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## Teacher perceptions of student speech

Yvonne G. Haig  
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**Teacher perceptions of student speech**

**Yvonne Gail Haig**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the award of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences,**

**Edith Cowan University.**

**March 2001**

## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

## ABSTRACT

Although language variation is widespread and natural, it is subject to judgement.

Where a standard language has developed, other varieties tend to be judged against its "standards". While a number of overseas studies have found that this type of linguistic bias occurs in education and negatively impacts on dialect speakers, there has been little research in Australia.

The research reported in this thesis investigates how teachers perceive the speech of school-aged students and whether the socio-economic status or level of schooling of the students influence these perceptions. Further, it examines the relationships between the teachers' background, the way they define Standard Australian English, their attitude to language variation and the way they perceive student speech.

The research was undertaken as three separate but related studies. Thirty six teachers from twelve different schools were involved - three teachers from four different schools (n=12) participating in each of the three studies. In Study One, the teachers kept observational notes on the problems they identified in their students' speech for a period of a week. In Study Two, the teachers participated in school-based focus groups to discuss those features they deemed to be problematic in their students' speech. In Study Three, the teachers ranked tape-recorded samples of speech from students who were not known to them. All the teachers provided background information, wrote their own definition of Standard Australian English and completed a questionnaire about their attitude to language variation in general and to the use of particular variants of English.

The teachers in the three studies identified aspects of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and language use as problematic in student speech. The teachers' judgement of what was problematic and their perception of what caused these problems differed according to the socio-economic status of the students. Many of the features teachers identified as problematic were variants of Australian English. The teachers of low SES students tended to see this variation as evidence of their students' language deficiency and to be the result of their "restricted" backgrounds. The teachers of high SES students identified fewer problems in their students' speech and tended to view variation as developmental, inappropriately informal use of language or the result of deterioration in "standards". The teachers' perceptions of speech also varied according to the year level they were teaching. These perceptions reflected the teachers' own backgrounds, their personal definitions of Standard Australian English, their own "idealised" speech and their view of the relative status of Australian accents. The written form of the language also greatly influenced the teachers' perceptions of student speech.

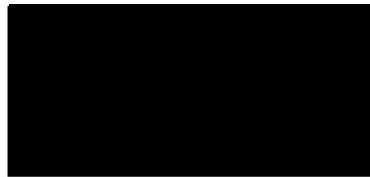
The results of this research have important implications for pedagogy, particularly in relation to equity and social justice. In an education system which increasingly relies on teacher judgements to assess the progress of students, the often negative influence of factors related to a student's background should be of serious concern. A failure to recognise the impact of non-standard features in speech on the educational opportunities and achievements of students would compromise their basic rights and limit the social and economic contributions they would otherwise be able to make.

## DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
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Date:

15<sup>th</sup> March 2001

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## **Definitions**

**perception**: In this research, the term perception refers to the way in which people receive, decode, interpret and judge speech and how their prior experiences impact on that process. This use of the term draws on definitions from the disciplines of phonetics and psychology. In phonetics perception refers to the process of receiving and decoding speech input (Crystal, 1991:253). In psychology, it refers to the way in which individuals are aware of objects, relationships and events through their senses and how they organise and interpret these stimuli (Goldenson, 1984:543; Reber, 1985:527; Eysenck, 1990:248; Stratton & Hayes, 1993:139). Prior cognition and affective experiences influences peoples' perception (Poppstone & McPherson, 1988:263).

**linguistic variables**: linguistic elements which are expressed through different forms (Hudson, 1980:139). For each of these variables there is a number of variants.

**variant**: a linguistic form which is one of a set of alternatives in a given context (Crystal, 1991:370)

**variety**: any system of linguistic expression whose use is governed by situational variables (Crystal, 1991:370). In this research, the term refers mainly to social varieties of Australian English.

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Background of the research

An individual's language differs in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, discourse and pragmatics according to how, when, where, why and with whom they communicate.

Individuals also belong to groups which communicate with one another sufficiently to form patterns of speech in common. The speech used within these groups, or speech communities, differs to varying degrees from that used in other speech communities.

Where speech communities are separated physically or socially, the differences between them become even greater. Language also changes over time in different ways for these speech communities. Although these differences are widespread and natural people perceive them differently. This perception may involve judgements made according to a range of standards. However, where a standard variety of a language has developed, it often comes to be seen as the "correct" variety and other varieties are then judged according to "the standard". In this way, a "non-standard" variety may become synonymous with a "sub-standard" variety. This has implications for the speakers of the non-standard varieties, especially in education where the standard variety is taught and is at the same time usually the medium of instruction.

The importance of issues to do with the relative status and use of varieties of English in education has been highlighted by a number of recent public debates. In Britain, there has been a heated public debate about the teaching of English in the National Curriculum in England and Wales. Similarly, in the United States of America the issue of Ebonics has been an on-going issue which periodically flares into a very public

argument. In Australia, there also has been a less publicised debate about the use of Aboriginal English in schools. These debates highlight the political and social nature of judgements about language and the difficulty of promoting a view informed by sociolinguistic understandings. Such debates also suggest that non-standard speakers may be subject to linguistic bias within the education system. Indeed, studies in the United Kingdom, the United States of America and in the Netherlands have demonstrated that students who speak varieties of the national language other than the standard may be subject to this type of bias (Edwards & Giles, 1984:122; Barbour, 1987:242; Hagen, 1989:51-3; Hollingworth, 1989:293-6; Noguchi, 1991:30; Lippi-Green, 1997:72-3; Rickford, 1999).

There has, however, been little research into this type of bias in Australia, and in Western Australia there has been none, other than for speakers of Aboriginal English. This is despite a recent *Child Health Survey* conducted in Western Australia identifying "speech and language problems" as a major educational and mental health issue in local schools (Zubrick, Silburn, Gurrin, Teoh, Shepherd, Carlton & Lawrence, 1997:38, 61).

Although Eltis (1978) investigated linguistic bias in teachers' perceptions of students, this research is now dated and left some questions unanswered. In Eltis's study, the teachers reacted to the accents of male adolescent students previously unknown to them and to their appearance and their written work. He compared the teachers' reactions to these three different student characteristics and found that the students' accent influenced the teachers' perceptions to a greater extent than either of the other characteristics. His study only included very experienced teachers and inexperienced student teachers and therefore did not provide evidence of the reaction of teachers with

a wide range of experience such as would exist in schools. It is also unclear what influence female accents or age differences would have on the teachers' judgments. The study only involved teachers' first impressions of students, and did not explore what influenced later decisions. Neither was the impact of on-going contact or background knowledge about the students investigated. These are all issues which need to be examined. Also there have been major changes in both teacher training and the structure and delivery of education since the time of Eltis's study. Therefore, there is a further need to investigate if changes have since occurred.

### 1.2 Pedagogical issues

At present, there is an unprecedented emphasis on oral language skills in a new curriculum framework being implemented in Western Australia. This framework has an outcomes focus and it describes the key learning objectives which all students are expected to achieve. While there is some recognition of linguistic diversity within the document, Standard Australian English is promoted as the variety of English valued by society and competency in it is an expected outcome of schooling. These changes make the influence of a non-standard variety an increasingly important issue to investigate.

If teachers' perceptions are influenced by factors related to the students' non-standard speech variety or low socio-economic background it may reduce students' educational opportunities and achievements, and therefore, it is important to address this prejudice. There is also a need to investigate the speech of students from low socio-economic areas so the differences and similarities to Standard Australian English are understood. This information is needed to guide the development of teacher pre- and in-service training

courses and curriculum support materials. Such information also can be used in the design of teaching methodology to assist both the teachers and their students.

### 1.3 Outline of the research

This research investigates how teachers perceive student speech. In particular, it examines the influence of the students' level of schooling and their socio-economic status on these perceptions. The influence of the teachers' background, the way they define Standard Australian English and their attitude to language variation is also investigated.

The research was undertaken as three separate but related studies. This design allowed for the use of three different data collection methods with matching groups of teachers. It was believed this triangulation would yield richer and more reliable data. In Study One, teachers kept observational notes on the problems they identified in their students' speech for a period of a week. In Study Two, teachers participated in school-based focus groups to discuss problematic features in their students' speech. In Study Three, teachers participated in school-based groups to rank tape-recorded samples of speech from students who were not known to them. All the teachers participating in this research also provided background information, wrote their own definition of Standard Australian English and completed a language attitude questionnaire.

This research is presented in the following manner; Chapter Two provides a review of the relevant literature and Chapter Three describes the methodology used to conduct the research. Chapter Four, Five and Six report the findings of Study One, Study Two and Study Three respectively. In each of these chapters, all the results are reported but only

those which are unique to a particular study are discussed in relation to the literature. The findings common to all three studies are discussed later in Chapter Seven. Finally, Chapter Eight provides a conclusion, including the implications of the major findings and suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

#### 2.1 Introduction

This literature review first examines language variation and the models which describe and explain that variation. Factors which influence variation, such as age and gender, are also described because of their particular relevance to education. Secondly, variation within Australian English is described, including phonological, lexical, regional and social aspects. Thirdly, standard languages and their relationship to non-standard varieties are examined. Here the nature and characteristics of standard languages and the process by which a variety becomes a standard language are described. The history of the standardisation of English is outlined to provide an example of this process. Next an overview of the history of Australian English is provided and the question of whether Australian English has a standard variety is explored. Fourthly, the role of standard and non-standard varieties in education is discussed, particularly in relation to equity issues, and fifthly, perceptions about variation and change in language are explored with particular reference to education. Finally, factors which may influence teachers' perceptions of student speech are discussed.

#### 2.2 The nature of variation

Evidence suggests that everyone's language varies and although Sapir (1921:147) claimed that "...everyone knows language is variable", awareness of the nature of that variation should not be assumed. There is a lack of understanding evident in the many public debates surrounding the defining and relative status of different varieties of



languages. One example is the on-going Ebonics debate which last recurred in Oakland, California in 1996 (Long, 1996; Fillmore, 1997; Wolfram, Adger, & Christian, 1999:20-2). This debate was sparked by a school applying for bilingual funding to support speakers of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in learning Standard American English. As part of the debate, the status of AAVE was again questioned and the resulting argument highlighted the differences in understanding of language variation between linguists and non-linguists. This section will examine the way linguists define language variation and the models which describe and explain that variation. Since the influence of age and gender on variation has particular relevance for education, and for this current research, it will also be described.

Language is a complex semiotic system that requires stability for continued operation. However, language is also subject to both change and variation. Language varies synchronically in terms of its use by individuals and groups, and diachronically in that it changes over time. Synchronic variation accounts for the way in which language changes according to variables such as the situation, the characteristics of the people interacting and the purpose of the communication. Diachronic variation accounts for the way in which language forms change and spread through a speech community over time. In most circumstances, this change is not fast enough to interfere with the everyday communication among speakers of the language. In fact, it may not be noticed by many people.

Linguistic variation has been categorised using linguistic terms such as language, dialect, register and accent. Because these terms are widely used in both an everyday and a technical sense, their meanings are sometimes confused. These meanings may

also be disputed as was seen in the Ebonics debate when the definition of language and dialect became an issue of contention (Long, 1996:106).

a) Language and dialect

Joseph (1987:1) defines the distinction between language, from the Latin word *lingua*, and dialect, from the Greek word *diàlektos* in the following way. "In general, a language is understood to be a system of elements and rules conceived broadly enough to admit variant ways of using it. A dialect is understood as one of these variant ways."

There have been a number of criteria used to discriminate between languages and varieties. Some linguists have attempted to draw boundaries between languages and dialects using measurable criteria such as mutual intelligibility (Voegelin & Harris, 1951; Chambers & Trudgill, 1980:3-4) or structural similarity (Agard, 1971:510), or a combination of these (Ferguson & Gumperz, 1960:5). According to Joseph (1987:1), such attempts have been largely unsuccessful because the criteria used to classify the varieties are not objective linguistic criteria. Joseph identified three alternative criteria which have been used as discriminators. These are political factors, developmental reasons or structural difference. Political factors have meant that the dialect of the dominant community becomes the language of a region. Developmental criteria are applied where a dialect has been developed into a language in order to be used in publication, education and other functions associated with public life. Structural difference demands that a dialect must show a considerable amount of internal disparity from all other languages under which it might be classified. Joseph claims that of these, structural difference is the only criterion which relies on linguistic factors to distinguish between dialects and languages.

The difference between a language and a dialect can also be distinguished according to relative size (Hudson, 1980:31-2). That is, a language has more linguistic items than a dialect which is then viewed as a subset of a language. However, there is a problem with this classification when a particular variety is considered a dialect in one context but a language in another. For example, if English is referred to as a language, then Australian English together with Scottish English, Indian English and American English are but a few of its many dialects. However, while Australian English is seen as a dialect of English, in Australia it is also a language with its own dialects. These include Aboriginal English, Standard Australian English, "non-standard" English and many other varieties. Joseph (1987:1) also describes this problem as a situation where "... we can alternatively view the variant ways of using a system as themselves constituting systems." Further, if a language is the sum of all its dialects, then by definition it has a larger number of items because it is the sum. However, it then has no independent existence aside from the dialects.

