AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND ENGLISH: THE PRESENT STATE OF STUDIES

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My title is perhaps something of a misnomer, in that I am not at all sure that the claims made by the phrase 'present state of studies' are warranted: what has prompted me to prepare this paper is the feeling that the present state is a fairly unhappy one, that an area of scholarship which appears to have generated quite a respectable literature and to be taught in most History-of-the-English-language-type courses in the Australasian universities is in fact a relatively neglected area, badly in need of the sorts of stimulus that comes from the linking of teaching and research, and of the sort of inter-university co-ordination, which should be one of the objects of an organisation like AULLA. My intention, then, is to look firstly at what is being done, and secondly, but somewhat more tentatively, at what might be done - in the hope that more scholars will be encouraged to take an active part in building up a body of information which will enable us to talk with confidence about the English used on both sides of the Tasman.

I have chosen to talk about both Australian and New Zealand studies because, particularly on the historical side, I believe that the study of the two has to be closely interrelated: knowledge of the historical development of American English and of the approaches to its study are illuminating and helpful even to the point of providing a model, and there seems to me even greater advantages in examining together two varieties of English which date from much the same time, which have had a great deal of contact with one another, which have, of course, essential differences but which are so close to each other - in terms of time, situation, and internal development - that study of the two together could not help but be mutually beneficial. One might even be able to go further than this and, without any suggestion of dependence, argue that New Zealand English cannot be adequately recorded and examined without prior or concurrent knowledge of Australian. And there is a case also, once a sufficient body of material in these two overlapping areas is amassed, for taking stock of the English used in Papua-New Guinea, Norfolk Island, and the Pacific Islands which have had most contact with Australia and New Zealand. I am, then, associating these two because, although the immediate difficulty of, say, Maori words in New Zealand English or Aboriginal words in Australian, may seem to push them apart, I believe that the similarities are of much greater importance than the differences and that, if ever
there was a fairy godmother of Australasian language and a major centre for linguistic research became possible, its concern should be with the English language as it is used in Australia, New Zealand and the South-west Pacific.

Two of the more important books on the subject have attempted this compass: in the first, E.E. Morris's *Austral English*, it is the difficulties that are more apparent than the advantages. No attempt is made to indicate distribution and the result is a rather confused picture of the language used on both sides of the Tasman - the very large numbers of Aboriginal and Maori words for flora and fauna being again the clearest indication of this. But G.W. Turner's *The English Language in Australia and New Zealand*, illustrates the value of a co-ordinated study of these closely related branches of English - both on the positive side, in that his method of approaching linguistic material through theoretical considerations makes good contrastive use of the differences and similarities, and on the negative side, in that the suggestion of imbalance in the book derives from the unevenness of his source material: Australian pronunciation has been fairly fully recorded, New Zealand pronunciation has not; Australian goldmining and shearing terminology have been the subjects of special studies, the corresponding areas of New Zealand English have not. Were this otherwise there would be no disputing the cohesion of the book's subject matter.

Turner's book was one of three published in 1966 which gives some account of Australian English, but the only one to consider New Zealand English. The other two, the second, revised and enlarged edition of Sidney J. Baker's *The Australian Language*, first published in 1945, and my own *Australian English, An Historical Study of the Vocabulary 1788-1898*, are essentially lexical studies and essentially Australian. In his bibliography Turner remarks that 'a Renaissance of Australian English studies is now under way'. And certainly in 1966 it looked that way, with these three and with the Australian Language Research Centre's Occasional Papers moving promisingly into the study of certain specialised vocabularies. But there was no comparable renaissance in the study of the vocabulary of New Zealand English and, although there is useful material in some areas, Maori names of flora, for instance and valuable unpublished material collected by H. Orsman (Victoria), there remains no published record of any great substance.

Turner makes no claims for comprehensiveness, rightly arguing that 'it is ... not yet time to attempt, even in outline, a definitive description and history of the vocabulary of Australian and New Zealand English'. His examples are drawn from his own observations, which are of most value when he is talking of New Zealand English, and from
previously published material, notably that of Morris and Baker. And it is no criticism of the book to say that its main value lies not in what it adds to our stock of information but in its being the sort of book which is likely to be used by undergraduates, which successfully conveys the excitement of lexical discovery, and which, however tentative some of its observations and transitory its examples, never loses sight of the theoretical bases of linguistic study or of the sense of discipline which should inform it.

