

The New Zealand accent: a clue to New Zealand identity?

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Three years ago—at the time of the last election—a question was put to some politicians to explain about what it meant to them to be a New Zealander. That’s not such an easy question and I remember some waffly answers at the time. I think if I were asked this, part of my answer would be that we are people who speak New Zealand English—we speak with a New Zealand accent—we’re a people connected by our vowel sounds.

Four years ago, when I retired from the University of Canterbury, my husband and I spent three months living in the East End of London. We were there as family support when our son and his wife had their second child. Most days we went out with Kathleen aged 14 months in her pushchair and we spent a lot of time travelling about on London buses. From time to time we would recognise other New Zealanders on those buses. How did we know they were New Zealanders? It wasn’t by how they looked or the clothes they wore. It was by the way they spoke. What is the main thing that identifies us as New Zealanders? It’s our vowel sounds.

And it’s not just that New Zealanders can recognise other New Zealanders overseas. Here back in New Zealand, we’re good at using vowel sounds to make fine social distinctions. You might be able to pick the fact that I spent ten years of my education at a private girls’ school. I talk like the other women who were in my school class. Often (not always, but often) you can tell if someone comes from Southland; you can tell if someone is Maori.

So I say that our variety of the New Zealand accent is the most permanent indication of who we are, and where we come from. It’s therefore surprising to me that the New Zealand accent is so often overlooked by people writing about New Zealand and New Zealand history. There’s no reference to it in any of the major histories of New Zealand that I’ve read.

In 1989 two University of Canterbury academics, Bill Willmott and David Novitz, edited a book called *Culture and Identity in New Zealand*. They invited people to write chapters on relevant subjects such as Maori identity, art, the media, war, the education system, the church and so on. The book was well underway when someone suggested a chapter on New Zealand English. It was added as an afterthought.

If the book had been about Maori culture and identity I am certain that the subject of the Maori language would have been there from the beginning. But New Zealand English isn't under threat. We don't have to struggle to have it represented on the media. We don't need a special "New Zealand English language week". So maybe the high-school girl in Christchurch had a point when she assured me that she didn't have a New Zealand accent—the way she spoke was "normal".

And for many of us, the way we speak is normal. It's when we go overseas we find that people comment on our pronunciation and sometimes have trouble understanding us. A friend told me about overhearing a young New Zealand woman having trouble in a bank in London. She wanted her change in four ten-pound notes. The teller kept saying "But we don't have fourteens." My husband had difficulty buying a train ticket to a town called Hassocks:

"I want to go to Hassocks."

"Which part of Essex?"

"No, Hassocks."

"Yes, but whereabouts in Essex?"

The way we speak is "normal" until we leave New Zealand and find that we do indeed have a New Zealand accent. And when we come home we are sharply aware of the New Zealand accents of those customs officials in the airport. That's when we think about who we are and how we speak.

If we look at the way people regarded New Zealand speech in the past, I think it can throw light on how New Zealanders at that time saw themselves and their identity. It was very much tied up with their relationship with what was then called the Mother Country. As I explained in my last lecture, we now know from research that an early version of the New Zealand accent was being used by people in some New Zealand towns as early as the 1870s, even though it wasn't recognised as such until about 1900.

We also know that in those early years, there were many different accents heard around New Zealand. Professor Arnold Wall, who arrived in Christchurch in 1899, said that among the people he employed were people from Yorkshire, Oxfordshire, Devonshire, Scotland, Wales and Australia, all, he said, "speaking their native dialect in its purity" (Wall 1951). So it is likely that the early New Zealand accent was there, but it went unnoticed, camouflaged by the many other varieties of English which would have been heard at the same time in those early settler communities.

By the turn of the century, however, it was a different matter, and the New Zealand accent was being heard everywhere, and coming especially from the mouths of children. Margaret Batterham, an Australian linguist, has made a study of the language used to describe the early New Zealand accent. It was “an incurable disease;” it was “vile, muddy, a blot on our national life”. There was the metaphor of crime: “the blood of the language on their hands;” it was “evil sounding, had despairing depths;” it was “corrupt, slovenly, unspeakably bad, mangled, twisted and debauched” (Batterham, 1993).

