

A LISTENER EXPERIMENT: VARIANTS OF AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH

Björn H. Jernudd, Monash University
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0. Purpose The aim of this simple experiment is to arrive at hypotheses about speech variation in Victoria. I asked a group of test subjects to sort recordings of speech according to social and regional characteristics.

1. Test subjects and setting The 28 test subjects are university students. The listening took place in a Tandberglanguage laboratory at Monash University. A few students listened individually in a university office. The test lasted for approximately 55 minutes. Test subjects were voluntarily recruited (and paid \$1). The listening was spread out over a week in mid 1967, but I do not suspect undue influence because of person to person contact during this time. The call for test subjects mentioned Western Victoria as a desirable origin of listeners.¹

2. Stimulus: the speech samples I selected speech of eight individual speakers using recordings made in Melbourne, Western Victoria and the Barossa Valley.² The topical contents of the recorded samples do in no case indicate speaker origin. The recordings all last for approximately one minute.

There are variations in speaker behaviour during the recordings, e.g. some are slightly but noticeably nervous in front of a microphone. I assume that these symptom features have not distorted the listeners' socio- and dialectal judgments, but rather reinforced them, since the speech performance as a whole served as a stimulus in this test. The greater naturalness of that stimulus should balance the artificiality of recording and selection.³

The speakers are:

- no. 1 a male research fellow at Monash University, age appr. 30, Melbourne born and resident (we will, below, call him "the Melbourne fellow")
- no. 2 a female high school pupil, age appr. 14, Nhill born and resident ("the Nhill girl")
- no. 3 an old woman from the Barossa Valley, interviewed in an old people's home ("the Barossa woman")
- no. 4 a male middle-aged Lutheran pastor from eastern South Australia (various residences), now serving at Nhill ("the pastor")

- no. 5 a pensioned but relatively well-to-do widow (farmer's wife), Nhill born and resident ("the Nhill widow")
 - no. 6 a male university service employee, age appr. 35, Melbourne born and resident, ("the Melbourne employee")
 - no. 7 a male farmer (relatively wealthy), age appr. 40, Nhill born and resident ("the Nhill farmer")
 - no. 8 a male university administrative assistant, age 38, Mallee born and childhood, but Melbourne resident since his early school years, Melbourne public school and university education ("the Melbourne administrator")
- I expect results as per this legend above.

3. Questions and results

3.1 Dialects The first question meant to elicit a judgment from where the speakers might come independently of any other regional indications than a map (for the text of the questionnaire, see appendix 1; for raw scores, see appendix 2). I interpret the answers with the map grid as a frame of reference.⁴ The results are:

- no. 1 the Melbourne fellow: allocated to Melbourne, which is his identity. This is a safe conclusion.
- no. 2 the Nhill girl: allocated to the Horsham (and Portland) areas. This is her identity but the conclusion is less distinct.
- no. 3 the Barossa woman: no regional bias
- no. 4 the pastor: no regional bias
- no. 5 the Nhill widow: allocated to areas along the western and southern edge of the map
- no. 6 the Melbourne employee: no regional bias
- no. 7 the Nhill farmer: allocated to the Horsham area, which is his identity. The conclusion is less distinct.
- no. 8 the Melbourne administrator: allocated to Canberra as a first choice, Melbourne as second. This could be caused by his High and urban speech. There might also have been a desire to spread out the answers by the test subjects.

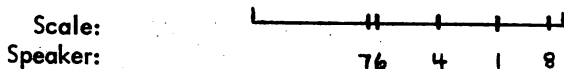
The second question is meant to allow a change of mind, or a specification in relation to question 1, by limiting the subjects' choice to five enumerated areas. The question does not indicate whether all speakers must be allocated to at least one of the enumerated areas or not. The majority seems to have understood it in the freest manner possible: if a speaker fits the suggested label, answer, otherwise not. The speakers were allocated in

the following manner:

- no. 1 the Melbourne fellow: defined as a Melbourne speaker. A safe conclusion.
- no. 2 the Nhill girl: can be defined as "Western Victoria".
- no. 3 the Barossa woman: can be defined as "South Australia".
- no. 4 the pastor: no bias
- no. 5 the Nhill widow: no bias
- no. 6 the Melbourne employee: may be assigned to New South Wales.
- no. 7 the Nhill farmer: might possibly be defined as Western but not at all as distinctly as the Nhill girl.
- no. 8 the Melbourne administrator: defined as Melbourne. A safe conclusion.