Baker's book does, unfortunately, claim not only comprehensiveness but a heightened status for the branch of English he is describing. The chauvinism of the earlier volume is a little more restrained but the Mencken-like title, *The Australian Language*, remains the same and the claims implicit in the title are there throughout. Revision has not, unfortunately, meant reappraisal: the errors, the naivete with which he has approached questions of a word's provenance, status, or distribution, the journalism, the antagonism for anything which even faintly smacks of the academic, the lack of system - these remain. Like Turner's the book is exciting, perhaps more exciting in the sudden contemplation of the wealth of jargon, slang, and colloquialism that Baker reveals. But one's excitement is tempered by one's realisation of the potential danger of the book. A *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer described Baker as a 'scholarly journalist' and, outside an Australian context, one realises just how difficult it is to assess his contribution. As the reviewer writes earlier (he was reviewing, amongst other things, Partridge's *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, Baker, and my *Australian English*):

> Mr. Partridge is a New Zealander who spent long and useful years in Australia: his dictionary contains masses of Australian words. He is therefore rubbed (to use the local term) by both Mr. Baker in *The Australian Language* and Dr. Ramson in *Australian English*. Dr. Ramson, while not withholding admiration from Mr. Baker, rubs him too. Mr. Baker starts rubbing Dr. Ramson and leaves off halfway; but he rubs good and proper Professor Mitchell, Dr. Ramson's sponsor, who wrote the introduction to his book. This is a good, Australian rough-up, where the pommy hardly dares to intervene.

Baker's errors of fact and failures in methodology are evident enough to those who 'know the language': the very real danger lies in the continuation of the myth overseas and in the absorption of his material into accounts of Australian English which are dependent on secondary sources (and here, of course, Partridge's work, whatever its other and numerous advantages, is the first to come to mind). If I can make a comparison with Turner's book, there is here the wealth of material which Turner wisely avoids, though it
carries its own excitement, but the tentative observations and transitory examples are offered with the unquestioning faith of the proselytiser and the resultant account, in the hands of the uninitiated, is seriously misleading.

My own Australian English has, for the purpose of this discussion, two essential limitations: firstly, it stops short at the end of the nineteenth century, at a time when a genuinely Australian colloquial speech had emerged and become, in literature, a 'standard' form of speech, and before the numerous complicating factors of the present century had made themselves felt (it tries, in other words, to demonstrate the effects of a new environment and of changing social requirements on an inherently unstable linguistic situation, without following the linguistic developments through to their post-Federation fruition); and secondly, it is a one-man scanning of what is obviously a very large range of primary sources and an attempt not to provide a definitive account of the vocabulary in this period but to indicate what appear, on a fairly random sampling of sources, to be the major trends in the development of the Australian vocabulary and the areas which would most repay closer investigation. It was, therefore, intended essentially as a corrective to the Baker point of view and, if it is not tiresome to labour the American analogy, a very small attempt to counter, as Krapp did those of Mencken, the extravagances of the chauvinistic approach.

These three books, taken together, make quite a respectable beginning to the study of the Australian vocabulary. Baker and Turner discuss also Australian pronunciation but the best general account of this is, of course, A.G. Mitchell's *The Pronunciation of English in Australia*, originally published in 1946 but subsequently revised by Mitchell and Delbridge; and the most thorough investigation of the pronunciation is in A.G. Mitchell and A. Delbridge's *The Speech of Australian Adolescents*. There is, again, no comparable study of New Zealand pronunciation, though the regional variations in New Zealand speech promise rich areas for both historical and descriptive work, and work on a survey has been begun by Professor Brosnahan and Mrs. Wylie at the Victoria University of Wellington.

It is obvious that these books are the results of independent investigation and that contact between otherwise isolated scholars in the field is essential. The AULLA Newsletter has made some improvements here in that members can now advertise the areas they have preemted but the real need is for some means of drawing together interested scholars whose work in the same or in closely related areas can be mutually beneficial.
A sort of informal 'old boys' network does grow up eventually but something stronger is needed.

