The Development of Australian English
—How historical events influenced attitudes towards English varieties and local sociolects—

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オーストラリア英語の発達
──史実はどのように英語種および社会方言に対する態度の形成に影響を及ぼしたか──

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Abstract

This paper was written with the purpose of tracing the evolution and development of the world English variety known as Australian English. In order to accomplish this, it begins by describing language use at the time of the first European settlement of Australia by Britain, and introduces what were the important historical events which affected the locally spoken language. In particular the analysis focuses on the most obvious features of Australian English which are its characteristic vocabulary and pronunciation. How these stereotypical features came to be commonly used, and why they were favored by Australian English speakers is explained. Finally, the Australian Government's National Policy on Languages is examined, as are the attitudes of the general populace towards Australian and other Englishes. The conclusion explains the development of Australian English in the context of the country's growing awareness of its separation from its former colonial master and towards recognizing its own identity as a truly independent nation, ready to determine a future well apart from Britain.

　本稿は世界諸英語 (World Englishes) のうちのオーストラリア英語に関する論考である。オーストラリア英語が独自の変種 (variety) として確立されるまでの過程を辿ることを目的とする。イギリスからオーストラリア大陸への入植を起点として，オーストラリア英語の発達に影響を及ぼしたと考えられる歴史上の出来事を取り上げていく。オーストラリア英語はその語彙と発音に特徴があるが，それらがどのように取り入れられ，なぜオーストラリア社会の中で受け入れられるようになったのかを考察する。最後にオーストラリア連邦政府の言語政策や，オーストラリア人が他の英語変種に対する考え方を検証す

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ることで，オーストラリアがかつての宗主国であるイギリスと心理的な決別を図り，自ら
のアイデンティティーを持つに至ったと結論づける。

1 Introduction

When discussing native English speaking countries, that is, what Kachru (1985) referred to as inner circle countries, most lists will include Australia along with other prime examples such as the United Kingdom, USA, Canada and New Zealand. This paper will trace the origins of the Australian variety of English and describe the principal features which distinguish it from other native English varieties. Its primary purpose is to examine and account for the changes in attitudes towards Australian English according to the country's historical development. Australia's path from a British-dominated colony towards its current status as an independent, regionally-focussed nation has been complicated but ultimately can be viewed as a deliberate path, forged by political leaders who were motivated to act pragmatically according to what they perceived were in the country's best interests. Being underpopulated and geographically distant from the other major English speaking cultures to which it traditionally gravitated, Australia has shifted its identity to reflect where the future opportunities were most attractive, and this paper argues this change has also manifested in attitudes towards language use. In doing so, it is hoped that the complex and fluctuating identity of the country can be more readily understood.

1.1 Australian English as a distinct variety

Although Australian English (AusE) has been heavily influenced by its British colonial past, it is now classified as a distinct English variety with its own defining rules and practices. As well as the various British Englishes spoken by the earliest Australians, there were non-English dialects such as the Welsh and Gaelic languages spoken by some settlers. Accordingly, the new British colony was a unique melting pot of non-British English and other languages, including aboriginal. Based upon these influences (detailed in Sections 2 and 3), the AusE variety eventually evolved. This variety is distinguished most obviously by the AusE accent. Although it is a close relative of British English, the accent is distinctively Australian and is usually distinguishable from other English varieties, although in some cases such as New Zealand English, it is may not be immediately obvious. The use of stereotypical words and expressions, however, can also display and confirm the AusE variety. This unique lexis has evolved to express the local culture and its values, as well as to explain things for which no other terms or expressions existed. In the latter case, this includes the adoption of aboriginal terms to refer to local phenomena which did not occur in Britain such as a *willy-willy* (a whirlwind or localized dust storm which often hits desert areas).

2 The Australian accent

2.1 History

The roots of the Australian accent are widely attributed to the English of Australia's first British settlers. As a penal colony for British convicts, the first Europeans to live in Australia were mostly working class, consisting of convicts and the soldiers who watched over them. There was little attraction to migrate to Australia for more educated settlers who initially would have been composed of a small contingent of administrators and officers. But why and how did the predominantly British working class accents evolve into a separate AusE accent? Moore (2008) believes that an Australian accent was formed around 1830 by a blending of the various British English varieties being spoken and mixed in the first colony, hypothesizing that a new accent may have formed to smooth out communication between the different dialects.

