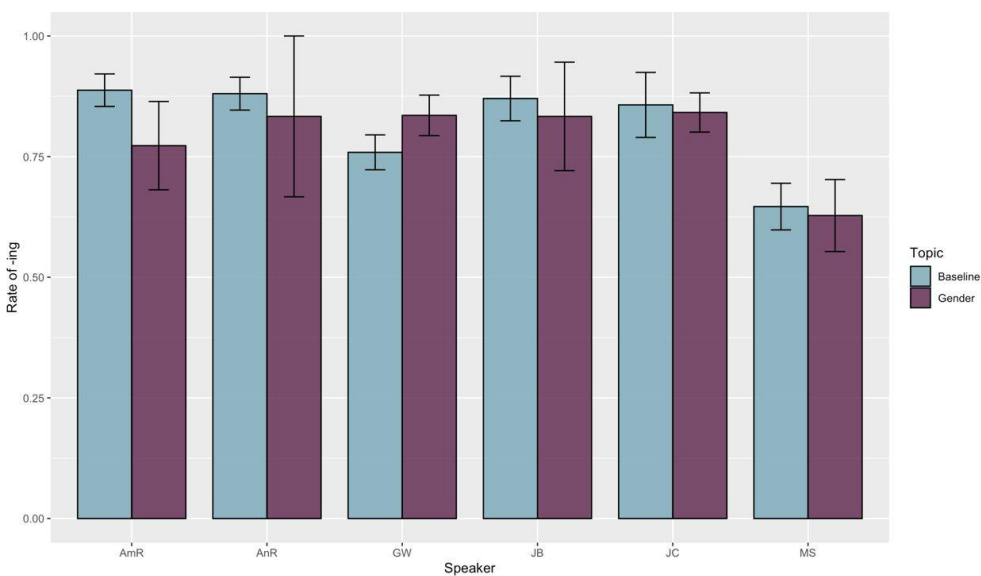


The effects of topic and part of speech on nonbinary speakers' use of (ING)

Sociolinguistic research on trans speakers has tended to view them through the lens of adherence to cisgendered binary norms (Goldberg & Kuvalanka 2018). Speakers with identities outside the trans-and-cis-normative gender binary have, in turn, received very little attention (Garmpi 2020, c.f. Zimman 2017). The present study seeks to build upon this growing body of research on nonbinary-gendered speakers through an investigation of the variable usage of (ING) by nonbinary speakers across conversation topics.

Gratton (2016) provided an analysis of variation in nonbinary speakers' use of (ING). (ING) is a typically gendered variable (e.g., Trudgill 1974, Labov 2001) that is metalinguistically salient, making it a prime target for agentive sociolinguistic work (Campbell-Kibler 2007). Gratton (2016) compared two nonbinary speakers' use of (ING) across two contexts – speaking with a friend vs. a stranger – and found that in the public setting, both speakers increased their rates of the variant not typically associated with their gender assigned at birth. Gratton analyzed this as an agentive “resistance to cis-normative femininity and masculinity”, in response to a perceived threat of being misgendered as a binary gender. Additionally, work by Grieser (2019) found that African American speakers shift their production of African American Language (AAL) features based on topic: certain topics, such as African American community and family, showed speakers producing higher rates of AAL features compared to other topics.

The present study builds on this previous work by asking whether nonbinary speakers shift their rates of (ING) variation when discussing the salient topic of *gender*. 6 nonbinary speakers (3 AFAB and 3 AMAB, ranging from 21 to 27 years old) participated in sociolinguistic interviews conducted by the lead researcher, who is a nonbinary speaker that has familiarity with each interview participant. A modular interview guide was developed based on Labov's Q-GEN-II modules (1984) with modifications made to specifically obtain participant narratives on their experiences with gender identity and expression in addition to traditional narratives. Interviews were coded for topic (gender vs. other) and (ING) tokens were coded for lexical category. Results are shown in Figure 1. Table 1 shows the results of the best-fit mixed effects model, with main effects of Topic, Part of Speech, and Sex Assigned at Birth (SAB), and random intercepts for speaker and lexical item.



lmer(ING ~ style * sexbirth + PoS + (1 speaker) + (1 word))			
	Estimate	t-value	p value
(Intercept)	0.92	13.4	>0.001
Style (Gender)	-0.04	-0.62	-0.5
Birth (AMAB)	-0.14	-2.03	0.1
PoS (noun)	0.08	0.90	0.38
PoS (something)	-0.03	-0.23	0.79
PoS (gerund)	-0.02	-0.17	0.82
PoS (verb)	-0.16	-2.47	0.01
Style: Birth	0.07	0.88	0.37

The results of the present study find that despite a markedly more deliberative style during gender topics, participants do not shift rates of (ING) across topics. This finding lends support to Gratton's (2016) argument that the perceived threat of being misgendered, rather than a factor such as attention paid to speech, is one of the major influences for shifting rates of (ING) in nonbinary speakers. The present study further finds that a speaker's assigned gender at birth *plays no predictable role* in rates of (ING). Taken together, these results suggest that nonbinary speakers form their own distinct linguistic community which should be analyzed as operating outside of the gender binary (Becker et al. forthcoming, Calder & King 2020). Future work will focus on investigating the consistency of these findings across other sociolinguistic variables.

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