

# On the irrelevance of prestige, stigma and identity in the development of New Zealand English phonology

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## Introduction

Our work on the origins of New Zealand English (Gordon et al, forthcoming) has shown that this newest of all of the major native speaker varieties of English is the result of dialect contact and new-dialect formation. Rather obviously, the dialects which were involved in the initial contact were dialects of English which had been brought from different parts of the British Isles. In terms of population figures, the Englishes that came into contact in New Zealand arrived from England, Scotland and Ireland in roughly the proportion 5:2:2. The north of England was underrepresented, and the Welsh contribution was very low. These proportions tally rather well with Bauer's lexical study (Bauer, 1999), which shows that there are focal points for the dialectal origins of New Zealand lexis 'in Scotland, in Ireland, and in a band stretching from Lincolnshire...through Nottinghamshire, Warwickshire and Somerset to Devon and Cornwall' (p. 52).

In considering the relative importance of the different forms of British Isles English involved in the dialect mixture which gave rise to modern New Zealand English, no one will doubt the significance of the input from England. From a phonological point of view New Zealand English is clearly typologically very closely related to the Englishes of the southeast of England. Both southeastern English and New Zealand English have the FOOT/STRUT split — unlike accents from the north of England, which have the vowel of FOOT also in the lexical set of STRUT (we employ here the labels for lexical sets introduced by Wells, 1982). Both forms of English distinguish between the vowels of TRAP, PALM, LOT and THOUGHT, unlike most forms of American English, which have no PALM/LOT distinction; and unlike Scottish and Canadian English, which have no LOT/THOUGHT distinction. Both varieties employ the vowel of PALM and START in the lexical set of BATH, unlike North American English. And, unlike Scottish English, both varieties also have wide diphthongs in the sets of FACE, GOAT, PRICE and MOUTH. And so on.

Unlike in the case of lexis, therefore, there would appear to be no room for any role at all for Scottish or Irish English in the development of New Zealand English phonology. This might be regarded as a rather puzzling phenomenon. New Zealand English is full of lexical features of Scottish, and to a lesser extent, Irish origin (Bauer, 1999). And, at the non-linguistic level, New Zealand is full of (at least) Scottish influences of other sorts. We show here that our theory of new-dialect formation, and in particular our claims about its relatively deterministic nature, accounts very nicely for the apparent

absence of Scottish and Irish features from New Zealand English. We also show, secondly, on the basis of analyses of a corpus of recordings from early New Zealand speakers, that the absence is actually, to a certain extent, simply apparent: there is more Scottish and Irish influence in New Zealand phonology than meets the eye.

The basis of this paper is a research project which has as its most important data a collection recordings made by the National Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand between 1946 and 1948. The Corporation's Mobile Disc Recording Unit travelled around small towns in both the North Island and the South Island of New Zealand, recording, among other things, 'pioneer reminiscences', mostly from people who were children of the first European settlers. About 325 speakers born between 1850 and 1900 were recorded before the Unit was disbanded in late 1948. Forty years later, Associate-Professor Elizabeth Gordon of the University of Canterbury arranged to purchase copies of the recordings, and they now form the basis of the Origins of New Zealand English (ONZE) project at the Department of Linguistics at the University of Canterbury. Genealogical information about the speakers, obtained from archival research and from contacts with the speakers' relatives and descendants, has made these recordings even more valuable for research purposes. In addition, the histories of communities visited by the Mobile Unit have been researched.

Our research project, with its unique corpus of nineteenth century speakers of English in New Zealand, thus enables us to discern, in a way that would be impossible for scholars attempting to work backwards from modern New Zealand English, the extent of the role that was played by Scottish and Irish English in the formation of New Zealand English.

### **New-dialect formation**

In Gordon et al (forthcoming) and Trudgill et al (2000) we outline a three-stage, three generation process of new-dialect formation. The first stage in the development of New Zealand English involves contact between dialects of British Isles English in the speech of the original immigrants. The second stage involves the highly variable and unfocussed speech typified by our ONZE-corpus informants, who were born in the period 1850–1890. The third stage involves the appearance of the newly focussed variety, New Zealand English, which we date to the end of the nineteenth century.

New-dialect formation consists of a number of key processes (see Trudgill & Britain, *fc*). Some of these are the following:

1. Koineisation, which comprises (a) the sub-process of mixing; and (b) the sub-process of levelling, which involves the loss of demographically minority variants. In a dialect mixture situation such as that present in a newly settled colony, large numbers of variants from the different dialects involved in the mixture will abound. As time passes, the variants present in the mixture will begin to be subject to reduction. The point is, however, that this reduction will not take place in a haphazard manner. In determining who accommodates to who — and therefore which forms are retained and which lost — demographic

factors involving proportions of different dialect speakers present will be vital.

2. Unmarking. The reduction of variants over time is also not haphazard from the point of view of purely linguistic forces. Degrees of linguistic markedness and regularity or simplicity may be involved, such that unmarked and more regular forms may survive even if they are not majority forms.

3. Interdialect-development. Interdialect forms can be defined as forms which were not actually present in any of the dialects contributing to the mixture but which arise out of interaction between them. Such forms are of three types. They may be (a) forms which are simpler or more regular than any of the forms present in the original dialect mixture. They may also be (b) intermediate forms (see Trudgill, 1986), which are most usually forms which are phonetically intermediate between two contributing forms in the mixture. And they may also be (c) forms which are the result of hyperadaptation. The best known form of hyperadaptation is of course 'hypercorrection', in which speakers attempt to use forms from higher status accents, but employ an incorrect analysis and extend changes to items where they are inappropriate.