School teachers were told that children who did not speak well couldn't appreciate good poetry, and one commentator even went as far as to say that the New Zealand accent itself was responsible for “minor throat and nasal disorders” (*The Triad* 10/8/1910: 37). In other words the New Zealand accent was so bad that it could make you ill.

At that time, the received opinion was that the way you spoke was completely within your own control. The new variety of English being used by New Zealand children was their choice and it was the result of laziness and bad company in the home and the street. Even so, some writers were optimistic that with the help of their teachers, the children could change and become a model for the rest of the Empire. This view was put forward by Mr R.N. Adams in some articles he wrote for the *Otago Daily Times* in 1904, which were later reprinted as a booklet. He wrote:

There is no good reason to prevent the hope that in these lands of the south, where we boast of such liberal systems of education, we may in the near future be recognised as the most correct speakers of the King's English of any in the wide Empire into which our people has developed.

It is certainly within the power of our schools and other educational institutions to promote a system of perfect English pronunciation in these new world states...

It now lies with us to make our language of the future what it should be, or to neglect it very much, as we have done up to the present time. We may develop a colonialism of our own, with a variety of shades of corruption that will be as distinct from each other as have been the dialects of England, Ireland and Scotland; or we may set up a standard of such excellence that no-one will question that it is the purest of all the Anglo-Saxon tongue. (Adams 1903: 30–31)

Teachers were told they must solve this ‘problem,’ and exercises of the lips and tongue were enthusiastically promoted. In 1925, the Minister of Education, in his preface to the Department of Education Bulletin on Speech Training, wrote, “in a

democratic country such as ours it is the right of everyone to speak in the manner that marks the educated man.”

The definition of what was ‘good’ or ‘correct speech’ was always the speech of the educated man—and he was the educated man in England. Professor Arnold Wall was the guardian of the King’s and the Queen’s English in New Zealand. As I explained last week, he wrote a book called *New Zealand English: How it should be spoken*. In the preface he wrote:

This book is designed for use by residents of New Zealand who wish to speak ‘good English’ or ‘standard English’, as spoken by the ‘best speakers’ in the old land; it is not intended for those who wish to develop a new dialect for this country... (Wall 1939:1)

In *Whitcombe’s Graded Lessons in Speech Training*, written in 1930, the author, Dorothy Stewart, suggested that New Zealand children should take as their model “the speech of one who is so unmistakably of the elect—Sir Johnstone Forbes-Robertson, so easily accessible by way of the gramophone” (Stewart 1930: ii). In other words, a British actor. Even better, they could listen to the phonographic recording of King George V and Queen Mary, whose messages to the children of the Empire were recommended as an excellent model of speech for New Zealand children to copy (*Education Gazette* 1/10/1924: 160). But the reality didn’t match the ideal that was being promoted by the speech trainers. It never does. New Zealand children, and their teachers, would have felt stupid talking like members of the British royal family.

There was an added complication, because while people criticised the New Zealand accent, they also criticised the speech of people who tried to sound ‘better than they really were’. One of the members of the Cohen Commission on Education, which travelled around New Zealand in 1912, complained:

What hope is there for change, when we find two of the principals of the largest secondary schools in New Zealand in giving evidence, using these expressions: ‘taim-table’ for ‘time-table’, ‘may own’ for ‘my own’, ‘faive’ for ‘five’, ‘gairls’ for ‘girls’. (AJHR, E-12 1912: 637)

This feeling persisted and was expressed years later in 1952 by Bill Pearson in his article *Fretful Sleepers*:

There is no place in normal New Zealand society for the man who is different; the boy whose misfortune it is to be sent to a snob school like Christ’s College or Wanganui Collegiate where a special dialect is taught, is immunised for life from contact with working men. He will

always shy from them because he will sense their contempt for his speech. (Pearson 1974: 6)

It's interesting to me that some of our earlier New Zealand literary figures lambasted the New Zealand accent. Ngaio Marsh wrote many letters to the editor of *The Listener* about this. She described our speech as being "in the manner of a pianist wearing a clown's gloves" (*Listener* 14/9/78). A.R.D. Fairburn wrote about "its wretched consonants and mangled vowels" (*Listener* 13/6/1947: 23–25). The novelist David Ballantyne in a lecture for the BBC described it as "ugly" and referred to "the harshness, the nasalisation, the monotony of our speech." Charles Brasch complained that New Zealand children were "crippled for life by an inadequate command of their own language" (*Landfall*, March 1956).