One prominent and unusual feature of the AusE accent is that although there may be some minor variation in the accents spoken, they tend to be the very similar, despite the pronounced size of the nation's land mass. That is to say unlike Britain or the USA, there are no truly distinct or recognized regional accents. The admittedly limited research on this subject was overviewed by the authoritative AusE scholar Bruce Moore who concluded that AusE pronunciation is uniform with no compelling evidence of the existence of any regional dialects (2008: pp. 167–169). It therefore would be difficult for Australians to tell if the countryman they are speaking to was born and raised in Perth or some 3,600 kilometers away in Brisbane.

This lack of regional accents throughout Australia and the development and propagation of AusE is said to be the result of its faithful transmission by children (Moore, 2008; Cochrane, 1989). These children, free from the influence of peers who would normally have established and championed local language usage rules, instead developed their own AusE accent. The key element in maintaining and encouraging the development of a distinct accent is attributed to children who either were born in Australia, or moved there before reaching what linguists refer to the Critical Age or Critical Period. This hypothesis assumes that after a certain age, often regarded to be around puberty, it is extremely difficult to acquire a language as easily and as expertly as a native speaker. Accordingly, young children in Australia developed a new accent which was acquired by newly born or later arriving children through peer pressure. Johnston (1976) discusses the strong peer pressure felt by immigrant children to conform to local accents. As they ventured out from the traditional first landing port of Sydney to other parts of Australia, the children took their now fixed accents with them as the first generation of AusE speakers. This explains how the AusE accent evolved and why it became so uniform. The next section will consider the main accent varieties to be found.

2.2 Accent Varieties

Mitchell & Delbridge (1965: 36–7) proposed a tripartite classification of AusE into Broad, General and Cultivated accent varieties, which is based upon variations in the pronunciation of distinctive vowels. Kiesling (2007) notes that despite the widespread credence given to this

framework, the authors themselves were not certain about the legitimacy of their claims, nor has there ever been any evidence offered to show how these categories are recognised in Australia either as an impression or by statistical breakdown. Nevertheless, most researchers appear to have accepted and based their analyses upon this basic categorization, although some have also augmented the classification. Horvath (1991), for example, included the addition of an Ethnic Broad sociolect spoken by more recent immigrants. Unlike the regular Broad AusE accent which may enjoy what she referred to as "covert" prestige, however, Ethnic Broad as a new and even broader variety is not considered prestigious by any Australians.

The recognition of the Ethnic Broad accent might be viewed as an inevitable result of the fundamental shift from the almost exclusively British-sourced immigrants increasingly towards non-English speaking countries. During World War 2, Britain had to essentially abandon the fight against Japan in the Asian theater in order to protect itself from the advancing Germans. This came as a huge shock to Australians who had enthusiastically participated in distant European or African-based wars as close British allies, and believed that Britain would always be ready and willing to protect its former colony. Instead the powerful American forces quickly proved themselves to be the saviors of Australia, which lead to a forging of closer links with the USA after the war ended. British ties remained quite strong, however, particularly in terms of cultural influences which included language. British prestige accents, and the Cultivated AusE accent closest to the British RP variety remained the desired sociolect for most educated Australians even up to three or four decades after WW2. This was the accent spoken by newsreaders, academics, and most political leaders of that era. Perhaps the final straw for Australians occurred in the 1970s with Britain's decision to align itself with the European Economic Community (or EEC which was later renamed the EC in 1993 to reflect how the organization was concerned with matters beyond economics). The role of Britain as Australia's most important trading partner right up until that point of time was clearly to change. The cutting of this remaining tie to the mother country represented more than independence from Britain. It emphasised the need for Australia to find its own way in a completely new direction.

The post-World War 2 allegiances of Australians away from Britain were also weakened by continuing changes in immigration policies which had been deliberately centered on Britain until the 1940s. There were exceptions to this bias but they were few and did not involve large numbers of people, such as Chinese migrants who came to join the gold rush from the 1850s, Pacific Islanders who worked as laborers in the Queensland sugar cane industry from the 1860s, and Japanese who dove for pearls in Broome from around 1900. The immediate post-war years saw a change to non-English speaking migration, particularly from Italy and Greece. This change reflected a concentrated government effort to boost the country's population in order to develop faster as well as to ensure Australia's defence in times of war. A target annual population increase of one percent was set and since it was not possible to achieve this with only British settlers who were still hoped would make up 90% of all new Australians, other nationalities were also permitted.

