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PARASITIC SYLLABIC NASALS AT MARSHSIDE,
LANCASHIRE

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The phonetic feature discussed below has not, so far as the writer is aware, been previously dealt with in print or, for that matter, observed in spoken English past or present. Briefly, it is the development of a parasitic nasal consonant: (a) after certain final consonants, mostly plosives, in words at the end of a sense group; and (b) before the plural inflexion [z] medially and at the end of a sense group. This phenomenon is a characteristic of the dialect of Marshside, an old fishing village near Southport, on the south side of the Ribble Estuary, Lancashire.

Marshside is the home of a small community, about 300 strong, of shrimpers and their families. The district is fast becoming residential, the population having now risen to roughly 1,000; and the old village, with one-storied thatched cottages in the main street, is now enclosed by rows of new brick-terraced houses and still newer semi-villas. Its dialect, which is well preserved and vigorous, first came under my observation in 1948, but I made additional investigations in 1949 and 1951.

Marshside lies in Ellis's dialectal area D 22,¹ but its vernacular was not, it seems, investigated by Ellis or his helpers,² or by J. Wright.³

In this dialect the voiced final plosives [b, d, g] are often, and the affricates [tʃ, dʒ] occasionally, followed by syllabic nasals. These nasals are partially unvoiced, but not more so than any other final voiced consonant in Received Standard

¹ Cf the map opposite p 88* in A. J. Ellis, *On Early English Pronunciation* v, London 1889.

² Cf Ellis's list of informants for the area, op cit 44*-45*.

³ Cf the list of authorities for Lancashire on pp 11-15 of the bibliography in J. Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary* vi, London 1905.

English. Not unexpectedly, the dialect speakers themselves are unaware of them.

After [d] and [dʒ], the nasal takes the form of [n], after [g] it is [ŋ], while after [b] and [tʃ] it is [m]. It will be observed that the nasals in question are homorganic with the consonants concerned, except for the [m] after [tʃ], which, unexpected though it is, undoubtedly occurs. I have noted the under-mentioned examples, all of them following a lengthened consonant. Further, gemination of consonants is frequent.⁴ These two phenomena, the gemination of consonants and the presence of a lengthened [b, d, g, tʃ, dʒ] before the following parasitic syllabic nasal illustrate the same tendency in the dialect towards heavy consonantal stress. The instances I have noted are the following:

1. After [b]: [blɛb:m] 'bleb, blister'; [kɒp¹wɛb:m] 'cobweb'; [kriɪb:m] 'crib, manger'; [fɒb:m] 'fob, watch-pocket'; [ˈspɪt ə ˈgɒb:m] 'spit a gob (a clot of phlegm)'; [nɒb:m] 'knob of a door'; [gɪɒb:m] sb 'grub'; [pɒb:m] 'pub (public-house)'.

2. After [d]: [ˈpɛɪswad:n] 'pea-swad, -pod'; [pad:n] 'pad, footpath'; [mɛd:n] pp 'made'; [ˌu:z ˈwɛd:n] 'she is wed'; [sɒnd:n] 'sand'.

3. After [g]: [ˈkɔ:v ə ðɪ ˈlɛg:ŋ] 'calf of thy leg'; [pɪg:ŋ] 'pig'; [ˌɪg:ŋ] 'rig (a half-castrated male horse)'; [ˈbrɛd mɔg:n] 'bread-mug'.

4. After [tʃ]: [ˈ?wɪnz ˈvɛɪə ˈpɒffɪ ɪ ˈma:t/m]⁵ 'the wind is very puffy (blustery) in March'.

5. After [dʒ]: [ˈkabdʒn] 'cabbage'.

I have never noticed such nasals occurring after final consonants except at the end of a sense group. For example, they do not occur in groups like 'the bag of ' or 'the dog is ' Sometimes, however, they are to be heard before the plural inflexion [z], both medially and at the end

⁴ In disyllabic words, a single [b, d, g, p, t, k, m, n, f] after a short vowel is often geminated, the most frequent sources of gemination being the present participle ending [-ɪn] and the adjectival ending [-ɪ], e.g. [ˈlɒbbɪn əˈbɑʊtɪ] 'lolling about'; [ˈskɪmmɪn] 'skimming'; [ˈknɒttɪ] 'knotty'. The final [n] of a monosyllable may also be geminated, e.g. [ˈðɛnn] 'then'; [ˌɒp ˈljɔnn] 'up yonder'.

