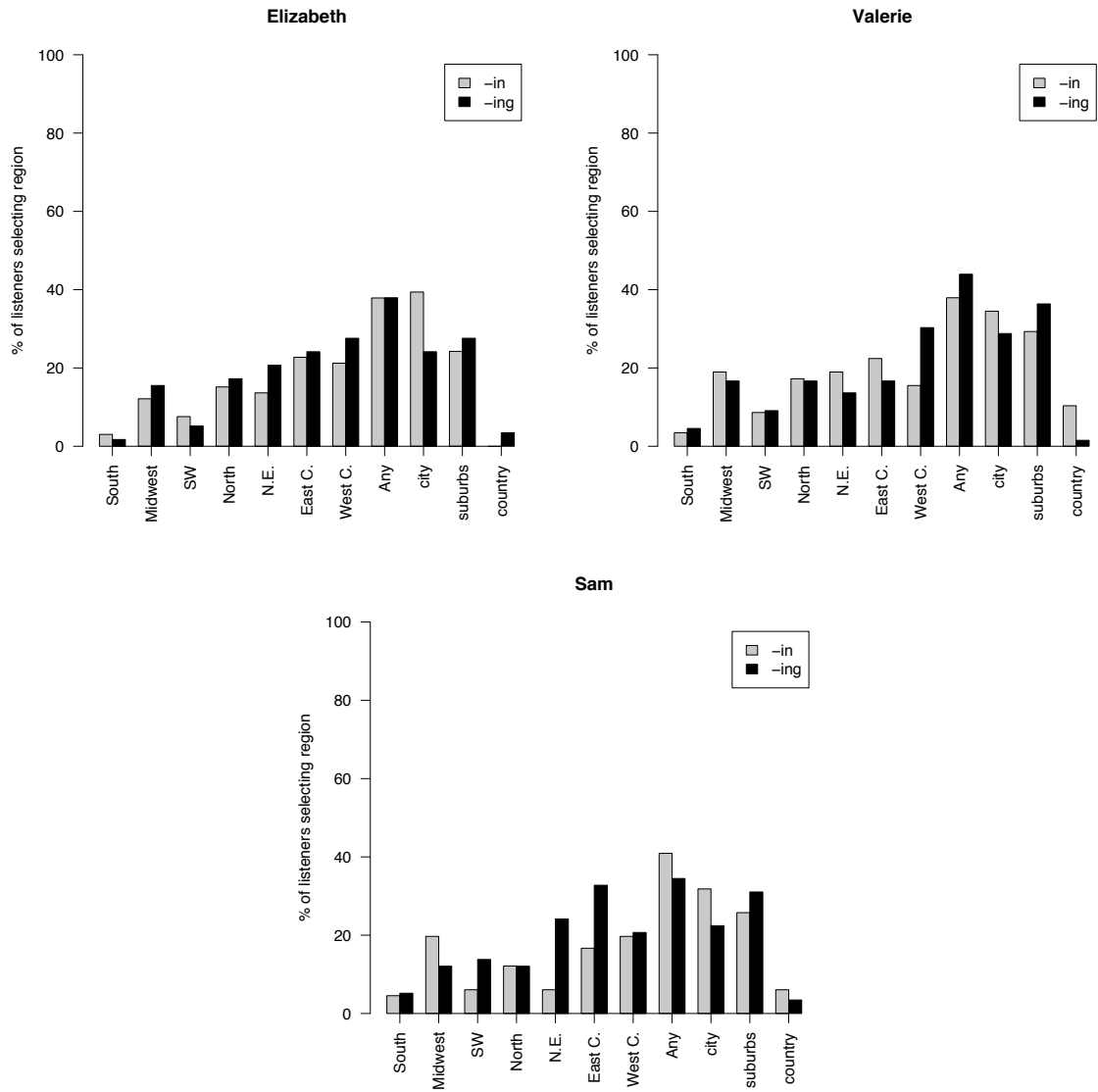
Elizabeth

Valerie

Sam

Figure 5.4: Region and community type selections for the anywhere speakers, by (ING)
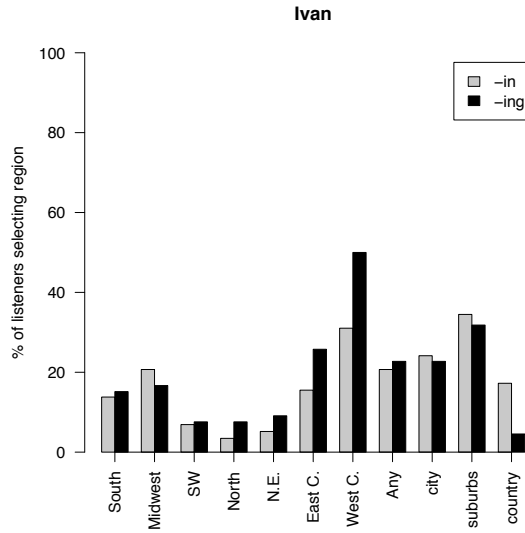
Ivan