Other features have been used to distinguish between a language and a dialect. For example, it has been argued that mutual intelligibility determines whether a variety is considered a language or a dialect. This definition is also flawed. While Norwegian, Danish and Swedish are considered separate languages, they are mutually intelligible (Chambers & Trudgill, 1980:4; Trudgill, 1984:16). Similarly, Galician and Portuguese resemble each other, share part of their history and are mutually intelligible. However, they are separate languages and the former, in fact, is considered a dialect of Spanish because its speakers are politically part of Spain (Joseph, 1987:1-3). On the other hand,

varieties of Chinese, such as Mandarin, Cantonese and Wu, are considered dialects even though they are mutually unintelligible, at least in their oral forms.

Within Western political states, varieties are also defined in terms of whether or not they are the "standard". Most often, the standard variety is known as the language and other related varieties as dialects. Usually it is the social prestige of the variety which leads to its selection as the standard and to its codification (Bex, 1996:102). The "standard" is exemplified in the written mode (Bex, 1996:9) and the dialects are traditionally spoken varieties (van Marle, 1997:21).

Therefore, in practice, the distinction between a language and a dialect depends to a large degree on extra-linguistic criteria (Joseph, 1987:1). In most cases, political forces determine the status of a variety as described in Weinrich's (1945) definition that "A language is a dialect with an army and navy." (Cited in Baldauf, 1998:4) or Lippi-Green's (1997:43) suggestion that "a dialect is perhaps nothing more than a language that gets no respect".

#### **b) Dialects and the standard**

The degree and nature of variation and change also distinguishes non-standard from "standard" varieties. While traditional dialectology describes "dialect" and "standard" as discrete but related systems, more recent approaches represent it on a continuum (Jorgensen & Pedersen, 1989:30-47; Malcolm, 1994:23). Ammon (1989:119-22) developed such a model to describe dialect usage in the Federal Republic of Germany and Switzerland (Figure 2.1). Ammon argues that in Germany social differentiation in the use of the standard variety has become well established and is part of a speaker's

social identity. He suggests that as a result of this, members of the lower social classes may avoid the use of standard forms, even where speech norms require their use while members of the upper social classes tend to avoid dialect forms even when the standard forms are not required.

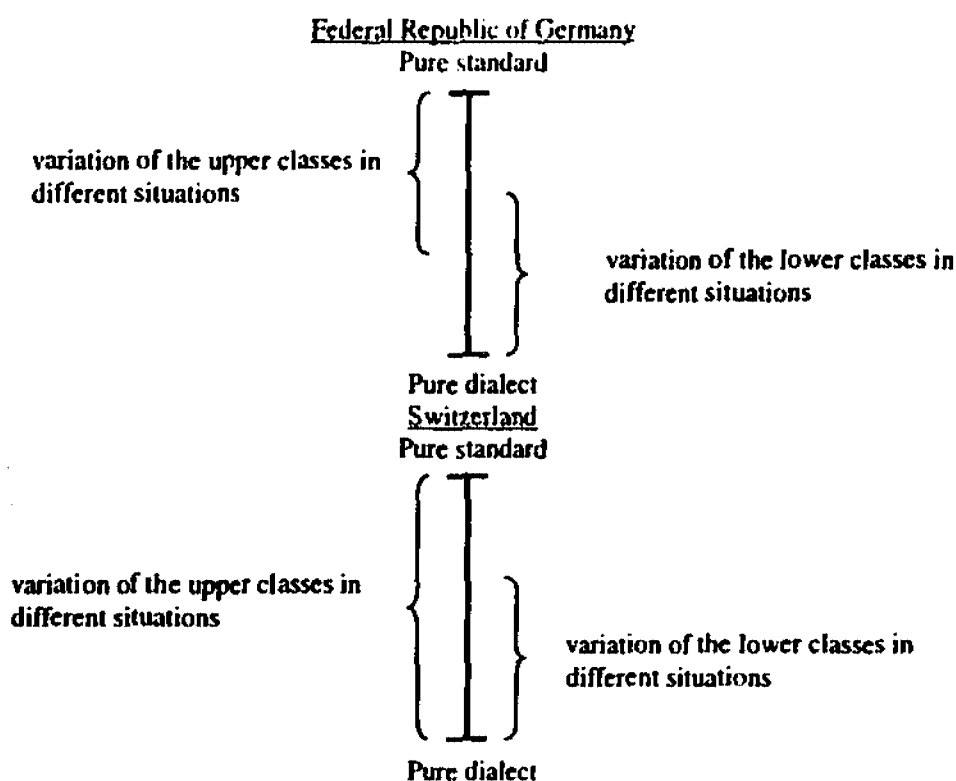


Figure 2.1 Dialect usage in the Federal Republic of Germany and Switzerland

Change and variation impact on standard and non-standard varieties in different ways with the result that a standard language has a minimum level of variation (Joseph, 1987:127; van Marle, 1997:24-5). This is because a higher level of consciousness is required to use the "standard" variety as its norms have been codified and need to be learnt (Joseph, 1987:17). Codification involves the determination of the norms or rules of the variety and the recording of these in authoritative dictionaries and grammars (see further page 38-42). By contrast, non-standard varieties are governed by unconscious norms and so are more subject to variation (Joseph, 1987:118).

According to Cheshire & Milroy (1993:6) the standardisation process involves the active suppression of variability and affects all aspects of the language including the vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and spelling. However, they note it is never fully successful at all of these levels. For example, it is most successful in spelling but least in pronunciation. Of particular importance, is the impact of the standardisation process on popular attitudes to grammar. Cheshire and Milroy discuss how standardisation has given rise to the view that only one out of two or more variants will be "correct" even when there is no difference in meaning between the two forms. An example of this is the alternative forms, "different *from*" and "different *to*". Aitchison (1981:21-2) argues that the notion of a "correct" form in "English" stems from the influence of Latin literature which then formed the model in the codification process.

Haugen (1972) and Bex (1996:102) argue that the functional aspects of a language although also subject to codification, are less so than structural aspects such as grammar, phonology and lexicon. Functional aspects refer to the ways in which linguistic choices are made according to such variables as social class, geographical situation or communicative purpose. Consequently, the functional range of the standard variety is broad although its structural variability is restricted (Bex, 1996:107-8).

The boundaries between dialects and the standard form of a language vary from one speech community to the next. Communities where the differences are great are referred to as "divergent dialect communities" (Trudgill, 1986:83, 91-4) and speakers often view the varieties as distinct (Milroy, 1982; Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985:191; Malcolm, 1997:55). Where these differences are not as pronounced, the

speakers often do not switch between dialects but rather vary the relative frequencies of individual standard and non-standard linguistic features (Trudgill, 1974; Shnukal, 1978; Eisikovits, 1981; Coupland, 1988; Lee, 1989b). This variability has implications for the education of children in such speech communities (Cheshire & Milroy, 1993:11). (See further discussion of this on pages 60-5)

### c) Register

The term "register" refers to the way speech differs according to the situation in which it is used (Halliday, McIntosh & Stevens, 1964:87). Individual speakers adjust their speech according to conventions whereby particular types of language are accepted as suited to particular functions or uses. For example, the language commonly used in a church service differs from that used at a football match. Most of these differences are reflected in the grammar and particularly in the lexis used. The lexical differences often concern the collocation of lexical items (Halliday, McIntosh & Stevens, 1964:88). The use of different registers involves selection from a range of alternative linguistic items to meet the requirements of the communication. In turn, these choices determine the way in which an individual's language use varies. Various linguists have described these choices and how they are made.

Hymes (1972:27) identified sixteen components that determine a speaker's selection of linguistic items. He grouped these together in categories related to settings, participants, ends, act sequences, keys<sup>1</sup> instrumentalities, norms and genres. However, Hudson (1980:49-51) argues that even this number of variables does not account for all

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<sup>1</sup> Keys refer to the tone, manner or spirit in which the act is done (Hymes, 1972:62).

the complexities of register. He claims that such models only provide a framework within which a speaker's complex choices may be located. Carter (1995:128) supports this view claiming that even clearly identifiable registers differ according to the context, the purpose and the audience. For example, weather forecasting differs according to whether it is spoken or written, is on television or radio, or even on different television stations such as local versus the national broadcaster.

A further model explains register by considering the setting and the relationship between the interlocutors and is known as sociosituational variation (Sanders, 1993:27). It considers factors such as age, sex, socio-economic status, regional backgrounds of speaker and addressee, degree of intimacy between the participants and the formality of the situation. However, as Horvath (1983) found in her study of the sociolects of Sydney, the correlation between these factors and linguistic choices is more complex than Sander's model would suggest.

An alternative model is proposed by Halliday (1978:33) who challenges the definition of register as dependent on the characteristics of users. He claims that language varies according to the situation of the communication and identifies three major dimensions, "field", "mode" and "tenor", which determine speaker choices. Field accounts for the purpose and subject matter of the communication; mode is concerned with the means of the communication, usually if it is spoken or written; and tenor refers to the relationships between the participants in the communication. O'Donnell & Todd (1991:66) criticise this approach as too simplistic and vague. At a general level, they criticise the model for constructing speakers as linguistic prisoners of some objectively identifiable situation. At a more specific level, they argue that notions of field, tenor



and mode are not sufficient to predict the type of language that is used. Further, they suggest that the need to determine the intricacies of the situations in which language is used decreases the model's usefulness. Despite criticism, however, this model, in the form of Systemic Functional Grammar, has been widely applied to the teaching of the standard language.

Although the models used to explain "variation according to use" (Hudson 1980:48) are seen to have weaknesses, they represent an important development in linguistics. That is, in seeking to explain how an individual's language varies according to use, sociolinguists attended to the contextual variation ignored in Chomsky's notions of competence (Pride, 1979:120-1; Trudgill, 1992:17).

#### d) Accent

Accent, or how a speaker sounds, is another way in which language varies. Accent refers to the "cumulative auditory effect of those features of pronunciation which identify where a person is from, regionally or socially" (Crystal, 1991:2). The study of accent is part of the larger discipline of phonology.

Dialect and accent are sometimes confused in general, non-linguistic discussions about language variation (Crystal, 1991:2; Lippi-Green, 1997:42). In these discussions, accent describes how words are pronounced, and refers to both second language speakers and native speakers (Wolfram, Adger & Christian, 1999:3-4). Often, in the latter case, the variation is due to geographical factors. In this way "accent" is used with a similar meaning to the term "dialect". This is, however, inaccurate as dialect includes

differences at all levels, such as in grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation (Crystal, 1991:2; Lippi-Green, 1997:42).

Numerous linguists have claimed that the standard variety can be spoken in any accent (Stubbs, 1976:26; Sato, 1989:263; O'Donnell & Todd, 1991:35; Carter, 1995:146).

However, if accent is seen as synonymous with dialect, then people who speak the standard with a regional or social accent may be judged as non-standard speakers.

Therefore, the overlap of these terms has implications for members of diverse communities where the standard language is also used. Lippi-Green (1997:44-5) provides an example where accent was seen as synonymous with dialect and resulted in discrimination. She describes a situation in Hawai'i where a speaker of Hawai'ian Creole English (HCE) was denied a promotion because it involved reading a weather report on radio. Although he could read the Standard American English report, he did so with a HCE influenced accent. He subsequently failed to win a discrimination case because of the belief that a "standard accent" was imperative for radio and that he could correct his "Pidgin" accent if he desired to do so.

#### e) Models of language variation

According to Hudson (1980:5) a model of language based on a notion of "variety", as defined by terms such as language, dialect and register, does not adequately reflect the complex and dynamic nature of variation. This view is shared by O'Donnell & Todd (1991:36-37) who argue that variation is more complex than these terms suggest. Other models may therefore need to be considered.

A range of alternative theoretical models have been proposed to account for language variation (Cheshire, Edwards, Münstermann, & Weltens, 1989:4). Those which are particularly relevant to this study are the Labovian model (Labov, 1966; Labov, 1972b; Labov, 1981), the dynamic paradigm (Bailey, 1972; Bickerton, 1975), and models from a social psychological perspective (Giles, 1973; Giles, 1977; Milroy, 1980:87; Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985:2).

Labov's (1966-94) variationist framework model uses a quantitative approach based on the relative frequencies of variant forms used by speakers. Labov divides variation into two types; inter-speaker and intra-speaker variation. He sees social factors such as age and social class as responsible for inter-speaker variation and stylistic factors such as the context of the speech and the status of the interlocutors as responsible for intra-speaker variation. Bell (1984:145-8), however, argues that while the social factors which impact on variation have been extensively analysed, those which influence stylistic variation have not. He claims that style has itself been treated as a quantifiable variable rather than correlated with independent variables. In addition, Pringle (1985:24) claims Labov's approach has limitations when applied to situations where social stratification is not as stable as it is in some European and American cities. He argues that places like Canada do not have such stratification because of recent non-English speaking migration and the resultant diverse populations. Furthermore, the correlations between demographic and linguistic categories are more complex than they appear (Horvath, 1985:173; Eckert, 1989:265).

