

Documenting unacknowledged inheritances in contemporary Australian English

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The development of Australian English (AusE) has been well-documented but some features dwelling on the margins of the ‘standard’ have also remained on the fringes of research. These inheritances are unacknowledged not only with respect to their origins but also, in many cases, their transported stigma. This paper outlines the approach of our ongoing project to thoroughly document these ‘non-standard’ and ‘marginal’ morphosyntactic, syntactic and discourse features. Through a discussion of *youse*, (embellished) clippings and final particle *but* we aim to demonstrate the value of wholly documenting features, studying their descriptive and interactional aspects and their social evaluation using diverse data. As it continues, this work will not only provide us with a much fuller understanding of these features and their place in contemporary AusE, but it will also serve as a model for inclusive linguistic research linking micro linguistic detail and whole cultures.

Keywords: Australian English, language ideologies, *youse*, embellished clippings, clause final *but*

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1. Introduction

Whilst there has been much discussion about just how Australian English (AusE) developed into a distinct variety of English from the numerous input regional varieties of the British Isles, most linguists agree on some sort of mixing-bowl model wherein the various regional forms melded together to create a new set of norms, with the majority of what eventually was codified as ‘standard’ AusE originating from south-eastern England, specifically London and East Anglia (e.g. Cochrane 1989, Fritz 2007, Horvath 1985, Kiesling 2004, Leitner 2004, Mitchell 2003, Moore 2004, Taylor 2003, Trudgill 1986).

In actual fact all of the input regional varieties have contributed to contemporary AusE, even though many inherited regional features have not been fully studied and remain largely unacknowledged in their details. For example, though some attention has been given to influences from Irish English (IrishE) (e.g. Jones & McDougall 2006, Lonergan 2003) and mixed sources more generally (e.g. Bradley 2003, Britain 2008, Taylor 2001), scant attention has been given to Scottish English/Modern Scots (ScotsE), northern English varieties and early American English input. Moreover, such features have frequently been marginalized in the face of a codified AusE. Although there was need in the 20th century to emphasize that AusE was a standard variety of English, able to be compared with northern hemisphere varieties but stand in its own right, this has led to a reduction and simplification of the presence of transported features and variation within AusE as used in everyday communication (Schneider 2007). Many features inherited from these varieties remain as variants used by various, but not necessarily all, AusE speakers.

Whilst there are authors who suggest that the ‘cultural cringe’ (a national inferiority complex) is not a relevant concept in present-day Australia (e.g. Görlach 1997: 28, Moore 1999), ‘non-standard’ forms are often seen to typify AusE, for example, in performances of the variety (Penry Williams 2011). Leitner argues that “most of what is considered typical of AusE has been pushed down to a socially inferior position” (1984: 78). What we find then is that many inherited features remain on the fringes both in terms of their grammaticality and social

position. They are stigmatized, but at the same time they are viewed as indexing Australianness.

In this paper, we propose an approach for investigating morphosyntactic, syntactic, and discourse variations in AusE that have been unacknowledged or under-documented in terms of their presence, their origins and/or their social meanings, often precisely because they are ‘non-standard’ or ‘marginal’. In the next section we put forward our approach to further understanding these features and their place in Australia, which employs descriptive, interactional, sociolinguistic and historical analysis. This combined approach is then demonstrated in §3 through the discussion of three examples: *youse*, (embellished) clippings (e.g. *uni*, *sunnies* and *muso*) and clause final *but*.

This paper is a foundational piece of an ongoing research paradigm in which we seek to address the larger questions of how people in contemporary Australia use AusE to negotiate cultural identities and how, and to what degree, these uses of language have evolved to be local. In particular, are the inherited forms the same in the specifics of their use and their social meanings or have they developed in ways which make them unique to Australia? A related question is how social evaluation and stigmatization fit into the negotiation of cultural identities and the localization of language use. For instance, many AusE speakers self-report that they do not use these features outside of linguistic play or mentioning them in describing particular identities. As Penry Williams (2011) observes, there is a rejection of ‘non-standard’ forms and simultaneously a view that they are all that AusE is.

