Heteronyms in Australian English: Self Reported Usage and Assessments

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This paper explores reported usage and evaluations of the ‘Australianness’ of heteronyms: pairs of words that have the same referent, are stylistically equal and traditionally are associated with different varieties of English. The data consist of 36 surveys completed by a diverse group of Australian English speakers. It examines the relationship between self reported usage, rankings of ‘Australianness’ and age. The findings indicate that older participants tend to report using more conservative forms. They also suggest that younger speakers differ to older ones in their views about the ‘Australianness’ of lexical items and that terms viewed as most Australian were also reported to be most used.

Keywords: Australian English, self reporting, heteronyms

1 Introduction

Australian English (henceforth AusE) was recognised as a variety of English by Mitchell in the 1940s, much to the outrage of many Australians, who saw divergence from British models as an abomination and perversion of the English language (Delbridge). Since that time it has been generally accepted and widely stated that AusE has little in the way of regional variation (Leitner). However, Bryant’s work on lexical items has challenged this view suggesting greater regional variation than previously assumed. More noticeable though than regional lexical variation, which even Bryant notes is largely unobtrusive, is another form of lexical variation; AusE has a proliferation of what Görlach labelled ‘heteronyms’ and Algeo termed ‘international synonyms’; these are two vastly different forms that index the same referent and are stylistically equal. Originally, these variants may have belonged to different varieties of English but in countries like Australia they may both be used and are frequently seen to ‘compete’ with each other.

While Görlach asserts the need for detailed, scholarly research into heteronyms, there has been little done in AusE. Some researchers such as Eagleson mention distributions of heteronyms such as lift/elevator, biscuit/cookie but their sources or methods for obtaining these conclusions are not mentioned. Oishi conducted surveys on heteronym preference but chose to investigate a huge number of variables with very little analysis. Bayard, Meyerhoff, Leek and Bayard and Vine have all completed much more detailed studies in New Zealand English; each of these studies builds on the previous. Meyerhoff’s study employs the same pairs of heteronyms as Bayard’s but reduces the
number, Vine looks at all those previous examined and adds a further four pairs. Leek and Bayard’s study focuses on the period of time and location as differences from Bayard’s first study. Meyerhoff’s data were collected through interviews (N=60) whilst Bayard employed surveys (N=141) and Vine used photographic prompts in interviews (N=30). The results of Meyerhoff’s study led her to investigate the fact that some borrowings are seen as more threatening than others. In further work Meyerhoff and Niedzielski (2002) went on to investigate attitudes amongst New Zealanders to heteronyms by asking participants to place sentences containing them on a scale from Absolutely New Zealand to not at all New Zealand. Comparing these studies to impressions of AusE usage it seems that New Zealanders employ conservative items infrequently heard in AusE and to favour more conservative heteronyms.

The terms ‘innovative’ and ‘conservative’, which have already been employed here, are used in the New Zealand studies and elsewhere to differentiate the two terms in a lexical pair. Although I use these terms I regret that they possess such blatant connotations and encourage ensuing value judgements. Such factors make them less than ideal for use in linguistic analysis. Likewise the direct association of British English with conservative and American English with innovative is problematic in that it is simplistic; the complex patterns of interrelation between varieties of English is often not recognised (Algeo). The situation is actually much more complex and dynamic than these terms are able to reflect. Whilst many AusE speakers view newer forms as ‘Americanisms’ this is actually a term that actually dates back to 1781 (Görlach). Taylor reports on the common complaints in the Australian media of the American ‘invasion’ on AusE. In these cases American English lexicon is usually seen to be usurping ‘Australian’ words. Meyerhoff and Niedzielski (2003) argue that all varieties of English are developing in accordance to processes of globalisation, rather than from single influences. So-called Americanisms are often not even seen as foreign as changes become more established in AusE (Sussex). Furthermore Görlach claims that the British/American division is redundant in AusE because the average speaker is unaware of word origins as being from British or American English, a point supported by Taylor’s observations. In Australia people discuss Australian, British and American words with little actual knowledge of etymology. This makes these classifications no less interesting, the fact that the general public often view alternatives as a choice between Australian and foreign variants raises interesting questions. Is it the case that younger Australians see the innovative forms as Australian and the conservative forms as British while older speakers view the innovative forms as American and the conservative as British – placing them with a different outlook to affect practice?