⁵ [aː:] denotes an [ɪ]-coloured [a:]. Similarly [ɔː:] denote [ɪ]-coloured vowels.

of a sense group. These nasals before [ʒ] are partially unvoiced, like the final syllabic nasals in the singular; and the plurals seem to be formed on the analogy of the singular. The [ʒ] is, of course, unvoiced throughout: [kaːd:nʒ] 'cards'; [saɪd:nʒ] 'sides'; [ˈwɒd,ɛd:nʒ] 'Woodheads (plural of the family name Woodhead)'; [bag:ŋʒ] 'bags'; [lɛg:ŋʒ] 'legs'; [dɒg:ŋʒ] 'dogs'; [pɪg:ŋʒ] 'pigs'; [ˈdɪg:ŋʒ ə ˈbɪblɪn ˈwe:tə] 'the digs (ducks) are bibbling (drinking) water'.

Nasal release may thus occur after an immediately preceding short vowel, both stressed, e.g. [pɪg:ŋ], and unstressed, e.g. [ˈkabɪdʒn]; as well as after *r*-coloured vowels, e.g. [kaːd:nʒ], and after [nd], e.g. [sɒnd:n]. It may occur after diphthongs, which usually count as long, e.g. [saɪd:nʒ], but not, apparently, after an original long vowel.

Similar nasals do not occur after [p, t, k] — at least, I myself never recorded an unambiguous case. For instance, it can be argued that the nasal at the end of the sentence [ðe: kən ˈse: ˌwət ðe: ˈlaɪk:n] 'they can say what they like', is a survival of the traditional third present plural indicative in *-[n]*, traces of which Ellis could still find in the district; cf his note on *hear-en ye* at Leyland.⁶ I recorded [ˈlaɪk ˈðat:n], but this could stand for either 'like that' or 'like that one'; again, [əðat:n] 'in that way', which is in common use, is of doubtful origin.⁷

Hargreaves, in his monograph on the modern dialect of Adlington, a village 15 miles east of Marshside, recorded instances both of geminated consonants⁸ and of present plurals in *-[n]*.⁹ Both these features characterise Marshside (cf [ˈpɒffɪ] and [ˌwət ðe: ˈlaɪk:n] above); but about final nasal plosion, which also occurs at Marshside, he is silent. I have heard this same nasal plosion in the speech of people from Banks, another fishing village two miles east of Marshside.

⁶ Cf Ellis, op cit 338, note 13, referring to transcription 13 on p 336. Leyland is some 15 miles ESE of Marshside.

⁷ Cf *athatn(s)* in EDD.

⁸ Cf A. Hargreaves, *A Grammar of the Dialect of Adlington* (Heidelberg 1904), § 85a, who states that gemination occurs at Adlington mostly with *p, b, t, d, m, k, g*.

⁹ Cf Hargreaves, op cit § 111.

