

# Setting New Standards: Sound Changes and Gender in New Zealand English"

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## ABSTRACT

*Social dialect data demonstrates that women tend to lead linguistic change in New Zealand English over a range of linguistic variables. This paper describes current sound changes in New Zealand English, discusses their potential sources, and suggests possible mechanisms by which they percolate through the system. Women's role in language change is a controversial area. The final section examines a range of explanations which have been proposed to account for the patterns identified by researchers and assesses their relevance to the New Zealand data.* (Keywords: Social dialects, gender, language change, New Zealand English).

## RESUMEN

*Datos obtenidos sobre los dialectos sociales demuestran que la mujer tiende a liderar los cambios lingüísticos del inglés neocelandés en numerosas variables lingüísticas. El presente artículo describe cambios fonéticos actuales del inglés neocelandés, discute sus fuentes potenciales y sugiere posibles mecanismos a través de los que se transmiten por el sistema. El papel de la mujer en el cambio lingüístico es un área controvertida. La sección final examina diversas explicaciones ofrecidas para estos patrones identificados por los investigadores y evalúa su relevancia atendiendo a los datos obtenidos en el inglés neocelandés.* (Palabras Clave: dialectos sociales, género, cambio lingüístico, inglés neocelandés).

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## I. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Sound change is probably the most mysterious aspect of change in language. as it appears to have no obvious function or rational motivation.

James Milroy (1993: 181)

Sound change presents a challenge not only to those concerned with accounting for processes of linguistic change but also to those interested in the relationship between gender identity and language use. Women's role in relation to sound change has been discussed by social dialectologists for decades. In recent years, the most thorough discussion of the topic is Labov's (1990) exploration of the many contradictory patterns evident in social dialect data from all over the world.

Searching for common underlying patterns in the disparate data he reviews, Labov identifies two basic principles, one of which he divides into two parts. Firstly he notes the widespread agreement that, provided they have access to standard norms (typically through education), women tend to use more prestigious or standard forms than men. Over ten years ago, Trudgill described this as "the single most consistent finding to have emerged from social dialect studies over the past twenty years" (Trudgill 1983: 162), and there is no reason to question its robustness on the basis of more recent research. Labov formulates this generalisation as his Principle I:

For stable sociolinguistic variables, men use a higher frequency of nonstandard forms than women.

William Labov (1990: 210)

This generalisation relates to stable sociolinguistic variables, such as (-ING) in many English-speaking communities, which are not involved in current sound change. Labov argues, however, that there is much in common between this pattern and another described in a second principle which addresses the issue of prestige innovations. Indeed the close relationship is reflected in his labelling it Principle Ia.

Principle Ia concerns women's role in relation to the introduction of new prestige patterns into a community:

In change from above, women favor the incoming prestige form more than men.

W. Labov (1990: 213)

Labov (1990: 213) comments as follows on such changes:

They take place at a relatively high level of social consciousness, show a higher rate of occurrence in formal styles, are often subject to hypercorrection, and sometimes show overt stereotypes as with stable sociolinguistic variables. Because changes from above share many of the properties of stable sociolinguistic variables, it is not surprising that the role of the sexes is similar, and women lead in both the acquisition of new prestige patterns and the elimination of stigmatized forms.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to the patterns relating to prestige variables, women's role in relation to vernacular changes is much more complex, and generalisations are much harder to identify. Though the formulation of Principle II is simple, the discussion of the data relating to this generalisation occupies the remainder of Labov's extensive paper. Principle II takes the form:

In change from below women are most often the innovators.

W. Labov (1990: 215)

In practice, Labov demonstrates that women from different social groups may respond differently to particular innovations; and women may play different roles at different points in the progression of a particular sound change.

Discussing data from Philadelphia, for example, Labov (1990) suggests that women led in new sound changes, whereas sex differences tended to disappear in older changes. But Penelope Eckert's data, collected from Detroit adolescents, provides no such clear-cut pattern:

In fact, in my data, the greatest sex differences occur with the older -and probably less vital- changes.

P. Eckert (1989: 263)

Following a careful analysis of the interactions between a range of variables, she argues that "the significance of gender in variation cannot be reduced to notions of male and female speech as 'more or less conservative'" (1989: 245). She emphasises the importance of categories other than gender, as well as the fundamental complexity of the notion of gender itself, arguing that it is most productively regarded as a process rather than a social category. And, in discussing reasons for sound changes, she argues against the widely accepted view that women's behaviour reflects their sensitivity to new prestige forms, claiming that "not prestige but power is the most important underlying sociological concept for the analysis of gender-based linguistic variation" (1990: 250).

Others have questioned a power-based explanation. Milroy *et al.* (1994), for example, suggest that it does not make sense for a powerless group to be acting as linguistic innovators. Why would anyone imitate their speech? If women lack power, they suggest, one would expect them to imitate men's usage rather than the reverse. Conversely, if men are the powerful players in society, why are their speech forms not considered prestigious? The issue of why women's linguistic innovations generally succeed in becoming established in the standard variety is clearly not straightforward, and is discussed further below.

Birch Moonwomon (1989) points to the importance of contextual factors in accounting for gender differences in relation to linguistic innovation. She notes that women tend to "style shift extremely", and suggests that some of the contradictions which have been identified in studies of women's role in language change may be accounted for by the conflicting role demands experienced by women, and by working class women in particular (Moonwomon 1989: 244). Women often use a wide range of variants, she notes, from the most extreme and innovative vernacular variants in their more casual styles, to the most prestigious and standard variants in their most careful styles. This may help explain the contradictory suggestions which have been put forward to account for women's usage, and especially their role in sound change.

Searching for general patterns in the process of sound change is clearly a challenge

then. but it is an important one because of the potential insights which it can provide on the nature of the interaction between linguistic and social processes. The robustness of the finding that women play a crucial role in relation to sound change suggests that it is an important area for language and gender research. Eckert recommends that

generalizations about the relation between sound change and gender are best deferred until more communities have been examined.

P. Eckert (1989: 264)

In this paper I will describe some evidence from New Zealand, exploring the role of women in relation to New Zealand English (NZE). The data reviewed includes changes to consonants, vowels, and prosody. It includes changes which can be described as 'natural' changes, reflecting regular phonological processes such as ease of articulation, as well as changes which clearly require more effort. And it includes changes which may have their sources outside New Zealand, as well as changes where the most obvious influence is local.

In the first section I outline evidence of sound change in NZE. I then go on to discuss in more detail the possible sources of the changes, and then focus in particular on the role of women in relation to these changes, attempting some explanations for the patterns identified in the New Zealand data.

## II. PATTERNS OF SOUND CHANGE IN NEW ZEALAND ENGLISH

The analyses of the six phonological variables discussed in this section are based on material drawn from two large corpora: information on lhl-dropping and the merging of the EAR/AIR diphthongs draws on the analysis of data from the Wellington Social Dialect Survey (Holmes, Bell and Boyce 1991). The analysis of the remaining variables is based on material drawn from the Wellington Corpus of Spoken New Zealand English (Holmes 1995a).

Our Wellington Social Dialect Survey (WCSoc) involved interviews with 75 speakers from three age groups and two socio-economic groups, and included both Maori and Pakeha women and men using a range of styles elicited in a typical Labovian interview. Interviewers were matched for gender and ethnicity with their interviewees, and the schedule included a group of questions designed to elicit information on people's social networks. The GOLDVARB 2.0 programme was the main statistical tool used in the analysis of the data. A detailed account of the methodology and results can be found in Holmes, Bell and Boyce (1991). The second source of data, the Wellington Corpus of Spoken New Zealand English (WCSpok) comprises a one million word corpus drawn from a wide variety of genres, contributors and contexts. For the purpose of the analyses described below, a sample of eighty speakers was selected to include two age groups and two socio-economic groups, both Maori vs Pakeha women and men, and the contrasting styles of formal interview and conversation. A detailed account of the methodology can be found in Holmes (1996a).