In light of the research presented above and the paucity of research focusing on recent AusE this study aims to investigate similar questions to those raised by the New Zealand English studies. It
responds to Görlach’s call for more work on heteronyms and seeks to further uncover some of the beliefs surrounding these words and their ‘Australianness’.

2 Methodology

The study has several research questions it aims to explore:

RQ1. Which heteronyms do AusE speakers favour? What is the distribution of the coexisting forms?
RQ2. Do older people use more conservative forms and younger more innovative? How strong is this relationship?
RQ3. Do younger AusE speakers view innovative forms as more Australian than older AusE speakers do?
RQ4. According to self reporting are people using variants that they see as more or less Australian?

2.1 Instruments

This study was part of a trial of several instruments including ones that related to pronunciation and are not reported on here. Data were collected through a pen and paper survey, which contained two tasks relevant to the study of heteronyms.

‘Australianness’

The first involved a Likert scale of ‘Australianness’ of lexical items, reduplicating the scale from Meyerhoff and Niedzielski (2002). In most cases only one of the pair of heteronyms was included, both were included for biscuit/cookie, tin/can and jumper/sweater. Items that lent themselves well to this Likert assessment were included and totalled six conservative and six innovative items. Additionally kangaroo was included as a control measure to ensure people were using the scale correctly, as it was anticipated this lexical item would receive a high level of “absolutely Australian” ratings. Each of these words was rated by participants circling a number between 1 and 6 on the following scale: Absolutely Australian (1), Very Australian (2), Somewhat Australian (3), Not entirely Australian (4), A little Australian (5) or Not at all Australian (6). Part of the need to trial this instrument was to see if there was considerable agreement in evaluations allowing it to produce meaningful data.

Usage

In the second task, participants were presented with the two heteronyms as a pair and asked to report on their own usage, whether they “always” used one, “usually” used one or used the two equally. The heteronyms used in this study were the same ones Meyerhoff used; she in turn had chosen them from
Bayard’s study adding just one pair, tin/can. For this study the pair petrol/gas was excluded as the items are not synonymous in AusE: they have different referents. Two other pairs were changed to better reflect AusE. New Zealand English’s jersey was changed to jumper as jersey is limited in its applications in AusE thus not a heteronym for sweater. The other changed pair was pictures/movies as it was felt pictures less frequently used and the distribution of film/movie would be more pertinent. This gave a final list of: torch/flashlight, jumper/sweater, biscuit/cookie, bonnet/hood (of car), lift/elevator, serviette/napkin, tin/can, trousers/pants, film/movie and lorry/truck. Participants were also asked to produce any other alternatives they may use or any limitations on usage. Background information on participants was also collected to assist analysis, as detailed below.

2.2 Participants

In total there were 36 AusE speakers (F=22, M=14, ages 13-57, \( \bar{x} = 32 \)). All participants were Melbourne residents attending school or working in Melbourne although many of them have lived/were born in other places in Victoria or other states and several have lived in Britain. They had attended a mix of state, independent and Catholic schooling but the number of participants who had attended independent schools was smallest. Participants were informally judged as upper working class or low to mid middle class, based on level of employment and occupation. ‘Class’ or socio economic status (SES) was not a focus of the study but the approximate range was seen as appropriate due to Labov’s curvilinear model, which asserts that these groups rather than the extremes of SES scales are the leaders of linguistic change.

