Morpheme Boundary and the Velar Nasal: A Study of Prefixation in *The Grand Repository of the English Language* (1775)

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The history of the velar nasal is usually associated with the behaviour of <ng> and, more precisely, with the study of final <-ing> and variation between the velar nasal /ɪŋ/ and the alveolar /ɪn/, for instance in *loving* and *singing* (Hazen 2006, Schleef *et al*. 2011). Yet, variation has also been attested when <ng> occurs in middle position, and also in the context of the voiceless cluster <n>+/k/, although historical evidence for this is scarcer. In fact, it is not until the eighteenth century that we find the first pronouncing dictionary that provides a separate notation for the velar nasal sound /ŋ/, namely Thomas Spence's *The Grand Repository of the English Language*, published in 1775. In Beal's (1999, 69) words, this is 'the first "phonetic" dictionary of English' to follow the 'one sound = one spelling' principle. Spence does not provide metalinguistic comments on the velar-alveolar variation, but his 'New Alphabet' shows a ligature that joins {N} with {G} for the velar nasal consonant, which allows for a comprehensive study of the distribution of three related variants: the bare velar nasal /ŋ/, the alveolar nasal followed by a velar plosive consonant /ng, nk/, and the 'velar nasal plus' /ŋg, ŋk/.

Amongst the range of linguistic factors that may condition phonological variation and change, previous studies have demonstrated the influence of morpheme boundary (Hargus 1993, Kaisse 2005). Taking this as a point of departure, this paper aims to shed light on the use and distribution of the velar nasal consonant in Spence's *Grand Repository* in the cluster sequence <n> + velar plosive /g, k/ and with a focus on the context adjacent to a prefix, as in *ingratitude* and *nonconformity*. This involves a total of 126 lexical entries in the dictionary with the prefixes *con-*, *en-*, *in-*, *non-*, *syn-*, and *un-*, including 36 for the voiced cluster and 90 for the voiceless cluster. The results of my case study confirm that morpheme boundary is indeed a determining factor in the selection of a particular variant when the cluster concerns the coda of a prefix and the onset of the stem. First, Spence never selects the bare velar nasal /ŋ/, neither in the voiced nor the voiceless cluster. Second, in the voiced context all items show the alveolar variant /ng/, as in *engrave* and *ungainly*, except for *congregate* and *congregation* which show the velar nasal plus /ŋg/. Likewise, in the voiceless context the preference is for /nk/, like *incoherent* and *synchronism*, with just five exceptions with the velar nasal plus /ŋk/, such as *concubine* and *conquest*. And third, variation between the alveolar cluster and the velar nasal plus shows a strong correlation with stress in that the latter pronunciations /ŋg, ŋk/ tend to appear in stressed syllables.

Overall, this case study will enhance our understanding of the distribution of the velar nasal in the eighteenth century, the heyday of the codification stage of a standard of spoken English.