It was partly in order to meet this need that the Australian Language Research Centre was formed within the English Department of the University of Sydney in 1962.

Let me quote from Professor Russell's Introduction to the Occasional Papers series:

In this earliest phase of its work the Centre is not a directing and initiating body. It administers no funds and it has inaugurated no research projects. Instead it seeks to provide individual scholars with an opportunity of participating in the kind of free but controlled exchange information which seems to promise most for the advancement of linguistic studies of this kind. In particular it enables the individual member of the Centre to know what his colleagues are doing, to check his own findings against their expertise, and to ensure that the kind of work upon which he is engaged is not simply a duplication of that being done by others. It has been common experience among members that their individual plans and research undertakings have been notably advanced and assisted by the opportunities provided by meetings of the Centre at which criticism is available and suggestions for new approaches are freely offered within a context of academic experience and of acquired skill which would otherwise be difficult to duplicate. The scholar who might otherwise be disheartened by a lonely cultivation of his own research finds constant stimulus in the opportunity to discuss the work of colleagues and in the realisation that important as his own work may be it has now become part of a large-scale attack on the problem which is continually producing results which are of direct bearing upon that segment the investigation of which is his own concern. 12

It is unfortunate that after a burst of initial enthusiasm the Centre has, for a number of reasons, fallen short of these ideals. One of these is that the Centre has always been exclusivist: its members are either present or past members of the English Language Department in Sydney and, as is perhaps inevitable in such a situation, it is the present members of the department who are most frequently in contact with each other and who thus determine future policy. And this, however beneficial it may be for those on the spot, does not offer much to interested scholars in other parts of Australia (and, as I will show later, the list of interested scholars is a reasonably large one and the potential of a grouping which is not centred within one University department and not subject to internal pressures and politics high). There are obvious difficulties in the organisation of a grouping covering Australia, New Zealand and Papua–New Guinea, but these do not seem insurmountable and, in New South Wales universities alone, there are interested scholars who are not
members of the Centre.

Secondly, it does not follow that a member of an English language department which teaches Old and Middle English and a good deal of English Linguistics is necessarily interested in making a contribution to the specific field of Australian English. And it is unavoidable that, given the Department's proprietary interest, senior members, distinguished enough scholars in their own fields, should assume responsibility for the running of a research group which is, essentially, outside their own areas of interest.

Thirdly, the Department is a teaching department, able to provide research assistants to work in the Centre but not able to free any of its senior members from their normal academic responsibilities. And the result of this is that the task of maintaining a series, like the present series of Occasional Papers, at a reasonable standard and with reasonable frequency of publication, becomes very difficult. It is not enough to offer the apology that all of these papers carry -- that they are essentially a record of work in progress, intended to 'record what has so far been discovered', 'elicit further information', and 'correct errors and (to) stimulate suggestions about possible new approaches'. They are the published record by which the Centre must be judged and, looking back over the thirteen published in the last five years, one cannot but be conscious of the fact that the achievement is small and the strain beginning to tell.

Some of their numbers, J.S. Gunn's two-part study, The Terminology of the Shearing Industry, the two numbers reporting on the Nuffield-financed investigations of gold-mining terms, J.R.L. Bernard's Rates of Utterance in Australian Dialect Groups and A.I. Jones' An Outline Word Phonology of Australian English, do fulfill the Centre's aims. These are genuine and valuable contributions, acting both as advertisement and stimulus. But others in the series, particularly latterly, imperil the standards of the series as a whole and cast doubt not only on the editorial policy but on the potential standing of the Centre itself. I think particularly of R.D. Eagleson's Bibliography of Writings on Australian English, which is substantially derivative and, as a separate publication, very hard to justify; and of the two-part study (with at least a third clearly promised) of The Terminology of Australian National Football, which it is very difficult to take seriously. The Centre's activities, in fact, illustrate all too well the difficulty of keeping in sight the ideals outlined by Professor Russell in its first Occasional Paper when the project is felt to be the property of one University and a large number of qualified and interested scholars are not asked to contribute in any way.
The other research centre in Australia which is concerned with English is also to be found within one department. This is the Queensland Speech Survey, operating from within the English Department of the University of Queensland. There are immediately obvious differences which make this a more valid project with a more reasonable expectation of success. The Sydney project's first objective, as defined and publicised in each occasional paper is:

to promote a comprehensive historical and descriptive study of the English language in Australia by stimulating and co-ordinating the research projects of its members.

