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ÉVA FORINTOS

Bruce Moore (2008). *Speaking Our Language: The Story of Australian English*. South Melbourne, Victoria: Oxford University Press, Australia & New Zealand. 225 pages.

Speaking Our Language – The Story of Australian English is based on the research conducted in the Australian National Dictionary Centre at the Australian National University. The author, Bruce Moore, a distinguished Australian lexicographer is director of the Centre and has published numerous Australian dictionaries, for instance, the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary*.

The book reviewed is a comprehensive survey covering the process during which Australian English was established and recognised as the 'natural and national language of Australia.' At the same time it provides explanation for the origin of the Australian accent and vocabulary. Throughout the book, there are numerous stories of Australian history – interspersed with personal accounts and experiences – and culture which together with the language, have contributed to the development of Australian identity.

The focus

The volume is divided into fourteen chapters, preceded by an introduction, in which the author refers to the argument about whether the Australian accent was transported to Australia from London, or whether it was fashioned in Australia. He also discusses that the Australian accent was established by the early 1830s. It is made clear in the introduction that accent and vocabulary are clearly focused on in the text, since the divergences in other areas of the language are insignificant.

The reader

Although the intended readership of the volume is the general reader with an interest in the history and distinguishing features of Australian English since no expert linguistic terminology is used in the book, it is undoubtedly a useful dialogue for undergraduates and for those who already have some background in the

study of the English language and English linguistics. No separate bibliography is provided, but as an alternative, the address of a recurrently updated homepage is given, where a list of thematically organised books and articles are available.

In the short section titled *Some Features of Australian Speech* the main general points are explained in which Australian English differs from Received Pronunciation, e.g., vowels and diphthongs, and a selection of other aspects regarding the sound of Australian English.

Borrowings from Aboriginal languages

Chapter 1 is devoted to borrowings taken from the indigenous languages, e.g., the native languages of Aboriginal people, the first and the best-known of which is *kangaroo*, which has become one of the most productive words in Australian English. At the time of the arrival of the first settlers Australia was a multilingual territory with approximately 250 distinct Aboriginal languages with numerous dialects. Words were borrowed at the point of the first contact but there was little continuing contact with the indigenous peoples and their languages. Many of the 440 Aboriginal words are superseded and the ones used currently are generally names of flora and fauna.

Naming strategies

The next two chapters cover the era when the convict colony was established and analyses the terms that contributed to the structuring of the convict society as well as the new naming strategy, used to name the new flora and fauna, which meant making comparisons between known animals and plants. In order to designate the dissimilarity between Australian and European animals and plants, the Australian word was often preceded by a term, the earliest of which was *wild*. The author states that many of the terms created during that period are basically known in historical contexts; consequently, they have principally historical importance. There is only a small number of terms in contemporary Australian English that can be attributed

to the convict era.

Conflicts

In later sections the emphasis falls on the conflict between natives (born in Australia) and immigrants, which was played out linguistically from the 1820s as a conflict between currency and sterling. Moreover there is evidence for the continuing notion that Britain is 'home,' even for people who were born in the colony, which lasted well into the 20th century. The term *new chum* and its origin are provided to further illustrate the conflict between currency and sterling. The etymology of the two early slang terms for a British migrant, *pom* and *jimmigrant*, is discussed in detail in the chapter, at the end of which the author concludes that there were Australianisms and colonialisms in the language at the time, but the issue of an Australian accent during this period is detailed in the next section. A major difficulty with any theory about the development of the Australian accent is that it is so homogeneous across the huge continent. According to the author a potential scenario is that the accent was established in Sydney and spread to other midpoints of the settlement. During the first two-thirds of the 19th century Australian English was considered a 'pure' form of English, for it contained no dialectal elements, and it continued to be spoken without any noteworthy negative remarks until the 1880s.

Gold rushes and the Australian accent

Moore draws the attention to the fact that the astonishing social and economic changes triggered by the gold rushes incorporated changes in the language. The author declares that Australians were on the move at the time and they carried the goldfield terminology with them, so the gold rushes are probable in having an essential role in enforcing the homogeneity of the accent across the continent. The author discusses the few British dialectal words which have never been adopted as a constituent of Standard English, but made their way into mainstream Australian English. Borrowing from British dialects and other variations of

English started after the Australian accent had been established, because by then it was ready to increase and stabilise its core vocabulary. The reason why many more British dialectal words were borrowed in the subsequent sixty years (1850-1909) than in the first (1788-1849) is also explained.

At a later stage Moore makes it clear that in Australia there was no explicit intervention in the artificial production of a new language, but there developed a language that indicated a considerable differentiation from British English. Additionally, it was considered that there was sufficient new material to produce a dictionary of Australianisms. Morris's *Austral English: A Dictionary of Australasian Words, Phrases and Usages* is published in 1898, which work – according to Moore – was not surpassed until the publication of the *Australian National Dictionary* in 1988.

During the first part of the 20th century there was a change in the attitude towards Australian English, when the Australian accent became a target for rather extensive criticism – Moore states. The three varieties (Broad Australian, General Australian, Cultivated Australian), which were proposed by Mitchell and Delbridge in the 1960s are also referred to in the very same chapter mentioning that the Cultivated variety was desired to produce a language closer to the new English standard of RP. Cultivated Australian represented British imperialism, which involved linguistic correctness and social hierarchy, whereas Broad Australian gave voice to Australian nationalism and embodied cultural values typical of the bush traditions, e.g., egalitarianism. It was in this period, 1900 to 1965, that several new words were created in Australian English, in which process the two world wars were driving forces.

Australian English became nationalised during the period between 1966 to 1988, which heralded a time

Accent varieties and Australian nationalism in the 20th century

when Cultivated Australian was almost eliminated and Broad Australian was severely weakened. This was the period when complaints about the Australian accent mainly vanished. There were, however, complaints about the influence of American English, but the author concludes that after 60 years of being exposed to American films, music, etc., the Australian accent has remained entirely unaffected. With this remark he suggests that accent is the most important linguistic marker of identity. The regional variations in terms of grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary are also studied with regard to both synonyms and core terms throughout the states and territories of Australia, and the author concludes that although there are differences in the vocabulary, dialects of Australian English cannot be identified thus making Australian English an extremely consistent language.

The present and the future of Australian English

The period called multiculturalism is described in one of the chapters, which replaced the assimilationist policy, also known as White Australia Policy. In addition to Aboriginal Englishes, migrant Englishes, e.g. ethnolects emerged then, furthermore radio stations were established. The *National Policy on Languages* published in 1987 supported that bilingualism should be encouraged as a positive value to both individuals and society.

The final chapter sheds light on the future prospects of Australian English, about which the author is optimistic, since he is of the opinion that it is not weakened by either Global English or the Internet. He proves this by adding that although new words, idioms and meanings continue to be created, the accent – unaffected by external influences – remains stable.

To conclude, this comprehensive volume in its diversity makes the book attractive not only to native speakers of Australian English, who will see their own 'story' revealed and considered, but also to foreign readers who would like to learn more about the history

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of the Australian English language. The story of Australian English proves that the development of a language's regional variation influences and contributes to the national identity of its speakers, which can help facilitate the intergenerational transmission of communities and languages.