The opportunity for free comments on the first two questions gave answers ranging from "there are definitely no regional speech variants in Australia" to "definite regional differences in Victoria". Some expressed a conviction that a rural/urban distinction is made, but that there is no regional bias within the rural group.⁵

3.2 Sociolects In this third question the weak terms "general lower/upper social status" together with a scale were chosen to give me a rank order only and as much as possible an answer that complies with the aggregate judgment that is demonstrated in western society in the terms High, Mid and Low class.⁶ The graph below shows the ranks obtained (median values):



The distinction between the Melbourne employee (no. 6) and the Nhill farmer (no. 7) is indeterminate. The answers overlap to some extent between the Melbourne fellow (no. 1) and the Melbourne administrator (no. 8) but the latter is clearly the higher.

The fourth question on the educational background is intended to give the subjects a chance of further social specification, which I would expect to be broadly the same as in question 3. Unfortunately the "intermediate" is not sufficiently defined in relation to "secondary", nor is the public/state school distinction made. However, I treat the four choices as equidistant and forming a scale. If intermediate/secondary is treated as one category in the analysis, we obtain a graph (median values) which is practically the same as the one below. This graph demonstrates the values we obtained through the original question:



The fifth question is a comparison between pairs of speakers (nos. 1 & 7; 1 & 8; 4 & 7)

in terms of social status, thus providing a further (though not particularly independent) check on sociolects. The answers to this question add little information. It is quite clear that both the Melbourne fellow (no. 1) and the pastor (no. 4) rank higher than the Nhill farmer (no. 7). The particularly interesting comparison between the Melbourne fellow and the administrator (no. 8) gave the result that the majority considered the administrator better than the fellow, but that one third judged the reverse and only a few maintained that they are both equal. The relation between the Melbourne administrator (no. 8) and the fellow (no. 1) is thus slightly in favour of the former.

A final open question gave comments on the discrepancies between actual and aspired social status, and also between actual status and speech. The educational variable was stressed as a major determinant of speech.

4. Results: interpretation and discussion

4.1 Dialects As for a dialectal distinction between rural and urban dialects in Victoria, the urban speakers, if sociolectally High, were identified as such (the Melbourne fellow and the administrator). The Melbourne employee (no. 6), a Low urban speaker, was assigned also to other areas than Melbourne, but without any definite bias. An hypothesis about a rural/urban dichotomy can be considered as established, but an investigation with recordings of at least High rural speakers and possibly also of Low urban speakers must be made to demonstrate that the sociolectal distinction alone did not account for the present outcome.

Melbourne, the only urban area of significance in Victoria, would naturally be the focus of any urban speakers. A Sydney-Melbourne-Adelaide study might reveal a difference within the frame of Australian English (for speakers with experience of both cities and possibly only when a Low sociolect is considered).

As for the distinction within the rural part of Victoria, the study seems to suggest, quite distinctly for the Nhill girl (no. 2) and less clearly for the Nhill widow (no. 5) and the farmer (no. 7) a connection between their speech and their Wimmera origin. The study did not include samples from other Victorian (or neighbouring) areas than Melbourne and the Barossa Valley that could oppose such an identification. These two districts were, however, identified.

The pastor (no. 4) and the Melbourne employee (no. 6) were not identified to region. The former obtained widely varying answers which might indicate some unfamiliarity with his speech. He is not originally a Wimmera man. It could be that he may have adopted some

speech characteristics peculiar to Lutheran pastors.

I had expected some correlation between listeners from the Western districts and the assignments of origins of Western speakers. No pattern emerged in support of this which would perhaps motivate a greater uncertainty in interpreting the dialect results.

In conclusion I hypothesize as well a rural/urban distinction as a Wimmera dialect. A strong objection against the second hypothesis is the fact that Victorian informants have a school background that gives the Western areas a strong bias generally in Victorian life.⁷

4.2 Sociolects All test questions gave, as we might have expected, the same indications.

High sociolectal ranks were given to the Melbourne fellow and administrator (nos. 1 & 8), both urban speakers.

Low sociolectal ranks were given to the Melbourne employee (no. 6) with an undetermined dialectal background, and the Nhill farmer (no. 7), a rural speaker. The Nhill farmer is de facto a reasonably wealthy farmer, whereas the Melbourne employee is a wage-paid man, which distinction obviously did not influence the sociolectal judgments. We must note, though, that they were not allocated to the same region. Another listener group than university students, less educationally biased and rural speakers themselves, may have given answers favoring the Nhill farmer.

The neutral position of the pastor (no. 4) both dialectally and sociolectally is remarkable.