Its claims, in other words, are large and, although it sets out initially to record only the English of New South Wales, its attempt to record the usage of Australian Rules suggests already that its scope is widened.

Mr. E.H. Flint, who has charge of the Queensland Speech Survey, defined its aims and status in a Bulletin of the Linguistic Circle of Canberra in 1965.

2.4.4 Mitchell forecast that the collection of further detailed evidence of the synchronic patterns of speech variation in Australia might reveal 'pockets of distinctive usage', possibly in isolated communities, or where social divisions exist.

2.5.0 Since 1961 detailed work under the Queensland Speech Survey has confirmed Mitchell's forecast that pockets of distinctive usage might be found in Queensland in areas of geographical or social isolation. At the same time it has confirmed the belief that the Australian English spoken by the majority of the population is comparatively uniform.

2.5.1 Communities or areas of distinctive usage have been found in the Cape York Peninsula and Gulf regions; in Aboriginal communities further south; less certainly in areas of original German and Italian settlement distributed throughout the State; and of course among migrants.

2.5.2 A particularly interesting area of language contact has been surveyed by T.E. Dutton in the Torres Strait Islands and on the tip of Cape York Peninsula. Here Australian and Aboriginal English meets two vernaculars, and also a contact vernacular. The latter may have some links with the speech of the remnants of the Kanaka population, which has also been recorded in the Survey.

2.5.3 Coincident with the main Survey programme, smaller projects have been undertaken using special sampling techniques. The influence of speech and drama training upon the informal conversational style of a speech community has been investigated.
Supplementary evidence bearing on this subject has been collected throughout the State. Studies of migrant English and of the phonemics of Queensland English have also been made.

2.5.4 A subsidiary aim of the Queensland Speech Survey is to test and evaluate current linguistic theories by applying them to a wide range of data, and thereby (if possible) to contribute to theoretical progress. Other theoretical approaches than the one above outlined have been used in the processing of the data. 15

The intention is clearly to accept the Mitchell Delbridge thesis as a general starting point, to make a closer examination of it in a defined area and to seek out those areas of usage exposed by the study which are peculiar to the region and which warrant fuller investigation. And this, given the start that has been made in published material on both the lexical and phonological side, 16 is essentially the sort of work that is needed. Theses have been proposed and general trends suggested: only close and detailed work on given regional or occupational areas can confirm, expand, or modify these.

Now it would seem a reasonable assumption that, if there has been a renaissance in Australian English studies and there are two research centres active in the country, this would be backed by a solid teaching programme in these and other universities, and that the amount of postgraduate research going on in the country in these areas was considerable. But this is, unfortunately, far from being the case.

Towards the end of 1968 I wrote to the heads of all English departments in Australia and New Zealand asking for information under four headings:

1. The titles of any postgraduate theses on any aspect of New Zealand and/or Australian English submitted in recent years;

2. The nature of any postgraduate work being carried out at present;

3. The extent to which the history and special character of New Zealand and/or Australian English is dealt with in undergraduate courses;

4. The names of members of staff with a special interest in the field. 17

The coverage of either New Zealand or Australian English in undergraduate courses is not very encouraging. Generally some mention of Australian English as made in History of the Language courses, usually at first year level but where the subject forms a substantial part of a course (and again usually at first year level) it is associated with the introductory study of phonetics -- appearing not as an end in itself, in other words, but as
part of a training, however limited, in general linguistics. New Zealand English appears even less frequently and at least two of my correspondents comment on how little is known, Professor Scott (Auckland) remarking that 'as yet simply not enough is known about New Zealand English to make it safe to lecture on the subject' and Professor Brosnahan (Victoria) remarking that, although the phonology is covered systematically it is impossible to make more than incidental reference to the characteristic features of New Zealand grammar. If there is such a thing as a beginning to a vicious circle this is it: there are obviously large areas of both Australian and New Zealand English which remain uncharted but so long as material from these fields is used in History of the Language or Phonetics courses as the known material which will give students some basis of familiarity from which to approach the concepts being taught them and not the other way round, as the raw material on which carefully inculcated principles and methods can be tested, there is unlikely ever to be much excitement at the prospect of postgraduate work in this field.

