

SOME ELEMENTS OF AUSTRALIAN SPEECH: VOWEL SOUNDS

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Abstract

The increasing use of English as a means of global communication, often between non-native speakers, has led to wider exposure to, and awareness of, different varieties and accents of English. In this paper, the author, an Australian native speaker teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Thailand, attempts to highlight some of the features of Australian pronunciation which distinguish it from other varieties. In particular, it is contrasted with the British "prestige" variety Received Pronunciation (RP). The emphasis in the paper is on vowel sounds since these are often the elements of Australian pronunciation most easily distinguishable to the listener.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing use of English as a global language has many implications both for learners and teachers of the language (see Van Essen, 2004, for example). One important development is that English is increasingly being used as a medium for interaction between users for whom English is not their first language. Indeed, many researchers (see Graddol, 1997, for example) have pointed out that the number of non-native English speakers vastly outnumbers native speakers and this disparity is likely to continue to grow. This broader use of English has, amongst other things, led to greater attention being given, both in research and teaching, to different varieties and dialects of English.

Traditionally, and even still today in some quarters, certain varieties of English, notably British "Received Pronunciation" (RP) and General American (GenAm), are seen as "prestige" varieties. This has led to being proficient in such varieties becoming an idealized goal, particularly in terms of pronunciation and accent, for many non-native learners of English. Other varieties of En-

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English exist, however, and in an environment of both increasing global use of English and increasingly easy global communication, such varieties are heard and spoken more widely than before.

The author of this paper is an English native speaker, born and educated in Australia. Since 1996, he has taught English as a foreign language (EFL) at an international university in Bangkok, Thailand. The international nature of the university means that instructors from over 60 nations teach a (predominantly Thai) student body using English as the medium of instruction. Obviously then, students are exposed to a rich range of varieties, dialects, and accents of English. Such exposure should, hopefully, assist students when they graduate to function effectively in English in a variety of contexts and with a variety of speakers, both native and non-native.

Aware that his own accent is neither RP nor standard American, the author felt it may be of interest to his colleagues, and perhaps to the broader community of interested students and lay people, to highlight some aspects of his own accent, particularly those that distinguish his pronunciation of English from the pronunciation of his colleagues from a variety of nations.

The purpose of this paper then, is to highlight some aspects of Australian pronunciation of English, particularly insofar as such pronunciation may differ from Received Pronunciation (RP). The paper focuses on Australian vowel sounds since it is here that the greatest distinctions between Australian speech and RP exist. No significant discussion of stress, rhythm, or intonation is undertaken. This is not to imply that, in these areas, Australian speech does not have its own peculiarities, but rather that space considerations force a deferral of the investigation of such issues to another paper.

Australia was first colonized by the English in 1788, considerably later than North America. It is not surprising then, that an Australian accent is

much more similar to the accents of present-day England than those of the United States. Nevertheless, enough time has passed for Australia to have developed a distinctive accent of its own, easily recognized as different from any accent of England.

Australian English is remarkably homogeneous, particularly given the enormous area over which it is spoken. From Perth to Sydney is over 3000 kilometers, yet their accents are practically indistinguishable. Such variation in pronunciation as there is tends to be a matter of urban versus rural, the rural accent being somewhat slower and broader than the urban. Apart from this, accent variability in Australia is social and stylistic rather than geographical (Wells, 1982, p.593). This uniformity of spoken English in Australia is attributed by Bernard (as cited in Wells, 1982, p.593) to two principal factors: first, that the early white Australians entered through a very small number of seaports, and remained in contact by sea through these ports; and second, that they built up a social solidarity (whether as convicts or as free migrants) against their Britain-based officials and administrators. Moreover, gold rushes and other economic booms and failures ensured that the early Australian population remained a mobile one, with little chance to develop regional differences. It appears that a distinctive Australian accent had arisen by the 1830s or 1840s, although the proportion of native-born Australians did not exceed that of immigrants until the 1860s. (Wells, 1982, p.594)

In describing present-day Australian pronunciation it is usual, following Mitchell & Delbridge (1965), to distinguish three main types: Broad, General, and Cultivated; identified principally by differences in the quality of certain vowels. In Cultivated Australian, vowels have realisations similar to those of RP, whereas in General Australian they have undergone diphthong shifting similar to that found in the south-east of England. Broad Australian is similar to General, but has extra duration in the first element of the diphthongs.