Later, migrants came from a widening source of countries including Malta, the former Yugoslavia, Lebanon, Hong Kong, and Malaysia. The increasing number of non-native English

speaking migrants gave rise to the greater recognition of an Ethnic Broad sociolect which may have always existed, but perhaps not in numbers large enough to be considered as distinct. As noted previously, this new sociolect, however, did not have any impact on existing AusE accents. Furthermore, the Ethnic Broad sociolect itself is inevitably in flux being affected by changes in the source countries and the numbers of non-English speaking migrants, and is in any case an ephemeral or transitional sociolect limited to the first generation of AusE speakers.

What is most revealing about the AusE accent has been the shift in attitudes. Initially and for many years even after independence, British accents, or at least their local equivalent of the Cultured AusE accent were the preferred varieties. It should also be mentioned that there has always been considerable ambivalence towards British accents in Australia. On one hand, they were admired while in some sectors, particularly among more working class Australians, British accents were regarded as pretentious as well as being inappropriate for the egalitarian leanings of 'true Australians'. Over time this preference has shifted along with the decreasing emotional affinity for Britain felt by Australians, particularly post-WW2. It is now believed that the General AusE accent is the favored variety, and also that its usage is predominant in Australia (Moore, 2008). And perhaps just as important as a marker of identity, it is believed that its growth is coming at the expense of the Cultivated AusE. This appears to demonstrate how Australians no longer assume a British-based identity or feel the need to have their values dependent upon British ideals and can confidently determine their own.

3 The Australian English Lexicon

3.1 History

AusE is also distinguished by the use of words and expressions not commonly used in other varieties, although many terms are shared with neighboring and culturally familiar New Zealand. There is a strong tendency for Australians to shorten words, particularly the longer multisyllabic ones, and to add common endings to these shortened forms. For example, frequently abbreviated terms include *Aussie* (Australia), *brekkie* (breakfast), *hubby* (husband) and *mossie* (mosquito). It is believed that such usage displays the widely-held Australian values of friendliness, humor and the importance of not taking matters or yourself too seriously. Wierzbicka (2003) examines the usage of a number of commonly used speech act verbs in Australia. As she noted, these are more than just convenient, locally used terms but are in fact heavily value-laden expressions which affirm the morals and expected behavior of 'true Australians' who are expected to *yarn* (chat sociably) or *shout* (buy drinks for your group, usually in strict turn-taking order) but they should never *dob* (report wrongdoings to a person in authority) or *whinge* (to complain). These terms and their frequent everyday usage effectively maintain and propagate core values throughout Australian society.

Earlier it was noted that unlike for other English varieties, there were no regional differences in AusE accents. The situation with regards to lexis, however, is not as clear. Bryant (1991) discusses her findings from examining lexical differences according to the regions approximating Western

Australia, the south-east portion of South Australia, Victoria/Tasmania/southern New South Wales, and New South Wales/Queensland. It seems that while some differences were revealed, they were in regard to relatively minor items which were not necessarily used frequently. Hence the use of regionally specific lexis or expressions would certainly not impede smooth communication with Australians from different areas, although the very occasional word or expression may give away that person's regional origin. An example of unique regional usage would be the common Queensland-based term of *port* which is referred to as a suitcase or school bag in all other states.

Delbridge (2006) reviews the development of lexicography in Australia, noting how it was automatically assumed that dictionaries for the local market would be created overseas, at least up until the 1980s. It was similarly unquestioned that British, rather than American, dictionaries would define the standards for English usage in Australia although there was never any official policy which advocated or suggested this. The widespread assumption was that AusE always adhered to British spelling and syntactic conventions simply because Britain was the mother country and despite independence, remained dear to the hearts of many Australians. The publication of and favorable reception to locally published major dictionaries, particularly *The Macquarie Dictionary* (Delbridge et al, 1981) and *The Australian National Dictionary* (Ramson, 1988), demonstrated the growing acceptance of the AusE variety and more broadly, the associated awareness of having an independent identity which was not reliant on the UK or other English language models.