2. Conceptual and methodological approach

Working from the research literature and recent lists that have catalogued the presence or apparent absence of grammatical features in varieties of English, including AusE (e.g. Newbrook 1992, Pawley 2004, Kortmann & Szmrecsanyi 2004, Leitner 2004, Schneider et al. 2004, Hickey 2004a, Kortmann & Lunkenheimer 2013, 2011), we have been building a database of morphosyntactic, syntactic, and discourse features inherited and borrowed into AusE in its earlier

history. This allows an assessment of the ways and extent to which each has been documented. The process therefore enables us to identify grammatical variations that have been under-documented or had elements of their place in Australia unacknowledged, particularly in regards to their social meanings.

Using a variety of available evidence from diverse sources, our approach for a selected grammatical feature is to establish its historical origins, document its use (both from descriptive and interactional perspectives), gather data which are revealing regarding its social evaluation in contemporary Australian society, and consider the language ideologies (e.g. Milroy & Milroy 1985/2012, Woolard 1992) and indexicalities (e.g. Ochs 1992, Silverstein 2003) behind the evaluation, including whether these are local or inherited. This combined approach builds on the successful analytical and conceptual approach of our earlier work on final particle *but* (e.g. Mulder et al. 2009), which is also briefly described in §3.3. Together, this enables us to explore the social meaning of a particular usage; the origins of the feature from a historical, descriptive, and sociolinguistic perspective; the detail of how the usage is either maintained or is unique to Australia; and the processes and language ideologies, such as iconization (Irvine & Gal 2000), covert prestige, cultural cringe, and stigmatization, that have shaped the social meanings of the usage, providing a fuller documentation of its place in contemporary Australia.

In documenting a feature, the types of evidence to be considered include historical records from Australia and abroad, contemporary and historic spoken and written corpora (e.g. the Australian National Corpus), song lyrics, novels, films, scripted and unscripted television, emails, social media posts, text messages, unsolicited folklinguistic comment (e.g. Australian Word Map and letters to the editor), folklinguistic interviews, social evaluation surveys, and interviews with authors and script writers. Although the focus is on spoken language, written documentation can be used to support understandings where other data, particularly historical, are not available (Burridge 2010) and further demonstrates the social life of the feature.

In sum, our approach is broad with serious interest in linguistic function and social processes which affect the distribution of grammatical features in contemporary AusE.

3. Documenting ‘non-standard’ and ‘marginal’ grammatical features

3.1 *Youse*

The second person plural form *youse* (or *yous*) most likely entered AusE via IrishE (Hickey 2003). Hickey (2004b: 123) posits that it was probably first constructed to mark a distinction found in Irish but lacking in English as Irish speakers were shifting to English use. As with many other ‘non-standard’ English pronouns, this form makes the pronoun system more regular. *Youse* has continued on in IrishE as a vernacular feature and through this can function as an informality marker (Hickey 2003, 2004b: 29). With a few exceptions (e.g. Hickey 2003), most references to this form are quite brief but it is mentioned as present in a number of contemporary Englishes including ScotsE (Bauer 2002, Hickey 2003, Miller 2004), South African English (Hickey, 2003), New Zealand English (NZE) (Hickey 2003, Quinn 2009, Hundt et al. 2008, Hodge & Song 2011), and some varieties of American English (Staum Casasanto 2009, Quinn 2009, Hickey 2003, Remlinger 2009) and English English (Hickey 2003, Kortmann 2006, Beal 1993, Wales 2003). Despite this, within Australia amongst non-linguists *youse* is often considered to be uniquely Australian (Penry Williams 2011).

Horvath (1985) notes the presence of *youse* in AusE and its parallel to the IrishE feature and it has been included in data-based studies by Pawley (2004), Quinn (2009) and Severin (2013). Pawley exemplifies its use by speakers of Tasmanian Australian Vernacular English. Whilst Horvath, based on a personal communication with Lesley Milroy, shows *yous(e)* as having a weak and strong pronunciation, Pawley appears to suggest that both *youse* and *yez* (*ɪz*) have a presence in AusE.¹ Quinn found just two instances of the form in her searches of

¹ Hickey (2004c) notes that IrishE has *youse* and *yez* with the latter a combined form from *ye* and *youse*.

