

Sociolinguistic variation in American English adverbial *-ly*

Allison Shapp (*New York University*) and Renee Blake (*New York University*)

“You are going to do amazing in the next couple of weeks.”

—Miranda Maleski , NBC’s *So you Think You Can Dance*, 6/30/2011

Prescriptively, adverbials of manner, the largest group of adverbs, are generally marked with the suffix *-ly*. However, variationist research has shown that there is variability between the marked *-ly* and zero forms with no difference in meaning (Tagliamonte and Ito 2002). The widespread usage of the zero form of the adverbial *-ly* suffix is associated specifically with American English in terms of both written and spoken data (Görlach 1991, Liddle 1999, Opdahl 2000). And yet, to date, there are no studies of American English that correlate the variation of the dual forms of adverbs of manner with social factors.

This paper provides a sociolinguistic analysis of the variation between the adverbial *-ly* suffix and the zero form in a U.S. corpus. We examine a corpus of 6,625 tokens of the dual forms collected through a survey. We present a multivariate analysis of the effects that social and linguistic factors have on the variable use of dual form adverbs. 900 survey participants were each asked to consider 9 sentences for which they were required to fill in a blank at the end of each sentence. The five adverbs analyzed have the root words, *slow*, *bad*, *loud*, *horrible* and *poor*, and are preceded by varying grammatical environments. The social variables analyzed include age, education, race/ethnicity, sex and linguistic history (L1 vs. L2 learners).

The results indicate that lexical identity and grammatical environment influence the adverbial form used. Education, race and an individual’s linguistic history also have significant influence on the differences found for the realization of the dual form adverbs. For instance, those individuals with higher levels of education have significantly higher *-ly* suffixing. Speakers who identified as black are prone to use the *-ly* suffix less, as are L2 learners of English. Historical corpora show that while the standard adverbial form has included the *-ly* suffix, the zero form has existed, often associated with colloquial or non-standard dialects (Tagliamonte and Ito 2002). We argue that from the present corpus, it appears that access and exposure to standard English through education or contact influences the use of adverbial *-ly* in American English.