

NEW news OLD news: A study of spoken Australian English in news broadcast speech.

The notion of language as a marker of identity is usefully explored in relation to broadcast speech. Since the media tends to act as a social mirror, we can trace our developing Australian self through the way we represent ourselves on the airwaves. Newsreaders' speech, like all spoken language, is subject to change over time, and although we now take it for granted that the majority of our presenters speak with an accent which identifies them as Australian, it was not always so. For some twenty years broadcasting clung to the inherited British model of Received Pronunciation (RP), dismissing Australian English as an inappropriate and inferior variety for this purpose. It was not until the 1970s that the colonial mantle was finally shed, and audiences could hear something of themselves on the airwaves.

Archival news footage is thus a rich source of evidence of Australia's development from colonial outpost to independent nation. The current linguistic research is a true 'real time' study, in that archival recordings of news bulletins were obtained for a total of 25 male and female newsreaders from radio and television, who were subsequently re-recorded reading excerpts from this material. Using a combined auditory and acoustic approach I focus on vowel quality as the primary indicator of accent change over time. In this session I will present my findings from 8 speakers, which suggest that over a 25-year period the newsreading voice has shifted from an approximation of the early BBC English accent towards a 'General' Australian accent. Such findings are in keeping with changes observed by other researchers as currently taking place in the broader community.