### II.1. /h/-dropping

The deletion of initial /h/ in words such as *house* and *hope* is a high-profile sociolinguistic marker in many vernacular varieties of English in New Zealand, Australia and Britain (eg.

Trudgill 1974. Horvath 1985. Newbrook 1986. Coupland 1988. Bell and Holmes 1992). though, interestingly, not in the USA. In NZE it has been a variable feature since at least the turn of the century (Gordon 1983). Our WCSoc confirmed the pattern identified in other dialects of English: lower socioeconomic groups deleted more /h/ than higher socioeconomic groups, though the overall level of lhl-dropping was much lower than that found in British surveys (14% across the NZ working class sample compared to 61% in Trudgill's survey).<sup>4</sup> And, in line with the well-established pattern for prestige variants referred to above, men generally dropped /h/ more often than women. The average level of lhl-dropping for the New Zealand men in our sample was 19% compared to only 8% for women. In other words, women use more of the standard or prestige variant than men.

The data from our survey suggests, however, that lhl-dropping is steadily decreasing in NZE, and that women have led this change, which is now almost complete. Among Pakeha women from both working-class and middle-class backgrounds, lhl-dropping is already at a very low level of 5%-6%, whereas the equivalent figure for Pakeha men is 15%. Among Maori people, lhl-dropping is also disappearing, but more slowly. Here too, however, women are leading the change to an lhl-ful variety (see Table 1). It seems that Pakeha women have established the lhl-ful variety as the norm in New Zealand, and Maori women are leading the change to the new lhl-ful standard among Maori people.

Table 1

<b>/h/-dropping in Wellington Social Dialect Survey: Maori</b>		
	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
<b>Old</b>	26	31
<b>Mid-age</b>	6	32
<b>Young</b>	6	10

## 11.2. Glottal stops

The use of the glottal stop as a variant of (t) is a stereotypical feature of many British dialects, including Scottish English and Cockney English, where it occurs both medially and finally in words: eg. [gɔʔ a bɪʔ a bʌʔə məiʔ] got a *bit* of hutter mate? Like lhl-dropping, this is a feature which distinguishes British from American varieties of English.

Until recently this feature was regarded as characteristic of British working class speech (eg. Trudgill 1974. Macauley 1977, Reid 1978). However, in the last ten years or so the glottal stop appears to have made some social progress in Britain. It can be heard in the speech of the 'young royals' and is a feature of what has been called 'Estuary English': a variety midway on a continuum between Received Pronunciation and London speech (Rosewarne 1994). Analysing glottal stops in a sample of Pakeha speech taken from the WCSpok it appeared that the final glottal stop is taking a similar route in NZE, moving from a stigmatised vernacular variant to one with more prestigious status (Holmes 1995b). Moreover, it seems that young women are playing an important part in this process: they used the highest frequency of glottal stops in both social classes (up to 44% for young working class women), while middle aged, middle class women used least (9%). Young women seem to be leading a change which is establishing the final glottal variant of (t) as a component of standard NZE.

### 11.3. T Voicing

Voicing of intervocalic (t) (T Voicing) in words such as *letter* and *butter* is usually considered categorical in the USA. but it is variable in New Zealand. where the pronunciation [tʰ] is also used. An analysis of T voicing in the data from our WCSoc suggested that it is steadily increasing in NZE. Young people voiced 83% of intervocalic (t). compared to 59% for middle aged and 51% for older people. An analysis by Bernadette Vine (1995) of T voicing in the speech of women from Wanganui, another New Zealand city, provides further evidence of this change in progress. The youngest women in her sample voiced intervocalic (t) 66% of the time. compared to 31% for the middle-aged group. and 19% for the oldest women.

In order to explore further the way in which this change was spreading in NZE. I analysed T voicing in the speech of a sample of Pakeha speakers from the WCSpok (Holmes 1994). The results suggested that the move from an aspirated to a voiced variant had originated as a vernacular change in the speech of working-class New Zealanders: T voicing is well-established in the conversational style of working-class young people (73% for women and 82% for men). The results also indicated that. as with the glottal stop variant of final (t), young middle class women were playing an important role in the spread of the new variant: in the middle class group. young women were well ahead of young men in the use of this feature (70% vs 59%. see Table 2).

Table 2

	% of T voicing		Gender, Age, and Class in Wellington Corpus sample	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Young	73	82	70	59
Mid-age	31	19	59	51

### 11.4. Syllable-timing

A feature which has been associated predominantly with the English of Maori New Zealanders is a distinctive syllable-timed rhythm which contrasts with the typical stress-timed rhythm characteristic of varieties of English elsewhere. In the syllable-timed variety. all syllables, not just stressed syllables, occur at roughly equal time intervals. and there are more full vowels in unstressed syllables where other varieties typically use reduced vowels (Bauer 1994: 414).

Using a sample taken from the WCSpok, and a count of full vowels in unstressed syllables as a measure. we analysed the English of twenty young New Zealanders and established that syllable-timed speech was clearly more characteristic of the Maori than the Pakeha speakers (Holmes and Ainsworth 1996). Maori speakers used significantly more full vowels than Pakeha speakers overall (31.6% vs 18.6%). The data thus confirmed the popular impression that syllable-timed English is one feature of Maori NZE.

Among the Pakeha speakers in our sample. the young women used significantly more syllable-timing than the young men: they used 21.9% full vowels in reduced syllables compared to 15.6% in the speech of the young men. If syllable-timing is increasing in the English of Pakeha New Zealanders. as Bauer (1994. 1995) suggests. then once again it is

women who are leading this change in NZE (see Table 3).

Table 3

% of full for reduced vowels by Gender and Ethnicity in Wellington Corpus sample			
Maori		Pakeha	
Female	Male	Female	Male
33.1	30.2	21.9	15.6

## II.5. Devoicing of final (z)

Another feature which has been suggested as a potential feature of Maori English is the devoicing of final obstruents such as /z/ in words like *was* and *does*. Richard Benton found this feature characterised the speech of the Maori children he studied in the 1960s (1966: 70). And a more recent analysis of the speech of six speakers by Shelley Robertson (1994) provided some support for the view that final obstruent devoicing is characteristic of Maori English.

In my analysis of the sample from the WCSpok, the devoicing of final (z) clearly distinguished between Maori and Pakeha speech (see Holmes 1996b for details). On average, Pakeha speakers of NZE devoiced (z) 15% of the time, while Maori New Zealanders devoiced it almost twice as often (29%). Moreover, Maori used a totally devoiced variant [s] more than four times as often as Pakeha (21% vs 5%), a highly significant difference. Devoicing of final (z) appears then to be a feature of Maori rather than Pakeha NZE.

Table 4

Distribution of [s] in Pakeha conversation			
Age	Class	Female	Male
Young	WC	19	5
	MC	7	6
Mid-age	MC	4	2

Once again, however, there was an interesting exception to this pattern. Among the Pakeha speakers, young working-class Pakeha women used a much higher proportion of the voiceless variant of final (z) than other Pakeha groups (see Table 4). These young women used nearly four times as many instances of the voiceless variant in their conversational style as their male peers (19% vs 5%), a figure much closer to the norms for Maori speakers (21%). There is also some evidence to suggest that this feature is increasing in Pakeha speech (see Holmes 1996b), though more extensive research is needed to confirm this. If this trend is confirmed, final (z) devoicing provides another example where young Pakeha women appear to be acting as conduits for a feature from Maori English to pass into Pakeha NZE.