A glance at appendix II confirms this. The only universities where postgraduate work in this field is going on are Queensland, where the links between thesis topics and the direction being taken by the Queensland Speech Survey are obvious; Sydney, where Professor Mitchell's interest in pronunciation and vocabulary has given way to an interest which centres largely on work made possible by a very well equipped language laboratory, often theoretical in character; Macquarie, where (Norfolk Island aside) phonetics is again the main interest; Melbourne, which has by chance a lone lexicographer; Victoria, where the theoretical study of language is firmly established in the English Department; and Papua-New Guinea, where the position is much the same.

There are perhaps too few topics here to generalise from but it is hard to avoid the feeling that, with one or two exceptions, the theses are theses in linguistics, using Australian or New Zealand English as the raw and illustrative material: their prime concern is either to demonstrate mastery of certain techniques or to advance given areas of linguistics theory and not in fact to increase the amount of available information on the raw material.

This gloomy picture is lightened a little by the number of scholars who have professed interest in the subject. The list is a reasonably large one and it is surely not too optimistic to think that, from this, some really fruitful investigation of Australian and New Zealand English may come.

Few would dispute that linguistic description and linguistic theory must go
hand in hand. But the danger, it seems to me, is that theoretical study may tend to woo potential scholars into realms of abstraction and away from the primary business of recording the language being used about us. As the same Times Literary Supplement reviewer concluded:

The range of books covered here shows what an exciting field linguistics is today. After reading them one feels bemused, like one who has sat through the first two acts of Moussorgsky's Khovanshchina with a firm determination to follow the story. The plot is indescribably complicated, emotions are strong and factions abound. Bands of streltsy, recruited by Chomsky all over the place, mob the cities and bid fair to grasp power. The Westerners have long-term faith in their cause, but find the immediate prospects somewhat grim. The Old Believers are likely to go up in flames before the end. There is still time for others to barge in and win the field; anyway, there are good tunes for all. Meanwhile, right outside the opera and far from the metropolis, pretty indifferent to heresies and faction, unhonoured and unsung, orthodox field workers till the black earth and bring in rich harvests of data to keep the community going.

The need seems to me at the moment for orthodox field workers to go on tilling the earth, both in Australia and New Zealand, on the lexical side more than any other. I have mentioned above the possibility of a centre for the study of Australasian and S.W. Pacific English which could carry out both descriptive and historical work, which could in some way co-ordinate the activities of all interested scholars and perhaps avoid the difficulties being met by the Australian Language Research Centre in Sydney. But the practical difficulties are, of course, enormous, and hopes of an institution like the School for Scottish Studies in Edinburgh, which houses under the one roof Scottish historians, The Scottish National Dictionary, The Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue, and the Scottish Dialect Survey, nothing more than pipe-dreams. And it is only fair to say of the Sydney group that, had they not been bedevilled by the lack of financial support, their work would be a great deal further on. The situation calls for a research centre with a permanent staff of its own and, wherever this is set up, it deserves general support and should itself actively foster the study and recording of standard and regional varieties of English through the other universities, building up a repository which, in its composition, reflects more than local interests and contacts.

But in the meantime we have no other recourse but to do as those in other neglected areas do -- look to our own. And it may be useful to suggest some ways of doing this:
1. Those who have professed an interest in the subject must be kept in touch with each other, much as mediaevalists in Australia and New Zealand now are, through a newsletter which would at least keep scholars aware of what is being done, and perhaps invite comment; ultimately one would hope through a journal of the Notes and Queries sort which, as more material became available, could expand to take more substantial contributions. Perhaps this could be begun by a subcommittee of AULLA, or by the Linguistics Society of Australia, perhaps the lead could come from Sydney, or perhaps it should be separately developed. Such a journal would encourage scholars from other disciplines, notably historians and literary historians, to keep an eye open for and send in snippets and short notices;

