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Here, there and everywhere

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Here, there and everywhere

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I was brought up in Sydney and have never lost parts of my Australian accent. Fortunately I grew up before the Australian English KIT vowel rose to its current high front position, so although students still notice that vowel in my speech, it's never been the exaggerated *feesh* that New Zealanders love to make fun of. I did grow up with TRAP vowels in the *dance, chance, answer* set of words, something I rapidly changed to START once we arrived in New Zealand. My parents sent me to a private girls school because it taught physics and chemistry as separate subjects rather than a combined general science course. I started out to do a full science course at school, but in my final year realised that my interests lay much more in the humanities area and took honours papers in both English and French. Fortunately, my school did not offer maths honours, or I would have taken that and dropped physics. This would have been very unhelpful, since I've used my high school physics in much of my subsequent acoustic phonetics research.

My class mates were very disappointed in my decision to study English and French at Sydney University. Because I had done well at school, everyone expected me to go into medicine – a field that has never attracted me in the least. I've never actually taken a course called 'linguistics'. Linguistics was a subject in stage 2 and 3 at Sydney, but because I was taking honours papers in both English and French, there was no room in my degree for me to take it. I had assumed that I would focus on English literature, but literary criticism following F. R. Leavis made no sense to me. We were introduced to the study of language in our first year English course. From the start, I found phonetic transcription easy – in contrast to the literary criticism being taught, phonetics was something that just 'made sense'. In our third year English course, we had to choose between focusing on language or literature. I moved into the language stream with decided relief. We all studied old and middle English. I was also taking French Honours at that stage, and the English department had a course called Anglo Norman on their books. It was not currently being offered, but I persuaded them to work with the French department and let me take the course. In my fourth year I had to choose between taking the honours course in English or French. At that stage I still wanted to do both, but chose English first. I sat in on my friends' courses in Old and Middle French and they sat in on my courses in Phonetics and language analysis. Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* had recently been published and the new method of analysis was producing much excitement. Arthur Delbridge supervised my honours thesis on the work and analytical methods of Raymond Firth and his school, and John Bernard introduced me to the delights of instrumental phonetics and the sound spectrograph.

After my English honours year, I decided not to pursue honours in French. Arthur Delbridge was moving to Macquarie University, where Alex Mitchell was the Vice Chancellor, to set up the department of Linguistics. Mitchell and Delbridge had just published their large scale survey of the speech patterns of Australian adolescents (Mitchell and Delbridge 1965) which had identified three types of Australian English, cultivated, general and broad, categories that did not transfer easily to New Zealand English when I later started to analyse it. For my master's thesis *Intelligibility of Australian English Vowels* I used these three categories to look at intelligibility of Australian English vowels in noise. This was an acoustic study using the old Sound Spectrograph which burnt spectrograms onto heat sensitive paper, and took 5 minutes to analyse just over 2 seconds of speech. It then took another 5 minutes if you wanted to do a spectral slice to look at the intensities of the harmonics. It took a long time to make all the spectrograms I needed. Although I have never smoked, I suspect that the smoke from all these spectrograms will have left their mark on my lungs... From this study I realised the importance of the second formant for intelligibility. The development of Praat and computerised acoustic analysis has greatly speeded up this process, but not removed the need for manual checking of automatically generated results.

I won a Commonwealth Scholarship to London where I studied at UCL under Adrian Fourcin. We worked in the 'hut', a work space built above a fully sound-proofed booth where we made many of our recordings. Adrian had started to work on his laryngograph but there were some problems with the initial versions. We used to tape the electrodes to the metal struts in the hut to listen to Radio 4 but it only seemed to work at night... I was fortunate to study with a stimulating group of people. We didn't have to do course work for a British PhD, but we all attended as many of the courses offered by the Phonetics and Linguistics departments as we could fit in. Articulatory phonetics courses with Gordon Arnold and Doc O'Connor were a revelation in difficulty. The Australian students discovered that we could always pick a central open vowel because it was our Australian START vowel. My thesis was on the *Effects of Source Inference on Speech Perception* and involved playing synthesised vowel sounds in noise with a carrier phrase spoken by a child or an adult. To my delight, the different carrier phrase did affect perception (see Ladefoged and Broadbent 1957), and again the second formant was particularly important.

I met Robert while I was in London and we married and moved to New Zealand in 1972 after I finished my thesis. Initially, Rob had a one-year appointment. I was very glad when it became permanent and we decided to stay in New Zealand. I was fortunate to meet Elizabeth Gordon soon after we arrived in Christchurch. She was expecting her second child and her head of department was not at all happy for her to teach. I taught some of her stage 1 English language classes, and the student feedback was very clear that my lectures were not nearly as good as hers! Elizabeth has remained a wonderful friend and colleague ever since.

I was not able to get a position at Canterbury University but at the end of 1972 I was invited to take some phonetics classes in the speech therapy course at the Teachers' College (as it was then). The following year this developed into a part-time position and eventually became full-time in 1998. I remained happily in the department and now, in retirement, hold an Adjunct position there. I was asked to

teach phonetics and linguistics including language acquisition. This was an exciting time – the field of language acquisition was being developed with Roger Brown’s work just appearing. There were no text books and no set courses – the students and I invented the course as we went along. I inherited a ‘baby study’ where students spent a day a week for a year with a family who had a new born baby. I changed it to half a day a week and made it a child study where we observed families with a 2- to 3-year-old as well as a new-born so the students could observe the emergence and amazing growth of language. We soon established *de facto* norms for language development in New Zealand and the students had the joy of observing the messy reality of a family with two small children – I always hoped it made them more realistic with what they asked of parents who brought children into the clinic. The notes from the language development course later became the basis for *Talking Baby* (Maclagan and Buckley 2016) which is probably my most useful publication. It is directed at parents and grandparents and describes normal language development from an Australasian perspective.