The changes in NZE discussed so far have described forms which reflect the influence of British English (BrE), American English (AmE) and Maori English (ME). The final example discussed in this paper of a change led by young women is the merging of the diphthongs in EAR and AIR words, a change which can almost certainly be attributed to the influence of internal rather than external factors.

### 11.6. EARIAIR merging

Studies covering four New Zealand cities have demonstrated that the centring diphthongs *lial* and *leal* are steadily merging in NZE (Bayard 1987. Maclagan and Gordon, in press. Holmes and Bell 1993, and Batterham, in progress). Though different methodologies have been used, and results differ regarding the precise direction of the change in terms of the vowel height of the diphthong onset, there is substantial agreement that this change is being led by young New Zealand women. Our Wellington data, for example, suggested that young Pakeha women were leading a change to a merger of the two diphthongs on the more open pronunciation of this variable, while in the previous generation the change had been towards the closer pronunciation, but once again women had been leading it (Holmes and Bell 1993).

A merger of these two diphthongs has been noted elsewhere (eg. Kurath and McDavid 1961, Trudgill 1974, Cassidy and Le Page 1980), but the result has tended to remain a localised dialectal variant. In New Zealand, by contrast, the merger is rapidly establishing itself as a new norm. This is an interesting example, then, of a change in progress in NZE whose origins are unclear, but which certainly cannot be traced to the influence of standard Australian (AusE), St AmE or BrE, since the standard variants in all three varieties distinguish between the diphthongs /iə/ and *leal*.

The EARIAIR merger differs from the change discussed so far because it involves vowels, rather than consonants, and it may be a component in more extensive internal sound changes, a point which is developed below. It appears to have begun in the speech of working class New Zealand women and spread upwards. In both social classes there is evidence that women have led this change which seems to be a classic example of a 'change from below', both in the sense of below the level of conscious awareness, and a change that has spread from working-class to middle-class usage.

It is clear that the merger of the EAR and AIR diphthongs is all but complete for young people. However, there is still a great deal of variation in the point of onset of the diphthong for any particular token. It is possible that, while individuals do not maintain a phonemic distinction between EAR words and AIR words, the precise point of onset may be variable for any particular realisation. There is relevant evidence from elsewhere, for example, that in the early stages of a sound change women are less likely to focus their realisations on one variant of a particular variable (eg. Britain's (1991) analysis of dialect contact in the Fens in England, Henton 1990: 211). Variation may reflect contextual factors. The analyses undertaken by Holmes and Bell (1993) and by Margaret Batterham (in progress) are not inconsistent with the suggestion that particular groups may select a more open onset in one style, but a closer one in another style.

So, while it is clear that the two diphthongs have merged and that young Pakeha New Zealand women have played an important role in this process, it is still not clear, where precisely the merger will finally settle in phonetic terms, and whose usage will contribute most to determining its final resting point. Patterns differ in different cities, in different social groups within cities, and in different speech styles, and it seems likely that variation will continue to be the norm for a considerable period of time. As Milroy (1993: 195) says

Sometimes (when the direction of change has not yet been determined) this pattern may seem to be rather inconsistent and unpredictable [...] we interpret this kind of pattern as indicating the break-up of consensus norms ...



It may be that variation in the point of onset of the merged diphthongs is a linguistic reflection of the current extensive social and economic changes going on in New Zealand society, in which women are integrally involved. Whatever its precise final phonetic realisation, given their contribution to other areas of sound change in NZE, it seems likely that, as the social patterns associated with different variants slowly emerge, women will make an important contribution to the integration of the merger into standard NZE.<sup>5</sup>

### III. SOURCES OF SOUND CHANGE IN NEW ZEALAND ENGLISH

The results presented in the preceding section demonstrate that young New Zealand women are consistently leading sound change in NZE. In this section, a number of alternative sources for the changes described will be discussed.

The steady decrease in lhl-dropping and the move to an lhl-ful variety evident in current NZE can be regarded as a move away from British vernacular speech. It could be considered either as a change from above, a conscious move to a prestigious form, or alternatively as a move away from a stigmatised form, since lhl-dropping has been overtly condemned for many decades (eg. Gordon 1983, Gordon and Deverson 1989). The effect is identical, whatever the precise motivation.

What is the most likely source of this change in NZE? There are many lhl-ful models of English in New Zealand, such as varieties spoken by Scots, Welsh, Irish and East Anglian immigrants, as well as speakers of educated accents such as RP from the south of England. These accents have been imported by immigrants throughout the last 150 years, and lhl-ful varieties are regularly modelled by speakers on British programmes broadcast on New Zealand TV and radio. Moreover, a range of attitude research has demonstrated that, surprisingly, RP continues to serve as an important prestige model for many New Zealanders (Bayard 1990b, 1995, Gordon and Abell 1990, Vaughan and Huygens 1990), a point equally relevant to the discussion of the glottal stop variant of final (t).

Another factor which may contribute to the increase in occurrence of initial /h/ is the influence of spelling pronunciation on NZE. NZE has developed in a context where education has been widespread since the variety first began to emerge, and young people have generally been exposed to print from an early age. As Bauer suggests, this may have provided "the kind of laboratory conditions in which spelling pronunciation has been able to flourish" (1995: 320). This change, then, may reflect the influence of a variety of 'standardising' pressures in the New Zealand speech community.

Accounting for the precise pathway followed by the glottal stop variant of final (t) as it entered NZE is much more problematic. Is it a change from below, a vernacular feature of New Zealand working-class speech which is unconsciously infiltrating the speech of middle-class New Zealanders? Is it a 'natural' change, the result of the process of lenition affecting a sound which Harris (1994: 120) describes as "one of the most unstable consonants in the language". Given its current status in Britain, it is also possible that the glottal variant of final (t) may be a change from above, a prestige form which is being consciously introduced into NZE by middle-class speakers.

Glottal stop variants of final (t) may have characterised the speech of some New Zealanders since English was first introduced (Gordon 1991), and the current process of glottal replacement certainly has some features of a vernacular change in progress in New Zealand. It is a relatively 'natural' change, reflecting principles such as ease of articulation or the

principle of least effort discussed by Bloomfield (1933: 386). Labov (1980: 253) comments that such principles generally underlie sound changes which arise in the speech of "the lowest social classes". This change is being led in New Zealand by young working class speakers, who use significantly higher proportions of glottal stops than their middle class counterparts. On the other hand, the change is being led by young women in both social classes, and it seems to be steadily acquiring standard status.

In Britain, the spread of the glottal stop for final /t/ appears to be a 20th-century vernacular change in progress (Wells 1982, Newbrook 1986, Mees 1987, Trudgill 1988, Milroy *et al.* 1994). It has spread steadily through different stylistic contexts and social groups, so that in some forms and linguistic contexts, it is currently identified as a feature of RP, the prestige accent in Britain. While the change originated in working class speech, the increasing use of the glottal variant by young middle class women indicates that its sociolinguistic significance is changing: glottal replacement is losing its stigma and developing as a new prestige norm.

The results described above suggest that the glottal variant is following the same pathway in New Zealand, namely from vernacular to prestige status. Indeed, the changing status of the glottal stop for final (t) in Britain may also have contributed to its acceptance in New Zealand. While in Britain it was unequivocally a change from below, glottal stops may be gaining ground more rapidly in New Zealand because they are recognised as features of 'young RP'. In other words the use of the glottal stop for final (t) in NZE may be a concurrent change from above and from below.