Native speaker status was disregarded as a criterion as many AusE speakers are non native speakers. However, participants were asked to nominate any factors they felt affected their English and some people volunteered that they were non native speakers or that their parents were.

2.3 Data Collection

This pilot study, part of an ongoing larger research project, was conducted in a short period of time over May/June 2006. Participants were found through the researcher passing surveys to friends, colleagues and some family members, who in turn passed the surveys on to some of their friends, family and colleagues. Milroy states that smaller non random samples can be used to generalise about language variation in large cities. Despite this survey involving a very small group, it did exhibit a lot of variation. Furthermore, while self reporting may not reflect real usage, Labov suggests that it is often indicative of prestige norms, especially since people often view their language as more standard than it actually is.
3 Results

Overall the results indicate that while some heteronyms are clearly favoured over their alternative, many pairs had large numbers of participants reporting to use both words. The ‘Australianness’ task results exhibited high levels of agreement with a pattern of conservative terms being viewed as more Australian and innovative forms as less although three words: lorry, movie and can did not conform to this trend.

3.1 Usage

RQ1. Which heteronyms do AusE speakers favour? What is the distribution of the coexisting forms?

Figure 1 below indicates the percentages, to the nearest whole number where appropriate, for reported use of each item. The preferred heteronym in each pair has been highlighted in the leftmost column. The column labelled “Collapsed” collapses “always” and “usually” categories to make results more comparable to previous studies where the choice appeared to be more ‘either or’. In the next column labelled “Not Collapsed” “usually” and “always” responses are included as part of the “both” category, the missing percentage (this is a truer reading of the data, percentages in text below refer to this analysis). The final column then breaks down the “both” category. Alternative forms were excluded from the percentages but are noted in this final column.

Here there are 34 not 36 participants because two participants, for reasons unknown, did not complete this section of the survey. As Figure 1 indicates in some cases there was an overwhelming preference for one of the heteronyms: truck, torch and jumper, all had very large “always” responses (85%-91%). Other pairs showed that individuals think they alternate their usage with large numbers of responses falling into the “usually” category. Similarly, film/movie, tin/can and lift/elevator all had large percentages for the “both the same” category (15%-26%). Of the preferred terms six are conservative while four are innovative forms.
Table 1.  Reported Usage of Heteronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Collapsed</th>
<th>Not Collapsed</th>
<th>Breakdown of the Both Category %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>torch/flashlight</td>
<td>100/0</td>
<td>88/0</td>
<td>12 usually torch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jumper/sweater (N=33)</td>
<td>97/0</td>
<td>85/0</td>
<td>12 usually jumper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 both the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N=1 top always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biscuit/cookie</td>
<td>88/3</td>
<td>41/0</td>
<td>47 usually biscuit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9 both the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 usually cookie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bonnet/hood (of car)</td>
<td>85/9</td>
<td>59/6</td>
<td>26 usually bonnet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 both the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 usually hood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lift/ elevator</td>
<td>76/9</td>
<td>41/3</td>
<td>35 usually lift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15 both the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 usually elevator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>serviette/napkin (N=33)</td>
<td>66/27</td>
<td>36.5/12</td>
<td>30.3 usually serviette.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 both the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15.2 usually napkin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N=1 different referents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tin/can (of food)</td>
<td>21/55</td>
<td>9/26</td>
<td>12 usually tin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24 both the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>29 usually can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trousers/pants (N=30)</td>
<td>7/83</td>
<td>7/33</td>
<td>10 both the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50 usually pants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>other N= 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>film/movie</td>
<td>3/71</td>
<td>3/39</td>
<td>26 both the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>32 usually movie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lorry/truck</td>
<td>0/100</td>
<td>0/91</td>
<td>9 usually truck</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.  Reported Usage of Heteronyms

RQ2. Do older people use more conservative forms and younger more innovative? How strong is this relationship?