The small sociolectal difference between the two High urban speakers, the Melbourne fellow and administrator, poses an interesting problem. Linguistically my own judgment assigns a much more "Australian flavour" to the speech of the fellow. The distance between the sound systems of these two speakers is much more pronounced, for myself as a foreigner, than between the fellow and both the pastor and the Melbourne employee. Compare, for example, the following two extracts from the stimulus tapes:

Speaker 8: the Melbourne administrator: [ðə nɔ:θ wind bɜ:ːh and bɜ:ːh bʌtːh ðə mɔ: hi bɜ:ː ði kɪ-ɔ+usə ðə tʃævːlɚ ʒæptːh hiɹ wo:m kɪəuk əʃvʌndɪm]
(the north wind blew and blew but the more he blew the closer the traveller wrapped his warm cloak around him)

Speaker 1: the Melbourne fellow: [ənd sɔ+u ðə nɔ:θ wind bɪ-əu: ən bɪ-əu+: əɹ ha:d əz ɹɪ kʌdːh andːh ðə mɔ: hi: bɪ-əu+ɚ ðə tʃævːlə ðə mɔ: ðə tʃævːlə ʒæpt his kɪ-əukːh kɪəvslɪ ɛʃvænd him]

(and so the north wind blew and blew as hard as he could and the more he blew the traveller the more the traveller wrapped his cloak closely around him)

This suggests a break in a possible linguistic continuum from sociolectally Low to High. It also suggests that other features of speech than the phonology plays an important role in sociolect identification, perhaps even off-setting otherwise clearly Low(er) sociolectal phones. The administrator is to me much closer to the British Received Pronunciation, albeit Australian.⁸

5. Conclusion I suggest that a continuation of this study concentrate on:

1. the High sociolect distinctions, exploring attitudes towards British-oriented speech, and the abilities of Australian English speakers to discriminate between the "Australian" and "British" variants;
2. the sociolectal ranks within a rural setting;
3. possible rural dialects; this study hypothesizes at least a Wimmera dialect;
4. the rural/urban dichotomy.

Notes

I am indebted to D. Holden and J. Neustupny, both of Monash University, and M.B. Jernudd for their suggestions on the research design and report, and to Mr. G.R. Hayter, Headmaster of Nhill High School, and his staff for introducing me to Nhill informants.

¹ Frequent questions on the reason for this wish of mine after the test reveal that the listeners probably did not realize the connection between this desire and the fact that some speakers came from the West. Also, "Western" was only mentioned together with a more narrowly defined area in the test itself.

² Dr. M. Clyne of Monash University kindly allowed me to use one of his Barossa Valley recordings.

³ The present study employed a sample of continuous speech, thus allowing an individual's total utterance to influence the listeners' judgments. This is a much more satisfactory approach to the reality of dialectal variation than the preoccupation of traditional dialectology with atomistic linguistic features, be it form or substance¹. The experiment approximates the first two steps (a & b) of dialectological research discussed in "There are no subjective dialects", *Kivung* 1:1:40, April, 1968. This study, however, makes no claims of being representative of a larger group, since the aim of the report merely is to aid in outlining some hypotheses and to test the research procedure. Also, although the report discusses "speakers" it is indeed their speech varieties that are being evaluated, not the speakers themselves. The speakers' characteristics are of course only correlates of the speech varieties.

A classification of the subject's speech into Cultivated, General and Broad (according to Mitchell, A.G. and A. Delbridge, The Speech of Australian Adolescents, Sydney: 1965, pp 33-38 & 80-86) marks speakers nos. 1 (but towards General), 3 and 8 as Cultivated, nos. 2, 4-6 and 7 (but towards Broad) as General.

⁴ The map grid (without coordinates during the test) aided the assignment of an area, but could have been deleted. I thought that it would be rather more difficult for the listeners

to manage the totally free choice offered by an unmarked map. On the other hand undesirable interference from a net might be stronger, e.g. centering effects, individual differences in applying the grid: per specific localities or per area, etc. Also the township notation attracted some answers.

⁵ It must be emphasized that the (quasi) statistical method of this study obscures the individual differences in dialect perception. However, this aggregate approach offers a convenient way of arriving at hypotheses about common individual dialect responses.

⁶ I needed two extremes on the scale surrounding 2,3,4 in order to get a spread of answers to counter the automatic test tendency of centralizing (averaging).

⁷ This was suggested to me by Mrs. H. Platt, Monash University.

⁸ It is possible that listener groups of the same characteristics, respectively, as the speakers evaluated will rank other speech varieties lower than the one with which they identify themselves. A "speaker no. 1 group" might feel that the opposing norm is "affected" and the "no.8 group" might rank the "no. 1's" slightly lower than themselves.