The voicing of intervocalic (t) is another current change in NZE with a number of alternative and perhaps complementary sources. It appears to be a vernacular change in progress, since it is more widespread in working-class than in middle-class New Zealand speech. Yet, contrary to what might have been predicted, young middle class women use as much T voicing as young working-class women, and they are well ahead of their male counterparts in the use of this vernacular form. Young middle class women appear, then, to be the main conduits of this change as it increases in the conversational style of the middle class.

Like glottal replacement of final (t), intervocalic voicing is another relatively 'natural' phonological process, attributable to lenition or ease of articulation, and hence this change could have its origins in internal mechanisms of sound change, a common reason for vernacular changes. However, varieties of AmE, where intervocalic voicing of (t) is categorical, provide another possible source.<sup>6</sup> Just as the growing prestige of the glottal variant in NZE may be enhanced by its progression towards standard status in Britain, so the establishment of T voicing in NZE may be facilitated by recent changes in attitudes to American accents.<sup>7</sup> T Voicing has often been condemned by purists as evidence of 'sloppy' or 'lazy' speech, an attitude probably reflecting its predominance in working class male speech and perhaps also the fact that intervocalic voicing can be attributed to the principle of least effort. Moreover, in previous decades American influence on aspects of New Zealand culture has been widely regarded with disfavour by many New Zealanders. In recent years, however, there is evidence that American influence on New Zealand speech is becoming more acceptable (see Bayard 1995, Vine 1995). In Bayard's studies of New Zealanders' attitudes to accents, the North American accent was rated second to RP on most power traits, and second to the Australian accent on solidarity traits such as likeability and humour (Bayard 1995: 113). And Bell's (1990) research on referee design in the media suggests that advertisers perceive

Americans as a relevant 'referee' or salient out-group for New Zealand speakers. Among young New Zealanders, then, T Voicing may have lost its stigma and be acquiring the prestige associated with an increasingly influential out-group.

The development of a more syllable-timed rhythm in NZE compared to varieties of English elsewhere is undoubtedly related to the influence of the indigenous language Maori on varieties of NZE, though it may well be reinforced by the influence of spelling pronunciation. Maori (like Japanese) is a mora-timed language (Bauer 1981), and mora-timing provides a rhythmic pattern which is more similar to syllable timing than to stress timing.<sup>8</sup> Though Maori is no longer widely spoken, even young Maori people who do not speak the language have regular contact with it, often through older family members, but also at meetings on the *marae* (a traditional meeting area for Maori people), and on the radio and television. This exposure to Maori rhythms in contexts where Maori is an admired and prestigious code is a very likely influence on their use of English.

While it is a more frequent characteristic of the English of Maori New Zealanders, syllable timing may also be increasing in Pakeha English (PE). Another feature of Maori English which may also be spreading into PE is the devoicing of final (z). Again young working class Pakeha women used the voiceless variant more frequently than any other group of Pakeha in the sample, and at a level closer to Maori than Pakeha norms. In both cases, then, the speech of young Pakeha women seems to be acting as a channel for features associated with ME speech to enter PE.

The little research which exists on attitudes to Maori accents of English suggests that they are generally rather negatively evaluated (eg. Vaughan and Huygens 1990, Bayard 1991a, 1991b, Robertson 1994). Shelley Robertson comments,

where speakers are perceived to be Maori, they are rated very low, especially on power variables such as class, education and occupation.

S. Robertson (1994: 53)

In the light of this evidence, the adoption of features of ME by young Pakeha women seems surprising. However, young women from different social groups and from different regional areas may differ in how they evaluate Maori accents of English. One might expect, for example, that differing degrees of contact with Maori people would affect attitudes to ME. We have little research to assist with interpretation here. It should be noted, however, that syllable-timed speech is not associated exclusively with stereotypes of rural, working class Maori people: it is also characteristic of the speech of middle class Maori (Holmes and Ainsworth 1996), and is evident in the speech rhythms of Maori newsreaders on the conservative National radio programme, and to some extent also in the speech of Pakeha newsreaders (Ainsworth 1993). Spelling pronunciations and concern for intelligibility may contribute to the amount of syllable-timing in newsreaders' speech, but the overall effect is to increase the acceptability of this feature in NZE. As Maori people gain status in New Zealand, the speech features associated with middle class, well-educated ME are likely to be positively evaluated. And all these factors may contribute to the higher level of syllable-timing identified in the speech of young Pakeha New Zealand women.

Without further research, it is difficult to know whether the same reasoning can be applied to the devoicing of final (z). Many New Zealanders are aware of the distinctive rhythms of ME, but the same cannot be said of the devoicing of obstruents. This vemaacular

feature is well below the level of consciousness in people's usage. Any account of the reasons for its adoption by young Pakeha women will need to address the more general issue of why young women are often in the forefront of vernacular change, a point discussed below.

At least two other vernacular speech features, namely the invariant tag *eh*, and the high rising terminal contour (HRT), both of which are significantly more frequent in Maori than in Pakeha speech, are also used much more often by young Pakeha women than by any other Pakeha group (Britain 1992, Meyerhoff 1994). The tag *eh*, heard in utterances such as *neat bike eh*, may have its source in the Maori particle *ne*, while Winifred Bauer (1993) comments on the increase in HRTs in modern Maori which she attributes to the influence of English on Maori. Both features are most frequent in the speech of young Maori men, while among Pakeha it is young women who use them most. These patterns provide further support for the suggestion that young Pakeha women are acting as a channel for features associated with Maori speech to enter PE.'

Finally, the merger of the diphthongs in EAR and AIR words is the one change in this data which involves vowels rather than consonants. It is widely agreed that consonant changes are less likely to have consequences for the wider sound system, and more likely to be changes influenced by external or social factors than changes involving vowels, which are more likely to be systematic changes influenced by internal factors. This is consistent with the suggestion that this sound change does not result from external influences on NZE, but rather has its origins in the internal mechanisms of the sound system.<sup>10</sup>

Mergers are very common and 'natural' sound changes (eg. see Labov 1994: 33-4). Indeed Labov states categorically that "[m]ost reports of phonemic change involve mergers" (1994: 331). He also points out that mergers do not generally involve any appeal to social factors to account for their establishment in the language:

The evidence for the absence of social affect of splits and mergers is massive and overwhelming.

W. Labov (1994: 343)

It has been suggested that the EARIAIR merger is the consequence of, or, less radically, has become caught up in the well known New Zealand front short vowel shift. Following Labov's (1994: 310ff) detailed discussion of such processes, Maclagan and Gordon (in press) suggest that it may be a merger by approximation which has arisen "because /e/ became involved in the raising of the New Zealand front vowels". A related suggestion, but one with more far-reaching implications, which has been explored by Margaret Batterham (in progress), is that the merger is the result of a cyclic chain shift involving the short front vowels in NZE. The centralization of /ɪ/, the PIT vowel, and the related rise of the PAT and PET vowels, have long been noted as features of NZE." Indeed Labov (1994: 138) cites NZE as an example of an upward pull chain shift involving short vowels, an uncommon linguistic phenomenon. Batterham interprets her complex data as indicating that the EARIAIR merger is another component in this chain shift. She proposes a cyclic shift: the merger results from a cycle which includes the short front vowels pull chain, the centralisation of /ɪ/, and the fronting of central vowels.

Whatever specific phonological mechanisms are involved, this is clearly not a change that has been imported from outside New Zealand: it is an indigenous and 'natural' change. It is equally clear, however, that it is a change which has been led by young women from

lower socio-economic groups. It is currently spreading into middle class usage, and young women are again in the forefront of change.