Yet these people were New Zealand writers who had a strong sense of their New Zealand identity. I often wonder if these comments about the New Zealand language reveal underlying attitudes which could never be openly expressed. Perhaps they demonstrate the uneasy tension that existed between the sense of New Zealand's independence and at the same time its colonial status.

Looking back at these earlier attitudes towards New Zealand speech we can say that we have now come a long way. New Zealand teachers have no interest in making their students sound like members of the British middle classes and we would consider it outrageous if they did. The old elocution teachers have been replaced by teachers of Speech Communication, concerned more with communication than vowel sounds. Is this acceptance of the way we speak as New Zealanders also a sign of a comfortable acknowledgement of our New Zealand identity? Does it mean that we are no longer the colonial cousins, insecure and ashamed of ourselves in the company of those who we fear might judge us? Can we say that the current attitude to our New Zealand accent reflects attitudes to our New Zealand identity? I think it does. But when it comes to explaining how our New Zealand accent developed and evolved, then the question of identity becomes more problematic.

I was asked to participate in Jim Mora's afternoon programme on Radio New Zealand National and the question of the development of the New Zealand accent came up. I explained that it was first heard in the speech of people lower down the social class ladder. One of the panel members then asked whether it had come about as a result of the deliberate efforts of school teachers who were trying to distance themselves from the British class system. Language change doesn't work like that. I had to explain that things are never as simple as that. Most language change is below the level of consciousness. People just don't realise it is happening. And there is so much that we don't know about language change. We can observe its processes and describe what happens, but there's a problem when it comes to the big interesting question, "Why?"

In our research into the origins and evolution of New Zealand English at the University of Canterbury we decided that New Zealand English was not transported here from somewhere else. So in spite of the strong beliefs of some people that it was the London dialect of Cockney carried to the Southern hemisphere, we decided that that this theory couldn't be supported. (For a discussion of this see Gordon et al. 2004: 71–2, 219–223.)

Some of us (including me) once thought it could have come across the Tasman from Australia. (See Gordon et al 2004: 72-5.) But we ended up with the view that I discussed in my last lecture—that it was a variety which developed here in New Zealand, and which developed in a relatively short period of time, maybe in the twenty years between 1870 and 1890.

The research team looked at many other explanations for the development of the New Zealand accent but in the end we decided that there was no one single explanation. I guess you could say we sat on the fence. We said there were probably a number of factors involved and this is what we wrote in the book published on this research by Cambridge University Press (Gordon et al., 2004).

But one member of our research team, the British sociolinguist Peter Trudgill, wasn't so reticent. He later came out with his own theory about the origin and evolution of New Zealand English. And he published this in a separate book in 2004 entitled *New Dialect-Formation: The Inevitability of Colonial Englishes*. In this book, Trudgill argued that there were no social influences in the development of the New Zealand accent. The reason New Zealanders speak the way they do is simply an artefact of demography. To work out what accent would eventually emerge in a new British colony, you needed to know certain things. You needed to know where the early settlers came from in Britain, and the numbers who came from each area. You needed to know about the dialect features in those areas. With this information, you could sit in your study and predict what the end result would be—what the new New Zealand accent would be like.

So according to Peter Trudgill, it is a question of pure linguistic determinism. *The Inevitability of Colonial Englishes*, he called his book. And he showed how this worked out. I've rounded the figures out here, but the 1881 census gives 20% of the settlers coming from Scotland, 17% from Ireland, 7% from Australia, 1% from Wales, around 9% from other places, but 45% from England. So according to Trudgill, the English of England was the winner on the day. New Zealand English would be based on the English of England, not on the English of Scotland or Ireland. The majority would win out.