Monophthongs

Comparing the vowels in RP with those in all three varieties of Australian English, Mitchell and Delbridge (1965, p.34) found a consistent variation in vowel quality.

The vowels affected are:

[ɪ]	as in	b itter
[ɛ] ¹	as in	b etter
[ɔ]	as in	b atter
[ɔ̣]	as in	s ort
[ɜ]	as in	b ird
[ɛ̣]	as in	l e tt e r, ab o ve
[a] ²	as in	b a r e t e r
[ʌ]	as in	b u t t e r

1. The IPA representation of this sound is [ɛ]. Mitchell and Delbridge's representation, however, is used throughout this paper.
2. The distinction between this sound and the standard IPA representation of it as [a] is discussed below.

The Australian vowels [ɪ], [ɛ], [ɔ], [ɔ̣], [ɜ], [ɛ̣], [a], [ʌ], are pronounced with a more closed tongue position (hereafter "closer") than in English speech. In addition to being closer, the Australian [ɪ] is more forward (i.e. pronounced more toward the front of the mouth) than the English vowel.

Mitchell and Delbridge (1965) also attempted to draw a complete distinction between the place of articulation of Australian and English vowel sounds. Their classification is as follows:

Australian	English
Front vowels:	Front vowels:
[i], [ɪ], [ɛ], [ɔ], [a], [ʌ]	[i], [ɪ], [ɛ], [ɔ]
Central vowels: [ɛ̣], [ɜ]	Central vowels: [ɛ̣], [ɜ]
Back vowels:	Back vowels: [ʌ], [a],
[ɔ̣], [ɔ̣], [ʊ], [u]	[ɔ̣], [ɔ̣]

The differences in quality between English and Australian vowels are most clearly heard in [a],

[ɜ], [ʌ] and [ɛ̣]. The difference between the English retracted [a] and the Australian front [a] is easily heard and, in the speech of some Australians, the [a] is so much forward as to draw attention to its characteristic front resonance. The quality of these two vowels may account in part for the common opinion that Australian speech has less resonance than English, and that it is more palatal and "thinner" in tone. Moreover, when the English [ɜ] and [ɛ̣] are a little more open, in the pronunciation of some speakers, than is usual, the Australian is apt to think the speaker is pronouncing an [a], that he is saying [bad] for [bɜd], [had] for [hɜd], [bɛta] for [bɛtɛ̣]. Conversely an English speaker, struck by the closer quality of the Australian [ɜ], is apt to imitate it in any exaggerated fashion as an [ɪ]. The closer qualities of the Australian [ɔ], [ɛ] and [ɪ] compared with the English sounds, are not so easily heard. Often Australians are accused of pronouncing [ɛ] instead of [ɔ], thus: *men for man, het for hat, bend for band*. The difference between the English and Australian [ɪ] is clearly heard in the two pronunciations of *pity*. The English speaker produces a retracted and lowered [ɪ] in the second syllable. The Australian speaker produces his characteristic forward, close [ɪ] in the first syllable and an [i] in the second. The marked difference between the open [ɪ] and the [i] in the second syllable adds to the contrast between the precise shades of the [ɪ] in the first syllable (Mitchell and Delbridge, 1965, p.37).