ICE-AUS (cf. seven in ICE-NZ and eight in London English COLT). In a recent online survey judging the acceptability of sentences, *yous shouldn't have done that* was selected as unacceptable by close to 71% of Severin's 335 participants whilst around 12.5% self-reported the form as one they would use. Her youngest age group (18–34 years of age, $n = 160$) was least likely to say it was unacceptable (66.25%) and most likely to report use (17%).²

In AusE, *youse*, apparently in-line with its position in other varieties of English, is stigmatized and understood as a vernacular feature. For the current study, it is of interest to further explore *how* this pronoun form is evaluated.

In interviews which focussed on eliciting folklinguistic accounts, *youse* was discussed without direct prompting by four of 15 young Melbournians (Penry Williams 2011). The social evaluation of this form contained many comments that are common assessments of stigmatized forms (or more plainly, of the people who use them). *Youse* was characterized as 'incorrect', 'unintelligent' and 'less educated'. These accounts indicated further that the form is a target of direct prescription with the comment *you don't say youse*. The strong reaction to the pronoun form was evidenced in the claim that hearing this made the speaker want to *biff* the person who uttered it *over the head* and another participant gave the impression of a physical reaction of repulsion, uttering *urgh* with a shudder in his voice (Penry Williams 2011: 299). Such reactions are stronger than those received for many other forms in that they appeared to manifest in physicality of some sort.

In terms of more local indexicalities, *youse* was associated with two local linguistically (and socially) stigmatized groups: *bogan* and *hardcore western suburbs*. Although often considered simply as a class-based category, *bogan* is a very flexible reference which centres on judgements regarding taste and aesthetics across a wide variety of practices (Penry Williams 2011). Importantly, saying something is *bogan* marks it as Other and distant from the Self (except in cases of claiming a *bogan* identity, in which the judgement is rebutted with acceptance) (Penry

² NZE studies using similar questions but given to teenagers found 22% reported that they would always use this form (Hodge & Song 2011) and close to 50% accepted it (Quinn 1995 as cited in Hodge & Song 2011).

Williams 2011: 354–355, see also Figure 3 below). The reference to the western suburbs of Melbourne evokes their history as a working class and cheaper area (partly industrial, modest housing-stock), although modifying this with *hardcore* perhaps recognizes that social meaning is more complex or changed, not just from the western suburbs, but more than this, such as having a long family history in that area or being a central member of a local community. Both these labels clearly tie into local ideas about ‘bad language’.

Whilst there is clear evidence then for local meanings for *youse* it is not yet clear to what extent the underlying evaluations match up with those in IrishE (where there is also a regional element to its distribution alongside *ye* (Hickey 2003)). Indeed it is possible they might be tied into the evaluations of Irish people when AusE was still in formation. The full field of its indexicality in AusE has not yet been mapped out and many questions remain not just unanswered but unasked. There certainly appears to be evidence that for some the form is used unselfconsciously (in Pawley 2004) but for others it is highly stigmatized, used only in linguistic play, voicing Others and stylization (Coupland 2007). It is likely, as is reported by Hickey (2003), to also be used to show informality and solidarity in some circumstances, even perhaps localness given the idea that some consider it to be a feature unique to AusE.

3.2 (*Embellished*) *clippings*

One of the most regularly mentioned and most culturally salient features of AusE is the occurrence of clippings as in *uni* ‘university’ or clippings embellished with *-ie/-y* or *-o* as in *sunnies* ‘sunglasses’ and *muso* ‘musician’ (e.g. Wierzbicka 1992, Austin 2006).³ Bauer (2002) suggests that the frequent use of *-ie/-y* in AusE may be inherited from ScotsE, whilst the *-o* suffix is generally attributed to IrishE (Simpson 2004). Whilst occurring in other varieties of English, what sets (embellished) clippings apart in both AusE and NZE is their local derivational process, their increased productivity, and their use across a wider range of

³ In the literature, clippings are also variously called shortenings, diminutives, abbreviations, truncations or hypocoristics.