The Labovian model also identifies the way in which variant forms act as social labels (Brown & Levinson, 1979:301; Scherer & Giles, 1979:xii). This labelling function may

be due to the transfer of the social evaluation of particular social groups to the linguistic forms they use (Wolfram, 1997:123). Labov (1972a) claimed that in most speech communities some linguistic variables correlate with variation in social class. He called these "indicators" (Chambers & Trudgill, 1980:11). Where a variable is subject to both social class and stylistic variation, it becomes a "marker" (Labov, 1972a:179).

According to Labov, markers carry a higher level of consciousness than do indicators. In turn, he suggests that this consciousness leads some speakers to modify the use of markers in some situations. For example, a speaker may monitor their speech more closely and use variants that are more "standard" on formal occasions. Listeners may also react to markers by treating them as sociolinguistic stereotypes (Wolfram, 1997:123). Such stereotypes tend to be overly categorical and linguistically naive (Honey, 1997:99).

In contrast to the Labovian framework are the dynamic models which account for variation by drawing on theories of language change. The first was proposed by Bailey (1972) and the second by Bickerton (1975).

Bailey's (1972) Wave Theory proposes that synchronic variability in language use is the result of the spread of linguistic innovation. That is, linguistic innovations spread from a "heavy environment", or one that favours the variant, to a "light environment", one that does not. Once the new feature has become more frequent in both the heavy and then light environments, the change is completed.

Bickerton (1975) proposes a dynamic model which uses implicational scaling to show that speakers can be placed at different points on a creole continuum, from basilect,

through mesolect to acrolect, according to the grammatical features they use. Bickerton (1975:200) uses evidence from research into Guyanese Creole to claim that "polycompetence and polysystematicity represent norms rather than perversions of natural language." Contrary to popular belief, linguistic systems are not static but rather, are representations of the dynamic relationships between systematic but variable components (Bickerton, 1975:166). According to this model, rule changes are interrelated and able to be described in principled ways.

The third type of model is based on a social psychological approach. This approach seeks to explain variation in terms of how speakers' attitudes to language are related to their language use. In this way, both the role of the addressee and the changing patterns of variation within an interaction are recognised. Arguably the most prominent of these models is the Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT) developed by Giles and his colleagues (Giles, 1973; Giles, 1977). SAT identifies three types of adjustments made by speakers during interaction. The first is the *convergence* that occurs when speakers adjust their speech towards that of their interlocutor or to the prestige norm they believe is valued by them. The second is *divergence* when speakers make their speech different from that of their addressee. Thirdly, *speech maintenance* occurs when the speakers do not adjust their speech. Giles suggests that accommodation is motivated by the attitudes of the speakers to their interlocutor or addressee. However, Bell (1984) criticises SAT claiming that it focuses only on the way listeners and speakers respond to one another and it fails to take account of stylistic choice being used in a way that initiates a change in the interaction.

Other social-psychological models have been developed to explain variation and include Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's (1985:2) "acts of identity" model and Milroy's (1987) social network model. The identity model focuses on the way people perceive groups and then attribute linguistic characteristics to them. In this way, it differs from the SAT which is more concerned with the way people interact and accommodate one another linguistically. (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985:2) adopt a view of variation as the norm and language as idiosyncratic. They argue that the way such entities as "language" and "a group or community" come into being is through the acts of identity which people make within themselves and with each other. In this way, linguistic behaviour might be viewed "...as a series of acts of identity in which people reveal both their personal identity and their search for social roles" (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985:14). Through this process, people create patterns of linguistic behaviour which resemble the groups to which they wish to belong or differ from those with which they do not wish to be identified (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985:181).

Milroy (1980:87), in her social networks model, argues that the "density" and "multiplexity" of an individual's social networks influence their linguistic choices and variant use. The density of a social network is determined by how many people within the network know each other. A maximally dense network is one where everyone knows everyone else. Multiplexity refers to the number of contexts within which members of the network interact. For example, a member may interact with another member as a workmate and as a friend. The higher the number of contexts, the greater the multiplexity.

### 2.2.1 Factors affecting variation

#### a) Age

Labov (1964:91-2) proposes six stages to "the acquisition of the full range of spoken English." The first, from birth to about five years old, involves the acquisition of basic grammar under parental influence. The second, from five to twelve years of age, involves the acquisition of the vernacular under the influence of peers in the school and community. The third, at about fourteen or fifteen years, sees the development of social perception and a movement towards adult norms. The fourth, after fourteen years, involves the development of stylistic variation under the greater influence of contacts beyond the immediate community. The fifth, in young adulthood, demands the ability to maintain consistent standards in a wider range of contexts. Labov claims that this stage is not usually achieved by other than middle class speakers of a variety close to the standard. The sixth stage involves the acquisition of the full range of linguistic forms and is only reached by "college educated persons with a special interest in speech." (Labov, 1964:92) It must be noted, however, that these six stages were developed using data mainly from speakers residing in New York and there is no evidence in the literature that these stages have been empirically tested.

Chambers (1995:158-9) suggests a different acquisition sequence which includes three formative periods. The first, in childhood, involves the development of the vernacular under the influence of family and friends. In contrast to Labov's model and similar to Romaine's (1984:102) he claims that children begin to acquire stylistic variation at an early stage. That is, along with phonology and syntax, style shifting begins to develop at this early stage. Chambers suggests that in the second stage, adolescent vernacular

norms move beyond the norms established by the previous generation. This rapid linguistic change is possible because of the dense social networks that exist for adolescents (Chambers, 1995:8). In the final stage, young adulthood, standardisation increases for that subset of persons involved in occupations which are "language sensitive" (Chambers, 1995:159).

Despite adolescence being seen as a vital stage in the development of sociolinguistic competence, there has been very little research into the childhood development which leads to this point. Eckert (2000:8) claims that the small amount of research that has occurred has mainly investigated psycholinguistic aspects of variation or the correlation of social and linguistic variables, focussing only on phonology. She also suggests that children are continually learning new age-appropriate behaviours as part of their development. Although this process of trialing new behaviours and styles in the search for a satisfying sense of self continues throughout life, it is usually more intense in childhood and adolescence. Further, she argues that adolescence is a time when accumulated social knowledge is used to express new social meanings.

In later research, Labov (1989:89) analysed the speech of families of children from Philadelphia. He argues that his data show that children demonstrate social and stylistic constraints on variation before language-specific grammatical and articulatory constraints (Labov, 1989:96). The children had matched their parents' patterns of variation by the age of seven and some constraints appeared in the speech of children as young as four. This would suggest that variation occurs as part of the development of linguistic competence.



Linguistic forms are not only acquired at different ages, but may be subject to age related constraints. That is, if they are not learnt by a certain age, they may be more difficult or impossible to learn later. This phenomenon has been investigated through studies of children whose families have moved from one dialect area to another. Such studies have shown that some language forms are not acquired even if the children are born in the new area. For instance, Payne (1980) in her study of the acquisition of the Philadelphia short /æ/, found that even children born and raised there rarely fully acquired the native patterns of use unless their parents had also been born and raised in that city. These apparent age related constraints may explain why Trudgill (1983a:13) found that adults have limited success in acquiring a dialect.

It may be that there are constraints in the acquisition of second dialects or varieties in much the same way as age constrains success in second language acquisition (Long, 1990:279-80; Newport, 1990:27; Spadaro, 1998). These constraints mean that success in acquiring the second language, in terms of phonology, then morphology and syntax and lastly lexicon, generally decreases with age. This also has implications for second dialect teaching and learning, particularly in relation to phonology and other aspects of speech.

Age and the structure of schooling also interact to influence the way an individual's language varies. Eckert (2000:50-1) suggests that this is because of the impact of these factors on the social networks of students. Students are encouraged to form their strongest peer networks within the age-related groups of their school grade level. Even in secondary school where student groupings are more flexible, the homeroom groups remain primary sources of social networks. In Eckert's (2000:51) study of Belten High,

a student's social networks remained within the school rather than extending to other schools. In turn, these social networks influence an individual's linguistic choices (Milroy, 1980:87).

Adolescents have social networks with high degrees of density and multiplexity.

Therefore, classmates and friends seem to influence adolescents' language use more so than do parents or teachers (Chambers, 1995:8). This is evident in the greater amount of speech innovation in this group compared with other groups in a society (Chambers, 1995:158-9) and would seem to give adolescents a special role in language variation and change. Further, Eckert (1988:205-6) argues that of any life stage, adolescence brings the greatest level of emotional involvement in identity which in turn motivates the adaptation of linguistic styles to express that identity. These linguistic styles not only signal solidarity with their peer group but also separation from the social groups of children on one hand and adults on the other (Rowe, 1992:6). Eckert (1988:183) claims that these adolescent innovations also spread outward from metropolitan areas and upward through the socioeconomic hierarchy. In this way, language changes are initiated and promoted by the adolescent search for new linguistic styles.

Adolescent linguistic styles have been categorised as emotive, connotative or socially coded language use (Danesi, 1989:320; Rowe, 1992:7). Emotive language expresses the strong feelings of adolescents and is characterised by increased rates of speech, exaggerated intonation, simplified clause structure and pronounced voice modulation accompanied by gestures and facial expressions. The connotative style involves creating words and phrases or extending the meanings of existing terms and is used primarily with peers. Finally, socially coded language involves such things as the use

of swearing as a code, in much the same way as style of dress is used to signal membership to the group. It is claimed that in this context, swear words do not retain the vulgar meanings they have in adult speech (De Klerk, 1992:287; Rowe, 1992:7).

Slang, like swearing, is also used to signal adolescent in-group membership (Chambers, 1995:171; De Klerk, 1992:287). However, the in-group may also exclude others who they do not want to be members of their particular group by rapidly changing the slang terms in current use. Slang terms may also change if they become generally used and no longer deemed by adults to be frivolous and/or extravagant. The slang terms used by adolescents reflect their interests which Chambers (1995:172) claims are limited to school, intoxicants and music.

Adolescents may also use vernacular speech to signal group membership. An example of this is seen in Cheshire's (1997:186) study of spontaneous, natural adolescent speech in Reading, Berkshire in Britain. The study involved 13 boys and 12 girls who were recorded and observed in an adventure playground setting for a period of eight months. Some of the informants were also recorded at school talking with two or three friends. Cheshire found that linguistic variation had a social function within the peer groups with some non-standard features being more sensitive markers of vernacular loyalty than others. Further, the signalling of vernacular loyalty was sometimes seen as more important than meeting the requirements of a formal situation with a more standard speech style. In an earlier study, Chambers and Trudgill (1980:98-100) found that adolescents also sometimes use vernacular speech to express anti-authoritarian attitudes.

Adolescents have also been found to code-switch to signal particular aspects of their identity. Rampton (1987:42-3) carried out an extensive study of adolescent language use in Bedford, a city in the South Midlands, which has one of the most ethnically mixed populations in Britain. He found that native English speaking adolescents used a particular speech variety which borrowed features from the varieties of local minority groups. This use of the "out-group" language can signal a common adolescent identity which crosses cultural and racial barriers and therefore becomes "we-coded" (Rampton, 1995:59).

#### b) Gender

The contribution of gender to language variation has been extensively examined. However, some have argued that these analyses have been limited by the treatment of gender merely in terms of the speakers' biological sex. Such an approach relies on a view of gender as "biological and anatomical differences between men and women" (Wodak & Benke, 1997:128). This view fails to recognise the complex ways in which gender influences language behaviour in particular contexts (Nichols, 1983; Eckert, 1989; Coates, 1990). An alternative view of gender is concerned with the cultural, social and psychological differences between males and females (Wodak & Benke, 1997:128). This view allows for the exploration of socially constructed language behaviours whereby "biological differences become a signal for, rather than a cause of, differentiation in social roles" (Connell, 1993:17). These social roles involve societal norms and evaluations, power structures and socialisation (Lewontin, 1982:142). In addition, change across generations and for different racial, ethnic, religious and social class groups is considered (Gal, 1989:178; Lorber & Farrell, 1991:1; Stolcke, 1993:20).

Gender influences on language behaviour have also been shown to differ according to situational context (Duranti & Goodwin, 1992; Wodak, 1994).

Labov (1991:205-6) argues that sociolinguistic sex differences are characterised by two principles. The first states that in stable sociolinguistic stratification, men use more non-standard forms than women. The second states that women use more of the incoming, or changing forms than do men. In a study of variation in the Netherlands, findings regarding gender difference were consistent with the first principle (Münstermann, 1989:172-4). In this study, females expressed more positive attitudes towards the standard form than did the males. On the other hand, males were more in favour of the use of the dialect in school and gave a higher aesthetic rating to the dialect. However, while many researchers claim that differences are due to the way in which women rely on the use of the standard for prestige that is unavailable through their work (Trudgill, 1974), Münstermann does not. Rather, he believes that they are the result of role-specific education where women are presented as needing to draw prestige from the standard. Additionally, their role as educators of their children is seen to influence women's attitude towards the more prestigious variety.