Diphthongs

A. The Centring Diphthongs

Since the Australian vowels [ɪ], [ɛ] and [ɔ̣] are closer than the corresponding English vowels, it follows that the initial vowel positions for the centring diphthongs [ɪɛ̣], [ɛ̣ɛ̣] and [ɔ̣ɛ̣] are closer. Since the Australian [ɛ̣] is closer than the English [ɛ̣], the vowel position towards which the diphthongs move is closer. The vowel-glides of [ɪɛ̣], as in *here*, [ɛ̣ɛ̣] as in *air*, [ɔ̣ɛ̣] as in *four*, [ʊɛ̣] as in *tour*, are represented on the cardinal

vowel diagram as follows:

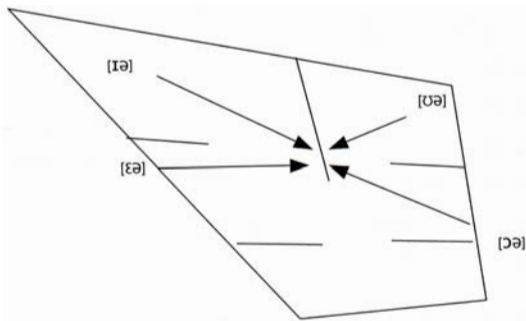


Fig. 1: The centring diphthongs in Australian speech. (from Mitchell and Delbridge, 1965, p.38)

In the pronunciation of some Australians, the glide in the centring diphthongs is very slight, with the result that the final [ə] sound is hardly heard. The effect is almost of a pure vowel lengthened. The pronunciation often more closely resembles [ɪɪ, eɪ, ʊʊ] than [ɪə, eə, ʊə], as in *here* [hɪɪ], *clear* [klɪɪ], *fair* [fɛɪ], *chair* [tʃɛɪ], *four* [fɔɪ], *store* [stɔɪ].

Both the centring diphthong and the lengthened pure vowel are likely to occur within the speech of any individual Australian speaker. The centring diphthong is generally used by Cultivated speakers in stressed syllables, especially when these occur at the very end of an utterance, or before a pause. But the same syllable followed immediately by another syllable with an [r] between generally has the lengthened pure vowel, thus *beer* [bɪə], compared to *beery* [bɪɪri].

The tendency not to use the inward glide is most marked in General and Broad Australian. [jɪɪ] and [jɪɪz], for *year* and *years*, are common enough pronunciations in both varieties. Among Broad speakers, there is overlapping between [i] and [ɪ], in that words like *real*, *feel*, *meal* might be pronounced with the diphthong normally used in the Broad variety for [i], namely [əɪ]. Thus [rəɪ], [fəɪ], [məɪ]. There is also a tendency for these words to be pronounced as bisyllables, with

a syllabic [l]. In the same way, [ɪə], as in *beer* [bɪə] may be made bisyllabic in Broad Australian, and pronounced [bəɪə].

In Cultivated Australian, the RP-style diphthong [ʊə] is commonly used in words like *pure*, *cure*, *curious*, *security*, *tour*, *allure*, *dour*, though the glide may be minimized before an intervocalic [r]. Also, [ʊə] is occasionally heard in *sure*, *insurance*, *poor* and *moor*, but these words are more often pronounced [ʃə] or [ʃə], [ɪnʃərəns], [pə] or [pə], and [mə] or [mə]. In the General version of words like *security*, *impurity*, *endurance*, there is generally a centralized vowel which might be represented as [ə]. *Security* might occasionally be spoken as [səkjʊrətə] by General speaker, but [səkjəʊrətə] is commoner. It is to be doubted if [ʊə] is ever heard in Broad Australian, its place being taken by [ə] in words like *sure*, *insurance*, and *poor*, and by the centralized vowel [ə] in words like *secure*, *tour*, *sewer*, and *dour*. In such words the [ə] of the nucleus is followed by a syllabic [ə], so that *tour* and *sewer*, for example, make rhyming pairs with *doer*, all of them bisyllabic, while *dour* and *doer* are pronounced alike.

B. The Closing Diphthongs

In Cultivated Australian speech, the four diphthongs [eɪ], [oɪ], [aɪ], [aʊ], are almost the same as the corresponding diphthongs in Educated Southern English pronunciation.