And we can then go further. When we look at where in England the settlers came from we find the majority came from the South. (In our research into recordings of old New Zealanders only one out of the 100 speakers we analysed had Northern English features.) If we continue with this exercise, and ask where in the south of England the settlers came from, then the majority came from London and the Southeast. And this is why, says Peter Trudgill, New Zealand English is a South-eastern variety of English. It's just a matter of the numbers. And he uses the same argument for Australian and South African English. These Southern hemisphere Englishes are all South-eastern English varieties. So the fact that Australian and New Zealand English are similar, and have quite a bit in common with South African English is not because of early contact—it isn't because people were transporting the variety from one country to another—it's because if you put similar ingredients into the mixing bowls, then similar cakes will emerge.

Of course New Zealand English isn't exactly the same as 19th century South-eastern English. For example, people living in the South-east of England in the 19th century dropped their 'h's. We know that early school inspectors in New Zealand complained constantly about h-dropping—what they called “the misuse of the aspirate,” which I mentioned in my last lecture. Well, you might say, maybe those school teachers won the battle and made their pupils pronounce their h's, because we know it wasn't long before Inspectors were saying that children were pronouncing their h's beautifully. In fact, so much so, that Mr Andrews writing in *The Triad* in 1910 said:

With regard to “h” which is so commonly misplaced in England as a sin of both omission and commission, I have never come across a boy, born and educated in New Zealand, who had any great difficulty with this refractory letter. He rather overdoes the sound, if anything, triumphing over the obstacle so vigorously that victory then becomes defeat ...It would almost make the hearers think that the ancestors of the New Zealander had been dropping h's for generations, and now he is engaged in picking them up, several at a time. (*The Triad* 10/8/1910: 37)

Mr Strachan, a Marlborough school inspector said in 1907: “The trouble with ‘h’ was less pronounced this year, and there was evidence of an organized attempt to deal with it” (*AJHR* E-1B 1907: 23).

But again, linguists know that language change doesn't work like this. The fact that New Zealanders today pronounce their h's, says Trudgill, has nothing to do with those teachers' efforts. He says it is due to the figures: people from Ireland, Scotland, Northumbria, the West Country, East Anglia and other places all did pronounce their h's. And when you put them all together—add them all up—they are in the

majority. So in New Zealand the majority usage of “h” won out at the expense of the h-dropping from the south-east.

Trudgill’s theory of linguistic determinism is simple, elegant and, I think, compelling. And it fits the facts. We don’t speak with a Scottish or Irish version of English; our New Zealand accent is closest to South-eastern English. And this has nothing to do with any attempts to express identity. It’s just the way the settlement numbers worked out. Trudgill is careful to limit his claims for linguistic determinism to colonial situations where there is a *tabula rasa* – where people arrive from overseas to a place where there is no existing variety, and the new variety is formed there from scratch. He agrees with the linguist Roger Lass that linguistic change in general is not deterministic (Lass 1990: 131), and he agrees with Lyle Campbell (who used to teach at the University of Canterbury) that it is impossible for a theory to predict that a change will occur, which change will occur, and when a change will occur (Harris and Campbell 1995: 321).

There is, however, one point Trudgill makes where I’m not so comfortable. And this is with the pronunciation of “chance” and “dance”. We know from our recordings of old New Zealanders in the Mobile Unit archive that 48% of them said /τΣΘvσ/ and /δΘvσ/. That’s what my father said, and he grew up on the West Coast. My husband’s mother and aunts always pronounced the girl’s name Francis as /frænsIs/. And the boy’s name Alexander /Θλ↔κζΘvδ↔/. Arnold Wall in his book, *The Mother Tongue in New Zealand*, published in 1936, said that in New Zealand the short vowel sound /Θ/ was more common than the long vowel /a/ (Wall 1936: 29). And I think Professor Wall was a reliable witness. So why don’t we say /τΣΘvs/ and /δΘvσ/ today?

Trudgill’s explanation involves settlement figures. In the analysis of the Mobile Unit speakers, 48% say /la:f/ and /pa:T/. But when the vowel precedes a nasal they say /dæns/ and /plænt/. In the end, he says, the south-eastern and the East Anglian pattern won out because when they are combined we find 52% saying //τΣΘvs/ and /δΘvσ/.. “It must have been a close-run thing,” says Trudgill (2004: 122–3). Well, he might be right—perhaps it was a close run thing—but just after the Second World War (when the Mobile Unit recordings were made) we aren’t talking about a *tabula rasa* and a newly developed dialect. We are talking about several generations of New Zealanders.