informal settings including written as well as spoken contexts (Bauer & Huddleston 2002, Fritz 2007, Melchers & Shaw 2003, Simpson 2004, Sussex 2004, Kidd et al. 2011). For example, in AusE polysyllabic nouns are typically shortened to one syllable of the original before the addition of *-ie/-y* as in *brekky* ‘breakfast’ and *Aussie* ‘Australian’ rather than the suffix being restricted to use with monosyllabic nouns as in *aunty* and *bootie* (Peters and Burridge, 2012). The wide range of use of (embellished) clippings, including in signage, is illustrated by the decal on a delivery van’s door captured in Melbourne:



Figure 1. Use of an embellished clipping in signage

Looking just at the suffix *-ie/-y*, Wierzbicka (1992: 384–385) argues that in AusE it adds a depreciative meaning, so “not thinking of it as a special thing”, which is quite different to its diminutive use in British English, for instance.

As Peters and Burridge (2012) conclude, embellished clippings with *-ie/-y* or *-o* are a distinctive areal feature of Antipodean English and their high productivity “correlates with the more informal character of the Australian and New Zealand culture, and its greater willingness to use colloquial styles of discourse” (253). They further argue that embellished clippings along with a set of other vernacular features with strong social meanings have been recalibrated (Trudgill 1986) in AusE and NZE and that through the realignment of stylistic norms they are “continuing to express cherished ideals such as friendliness, nonchalance, mateship, egalitarianism and anti-authoritarianism” (254). Along with these social meanings, (embellished) clippings have been said to express social solidarity (Bardsley & Simpson 2009). Sussex asserts that “Australians are both very much aware of the social meaningfulness of diminutives [embellished clippings], and use

them systematically and consciously in contexts which require awareness of language choice and use in terms of identity and ingroup/outgroup orientation.” (2004: 11).

In our efforts to more fully document the role of various features in AusE such as (embellished) clippings, we have been collecting examples of strategies used by Australian authors to build a character’s identity through their speech and further to this, seeking authors’ perspectives in some instances. At this stage, we have spoken to Kerry Greenwood and John Marsden. Greenwood’s work provides many excellent examples, such as in the speech of the tough and streetwise Bert in the Phryne Fisher series:

- (1) *And them **musos** drink like **wharfies**, a man can’t hardly keep up with them. We shucked our gear and washed ourselves as clean as little lambs. I remember saying to **Billo**, I didn’t know you had fair hair.* (Greenwood 2002: 114)

Not only can the recognition and utilization of (embellished) clippings in fictional dialogue be taken as evidence that these forms have social meaning, but more importantly the social meanings that these forms are associated with — that is, what they index — can be drawn on by authors for creative and stylistic purposes. As author John Marsden commented (in personal communication with one of the authors), he purposely uses features such as embellished clippings in dialogue to build a character’s identity rather than using prose to describe the character.⁴

Leitner (2004: 250) suggests that in the absence of well-recognized and marked regional varieties, as there are in Britain, for example, non-standard language can be employed to create localness in the penning of Australian literary characters. In particular, Leitner (2004) states that clippings add a colloquial flavour to texts.

The fact that (embellished) clippings are the focus of folklinguistic comment supports the idea that they are seen as part of mainstream AusE and have particular social meanings. Consider, for example, the interview extract in (2), in which Ian makes a link between clippings and the idea that Australians are laidback (Penry Williams 2011: 268):

⁴ Indeed, using dialogue to reveal the personality of a character is a well-known tenet of creative writing (e.g. Bernays & Painter, 1995; Cook, 2002; May, 2010).

(2) *Ian's discussion of shortening*⁵

- 1 IAN: I suppose as a–
 2 as a ^country,
 3 we tend to ^shorten a lot of words,
 4 so like,
 5 we always say ^footy and uni,
 6 and;
 7 (H) um,
 8 We- –
 9 you know,
 10 I think it's more,
 11 again,
 12 this idea of Australia's so laidback that,
 13 we can't even be bothered finishing our words properly,

The iconic association here between a characteristic of AusE speakers and clippings is an example of iconization (Irvine & Gal 2000) whereby the form is seen as capturing an essential property attributed to Australians:

(3) Iconization of (embellished) clippings

- national social images of Australians as laidback
- features of AusE as laidback
- = evidence of being laidback

The assessment of AusE as laidback and informal was common amongst the interview participants in Penry Williams (2011) and it seems the use of (embellished) clippings was important to this view.