#### IV. EXPLAINING WOMEN'S ROLE IN SOUND CHANGE

##### IV.1. Types of prestige

I have used the term 'prestige' in the discussion so far to refer to the overtly recognised status of standard varieties or accents, such as RP. In exploring further the reasons for women's role in relation to sound change in NZE, it is useful to note three different types of prestige which have been distinguished by sociolinguists working in this area: global prestige, local prestige and covert prestige.

Eckert (1989: 250) describes global prestige as "based on norms imposed in the standard language market-place", covert prestige as "based in opposition to those norms", and local prestige as "based on membership in the local community" (1989: 250). The accent of the best educated members of the dominant group in a society generally has global prestige, while that of the local community generally has local prestige. Non-standard or vernacular accents, which are usually associated with working class, and often masculine speech, have covert prestige for their users. So using these terms, in Britain, RP has global prestige, many educated regional accents, such as Scottish, Welsh, or Lancashire accents have local prestige, and the accents used by the urban working class (such as Liverpool 'Scouse' or Birmingham 'Brummy') often have covert prestige (see Newbrook 1986).

These definitions are not easy to apply in New Zealand. The scope of the terms 'global' and 'local' is one obvious problem. One solution is to restrict the application of the term 'global prestige' to varieties which are external to New Zealand. In this case, there are at least two possible contenders for the status of accents with global or external prestige in New Zealand, namely RP and St AmE. Attitude research undertaken in three cities, Auckland (Vaughan and Huygens 1990), Christchurch (Gordon and Abell 1990) and Dunedin (Bayard 1990b) suggests that RP has overt prestige in New Zealand, while Bayard's (1991b) research indicates that standard North American English accents are increasingly highly rated.

There is, on the other hand, something of a lacuna in relation to accents with local prestige parallel to those identified in Britain and the U.S.A., unless we treat standard or cultivated NZE as a local accent of English in the context of varieties of English throughout the world.<sup>12</sup> But within New Zealand this accent clearly has national prestige. Apart from the commonly cited example of the Southland accent, we have no firm evidence of regional difference in NZE, and there is certainly no evidence that New Zealanders can reliably identify regional accents (Bayard 1995: 53-4). The most promising contender for an accent with 'local' prestige is, in fact, the ethnic variety referred to above as ME (better described as a range of varieties along a continuum from standard to vernacular), especially the variety of ME used by educated middle class Maori New Zealanders. Other more vernacular varieties of ME are used by the much larger group of Maori from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and Benton (1991) has described a more colloquial register of ME associated with informal contexts and predominantly Maori participants. The evidence discussed above supports the suggestion that there is an educated variety of ME - standard ME - which is admired and overtly prestigious in the national context. In my view, this is a strong contender for the status of a New Zealand

accent with national prestige.

Finally, there is the issue of accents with covert prestige. The term itself is inherently problematic and could be considered an oxymoron. Labov points out that if attitudes are truly covert, the evidence for accents with covert prestige must necessarily be indirect (1990: 215). One could go further and say that if accents have some kind of prestige or standing, then among those who value them, this prestige is not covert. Hence the term 'covert prestige' reflects the perspective of the dominant group. A better term might be 'vernacular prestige'. Are there accents with such prestige in New Zealand?

Since we have little research in this area at present, it is only possible to speculate. It seems likely, however, that vernacular varieties of ME have vernacular prestige, at least among Maori, and perhaps especially for Maori males, and possibly for some Pakeha people too (Robertson 1994). It is possible that a 'broad' New Zealand accent also has vernacular prestige among some groups, and perhaps in rural areas. It is clear that more research is needed on attitudes to New Zealand accents to help tease out some of these issues (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Possible types of prestige relating to New Zealand accents

#### IV.2. Why do women lead sound change in NZE?

We are now in a position to explore the issue of why women are leading sound change in NZE. The most commonly cited reason for women's role in relation to sound change relates to prestige changes. It is claimed that women are more status conscious than men, and that they are more sensitive than men to the significance of language as a reflection of social status. Consequently, they not only use more instances of stable prestige forms than men in formal

contexts, they also introduce new forms into speech communities from external prestigious reference groups (eg. Trudgill 1972. 1974. Labov 1966. 1972).

More recently Labov (1990: 214) summarises a rather more sophisticated expression of this argument in the following form: "Women are said to rely more on symbolic capital than men because they possess less material power". He goes on to point out that such behaviour can be regarded as advantaging women. "In disadvantaged communities. sensitivity to exterior standards of correctness in language is associated with upward social mobility". Consequently, if women use more prestige forms than men. this leads to greater employability. He interprets this as a "symptom of an overall readiness and opportunity to take advantage of prevailing community norms (1990: 214).

Labov notes that:

Because changes from above share many of the properties of stable sociolinguistic variables. it is not surprising that the role of the sexes is similar. and women lead in both the acquisition of new prestige patterns and the elimination of stigmatized forms.

W. Labov (1990: 213)

In citing support for this principle Labov points not only to social dialect data but also to examples of language shift in multilingual communities (see also Burton 1994). There is evidence that New Zealand women in ethnic minority communities are similarly very aware of the importance of learning English. the overt prestige code. It provides them with access to better jobs and for many represents an escape route from confining social roles.

But while this explains why women will favour prestige forms, it is clearly not applicable to what Labov describes as "the most basic form of linguistic change that operates within the system" (1990: 215) namely sound changes from below, where vernacular forms associated with the speech of lower socio-economic groups spread upwards into middle class speech and establish themselves as new standard or prestige forms. Is it possible. then. to identify a common process accounting for women's lead in sound change in these two rather different cases?

Labov (1990) explores this issue in considerable detail. Presenting a complex argument based on the interpretation of a mass of social dialect data. he comes to the conclusion that it is possible to perceive common processes at work in both cases. Simplifying his argument considerably. the suggestion is that regardless of whether changes are imported from outside prestige groups. or occur through "natural linguistic processes" (1990: 227). most changes will appear to be led by women because women are usually the care-givers in society. Thus, assuming variation is omnipresent as a potential source of change. the particular variants favoured by women will be given an advantage by being passed on to children. and hence these female variants have a better chance of being established as changes than those which occur in male speech. In other words, Labov suggests that the mechanisms by which particular variants are propagated result in the favouring of changes associated with women's speech. In the case of vernacular changes he suggests that women subsequently react more sharply than men against these stigmatised forms as they enter people's social awareness. and hence their initial lead diminishes over time as the changes spread through the community.

To what extent do the changes in NZE support Labov's argument? The reduction in /h/-dropping and consequent move to an /h/-ful variety can be described either as a prestige innovation, or alternatively as the deletion of a stigmatised form. In either case. since standard

English accents are universally /h/-ful, the outcome is a form which brings NZE into line with external standards of English world-wide, including RP and St AmE, which I have argued can be regarded as having global prestige in the New Zealand context. New Zealand women are behaving as one might expect, then, with respect to this sound change.

The precise status of the innovations of the glottal stop for final (t) and intervocalic voicing of (t) are much less clear. Are these examples of prestige forms being introduced from external varieties with global prestige, namely 'young RP' in the case of the glottal stop and St AmE in the case of T Voicing? Or are they examples of vernacular changes spreading from below?

It is not plausible to treat the glottal stop as purely a 'natural' or systematic change in NZE: it is not likely to be a change reflecting only the internal mechanisms of the sound system, a change independent of the koinéisation process. The glottal stop is such a well-established sociolinguistic variable in many varieties of BrE, including varieties such as Scottish and Cockney English which have been heard in New Zealand since at least the 1860s, that it must function as a marker, rather than an indicator. In other words, it is unlikely to qualify as a change from below the level of awareness. The data suggests, however, that it had its origins in working class speech and that it is steadily spreading to middle class speech. The fact that it is more frequent in conversational speech than in interview style provides further support for the classification of this as a vernacular change in its origins.<sup>13</sup> Since it is unlikely to be a change from below the level of consciousness, this suggests that the glottal stop must have some kind of prestige. There is no obvious community norm which might confer local prestige on this change. Does it then have vernacular prestige?