In contrast, Horvath (1985:81-2; 167; 171) in her study of the sociolects of Sydney found the social distribution of vowel variants did not fit a simple model of gender difference. Rather, the pronunciation differences were not categorical and interacted with ethnicity, age and social class.

Eisikovits (1989:41), Horvath (1985:171-2) and Romaine (1984:111) also suggest that age and gender may interact in dynamic ways to determine the choice of variants used

by speakers in particular contexts. For example, in a study of Edinburgh school children, Romaine (1984:113-8) found that children as young as six showed evidence of gender differences in the use of some phonological variables. By the age of ten, gender differences were found in the use of other features, including tense forms. Other studies have also found gender differences in children's speech (Biondi, 1975; Macauley, 1977; Cheshire, 1982b).

Verhoeven (1997:401) believes that children learn to recognise gender differences in speech at an early age and that this recognition is demonstrated in topic preferences and their choices of linguistic forms. He claims that boys tend to speak more than girls do and to use more forms which are nonstandard. Further, parents provide gender-differentiated speech models to their children and interact with them differently according to the gender of the child. There is also evidence that single-sex peer groups reinforce these gender-based patterns (Romaine, 1984:12). Horvath (1985:5) also suggests that single sex schooling may further increase gender differences.

### 2.3 Variation in Australian English

Australian English is a variety of English spoken by native born Australians and is characterised by particular accents, lexis and idiom (Delbridge, 1981:80). Like other varieties, it is subject to phonological, lexical, regional and social variation.

#### a) Phonological variation

In early studies, Australian English was found to be homogenous (Mitchell, 1951, 1958; Mitchell & Delbridge, 1965). This may have been because the studies sought evidence of geographical variation and researchers were experienced with the marked differences

in dialects in Britain and did not find the same degree of difference here. Bernard (1967:72) analysed the vowels of 171 adult males to supplement Mitchell's and Delbridge's (1965) earlier study of adolescents. He did find variation, but this was socially, rather than geographically based. These studies identified three Australian accents, Broad, General and Cultivated, based mainly on vowel differences. Horvath (1985:19) claimed that these studies only compared two "regions", the major cities and other centres. In this way, they were a comparison of urban and rural areas rather than a thorough investigation of regional variation. Horvath (1985:19-20) also challenged Mitchell & Delbridge's (1965:39) finding that there were no clear relationships between social characteristics and the three accent types found. She reanalysed their data to show a number of relationships including some related to gender, to occupation and to schooling background. She suggests that although Mitchell and Delbridge (1965) recognised some of these relationships they did not attach importance to them because they were seeking categorical, rather than proportional variation (Horvath, 1985:21).

Cox's (1998:50-2) reanalysis of Bernard's 1960's data statistically confirms his description of accent differences for Australian vowels. She also found an effect for age that could indicate vowel changes in progress. This interpretation is supported by speech data she collected in the 1990s which shows the continued presence of these features (Cox, 1996).

Hammarström (1980:60-1, 67) added a fourth accent category to the original three categories of "Broad", "General" and "Cultivated". This accent was even more similar to RP than cultivated and could be considered an alternative high sociolect. He argues that RP did not emerge until the nineteenth century so it did not have an influence on

early Australian English pronunciation. However, after the nineteenth century its influence led to the development of the alternative high sociolect.

In a comparison of Australian English and English RP, Trudgill and Hannah (1982:17) found four main differences. These were that the Australian vowels tend to be more closed than in RP, some diphthongs are wider than in RP, there is a tendency for the diphthong to have a longer first element or to become monophthongised and finally, the /ɑ:/ vowel is rendered as a front /a:/.

Many other studies of Australian variation have also focussed on pronunciation (Bradley, 1980; Finch, 1982; Laver, 1980; Oasa, 1980; Sharpe, 1970). However, these studies have often had limited sample size, largely due to the relative expense of such research.

More recently, Lee (1989a) examined the relationship between social differences and phonological variation in a study of forty-eight adolescents from four Brisbane high schools. As part of his study, he analysed the relative frequencies of variant forms of vowels in the speech of the adolescents. He found that the patterns of use among these alternative variants did not correspond to the traditional divisions of broad, general and cultivated Australian English (Lee, 1989a:68-9).

Bernard and Lloyd (1989:288-300) investigated the indeterminate vowel /ə/ as it is claimed to have a relatively high occurrence in Australian English. Their study examined the use of the vowel in Sydney and Rockhampton but found more similarities than differences. However, minor differences included more fronted pronunciation of



**/u/ and /ɜ/ but less peripheral ones of initial and final /ə/ in the speakers from Rockhampton.**

**b) Lexical variation**

**Lexical variation in Australian English has also been investigated through two types of studies. The first type explores regional and social variation and the second how Australian English lexicon developed differences from its parent, British English.**

**Early studies into regional-based lexical differences found little evidence of variation (Baker, 1966:341-9; Gunn, 1970:64; Pilch, 1976:119; Ramson, 1972:37-8; Sharwood, 1982:11-63; Turner, 1966:163-4). However, these studies were limited in their sample size and did not include all regions of Australia. Recently, a more extensive dialect study by Bryant (1997:211) found many words which form patterns of regional distribution. The patterns of usage could be divided into four regions; the north-east, south-east, south-central and south-western, none of which coincided with state boundaries. It should also be noted, that the north of Western Australia, the Northern Territory and parts of Queensland were not included in Bryant's analysis. She argued that these areas were undergoing social change as a result of an influx of short-term workers from other regions and this was impacting on the local vocabulary. This made the local vocabulary difficult to describe.**

**A study currently being undertaken in Western Australia is investigating both geographical and social influences on lexical, and other forms of variation, in the speech of school children (Oliver, McKay, & Rochecouste, 1999). Early results suggest that there is both geographical and social variation within Western Australia in the lexicon**

of native speaking Australian English students, as well as in those from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The second type of study explores the way in which the new variety of Australian English differs from the parent British English. Ramson (1972:39-40) proposed several ways in which this might have happened. These included borrowing from Aboriginal languages, innovations, and extensions of and changes in original word meanings.

There were only about 220 Aboriginal words borrowed by the early settlers probably because of cultural distance between the two groups (Görlach, 1991:163). This is similar to the limited number of American Indian words found in American and Canadian English (Görlach, 1991:163). Ramson (1972:40) reported that most of the borrowed Aboriginal words refer to flora (karri, kurrajong) and fauna (dingo, kangaroo). A small number also refer to features in the landscape (billabong) or objects with a distinctly Aboriginal purpose (boomerang, mia mia). The latter were used to name new concepts with no existent lexical entry in English.

Innovation in Australian English also included compounds and adaptations (Ramson, 1972:41-2) which, like Aboriginal terms, were largely used to refer to flora and fauna. According to Ramson, this process took one of two forms. The first used the apparent similarity between the new object and one already familiar to the British settlers as with the naming of the "Moreton Bay chestnut". The other form used compounding such as in the word "bluegum", or adapted existing terms such as the word "creek". Originally creek meant an estuary or arm of the sea, but came to mean the mouth of a stream flowing into a river and later to mean the tributaries themselves (Ramson, 1972:42).

Ramson also suggests that the meaning of some words were not only widened, but also changed to fit the Australian context. For example, some terms which developed a distinctly Australian meaning are *barrack*, *billy*, *cobber*, *dinkum*, *larrikin*, *tucker* and *wowser*<sup>2</sup>.

#### c) Regional variation

Bernard (1989:255-9) claims that a survey of the studies investigating regional variation, particularly in lexis and phonology, reveals Australian English as unusually uniform. However, he acknowledges that these studies have been limited and more detailed and extensive research may find more variation than previously thought. Further, he claims that regional variation is likely to increase with time and under the influence of non-British migration. A recent study by Oliver, McKay and Rochecouste (1999) of variation in Western Australian school children has in fact found this to be true with some regional differences being apparent in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar.

#### d) Social variation

Arguably, the most comprehensive analysis of linguistic variation undertaken in Australia to date is Horvath's (1985) research into the sociolects of Sydney. She examined the distribution of five vowels, four consonants, the morpheme "ing", the High Rising Tone intonation pattern and the use of descriptive texts. In this study,

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<sup>2</sup> *barrack*: to support or shout encouragement or approval; *billy*: any container, often makeshift for boiling water, making tea etc; *cobber*: mate, friend; *dinkum*: true, honest, genuine or interested in a proposed deal; *larrikin*: a lout or hoodlum, or a mischievous young person; *tucker*: food; *wowser*: a prudish teetotaler or a killjoy (Delbridge, 1981).

Horvath took into account the variables of age, gender, ethnicity and social class.

The results of Horvath's study challenge Mitchell and Delbridge's classifications of "Broad", "General" and "Cultivated" Australian English and show the situation is far more variable than the three categories suggest. Social characteristics are shown to influence the patterns of variant use with gender, social class, age and ethnicity important in explaining variation (Horvath, 1985:174). Moreover, this research demonstrates that the relationship between these characteristics and the use of variants is complex.

#### 2.4 Standard varieties

Although people everywhere make judgements about the quality of the language they hear and see, the standards they use to make those judgements vary according to the individual language concerned (Joseph, 1987). While this type of judgement might be considered universal and natural, the development of a standard language represents a specifically Western concept that has been spread by cultural tradition. This tradition or process is called "standardisation" (Joseph, 1987:7).

"It is an approach in which standard languages are seen to come into existence through a surprisingly uniform progression of cultural changes - a progression that is hard to buck - in which power, which is absolutely and quantitatively measurable, and eloquence, which is only relative and qualitative (even if it is scientific linguists who are attempting to set the standards), frequently assume the configuration of ventriloquist and dummy." (Joseph, 1987:16)

Baldauf (1998:5), Cheshire and Milroy (1993:5) and Hudson (1980:32) also argue that standard languages are not natural, but the result of historical processes which have developed out of the European tradition of language planning.

Joseph (1987) describes the process of language standardisation in his book "Eloquence and power: The rise of language standards and standard languages". He claims that the origin of the word "standard" is unclear. It may have come from an original Germanic compound like stand-hart "stand hard (firmly)" or from the Latin-Romance *extendere* "extend (a flag)" and was subsequently misunderstood as being connected with the Germanic verb "stand". Regardless of its path of development, the notion of permanence and fixity is suggested by the "stand" element. The semantic history of this term also includes its reference to quantitative measures and later to how these were used to judge quality. This later meaning of the term continues into the present (Joseph, 1987:3-4).

Joseph (1987:4-5) claims early references to "standard" in relation to language were made in 1711 by Anthony Ashley Cooper in *Characteristics of men, manners, opinions, times* and further instances occurred in 1742 in personal correspondence that was later published in 1838-9. Joseph found the first use of the phrase "standard language" in the *Proposal for the Oxford English Dictionary* published in 1858. By the late nineteenth century, the term "standard language" was widely used. However, at that time it was a product of liberal thinking and seen as a more appropriate term than "literary language" or "The Queen's English". Joseph (1987:5-6) suggests "standard language" originally denoted an area of scholarly inquiry and was not associated with notions of prescription, privilege, social class, region or nationalism.

Joseph (1987:6) describes nine characteristics which he believes are common to standard languages. The first five of these are particularly relevant to the current study and are listed below according to their historical occurrence and each, in turn, is less

likely to occur as a natural part of language change. These characteristics are summarised here with Australian examples where appropriate.

1. A variety becomes the "standard language" with the other varieties becoming "non-standard varieties" or dialects. In this way, the standard language goes from "first among equals to first among unequals" as the first step in the process of standardisation (Joseph, 1987:2).
2. Speakers of the dialects recognise linguistic forms belonging to the standard language as valued forms. The standard is therefore, perceived as qualitatively apart from the dialects.
3. These standards are codified and made available to speakers in dictionaries and grammars. The codification of the Australian lexicon has been relatively recent with the publication of the Macquarie Dictionary (Delbridge, 1981) although Australian editions of the Oxford Dictionary have been published since 1976. Codification of grammar is still largely dependent on British based publications.
4. The standards and their codification rely on the regular use of a writing system.
5. Codification also requires people to act as enforcers of linguistic stability through their influential roles in the community. For example, through editors who enforce style guides, teachers who teach and assess using the standard variety and high status job selection processes that emphasise spoken and written skills in the standard variety.

The original variety typically passes through four processes to become a "standard" language (Garvin, 1959; Garvin & Mathiot, 1956; Hall, 1972; Macaulay, 1973; Trudgill, 1974), which then has spoken and written varieties. These processes are

implicit in Joseph's characteristics listed above. The first process is the selection of a variety to be the standard. This is based on social and political criteria and involve an existing variety, a combination of existing varieties or a newly created variety. The second process is codification when the norms of the variety are recorded in dictionaries and grammars so there is agreement on what is "correct". These correct forms often reflect the written mode of the variety. In the third process, elaboration, the selected variety is extended to fulfil functions associated with written forms and formal roles in civic contexts. The fourth process is acceptance by the general population which in turn uses the selected variety as the "standard". In this way, a new variety develops. The history of the development of Standard English provides an example of the way the four processes of standardisation occur. Also apparent in this history is the role of political and economic factors in the imposition of this "standard" code on users of other codes.

a) The selection of the standardised variety

As early as the fifth century, the language of the invading Anglo-Saxons overwhelmed the Celtic and Latin languages of the indigenous population of Britain. By the ninth century, under Alfred, West Saxon had developed as an instrument of learning.

