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# **REGIONAL VARIATION IN THE LEXICON OF AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH**

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## 6 LEXICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH

Theories on the origins and development of Australian English as a variety separate from British English have to date depended largely on phonological evidence (e.g., Bernard 1969, Hammarstrom 1980). This chapter uses lexical evidence to evaluate and expand on these theories.

When Australian English is compared as an entity with British English, the minor differences within Australian English are easily overlooked. Nevertheless, as this project has shown, there is diversity within the striking uniformity. The main part of this project has been a synchronic study of regional lexical variation in the language. This chapter is a brief diachronic study of the development of both the regional uniformity and the regional diversity.

### THE ORIGINS OF AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH

"Evidence which would enable us to follow the development of Australian speech practically does not exist" (Mitchell and Delbridge 1965a:24), so that only conjecture is possible on the origins of Australian English. However, theories, some more plausible than others, have been suggested, but as Delbridge (1970:24) points out, "The evidence of historical records ... is so meagre as to be incapable of initiating any theory at all." In particular, early records do not give all the information needed to know in which parts of Britain the early settlers acquired their regional speech.

#### The one-origin theory

The simplest explanation for the origin of Australian English, and in particular its uniformity, is that the language, or at least the pronunciation, was already uniform when it arrived in Australia because it came from only one source. This is the view of Hammarstrom, who hypothesises that "Australian English must have had its origin in the dialect of London or, perhaps, in the dialects of South-Eastern England" (1980:4), though he does not specify which dialects. He concludes that "Australian pronunciation is not an amalgam but simply the pronunciation of London towards the end of the 18th century" (p.66). He argues against the view that the elements of the Australian accent were blended once they were brought to Australia; it was, he believes, brought from London (p.54). He quotes evidence from early visitors to the Australian colonies who had remarked on the similarities between Australian and Cockney pronunciation (pp.31-32).

Hammarstrom bases his conclusions on four sorts of evidence. First, present-day Australian English vowels are similar to Cockney vowels (p.66). He uses evidence from Gunn (1975) who asked "how different is present Australian pronunciation from popular London of the late eighteenth century[?]" (p.8), and concluded from an examination of the distinctive Australian English vowels and diphthongs that the

earlier forms "are not very different from the modes established and preserved in Australia" (p.11). Hammarstrom acknowledges that it would have been better to compare late 18th century Australian English vowels with late 18th century Cockney vowels (1980:30), (and, although he does not say so, to compare present and late 18th century Australian vowels.) The spectrum of Australian accents may exist because "Among the earliest immigrants ... there were people from all kinds of social classes" (Hammarstrom 1980:59), so that "There were from the beginning somewhat higher and somewhat lower sociolects and these have remained until the present day without significant change" (pp.66-67). Second, early writers on Australian English praised it, presumably because it was similar to London speech (p.66). By the second half of the 19th century, when writers were attacking Australian pronunciation, he suggests that it must have been because London English had changed (1985:370). Third, he believes the language of immigrants changes slowly (e.g., French in Canada, English in India), and does not change in the same ways as the language in the homeland (1980:42 and 1985:369). Hence, Australian English is not likely to have changed much since the late 18th century. Fourth, characteristics of the pronunciation of other parts of Britain are not found in Australian English (1980:4).

While agreeing that there is some evidence to support Hammarstrom's view, Trudgill (1986:135-7) adduces two pieces of evidence for phonological features brought from other dialects - /ə/ in unstressed final syllables in Australian English where London English has /ɪ/, e.g., in *horses* or *wanted*; and a front vowel in words such as *bar* or *card* where London English has a back vowel. These two features are enough to overturn Hammarstrom's theory - although Australian English is similar to the English of London at the time Australia was settled, the two are not identical.

### The mixing-bowl theory

This is the opposite of the one-origin theory. In one version, that of Collins (1975), the mixing took place before the settlers left England, in the towns in the south-east quadrant of England (presumably this is a larger area than that usually referred to as the south-east of England), where there was "a convergence of Midland and East Anglian pronunciation" (p.116) and presumably vocabulary. However, Trudgill (1986:138-142) finds evidence for features of Australian English which must have been added after the settlers arrived in Australia and had contact with dialects from other parts of Britain. One is /æ/ in *dance*, *plant*, *sample*, etc. This is found in the speech of Scotland and of the north and south-west of England. Another feature is the presence of initial /h/ in Australian English in words such as *hat* and *hit*; this feature is found in Britain in East Anglia, Ireland, Scotland and a few other small areas, and variably in London. He also gives examples of Irish English influence on the accent, lexicon and syntax of Australian English, and of Scottish influence on the lexicon. As these were not part of Midland or East Anglian speech, they must have been added in Australia.

In the more plausible version of the mixing-bowl theory, the mixing took place in Australia, when people from different parts of Britain brought with them their different dialects.

It is hard to know what this mixture might have been in more than a general way - certainly a mish-mash of deracinated regional and social



British dialects with every county of the land somewhere represented (Bernard 1969:64)

but probably with

a disproportionate bias towards the belts of greatest population where the incentives both to migration and to dishonesty must have been greatest. Thus whether one speaks of a convict centre like Hobart or a free settlement like Adelaide the raw material was, within tolerance, similar (p.66).

This mixture resulted in

a fusion of several regional varieties of English in conditions that would lead to the extinction of features that were peculiar to a small number of speakers and the promotion of those that were more general (Turner 1966:32-3).

### **Lexical evidence for the origins of Australian English**

The mixing bowl theory should predict that more Australian English words would come from the London and South-Eastern dialects than from other dialects, and that some from other regional dialects would also be represented. The one-origin theory, if applied to the lexicon, should predict that Australian English would consist only of words from the London and South-Eastern dialects (allowing of course for later borrowings).

"The greater part of the Australian's vocabulary is ... Standard English" (Ramson 1966:6). Standard English, had its origins in the south-east of England (Trudgill 1990:13). Hence the greater part of the Australian English lexicon probably derived from there. However, some words from other regional dialects also became part of the Australian English lexicon, as reference to Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary* (1898-1905) shows. For example, a sample of five words used in Australian English - *bob* 'move up and down', *chuck* 'throw', *locker* 'a small cupboard, locked compartment', *peek* 'to peep, pry', *rubble* 'fragmentary pieces of stone' - are shown as having their British dialect origins in Scotland generally, Banffshire, Fife, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Nottinghamshire, Northhamptonshire, Berkshire, Somerset, Northumberland, Cumberland, Cheshire, Westmoreland, Lakeland, Leicestershire, Warwickshire, Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire, East Anglia, Kent, Devon, Derbyshire, Worcestershire, Herefordshire, Huntingdon, Suffolk, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and Wiltshire. (Some words were used in several parts of Britain, e.g., *bob*, for which Wright gives citations from the first nine places in the above list.)

This small amount of lexical evidence supports phonological evidence for the mixing-bowl theory on the origins of Australian English. A count of a larger proportion of the words current at the time Australia was settled is needed to confirm this.