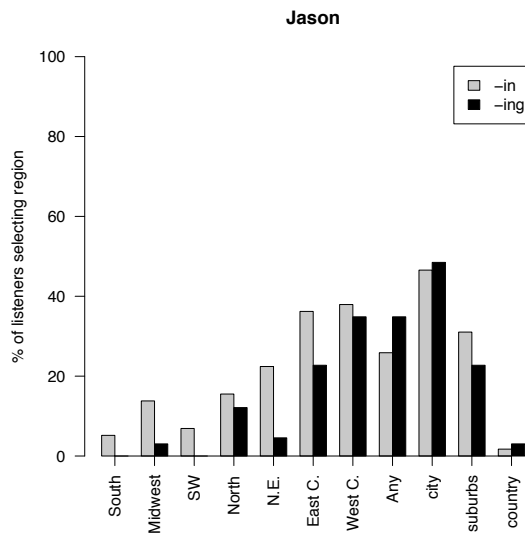Figure 5.5: Region selections for Ivan, by (ING)

Jason

Figure 5.6: Region selections for Jason, by (ING)

to be because Jason's accent is associated with has little to do with the South or the country. Instead, listeners perceive him as having either a gay accent, an urban accent (although only of a relatively high social class) or a New England accent (also associated with wealth). Section 5.3 will explore all of these issues in more detail.

Geography is a rich site for both language variation and social meaning and concepts like region and community type are fraught with sociolinguistic meaning. Regional labels in particular are crucial markers that people use to understand linguistic diversity. These and other social divisions helped to structure language ideologies which influence which speakers are considered accented or unaccented. All of these pieces form the background into which specific linguistic resources are embedded.

5.3   Different speakers, different accents

In the previous section, we saw that the Southern speakers were overwhelmingly seen as more accented than the others, suggesting that in the context of the study, the Southern accent serves as a canonical accent. For these speakers, their accents were considered stronger when they use *-in*. For one speaker, however, the relationship between (ING) and accent was quite different. Jason, the urban bicoastal speaker, is the only speaker to be rated as more accented in his *-ing* guise than in his *-in* guise, as Table 5.5 shows.

	-in	*-ing*
accented	1.83	*2.29*

Table 5.5: Accented ratings for Jason, by (ING) (p = 0.039).

The explanation for this difference lies in Jason's individual style and the type of accent he has. Although Jason's (ING) pattern is in itself a surprise, given the pattern in the overall data, it is not surprising that in his case *-in* is not associated with a Southern accent. He is perceived generally as being from the coasts and from a city, as (19) demonstrates. Interview participants did not seem to consider a Southern identity as a likely possibility for Jason, although Molly points out that

urban residents of the South could have "voices like that".

(19) **Moderator:** Any sense of where he might be from?

Shantell: I'd say New England or somewhere on the East Coast. Definitely not the South. Or um, like, Minnesota, Colorado.

Janis: I wouldn't think he was from like Boston, East Coast cause he doesn't really have that accent at all. So.

Shantell: Oh, no.

Shantell: I've never been there so I really couldn't tell ya but I know he's not from where I'm from.

Molly: Um, I think he could be actually from where I'm from. I'm from San Antonio.

Shantell: No way! I think I've met you before!

Molly: Yes, you have.

Shantell: Where are you from? [town name]

Molly: [??] Every- If you- the closer you get to the city in the South the more likely you are to um, [??] voices like that. Could be.

Moderator: So, you're saying he could be from the South but he'd be in the city?

Molly: Ah yeah. I mean I think he-

Bill: I- he seemed from New England but like a city not- yeah, I agree not Boston. Maybe like New York and he didn't grow up there.