Bayard (1990a) points to the influence in New Zealand of television programmes such as *Minder* and *EastEnders* (perhaps mediated through the usage of New Zealand punk rock bands)<sup>14</sup> as possible explanations for the increase in glottal stop variants of (-t) in New Zealand speech, although he admits this is difficult to prove (Bayard 1990a: 159). On the other hand, Trudgill (1986: 40) argues that "the electronic media are not very instrumental in the diffusion of linguistic innovations", and that face-to-face interaction is necessary to spread phonological variants. However, he acknowledges that the media may "be part of a 'softening-up' process" which can contribute to the adoption of an innovation even if "it does not cause it" (Trudgill 1986: 54-5). And it is possible that media exposure and use by rock bands could contribute to the covert prestige of such forms for young people. However, this provides no obvious explanation for why young working class women should use more such forms than young men.

An alternative or possibly complementary explanation which I have suggested is that the final glottal stop variant of (t) is no longer associated predominantly with working-class speech. The fact that glottal replacement is now a marker of 'young RP' may be contributing to its spread in New Zealand. In this case it could have global prestige in the eyes of young New Zealanders, and its greater frequency in the speech of young New Zealand women than men, and particularly in the speech of young middle class New Zealand women would thus be easier to account for. Indeed this change may owe something to the influence of both vernacular and global prestige. More research is needed to establish the relative contributions of each.<sup>15</sup>

T voicing is another vernacular change in progress which has spread from working class to middle class speech, and from less formal to more formal styles. As a natural phonological process, this may well be a classic example of a change from below. If Labov's analysis is correct we would predict that, as the change approaches completion, women's lead



in respect to this usage would reduce. This is consistent with the pattern for working class New Zealand women's usage, but middle class women are still well ahead of their male peers. They appear to be leading this change into middle class usage, and thus establishing it as a component of standard NZE. As yet there is no evidence that they perceive the change as a stigmatised innovation.

On the other hand, intervocalic voicing is a categorical feature of AmE, a variety with increasing prestige in the eyes (or, perhaps more accurately, ears) of young New Zealanders (Bayard 1991a, 1995; Vine 1995). Whatever its original status, this innovation too may currently be regarded as a change from above, reflecting the global prestige associated with an increasingly important reference group. In this case its attraction for young middle class women would be easier to explain. Further research on its distribution in different styles would assist here. So rather than conforming to the pattern outlined by Labov, the use of glottal for final (t) and voicing of intervocalic /t/ seem to follow a distinctively New Zealand pathway to standard status, reflecting the fact that they are changes both from above and below.

The increased evidence of syllable-timing in the speech of young New Zealand women appears to constitute an example of an innovation reflecting the local prestige of standard educated ME (reinforced perhaps by the influence of spelling pronunciation). Syllable-timing is a well-established feature of the English of educated Maori people and can be heard in formal contexts. There is a good case for considering it as a feature with local prestige in the New Zealand community, and so it is interesting to see young women leading change in this area too. Evidence from a number of features suggests that young Pakeha women are well-disposed towards features of ME, and regard it positively as a potential source of innovation.

The same explanation might account for the high proportion of the voiceless variant of final (z) in the speech of young Pakeha women. It should be noted, however, that, like intervocalic voicing, devoicing of final obstruents can be considered a relatively natural phonological process (Harris 1994: 210), and hence this feature may be an example of a change from below the level of consciousness. We do not yet have sufficient research to indicate whether this feature is more frequent in working class than in middle class Maori speech. Moreover, unlike syllable-timing which is a widely recognised feature of all varieties of ME, devoicing of final (z) is certainly not a feature which has attracted much comment. If this is a vernacular change in progress, Labov's argument would predict that, as it spreads upwards through the community, increasing awareness of it as a stigmatised form will lead to a reduction in the gap between its frequency of occurrence in women's and men's speech. At present, it is too early to see whether this prediction will be borne out.

Finally what explanation can be proffered for the predominance of the EAR/AIR merger in the speech of New Zealand women? As described above, this merger appears then to be an indigenous and 'natural' change which is being led by New Zealand women.<sup>16</sup> There is also interesting evidence that the patterns demonstrated by the progress of the EAR/AIR merger over time support Labov's observations of women's usage in relation to vernacular innovations. Our data suggests that women first led a merger towards the closer variant, but that this pattern has been subsequently reversed, with younger women moving towards a merger on the more open variant (Holmes and Bell 1993). More recent data collected by MacLagan and Gordon (in press) suggests that young women in their Christchurch sample are moving towards the closer variant after earlier preferring the more open variant. In both cases, one could interpret the data as evidence that women are reacting as they become aware of the extent to which a stigmatised variant features in their speech. Since, as Labov (1994:

311) notes, "mergers are irreversible", one possible reaction to a stigmatised merger is to move the point of phonetic realisation. This is what I propose has happened with the EAR/AIR merger in NZE. It will be interesting to observe how long this sea-sawing back and forth between the closer and more open points of onset will continue. In the meantime, it appears to constitute a fascinating example of women's sensitivity to a natural vernacular change which has begun to acquire social affect." Nevertheless, whatever the final point of onset, the merger is now a well-established feature of standard NZE, and women have played a significant role in establishing the merger as a feature of standard NZE.

Clearly New Zealand Pakeha women make a significant contribution to establishing vernacular changes as components of standard NZE, a role identified by Milroy *et al.* (1994) in relation to glottal stops in middle class BrE. This pattern is clearest with respect to the merging of EAR/AIR, but, if one regards them as vernacular rather than prestige changes, it is also evident in the use of syllable-timed speech, glottal stops and intervocalic (t) voicing too. It will be interesting to observe the progress of final (z) devoicing, since this is undoubtedly a vernacular change, and it appears to be poised for a similar progression.

There is also evidence that Pakeha women play a role in introducing prestige forms into the NZE sound system. The increase in the proportions of initial /h/ in NZE has been led by women, and, while this may be reinforced by the influence of spelling pronunciation, it is also a move in the direction of models of English with external prestige. Young Pakeha women's greater use of syllable-timed speech may also reflect the local prestige of its middle class educated Maori users. Glottal stops for final (t) are recognised as components of innovative RP in Britain. And while intervocalic voicing had its origins in working class speech, the increasing global prestige of American varieties of English no doubt contributes to its acceptability in NZE. In these cases, if there is a contribution from their association with varieties with global and local prestige, women's role appears to be to endorse and ratify the prestige status of such innovations as components of standard NZE.

Hence, whatever their origins, the success of particular innovations (as opposed to linguistic variants which never acquire the status of changes in the standard accent) appears to depend on their being adopted and endorsed by women. The question which still remains is "why do women play such a significant role in language change?"

An adequate response to this question will involve interdisciplinary research. Similar patterns have been identified across many western urban communities in which it is generally agreed that overall women are socially subordinate to men. Despite the fact that in most areas women lack power (at least in terms of conventional definitions of power), they appear to have considerable influence in areas of linguistic usage. At least since women have had access to education, and perhaps especially in colonial societies, language has become an area where women are allowed some authority and expected to exercise some influence.