Today if someone says /τΣΘvσ/ and /δΘvσ/ they’d be associated with Australia. I don’t know when this happened—when New Zealanders stopped saying /δΘvσ/ and everyone said /da:ns/—it would be interesting to find out, because both pronunciations were around in New Zealand for some decades before there was this reallocation. And so I wonder if there’s not the tiny possibility that the fact that New

Zealanders went the way of /da:ns/ not /dæns/ had something to do with being different from Australia?

Trudgill was arguing against seeing identity contributing to the formation of the New Zealand accent. He wrote:

Why do New Zealanders need to symbolise their identity as New Zealanders when most of them spend most of their time, as is entirely normal, talking to other New Zealanders? (p. 157)

Of course he's right. But I think he's leaving something out. At home in New Zealand we identify far more about ourselves than just the fact that we are New Zealanders. We can often tell if someone is old or young, male or female, from Southland, high on the social class ladder or low, educated or non-educated, Maori or Pacifica or Pakeha. The way we speak carries a huge amount of social information. So how does this happen?

Linguists can describe some of the processes involved. We know about the influence of peer group pressure in primary school. I observed this with my own children when we went on sabbatical leave to England and sent our children to a primary school in London, near King's Cross station. And it wasn't long before the glottal stops started to appear and vowels began to change. When we came home to New Zealand they went back to their New Zealand accents almost overnight. Children have a powerful desire to fit in and not to sound different. I think this could have had a part to play in the rapid dissemination of the early New Zealand accent. In New Zealand the 1877 Education Act brought in a national system of free primary education. After this date, large numbers of children were coming together for their education. And this coincides with the period when the New Zealand accent was developing. Those who complained about the "colonial twang" always said it was worse among children.

We also know about what sociolinguists call "accommodation" – that uncomfortable compulsion some of us have to change our vowels or our intonation in the company of a person who speaks a different variety of English. If you go to Wales do you find yourself using a different intonation when you talk to the locals? Jim Bolger was famous for his linguistic accommodation, especially to speakers of Irish English. In the recent film festival in Christchurch I saw the New Zealand made documentary *Trouble is My Business*. It was filmed over a period of 6 months at the secondary school Aorere College in South Auckland, with the film-maker following around a teacher called Mr Peach, as he worked with some troubled students. Mr Peach addresses the camera directly from time to time speaking in a general New Zealand accent. His pupils speak quite differently: they speak Pacific Island English or Maori English, and so do their parents. But when Mr Peach is talking to one of these

children you can hear the change in his pronunciation. The rhythm changes, and his vowels change. And I have been told that there is actually a difference in his speech when he is talking to Pacific Island children and when he is talking to Maori children. This is a good example of accommodation.

My son John taught history at Aorere College for three years and while he was there I noticed he developed some th-fronting. He was started to say *fing* for *thing*, and *wif* for *with*. Now he has left teaching and is a corporate lawyer, but he still says “wif”. So maybe what started as accommodation became fixed. (I should add that he has always strongly denied that there was or is any such change but there are some things mothers know about.)

There is one piece of sociolinguistic research which connects language change with identity. This was the work published in 1963 by the man who is sometimes called the father of sociolinguistics: William Labov. It was called “The Social Motivation of a Sound Change,” and it was Labov’s first major piece of research. It was pioneering work at the time because he went around with a tape recorder and actually recorded people speaking. The research is very well known to anyone studying sociolinguistics but for those who are unfamiliar with it I will briefly describe Labov’s findings.

The research was carried out on Martha’s Vineyard, an island off the coast of Massachusetts. It had a population of about 6,000 people but in the summer it was a very popular resort for the rich and famous and about 40,000 summer visitors came in. It is where the Kennedys had their holidays. A linguist had visited 30 years earlier and recorded some members of old families, so Labov was able to compare his interviews with the older material.

He found that some vowel sounds on Martha’s Vineyard were changing. In particular he noticed that in words like *out*, *trout*, *house*, /au/ was changing to /’u/; and to a lesser extent in *white*, *pie*, *night* and *like*, /ai/ was changing to /’i/. Labov found that the change was most evident with people aged between 31 and 45. It wasn’t so strong in older people or younger people. And he found that the Islanders were completely unaware of any changes taking place.