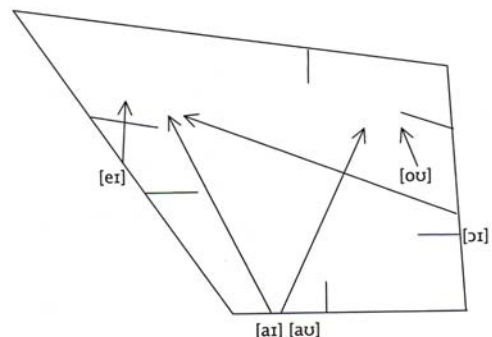


Fig. 2: The diphthongs in Cultivated Australian speech. (from Mitchell and Delbridge, 1965, p.40)

In Cultivated Australian speech, the diphthongs [eɪ], [aɪ] are closer and more forward than in English pronunciation. General Australian is characterized by its variants of the diphthongs [eɪ], [oʊ], [aɪ], [aʊ] and by the diphthongising of [i] and [u].

The General Australian variant of [eɪ], as in say, may be represented by the phonetic symbols [ʌɪ]. Examples of the occurrence of [ʌɪ] in General Australian speech are: ['sʌɪm], *same*; ['mʌɪk], *make*; [«rʌɪn], *arraign*; [ʃʌɪk], *shake*; [ɒs'trʌɪljə], *Australia*; [«s'trʌɪ], *astray*; ['drʌɪpə], *draper*; [gʌɪn], *gain*; ['sʌɪv], *save*; ['trʌɪs], *trace*.

The General Australian variant of the diphthong [oʊ], as in so, may be represented by the phonetic symbols [ʌʊ]. Examples of occurrence of [ʌʊ] in General Australian speech are: ['rʌʊp], *rope*; ['sʌʊk], *soak*; ['rʌʊlə], *roller*; ['nʌʊ], *know*; ['sʌʊ], *sew*; ['hʌʊ], *hoe*; [«lʌʊn], *alone*; ['hɒlʌʊ], *hollow*; ['tɛlɪfʌʊn], *telephone*; ['hʌʊst], *host*.

The General Australian variant of the diphthong [aʊ] may be represented by the phonetic symbols [ɔʊ]. Examples of the occurrence of [ɔʊ] in General Australian speech are: ['hɔʊ], *how*; ['pɔʊə], *power*; ['sɔʊnd], *sound*; [«vɔʊə], *avowal*; [s«rɔʊnd], *surround*; ['hɔʊs], *house*; [«lɔʊ], *allow*; ['krɔʊn], *crown*; ['skɔʊt], *scout*; [«grɔʊnd], *aground*.

The General Australian variant of the diphthong [aɪ] may be represented by the phonetic symbols [ɒɪ]. Examples of the occurrence of [ɒɪ] in General Australian speech are: ['hɒɪ], *high*; ['gɒɪd], *guide*; ['fɒɪnd], *find*; [s«plɒɪ], *supply*; ['krɒɪd], *cried*; ['brɒɪt], *bright*; ['mɒɪnə], *miner*; [d«nɒɪ], *deny*; ['twɒɪs], *twice*; [«kwɒɪ], *acquire*.

In Cultivated Australian, the sounds [i] and [u] are normally diphthongized, and occur as [ɪi] and [ʊu].

The General Australian variant of the sound [i] as in *tea* may be represented by the phonetic symbols [«ɪ]. Examples of the occurrence of [«ɪ] in General Australian speech are: ['t«ɪ], *tea*; [m«ʃ«ɪn], *machine*; [b«l«ɪv], *believe*; [h«ɪt], *heat*; [m«ɪt], *meet*; [k«ɪ], *key, quay*; [ð«ɪs], *these*; [j«ɪld], *yield*; [t«ɪm], *team*; [l«ɪf], *leaf*.

The General Australian variant of the sound [u] as in *two* may be represented by the phonetic symbols [«ʊ]. Examples of occurrence of [«ʊ] in General Australian speech are: [t«ʊ], *two*; [tʃ«ʊ], *chew*; [r«ʊl], *rule*; [st«ʊl], *stool*; [sʃ«ʊm], *assume*; [m«ʊv], *move*; [str«ʊn], *strewn*; [«l«ʊf], *aloof*; [r«ʊf], *roof*; [j«ʊ], *you*.

