

PERSPECTIVES ON THE AMERICANISATION OF AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF VARIATION

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Abstract

The study is based on sociolinguistic interview material gathered by the author in the tiny country town of Blayney, New South Wales, with people ranging in age from adolescent to middle-aged to older. Given the scarcity of crossgenerational studies, this thesis makes an essential contribution to the empirical sociolinguistic study of contemporary Australian English.

VARIATION IN AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH

The pronunciation of vowels distinguishes AusE from other types, and this vowel variety is frequently examined through Mitchell and Delbridge's (1965) classification of AusE into Broad, General, and Cultivated accents. Although this classification has been criticized (see, for example, Bradley 1980; Horvath 1985), the three-partite split is still commonly employed to describe AusE. The variety in modern AusE is examined in the following sections from the perspectives of regional and socioeconomic diversity. First, I will describe the regional, socioeconomic, and ethnic variance in AusE, followed by a more in-depth discussion of the social aspects of age and gender.

Differences between rural and urban locations can also be classified as regional differences, and these have been documented in AusE since Mitchell and Delbridge's (1965) pioneering study. Although the rural/urban dichotomy (as in city versus bush) has always been important in Australia (Butler 2001: 157), it has not been treated in much length in linguistic research literature and hence warrants further exploration, as Taylor (2001: 334) suggests.

AMERICAN ENGLISH INPUT INTO AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH

Vocabulary supplies the earliest AmE transfers in AusE, and it is frequently perceived by the public as being inundated with Americanisms. The first American words were borrowed before the 1850s gold rush period, and they included. However, Peters (1998: 37) questions the AmE origins of these lexemes, writing that they "do not seem to have been mediated directly from the New World, but rather by the British colonial administration." The second group of terminology was adopted from Americans during the gold rush eras, and it featured American mining language such as and (Ramson 1966: 148-149). Aside from words borrowed

in the Australian gold fields, there had also been Australians who had gone to California in pursuit of gold and subsequently returned to Australia, taking with them some American language (Fritz 2007: 44).

After World War II, the next period of substantial American lexical influence can be said to have begun. According to Taylor (1989: 239), "lexical items transferred from AmE to AusE since WWII can be counted in the thousands," the majority of which have also entered General English. He lists the number of American lexemes that entered AusE after WWII in several areas of vocabulary (1989: 239-244):

- exclamations, for example, hi, so long, wow, huh (as a question tag) sure, yuk
- popular nouns referring to humans, such as guy, dame, chick
- derogatory words, for example, chicken, to chicken out, jerk
- elements of prohibited language, such as to screw, to lay, crap
- transportation, for example truck has nearly totally replaced, has mostly supplanted lorry the majority of surfboarding terminology consists of AmE transfers

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