Certainly in Pakeha New Zealand society, areas such as social etiquette have traditionally been considered areas where women's influence is greater than men's. In colonial times, women were quite explicitly regarded as having a civilising influence on men - women were regarded as "God's police" (Summers 1975, Bassett *et al.* 1985) and identified with "refinement, morality and culture" (Lady Barker quoted by Dalziel 1977: 119). Indeed one account of the reason why women were given the vote so early in New Zealand attributes it to the expectation that the "women's vote, pure and refined, would balance the sordid influence of the single males" (Phillips 1980: 226). And the matters over which women were expected to exercise their influence certainly extended to language. Women were expected to provide

models of correct and refined linguistic usage, as well as to avoid coarse language and swearing.<sup>18</sup>

Hence issues of language usage have long been regarded as more appropriately the concern of women than men in New Zealand. Concern over linguistic issues is even considered somewhat effeminate: there is an implication that 'real men' don't get involved with such matters. This may well be some explanation for the fact that women take such a leading role in determining which forms become established in the standard variety. Incidentally, this explanation may also account for the fact that the same patterns are not always evident in Maori society where men have traditionally been regarded as the experts on matters relating to language. The little evidence we have suggests that, even in their use of English, where there are gender differences, Maori men tend to be ahead of women in the use of innovative forms.

This argument is consistent with the economic and sociological analysis outlined in Eckert's work. Arguing that linguistic analysis should examine the behaviour of females within different social categories as well as across categories, Penelope Eckert (1989: 255-7) suggests that the underlying explanatory factor is power rather than prestige. Adopting a neo-Marxist framework, and a notion of the market-place and the significance of symbolic capital which reflect the influence of Bourdieu, gender differences in variation are "attributable to social forces that attach to women by virtue of their place in the economy" (1989: 255). She argues as follows:

Deprived of power, women can only gain compliance through the indirect use of a man's power or through the development of personal influence. Since to have personal influence without power requires moral authority, women's influence depends primarily on the painstaking creation and elaboration of an image of the whole self as worth [sic] of authority. Thus, women are thrown into the accumulation of symbolic capital.

P. Eckert (1989: 256)

Language is one form of symbolic capital, and authority in the area of linguistic usage is one of the few avenues available to women to assert their influence in society.<sup>19</sup>

This influence is most evident in the well established pattern that, in formal contexts, women use more standard or prestige forms than men. In such contexts women are performing their role as guardians of the language and modelling the community's 'ideal' or standard language forms (cf. Romaine 1996). But it is also reflected in the widely accepted belief, which has some support from the evidence of social dialect interviews, that women are stylistically more flexible and tend to develop a wider linguistic repertoire than men.<sup>20</sup> Women from lower social groups in particular are often the brokers in neighbourhood interactions as well as in communications between bureaucracy and the family. Women's social activities and jobs often involve them in interaction with a wider range of social contacts than men's (eg. Milroy 1980, Nicholls 1983). In such contexts, they are exposed to a variety of pressures, including pressure to accommodate to the speech of others if they are to be effective in their interactions. As Moonwomon (1989: 244) suggests, the wide variation observed in the speech behaviour of women is a response to the conflicting demands of their many roles. In this way they encounter a great deal of linguistic variation which must always be regarded as a potential source of innovation.

This relates to one of Eckert's main points, namely that gender is but one factor to consider in the social scheme of things, and she demonstrates in her own analysis that alternative social categories (Jocks and Burnouts) reflecting different orientations to middle class culture and particularly to school values are at least as relevant as gender in accounting for patterns of sociolinguistic variation. Eckert's analysis is convincing. In New Zealand, gender interacts with many other salient social categories, including ethnicity and social class. But there is sociological and historical evidence that gender is particularly influential in New Zealand society. New Zealand has been described as a 'gendered culture', a culture in which "the structures of masculinity and femininity are central to the formation of society as a whole", a culture in which "the intimate and structural expressions of social life are divided according to gender" (James and Saville-Smith 1989: 6-7). Gender, it has been suggested, is the motif and preoccupation of New Zealand society, as class is in Britain: women and men are more effectively trapped in gender roles still in New Zealand than in Britain (James and Saville-Smith 1989: 12).

This provides, then, at least one plausible explanation for why Pakeha New Zealand women are making such an influential contribution to the development of standard NZE. Firstly language is one of the few areas where women can claim some authority and exercise some influence. As a result women's variants are treated as models by the society and become established as components of the standard language. Secondly, women typically interact with a wider range of social contacts than men. Since they are more responsive to the speech of others than men are, they are thus likely to acquire a number of linguistic variants from which innovations may develop. The variants which are favoured over time by women as a group will then become the new standard forms.

## CONCLUSION

I have described a number of changes which are currently in progress in NZE. Four of these involve consonants which occur in specific positions in words: the reduction of initial /h/-dropping, voicing of intervocalic (t), the use of a glottal stop for final (t), and devoicing of final (z); one involves a prosodic feature, namely syllable-timing, and the final change is the merger of the EAR and AIR diphthongs.

It is not possible to state categorically how such changes begin in a variety such as NZE: there are a number of potentially relevant influences, all of which may contribute to different extents. The decrease in /h/-dropping, for instance, may reflect the continuing relevance of external prestige models in New Zealand: there is evidence that both RP and AmE have global prestige for many New Zealanders. But the contribution of spelling pronunciation to such a change cannot be discounted, especially in a literate, educated population. The glottal stop for final (t) could be regarded as a vernacular change with its origins in ease of articulation or the principle of least effort. But it is also a change that is establishing itself in modern RP, and hence this is another probable influence on the New Zealand change. The same two sources apply to intervocalic voicing, which could equally be regarded as a relatively 'natural' change, and which has similarly established itself in an external variety, AmE, which appears to have increasing global prestige in the New Zealand context. The most obvious source of the higher level of syllable-timing in NZE is ME, which is undoubtedly gaining prestige as the status of Maori people and their culture rises. So the ME of educated middle

class Maori, in particular, can be regarded as a very likely influence on PE. But, again, spelling pronunciation, especially in more formal styles, may be another contributing factor. Similarly, the devoicing of final (z) may be attributed most obviously to the influence of ME, but, unlike syllable-timing which involves more effort (at least to the extent that full vowels require more effort than reduced vowels), devoicing is a natural change, and as such is a typical vernacular change. Finally, the merging of the EAR and AIR diphthongs is another relatively natural change, a vernacular change which has almost gone to completion in NZE. Again other factors, such as internal pressure from vowel changes affecting the short front vowels in NZE, may have contributed. These New Zealand examples thus illustrate the complexities of sound change in progress, and suggest that it is rare to be able to attribute a change to a single source. Where more than one factor contributes, it is possible that a particular change is favoured or accelerated compared to other potential changes.

In all the examples described, as well as others, such as the increase in the use of the HRT (Britain 1992) and the centralisation of the short front vowel [ɪ] (Bell 1993), New Zealand women play an important role in leading sound change in NZE. These New Zealand examples demonstrate very clearly that the changes led by women may be traced to a range of sources: there is no uniform pattern. Women lead changes which could be described as prestige changes, as well as changes which are undoubtedly vernacular changes. The role of women in linguistic change has been much debated. It is apparent that there are many different and often contradictory factors which need to be considered in different contexts and communities. Women from different social groups may respond differently to any particular linguistic innovation, as Labov (1990) suggests. Moreover, women play different roles at different points in the progression of any change from its first introduction to its final acceptance or rejection in any community.

Researchers such as Labov (1990) and Eckert (1989) have suggested that women introduce prestige forms from outside a community for the same reasons that they tend to use more stable, established prestige forms in formal contexts. Because of the differential power relationships between women and men, language is an important means by which women assert their authority and position, a form of symbolic capital for women. Sensitivity to 'correct' forms is an important factor aiding social mobility in disadvantaged groups. Labov has argued that the reason why women lead vernacular change reflects their role as child-rearers: children learn the vernacular forms which women favour and this gives these forms an advantage over vernacular forms favoured by men. Thus, over time, even if women retreat from the leadership role in relation to such changes, they become established in the language as the children become adults.