Change was especially noticeable in a place called Chilmark, which was the centre of the island’s fishing industry. The problem at that time was that the fishing industry was in trouble, and it seemed coincidentally that the sound changes were strongest with fishermen. So you could say that the changes seemed to be radiating out from a small group of fishermen in a particular area.

So the question Labov asked was why was this happening? Why were the fishermen changing? Did it start from one man and then the others copied him? And why

would the wider population of a place like Martha's Vineyard start talking like a small group of fishermen? Labov found some more interesting things. The fishermen didn't suddenly start using a *new* pronunciation; they were actually exaggerating a tendency that was already there. In fact the supposedly new pronunciations were actually very conservative old fashioned pronunciations—they were the pronunciations which would have been heard on the mainland of America in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Labov knew that 30 years earlier the people of Martha's Vineyard had been changing to the Mainland speech. Now, 30 years later, they were going back to this much older pronunciation. So why was this happening? His answer involved the rise in popularity of the Island as a tourist resort. The fishermen in Chilmark—a very tight knit conservative group—were those most opposed to the incursions of the summer tourists. They thought they themselves represented the good old Yankee values: hard work, thrift and so on, unlike those they saw as the lazy rich summer visitors. Labov called this the “social motivation of a sound change”.

When I first read Labov's research on Martha's Vineyard, it came as a revelation to me. It doesn't mean that people deliberately changed—like people paying for elocution lessons. The change he described was below the level of consciousness, but it was caused by social factors. It was caused, Labov said, by the need of speakers to assert their identity in the face of another clearly identified group of people. When I read about this I thought it might be a clue to understanding about the New Zealand accent and New Zealand identity.

But there are fashions in sociolinguistics as there are in other places, and today Labov's research on language change on Martha's Vineyard doesn't feature in accounts of language change. People don't talk about identity and change. If you do talk about this you can expect to be strongly challenged. And even Labov himself seems to be distancing himself from his own research. In 2001 he wrote:

The Martha's Vineyard study is frequently cited as a demonstration of the importance of the concept of local identity in the motivation of linguistic change. However we do not often find correlations between degrees of local identification and the progress of sound change.

(Labov 2001: 191)

So today we don't mention Martha's Vineyard and social motivations of sound changes. And we don't hear it cited in relation to New Zealand English. People are looking for other explanations. But I'm going to stick my neck out here and say that I think this is a pity. I'm retired and retirement has made me bold. I think we should think about language and identity.

Of course it would be silly to suggest that early New Zealanders deliberately changed their vowels to assert some kind of national separateness. As I keep saying, language change just doesn't work like that. The fishermen in Chilmark and the other residents of Martha's Vineyard had no idea that their vowels were changing. But the important thing about the language change on Martha's Vineyard is that it differentiated one particular group from the others. The identity of the fishermen and the rich summer visitors on Martha's Vineyard was marked by a language contrast.

I think that it is this notion of contrast which is important. A sense of identity needs contrast. It is the contrast we become aware of when we leave New Zealand and we find that other people speak differently from us. It is the awareness Janet Frame described in her autobiography *The Envoy from Mirror City*. When she first went abroad she found herself "already undergoing the change forced on every new traveller and accompanied by examining not the place of arrival but the place of departure" (1985: 5).

It was during the Women's Movement in the 1970s that we became aware of women as an identifiable group. That was a completely new experience for me. In the past women had been scattered through the community, usually living in pairs with men, but now women were given a separate identity which could be discussed and described. But to do this required women to be seen in contrast to and often in opposition to men. That's a diversion, but to me this is how identity is constructed. But if you think of groups in our society that have an especially strong sense of identity you'll find they are usually in a minority.

One of our students, Chris Bartlett, did his PhD at the University of Otago on the language of Southland (Bartlett 2003). He found that older speakers pronounced their 'r's in all appropriate environments: in *horse, cart, letter, nurse*. The middle-aged speakers were varied. Sometimes they pronounced the 'r' and sometimes they didn't. The younger speakers retained 'r' only on the NURSE vowel. They said *horse* and *cart* without the 'r', but *purple shirt, third term, fern birds* with the 'r'. However, Chris found that in Invercargill the 'r' seemed to be coming back in the speech of young people, especially young women, and not just on the NURSE vowel.