The one disadvantage, academically, with being at the Teachers’ College was that there was no research culture at that time, so I dropped out of research for several years. I still remember the generosity of a \$100 grant my head of department was able to wrangle for me. I had discovered that biology had a sound spectrograph, so I bought spectrogram paper and started my analysis of NZE vowels. It seemed fitting that the subsequent paper was published in the *Speech Therapists Journal* (Maclagan 1982). In 1983 Elizabeth Gordon and I started our long-running study of the NEAR/SQUARE contrast (or lack of contrast) in NZE. We repeated this study 3 more times at 5-yearly intervals, visiting the same 4 schools each time. In the 1983 study approximately 50% of the token pairs were distinguished. By the 1998 study the percentage of pairs pronounced differently had dropped to just 25% (Gordon and Maclagan 1985, 1989, 2001, Maclagan and Gordon 1996). We had not realised change could happen so fast!

Elizabeth and I started the New Zealand English course in 1994, over the objections of some faculty members who could not see that NZE was worth studying. The University of Canterbury had purchased a copy of the Mobile Unit (MU) tapes in 1989, and Elizabeth had already started working on them. As part of the NZE course the students recorded speakers designed to create a sociolinguistic database. These speakers eventually became the Canterbury Corpus (Maclagan and Gordon 1999) and, together with the MU speakers form part of the Origins of New Zealand (ONZE) database (Gordon, Maclagan and Hay 2007). The ONZE speakers allowed us to trace the development of NZE from some of the earliest speakers – Hannah Cross was born in Dunedin in 1851 – to the present day (Gordon et al. 2004). The resources of the ONZE database are still providing fruitful material for new generations of researchers. Most recently I analysed the incidence of vocal fry (creaky voice) in the young women in the Canterbury Corpus to investigate any change over time (Hornibrook, Ormand and Maclagan 2018). The number of words spoken with vocal fry in a 10-minute segment of these interviews doubled in groups of speakers born 10 years apart.

There were 10 Māori speakers among the recordings in the Mobile Unit archive. Jeanette King and I decided to develop a Māori archive, MAONZE (Māori and NZE) to parallel the ONZE archive (King et al. 2011). We were joined by Ray Harlow from

Waikato and Catherine Watson and Peter Keegan from Auckland. We were lucky enough to obtain a Marsden grant which enabled us to record 10 Kaumātua and 10 young Māori speakers, with five of the young speakers being first language and five second language speakers of Māori. All were recorded for an hour speaking in English and an hour in Māori. We were awarded a second Marsden grant to record and analyse a parallel corpus of female speakers. In total the MAONZE corpus now contains 61 speakers. With these speakers we were able to track the rapid changes in Māori pronunciation over the last 100+ years (Watson et al. 2016). These changes have largely come about because of the influence of NZE. This work has moved from sociolinguistics into the field of sociophonetics – the detailed differences in pronunciation for people from different social classes, and for NZ, different language backgrounds, in both the pronunciation of NZE and Māori. My fascination with formant frequencies that started with my Masters thesis has continued throughout the ONZE and MAONZE work as we tracked the movements of the NZE and Māori vowels. The high front corner of the NZE vowel space is becoming very crowded, especially for our young Māori speakers who often have FLEECE, DRESS, NURSE and GOOSE all in the same area. NURSE and GOOSE are distinguished from FLEECE and DRESS by some lip-rounding, but there is little to separate the two unrounded or the two rounded vowels from each other (see Watson et al. 2016 for Māori and Maclagan and Hay 2007 and Maclagan et al. 2017 for NZE.)

I have always been fascinated by language change, usually pronunciation change over time. Since 2005 I have worked with Boyd Davis of UNCC-Charlotte on retained language skills even as language deteriorates for people with dementia of the Alzheimer's type. We have focused particularly on our interviewees' desire to continue to communicate and on the ways in which they continue to tell parts of their personal stories (for examples see Davis and Maclagan 2009 and 2018).

I have supervised relatively few post-graduate students; students in linguistics looked to my colleagues in that department, and speech pathology students looked to my colleagues with qualifications in that area. However, one of the exciting features of working with a team is helping to supervise the research assistants who take part in the on-going projects. At the start of the ONZE project, Jen Hay was one of our post-doctoral students. She is now a valued colleague who continues to carry out research in NZE. Students in the NZE course produced publishable research projects (D. Maclagan 1998, Looser 1999, Nicholas 2000, Baird 2001, Wood 2003, Barton 2004, Hornibrook 2006). Some, like Diana Looser and Toby Macrae, have gone on to do PhDs elsewhere, others have done Masters theses in NZ. While their post-graduate research may not be on NZE, they are valuable members of the academic community.

One of the advantages of working with established databases is that I can continue to carry out research in retirement without on-going funding. The study of language fascinated me during my BA degree; 50+ years later I still find it a fascinating area. NZE has been a particularly fruitful area to study: changes have happened so fast that at times we have said that grandparents and grandchildren are misunderstanding each other. We continue to find little evidence of dialect difference around New Zealand. Features like the Southland /r/ or the Ngai Tahu /k/ for /ŋ/ are very important for those who use the particular features but are not in themselves sufficient to create regional dialects. In our MAONZE analysis of NZE we have not

yet seen a reversal of the NZE front vowel raising that is evident in Australian English. I wait with interest to see how the ever-changing NZ accent moves next.

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