Following the Norman Conquest, however, Norman French replaced Anglo-Saxon for all official purposes and Latin became the language for learning and religion. English, however, was most commonly used for oral interaction. Therefore, English, French and Latin were used for distinct personal, social and intellectual purposes.

In the fourteenth century, the majority of the population of England lived south of the Humber River, with eighty-five percent in rural areas. The East Midlands, north of London, was the most densely populated area having been least effected by the Black

**Death of 1349-1400.** During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, this area became the economic centre for the exportation of corn and wool. Additionally, by the late fourteenth century most officers of the London City Government were from this area which contributed to the later selection of the London and South East Midlands dialect as the "standard".

A further influence on the selection of this particular dialect was its use in the expanding production of printed material. However, although Caxton had introduced printing in 1476, it did not immediately lead to more uniformity or the development of prescribed language rules. This was due, in part, to the employment of foreign labour as printers. These workers were untrained and had low levels of competence in English. Additionally, as printing was priced by the inch, extra letters had financial advantages for the printer. This situation gradually changed as former scribes gained employment in printing and began to apply their own craft traditions, which included greater uniformity in spelling and grammar. Eventually, increased print production and higher levels of literacy joined with other economic and social forces to promote the next stage in the standardisation of English.

#### **b) The codification of English**

The codification of English, involving the recording of language "rules" in dictionaries and grammars, began in the sixteenth century and was well established by the middle of the nineteenth century. During that period, a tension developed between two competing views of language. On one hand, spoken and written language were seen to be best learned in realistic settings, language being viewed as a tool which was changed by its speakers. English was also seen as having advantages over Latin as it could be both



plain and simple and made to fit a variety of speakers and uses. On the other hand, there was a concern that English was decaying and that it needed greater codification to preserve it (Crowley, 1991:30-41).

The first serious steps towards codification were made with the publication of Bullokar's *Pamphlet for Grammar* in 1586 and the first "modern" dictionary in 1604. Ben Jonson's *Grammar*, published in 1640, was seen as commercially advantageous and as valuable for educational purposes. It was also seen as freeing the language of rudeness and barbarianism.

"We free our language from the opinion of Rudeness, and Barbarisme, wherewith it is mistaken to be diseas'd; we show the Copie of it, and Matchableness, with other tongues: we ripen the wits of our own children, and Youth sooner by it, and advance our knowledge." Cited in Bex (1996:39-40).

This connection between language, education and social behaviour has been a common theme from that time.

Despite these developments, codification remained a contentious process until the eighteenth century (Honey, 1997:75) and did not broaden its influence beyond the highly educated. In the early part of that century, the English language was very variable with diverse Welsh, Scottish and English cultural influences. This linguistic diversity was increased by considerable variation at the regional, village, town and family levels (Bex, 1996:40). However, with the Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745, a definitive English language became part of the Nationalist Movement. At this time, Swift recommended a commission be established and charged with "correcting, improving and ascertaining the English language" (Crowley, 1991:31). Through this

process of "improvement", the language behaviours of a particular class, seen as the "learned and polite", were promoted as part of nationalism.

The codification of the lexicon also involved the selection of terms favoured by the prestigious class. For example, Samuel Johnson argued that not all words were worthy to be included in a dictionary of English (*The plan of a dictionary of the English language*, 1747). He claimed that many of the words used by labourers and merchants would not necessarily endure and so should not become part of the permanent record of the language.

"Not are all words which are not found in the vocabulary, to be lamented as omissions. Of the laborious and mercantile part of the people, the diction is in a great measure casual and mutable; many of their terms are formed for some temporary or local convenience, and though current at certain times and place are in others utterly unknown. This fugitive cant, which is always in a state of increase of decay cannot be regarded as any part of the durable materials of a language, and therefore must be suffered to perish with other things unworthy of preservation." (Crowley, 1991:44)

The preparation of grammars of English was also influenced by economic and social changes. Increasing commercialism led to the creation of a wealthy merchant class, the movement of people from rural areas to cities and an increase in written communication associated with trade (Bex, 1996:41). In turn, this increased concern for social manners and appropriate language use, both in its spoken and written modes. As Latin and literary language were used as models for appropriate use at that time, they strongly influenced the construction of formal grammars for English. These influences proved problematic as English grammatical categories did not fit into Latin grammatical moulds and literary language proved a poor model for the types of writing expected of many students when they left school (Bex, 1996:42).

During this period, liberal views of language were also presented. Priestly's *Rudiments* and Lowth's *Short Introduction* were less Latinate grammars (Bex, 1996:42). Hone Tooke expressed concern with the way in which language could be used to legitimate power. He argued that speech, characteristic of particular social groups, expressed different meanings rather than being the same thing said different ways (Bex, 1996:43). William Corbett viewed grammar as a means to make intended meaning clear. He believed the petitions for male suffrage presented between 1793 and 1818 failed because they did not make their intention clear (Bex, 1996:44). Others wrote of an approach to appropriate language that was based on models rather than rules. In 1767, a writer commented:

"I cannot help thinking a living language stands in small need either of grammar or dictionary...The syntax and choice of words are best learned from good authors and polite company...Let your style be plain and simple, suited to your subject, and to the capacity of those for whose perusal it is intended." Cambell, *Lexiphanes: A Dialogue* (cited in Heath, 1980:5)

However, by the middle of the eighteenth century, while spelling and usage remained variable, there was a view that written English had lost its classical purity and was in need of improvement. This was because English usage was compared to Latin grammar and perceived to be deteriorating. This increased pressure to nominate one correct form from among the many variants being currently used. Therefore, when Samuel Johnson developed his dictionary he selected one "correct" form which was invariably the one used by those with social prestige.

"...he '...laboured to refine our language to grammatical purity, and to clear it from colloquial barbarisms, licentious idioms, and irregular combinations' he meant he had in many instances pronounced against the spoken language of the lower classes, and in favour of the spoken and written forms of groups with social prestige." (Aitchison, 1981:23).

Similarly, Robert Lowth's *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*, published in 1762, emphasised rule-governed notions of correctness. It states,

"the principal design of a Grammar of any Language is to teach us to express ourselves with propriety in that Language, and to be able to judge every phrase and way of doing this is to lay down rules." 1762. (Aitchison, 1981:17).

Pronouncements on aspects such as the use of prepositions at the end of sentences, forms of pronouns appropriate when separated from the verb (for example, *wiser than me* versus *wiser than I*) and the use of double negatives persist to this day. It was not until the latter part of the eighteenth century, however, that this concern about the state of the language became widespread.

For the remainder of the eighteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century, the pressure to impose one standard on all English speakers gained momentum. The movement continued earlier themes of an association with correct behaviour, the selection of prestigious forms and the dominance of written forms of language as the model for correctness. While diversity in speech forms persisted as an important expression of identity, so did attempts to impose oral forms based on such models as Received Pronunciation (RP). In the written mode, spelling and grammar were emphasised and literary forms, drawn from the accepted canon, were promoted as models of usage. In this climate, the purpose of grammars shifted from an emphasis on description to one of prescription.

### c) The elaboration of English

After the middle of the nineteenth century, forces changed the distribution, functional range and structure of English (Joseph, 1987:44). This elaboration of English began

when it replaced French and Latin in formal and written contexts. However, the use of this form of English was still largely restricted to the wealthy and well educated. This meant its functional range was limited. However, around the 1850s a period of rapid political and economic change occurred in England. Consequently, the middle class expanded and more people became moderately wealthy. Education became more widely available and this together with social and economic change increased the functions of English.

#### d) Acceptance of Standard English

By the end of the nineteenth century, a standard variety of the English language was well entrenched. It was seen as a national ideal, a single standard, a mark of individual achievement, a reflection of the desire to do well and as a sign of self-respect.

Education provided access to the standard variety and the associated social and cultural beliefs.

#### 2.4.1 The history of Australian English

The history of Australian English is particularly difficult to describe, as the sources of data are poor (Horvath, 1985:26-9). At the time that Australian English began to emerge as a distinct variety, spelling in British English had been standardised but the formal study of variation had not began. These two factors limit the data available to sources such as novels written during the early years in Australia. The written speech of the characters in these stories indicate possible speech patterns of individuals from different social backgrounds. However, these are poor sources as authors may have stereotyped the characters who represented different social classes from their own. Similar problems also apply to records of speech variation reported in the letters and

diaries of visitors to the colony. It is with these limitations in mind, that the following section examines the early investigations of the history of Australian English. This research focuses on the vocalic system<sup>3</sup> and is mainly concerned with three issues. The first issue is how Australian English, usually with the Broad accent, came to be a distinctive variety. The second issue is how the different varieties of Australian English developed. Finally, it addresses the issue of why Australian English is relatively uniform throughout the continent.

a) Australian English as a distinct variety

There is a range of views on how Australian English has become a distinct variety. These include the view that it is a continuation of changes already in progress in British English, the establishment of norms by the first settlers, and, as the result of competing influences of dialect contact and a rigid class system.

The first explanation suggests that Australian English developed as a continuation of changes already in progress in England (Collins, 1975; Gunn, 1975; Turner, 1960). On the other hand, Hammerström (1980:39) argues that Australian English is based on London Cockney and was transported with the first people to come from England. Horvath (1985:29) draws these two arguments together and suggests that in fact they are similar because Cockney can be viewed as the culmination of the sound changes in progress as referred to by Turner (1960), Collins (1975) and Gunn (1975). Horvath claims, however, that the arguments for this position are not strong, as this was just one vowel shift among many which occurred in English. She also suggests that the position

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<sup>3</sup> The classification of sounds based on generative phonology where vocalic sounds are those where there is a free passage of air through the vocal tract with the constriction of the oral cavity not exceeding that required in /i/ and /u/ (Crystal, 1991:374).

would be strengthened by greater demonstration of the historical connections between Cockney and Australian speakers.

The second explanation is that the first settlers established norms that influenced those who came after (Görlach, 1991:145-6). These new norms arose out of the process of "transplanting" British English into a new environment. Adaptations became necessary as the social and linguistic characteristics of the settlers began to differ from those of their homeland. The new environment and experiences required naming, sometimes with new linguistic forms or with old forms given new meanings. These new lexical items and syntactic constructions accelerated the formation of a new variety. New language contact situations, such as with Aboriginal languages, led to borrowings which also changed the language. Further, some of the forms that occurred in regional and social British varieties fell out of use in Australia as they did not have general currency or were of no further use in that new environment.

The third explanation is that the new variety developed as a result of two counter forces (Turner, 1994:277). Turner argues that the first force was due to dialect contact and levelling and the second to the influence of a rigid class system. Accordingly, the first operated through the settlement process which brought together people from diverse speech communities and enforced a levelling process begun in England. For example, many convicts had already experienced language change with their move from the country to the city and then to prisons before transportation to Australia. Turner believes that the new forms resulting from this levelling process were adopted by the children of the colonies under the influence of their peers (Turner, 1994:278). At the same time, a rigid class system acted as a counter force to the influence of levelling by

reducing the contact between different groups within the colony. The power and authority of the ruling class within this system also meant that their prestige variety was influential despite being spoken by relatively few people. This variety was also associated with upward mobility (Turner, 1994:279) in contrast to the language of the convicts and lower classes which was widely viewed as unacceptable (Turner, 1994:278).

Horvath (1985:25-32) argues, however, that none of these explanations of how Australian English came to be a distinctive variety of English are satisfactory. She also claims that the explanations for uniformity rely too much on an inadequate understanding of the changes which result from dialect contact.

#### b) The development of different varieties

As with the development of Australian English as a variety distinct from British English, there are a number of views on how different varieties of Australian English developed. These include that the Cultivated and General varieties grew out of Broad Australian English<sup>4</sup>, that the varieties emerged through conforming to different British norms or that the Broad and Cultivated were present from the beginnings of the colony while the General developed as a compromise between them.

The first view suggests that there was a move away from Broad towards Cultivated Australian English which is closer to Received Pronunciation (RP). The General accent fell between these two styles. Bernard (1969:67) claims that a Proto-Broad was

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<sup>4</sup> Although Mitchell and Delbridge's Cultivated, General and Broad categories originally referred to accent, they have been expanded to refer to varieties of Australian English. However, these varieties differ not only in pronunciation but also in vocabulary and grammar.



developed by the first generation of native-born Australians. Subsequently, the General and Cultivated varieties developed to distance speakers from the negative social evaluation elicited by the use of Broad. Further, speaking the General or Cultivated variety was viewed as a matter of choice, whereas the use of the Broad variety was seen as arising from the speaker's environment. Eagleson (1982:426) supports Bernard's view that the Cultivated and General grew out of the Broad. However, he adds that many Australians view the Cultivated variety as affected.