### **Historical evidence for the origins of Australian English**

Although the records of the early settlers do not contain all the information needed to establish their regional origins, there is sufficient evidence to evaluate the theories on the origins of Australian English.

The type of speech brought to Australia by the best documented settlers, the convicts, was the largest contribution to the beginnings of Australian English. Convicts made up the largest proportion of settlers in NSW (which included Queensland) and Van Diemen's Land, and Victoria was settled from both these places. In NSW, the proportion of settlers who were convicts rose from 86% in 1788-1800 to 91% in 1811-1820, before declining to 4% in 1841-1850 before transportation ceased. In the first 53 years of the colony, 1788-1840, 61% of new arrivals were convicts. In Van Diemen's Land, the proportion ranged from 59% in 1801-1810, to 86% in 1841-1850. In the first 48 years, 1803-1850, 76% of new arrivals were convicts. Only in Western Australia did convicts form less than half of new arrivals. The early settlers 1829-1849 were free. Transportation occurred only from 1850-1868, with 47% of new arrivals in 1851-60 being convicts. (Percentages derived from Price 1987:4). The origins of the speech of the convicts, then, should indicate the origins of Australian English.

The largest single source of convicts was London and South-Eastern England. The convict indents, which were prepared before the convicts left England, contained among other things information on each convict's town and county of birth, and county of trial (Nicholas and Shergold 1988a:44). Since trials were usually conducted in the county in which the crime was committed, the place of trial was a reasonable indicator of a convict's place of residence before being transported (Nicholas and Shergold 1988b:23). The proportion tried in London and South-Eastern England (counties not specified) was 30.3% in the eastern colonies, and 29.9% in Western Australia. The next highest proportions were from the North (14.0% and 28.2% respectively for the eastern colonies and Western Australia), the Midlands (11.1% and 15.2%), and so on down to 0.1% from the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands (Nicholas and Shergold 1988b:26). In addition, the proportion of free settlers from London and South-Eastern England was similar to the proportion of convicts. For example, in the period 1846-50, over 30% of government-assisted migrants to NSW, Victoria and South Australia were from there (Atkinson 1988:41). Overall, about 30% of all settlers, both convict and free, came from London and South-Eastern England.

However, many of the convicts were not tried in the county in which they were born. A comparison of the information in the convict indents on place of birth and place of trial allows the percentage of convicts who had moved to be calculated. The figures range from 35% of English convicts, over half of whom had moved to a non-adjacent county, to 58% of Scottish convicts (Nicholas and Shergold 1988b:29). This high rate of movement means that place of trial is not a reliable indicator of where convicts grew up and acquired their regional speech, as there is no record of how often they had moved or of the places they had lived.

Hence not all the convicts tried in London and South-Eastern England would have used the speech of that region, though urban-born convicts were less likely to have moved than the rural-born (Nicholas and Shergold 1988b:29). During the Industrial Revolution, many of the rural poor moved to the industrial towns in the north of England and to London (Plumb 1950:153), so that some of those tried in London would have spoken with other regional accents. However, 65% of those tried in London and South-Eastern England were born there and would have used that region's speech (assuming they had not lived elsewhere between birth and trial). That

represents about 20% of all convicts. If all the convicts had used the speech of the place where they were tried, 30% would have used the speech of London and South-Eastern England. Thus the proportion of those using the speech of London and South-Eastern England appears to be between 20% and 30%, with the remainder bringing their speech from other parts of Britain.

The historical records, then, support the mixing bowl theory for the origin of Australian English, and indicate that the speech of London and South-Eastern England was the largest single ingredient. This would have affected the eventual synthesis of the ingredients, so that words from this region would have been more common than words from any other single region.

## **REGIONAL UNIFORMITY AND REGIONAL DIVERSITY**

Many observations on Australian English have focused on its uniformity, e.g., "The homogeneity of Australian English is remarkable. It would be difficult to find elsewhere a geographical area so large with so little linguistic variation" (Turner 1966:163). Pilch (1976:119) observed "Dialect variation is continuous over the whole of most language areas (the only known exception is Australia)". Ramson (1972:37-38) goes so far as to say "This homogeneity ... is probably the most distinctive feature of Australian English".

A brief look at the background to this regional uniformity is useful for the light it throws on regional diversity. Most work has been carried out on the pronunciation. "Australian English is quite remarkably homogeneous, particularly if one considers the enormous size of the territory over which it is spoken. From Perth to Sydney is over 3000 kilometres, yet their accents are practically indistinguishable" (Wells 1982:593), and "... it is not true that there is no variation at all, quite the contrary, but what there is is not regionally based and wherever one goes the same sets of variants are to be heard" (Bernard 1969:62). There is also some reference to uniformity in other aspects of the language, e.g., "The overall picture ... is one of remarkable uniformity in pronunciation, syntax and vocabulary" (Maley 1972:68), and "The same accent is heard through widely different climates and there is little variation in vocabulary" (Turner 1966:163).

### **Lexical evidence for the origin of uniformity**

The fact that the dialects of London and the South-East probably provided the greater part of Australian English vocabulary means that a large part (but not all) of the lexicon was uniform in all the colonies from the beginning. In addition, the common elements of the other dialects brought to Australia would have been common to the speech of all the colonies, and Trudgill (referring to phonology, though the same principle would apply to the lexicon) points out that "the more common a feature was in the English varieties of the British Isles, the more frequently it was likely to occur in the colonial mixture situation, and the more likely it therefore was to survive in Australian English" (1986:145). Thus the basis for the regional diversity in Britain becoming regional uniformity in Australia existed in the speech first brought here. After the colonies were founded, further forces may have reinforced these processes, though what these forces were is a matter for conjecture. The theory most often

advanced is that movement of the population, whether convicts, rural workers, gold miners or settlers (see, for example, Turner 1966 and Mitchell 1970), ensured that the uniformity was spread across the country. However, population movement began early in the history of each colony (the first inland town in NSW, Bathurst, was established in 1815, 27 years after Sydney was settled, for example) while the uniformity may still have been in the process of development.

### The origins of regional diversity

In the "unsystematic and often contradictory observations of lay observers" (Delbridge 1970:24) of the accent, there is no reference to the existence of regional differences in the accent early in the development of Australian English. However, the accent, being an unavoidably public aspect of the language (unlike the regional words, which form only a small and easily overlooked part), would surely have drawn attention if there had been noticeable regional differences.