4. Focussing (see Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1991), which is the process by means of which the new variety acquires norms and stability.

In the first three cases, the key sociolinguistic mechanism involved is accommodation between speakers in face-to-face interaction.

We claim that the new-dialect formation which resulted from the mixture of dialects brought from the British Isles to New Zealand was not a haphazard process but, on the contrary, largely deterministic in nature. What happened was that, for any given feature, the minority accommodated to the majority. We have not found it at all necessary to call on social features like 'prestige' or 'stigma' as explanatory factors, nor have we had to have recourse to notions such as 'identity'. That is, the newly formed focussed dialect, New Zealand English, which is the third-generation outcome of dialect contact and dialect mixture, is characterised at the phonological level by the presence of those features which were in a majority in the first-generation input, except in cases where linguistically unmarked or more simple features are in a large minority and win out over majority features on the grounds of their unmarkedness and/or complexity (unmarking).

The way in which this happened, however, is complex. For the 'core informants' in our ONZE-corpus—the earliest generation of New Zealand born anglophones, who represent the second stage of new-dialect formation—there was in most early communities no homogeneous local accent but instead a kind of supermarket of vocalic and consonantal variants that were available for inclusion in their developing ideolects, notwithstanding the obvious influence of their own parent's dialect(s). (This is of course why colonial and other new dialects consist to a considerable extent of new combinations of old features.) There are, crucially, many inter-individual differences in the way in which these combinations were formed.

It is clear that this implies a degree of randomness concerning which speakers chose which variants, such that different people in the same community may arrive at different combinations even in the case of certain speakers who have lived in close proximity to one another all their lives and whose parents even had similar origins. We then explain the survival of particular variants at the third stage in terms of their majority status in the speech of our second-stage ONZE informants. And we in turn explain this majority status in terms of the presumed majority status of these variants in the speech of our informants parents' generation, i.e. in the dialects brought to New Zealand at the first stage by immigrants from different parts of the British Isles. The differential proportions of variants in the ONZE corpus (and thus their later survival or disappearance), is, in other words, not random (see Trudgill et al, 2000).

We therefore have to assume the following. The 'original' mixtures of British Isles features which we find in the speech of individual ONZE informants reflect, to an extent, their parents' dialect(s), but with many of the relevant dialect features missing and with a considerable addition of features unlikely to be found in their parents' speech but present in the speech of other members of their community. The proportions of variants present in the accents of groups of second-stage speakers in a particular location, taken as a whole, then derive in a probabilistic manner from, and will therefore reflect at least approximately, the proportions of the same variants present in the different varieties spoken by their parents' generation taken as a whole. The most common variants at Stage 1 were the ones which were most often selected at Stage 2, even though Stage 2 speakers demonstrated considerable inter-individual variability stemming from the lack of constraints that a more homogenous speech community could have imposed; and these most common variants were therefore the ones to survive into Stage 3 — the new dialect we call New Zealand English.

For example, modern New Zealand English has both /h/-retention and, though this is decreasing now, /hw/-retention. This is predictable from the fact that 75% of our Stage 2 ONZE-corpus informants were /h/-retainers and 60% percent were /hw/-retainers, which is in turn, we suggest, because these were also approximately the proportions of such speakers, taken overall, at the earlier immigrant stage, the pre-ONZE corpus Stage 1. Why should this be? In our view, New Zealand English is a variety which is, from a phonological point of view, basically a southeast-of-England sort typologically, *not* because most of the immigrants from Britain to New Zealand came from there, but because, as it happens, individual forms found in the southeast of England were also, coincidentally (taking all the dialects which contributed to the mixture as a whole) very often majority forms in the original dialect mixture. However, it is very clear that where southeast-of-England forms were not in a majority, they did not survive. /h/-dropping — the pronunciation of *hammer*, *hill*, *house* etc. without initial /h/ — does not survive in New Zealand English in spite of the fact that it is the norm in vernacular varieties in London and everywhere else in the southeast of England. The Irish and Scottish /h/-pronouncing variants, together with Northumbrian, (partial) West Country and East Anglian accents, which were also /h/-pronouncing at the time, were in the majority in the mixture and have won out in modern New Zealand English. The immigration figures cited above help to confirm this thesis. Even if all the immigrants from Wales and

England combined were /h/-droppers, they constituted only 55% of the arrivals and were almost matched numerically by arrivals from Scotland and Ireland, areas where /h/-dropping was and is still unknown. When one further considers that some of the English immigrants would have been from the peripheral areas of England just mentioned, where /h/-dropping did not at that time occur, this suggests very strongly that during the crucial first-stage formation period New Zealand, unlike the southeast of England, was an area where /h/-droppers were in a minority. Similarly, because of the input from Scotland and Ireland, /hw/-retainers would also have been in a majority. What was *not* present at the first stage is the fascinating and bizarre combination of /h/-dropping with retention of /hw/ demonstrated at the second stage by one of our informants, Mr. Ritchie from Arrowtown, in the South Island (see Trudgill et al, 2000).

## References

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