???: yeah mhmm

Janis: I like, The first thing I thought of was New York but I also think he could be from San Francisco or Seattle or something because those like cities like that on the west coast are known for being pretty like artistic and cool and like

Bill: mhmm

Bill: I think that's what I [? no regionalisms?] like

Janis: yeah

Janis: Watch he's from like, Idaho.

All: (laughter)

Janis: Rural [???].

Bill: Yeah.

Molly: If he is he was made fun of as a child.

All: (laughter)

Group 8, Stanford. In response to Jason, recording: clocks (variant), -ing guise.

Survey listeners agreed with this assessment, only rarely selecting the *South* or *country* for Jason. Given this, it is apparent that for most people the percept of "Southern accent" simply did not apply to Jason. But even though Jason clearly does not have a Southern accent, he has the potential for one or more other accents which connect to (ING) in very different ways than Southern accents do. The social meanings associated with Jason's speech seem to vary for different listeners. For many, he sounded gay, while for others he seemed like a wealthy New Englander. Most heard him as urban.

Although Jason clearly contrasts with the Southern speakers, for at least some listeners, he still has an accent. Not only are his *accented* ratings increased by *-ing*, overall they are higher than the other West Coast speakers. It is not entirely clear what constitutes accent to these listeners but whatever it is, Jason seems to have some of it. That something also turns the usual paradigm of markedness of (ING) on its head. Although listeners explicitly conceptualize the *-ing* variant as "correct" or unmarked, this status is dependent on the overall linguistic context. Different speakers may diverge from the norms in different directions. As a result, the ways in which their speech is affected by (ING) may take them either towards or away from that norm. In Jason's case, it is the *-ing* variant which moves him away from the unmarked towards the realm of accent.

A gay accent?

The first pattern involving Jason and accent revolves around how often listeners described him as gay. This pattern turns out to be correlated with perceptions of Jason being from the city, as well. Perceptions of gayness are linked explicitly to language and accent in special ways, tying into the concept of "gay speech" which has been investigated off and on for many years.

Not only does Jason sound gay to many listeners but he may be more likely to sound gay when he uses *-ing*. There was a trend approaching significance suggesting that Jason was more likely to be described as *gay* in his *-ing* guise, as shown in Table 5.6.

	% listeners selecting checkbox	
Checkbox label	*-in*	*-ing*
gay	36.5	63.5

Table 5.6: *Gay selections for Jason, by (ING) (p = 0.052).*

Listeners also associated being gay with having an accent. As Table 5.7 shows, those listeners who describe Jason as *gay* rated him as more *accented* than those who did not. We can be very confident that this pattern is not due to an association between being gay and being from the South. Only three people said that Jason was possibly from the South and none of those three selected *gay* as a descriptor. It is

	gay not selected	*gay* selected
accent	1.71	**2.58**

Table 5.7: *Accented ratings for Jason, by gay. (p = 0.000)*

likely, instead, that my listeners share the widespread and well documented ideology of the "Gay Accent" (Gaudio 1994; Podesva *et al.* 2001; Levon 2005a). It has long been a source of discussion among linguists and nonlinguists alike that some gay men seem to signal their sexual identity in their speech patterns. Some work has sought to find consistent differences in speech production between gay and straight men, however more consistent results have been found in looking at acoustic correlates to the percept of "sounding gay", rather than looking for correlates to sexual orientation. Kulick (2000) gives a thorough critique of the sexual identity literature, particularly that which seeks linguistic correlates to sexual orientation. Researchers into the percept of gay speech have investigated a range of acoustic cues, with somewhat uneven results.

Early work took a speech pathology approach, identifying effeminate speech in men (or masculine speech in women) as a problem to be fixed. Terango (1966) found that men perceived as feminine had higher median pitch than those described as masculine and a higher rate of pitch change. Travis (1981) found that men identified by listeners as feminine had higher pitch and a greater variation of intensity than other men. Initiating a new chapter in the topic, one with a greater focus on identity, Gaudio (1994) presented a small group of undergraduate subjects with recordings from four gay and four straight men, reading both a passage about accounting and a portion of a play with a gay theme. He found that his listeners were able to judge the sexual orientation of the speakers with reasonable accuracy. He also acoustically analyzed the recordings for pitch but was not able to find any clear predictors. Crist (1997) introduced an element of performance and drew out the notion of stereotype more explicitly by having speakers read a passage in both their ordinary voices and in an exaggerated "queeny" voice. He found that in performing the stereotyped gay voice, speakers lengthened /l/ and word initial /s/ before /p/ and /k/. This pattern held for five of his six speakers, but not for the final one, suggesting unsurprising variation in how individual speakers conceptualize a stereotyped voice in relation to their regular speaking style. Linville (1998) found a reliable correlation between actual and perceived sexual orientation, but only found reliable two acoustic correlates: the duration and peak frequency of /s/. She also examined F0, speech rate and long-term average speech spectra, but found no relationship between these and either actual or perceived sexual orientation.