Theories on the origins of the language have mentioned the lack of time since European settlement for regional differences to develop, e.g., "the history of Australia is short and would hardly allow any marked developments of this kind even if conditions were favourable" (Mitchell 1947:13). Popular stereotypes of regional speech in Australia have recognised that South Australian speech can be distinguished from that in other States, and that people in rural areas tend to have Broader accents than city people. These stereotypes have been confirmed by the work of Bradley. His work, and that of others (see Chapter 2), has begun to uncover other, less marked, but quantifiable, regional variation in the accent. Bradley believes that regional accents may only now be developing:

No doubt ... [regional] developments will continue and expand as Australia enters its third century of English-speaking settlement. In the American case, it took about two centuries to shake off cultural dependence on England and recognise the developing independence and diversity of national and local dialects; Australia seems now to be doing the same. (1980:84)

While it appears that the accent is only now developing regional differences, this is not the case with the lexicon. Although it is not possible to date accurately the earliest use of all the regionalisms, it is possible to see that their use arose in two stages, the first of them early in the development of the language. The first stage involved items already known by the settlers before they left Britain and the new things they found when they arrived in Australia; the second involved things introduced after the colonies were settled.

Of the 67 items mapped in this project, probably only 13 would have been known to the settlers before they left Britain, up until 1836 when the last colony was settled. To determine this, all the items likely to have been in existence then were checked for their earliest entries in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, using their Standard English names. These were *portmanteau*, *harvesting*, *reaping*, *stripping*, *gutter*, *dressings table*, *dustman*, *stone*, *pier*, *Santa Claus*, *hide and seek* and *skipping* from Standard English, *nose bleed* and *barley* from regional dialects, and *lock* (Standard English) and *snib* (Scottish). Not all the names by which these are known in Australia are given in

the *OED*. Other names may not have been recorded in the *OED*, e.g., *hidy* [sic] in the *English Dialect Dictionary* with no date. It is also possible that some of the names were introduced later.

Marckwardt (1958:140), explaining the development in America of regional speech, described the process by which regional differences in the lexicon would have been established early (though note that he believes regional accents may have taken longer to develop):

... it is quite unlikely that any single settlement, even at the outset, ever consisted entirely of speakers of the same dialect. ... In the course of their being in constant contact with each other, compromises for the everyday terms in which their dialects differed would normally have developed, and one could reasonably expect to find a southern English term for a water receptacle, a northern word for earthworm, and a western designation for sour milk. Matters of pronunciation would eventually, perhaps after a slightly longer time, be compromised in much the same manner. Moreover, the resultant compromises for various localities would be different. ... no two localities would have had exactly the same proportions of speakers of the various English dialects, and even if they had, the two localities would not have arrived at precisely the same set of compromises.

In Australia, similar compromises would have taken place in each colony among the words, both Standard English and British dialect, for items already known by the settlers. In the case of harvesting, for example, for which all three words are recorded in *OED*, the process of compromise led to *harvesting* becoming the Australia-wide word, while *stripping* and *reaping* became the elective regional words in the SE and SC respectively.

The other items with regional names which may have arisen early were new things the settlers found here. In this case, the new regional names would have been arrived at separately in the different colonies. Of the 67 items mapped, there were ten such items needing to be named here (including stones for throwing, which did not in fact need new names). There were three strategies for naming these new things. The first, applied to flora and fauna, was to give the names of things they were familiar with in Britain to similar things here. These were *lobster* or *crayfish* (both marine and freshwater), *cod* or *haddock*, *peewee* or *mudlark* or (Murray) *magpie*, and *soursobs*. The second was to use words from Aboriginal languages. These were *bindi-eye*, *yakka*, *paddymelon*, *yabby* or *jilgie* or *marron*, and the various names for stones for throwing. The third was to use English words, but not applied to the things they were applied to in Britain. These were *cat-head* or *cat's eye* or *bull-head* or *three corner jack*, *blackboy* or *grasstree*, *sourgrass*, and *pig melon* or *camel melon*. Different strategies were sometimes applied to the same item in different places, e.g., the names for bindi-eyes and yabbies.

Altogether, 23 items of the 67 surveyed would probably have acquired their regional names early.

The second stage in the development of regional names was the naming of things introduced after the colonies had been settled. The remainder of the items in this survey are in this category, e.g., strollers, parking inspectors, ice blocks or swimming costumes. Either of the processes that operated in the first stage could have operated in this stage, with new items given different names in each region, e.g., food items, with compromises made between names for new items introduced from overseas, e.g., pedestrian crossings. Marckwardt (1958:143-4) gives a recent example of the first of these processes in America: "large, double-lane, limited-access automobile highways" built in the preceding two decades were given different names in different parts of the country - *parkways*, *turnpikes*, *thruways*, *expressways* and *freeways*. The second process operated when these highways were introduced into Australia, with some of their American names becoming regional names here, e.g., *freeway* and *expressway* in Sydney, *parkway* in Canberra.

### Evidence for early use of regionalisms

There is some evidence that use of regional terms began early. This can be found in the *Australian National Dictionary*, which is organised on historical principles, giving the earliest known written sources of words "which have originated in Australia, which have a greater currency here than elsewhere, or which have a special significance in Australia" (Ramson 1988b:vi). However, most words used in Australian English are not exclusively Australian and therefore do not appear in the *AND*. Nor do most of them appear in Morris's *Austral English* (1898) or Wilkes's *A Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms* (1990), both also on historical principles.

The best category of regional words to look at for evidence of early <sup>use</sup> contains the new items the settlers found here, as these are exclusively Australian. Twenty-four regional names for the ten items are given in *AND* (though in few cases are they marked for region). The earliest is *crawfish* 1770 (referring to marine crayfish), used by Captain Cook. The first regional words used in print after European settlement were *gibber* 1790 and *grasstree* 1794. Eight - *blackboy*, *grasstree*, *gibber*, (freshwater) *lobster* and *crayfish*, (marine) *crayfish*, *peewee* and *soursobs* - were first used in print within 50 years of the founding of the relevant colonies.

However, oral usage is likely to have predated the earliest written usage. For example, the *AND* notes that Cape weed, a South African plant, was naturalised in Western Australia by 1833, but the first quotes for its use in print are 1878 in Victoria and 1897 in Western Australia. This is a time lag of 45 years. A rough estimate of the time lag between oral use and first printed use of other words can be made, using the apparent time covered by the survey for the present work, i.e., the lifespans of the informants. Speakers would have learnt the names of most of the items when they were young, say by the time they were ten years old, so we can estimate when the oldest speakers would have begun using them. For example, the earliest written use for *bubbler* is given in *AND* as 1970, whereas in the NSW part of the NE it was used by the oldest informants, who were born in 1925 and 1926, so that it was probably in use at least as early as the mid 1930s, about 35 years earlier than its first written use. There are other such examples. Words for items which would have been known at least from about 1910, and whose first entry in *AND* is later than 1950, were selected to estimate when they would have been in use by speakers in this survey. There were

ten such words besides *bubbler*. Their estimated early use by the oldest speakers who used them, and their first entry in *AND* are: *little lunch* (early 1930s - 1982), *big lunch* (late 1930s - 1982), *swimmers* (early 1940s - 1967), *gramma* (early 1940s - 1964), *hidey* (mid 1930s - 1957), *garbo* (early 1930s - 1953), *brown bomber* (late 1930s - 1953), *pusher* (about 1910 - 1953), *boondie* (early 1940s - 1952), and *lobby* (early 1940s - 1952). The time lag between oral use and first written use ranged from about ten years to about 50 years. Of course, if older speakers had been available, this time lag may have been even longer. However, even this rough estimate is enough to show that regionalisms were in use considerably earlier than written evidence suggests. If this sort of time lag is applied to regional words with an earlier date for first written use, we can see that some of them must have been in use quite early, e.g., *peewee*, first used in print in 1827; or *yabby* 1884; or *soursobs* 1885; or *port* 1898. These could have been in oral use perhaps 50 or more years earlier.