The General Australian diphthongs are shown below:

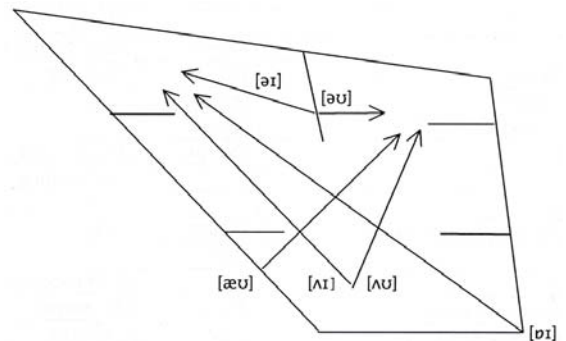


Fig. 3: The diphthongs in General Australian speech. (from Mitchell and Delbridge, 1965, p.43)

The Broad Australian variant in words like *male, same*, has a slower glide than the General variant, and it may start from a more advanced position. It might be represented as [ʌʔɪ].

The Broad variants of the vowel in *rope, roller, hoe*, likewise have a slower glide, and possibly a more advanced starting position. The sound is frequently unrounded. The variant might be written [ʌʔʊ].

The tendency to a slower glide is observed in the Broad pronunciation of words like *hour, power*;

sound. The sound is prone to nasalising, and the nasality may be quite marked when a nasal consonant follows the vowel. The variant may be represented [ɔ̃ʊ].

The vowel in words like *high*, *find* and *bright* has slower glide in Broad Australian speech, and may be written [ɒʔɪ].

In words like *beat*, *machine*, *key*, the vowel in Broad Australian has a slower glide, with the first element prominent and possibly more open than in General Australian. It may be heard as [æʔɪ]. Similarly words like *boot*, *two*, *stool* will have a slower glide, possible a more open starting position, and be unrounded throughout. The variant may be written [æʔʊ].

In Broad Australian, there is a tendency for front vowels to be closer in tongue position than in the other varieties. The sounds [ɪ], [ɛ] and [ɔ] are often spoken with noticeable tension. There is also a tendency, especially with the latter two, for the sounds to be nasalized.

Weak vowels

Australian English has a phoneme [æ], restricted in occurrence to weak syllables. It contrasts with all other vowels. There is generally no opposition between [ɪ] and [æ], the later occurring to the exclusion of the former. There is no distinction then in the pairs shown below (usually distinct in RP):

boxes and *boxers*, both [ˈbɒksæz];
founded and *founded*, both [ˈfɔʊndæd];
valid and *salad* rhyme, both end [-æd];
rabbit and *abbot* rhyme, both end [-æʔ];
bucket and *ducat* rhyme, both end [-æʔ];
Alice and *callous* rhyme, both end [-æs];
Armidale, NSW, is homophonous with
Armadale, Vic.

(Wells, 1982, p.601)

The suffixes spelt *-ate*, *-ess*, *-est*, *-et*, *-id*, -

ist, *-less*, *-let*, *-ness* accordingly all have [æ] in Australian speech. So does *-age*, as *cabbage* [ˈkɒbædʒ], *village* [ˈvɪlædʒ] (compare British [ˈkɒbɪdʒ], [ˈvɪlɪdʒ]). One must perhaps not be too categorical about these suffixes where Cultivated Australian is concerned, however. Wells (1982, p.602) notes that there do seem to be some speakers who have [ɪ] not only in *-age* but also in *-ive*, thus *massive* [ˈmɒsɪv] (usual Australian form: [ˈmɒsæv]).

The words *it*, *is*, and *him*, as a result of this tendency, have distinct strong and weak forms in Australian English, e.g. stressed *it* [ˈɪt], unstressed [æʔt]. Thus *pack it* is still homophonous with *packet*, both [ˈpɒkæʔt]. Hence weak *it* and *at* are phonetically identical, as are weak *is* and *as*.