More recently, Smyth *et al.* (2003) assembled a set of recordings of 25 speakers in three different situations, spanning a range of perceived sexual orientation. Their results also indicate some intriguing complexities in the judgments their listeners were making. In two different experiments, they asked listeners to judge the voices either as gay/straight or masculine/feminine. Although for the most part the two sets of results correlated with each other, lower pitched voices showed a larger discrepancy between the two tasks than did voices with higher pitch. This was despite the fact that pitch had no direct predictive power for either real or perceived sexual orientation. They also found an interesting effect from message content. Before carrying out

the experiment, Smyth and his colleagues took pains to remove information which explicitly marked sexual identification from the recordings of spontaneous speech. Despite this, judgments based on transcripts correlated strongly with those based on the actual recordings, indicating that a large portion of the judgments related to content rather than acoustic cues. It also indicates that content, lexical choice and discourse structure may be loaded in terms of sexual orientation in much more subtle ways than they had anticipated. Shifting the focus back to correlates of actual sexual orientation, or at least self identification, Pierrehumbert *et al.* (2004) reported that the gay men in their study exhibited an expanded vowel space relative to the straight men. They suggested that this resulted from the men adopting "aspects of female speech that convey social engagement and emotional expressiveness" (p. 1908).

Only one study to date has explored sexual orientation and the use of (ING). Unfortunately, Fai (1988) is marred by methodological issues. She started with the hypothesis that gay men would use more *-ing* than straight men, due to their marginalized status among men. Her results, however, actually indicate higher use of *-in* among the gay men, a finding which is apparently due to the interview with the gay speaker being more casual than those involving the straight men. This study does not seem to shed much light on either the real or imagined connection between sexual orientation among men and (ING).

More satisfying work relevant to the current project is the recent research of Levon (2004, 2005) . As in the research presented here, he takes a crucially important step away from looking for correlates across different speakers and instead uses digital manipulation to investigate the impact of specific variables directly. Drawing on the existing body of work, his research investigates the effect of changes in pitch and silibant duration on listeners' estimates of sexual orientation in a single speaker. Beginning with a recording judged to be extremely effeminate and extremely gay sounding, Levon created alternate recordings by compressing the pitch range and reducing the length of the silibants. He found that both of these manipulations significantly reduced the percept of gayness and effeminacy. However, when he carried out the opposite procedure using recordings made by a masculine sounding male speaker, no effect resulted from lengthening the pitch range or the silibants.

My results show a possible impact of (ING) on sounding gay, but as in Levon's data only in the speech of the speaker who is already identified as *gay* relatively frequently. The other speakers, who are not particularly heard as gay, shown no suggestion of (ING) influencing how often they are described as gay. Similarly, Levon's listeners were only influenced by pitch and silibant duration in the context of an overall a feminine or gay performance. This suggests that all three of these resources do not necessarily bear a direct meaning of sexual identity, but rather are able to form part of a package style, helping to enhance a performance which encompasses a range of linguistic and extralinguistic features. This observation builds on a point made by myself and my co-authors in Podesva *et al.* (2001), that a performance which is perceptibly gay may be built using resources which are widely available and form part of the stylistic repertoire of many speakers. In that study, we documented a gay activist lawyer using increased frequency of word final /t/ release as compared to his straight interlocutor. We emphasized that although the overall impact of the lawyer's style was extremely gay, he was also performing the persona of a competent lawyer who could speak knowledgeably about a legal case as well as represent the gay community. The crux of our claim was that individual styles are built out of a range of available resources, many of which do not relate solely to that style.

Understanding the processes of stylistic construction naturally requires understanding stylistic comprehension. Jason was the only speaker who was heard as gay a significant portion of the time. Sam, the other West Coast male speaker, also had some incidence of being marked as gay, about 10 percent of the time. Responses to Sam show no effect of (ING), although this may be due to the infrequency of the selection overall. In Jason's case, his *-ing* guise favors attributions of being gay across all four recordings individually, although each recording has a different overall likelihood of *gay* being selected, as shown in Figure 5.7.

