

# Language variation and change in non-urban settings: Honing the conceptual and methodological toolkit

November 18-22, 2024

A.D. Hope Conference Room 1.28

14 Ellery Cres, Australian National University

In this one-week seminar series, we delve into issues relevant to the contemporary sociolinguistic study of dialectal variation. We invite local and international experts to give seminars on geographic diffusion of dialects and dialect change; the role of place attachment in shaping linguistic patterns; working with stories around natural disasters as data; and Australian English in urban and regional contexts.

Seminars are open to all who are interested. We welcome the opportunity to engage in broader discussion about the issues raised, to share wider perspectives and experiences of contemporary sociolinguistic research, to explore working with data collected from natural disaster contexts, and to think about how the conceptual and methodological tools for the study of language variation and change can be applied in the Australian context.

Seminars will be held on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 9.30-11.15am, including morning tea. They will be in-person only, except for Tuesday's seminar. Details appear below.

This seminar series is offered by "Voices of Regional Australia", an ARC Discovery Project (DP230100464) led by Catherine Travis, Ksenia Gnevshva and Gerry Docherty, and is organised by Katherine Revius.

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MON 18 Nov	TUE 19 Nov	WED	THU 21 Nov	FRI 22 Nov
<b>Conducting sociolinguistics in regional Australia</b>	<b>Australian English</b>	—	<b>Working in disaster contexts</b>	<b>Perspectives on modern dialectology</b>
<b>Catherine Travis, Ksenia Gnevshva, Gerry Docherty</b> "Voices of Regional Australia: The Linguistic Patterning of Local Attachment"	<b>Felicity Cox</b> (hybrid) "Broadening the focus: Sources of variation in Australian English phonetics and phonology"		<b>Lynn Clark, Paul Millar</b> "The QuakeBox Corpus: uses and applications"	<b>Dave Britain</b> "The geographical diffusion of (linguistic) innovations: maps, models, and real people"
<b>10:45-11:15 Morning Tea (catered)</b>				

## Monday –Voices of Regional Australia: The Linguistic Patterning of Local Attachment

Catherine Travis (ANU), Ksenia Gnevshva (ANU), Gerry Docherty (Griffith University)

The principal triggers for linguistic change are understood to be found in the large, rapidly growing and diversifying populations of major cities (Britain 2004: 623). In the Voices of Regional Australia project, we consider this general pattern in the Australian context, to ask whether the kind of variation observed in urban settings can be generalised to non-urban settings, and if so, whether the social and stylistic constraints vary from those typically described for urban settings, with a particular focus on the concept of place attachment.

To do this, we examine linguistic patterning in a large corpus of English spoken in small towns in inner-regional Australia: Braidwood in NSW and Trentham in Victoria. Both regions have been sites of major natural disasters, and stories of residents' experiences make up much of the speech corpus we use as data (cf., Carmichael, Clark & Hay 2022).

In this talk, we introduce the project. We discuss methodological issues around the task of designing a place attachment metric that is suitable for use in a regional Australian context. We also present some initial findings to consider the extent to which linguistic patterns across the two field sites are congruent with more general accounts of the social and geographical trajectories of variation and change in Australian varieties of English (Cox & Fletcher 2017). We conclude with questions that will stimulate discussion around methods for dialectology research and linguistic patterning of urban and regional communities in Australia and beyond, thus setting the context for the seminars that will follow in the rest of the week.

### References

- Britain, David. 2004. Space and spatial diffusion. In J. K. Chambers, Peter Trudgill & Natalie Schilling-Estes (eds), *The Handbook of Language Variation and Change*, 603-637. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Carmichael, Katie, Lynn Clark & Jennifer Hay. 2022. Lessons learned: The long view. *Linguistics Vanguard* 8(s3): 353-362. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lingvan-2021-0050>.
- Cox, Felicity & Janet Fletcher. 2017. *Australian English pronunciation and transcription* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## Tuesday –"Broadening the focus: Sources of variation in Australian English phonetics and phonology"