This sounds to me as if it could be the Martha's Vineyard effect. I remember talking to teachers from Southland in the 1990s who told me that when they did their teacher training they were told to get rid of their Southland accents if they wanted to be teachers. Later this became a source of sadness to them. My own students from Southland used to tell me that they were embarrassed by their Southland accent, and that students in Christchurch teased them about it. Maybe Chris Bartlett's findings are a reflection that young people in Southland are now feeling differently about their Southland identity. Their use of the older form of Southland English could be

subconsciously demonstrating this. So although we can't prove that an initial sound change was set in motion by a quest for identity marking, I think that once the changes have developed, they can become emblematic.

I have a radio recording of six young Maori speakers who were interviewed in 1958. They were being asked about what it was like to move to Auckland from the countryside. Only one of them could be identified as speaking English with a Maori accent, and even that was very slight. In the 1990s I was keen to record Maori accented English and I found that I couldn't do it. I would hear young Maori people speaking with a different rhythm and different vowels and I would think, "Great! Today I'll capture Maori accented English." But as soon as I appeared with my tape recorder they began to speak with general New Zealand accents. So we could say then that speaking English with a Maori accent was stylistic: the young Maori could move in and out of it.

But I think things have changed today. People who have done research into this variety of New Zealand English tell me that for some young Maori it is now their mother tongue. They use it all the time. I'm sure this would be the case for those young people recorded at Aorere College in South Auckland in the documentary I've referred to. I'm sure for those young Maori students it is the way they speak all the time. We can hear plenty of Maori accented English today. Listen to some of the Maori sports men and women. Listen to Maori TV.

So is speaking Maori accented English part of the construction of a Maori identity today? We have come a long way from the time when children were accused of having a horrible colonial twang, from the time when—at my school anyway—there were hopeless attempts by the elocution teacher to make our vowels sound like those of posh people from England. New Zealand accents are heard on the radio and TV, even on the concert programme. Earlier radio announcers used a pronunciation guide based on Daniel Jones' *Pronouncing Dictionary of English*. They had special speech lessons. Those days are past. We have Simon Dallow, not Philip Sherry.

But as I've tried to argue, the way we speak doesn't only reflect the fact that we are New Zealanders. It reflects the fact that we are particular New Zealanders; we live in multi-dimensional space where age, gender, race and class also have a bearing. And if people aren't saying nasty things about New Zealand English in general today, some are still quick to criticise some of its varieties. Ginette Macdonald has made her name with her caricature Lyn of Tawa. We fall about laughing at the speech of this lower class New Zealand woman. Why do we find this so funny? People don't choose to speak like this; for some New Zealanders it is their mother tongue. And we'll also laugh at representations of upper class cultivated New Zealand speech. So while I agree that we need to be careful about making causal connections between

the development of a variety and identity factors, once the variety is established, then it seems to me that matters of social identity do become important.

When we listen to the speech of individuals we can see how social factors influence their speech. I had an honours class where the students were required to record and analyse the speech of three members of the same family. One student recorded three sisters; two sounded very similar and one sounded quite different. The similar ones went to the university and both worked in law firms in Christchurch; the third sister, the one who sounded so different, worked in the pub at Haast in South Westland.

In the 1970s we had a young girl living with us, rejected by her parents because she was pregnant. She had attended an elite private girls' school as a boarder from the age of 7 to 15 and I know what girls at that school sound like because I once went to the same school. But she spoke with a broad New Zealand accent and had a wonderful command of non-standard syntax: "I seen it", "I done it", "What do yous think?" She spoke like the country town boys whose company she liked to keep.

Language and identity is a fascinating subject and I'm glad I was asked to give these lectures on the Ian Gordon Fellowship. I've been working on New Zealand English for many years and thinking about it for many years, but this fellowship has made me go back to an aspect of the subject I once thought was just too difficult. I don't think I have the answers, but I'm sure that the language we speak is not just an asocial construct based on demography even if that's how it began. The way we speak tells people who we are and where we come from and where we want to belong, and that's important—it is part of our identity.

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