The vowel for *happy* is [ɪ̃]. Pairs such as *studied* and *studded* (homophonous in RP with [-ɪd]) are sharply distinguished by Australians, as [ˈstʌdĩd] vs. [ˈstʌdæd]. The prefixes *be-*, *de-*, *e*, *pre-*, and *re-* all fluctuate between [ɪ̃] and [æ]; they do not, of course, have RP-style [ɪ]. Thus *pretend* can be [prĩtend] or [præʔtend]. However *se-* is apparently always [sæ], thus *select* [sæʔlekt].

The Australian trend towards merging of all unstressed vowels in [æ] may lead also, for example, to identity between the initial syllables of *July* and *Geelong*, thus [dʒæʔlaɪ], [dʒæʔlɒŋ].

The fact that the final vowel of *Latin* and *Martin* is phonemically [æ], not [ɪ], causes these and similar words to be subject to Syllabic Consonant Formation: [ˈlɒtn, ˈmɑɪtn] (compare the usual RP: [ˈlɒtɪn, ˈmɑɪtɪn], where Syllabic Consonant Formation is blocked by the presence of [ɪ] in the structural description).

Constraints on Australian [ɪ] also mean that the rival forms of *-ing* differ not only in the place of articulation of the nasal but also in the vowel: high-prestige [ɪŋ], low-prestige [æŋ]. Hence the prevalence in Broad Australian of forms such as [ˈrɒɪdn] *riding*, [ˈrɒbætn] *rabbiting* (a pronun-

ciation regarded as 'normally unacceptable' by Mitchell and Delbridge 1965, p.48).

Wells (1982, p.602) also highlights the pronunciation of the pronoun *you*. In broader types of Australian English, the weak form [j<>] is very common; and this is rather frequently reduced by elision to [j] in the environment of a following vowel, as [jaɪnt] *you aren't*, [ˈjɔft<>] *you have to*. (Compare also [aɪmiːləɪf tɪfnzɪp] *army life toughens you up*, quoted by Mitchell and Delbridge, 1965, p.52). While such reductions are not unknown elsewhere, they to seem particularly prevalent in Australia.

Consonants

The consonants of Australian English generally follow RP. The non-rhotic distribution of [r] and the variable dropping (except in Cultivated Australian) of [h] further contributing to the general impression of Englishness as against Americanness. The most noticeable differences are with the pronunciation of [t] and [l].

The Intervocalic [t] may be pronounced as a tap or trill rather than a plosive. Moreover, is no sharp clear [l] vs. dark [ɫ] distinction as in RP.

Separate Words

Words which acquire a variant national pronunciation in Australia are usually those in ordinary current use. Words which are less commonly used, for instance scholarly and literary words, are less likely to vary from RP, since the people who use them usually refer to the dictionaries to ascertain the pronunciation.

Mitchell and Delbridge (1965, p.50) noted that an unaccented vowel or diphthong which in English pronunciation is reduced to the neutral [<>] or [ɪ] retains its full value in Australian speech. Thus the Australian pronunciations of *accent* and

income are [ˈɔksɛnt] and [ˈɪnkʌm], never [ˈɔks<>nt] and [ˈɪnk<>m]. Similarly the pronunciations [ˈsɜk<>st<>ns] and [ˈkɒnsɪkw<>ns] for *circumstance* and *consequence* are less common in Australian speech than [ˈsɜk<>stɒns] and [ˈkɒnsɪkwɛns]. Other words in which this tendency can be seen are:

	English	Australian
bankruptcy	[ˈbɔŋkr<>ptsɪ]	[ˈbɔŋkrʌptsɪ]
brimstone	[ˈbrɪmst<>n]	[ˈbrɪmstoun]
combat	[ˈkɒmb<>t]	[ˈkɒmbɔt]
comrade	[ˈkɒmr<>d]	[ˈkɒmr<>ɪd]
crayon	[ˈkr<>ɪ<>n]	[ˈkr<>ɪɒn]
ingot	[ˈɪŋg<>t]	[ˈɪŋgɒt]
nomad	[ˈnɒm<>d]	[ˈnɒmɔd]
product	[ˈprɒd<>kt]	[ˈprɒdʌkt]
proverb	[ˈprɒv<>b]	[ˈprɒvɜb]
steadfast	[ˈstɛd<>fst]	[ˈstɛdfaɪst]
subject	[ˈsʌbdʒ<>ɪkt]	[ˈsʌbdʒɛkt]
vagabond	[ˈvɔg<>b<>nd]	[ˈvɔg<>bɒnd]