Each item relating to usage was rated on a scale from innovative form always (5), innovative form usually (4), both equally (3), conservative form usually (2) to conservative form always (1). Each participant then received a mean from all her/his responses; missing data and responses that did not fit this scale were removed and each person received an INNOscore, which shows how ‘innovative’ the participant was in his/her reported usage. A Spearman rho correlation between age and INNOscore was run ($\rho = -.606 p <0.01$), although this is not a strong correlation a definite pattern of older participants using more ‘conservative’ forms and the younger participants more ‘innovative; exists. Figure 2 gives information about the INNOscores received, it is clear that the means decrease as the participants get older, as do the maximum and minimum scores.
HETERONYMS IN AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>under 20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.0150</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.7767</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32-57</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2.4306</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. INNOscore by Age Group

Figure 3 below is a scatterplot representing each participant. It too shows the relationship between innovativeness and age. The lines superimposed across the plot show that there is a distinct main distribution pattern that accounts for 30 of 36 participants or 83%.

The trend suggested in the INNOscore means displayed in Figure 2 above are also apparent when the mean score for each pair of words is viewed by age group. The majority of sets of heteronyms: bonnet/hood, lift/elevator, pants/trousers, serviette/napkin and biscuit/cookie clearly follow this pattern with an increasing use of conservative forms as age increases. Only one pair, jumper/sweater, follows the reverse trajectory but the difference in the means is only small. Torch/flashlight and lorry/truck show very little difference across age groups due to the low numbers of people reporting to use lorry and flashlight. Film/movie and tin/can follow a fourth pattern with a slightly higher level of movie in the middle group and a clear spike in the case of can. In both these cases though, the oldest group is still the most conservative.
3.1. ‘Australianness’

RQ3. Do younger AusE speakers view innovative forms as more Australian than older AusE speakers do?

Figure 4 below displays mean scores and the mode for the items from the six point Likert scale of ‘Australianness’. The mode was included in the table because it often accounted for such a large percentage of the responses. Surprisingly *lorry*, rarely heard in AusE and meant to function as a comparison, was seen as more Australian than *cookie*, which 59% of speakers reported using at least occasionally but *kangaroo* functioned as was intended. The innovative forms (*) were generally marked as less Australian but *can* and *movie* did not follow this pattern. The pairs in which both the innovative and the conservative forms were presented suggest that the instrument worked well as pairs fit together well on the scale:

- *biscuit* very – *cookie* not at all Australian
- *jumper* very – *sweater* not at all Australian
- *can* and *tin* both somewhat Australian

If both forms in a pair of heteronyms had received incompatible ratings the data would have been highly problematic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>‘Australianness’ Descriptor for Mode</th>
<th>Mode %</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>‘Australianness’ Descriptor for mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kangaroo</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Absolutely</td>
<td>88.6</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>Absolutely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jumper</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Absolutely</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>Very</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biscuit</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Very</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>Very</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bonnet</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Very</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>Very-Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>movie*</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Very</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tin*</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can*</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>napkin*</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>Not entirely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trousers</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Not entirely</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>Somewhat-Not entirely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elevator*</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Somewhat + not at all</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>Not entirely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flashlight*</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>A little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lorry</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>A little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cookie*</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>A little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sweater*</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>A little</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. ‘Australianness’ ratings of items

Figure 5 displays the relationship between mean scores of ‘Australianness’ and age group for the items where there was a stronger relationship. The oldest group judged the innovative forms, *sweater*, *cookie*, *napkin* and *can* as less Australian than the two younger groups but also the conservative forms *lorry* and *tin*. Generally the oldest group viewed all the variants as less Australian.
except for the conservative forms *jumper* and *bonnet*. The only words that were highest in the middle group, 23-30, were *flashlight* and *trousers*.