The second view proposes that the spoken varieties emerged from processes at work in the colony (Görlach, 1991:146). The variety of the upper classes moved toward a London middle class norm while the lower classes norms reflected those of similar classes in southeastern England, mainly from around London.

The third view that the Broad and Cultivated were present from the beginnings of the colony while the General developed as a compromise between them is the most comprehensively argued position. Horvath (1985:25) takes this view and because of the lack of historical data, uses a "sociolinguistic reconstruction", rather than a more common "historical linguistic reconstruction" to argue her case. Sociolinguistic reconstruction, as the name suggests, seeks to reconstruct the variation that was present in a past speech community through an understanding of the social conditions present at the time. These understandings then allow predictions to be made about the social dialect variation likely to be present. This approach therefore, relies on a thorough understanding of the early history of English language use in Australia.

The British penal colony of New South Wales was established in 1788 with the arrival of 750 convicts (Clark, 1963:24). The transporting of convicts continued until 1851 by which time approximately 160,000 convicts had arrived to provide a free labour force for the building of the settlement and the development of pastoral properties (Connell & Irving, 1980:51). By 1819, it is estimated that the convicts and their offspring outnumbered the free settlers by four to one (Clark, 1963:51). At this time, the demand for male labour was particularly high in the pastoral industry (Connell & Irving, 1980:42).

An additional penal colony was begun in Van Dieman's Land (Tasmania) in 1803 mainly as a deterrent to the French who were believed to be interested in settling there (Clark, 1963:35; Appleyard & Manford, 1979:31-3). Horvath claims that the other three colonies of Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia were settled later, without convict labour. Western Australia did in fact have convicts for a short period from 1850-68 (Hasluck & Lukis, 1977:viii; Dahlke, 1979:221) because most of the colony's free settlers were landowners not prepared to work even their own land so convicts were requested to meet a severe labour shortage. Convicts constructed public works, buildings and particularly roads and near the end of their sentences were assigned to assist the landowners.

While the Victorian, South Australian and Western Australian colonies also had overseas immigrants, they differed from New South Wales in that they attracted settlers from inside New Holland (Australia). Further, the gold rushes in Victoria and New South Wales (1850s) and later in Western Australia (1890s) greatly increased this internal migration.

Horvath (1985:33-6) asserts that, from the beginning of settlement, Australian society was divided into three distinct groups, the ruling elite, the free immigrants and the convicts and their offspring. The elite, or first group, remained committed to England as "home" and separated themselves from other levels of society while in Australia (Clark, 1963:97-8). The education of their children maintained that separation with tutors at home and later elite private schools. This pattern of marked social stratification was also part of rural life. Additionally, the men and women had divided social lives with men relying on private clubs and the women on less structured contacts with one another.

The second group included the free settlers working as clerks and tradesmen in the city and wage labourers in the city and country. Within this group, the sexes were also divided in work with women only being able to find employment as servants.

Finally, the third group comprised convicts and their offspring. Horvath suggests that the emancipists and native-born children of this group bore the brand of their history and were not accepted by the other two groups in society. As there were many Irish Catholics among the convicts, this division was exacerbated by religious, ethnic and political differences. Division of the sexes also occurred in this third group, but there was an imbalance in numbers between males and females, especially in rural areas.

While access to education was denied for this group, many became well-paid labourers. The third group was substantially larger than the other two groups combined, although this difference decreased as time went on. In 1828, they comprised 87% of the population, but by 1851 only 41%.

Based on this evidence, Horvath (1985:35) claims that early Australian society was hierarchical and patriarchal with status, property and power separating the rulers from the labourers. This division was reinforced by the criminal history of many of those labourers. However, Ward (1958:1-2, 17-18, 51-2) claims the labourers developed a more egalitarian ethos which spread because of their relative size and mobility. In contrast, the ruling class's orientation to all things English reduced their broader influence in establishing a local ethos while the middle group were too small and lacking in social power to exert a significant influence.

Horvath (1985:36) suggests that it is highly unlikely that the social polarization evident in the early history of Australia would have given rise to a single linguistic variety which later developed into several in response to social pressure. On the contrary, she claims that the variation found today was present from at least the 1880s and cites evidence from Ellis (1887:236-48) to support her case. Ellis examined the records of a school principal named McBurney from Victoria. McBurney travelled widely to examine singing students and transcribed their speech using glossic and paleotype conventions based on the work of Bell and Ellis. It is apparent from his records that variation was present at that time.

While the historical evidence supports the case for the Broad and Cultivated varieties having been present from the early days of settlement, the origin of the General variety is more speculative. Horvath (1985:37) suggests that the General variety developed as a compromise between the nationalistic forces towards the Broad and the social prestige forces towards the cultivated. The compromise would appear to have favoured the

**Broad with General sharing many more of its features with that variety than the Cultivated.**

"In sum, Australian English developed in the context of two dialects - each of them bearing a certain amount of prestige. Cultivated Australian is, and continues to be, the variety which carries overt prestige. It is the one associated with females, private elite schools, gentility, and an English heritage. Broad Australian carries covert prestige and is associated with males, the uneducated, commonness, and republicanism. The new dialect is 'General' which retains the national identity associated with Broad but which avoids the nonstandardisms in pronunciation, morphology, and syntax associated with uneducated speech wherever English is spoken." (Horvath, 1985:40)

However, Görlach (1991:146-7) suggests this is difficult to establish given the lack of historical evidence. He argues the two groups of speakers were not sufficiently separated for the distinctions between them to remain constant. Many emancipists, ticket-of -leave holders and ex-convicts moved into the "liberal professions", the merchant class or became landowners or manufacturers (Ramson, 1966:97). Görlach (1991:146-7) argues that the social mobility of the lower class, the influence of new generations and the arrival of settlers not fitting the patterns of previous migrations would have given rise to a diversity not well reflected in the dichotomy proposed by Horvath.

### **c) The geographic uniformity of Australian English**

The uniformity of Australian English has also attracted a number of explanations and remains an issue of debate. Bernard (1969:66) argues that Australian English developed in each of the centres with the similarities due to the "linguistic mixture" being the same. Further, the attitudes that led to the move towards Cultivated were also similar in each of the places where settlement occurred. In short, the same developmental forces operated in different places to produce similar varieties of Australian English.

However, Horvath (1985:31-2) suggests that this explanation of uniformity relies too heavily on an inadequate understanding of the changes which result from dialect contact. In addition, Bernard's explanation does not account for the different settlement patterns across the colonies. She also suggests that Bernard's assertion that the native-born speech community was monolectal in the early phase of its history is problematic.

Hammarström (1980) argues that Australian English was transplanted from southern British English and the forms persisted. On the other hand, Trudgill (1986:129) claims that the speech forms levelled in Australia. Görlach (1991:150) supports Trudgill's position but raises the additional issue of how that process occurred. Did the homogenous forms arise independently or spread from a single area?

Ward (1958:96) and Connell and Irving (1980:58) attribute the homogeneity to the mobility of the population from very early in the history of the colonies. The workers may have been very mobile in New South Wales and Victoria and even as far as South Australia but a severe shortage of labour in Western Australia suggests there were not many who ventured that far west. For it was the severe, indeed crippling, shortage of labour in the Swan River Colony which forced free settlers to request convicts in the 1850s and 60s (Dahlke, 1979:221). However, the influence of internal migration to this colony may have occurred later during the gold rushes beginning in 1893 when the lure of gold brought many prospectors from New South Wales and Victoria (Houghton, 1979:314).

An alternative explanation is provided by Ramson (1972:36-9) who suggests that the distinctly homogenous nature of Australian English is due to the retention of only some parts of the total pattern of British English and the unique set of circumstances encountered in Australia. Most of the convicts and free settlers in the nineteenth century were from urban areas, mainly from the greater London area and from the industrial towns of the Midlands therefore, the influence of Scottish and Irish varieties would not have been great. He argues that there was a "melting pot" situation in Australia with convicts forming a mobile labour force, immigrants entering the country through a limited number of ports and settlements, and the internal population movement created by the gold rushes. A further influence was the tendency for immigrants to come as individuals, rather than as members of groups with established ties.

Trudgill (1986:145) suggests that the extreme uniformity of Australian English is typical of the initial stages of mixed, colonial varieties. In such cases, the degree of uniformity is in reverse proportion to historical depth. He suggests that the uniformity can be explained largely in terms of levelling, dialect mixture, and similar change phenomena. However, settlement patterns and population movements also play a role which suggests that greater diversification will occur with time. Further, for some time it has been argued that regional variation has not been sufficiently investigated to make strong claims for uniformity (Gunn, 1972:47; Oliver, McKay & Rochecouste, 1999).

#### 2.4.2 Standard Australian English

Historically, Australia looked to Britain for language standards but with time an interest in distinctly Australian language varieties grew and new standards were established.

Although Australia was a relatively open society in the nineteenth century, it did demand conformity to established language norms (Görlach, 1991:147-8) which were drawn from Britain (Ramson, 1972:34; Thuan, 1976:79; Trudgill & Hannah, 1982:1; Kaldor, 1991:70). However, it can be seen from historical accounts that many failed to conform to these norms, for example:

"Bearing in mind that our lowest class brought with it a peculiar language and is constantly supplied with fresh corruption, you will understand why pure English is not, and is not likely to become, the language of the colony." (Baker, 1970:3)

It would seem that this language behaviour persisted and a similar complaint was recorded in 1911 when the American linguist William Churchill wrote:

"...the fact remains that the common speech of the Commonwealth of Australia represents the most brutal maltreatment which has ever been inflicted upon the mother tongue of the great English speaking nations." (Cited in Bernard, 1969:69).

Published literature remained dominated by British topics and written norms throughout the nineteenth century (Baker, 1970:413) and even during the nationalistic movements in the 1890s, the literature of Lawson and Furphy were criticised for their use of the vernacular (Johnston, 1970:199). However, local speech varieties were emerging.

The interest in Australian English also led to debates about the relative influence of different norms, both British and local. Görlach (1991:150-1) suggests that early in Australia's history there was a great deal of variation in speech<sup>5</sup> because of social factors. He claims that speakers were able to choose which norms they followed to a greater degree than in many other communities at that time. Evidence of this linguistic flexibility is found today with differing speech even within families (Horvath, 1985:18,

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<sup>5</sup> This refers to social variation while the earlier reference to uniformity in Australian English referred to geographic variation.



38). However, while there may be a degree of individual choice involved in variation, there is also sociolinguistic correlation (Bernard, 1969; Bernard, 1981; Eagleson, 1976; Hammarström, 1980; Horvath, 1985; Mitchell & Delbridge, 1965). One of the constraints on an individual's linguistic choices may be the pressure to conform to competing language norms. On one hand, there are local speech community norms and on the other norms, or standards imposed from outside. The defining of that external standard is a source of debate in Australian English.

One of the ironies of the debate around notions of "standard" is that while Australians argue the relative merits of changing the status of the "non-standard" varieties in education and other civic contexts, some in the international community do not see Australia as even having a valid local "standard". Quirk (1988, 1991) asserts that in order to be considered "standard" a variety must be institutionalised. By this he means the variety must be fully described with defined standards observed by the institutions of state. He sees only American English and British English as meeting this requirement. Australian English is viewed as having somewhat informal standards. Trudgill and Hannah (1982:1-2) also note that traditionally English is seen to have two "standards", British and American. They claim that in terms of grammar and vocabulary, there are few differences between British and Australian English. However, this is not the case with phonology, or accent where there are considerable differences (Trudgill & Hannah, 1982:16-8).

Joseph (1987:2) claims that to be a "standard language" a variety must be *Abstand*, or be different to other varieties belonging to that language, and be *Ausbau*, or have codified norms. According to his analysis, Australian Standard English must meet these two

criteria to be accepted as a standard language. Görlach (1991:157) suggests that a standard language must also differ from its historical source, which in Australia's case is British English.

Earlier generations of educated Australians tended to view their language as synonymous with British English rather than as a separate variety (Görlach, 1991:157). Phonological differences were perceived to be the result of poor pronunciation and a preference for slang was regarded as neo-Cockney and therefore of British origin.

In time, pronunciation came to be considered the most distinctive characteristic of Australian English (Görlach, 1991:158). However, it should also be noted that this perception of distinction is influenced by stereotypes about Australian speech which persist despite evidence to the contrary. For example, nasality has been denied (Mitchell, 1970:3); flatness with no movement of lips and jaw ("not moving the lips as a precaution against dust and flies") has been challenged (Mitchell, 1970:5; Baker, 1970:453); and the "Aussie drawl" is believed to be uncommon (Mitchell, 1970:7). Further, it has been argued that a standard language can be spoken in any accent (Stubbs, 1976:26; Sato, 1989:263; O'Donnell and Todd, 1991:35; Carter, 1995:146). Therefore, it would seem that pronunciation differences alone are not sufficient to meet the requirements of *Abstand*.