3.2 Non-British influences

When the first British colonies were being established in Australia, Burridge (2010) notes how in the late 18th century as many as one-third of Britons spoke their own Celtic or regional language with little or no English. While it would be expected that English started as the standard language of communication for the new settlers, the adoption of non-English terms is also likely to occur given the mixed population. The result was that many non-English terms also became standard AusE including the now stereotypical Australian lexis *billy* (from the Scottish term for a small pot for boiling water) or to *fossick* (from Cornwall and meaning to rummage).

Although the native Australian or aboriginal languages have not strongly influenced the grammar or phonology of AusE, a lot of vocabulary was directly borrowed. This was especially when English equivalents did not exist such as in the case of the local flora and fauna, for which Aboriginal words such as *galah* (a cockatoo), *jarrah* (a type of tree) and *waratah* (a local flower) have become the standard terms readily recognized by Australians although they are may not be so familiar to non-Australians. Other aboriginal words, however, such as *boomerang*, *koala* or *wombat* have also become standard in the Englishes used in other countries (Dixon et al, 1990). Australian identity is deliberately evoked by the tendency to employ aborigine-based terms as names for the sporting teams representing the country. For example, the popular national rugby union team is called the Wallabies and they should not be confused with the Kangaroos which are the national rugby league team (rugby league and rugby union being closely related and competing football codes played professionally in Australia). Not to be outdone, the national soccer team has adopted a blended name as their moniker, namely the Socceroos. In addition, many Australian cities and

towns, as well as the suburbs and streets within them, have been given aboriginal names. Perhaps the most famous example was the naming of the capital city of Canberra, which was a word taken from the local tribe living there. There are also many other cities and towns with colourful names such as Wagga Wagga, Budgewoi, Indooroopilly and Wollongong which were taken from the local aboriginal languages.

In the 1850s the variety of linguistic influences widened as an influx of people from all over the world came to participate in the Australian Gold Rush. Although the impact of American English is thought to be very limited in early times, there were definite influences as the result of Australians going to the USA to join the American Gold Rush from 1848. The beginning of the Australian Gold Rush in 1851 saw many of these Australians return, along with American gold seekers, and they brought with them new gold-related vocabulary they had been using over there. For example, the quintessential Australian term *bonzer* used to describe something very good is said to have been derived from the American Gold Rush dream of a *bonanza* or finding a lot of gold. Similarly, this era saw the adoption of originally American terms such as *squatter* (a settler without legal title) and *bush* (woods or forest) all of which remain as culturally important and widely used terms in the lexicon today. It is highly doubtful, however, that most Australians realize these quintessentially AusE words were originally from American English.

This is in part because Australians have generally held a distinct prejudice towards US English throughout most of their history. While British accents and standards for syntax and spelling were generally preferred, or at least tolerated, most American conventions were either challenged as to their appropriateness or simply declared to be incorrect. Although there never seems to have been any conscious decision to become more accepting of American conventions, the post-WW2 American domination of pop culture through music, movies and television content has given rise to a growing acceptance or toleration of American terms. The usage of American slang or expressions by Australian teenagers, for example, would probably not cause any complaint now, although that probably would not have been the case only some 50 years earlier. There is now a greater likelihood that young Australians will employ American peer expressions over their British counterparts. The term *guy(s)* is now frequently employed despite the prior and continuing usage of equivalent AusE terms such as *bloke(s)* or *fellah(s)*.

In spite of considerable attitudinal changes, there remains a distinct dislike towards American English in some Australian quarters. It should be noted that any such attitude is a product of individual prejudice, rather than being the result of any policy or official opinion. Nevertheless, many originally American expressions are commonly used. Very few if any Australians would use the British terms *motorway* or *lorry* as they would more naturally produce the words *freeway* and *truck* without even recognizing them as being American English. Overall, however, American English is still not a major influence on the most apparent elements of AusE, that is, accent and lexis (including spelling) which remain closer to, if not exclusively, British English. The changing attitudes towards other Englishes can be very clearly seen in comparisons of attitudes toward various English accent varieties that native English speakers have in the US, Australia and New Zealand. One study noted how all native English speaking groups preferred US English over all

other varieties, including their own or those of prestigious British accents (Bayard, Weatherall, Gallois and Pittam, 2001).