Jason's overall style is one which a significant portion of the listeners interpret as gay. The manipulation of a single variable, in this case (ING), may either enhance or dampen it. This does not mean that *-ing* carries any "gay meaning". Indeed, this seems very unlikely given that Jason is the only speaker to exhibit any influence of (ING) on listener impressions of his sexuality. In the context of Jason's speech,
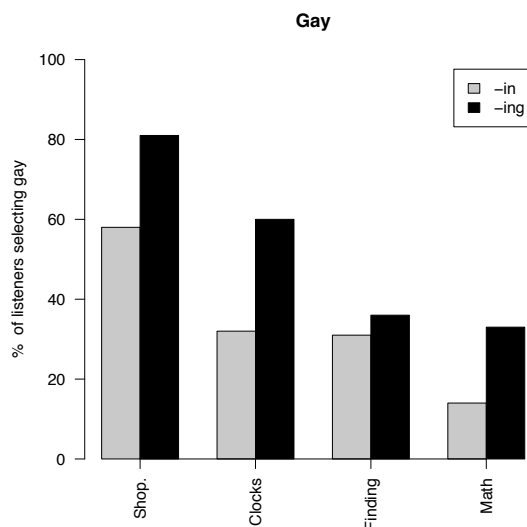
Figure 5.7: Gay selections for Jason, by recording and (ING)

impressions of his sexual orientation are manipulated by (ING), possibly through the medium of the relationship of (ING) to masculinity. This relationship, in turn, may either be direct or, more likely, be itself mediated through formality and engagement in the standard language market.

The function of masculinity in connecting (ING) in Jason's speech to a percept of gayness may be seen in the relationship of both of these to listener ratings of masculinity and to the concept "metrosexual". I included the term *metrosexual* in the survey materials in response to a couple of instances in the interview data where listeners commented on the potential that Jason might belong to this category, as shown in (20).

(20) **Tamika:** At risk of sounding like everybody else with this whole metrosexual thing.

　All: (laughter)

　Tamika: I mean for lack of a better term I'd use that for what I'd think he, like, the kind of person he was.

　Abby: He could be gay. (laughter)

　Mary: That too.

Abby: I mean a, well, guy who likes to shop and buy expensive things. Well, it could be electronics but he could be talking about Banana Republic or something. (laughter)

Mary: Or Structure. (laughter)

Abby: Structure (laughter)

Moderator: () So, is Banana Republic a particularly meaningful store? To like, to shop at?

Abby: Um, for guys who like expensive clothing and really pay a lot of attention to how they dress, yes.

Mary: (laughter)

Moderator: And Structure is same type?

Abby: And Structure, yeah. It's sort of the metrosexual look, urban chic thing going on.

Group 19, Duke. In response to Jason, recording: shopping, -ing guise.

In this conversation, the interview participants focus on the content of Jason's recording in their reactions concerning his sexuality. The recording under discussion in (20), which discusses his love of shopping, is more often described as gay than of any of other recording. Nonetheless, all of his recordings outstrip those of any of the other speakers in ratings of gay or metrosexual, suggesting that there is more to this pattern than this obvious content cue.

Although it is not clear to what extent the term (or the concept) metrosexual has spread through different populations in the country, for this listener population it was closely connected with being gay, although it seemed less loaded. Table 5.8 shows that in Jason's speech, the two terms heavily favor each other. But although the two are conceptually linked, metrosexual is not linked to speech in the same way that gay is. Jason's *gay* attributions are possibly influenced by (ING), while his attributions of *metrosexual* show no consistent pattern in response to (ING) across the different recordings, as shown in Figure 5.8.