Hence, although it is not possible to find definitive evidence of when use of regionalisms first arose, there is evidence that it was quite early in the development in Australian English.

## SOURCES OF AUSTRALIAN REGIONALISMS

British English is the principal source of Australian regionalism words, whether for items known before the settlers left Britain, found when they arrived here, or introduced later. Other sources are American English words, words borrowed from Aboriginal languages, proprietary names, and a word from Afrikaans (*double gee*, from *dubbeltjie*). These other sources form only a small part of the regionalisms.

### British English

The *Oxford English Dictionary*, the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, and the *English Dialect Dictionary* were the main sources consulted for the provenance of the names of the items in this survey. In one case, *bars*, Wakelin (1972:81) gives a dialect origin, though the word is not in the dictionaries; in another, *sandshoes*, these sources showed the name as Standard English, but Trudgill (1990:101-2) gives a dialect origin. These overrode the dictionary sources.

It is instructive to look separately at the Australia-wide words and the regional words. The principal source of the former is Standard English, and of the latter, Standard English words put to different uses in Australia.

### Australia-wide words

The 36 items with Australia-wide names have 53 names between them (several items, e.g., *shanghai*, have more than one Australia-wide name). The main source of these is Standard English - 28 of the Australia-wide words are shared with it. These cover categories of the lexicon as diverse as food, children's activities, clothes, and personal and household items. Five were from British dialects - *soft drink* (North Ireland), *shanghai* (Scotland, Northumberland), *sandshoes* (north-east area), *pee-the-bed* (Devon), and *It* (Northumberland). Four - *daisy*, *blackboy*, *pumpkin* and *marrow* - were Standard English names applied to different plant species here. Fifteen



were Standard English words put to different uses here. Many of these items may exist in Britain under different names, or may simply not have been listed, e.g., relief teacher, holiday house, cocktail frankfurts, street directory, or parking inspector. However, the remaining one appears to be an Australian innovation. This is *garbo* 'garbage collector'.

### Australian regional words

Both sorts of regional words in Australia, elective and obligatory, follow the same pattern. The 36 items which have Australia-wide names also have between them 69 elective regional names. The 31 items with obligatory regional names have 111 names between them. This gives a total of 180 regional words. Only 15 of these are Standard English, e.g., *thumb tacks*, *slide*, *pedestrian crossing*, *peanut butter*, *verge*, *tip and run*, *reaping*. (One of them, *stripping*, is apparently not in current use, as the last entry for it in the *OED* is 1886, and it is not in the *COD*.) Six are British dialect words - *nose bleed* (south Worcestershire and Gloucestershire), *polony* (Yorkshire), *barley* (Scotland, Ireland, Northumberland, Cumberland, Westmoreland, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cheshire, Staffordshire, Derby, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire), *bars* (Devon), *snib* (Scottish) and *hidey* (Devon). Two - *housie* and *housie-housie* - are marked 'Army'.

By far the largest number of regional words, 125, were Standard English words used differently in Australia. Some, such as *sourgrass*, *soursobs*, *cod*, *haddock* and *mudlark*, apply to different species here. Some may be unrecorded British dialect words, e.g., *bar*, *barleys* and *'bar'leys*. The remainder are Standard English words applied to things known in Britain by other names, e.g., *water boots* or *pusher*; or to things found only in Australia, e.g., *three-corner jack*, *Tasmanian scallop* or *camel melon* and *pig melon*.

### Distribution in Britain and Australia

There is no pattern to where the British English words, whether Standard or dialect, became regional words in Australia. Of the 15 Standard English words which became Australian regional words, four are found in the NE, three in the SE, one each in the SC and SW, and the others are shared by more than one region. Of the six British dialect words which became Australian regional words, two are found in the SE, one each in the NE, SC and SW, and one is shared by the SE and SW.

There is little evidence of any pattern to the British dialect sources for Australian English words, both Australia-wide and regional. The five British dialect words that became Australia-wide words were drawn from four regions of Britain. Three of them were from Northumberland - *shanghai* (shared with Scotland), *sandshoes* (shared with four other counties to the south), and *It*. The six British dialect words that became Australian regional words were drawn from wider areas. The two found in the SE, *snib* and *barley*, are from Scotland and from western counties and the eastern part of Scotland respectively. The two words from Devon, *bars* and *hidey*, became regional words in the SC and SE/SW respectively.



## American English

Australian English and American English have a number of words in common that are not in Standard English use. These may have been brought to Australia by Californian miners or taken to America by Australian miners in the goldrushes from 1849 to the 1860s; they may have been borrowed independently from British slang or dialects (Ramson 1966:132); or they may be later borrowings due to the influence of American culture in Australia since World War II.

Two Australia-wide words were from the US - *rock* 'a stone of any size', and *stroller*.

Four Australian regional words - *cantaloupe*, *Santa Claus*, *garbage can* and *recess* - are from the US, and a further three - *sneakers*, *tennis shoes* and *ice cream soda* - are defined in *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, but not in the British English dictionaries consulted.

These words from American English also do not form a pattern of distribution in Australian English. Three, *cantaloupe*, *tennis shoes* and *sneakers*, are SE words; three, *ice cream soda*, *garbage can* and *Santa Claus*, are NE words; and *recess* is used everywhere.

## Aboriginal languages

Names of Aboriginal origin occur in only three areas of the lexicon studied in this survey, in the categories of plants, shellfish, and stones. In fact, only five items had Aboriginal names. (See the *Australian National Dictionary* (1988), Dixon et al. (1990) and the *Macquarie Dictionary* (1991).) The plants were NE *bindi-eye* (*bindayaa*, from the eastern NSW languages Kamilaroi and Yuwaalaraay); *paddy melon* (from a possible association with a type of wallaby of the same name, *badimaliyan*, probably from Sydney region Dharuk, though the *Macquarie Dictionary* (1991) gives a possible etymology as *paddy field* (from Malay *padi*) + *melon*); and SC *yakka* (probably from a South Australian language). The crustacean was NSW/SE mainland/SC *yabby* (*yabij*, from the western Victorian language Wemba-wemba) and SW *jilgie*, *marron* and *koonac* (*jilgi*, *marran* and *gunag* respectively, all from the Perth-Albany region language Nyungar). The names for stones were NE *gibber* (*giba*, from Sydney region Dharuk), NE *goolie* (probably from a NSW language), SW *boondie* (probably from a Western Australian language), and SE mainland *yinnie* (probably from a Victorian language). *Ronnie* (SC) and *gonnie* (Qld), though not listed in the sources consulted, may also be from Aboriginal languages.