Felicity Cox (Macquarie University)-hybrid

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, phonetic variation in Australian English (AusE) was largely defined within an Anglo-Celtic frame of reference, incorporating an architecture (the Broadness continuum) that did not provide a mechanism for including variation outside this narrow Anglo-based focus. Variation under this model was considered primarily vowel-based, with a focus on the realisation of six vowel phonemes (fleece, goose, face, price, goat, mouth). Towards the end of the century, the Broadness continuum began to contract, and new

variation became apparent, developing in concert with rapid increases in migration from non-English speaking countries. Coincident with this extensive social change, researchers began to consider a wider range of phonological variables, including the full vowel inventory (e.g. Harrington et al. 1997, Cox 1999, 2006; Cox & Palethorpe 2001), a small set of targeted consonants (e.g. Horvath 1985, Horvath and Horvath 2001, Ingram 1989, Tollfree 2001), and prosodic features (e.g. Fletcher & Harrington 2001). Over the past 20 years greater energy has been directed towards understudied phonetic phenomena including voice quality, connected speech processes, consonantal and prosodic variation. Projects have incorporated auditory, acoustic and (increasingly) articulatory analyses to more fully understand the nuances of sociophonetic variation in AusE. In this talk I will review recent analyses of understudied variation in AusE and will consider new avenues for broadening our focus to include a wider range of speakers, populations, and variables as we move towards a reconceptualisation of 21st century AusE.

## References

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- Fletcher Janet & Jonathan Harrington. 2001. High-rising terminals and fall-rise tunes in Australian English, *Phonetica* 58, 215–229.
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- Ingram, John. 1989. Connected speech processes in Australian English. *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 9, 21–49. doi:10.1080/07268608908599410.
- Tollfree, Laura. 2001. Variation and change in Australian consonants: Reduction of /t/. In David Blair & Peter Collins (eds.), *English in Australia*, 45–68. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

## Thursday –“The QuakeBox Corpus: uses and applications”

Lynn Clark and Paul Millar (University of Canterbury, NZ)

The QuakeBox Corpus is a unique oral history project that captures firsthand accounts of the 2010–2011 Canterbury earthquakes in New Zealand. It consists of personal narratives collected from residents who experienced the earthquakes, offering valuable insights into the socio-cultural and emotional impacts of these natural disasters. This paper explores the diverse uses and applications of the QuakeBox Corpus in both academic and community contexts.

The first part of the paper will explore some of the ways that linguists have utilized the corpus e.g. to study various aspects of regional and social phonetic variation and change or to study the structure and emotional expression of post-disaster narratives. The second part of the paper will explore some of the ways in which the QuakeBox Corpus has also served as a tool for disaster preparedness and community healing, as part of the larger CEISMIC Canterbury Earthquakes Digital Archive, with its focus on fostering shared understanding through storytelling. We will examine how local communities and government agencies have used the narratives to inform post-earthquake recovery strategies, recognizing the importance of lived experiences in shaping effective disaster response policies.

The QuakeBox Corpus is a critical archive that bridges academic inquiry and practical community engagement, offering a comprehensive approach to understanding the human dimensions of natural disasters. In sharing this work, we also hope to provide an opportunity for discussion around best practices in doing this type of work generally.

## Friday –“The geographical diffusion of (linguistic) innovations: maps, models, and real people”

Dave Britain (University of Bern)

Much of the literature on the spatial spread of linguistic innovations has contrasted a range of models that aim to predict how linguistic features will diffuse from one place to another (for summaries of this literature see, for example, Britain 2013, 2017) –these include the ‘urban hierarchy’ or ‘cascade’ model, the ‘contagion’ model, the ‘cultural hearth’ model and so on. The empirical evidence to support these models is relatively scant, however, and often not entirely robust. These abstract models, unfortunately, often erase the fact that they are predicting the behaviour of diverse and distinct communities of living breathing social animals –humans –and it is interesting to note that while modelling of spatial diffusion remains highly discussed in economic geography and business studies (and social dialectology), it is barely a topic anymore in *human* geography, since damning critiques of such modelling from the 1980s onwards (e.g. Gregory 1985): the adoption of human traits (such as dialect features) could not be investigated, it was argued, in the same way as, for example, the adoption of the latest Audi or of Taylor Swift’s latest album. Another problematic issue that we occasionally see in the diffusion literature is what I will call the monogenesis problem – the idea that innovations begin in one place, “A”, and if they reach “B”, “C”, “D”, ... “N”...“Z”, then they must have come from “A”. Since we are rarely there at the point of actuation to see features spread from “A” to “B”, we can thereafter, I would argue, no longer assume monogenesis.

In order to speak to this discussion, I present evidence from two empirical studies which enable us to examine the predictions of spatial modelling: cartographic evidence of linguistic change gathered from a dialect smartphone app, the English Dialects App (e.g. Leemann et al 2018, Britain et al 2020, 2021), and a more localised investigation of sociolinguistic fieldwork data (recordings of informal conversation) collected from multiple urban and rural sites in Eastern England (e.g. Britain 2020). What we find is that spatial dialect patterns, in the British case at least, reflect actual human mobility, the structure of which can change over time, and which may or may not resemble the predictions of formal models.

## References

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