The interaction of these two qualities with accent confirms this picture: there is an extremely robust connection between perceptions of Jason being *gay* and ratings of him as *accented.* Once this association is accounted for, however, there is no connection between perceptions of him as *metrosexual* and *accented.* There is, however,

	% listeners selecting checkbox	
	gay	*gay*
Checkbox label	not selected	selected
metrosexual	26.4	69.2

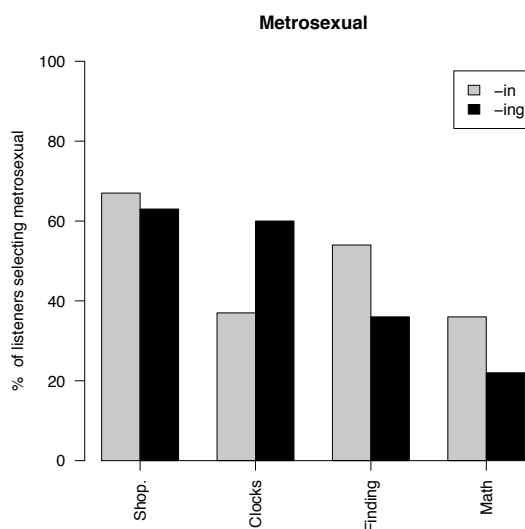*Table 5.8: Metrosexual selections for Jason, by gay (p = 0.000).*

Figure 5.8: Metrosexual selections for Jason, by recording and (ING)

a robust interaction through which (ING) changes the relationship between these two percepts. Specifically, listeners who selected *metrosexual* and heard Jason's *-ing* guise rated him as more accented than others.

	-in	*-ing*
not *metrosexual*	1.90	1.87
metrosexual	1.74	**2.86**

Table 5.9: Accented ratings for Jason, by (ING) and metrosexual (p = 0.003).

The social image of urban centers forms another important piece to this puzzle. In example (19), we saw the suggestion that listeners associate part of Jason's style with living in, but not necessarily being from, a city. Much of the time people associate

sexual minority groups themselves with cities, exaggerating the real tendency of the members of such groups to move to metropolitan areas in order to join existing communities. Given all of this, it is not surprising that this interplay between sexuality, stylistic identity and accent also is intertwined with the city. Table 5.10 shows that listeners who thought that Jason was from a *city* rated him as more *accented* than those who thought he was not, suggesting that the quality of Jason's accent is of a sort associated with city dwellers, rather than country dwellers. This contrasts with the overall data on the urban-rural divide, in which the Southern accented speakers had higher accent ratings when they were seen as being from the country.

	city not selected	*city* selected
accent	1.86	*2.31*

Table 5.10: *Accented ratings for Jason, by city. (p = 0.043)*

Table 5.11 shows that perceptions of being from the city and (ING) may serve to magnify each other's relationship to accent, a trend which does not reach significance. In Jason's *-ing* guise, not only is he rated as more *accented* overall, but the difference in accent ratings based on urban identity may be increased.

	-in	*-ing*
city not selected	1.81	1.91
city selected	1.85	2.69

Table 5.11: *Accented ratings for Jason, by (ING) and city (p = 0.100).*

The interplay between accent, (ING) and the city is also tied to the perceptions around Jason's sexuality. In addition to having similar relationships to *accent* and (ING), perceptions of Jason as being from the *city* and *gay* tend to co-occur, as Table 5.12 shows, while *suburbs* tend to disfavor *gay*, shown in Table 5.13. No connection between *gay* and the *country* is visible, due to the extremely low occurrence of *country*.

Table 5.14 shows the interaction between listeners' perceptions of Jason as *gay* and how *masculine* they rated him. When listeners described Jason as *gay*, they rated him as significantly less *masculine* than otherwise, as Smyth *et al.* found in

	% listeners selecting checkbox	
	city	*city*
Checkbox label	not selected	selected
gay	32.3	52.5

Table 5.12: Gay selections, by city (p = 0.023).

	% listeners selecting checkbox	
	suburbs	*suburbs*
Checkbox label	not selected	selected
gay	47.3	27.3

Table 5.13: Gay selections for Jason, by suburbs (p = 0.046).

their study. Although *metrosexual* is also associated with lower *masculine* scores, this association is entirely accounted for by the connection between *gay* and *metrosexual*, leaving no association between *metrosexual* and *masculine* once the variance related to *gay* is accounted for.

	not *gay*	*gay*
masculine	**3.67**	2.23

Table 5.14: Masculine ratings for Jason, by gay (p = 0.000).

Given the relationship between sexual orientation and masculinity and the relationship between his sexuality and (ING), it is reasonable to inquire as to the effect of (ING) on listeners' perceptions of Jason's masculinity. It turns out that this relationship is dependent on the gender of the listener. Female listeners hear Jason as equally *masculine* in either guise, if anything favoring his *-ing* guise as more *masculine*. Male listeners, on the other hand, rate his *-in* guise as quite a bit more *masculine* than his *-ing* guise. None of the groups' ratings reaches the halfway point of 3.5, showing that even in his *-ing* guise listeners found Jason less masculine than "average".