Local speech at Marshside plays havoc with normally voiceless consonants. Ellis, in his remarks on D22, states¹⁰ 'the final (s, f, t) frequently become (z, v, d) . . . but I do not know the law of change'. Words like [bag:] 'bag', [lɛg:] 'leg', are also sometimes pronounced with a lengthened [g] which, though not exploded nasally, stands out prominently in the word. This might well be a stage preceding the development of the parasitic nasal. Another possible intermediate stage is the occurrence of [-ə] after a lengthened consonant, as in the word *stub* ('the side-post of a gate'), cf EDD *stub* sb², which appears as [stɔb:] beside [stɔb:ə]. The examples given above reveal that the parasitic nasals invariably follow lengthened consonants. Furthermore, the following words and phrases illustrate the general tendency towards heavy voicing and the lengthening of final consonants: [ˈnɒə az ˈnɒd:] 'no, I am not'; [ˈðats ˈɪd:] 'that's it'; [gɪɪd:] 'grid'; [ˈad: mə] 'at me'; [ˈkwaːd·əʔ] 'quarter'; [ˈmæg: ˈɪɔgz] 'make rugs'; [ðɪ ˈdɔg·təʔ] 'thy doctor'; [ˈfɜːnɪdʒ·əʔ] 'furniture'; [bɛlʒ:] v 'belch'.

Conversely, in final positions voiced consonants sometimes undergo an unusual amount of unvoicing. Wright notes this for the region in which Marshside lies,¹¹ and my own material includes the following examples: [ˈmɔstət ən ˈkɪəs] 'mustard and cress'; [ˈfɔrət] 'forward'; [ˈbəkət] 'backward'; [tɪtət] 'tired'; [ˈɔəd ˈfaʃənt] 'old-fashioned'; [ˈθɪʃət] 'threshold'; [ˈθɔndət] 'the hundred'; [ˈnju: ˈfæŋɡlt ən] 'new-fangled one'; [tʃaʊlt] 'child'; [ˈne:ɪt ˈɒn] 'nailed on'; [ˈstɛʊlt ˈappəz] 'stole apples'; [ˈɔndəˈstɒnt] 'understand', heard finally in a sense group.

All the above examples, however, concern the unvoicing of [d], and then only in unstressed positions, or after *l*,¹² or finally in the sense group, where there is normally some unvoicing. At most, these examples indicate that there is a variable amount of voicing in different contexts, for, as the

¹⁰ Ibid 330.

¹¹ Cf J. Wright, *English Dialect Grammar* (London 1905), § 302.

¹² *l* locally is very 'thin'.

evidence shows, the general tendency is towards heavy voicing.

These nasal consonants seem to me to be due to the tight closures made for the articulation of the lengthened [b, d, g] and the first elements [t, d] of the affricates [tʃ, dʒ]. When the breath, piling up behind them, is finally released, it is exploded, not through these tightly held points of closure, but nasally.

These nasals seem to be hardly ever used by the younger generation at Marshside. Further, elderly Fleetwood inshore fishermen, who are descendants of Marshsiders that migrated to Fleetwood round about 1840-1860,¹³ never to my knowledge — and I am a native of Fleetwood — use these parasitic sounds except to deride them as being ‘real old Marshside’. This suggests that the nasals are not a modern development. Two slight traces of them may still survive at Fleetwood. The word pronounced in this locality as [ˈdɒɡɪn] ‘doggin (portion of a rainbow)’ may be the same as OED *dog* sb 10b and EDD *dog* sb 8, and if so may have come from Marshside [dɒg:ŋ] ‘dog’. The parasitic nasal may also be preserved in the nickname *Bobbins*. [bɒb:m] ‘Bob’, whose full name is Robert Wright, was a Marshsider who fifty years ago moved to Fleetwood. Here, the local fishermen, unable to pronounce his Christian name to his liking, called him simply [ˈbɒbɪnz] ‘Bobbins’ (the usual Fleetwood expression for ‘reels of thread’). Incidentally, Marshsiders of my acquaintance who have recently moved to Fleetwood retain these nasals; and I know some who have long been abroad and still retain them. At Marshside these nasals are still in regular use, and anyone who cares to engage in even a brief conversation with an adult dialect-speaking inhabitant, will at once observe them.

¹³ It is accepted as fact locally that most of the original settlers of Fleetwood were fishermen who came from Marshside in these years; cf J. Porter, *A History of the Fylde of Lancashire* (Fleetwood 1876), 266-7.