2. more time should be given in History of the Language courses, and in introductory courses in General Linguistics, to Australian and New Zealand material, with a view to developing interests which could, hopefully, be met by more advanced optional courses; 19

3. more encouragement should be given to postgraduate work in the field: there are innumerable areas, historical and contemporary, occupational, regional, and social, which can be neatly packaged and which would make valuable and not at all unsatisfying, contributions to the total picture. Some on the historical side would obviously be tied to the main manuscript repositories and libraries: but others would need little reference to these, relying more on experience in recording language in use. The problem of supervision would be difficult but not, if there was reasonable co-operation between universities, insurmountable;

4. there is the possibility of bringing some of those interested together at a conference, either by building a rather fuller section on Australian and New Zealand English into the AULLA programme or through the Linguistic Society of Australia.

These are some thoughts on possible ways of arousing interest in the subject and overcoming the present neglect. My concern is that something should be done, that it should be done with some urgency, and that, only after the study of the subject has been promoted far more generally than it is at present are we likely to attract the sort of financial support which would make the pipe-dream research centre mentioned earlier a reality.
Footnotes:
1 A paper presented to the AULLA Conference, University of Western Australia, February 1969.
4 Sydney: 1966.
5 Canberra: 1966.
6 op. cit., p. 213.
7 ibid., pp. ix-x.
9 ibid.
10 Sydney: 1965.
11 Sydney: 1965
13 Occasional Papers 5, 6, 7, 8.
14 Occasional Papers 11, 12, 13.
16 See pp. 43-45 above.
17 The answers are summarised in the appendices.
19 A collection of papers on Australian, New Zealand and New Guinea English, which might be useful for this purpose, is to be published shortly by the Australian National University Press.
20 This is based on answers received from English Departments only. To it must be added Professor Hamerstrom (Linguistics, Monash) and Dr. S. Kaldor (Anthropology, Western Australia).
21 Now Professor of English in the University of the South Pacific.
APPENDIX 1

Inclusion of Australian and/or New Zealand English in undergraduate courses.

Australian

Townsville
Queensland
New England
Newcastle
Sydney
New South Wales
Macquarie
Wollongong
Australian National U.
R.M.C. Duntroon
Melbourne
Monash
La Trobe
Adelaide
Flinders
W. Australia

New Zealand

Auckland
Waikato
Massey
Wellington
Canterbury
Otago

Papua-New Guinea

University

APPENDIX II

Post-graduate work in Australian and New Zealand English

Australia

Townsville
Queensland
New England
Newcastle

Papua-New Guinea

University

Incidental to language courses
Sydney M.A. and Ph.D. theses on phonetics, syntax, vocabulary
N.S.W. None
Macquarie M.A. theses on phonetics, Norfolk Island English
Wollongong None
A.N.U. None
R.M.C. Duntroon None
Melbourne One Ph.D., lexical
Monash None
La Trobe None
Adelaide None
Flinders None
W. Australia None

New Zealand

Auckland None
Waikato None
Massey None
Victoria Thesis on syntactic patterns (1966)
Canterbury None
Otago No information

Papua-New Guinea

University M.A. thesis on phonetics

APPENDIX III

Staff professing an interest in aspects of Australian and/or New Zealand English

Australia
Townsville Professor C. Roderick, D. Gallagher
Queensland E.H. Flint, G.R. Cochrane
New England J.S. Ryan
Newcastle None
N.S.W. O.N. Burgess, A. Ginges
Macquarie Professor A. Delbridge
Wollongong (Mrs.) G. MacNeill
A.N.U. W.S. Ramson
R.M.C. Duntroon Professor G.K.W. Johnston
Melbourne None
Monash None
La Trobe None
Adelaide G.W. Turner
Flinders None
W. Australia None

New Zealand
Auckland Professor F.S. Scott, E.A. Sheppard, C.C. Bowley
Waikato None
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<tr>
<td>Massey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Professor L.F. Brosnahan, H.W. Orsman, (Mrs.) H. Wylie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canterbury</td>
<td>(Mrs.) M.E. Osmers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Otago</td>
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<tr>
<td>Papua-New Guinea University</td>
<td>D. O'Shea, A. Balint</td>
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