In each case the regional names in Australian English are taken from Aboriginal languages in the same regions. In almost all cases an English word exists alongside the Aboriginal word. For example, *bindi-eyes* are known in parts of the same region as *cat heads* or *cat's eyes*; *yakkas* are also called *blackboys* or *grasstrees* in the SC; *paddy melons* are also called *pig melons* in the SW and *camel melons* in the Riverina; *crayfish* is also used in the *yabby* region, though in the SW only the Aboriginal names were given; and everywhere *goolies*, *gibbers*, *yinnies*, *ronnies* *gonnies* and *boondies* were also called *stones* or *rocks*.

## Proprietary names

The names of foods, such as ice creams and smallgoods, are the most common regional proprietary names found in this survey, though other items may also have less readily identifiable proprietary names, e.g., slippery dip, or traymobile. The lexical usage regions for the names of these items apparently correspond to the distribution networks for the manufacturers. Most of the distribution areas roughly cover States, but in some cases small local manufacturers' areas can be seen, e.g., the manufacturer in northern Queensland, possibly in Townsville, who distributed ice blocks known as *by jingoes* to nearby towns, or the manufacturer in Rockhampton (60) whose locally made *devon*, *Belgium sausage*, was distributed to nearby towns.

Just as the publishers' names of street directories used as generic names indicate which city people in border areas regard as their regional capital (see notes on Item 24), the proprietary names of these foods indicate which towns in border areas people use as their local shopping towns, e.g., informants in Murrayville (252) in Victoria who shop in Pinnaroo (43) over the border in South Australia.

Proprietary names tend to become generic names, and may continue to be used after the manufacturer has changed the name, e.g., *SC dandies* which are now made by a different manufacturer and called *cups*; or stopped making the product, e.g., *Byron sausage*.

## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF LEXICAL USAGE REGIONS

### Original settlement patterns

The geographical extent of the lexical usage regions reflects the pattern of settlement for the regions. For example, the Riverina area of southern NSW was opened up by explorers from NSW, who were followed by settlers who moved stock in from NSW and Queensland in the 1840s and 1850s (White 1968:70). From the 1860s, settlers from Victoria also moved in and established trade links with Melbourne (Blainey 1980:211). This is the transition zone which uses lexical items from both the regions from which it was settled. In the transition zone between the SC and SE, the Mount Gambier district of South Australia was settled from Victoria in 1839, and the early settlers were oriented more to Melbourne than to the State capital, Adelaide (White 1968:278). The terrain surrounding Mount Gambier made Portland in Victoria more easily accessible than Adelaide was (Ferguson 1977:3). In spite of Adelaide's general neglect of the area (p.11), a secession movement in Mount Gambier in the 1860s had not been a threat to Adelaide's influence there (p.26). In this area, both SC and SE lexical items are used, though SC influence is stronger. For the 19 items where SC and SE usage differ, 11 had SC names, three had SE names, and both were used for five.

### Trade and social links

Later trade and social links reinforced the lexical usage patterns established by the early settlers. For example, in the early 1960s, milk was delivered from Tallangatta (292) in Victoria in the SE to Henty (212) in the NE/SE transition zone in southern NSW. Children from the transition zone who go to boarding school are sent to either

Melbourne or Sydney, whereas those in the core of the NSW part of the NE region are sent to Sydney. Use of the name of Melbourne's street directory as a generic name in the southern part of the transition zone also indicates the strong links with Melbourne.

A strong indicator of regional allegiance is the major code of football played. Rugby League, which was first played in Sydney in 1909, is the main code played in the NE. Australian Rules, which was first played in Melbourne in the 1850s, is the main code played in all the southern regions. These codes spread from the capitals to the regions by social contact. The part of NSW in which Australian Rules is played is co-extensive with the SE usage region, with a few towns in the north of the region (where SE lexical use is least strong) also having Rugby League teams. (This was confirmed by checking the type of goal posts at the local oval in each town before interviewing informants during field trips in the transition zone.) People in this part of NSW look to Melbourne as their sport capital.

### Isolation

The relative isolation of the early colonies from each other would have contained regional usage. This contradicts the theory of Thomson (1951:335), who believed that

Regional speech can arise only where communities have been isolated and have had little or no communication with their neighbours. Australia has been settled within a short space of time, during a period when means of communication were relatively efficient, and no part of Australia has been isolated, and, therefore, there is no regional speech in Australia.

Until the separate colonies were connected by telegraph, beginning in 1858 with Melbourne and Adelaide, contact between the colonies involved long and difficult journeys. Melbourne and Sydney, for example, were linked by rail only in 1883 (Larkins 1980:185). Until then contact had been by coastal ships or overland. Travellers in the 1860s from Mt Gambier in south-east South Australia could reach their State capital, Adelaide, 480 km away, by a six and a half day journey overland, or by catching the steamer from nearby Port McDonnell to Melbourne then catching the inter-capital steamer to Adelaide, taking only three and a half days (Ferguson 1977:31). This difficulty of contact would have ensured that the regional words in each region could establish themselves without frequent contact with words for the same items from other colonies.

Marckwardt (1958:142), writing at a time when regional studies of US regional speech were somewhat more advanced than similar studies are in Australia at present, wrote:

... the complete linguistic history, particularly with respect to regional forms, of the United States will not be known until all of the facts concerning the present regional distribution of speech forms have been collected, and until these facts have been collated with the settlement history of the various areas and the speech types employed by the settlers at the time they moved in.

The evidence presented in this chapter for the history of the regionalisms indicates that a fuller diachronic study of the type suggested by Marckwardt is needed here.

## **7 THE NATURE OF REGIONAL LEXICAL VARIATION IN AUSTRALIA**

### **LACK OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This research has used the techniques of dialectology to explore a previously uncharted area of Australian English. Dialectology has traditionally been pragmatic in its approach to the findings of surveys, since it has not worked within a theoretical framework of its own. It has amassed and analysed information and formed generalisations, (e.g., that dialect regions tend to be larger in newly colonised countries), that relate the findings in one country to the findings in others. Different theoretical perspectives in the broader field of linguistics, e.g., generative or structuralist theory, have been applied to dialectology. However, these attempts have been based on regional phonological rather than lexical differences, as structured data, such as phonemic systems, are more easily fitted into theoretical frameworks. Lexical data are relatively unstructured. Changing a word does not upset a system the way a phonological change does. Lexical differences are more sporadic than either phonological or syntactic variation, and more subject to change, as lexical items are easily learnt and easily changed. Hence "it is to phonology that we must look for the most interesting relationships between dialectology and linguistic theory" (Francis 1983:149), while seeing lexical data as part of a body of information which is not part of a system.