(Mitchell and Delbridge, 1965, p.51)

In a similar way, the endings *-ial*, *-ius*, *-ious*, *-eous*, which in English pronunciation are often reduced to monosyllables are usually disyllabic in Australian speech:

	English	Australian
Genial	[ˈdʒi<>ni<>]	[ˈdʒi<>ni<>]
genius	[ˈdʒi<>ni<>s]	[ˈdʒi<>ni<>s]
helium	[ˈhi<>li<>m]	[ˈhi<>li<>m]
ingenious	[ɪnˈdʒi<>ni<>s]	[ɪndʒi<>ni<>s]
spontaneous	[spɒnˈte<>ɪni<>s]	[spɒnˈte<>ɪni<>s]

(Mitchell and Delbridge, 1965, p.51)

What is termed "spelling pronunciation" is also common in Australia. In many words, a syllable commonly dropped in English pronunciation is retained in Australian pronunciation.

Regarding other issues of lexical distribution, Mitchell and Delbridge (1965, p.52) note that the following English pronunciations are not heard, or are very rarely heard, in Australia:

immediate	[ɪˈmi<>ɪdʒ<>]
projectile	[ˈprɒdʒɪ<>]
roster	[ˈrɒst<>]

scone	['skoun]
transition	[trɔn'sIʒn]
year	['jɪ]

The usual Australian pronunciations are: [I'mi'di<t], [pr<<'dʒɛktaɪ], ['rɒst<], ['skɒn], [trɔn'zɪʃn], ['jɪ<].

Other notable pronunciations are:

	RP	Australian
aquatic	[<<'kwɔtlk]	[<<'kwɒtlk]
artisan	[ɑ'tɪ'zɔn]	['ɑɪtɪzɔn]
auction	['•ɪkʃn]	['ɒkʃn]
austere	[<<'stɪ<]	[ɒstɪ<]
caustic	['k•ɪstɪk]	['kɒstɪk]
colander	['kʌl<<nd<]	['kɒl<<nd<]
combat	['kɒmb<t]	['kɒmb<t]
comrade	['kɒmrɪd]	['kɒmeɪd]
decade	['dɛk<d]	['dɛkeɪd]
jubilee	['dʒuːbɪliː]	[dʒub<'liː]
quagmire	['kwɔɡmaɪ<]	['kwɒɡmaɪ<]
chassis	['ʃɔsi]	['ʃɔzi]
immediate	[ɪ'mi'diʒ<t]	[<<'mi'diɪ<t]
Melbourne	['melb•ɪn]	['melb<n]
oral	['•ɪrel]	['ɒrel]
Queensland	['kwiːnzl<<nd]	['kwiːnzlɔnd]

(Adapted from Mitchell and Delbridge, 1965, p.52-53; Wells, 1982, p.597)

Finally, among many Australian speakers there is an inclination, whenever a choice is to be made between [a] and [ɔ], to choose the latter. For the [ɔ] speaker of words like [dɔns], *dance*, and [d<mɔnd], *demand*, the choice of [a] is a sign of pedantry, snobbishness, or of undue striving for effect. Those who say [plastɪk], *plastic*, [lað<], *lather*, [ɪlastɪk] *elastic*, and even [transfɜ], *transfer*, are thought to make themselves slightly ridiculous. There is, however, a genuine choice between [a] and [ɔ] in words like *demand*, *circumstance*, *grasp*, *Newcastle* (this choice is regionally conditioned), and *contrast*.

CONCLUSION

What appears above is an overview of the salient features of Australian pronunciation, viewed in relief against the backdrop of RP. Further analysis, comparing the Australian accent, in any of its three main varieties, to General American (GenAM) pronunciation could also prove instructive. It is to be hoped also, that this short paper spurs the writer's colleagues to investigate their own varieties of English and to write about them for the edification of students and teachers alike.

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