Australian English syntax at the "standard" end of continuum is nearly the same as British English (Görlach, 1991:161). Kaldor (1991:74) has also suggested that there are few grammatical differences between Standard Australian English and Standard British or American English. However, Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1985:21-2)

identify two features which are typical of Australian English; adverbial *but* and feminine pronouns to refer to inanimate nouns. Other studies have also suggested there are differences, usually expressed in terms of preferences for alternative forms (Collins, 1989:148; Peters, Collins, Blair, & Brierley, 1988; Trudgill & Hannah, 1982). These differences are minor although Collins (1989:148) suggests that an indigenous Australian norm may well be just emerging. He claims that Australians are less linguistically conservative than their British and American counterparts. Therefore, future change in Australian English may be more rapid (Collins, 1989:149). This accords with Trudgill's (1986:145) suggestion that mixed, colonial varieties become more distinct with time.

Although most would claim that the Australian English lexis does not differ greatly from the British, there are some semantic and stylistic differences (Görlach, 1991:163). Historically, generally fewer dialect words survived in Australia than in Britain. While some words lost in Britain were retained in Australia, these were mainly restricted to specialist registers such as in mining (*dolly*, *fossick*, *mullock*) and animal husbandry (*bail*, *poddy*, *poley*). Other British dialect words, such as *cobber*, *dinkum*, *larrikin* and *tucker*, passed into general currency and came to be viewed as uniquely Australian.

An area where Australian English is believed to differ is in the use of slang and colloquialisms. Seal (1999) argues that this is the area of language which most defines Australian English. Although Seal draws on comprehensive historical sources, it remains difficult to distinguish borrowed from newly coined terms. It has always been the case, that a great deal of slang is adopted from Britain and America (Görlach, 1991:165).

One area of the lexis, which is uniquely Australian, is the borrowing from Aboriginal languages. However, although the new environment was very strange to the British settlers and Aboriginal words were readily available to describe it, there are fewer Aboriginal words than might be expected (Görlach, 1991:166). Görlach claims this was due to the cultural distance between the settlers and the indigenous people. The earliest contacts with languages spoken around Port Jackson provided the greatest number of loan words, including corroboree, dingo, gibber and woomera. Later contacts added names of animals (eg. budgerigar/budgie, koala, wombat) and plants (eg. kurrajong, mulga, wonga-wonga) or of Aboriginal life (eg. billabong, boomerang, bunyip, gunyah). Although rather than use the indigenous names for many of the plants and animals, the settlers imposed misleading European terms. In some cases they used neo-Greek terms like platypus and eucalyptus (Görlach, 1991:167) which ironically are now seen as quintessentially Australian. Similarly, terms borrowed from American English developed particular Australian meanings as in *township*, *section*, *block*, *location*, *bush*, *bushranger*, *landshark* and *squatter* (Ramson, 1966:135-44). Thus, it would seem that Australian English fails to meet the requirement of *Abstand* based on the grammar and lexis of the language. However, it might be argued that further analysis of the differences in discourse could provide evidence of it being a separate variety.

With respect to the remaining condition, *Ausbau* or sufficient codification, Australian English relies on British grammars for its norms. Although it does have pedagogic grammars, these differ little from their British models. However, the Macquarie Dictionary (Delbridge, 1981) and the Australian National Dictionary (Ramson, 1988) have codified the lexicon. The Macquarie Dictionary provides an alternative dictionary

with a comprehensive account of the general stock of English words and the distinctive vocabulary used in Australian English. On the other hand, the Australian National Dictionary was not intended as an alternative dictionary but rather as a scholarly work identifying distinctly Australian lexicon. Spelling mainly follows British English orthography, although "modern" spellings of words are more readily accepted, as in "program" for "programme". The Australian Government Style Manual also codifies a number of aspects of language, including spelling.

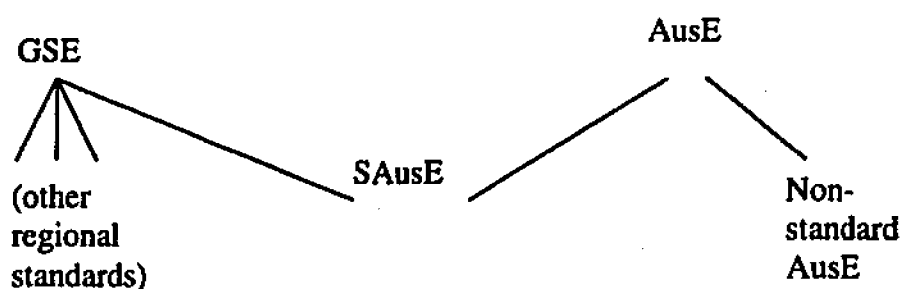
Australian English would seem to meet the further requirement of *Ausbau* that there be agencies of codification (Thuan, 1976:83). These agencies include language policies in education, the Australian Broadcasting Commission's Standing Committee on Spoken English, and style guides for newspapers, magazines, and professional journals and for institutions such as universities and government departments.

However, with the lack of grammatical differences and the similarities in codification, Standard Australian English would not seem to meet the requirements for either *Abstand* or *Ausbau*. Nevertheless, most Australians assume that the variety exists probably because decisions about the status of linguistic varieties are rarely made on the basis of linguistic criteria. Rather, political and social factors are the most influential and this would seem to be the case here.

Australian Standard English has been defined as a regional standard English which is recognised by educated Australians as being a suitable variety for official communication, including formal and informal speech and writing (Kaldor, 1991:69). Although this variety is accepted as the norm or standard, it is an idealised form which

is unlikely to be the actual language of anyone across all four macroskills (Baldauf, 1998:5).

Kaldor (1991:69) describes how Standard Australian English relates to other Englishes and to non-standard varieties in Australia. She believes Standard Australian English (SAusE) is viewed as sharing a common core of features with Standard British English and Standard American English. It represents the norms of General Standard English (GSE), but also differs from them in a number of significant ways. It is a subset of Australian English (AusE), which also includes non-standard spoken and written varieties. The following model is a representation of these relationships.



Kaldor, 1991:69

Figure 2.2 Standard Australian English

## 2.5 Standard and non-standard varieties in education

The role of standard and non-standard varieties in education is influenced by historical factors, by arguments relating to the teaching of the standard and by views on the relative value of these varieties within schools and the wider community.

Hollingworth (1989:293-6) argues that despite the major contribution of the vernacular varieties to society, including the area of literature, they have never been valued in education. He claims that this is due to the continued influence of the dominant

linguistic theories of the nineteenth century. When mass education was first introduced in England, Standard English was seen as being essential to education. This was also linked to an idealist theory which saw this variety as a representation of a "purer" past. These ideas have been used to justify linguistic prejudice and elitism even to the present day.

An early view of the relative roles of standard and non-standard varieties was published in the Newbolt Report (1921) on English teaching in England. The beliefs expressed in this report include that teachers have a responsibility to eliminate the "evil" variety that the children bring to school but they do so against the counter influences of home and community. The children are viewed as having no adequate language, of being unable to communicate and as having had no access to learning prior to school.

"The great difficulty of teachers in Elementary Schools in many districts is that they have to fight against the powerful influence of evil habits of speech contracted in home and street. The teachers' struggle is thus not with ignorance but with perverted power... Plainly, then the first and chief duty of the Elementary School is to give its pupils speech - to make them articulate and civilised human beings, able to communicate themselves in speech and writing, and able to receive the communication of others. It must be remembered that children, until they can readily receive such communication, are entirely cut off from the life and thought and experience of the race embodied in human words. Indeed, until they have been given civilised speech it is useless to talk of continuing their education, for, in a real sense, their education has not begun." (Education, 1921:59-60)

The view that non-standard varieties are inadequate has persisted even into the present day. However, at times voices have been raised in support of linguistic equality. For example, Mittens (1969:62) urged acceptance of language change and challenged the notion of there being one correct form:

"...defending clarity and precision to an appropriate degree but not to excess. It means not fighting battles that have already been lost, against, for instance, adverbial due or the singular data. It means recognising that the job is to encourage a confident and resourceful flow of words, not to inhibit it. It means

acknowledging that over-insistence on one allegedly "correct" form may have unforeseen circumstances elsewhere, as when "you and me" in the position of subject is so energetically attacked that it feels wrong everywhere and we all end up saying "Between you and I". It means reasonable tolerance of alternative usages where no issue of comprehensibility is involved...Above all, it means accepting that language changes and that change is not corruption."

There was also Labov's (1969) well known paper, "The logic of non-standard English" (reproduced in Labov, 1972a:201-40) which challenged the belief that the quality of the ideas being communicated is determined by the variety of language used to communicate them.

More recently, in Britain, the Cox (1989) and Kingman (1988) Reports have added to the debate because they recommend the teaching of the standard form of English while not endorsing traditional grammar approaches nor denigrating non-standard varieties (Winch, 1989:275-6; Cameron, 1995:85; Poulson, Radnor, & Turner-Bisset, 1996:33-4). This created a great deal of controversy and press coverage supported a conservative view and attempted to discredit the reports and to whip up hysteria with stories of falling standards and ideological subversion among teachers. An example is the following extract from the *Star*:

"It ain't 'arf OK for kids not to talk proper. That's the verdict of a shock new report on how Britain's children should be taught. The controversial blue-print by the National Curriculum Council says schools should introduce a new 'three Rs' – reading, 'riting and relaxing the Queen's English." (Cited in Cameron, 1995:101)

Subsequently, the third version of the English Orders (1994) stressed the use of standard English and demanded that all teachers at all times must correct children's non-standard speech (Cameron, 1995:92).



In Australia, there have been few debates about the use of non-standard varieties in education but rather a general acceptance that Standard Australian English is the appropriate variety in this context. However, in recent years, this view has been challenged by those who claim that Aboriginal English should be valued and accepted in education (Gray, 1990; Malcolm, Haig, Königsberg, Rochecouste, Collard, Hill & Cahill, 1999a).

One of the reasons why the standard variety is endorsed is that it is multifunctional while non-standard varieties have limited functions (Honey, 1991:23). Honey argues that the functions of the "standard" are particularly important in education and for meeting the demands of information processing in modern technological societies. Furthermore, the "standard" is available in the written form and more suitable for formal speech and writing and planned discourse. He claims that it is characterised by less redundancy and more explicitness. In addition, it has a vast lexicon. Honey also argues that the standard allows users to be more analytical and objective and to better express themselves in positions of authority and power. These functions are possible because of codification which in turn makes it easier to teach. Joseph (1987:30-31) argues that learning the standard provides non-standard speakers with greater life opportunities. Furthermore, that by learning the standard, speakers are able to use it in civic contexts and gain the prestige which accompanies its use. The "standard" variety is also predominantly the language of literacy.

Bex (1996:14-15) reports that proponents of the standard claim that it is the variety of English which enables its users to say all that they wish to say and to which all English

speakers can aspire. At its strongest, this view argues that the standard variety is fully codified, invariable, and able to be learned by the whole population.

The assumption that the standard language is sufficiently codified to be taught and that all members of the nation-state have the capacity to learn it has strongly influenced language policy and practice within education. Schools value and reward the standard variety and this is reflected in the curriculum documents which guide teaching and learning processes. For example, in the Curriculum Framework in Western Australia, the English Learning Area states the following as an essential outcome of schooling:

"Students identify when it is appropriate to use the conventions of Standard Australian English and apply them effectively in these situations. They understand that following the conventions of Standard Australian English may make communication easier and ensure common understandings. They also understand that many of the conventions of Standard Australian English are highly valued, following them is often rewarded, and departing from them may be used by some people to make negative judgements about them or discriminate against them." (Curriculum Council, 1998:87)

The belief that Standard Australian English conventions "may make communication easier and ensure common understandings" has been used to justify prescriptivism which ensures that communication is clear and unambiguous and fragmentation is avoided (Cameron, 1995:23). This assumes that a message, encoded by the speaker or writer will be decoded in the same way by the receiver and that identical rules guide both the production and reception of a message. Such a view however, fails to recognise the importance of the content of the message or how shared understandings facilitate communication. It also ignores individuals' capacity to interpret meanings or to negotiate them (Mühlhäusler, 1996:209; Baldauf, 1998:8). Breakdown in communication is more likely to be caused by a lack of shared social, cultural and political understandings, than by a failure to apply "rules". Moreover, the view that a

"standard" as somehow culturally and socially neutral, and available to all, disguises the inequities inherent in its role in education.

The view of the standard as a "unit of loyalty as a whole" (Joseph, 1987:129) also strongly influences language policy (Joseph, 1987:63) as it is seen as promoting social unity within a nation state (Bex, 1996:15; Cameron, 1995:25). While this may have been possible in the nineteenth century when the public sphere was relatively homogenous (Cameron, 1995:26), such a position is harder to argue in today's diverse and rapidly changing societies.

Others have suggested that learning the standard language provides an escape from the effects of the prejudice attached to non-standard varieties (Barbour, 1987:242; Noguchi, 1991:30). Campbell (1994:8) argues against this view claiming that such approaches are often ineffective because non-standard speaking students resist learning the standard form. It also could be seen to perpetuate linguistic inequity (Sledd, 1983:667; Lippi-Green, 1997:113).