The findings of this survey, then, which has collected and analysed lexical data only, fit into the world-wide body of data on regional varieties. The data found here are incremental additions to the body of empirical data from other surveys, and allow comparisons to be made between the nature of regional variation here and in other countries.

### **THE NATURE OF REGIONAL LEXICAL VARIATION IN AUSTRALIA**

#### **Features unique to Australia**

There are several characteristics of regional lexical variation in Australian English that distinguish it from regional language use in the other English-speaking countries where similar surveys have been conducted. Firstly, it has been shown to occur over the whole country only in the aspect of language considered to be the most marginal in identifying regional varieties, i.e., the lexicon. However, this may have more to do with the state of regional studies in Australia than with the nature of regional language here. Regional variation has been shown to exist in the phonology in the eastern State capitals, for example, and possibly in part of inland NSW. Further regional phonological variation may be waiting to be found in other country areas.

Secondly, there is very little variation in the lexicon. Bernard (1989:258) rightly emphasises that "it seems unlikely that the variant elements ... can make up more than a minute fraction of the total lexis of any individual." Although in other countries

regional words probably also form a small proportion of the lexicon, in Australia the number of items known (rather than suspected) so far to have regional names is certainly smaller than the number investigated in other countries. The English survey, for example, contained about 730 questions mainly concerned with the lexicon, and the New England survey about 400. This compares with the 696 items suggested for the Australian corpus of regionalisms (see Table 4.1), of which 186 were selected for trial, and 72 which went into the final survey. Of course, the survey only included terms which were regional in the sense that the items they referred to occur all over Australia. If it had also included words that are regional because the items they refer to occur only in one region, e.g., *pocket* 'small sack' in the potato growing industry in Tasmania (Ramson 1989:79), then the total of Australian regional words would have been much higher.

A third characteristic is the absence of traditional rural dialects. The developing phonological differences between the eastern State capitals may cause differences between urban and rural accents for a while; but if the new forms spread from the capitals to the country, then this will heighten the differences between regions rather than creating a distinction between city and country.

The fourth distinguishing characteristic is the existence of two mutually exclusive classes of regional words, elective and obligatory. This pattern of distribution has not been described in other varieties of English. Maley's observation (1972:68), that there is only a *tendency* to use regional words, may have come about from noticing that people sometimes use elective regional words instead of Australia-wide words. On the other hand, with the obligatory class there is categorical rather than relative use of regional words,

Two contrasting patterns of distribution described in England by Trudgill are not the same as those in Australia. The first has something in common with the Australia-wide/elective regional distribution pattern in Australia, i.e., the use of a term over the whole country, but there the similarity ends. In England in most cases there is a Standard word used everywhere in the country, and in addition regional words in all but one region. "This is because, where regional vocabulary variation existed in the centuries before the development of Standard English, one word from one of the Traditional Dialects usually became the Standard English word, with the other variants remaining characteristic only of regional dialects. In the Traditional dialect area in question, therefore, there will only be one word, while everywhere else there will be two - the local dialect word and the standard word" (1990:105).

This is not the same as the use of Australia-wide and elective regional words in Australia (though the regional words in this case in England may be optionally used in place of Standard words). In Australia, it is not the general pattern to find elective regional words in all but one region - they may occur in only one region, e.g., *duchesse* in Queensland; or in some, e.g., names for smoked cod in three regions; or in all, e.g., the names for stones for throwing. This situation came about for different historical reasons. In most cases there is nothing to suggest that the Australia-wide words were once regional words that spread. There is no record in the literature of Australian English ever having a prestige regional variety which spread, and the

linguistic evidence supports this. If there had been, there would be an identifiable region which had mainly 'standard' words, compared with other regions which had the 'standard' word plus their regional words. No one region has a monopoly on lack of elective regional words. In addition, if there had been a prestige variety, it would probably have been in Sydney or Melbourne (the longest established seats of power, education and wealth), where the Cultivated Australian accent is more widely used than in rural areas. The spread of the prestige variety would probably have taken with it the use of this accent, so that Cultivated would have become the standard accent, and General and particularly Broad would have become regional accents. This is not the case. It seems unlikely, then, that Australia has ever had the pattern Trudgill describes for England.

However, this project has found three instances where this pattern may be starting to occur, but the words are spreading from three different regions, none of which is more prestigious than the others. It is apparent from the age of the informants that what was once a clear pattern of obligatory regional use is becoming less distinct as one of the obligatory regional names is beginning to spread into other regions with their own obligatory regional names. NSW *Santa Claus* (Item 37) is spreading into the southern regions and Queensland; southern *spider* (Item 40) is spreading into the NE; and Queensland *little lunch* (Item 57) is spreading into NSW. All these changes are spreading via younger speakers. These may eventually become Australia-wide words, with the older terms in the regions being invaded becoming elective regional words used alongside the new Australia-wide words.

The second pattern of distribution in England described by Trudgill has something in common with the use of obligatory regional terms in Australia, i.e., the use of regional words only, because of the lack of a term used everywhere in the country. "There are also ... quite a number of cases where the Traditional Dialects have words which have *no* counterpart in Standard English at all - where the Traditional Dialects have words for objects or concepts which do not exist in the Modern Dialects, and where, therefore, we can say that none of the variants available has made it into the standard" (1990:107-8). This is because Standard English is associated with middle class urban people not familiar with rural life. In this survey, this difference between rural and urban experience did not fit the definition of *regional*, i.e., the items had to occur over the whole country. Names for rural activities are not familiar to city people in the same way that city experience, such as having names for security guards on suburban trains, is not familiar to rural people. In Australia, the obligatory regional words are used for objects and concepts which exist all over Australia, not just in rural areas.

### **Comparison with other countries**

Australian regional usage shares many of the characteristics of other colonised countries. The regional varieties became established and spread in similar ways, with the origins of the settlers determining at the outset the distribution of later regional dialects. This is how the regional dialects in present-day England began. The Angles, Saxons and Jutes who invaded Britain in the 400s settled in different parts of the country, and "the approximate boundaries of these areas continue to be discernible ...

in some rural dialect characteristics today" (Trudgill 1984:9). In the United States, the compromises between the regional dialects of the settlers described by Marckwardt (1958:140-1) established the regional varieties in the first colonies on the Atlantic seaboard; and these were carried to the newly settled inland areas (Allen 1973:126). In New Zealand, some of the regional differences can be traced to the early European settlers, such as the Scots who settled the Otago and Southland districts of the South Island (Gordon and Deverson 1985:59). In Australia, we have seen that the regional varieties established from the beginning by the early settlers laid the foundations of the present usage regions.