While the data that we have presented here show the types of understandings that can be gained through the approach that we are advocating, much remains to be explored. As Sussex (2004: 17) suggests, the next line of research should be attitudes towards (embellished) clippings and their relationship to the identity of AusE and its speakers, and to explore their use in interaction.

⁵ This interview data is transcribed according to the system described in Du Bois et al. (1993).

3.3 *Final but*

This is the feature on which we have trialled the conceptual and methodological approach outlined in §2 and so our documentation of it is far more advanced than the others presented here. At the beginning of our study of final *but* there were only brief mentions of its use in AusE, perhaps accompanied by one or two examples. We have investigated final *but* from a range of analytical perspectives using a wide range of data types, in working towards providing a full documentation of the AusE final particle *but*. This has been achieved by integrating diachronic considerations, interactional and usage data, and results of questionnaires and interviews probing folklinguistic beliefs. To illustrate the range of our findings, in this section we revise the major conclusions of previous work but do not detail them (see Mulder et al. 2010, Mulder & Thompson 2006, 2008, Mulder et al. 2009, Penry Williams 2011).

The origin of final particle *but* is likely a result of dialect retention with input from IrishE, mutually reinforced by that of ScotsE and north-eastern English English varieties. It had a covert entrance into AusE and this is part of its colloquial status in present-day AusE (Mulder et al. 2009). Work by Mulder and Thompson (2006, 2008) has established the grammaticization continuum of *but* to its final particle function as follows:

(4) Grammaticization continuum of final *but*

initial *but* > Janus-faced *but* > final hanging *but* > weak final particle *but* > strong final particle *but*

In the final particle use the contrast is indicated after the concession so that rather than the canonical structure associated with the form, *it doesn't fit here but it fits over there* (X *but* Y), one hears *it doesn't fit here, it fits over there but* (X Y *but*).

As part of collecting data for this stigmatized form, we have found it may appear relatively infrequently in large corpora so took to collecting examples from diverse sources, including informal written personal communication addressed to the authors. Figure 2 is a capture of a Facebook status of an AusE speaker.



Figure 2. *Final but use in a Facebook update (19 July 2010)*

Another example shown in (5) comes from an informal but work-related email exchange (addressed to the second author) with a senior academic.

- (5) *Here (attached) is what Eugene came up with. Not sure that we need all the pretty pictures (nice but).. Another possibility would be that you do the qual stuff and I give Eugene [...] the quant stuff.* (11 December 2006)

The most interesting part of this example is perhaps the response to the request to use it as data. The same author replied

- (6) *Of course I was being deeply ironical --pride myself (in snobbish fashion) on the fact that this kind of but is not usually part of my repertoire. Perhaps Jean can use both emails..the former and self distancing latter as part of her data.* (11 December 2006)

As (6) demonstrates, these sources of data can have potential additional insights. In particular, fictional and scripted dialogue have been of interest because they try to function as a quick way to understand the social type of a character by drawing on the social knowledge of the reader or viewer. These have allowed us better access to the interactional and pragmatic functions of use. Corpora data have helped provide insight into the role of phonetic and prosodic characteristics, which we then trialled in group surveys to ensure that speakers actually attended to these cues (Mulder et al. 2009). We further asked survey participants to self-report on use and asked the open question ‘Does it tell you something about a person if s/he ends a sentence with *but*?’ (Mulder et al. in preparation). Further and more detailed evaluations were given in the folklinguistic interviews, in which interviewees performed final *but* usage (Penry Williams 2011: 326–331).

Based on analysis of the Melbourne questionnaire participants' comments and those of interviewees, Figure 3 below presents an indexical field (Eckert 2008) for final *but*.