4 National language policies

The position of English in Australia was never really debated. As an ex-British colony, English unwittingly became the national language even though it has never had any official status as such (Australia does not have an official national language). For most of its history the Australian Government did not formulate any policies with regards to language, nor did it establish an official body to oversee and regulate language use in the way that the *Acadamie francais* does in France. The use of English, particularly in terms of preferred pronunciation, syntax or lexis may not have been determined by government policy, but it was very much influenced by public media. In particular, the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) which provides public radio and later, television to a nation-wide audience, carefully considered its accent variety. Leitner (1984) details the evolution of the ABC's language use policies from its initial policy of close adherence to what was viewed as the British BBC's model, especially in terms of avoiding broader Australian accents and championing the Cultivated AusE sociolect. In the post-war years, there was increasing recognition of the need to adopt more regular Australian accents along with a more populist programming content, although the broader sociolects were not featured. In contrast to this, however, were the Broad AusE accents featured on commercial radio and television programming, particularly in programs aimed at the 'common man' such as talkback radio and sporting coverage of cricket, football and horseracing.

The status of English became confused with the official push for multiculturalism in the 1970s which in essence, demanded greater understanding of non-Anglo cultures and accordingly, their languages. Suddenly the previously assumed monopoly of English was on less sure footing. The government supported this initiative through the establishment of non-English radio (1975~) and television (1980~) programming in languages such as Chinese, Arabic, Vietnamese, Tagalog, etc. Foreign language education in schools also shifted from the traditionally European focus on the popular French or German language options increasingly towards Asian languages such as Indonesian, Japanese, and more recently, Chinese (Mandarin). Asian languages have since proven to be highly successful with many students studying them at high school or university.

The 1987 report on a National Policy on Languages (Lo Bianco) established a clear language policy that remains in place despite the changes in leadership and political parties since. The National Policy on Languages was formulated as Australia's first comprehensive language policy. This policy espouses the principle that while English is the language for all Australians, the government will also support aboriginal, heritage and/or second languages, and provide more in the way of language services (such as the federal government-sponsored SBS foreign language-based television, radio and online network, translation services, multilingual official forms, etc.) These policies are realized through the creation of the NPO, Language Australia, which works with universities, professional bodies and educational organizations on language and related policy

matters.

5 Conclusion

Language and national identity are closely related. Countries are mostly composed of a population speaking a single language or fixed set of languages. In France for example, French is the official language and the other minority languages spoken there are not accorded any official status. In Singapore, Malay is the national language for historic (being a former part of Malaysia) rather than for practical reasons, with Chinese, Tamil and English also recognized as official languages. Traditionally, there were only two competing models for English-speaking countries: either British or North American. AusE grew from British roots, as did North American English, but unlike the USA, Australia chose to closely align itself with Britain and its language. Since it began taking baby steps towards greater autonomy—or was forced into this situation with the increasing recognition that Britain did not seem to reciprocate the same degree of commitment in the relationship during and after WW2—Australians began to develop more confidence in their own English variety.

This growing sense of independence manifested in the serious study and championing of AusE within Australia, culminating in the publication of the ground-breaking Macquarie Dictionary of Australian English in 1981. The Macquarie Dictionary has since been progressively accepted in Australia and is used by many schools and institutions as the standard dictionary. This dictionary reflects the language used by Australians, that is, the regular English used by other native English speaking countries along with terms unique to Australia, as well as New Zealand which is also covered. This greater sense of a national identity independent of Britain is demonstrated by the acceptance of AusE, the lessening importance and influence of British English and the increasing acceptance of American English and non-European languages as being a part of the new Australian society.

One obvious sign of this separate identity can be seen with the number of terms and expressions that pertain to the bush, and to the lifestyles of those residing there. Although Australia is one of the world's most urban countries with around 85 per cent of its population dwelling in cities, there has been almost a mythical association with its rural and rustic bush-based roots. The continuing and frequent use of unique bush-based lexis to reflect the local situation in Australia effectively contrasts profound differences in the environment and circumstances to be found in Britain and other countries. Such language usage combined with markedly changed attitudes about AusE accents are definite manifestations of the growing confidence Australians have in their own sense of identity as a nation; a country that is increasingly free from many of the self-imposed values which have been hindering its own development for so long.

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