In the United States, "speech expansion areas" correspond roughly to different phases in the westward movement of settlers (Allen 1973:124); "isogloss bands have to be treated as successive waves in the transition from one core area to another" (Reed 1967:42). By contrast, movement inland in Australia carried the speech of the capitals into the interior of each region, so that regional speech is the same all over the region except for isolated pockets such as towns where local food manufacturers used their own local names for their products. The heteroglosses show the limits of movement inland, not progressive stages in the movement. In the United States, where population movement carried eastern speech westwards, there was considerable mixing of the eastern settlers in the western colonies, so that in the far west it is difficult to disentangle dialect origins (Reed 1967:41). In Australia, there is one part of the country where it is most evident that the speech of the early settlers mingled, but this is where settlers from opposite directions met. This is the NE/SE transition zone, where the regional speech of settlers coming from the north co-exists with that of settlers from the south, but the origins are easily seen.

The present stage of regional usage in Australia has similarities with the United States at an earlier stage, while the stage New Zealand is at now has similarities with Australia in the recent past. In all three countries at these stages, the uniformity of the language was regarded as one of their most striking features, while there was doubt about the existence of regional differences. As we saw in Chapter 6, regional uniformity in Australia drew much attention, e.g., "The English spoken in Australia appears to be quite extraordinarily uniform over the whole extent of the land " (Bernard 1969:62).

Such observations are reminiscent of those of Mencken on American English half a century ago. As late as 1936, at the time when the first of the United States regional surveys was investigating "the large and vexatious subject of regional differences in usage" (p.vii), he referred to the uniformity of American English throughout the country:

In place of the discordant local dialects of all the other major countries, including England, we have a general *Volkssprache* for the whole nation, and if it is conditioned at all it is only by minor differences in pronunciation and vocabulary, and by the linguistic struggles of various groups of newcomers. No other country can show such linguistic solidarity, nor any approach to it. (p.90).



This parallels the situation by observers of Australian English in the 1960s and 1970s. Marckwardt (1958:132) quotes several early observers of American English who had commented on regional diversity, but <sup>also</sup> others who had commented on regional uniformity. He believed that both views were right - "People in various parts of the United States do not all speak alike, but there is greater uniformity here than in England or in the countries of Western Europe" (p.132). The linguistic solidarity of the United States was in fact shown by the regional studies to contain considerable regional diversity. In Australia, people in different parts do not all speak alike, but there is greater uniformity here than in England or the countries of Western Europe. The studies now being made of regional differences here are showing that the regional uniformity of Australian English also contains regional diversity.

(In passing, the various groups of newcomers to Australia since the original British settlement have left little mark on Australian English, no doubt "partly because Australians have been unreceptive, often hostile, to any way of living other than their own" (Ramson 1966:159). Only the names of foods introduced by the newcomers seem to have made an impact on the language, and these do not have regional names in Australia, with the reported exception of *kabana* (Victoria)~*cabannosi* (NSW), a long, thin smoked sausage.)

In New Zealand, where regional studies are beginning, "there are constant reports from many people that such differences do actually exist", though the small amount of research so far has not confirmed this (Gordon and Deverson 1985:61). This has some similarities with the situation in Australia early in this project. The contributors to the corpus of regionalisms, for example, had all noticed that regional differences existed, in spite of the prevailing view at that time that the language was regionally uniform. The situation in Australia was different, however, in that the first research, the pilot study for this project, showed clearly that regional differences did exist.

Seen in the context of other countries colonised comparatively recently, the uniformity of Australian English is put into perspective by Trudgill (1986:145): "This uniformity appears to be quite typical of the initial stages of mixed, colonial varieties ..., with degree of uniformity being in inverse proportion to historical depth."

Another characteristic of recently colonised countries is the comparatively large size of their dialect regions: "... in more recently settled regions, like North America and Australia, it is becoming apparent that dialect features tend to be shared over relatively great distances when the settlement history goes back only one or two centuries" (Chambers and Trudgill 1980:108); and "Dialects of colonial areas are ... more often uniform over a wider area than those of the smaller areas of a mother country" (Reed 1967:3). (In fact, "It is often possible to tell where an English person comes from to within about 15 miles or less" (Trudgill 1990:9). In Australia, at best it is usually only possible to tell which transition zone a person comes from; or in a very few cases which town, if they use the local name for one of some manufactured foods.) By coincidence, the mother countries of colonial Englishes have been geographically small, so that their dialect areas are necessarily small; while of recently colonised countries where English has become the main language, the most thoroughly studied have been geographically large. The size of the dialect regions in newly



settled countries may be a function of the room to spread as much as of linguistic and historical factors. Two smaller colonised countries, New Zealand (Gordon and Deverson 1985:59) and the Falkland Islands (Trudgill 1986:128), are counter-examples, though little is known yet about regional differences in them. In the larger countries, it is difficult to speculate on whether they will develop smaller dialect regions after a long history of settlement or if population density increases. Better transport and communication have largely eliminated the isolation which allowed dialect regions in older countries to be small and sharply differentiated.

In Australia and the country most similar to it geographically and historically, the United States, the usage regions are certainly large. (In the United States, English has been established for under 400 years, and in Australia for just over 200 years. The area of the United States is roughly 9.4 million square kilometres, and of Australia roughly 7.7 million square kilometres.) One dialect region in the United States, for example, the Midland region of the Atlantic states is about 950 km at its widest (derived from Davis 1983:35), and the Upper Midwest is about 1320 km at its widest (derived from Davis 1983:38); while in Australia the mainland SE region is about 640 km at its widest, and the NE region is about 2,700 km from north to south.

The United States, although a comparatively newly colonised country, has one feature of older countries that Australia does not have. The New England survey found that many relics of older usage remained in areas away from the main urban settlements (Davis 1983:25). These "indicate a late stage in the displacement of a formerly widespread linguistic feature by an innovation" (Chambers and Trudgill 1980:109). The only instances in Australia of different (but not necessarily older) usage in outlying areas appear not to be relics of earlier usage left when newer usage spread from the main urban settlements. One instance was the use of SE *dixie* (Item 3) in the *dandy* region in the SC. The other was the use of NE *peewee* (Item 26) between the regions of SC *Murray magpie* and SE *mudlark*. Further evidence is needed on whether the terms now used in the isolated outlying areas were ever used in the surrounding areas.

Another characteristic shared with other countries is the similarity of the categories of items with regional names. Kurath (1939:1) believed that regional differences occur more "in the homely vocabulary of the family and the farm than in the vocabulary of 'society' and of urban areas". He called them 'humble words', though presumably he meant names for humble things. In the Australian survey, all except perhaps one of the items (hospital trolley) were humble or mundane things.

## REASONS REGIONAL LEXICAL VARIATION REMAINED UNNOTICED

"There are just so few difficulties involved in communicating in another part of the country that uniformity here is much more striking than divergence and it is not surprising that the realisation that lexical variation is as significant as it nevertheless is has been so slow in coming" (Bernard 1989:258). Several factors have interacted to cause regional lexical variation to go largely unnoticed until the early 1980s, in spite of the fact that it has probably existed since the early years of Australian English.

