

New Zealand Playground Language Project

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About this Project

This project was funded by the Royal Society of New Zealand through the Marsden Fund. The research was carried out between March 1999 and February 2002.

The research was carried out at the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand.

The principal researcher was Prof. Laurie Bauer; he was assisted by Dr Winifred Bauer.

The background

New Zealand English has hitherto been shown to lack significant dialectal variation, with the notable exception of what is often called the Southland “burr”: a rhotic pronunciation of English found in some parts of Southland and Otago, usually believed to derive from the rhoticity of the Scottish settlers. Various studies have attempted to find regional characteristics, but in general they have concluded that there is none.

However, in Australia in the last 20 years, dialect differences have been increasingly commented on and documented. If this is a relatively new phenomenon there, it might be expected that in New Zealand, the process might be in its infancy now.

If language innovation begins with the young, and works its way upwards through the population, as many studies of language change suggest, then one hypothesis worth testing is that young New Zealanders might be currently in the process of creating innovations in language which will lead to dialect differences in the future.

The broad aims of the research were:

- 1 To see whether the playground language of New Zealand primary school children showed any signs of regional variation.
- 2 To learn more about the process of dialect development.
- 3 To increase understanding of the dual role of children as conservators and as innovators in the process of language change.

An outline of the research process:

- 1 Primary schools throughout the country were asked to assist with the research. No assumptions were made about possible dialect areas; these were to be determined by the data.
- 2 A questionnaire was developed, piloted, and completed by the schools which agreed to assist.
- 3 The data was collated and examined for patterning.
- 4 The data which showed signs of patterning in relation to region and social factors was analysed statistically.

The material available electronically:

There are documents outlining in more detail the research process undertaken.

For each question in the questionnaire, there is a document outlining the data obtained. Where relevant, these documents also contain maps of the

regionalised data, graphs of any socially-differentiated data, and any relevant statistical tables.

The document called Contents lists the available documents, with a brief outline of their coverage.

The material in these documents has not undergone rigorous editing and refereeing processes, and in some respects the files should be considered working documents rather than definitive and polished statements. They are made available in this form for the benefit of the scholarly community, but should be read as background working documents. We are happy for these to be quoted subject to normal citation conventions.

Neither author is a sophisticated statistician, and while we have taken all possible care to ensure that statements made about the statistical analysis are reasonable, we have included the original statistical tables to enable subsequent researchers to reinterpret the results where this seems warranted.

The material available in print:

The following publications have appeared or have been accepted for publication.

Winifred Bauer and Laurie Bauer (2000). "Two unrelated changes in the English of young New Zealanders", *Kotare* Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 3-9.

Laurie Bauer and Winifred Bauer (2000). "Nova Zelandia est Omnis Divisa in Partes Tres" *New Zealand English Journal* No. 14, pp. 7-17.

Laurie and Winifred Bauer (2000). "Creeping Games" *Play and Folklore* No. 38, pp. 1-5.

Laurie and Winifred Bauer (2001). "NZ English or NZ Englishes?" *English in Aotearoa* No. 43, pp. 59-76.

Laurie and Winifred Bauer (2002). "The influence of the Maori population on NZ dialect areas". To appear in *Te Reo*.

Laurie and Winifred Bauer (probably 2003) "Adjective Boosters in the English of Young New Zealanders". To appear in the *Journal of English Linguistics*.

In addition, the draft of a book outlining the main findings of the research is currently under consideration by a publisher, and there are several more articles in the pipeline. Also submitted for publication are:

"Anyone for Marbles?"

"The teacher as dialectological recorder"

"The persistence of dialect areas"