**Figure 5.** Age and Mean Scores of Australianness

**RQ4.** *According to self reporting are people using variants that they see as more or less Australian?*

Figure 6 investigates the final research question. Indeed it seems there is a higher usage of terms that are seen as more Australian.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Australianess’ Descriptor for Mean</th>
<th>Usage-Collapsed Preferred by %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>biscuit</td>
<td>Very</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jumper</td>
<td>Very</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bonnet</td>
<td>Very-Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>movie</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tin</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trousers</td>
<td>Somewhat-Not entirely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>napkin</td>
<td>Not entirely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elevator</td>
<td>Not entirely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cookie</td>
<td>A little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sweater</td>
<td>A little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flashlight</td>
<td>A little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lorry</td>
<td>A little</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6.** A Comparison of ‘Australianess’ and reported usage
4 Discussion

4.1 Sample/Method

The sample used in the present study has a lack of older participants and contained a low number of independent schoolgoers; both these groups are often noted for more conservative language usage. Due to this, the sample could be more innovative than the general population. This is a limitation of the method employed for finding participants that allowed little control over such factors. Meyerhoff and Vine both constructed age groups 20-29, 40-49 and 70+, wider and more distanced age groups such as and may have found a stronger correlation between age and INNOscore.

The Likert scale of Australianess used the indicators from Meyerhoff and Niedzielski (2002) but the survey format differed from the previous study in that instead of presenting participants with sentences, they were just given the lexical items. This was done to make the task simpler for participants and therefore hopefully provide a higher return rate as well as making the task less tedious. Meyerhoff and Niedzielski (2003) report that prepositions and other words in the sentences interfered, that participants judged the sentence rather than its lexical items, which seems a reasonable assumption. Although the scale of Australianess seemed like it might be a difficult task for participants the high percentage of agreement (see the mode percentage in Figure 4) shows that it was affective and it produced meaningful results.

4.2 ‘Australianess’

Meyerhoff suggests that perhaps some variants are seen as more American or more marked, noting that some words are attacked and ridiculed while others go unnoticed or are not even recognised as ‘foreign’. The Macquarie Dictionary only marks two of the forms investigated here as ‘other’: cookie and lorry are described as “chiefly US” and “chiefly U.K.” respectively, all the other innovative forms referred the dictionary user to the conservative form for a definition. Cookie and lorry were in the group of the least Australian, along with sweater and flashlight. Although the differences are small and not statistically significant, these words were seen as more Australian by the under 20 group, than the 23-30 one and least so by the oldest group. In fact it appears that older Australians see conservative heteronyms as more Australian and the youngest group sees the innovative terms as most Australian. Sussex suggests that the American terms may be more noticed when they are new to AusE but if younger speakers have grown up hearing both variants they may not have a sense of one word being newer than the other. Oishi mentions the history/age of some words but does not link these ideas to attitudes towards these heteronyms. Surprisingly lorry, infrequently heard in AusE was seen as more Australian than cookie, which 59% of speakers reported using at least occasionally,
which suggests that a longer history rather than usage may have been a factor in rankings. Other ratings of interest are those of *biscuit* and *movie*. *Biscuit’s* ranking as absolutely Australian despite much lower reported usage than *jumper*, the other item which had absolutely as its mode, could in part be a reaction against *cookie*. The reason for *movie* being the seen by 38.9% as very Australian is less clear but could perhaps be related to its –*ie* ending although this alone cannot be the reason given the very different ranking of *cookie*.

### 4.3 Usage

The innovative words *pants* and *truck* show themselves to be well established in AusE while *can* and *movie* appear to be more in transition with 24% and 26% reporting to use both the same amount. *Lorry/truck* was included as a control measure and it was expected that *lorry* would be used by no one however three older participants chose usually *truck* rather than always *truck* option. This was surprising given that it is reported that *truck* is increasingly popular in British English (Trudgill) and *lorry* was described as “all but displaced by *truck*” in AusE by Eagleson in 1982 (430).