## **Large regions**

Given the large size of the usage regions, it is possible to travel hundreds of kilometres, even in the more closely settled parts of the country, without encountering any regional changes in the lexicon. This, of course, makes the language seem very uniform when speakers are surrounded on all sides by people whose lexicon is the same as their own. Reed (1967:3) also found that because dialects in colonial areas are often uniform over a wide area, people living in a relatively new territory, such as the Pacific Northwest of North America, rarely notice dialect differences in the speech around them.

In Australia, not only are the usage regions large, the transition zones between some regions are also large. When the transition zone is larger than the focal area, as in the case of the NE/SE transition zone and the SE focal area, it is not surprising that the existence of the region has not been well recognised.

## **"Humble words"**

The items which have regional names, Kurath's "humble words", are things which are seldom mentioned in public utterances, e.g., household objects and childhood activities. They are used in areas of life shared by all speakers, but because of their mundane nature, they are unlikely to be spoken about outside the speaker's immediate circle, and hence do not become widely known. Many of the contributors to the corpus of regionalisms reported that they only became aware of regional differences when they visited or were visited by relatives who lived in other States. Even then, the items which show regional variation form such a small part of the lexicon as a whole that they are usually dismissed as sporadic oddities.

However, these two characteristics of regional speech in Australia, large regions and humble words, are shared by other relatively recently colonised countries such as the United States and Canada, so that other factors must have been at work to have caused regional variation to go unnoticed in Australia.

## **Lack of other regional linguistic features**

People are likely to think of traditional rural dialects when they think of regional speech, and because there are no traditional rural dialects in Australia, this may have led people into thinking that there was no regional speech here. The speech community therefore did not perceive the few examples of regional words known to most people as constituting regionality. The examples did not fit part of a known pattern, and so were thought of as isolated cases.

There is not enough easily recognisable regional variation in the phonology to make regional accents easily recognisable by the speech community, and it is possible that this led to the misapprehension that regional lexical variation was also absent.

Because the standard language is the same everywhere, no area can claim to have the prestige variety of the language, so that there is no socio-political significance in

the regional lexical varieties. This lack of association between prestige and regional variation may also have contributed to the common lack of awareness of its existence.

### Complexity of distribution

The complexity of the pattern of regional distribution obscures its existence, particularly in the eastern mainland. In the SW and SC, regionality is more readily detected because it is less complex, so that speakers can refer unequivocally to the SW names for items such as the double gee, for example. Where there are sub-regions, minor sub-regions and local regions within one of the main regions, the NE, this makes the pattern of regionality more difficult to see. A speaker in central western NSW, for example, has a choice of *yabby* (the eastern mainland term), *crayfish* (the NE regional synonym), *craybob* (the inland NSW term), or *craydab* (the central western NSW term). When viewed from a local perspective, these terms seem like synonyms, not layers of increasingly localised regional terms.

### Confusion with other types of lexical variation

Synonymy, both in the language at large and as part of the regional pattern, obscures regional variation. Most synonymous terms are used Australia-wide - *bitumen~asphalt~tar*, or *pillow case~pillow slip*, for example. However, when an Australia-wide term and an elective regional term are both used in the same region, *regional synonymy* occurs, e.g., *guttering* and *spouting* in the SE. With so much synonymy in the lexicon generally, plus regional synonymy, it is easy for speakers in the regions where elective regional terms are used synonymously with Australia-wide terms to be unaware that one of the terms is a regional one. Furthermore, synonymy obscures the overlapping of regional terms in the transition zones. It is easy to mistake the use of two regional terms in a transition zone for another case of synonymy, e.g., *bindi* from the SE and *three corner jack* from the SC in the north-west of Victoria.

*Regional homonymy*, e.g., the use of *bindi* for two different weeds in inland NSW (Item 10), also plays a part in obscuring the existence of regional variation. The various uses of *tank* and *dam* illustrate this. *Tank*(1) (used Australia-wide), a large, closed, corrugated galvanised iron container for storing rainwater above ground, and *tank*(2), (reported from the fruit-growing districts of Victoria and South Australia), a large, open, concrete container for storing water in the ground, form a regionally homonymous pair. *Tank*(1) and *tank*(3) (reported from far western NSW), an excavated waterhole with earth banks, used for storing water for stock, also form a regionally homonymous pair. *Tank*(3) (in far western NSW) and *dam*(1) (elsewhere), the type on a farm, form part of a regional pattern. This use of *dam*(1) in turn is part of a further regionally homonymous pair, *dam*(1), (everywhere but far western NSW) and *dam*(2) (Australia-wide), a barrier across a river.

A related phenomenon, which could be called *neighbouring homonymy*, further obscures regional variation. This occurs when different referents in neighbouring regions have the same name. It also occurs in North America, where Reed (1967:42) calls it "secondary semantic differentiation": *pail* in the North "does not mean the same thing" as *pail* in the Midland. Two examples of neighbouring homonymy were

found in the Australian survey. *Footpath* (the grassed type - Item 48) in the SE, SC and SW "does not mean the same thing", i.e., apply to the same referent, as *footpath* in the NE and SC (Item 7); and *spinach* applies to different referents in the NE and SE. (For some speakers, this causes a problem, which evidently arises because Australians think Australian English is uniform, and therefore expect that the word they apply to a particular referent will apply to the same referent everywhere. On most items covered in this survey, informants were prepared to regard speakers who used terms different from their own as simply different, but with *footpath* and *spinach*, many SE speakers were adamant that NE speakers are wrong when they call different but related things by these names.)

It is only when a nation-wide survey is done that the different types of lexical variation can be separated into regional and non-regional patterns.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER WORK

This project has shown that regional variation in the lexicon of Australian English exists, and that it has several characteristics which set it apart from regional usage in other varieties of English. Not only does it exist, it has probably existed since early in the history of Australian English.

The findings of this project suggest possibilities for further research in regional studies of the lexicon. A fine-grained survey is needed in the parts of the country where only a broad-grained survey was carried out this time, to investigate whether there are further sub-regions not found in this survey. For example, some minor differences were found within the Queensland sub-region of the NE, but there may be more systematic differences - "There does seem to be a split between north and south Queensland, although nobody wants to plot it on a map. My students tell me Mackay would be a starting place to examine the split" (Dr Anna Shnukal, p.c. 19.9.1986). Particular attention also needs to be paid to the Northern Territory and the north of Western Australia. Other lexical items not covered in this survey from the corpus of regionalisms need investigation. There is also a need to investigate other aspects of the language. Observations of possible regional syntactic variation are now at the stage observations of regional lexical variation were at when this project began; an investigation of a similar scope may find a pattern of regional differences here too. The work undertaken by Bradley and others has found the beginnings of development of regional accents in the capital cities, and country regions need to be monitored for the spread of these differences from the capitals.

When further work is done in all these aspects of the language, it is possible that it will be found that Australia is entering the stage when (to quote Bradley 1980:84) "[regional] developments will continue and expand as Australia enters its third century of English-speaking settlement."