	-in	-ing
Female listeners	2.91	3.26
Male listeners	3.36	2.71

Table 5.15: Masculine ratings for Jason, by (ING) and listener gender (p = 0.039).

A New England accent?

Not all of the listeners turned to Jason's sexuality for an explanation of his speech patterns. Two other qualities which interacted with (ING) and ratings of accent were being *wealthy* and being from *New England*. These strongly favor each other (p = 0.010) and share identical patterns in interacting with (ING). The description "wealthy New Englander" provides an alternate explanation for Jason's speech patterns not related to sexuality. There is no interaction between these and ratings for gay or metrosexual; they neither favor nor disfavor each other but occur independently.

The somewhat complicated relationship of *wealthy* to (ING) and accent is given in Table 5.16. In Jason's *-ing* guise, those listeners who thought that he might be *wealthy* rated him as more *accented* then those who did not think so. In contrast, in his *-in* guise, listeners who selected *wealthy* rated him as less *accented* than those who did not. In other words, *-ing* led to a positive relationship of sounding *wealthy* and sounding *accented*, while *-in* led to a negative relationship between these two perceptions. Table 5.17 shows that a trend of a similar interaction exists between (ING), accent and New England. Because of the connection between *wealthy* and *New England*, it is likely that the perceived accent in these two tables is the same one.

	-in	-ing
not *wealthy*	1.92	2.20
wealthy	1.65	2.56

Table 5.16: Accented ratings for Jason, by (ING) and wealthy (p = 0.038).

Looking at this relationship, it is tempting to claim that *-ing* is increasing the

	-in	*-ing*
not *New England*	1.95	2.25
New England	1.38	3.00

Table 5.17: *Accented ratings for Jason, by (ING) and New England (p =0.126).*

	% listeners selecting checkbox		
Checkbox label	*-in*	*-ing*	sig.
wealthy	34.5	24.2	0.210
New England	**22.4**	4.5	0.003

Table 5.18: *Wealthy and New England selections, by (ING).*

appropriateness of the terms *wealthy* and *New England*. This is not so, however. When accent is taken out of the picture, it is *-in* which is associated with the qualities of *a wealthy background* and being from *New England*. Table 5.18 demonstrates that selections describing Jason as being from *a wealthy background* and from *New England* are both greater in his *-in* guise than his *-ing* guise. This pattern is significant in the case of *New England*, but not for *wealthy*. The exact meaning of this divergence is not clear, although it opens up a fascinating realm of possibilities involving the relationship of linguistic styles to the concept of accent.

All of these patterns combine to make a crucial point: accent is not perceived by the participants in my study as a continuum, but rather as a multi dimensional landscape arrayed around a central norm. Although listeners may share an idea of what constitutes a lack of accent (i.e. the standard), they recognize a range of ways in which a speaker may diverge from this norm and be accented. In speakers with Southern accents, *-in* is perceived as "matching" that accent and enhancing its performance. Jason's non-normativity occupies a different portion of the social space and the minor adjustments made by the use of (ING) relate differently to the norm. Listeners associate Jason's accent with that of gay men and wealthy New Englanders. In all of these cases, it is the *-ing* variant which moves Jason further away from the norm and increases his accent.

5.4   Summary

The data presented in this chapter show that listeners shift their associations of (ING) based on surrounding linguistic and social context. The relationship of (ING) to the concept of accented speech is different depending on the context and which kinds of accent are relevant. This is helpful in understanding the flexibility of linguistic meaning but also the role of accent and overall personal style in framing individual tokens of a variable.

Listeners draw on several levels in assigning meaning to a particular token of a variable. They have a general impression of the variable itself and its associations (e.g. (ING) and education). They also have wide-ranging linguistic and social ideologies which structure how different meanings may connect with each other. For example, it is infelicitous to describe an unaccented speaker as a rural resident of the South, but intelligible to use an urban origin to explain the lack of accent in a Southern speaker. Listeners use a speaker's individual style to gather social information, which they may use in turn to deduce other social information. For example, linguistic aspects of Jason's style trigger a percept of gayness, which may increase the association with the city and/or the coasts as listeners associate alternative sexualities with urban residents or "blue state" residents. Because listeners are operating on all of these levels at once, the context in which a variable is deployed crucially influences how it contributes to the meaning of the utterance.