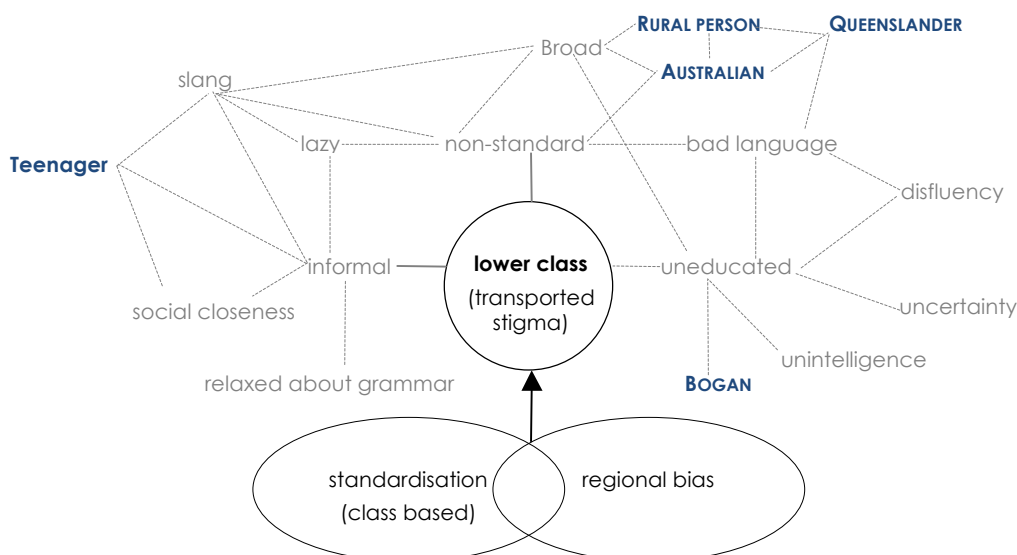


Figure 3. A sketch of an indexical field for final *but* in AusE (from Penry Williams 2011: 324)

This sketch depicts how indexicalities for final *but* build upon one another, creating new meanings from old (Silverstein 2003). Focusing on the elements of most interest for the present discussion, we briefly note that the grey items are folklinguistic assessments and the blue ones identities. This analysis suggests the underlying (first order) indexicality is one of class. Class is not a notion that exists prior to ideology and the link is not direct (Ochs 1992). This diagram aims to depict that before entering AusE, this linguistic feature was marginalized through processes of standardization which were themselves shaped by ideologies relating to class and region within the British Isles. Final *but* became 'lower class' through existing power relationships, with those in the privileged position to do so claiming their own linguistic norms as 'correct' and *the* norm. This indexicality then came to Australia with the form, its use indicating the speaker was of a lower class. Such meanings though are constantly reanalysed in ideological accounts (creating second orders of indexicality) (Silverstein 2003). Some of the evaluations here, and their ties to one another, may be well-known for stigmatized features (e.g. *uneducated*, *lazy*, *unintelligence*). If one follows the ties through in a pathway,

each label creatively builds upon the previous one. For instance, *informal* leads to *teenager* with teenaged participants re-understanding the first order indexicality to form an ideological relationship to an identity associated with their own life-period. On the other side of the sketch, we see more specific identities demonstrating that the social meanings of this form also link to local type identities, via ideologies about what type of English AusE is (for further discussion of this figure see Penry Williams 2011: 324-325). Notice that there is an unbroken line symbolizing enregisterment between *lower class* and *non-standard* and that this is then associated with being (linguistically) Australian.

Through this discussion, we have demonstrated the range of potential insights offered by the methodology we outline here. Final *but* in AusE has now been investigated and documented for its function in interaction and other elements of use, as well as its place in Australian cultures. Yet we still have questions regarding the extent to which this is similar or different to the situation elsewhere. In contemporary ScotsE, IrishE and northern English Englishes, clause final *but* is sometimes suggested to be frequent (in personal communications with the authors). However, in the literature it is just noted with an example or two without elaboration, leaving questions regarding its comparative commonness, function and social evaluation.

4. Conclusion

In this paper we have proposed that by integrating numerous analytical perspectives and drawing from a range of different types of data sources, we are able to gain a fuller understanding of the history and position of various morphosyntactic, syntactic and discourse features in contemporary AusE. Importantly, such an approach enables us to both explicate how “most of what is considered typical of AusE has been pushed down to a socially inferior position” (Leitner 1984: 78) and identify the relevant ideas and histories through which local linguistic prejudices are formed. Moreover, it also serves as a model for an open and inclusive approach to research, one interested in micro linguistic details and whole cultures: language in society and society in language.

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