The New Zealand data I have described supports the view that, whatever the particular sources of the change, and whether they are regarded as vernacular or prestige innovations, women play an important role in establishing changes as components of the standard language. There is also evidence that women have traditionally been regarded in New Zealand society as appropriate models in areas such as social etiquette and language. Indeed, the data reviewed is compatible with the suggestion of Milroy and Milroy (1993) that it is the adoption of particular sound changes by women that gives them prestige, rather than the reverse: ie. "if females favour certain forms, they become prestige forms" (1993: 65). In other words, rather than women copying statusful or prestigious forms used by others, they in fact create the standard forms." On this interpretation, New Zealand women's usage is a clear indicator of the future direction of NZE.

Indeed, the interesting position of New Zealand in relation to numerically and economically dominant countries such as Britain and the United States of America, makes it a potential linguistic laboratory in such areas. These external varieties may account for or contribute to the establishment of some changes, but there are others, such as the EAR/AIR merger and final (z) devoicing, which present ideal testing conditions for the Milroys' claims. Will these demonstrably vernacular changes become established as components of standard NZE as a result of their use by New Zealand women'?

It is also interesting to note that the potential sources of change described in this paper are many and various. They include 'natural' changes attributable to factors such as ease of articulation, as well as changes which clearly require more effort; they include changes which may have their sources outside New Zealand, as well as changes whose most obvious source is local. This suggests that women are open to new influences, and willing to be innovative in their language behaviour. There is support for this view in other areas of gender and language research. Women have been shown to style shift more dramatically than men, responding more sensitively to contextual factors than men. Minority group women are quick to see the value of maintaining the minority language, which is so important in terms of family relationships and ethnic identity, as well as learning English which has such obvious instrumental value. Women generally need to be more stylistically flexible than men because of the many demands that are made of them in their roles as mothers, friends, employees, family brokers in the bureaucratic market-place, and so on. Their many roles also expose them to more varieties than their equivalent men: the greater potential for being linguistically innovative is obvious. In all these examples we see evidence that women perceive the potential value of language to them as relatively less powerful members of society, and they use it as a flexible resource. Women's role in language change is yet another piece of evidence that women are socially sensitive language users.

## NOTES

1. This paper has benefited greatly from extensive discussions with David Brittain. The research on which the paper draws was made possible by a grant from the New Zealand Foundation for Research, Science and Technology.

2. In addition to Labov's qualification regarding access to the standard norms, I would add a second rider relating to stylistic context. Where sociolinguistic surveys have included a range of styles, the evidence suggests that women's usage differs from men's mainly in more formal styles. The revised principle would thus read as follows: «For stable sociolinguistic variables, provided they have access to standard norms, women use a higher frequency of standard forms in formal styles than men». This point is explored in more detail below.

3. In both cases women must have access to the relevant norms, through education or work. Women cannot lead changes to prestige forms "when the language is associated with work situations and educational opportunities open predominantly to males" (Labov 1990: 214).

4. To facilitate comparability with other studies of /h/-dropping, unstressed syllables and two groups of frequently-occurring lexical items beginning in orthographic /h/ were excluded in our most recent analysis (Bell & Holmes 1992): (i) the auxiliaries *have*, *has* and *had*, and (ii) the 3rd person pronouns *her*, *hers*, *he*, *him*, *his*.

5. There is evidence that a number of other changes in NZE are also being led by Pakeha women: eg. pronunciation of *known* with an epenthetic vowel between /w/ and /n/ (Britain in progress), centralisation of short front /ɪ/ (Bell 1993).
6. It has also been suggested that Australian English may be a relevant influence on T Voicing in NZE but there is little evidence for this at present, given that the levels of intervocalic voicing of /t/ noted in a small set of lexical items elicited in Horvath's (1985) Sydney study were, at 41%, considerably lower than those noted in the New Zealand data.
7. Mowbray (1989) notes that changes from above are often phonologically isolated, whereas changes from below are more often part of a system change. Given that phonologically isolated changes tend to involve consonants rather than vowels, this supports the probability of a prestige rather than a vernacular source for changes such as intervocalic /t/ voicing and the glottal stop for final /t/.
8. Donegan (1978: 53) describes mora-timing as follows: "When there is a distinction made between short (one-beat) and long (two-or-more beat) syllables, so that each short vowel [...] is mapped onto one 'beat' or time-interval, and each long vowel is mapped onto two, the language is said to be [...] mora-timed".
9. A very small tendency in the same direction as that discussed for final /z/ is evident in my analysis of unaspirated initial /t/ in words like *time* and *television*, another feature of Maori English (Holmes 1996a).
10. But see Woods (forthcoming) for a discussion of the possible role of social processes such as speech accommodation in dialect contact situations in accounting for processes of linguistic change. Analysing real time data, Woods provides evidence that the rise in the TRAP and DRESS vowels in New Zealand English was also initially led by women.
11. Bell's (1993) analysis of data from our WCSoc demonstrates that a centralised vowel is well established in the NZE of Pakeha people in their seventies, suggesting it may have been a feature of NZE since the turn of the century.
12. The terms 'cultivated', 'general' and 'broad' were first used by Mitchell and Delbridge (1965) to describe Australian English. Provided it is recognised that they impose categories on what is in fact a continuum, they are useful in distinguishing broadly identifiable social varieties of New Zealand English.
13. Data from the WCSoc interviews also supports this interpretation.
14. One small study suggested an increase in glottal stops for (-t) in the singing of three New Zealand punk rock groups over the period 1979-1986 (Bayard 1990a: 160). More recently Brooks (1994) identified the same pattern in an analysis of 40 songs over the thirty-three year period between 1960 and 1993.
15. In either case contact through interaction with British speakers seems essential at some point in transmitting this change. The mechanisms of transmission - whether through contact with immigrants from Britain or with New Zealanders who have spent time in Britain - are an obvious area for further research.
16. On the other hand, as mentioned above, in some cases the merger appears to be more advanced in minimal pairs style, a finding that perhaps indicates the degree of confusion currently surrounding this sound change in progress.
17. David Britain (pc) notes that stigmatisation, and hence saliency, tends to lead to focussing, while lack of it favours diffuseness. Many young New Zealanders are unaware that EAR and AIR words were once pronounced differently; the merger is clearly not stigmatised for them. Consequently, there is no reason for them to focus the position of onset.
18. In a recent paper, Suzanne Romaine (1996) discusses in a much wider context, the extent to which "notions of 'speaking properly' have become intertwined with beliefs about femininity and female nature, and in particular, how they have been used in the construction of the concept of 'lady' in the guise of 'glamour girl'".
19. Larsen (1982) makes a related but slightly different point when she argues that Norwegian women use the standard variety to assert authority in a way that is consistent with their gender identity.

20. The difference between women's most casual and most careful styles is quite dramatic for some linguistic variables in the speech of lower social groups in both British and American surveys (eg see Trudgill 1974, Labov 1972). However, the WCSoc suggested a number of qualifications: eg, the patterns seemed to vary according to whether the variable was a stable one, or was involved in linguistic change. For the stable variable ING, the men shifted very much more than the women as they moved from careful reading style to relaxed conversation. For the more volatile variable EAR/AIR, on the other hand, which is currently involved in change, the women showed more style shifting.

21. Larsen (1982) makes this point in relation to rural women's traditional role in Norwegian villages: "Females act as culture brokers, serving to legitimate the use of standard forms in the community repertoire".

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