In the US *biscuit* and *cookie* have different referents but there is no evidence that this distinction is maintained in AusE and no participants suggested this. Elsewhere on the survey there was a question that asked about the particular foodstuff associated with ANZAC day. The response to this question suggested that people accurately informed, at least on the *biscuit/cookie* item, as the three people who responded with *ANZAC cookie* reported using the *cookie* in the usage of the questionnaire. The large amount of misspelling of *biscuit* in relation to the ANZAC question also made me wonder if this is part of the high usage of the innovative form. Six percent of the *biscuit* always category was actually the shortened form *bickie* which also was spelt differently by participants. There may also be issues here relating to spoken English as opposed to written English.

In relation to Figure 3, which charts the relationship between INNOscore and age, six participants do not fit the pattern. The two participants in their 50s that appear innovative for their ages both work as teachers. It is possible suggested that exposure to young people such having children or working with teenagers/young adults may affect usage.

Meyerhoff reports that some respondents felt that a *napkin* was made of paper but a *serviette* was cloth and one participant also suggested this was the distinguishing factor but actually had the terms the other way around. Generally, few comments were made, the others all related to the *trousers/pants* pair; one participant distinguished them as separate with *trousers* for “boys” and *pants* for “girls”. Another participant presented three other terms, *slacks, jeans* and *trackies* and noted that it depended on the “specific item”. Two others suggested *jeans* while one participant claimed to always use *track pants*. 
The information in Figure 6 suggests there is reported higher usage of terms that are seen as more Australian. This could be related overall positiveness towards AusE. In particular, the trend of younger participants seeing lexical items as more Australian may be at least partly attributable to increasingly positive attitudes about AusE (Bradley and Bradley).

5 Conclusion

This initial study has suggested that AusE favours a mix of innovative and conservative heteronyms, with some pairs having a clearly preferred variant whilst others are more in flux. The research shows a more complex picture than provided by previous research by allowing participants to report in a less ‘black and white’ way through the “usually” categories.

A relationship between age and heteronym form was shown to exist, even though it was not strong in this (youngish) sample. Older people tended to prefer the more conservative forms while younger AusE speakers preferred more innovative forms. Interestingly too, participants seemed to view the forms they used as the more Australian terms. Perhaps this shows the growing acceptance of AusE and Australian identity but perhaps people actually view their own choices negatively. There were no questions about ‘better’ English or attitudes but Bayard found that often informants suggested that they actually preferred the term that they did not use. How people actually feel about the variants AusE speakers choose to use is an avenue for future research.

Additionally, future research would be strengthened by the addition of interviews to discuss views and explore usage in detail. Vine argues for the superiority of such methods and her investigation employs both interviews and visual stimulus. Flash cards or picture prompts might be useful in identifying, whether semantic boundaries of heteronyms are the same, for gathering less thought out responses and to explore the influence of environments. For example in the environment of or a picture of a chocolate chip_______ more likely to produce a response of cookie than say chocolate_________. It would also be useful to collect data when participants are not focusing on the language but on producing quick responses as in answering a quiz or viewing the pictures only fleetingly. This type of data could also then be compared to self reported usage. It would be of great interest and fill gap in current research to actually discuss with people how they feel about innovative terms. The reactions in the media are of course those at the extreme. However, they raise questions about whether innovative forms really are so hated or does Görlach’s suggestion, that AusE speakers do not truly know which forms are from where, still hold in 2007. The time of entry into AusE may also have a relationship with ‘Australianness’, in which case the question is how long does it takes a lexical item to lose its ‘otherness’. The notion of British or American English words in AusE also needs some serious rethinking. Australia is increasing distancing itself further from Britain in order
show its independence and movement away from the past. At the same time, especially politically, Australia is forging a relationship with the United States. These changing alignments suggest a questioning of the idea that British English word is anymore Australian than an American one. Furthermore, is it just the case that these words are being imported or have they/are they changing and becoming unique to AusE in their semantic subtleties? These are all questions that need to be explored for a comprehensive analysis of heteronym usage in AusE.

Works Cited


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