See also the interesting discussions about Australian speech norms and the Educated Southern English, Cultivated and General speech varieties (pp 16-19) and the histories of Cultivated versus General and Broad speech (pp 23-24) in Mitchell, A. G. and A. Delbridge, The Pronunciation of English in Australia, revised edition, Sydney: 1965.

APPENDIX 1

Questionnaire.

enclose text that is also heard on tape. I present the text here in a more compact way than to the test subjects:

Name: _____ Telephone no. _____
Where did you go to High School? _____

You will hear eight speakers. We will call them Speaker 1, 2, Speaker 3, etc. We will start by listening to them all. Speaker 1...

Now when you are familiar with them, please look at question 1. Read the question

Question 1

As far as you can judge from his speech, from which area on the map at your side does each speaker come? Place every speaker in the appropriate square on the map, marking a (1) for Speaker 1, (2) for Speaker 2, etc.

You will hear the voices again with short pauses in between to enable you to put the Speaker's number on the map. Speaker 1...

Please look at question 2. Read the question

Question 2 (covered during the presentation of question 1)

Which speaker(s) come(s) from the areas indicated below. Mark Speaker 1, 2, etc. in the space opposite the appropriate area.

Area:
Western Victoria ("Wimmera")
Eastern Victoria ("Gippsland")
South Australia ("Barossa Valley")
Western N.S.W. ("Broken Hill Area")
Melbourne

Speaker(s) no.:

[You will hear the speakers again with short pauses to enable you to answer. Speaker 1... Please give any comments you might have in the blank space below on this page.]

Any comments on the preceding questions:

(Space for answer)

[You will hear only Speakers 1,4,6,7 and 8. Please answer both question 3 and question 4 at the same time. Read the questions now.]

Question 3

Assign a number to each speaker from the scale below showing general social status.

lower social status 1 2 3 4 5 upper social status

Speaker 1: no. from scale: _____
4: no. from scale: _____ etc.

Question 4

Which educational background does each Speaker have? Mark the appropriate box for each speaker.

Speaker 1: (small circle) primary or lower
" intermediate
" secondary
" university, college, etc.
Speaker 4: " primary or lower
intermediate etc.

[Speaker 1:.... Now for question 3, put his scale number opposite Speaker 1 above. For question 4, mark the appropriate box. Speaker 4... etc.]

[Read question 5.]

Question 5 (answers to previous questions have been handed in)

Compare the following pairs of Speakers in terms of general social status. For each pair, choose and mark the sentence that fits your impression best.

Pair a: Speaker 1 and Speaker 7: (small circle) Is the speech of S1 better than S7?

" Are they the same?

" Is the speech of S7 better than S1?

Pair b: Speaker 1 and Speaker 8:

Pair c: Speaker 4 and Speaker 7: etc.

[Pair a, Speaker 1 and Speaker 7... Mark the appropriate sentence. Pair b... Please give any comments you might have on questions 3,4 and 5 in the blank space below.]

(Space for answer)

APPENDIX 2

Raw Scores

Question 1

Speaker no.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
				1	1	3	1	
	3		4	1	2	1		3
		3	3	8	3	3	2	
	1	1	1	1		3	1	
			3				1	
				1	2			1
	1	8	1	2	3	3	10	
	3	1	4	2		8	3	
	1	1	3	4			4	1
	2							14
	1	6	1	3	9	1	1	1
	13	4	4	3	5	1	2	7
	1	4	2	3	3	5	3	1

area no. (see map)

1	A
2	
3	
4	
5	
<hr/>	
1	B
2	
3	
4	
5	
<hr/>	
1	C
2	
3	
4	
5	
<hr/>	
1	D
2	
3	
4	
5	

Question 2

Speaker no.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	5	13		5	8	6	9	3
	1	6	6	7	3	6	6	2
	3	2	12	5	5	3		2
	2	1	6	3	3	10	6	1
	16	5	4	3	7	1	3	18

area
Western
Eastern
South
NSW
Melbourne

Question 3

Speaker no.	1	4	6	7	8	social index
		1	5	7	1	1
	1	3	18	16		2
	4	22	4	4		3
	20	2		1	7	4
	3		1		20	5

Question 4

Speaker no.	1	4	6	7	8	education
	3	15	10			primary
	1	13	10	18		intermediate
	10	11	3		5	secondary
	17	1			23	university/college

Question 5

pair a:	1 better than 7	27
	same	-
	7 better than 1	1
pair b:	1 better than 8	8
	same	5
	8 better than 1	15
pair c:	4 better than 7	24
	same	4
	7 better than 4	-