## 2.6 Judging variation

It would seem that although language variation is widely recognised, it is not necessarily understood and so is subject to value judgements (Joseph, 1987:30; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988:13; Cambourne, 1990:290; Hodge & Kress, 1993:66; Cameron, 1995:30). Where standard languages have developed, this judgement tends to lead to prejudice against non-standard dialects (Edwards & Giles, 1984:122). It could be argued that teachers as members of society are subject to these attitudes which in turn

may impact on the way they judge the language of their students (Giles & Coupland, 1991:45) and the way that they teach and assess their students.

The prejudice against non-standard varieties is influenced by widely held beliefs about the nature of standardisation and notions of accent. There is a persistent belief that a homogenous, standardised language is possible and desirable (Lippi-Green, 1997:44). This is despite all the evidence that language must vary to meet the diverse needs of its users. The myth of standardisation includes regulating the way people speak and is complicated by the belief that only other people have accents (Crystal, 1991:2; Wolfram, Adger & Christian, 1999:4). That is, people generally see their own accent as neutral and others as having marked accents. However, where there is a high prestige accent, such as in Received Pronunciation (RP) in Britain, there is a tendency to consider it the neutral one while all other accents are considered marked (Trudgill, 1984:19).

Under the influence of such myths, natural linguistic variation comes to be perceived as deterioration which must be resisted if language is not to be destroyed (Aitchison, 1998:38). The advocates of this view are sometimes known as "linguachondriacs" and they are part of a "complaints tradition" (Aitchison, 1981:23) which has influenced attitudes to variation since the nineteenth century (Hammarström, 1987:357-8; Milroy & Milroy, 1991:31-6; Cameron, 1995:94; Bex, 1996:45; Eggington, 1997:31-3). Complaints about language take on a tone of "moral panic" (Cameron, 1995:82-85; Eggington, 1997:31). They focus on points of social conflict such as race, class, gender, generation, sexual practice and political dissent with attitudes that are conservative and based on a perception of a past where such evils did not exist. Through this process,

questions about race, class and culture can be disguised as concerns with language standards.

When the language of non-standard speakers is compared with the idealised form of the standard variety, it is consistently evaluated less favourably. Consequently, standard speakers are considered to be more competent, intelligent, confident and ambitious than non-standard speakers (Giles & Coupland, 1991:38). Negative attitudes influence behaviour and compound the disadvantaged position of these speakers. Non-standard speakers are influenced by these views and can come to judge their own variety in the same negative manner (Luhman, 1990; Thompson, 1990:314; Giles & Coupland, 1991:38). However, this negative view may be modified by the covert prestige of the non-standard form (Labov, 1966:108) when it is used to promote solidarity (Trudgill, 1983b:177; Luhman, 1990:345-6). Attitudes are also effected by context and there are indications that non-standard varieties are more tolerated in the home or personal contexts than in public (Giles & Powesland, 1975:85-6).

There have been a number of studies which have investigated prejudice against non-standard dialects. Hagen's (1989:51-3) analysis of the dialect research in the Netherlands found that where the dialect is associated with lower socio-economic status, such as in some communities within large towns and cities, it attracts negative attitudes. On the other hand, where it is a positive marker of local or regional identity this is less so. These differences, at least in the Netherlands, would seem to be decreasing as the standard replaces dialects even in homes.

Numerous studies in Australia have investigated the way in which variation in speech influences attitudes. Some have investigated the influence of voice quality on evaluations (Jernudd, 1969; Reeve, 1982; Seggie, Fulmizi, & Stewart, 1982; Lapidge, 1983; Pittman, 1987). Others have examined the influence of accents, including those of ethnic groups, on judgements of speakers (Smolicz & Lean, 1979; Gallois & Callan, 1981; Gallois, Callan, & Parslow, 1982; Ball, 1983; Callan, Gallois, & Forbes, 1983; Ball, Giles, & Byrne, 1984; Gallois, Callan, & Johnstone, 1984; Gallois & Callan, 1989; Reeve, 1989;). Seggie (1983) and Seggie, Fulmizi and Stewart (1982) provide examples of this type of research. Seggie (1983) investigated the way that a Received British Pronunciation (RP), a broad Australian and an Asian English accent influenced the attribution of guilt to persons accused of different crimes. He found significant differences with the informants attributing crimes of theft to the RP speakers and violence to the Broad Australian speakers. However, the differences in attribution for Asian English accents were not significant. Seggie used his results and those of other research into attitudes to argue that social judgements may also be subject to change (Seggie, 1983:204-5).

In another study, Seggie, Fulmizi and Stewart (1982) investigated the influence of standard and non-standard speech on judgements of suitability for employment. The judgements varied according to the nature of the job being filled. Generally, the standard speakers were deemed suitable for the higher status jobs and the non-standard speakers for those with lower status. Lippi-Green (1997:152-70) provides further evidence of this sort of discrimination in the United States.

## 2.7 Language variation and equity in education

The relationship between language and power is perpetuated through institutions in society. The central role of language in the institution of education means schools are particularly important in maintaining power relations within society. The structures in schools allow discrimination against those who do not use the language endorsed by those in power. The way in which this happens has been the subject of considerable research.

The relationship between language and power has been debated since classical times and according to Corson (1993:2-3) has four main lines of argument. The first, and oldest, is rooted in the classics and recognises the rhetorical force of language. This force allows oratorical language to have little propositional content and yet still wield power. Dewey, Hegel and Marx also discussed the influence of complex vocabularies in moral power struggles. The second line of debate concerns language change and can be traced back to the early historian, Thucydides, who noticed semantic changes after the Peloponnesian War. The third argument links power and language via ideology and comes from the ideas of Marx and Engels (1976). According to Corson, there are two approaches within this argument; one examines the way language is used to legitimise a view of domination and the other focuses on the power relations inherent in the everyday use of language. The final line of debate concerns the power of language to shape thought and world view and can be traced back to the German romantic period. A more recent influence in this debate has been the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Carroll, 1956) and the writings of some feminists who argue that women's thoughts are influenced through men's control of language (Spender, 1990). However, these views

are contested and according to Corson (1993:3), might be considered an overstatement of the influence of language.

The way in which one particular world view dominates other world views through the agency of language is represented through a number of models. These include Bourdieu's (1974, 1991) ideas about the influence of cultural capital, Cameron's (1995) verbal hygiene model and the idea of language subordination developed by Lippi-Green (1997).

Bourdieu (1974:39) argues that it is the culture of the dominant group, that is, those who control the economic, social and political resources, which is not just reflected but also valued and reproduced through schooling. He uses an economic analogy and the term "cultural capital" to demonstrate the advantages that people gain as part of their experience, peer group contact and their family background. He argues that through schooling the attitudes and aptitudes of cultural capital already possessed by the children of the "cultivated" classes must be acquired by the dominated, usually "lower", classes. Bourdieu claims that possession of the appropriate cultural capital is reinforced by success in the school system and so the process is perpetuated. It could be argued that the most important aspect of this cultural capital is linguistic capital as it gives access to the dominant discourses in a society. As schools are the key agency responsible for passing on these discourses to each successive generation, they have the power to "repress, dominate and disempower" language users whose practices differ from the norms established by them (Corson, 1999:17-8).



Cameron (1995:11) introduced the notion of "verbal hygiene" to describe how "normativity", or the process of describing a set of language norms, is used prescriptively. By this process, arbitrary norms become normalised and therefore less likely to be challenged. She suggests that questions about who prescribes for whom, what is prescribed, how this is done and for what purpose need to be asked in order to challenge the normalising process.

Cameron's model also questions why certain social conflicts find symbolic expression in language. These conflicts, or "verbal hygiene debates", often arise when there is a perceived challenge to authoritative ways of behaving appropriately. During the debates, authority is reinforced by the respect people have for custom and practice, or traditional ways of doing things (Cameron, 1995:14; Bex & Watts, 1999:7). Cameron argues that the uncritical acceptance of custom and practice is more widespread and more accepted in relation to language use than to other social practices and that this is why many verbal hygiene debates arise when linguistic change processes threaten some aspect of traditional language use. She suggests that this resistance to change may be influenced by the persistence of values and practices acquired in early childhood. Cameron (1995:30) suggests that recent debates have focussed on restricting some groups' right to speak because their speech does not conform to established norms.

Lippi-Green (1997:8), like Cameron (1995:8), suggests that the prescriptive versus descriptive dichotomy disguises the fact that both approaches refer to norms but appeal to different types of authority to validate them. This argument is largely between non-linguists and linguists and centres on language structure and function. While linguists

differ greatly in their beliefs about language, this is one of the least contested areas (Lippi-Green, 1997:9).

Lippi-Green (1997) argues that language does not only express power but is a source of power. However, even in societies presumed to be democratic and free of prejudice, this power can be denied to groups which do not use language in prescribed ways. She calls this process "linguistic subordination" and argues that it allows the dominant group to meet their particular needs and interests at the expense of other groups in society. She also argues that it depends on the beliefs that the standard variety is the only acceptable form of the language and that it can only be spoken with a "standard" accent. She called these beliefs the "standard language ideology" and the "non-accent myth" and claims they are perpetuated through institutions such as education.

In order to counter the myths perpetuated by non-linguists, Lippi-Green (1997:10-40) presents the following four "linguistic facts of life". Firstly, all spoken language changes over time and different varieties, in linguistic terms, are equal. Secondly, grammaticality and communicative effectiveness are distinct and independent issues. Thirdly, written language and spoken language are historically, structurally, and functionally different. Fourthly, variation is intrinsic to all spoken language at every level. She claims that these facts need to be understood and widely accepted if linguistic subordination is to be overcome.

Bourdieu, Cameron and Lippi-Green examine the way complex relationships among language, power and education are reflected in language practices, including those in schools. Language is central to education because schools have a vital role in

promoting language development, at the same time they use language as the medium of instruction and as the means to assess achievement. This gives the institution of education the power to promote ideas about what language is appropriate and to reinforce discrimination and injustice (Bex & Watts, 1999:7-8; Corson, 1999:14). This often subtle function of language control has important implications for equity, particularly for speakers of those varieties of language not endorsed by the school.

Discrimination based on linguistic characteristics, or linguistic discrimination, can be used to establish and maintain power relations between groups of people so that the interests of the powerful are served, as described by Long (1996:97) in his reflections on the Ebonics issue:

"On all five continents, coercive power and oppressed groups wielding little or none find linguistic reflexes. The elites speak the 'official' state language or the 'standard' variety of a language - in the present case, 'standard English' (SE) - which they made official or standard; the oppressed groups (not necessarily minorities, as in the present case) are decreed by the same elites to speak a less acceptable or unacceptable language or a socially stigmatized variety of the same language, like 'Black English'. Very real objective linguistic differences thus provide yet another excuse for discrimination in many areas of public life, including education, (so called) criminal justice systems, employment, media access, and even labor unions. The public policy decisions in different countries that result from these periodic convulsions, often enshrined in statute and law, concern linguistic human rights, and they have wide-ranging social consequences for hundreds of millions of people."

Milroy and Milroy (1985:98) argue that public discrimination on the grounds of race, religion and social class has become unacceptable but discrimination based on linguistic characteristics persists. Therefore, it is still acceptable to criticise the way someone speaks, while other aspects of their identity and culture must not be vilified publicly.

Lippi-Green (1997:73) sees linguistic discrimination as applying particularly to accent. She argues that the practice of evaluating people on the basis of their speech is so

widespread and unchallenged that it must be seen as the "last back door to discrimination".

The impact of linguistic discrimination may be different depending on the relationship between non-standard and the standard varieties. In most situations, one variety has developed into the standard and the importance and role of this "standard" variety has impacted on the status and role of the other varieties. In Britain, Australia, New Zealand and the USA, non-standard varieties and the standard variety tend to be divided according to class, with the middle class being more likely to use the standard to the exclusion of other, non-standard, varieties. However, this exclusive use of the standard applies more often to grammar and vocabulary than to pronunciation (Cheshire, Edwards, Münstermann & Weltens, 1989). Nevertheless, while it is generally accepted among linguists that the standard can be spoken in any accent (Stubbs, 1976:26; Sato, 1989:263; O'Donnell and Todd, 1991:35; Carter, 1995:146), there is still prejudice against accents associated with nondominant groups as was discussed earlier.

It could, however, be expected that in divergent dialect communities (Trudgill, 1986:91-4) linguistic discrimination would be less likely to occur because a diglossic situation may arise (Cheshire, Edwards, Münstermann & Weltens, 1989:4). For example, the non-standard variety may be used in informal speech with family and community members and the standard used in public situations such as in education, law and government. This happens in Germany and the Netherlands where speakers from all socio-economic classes are bidialectal, regularly using a dialect and the standard language. Nevertheless, even in these countries, language and class are still related

particularly in urban areas where non-standard dialect use is more closely associated with working class people which in turn may lead to discrimination.

In these situations, conflict arises for students where there is pressure from their peers, families and communities to maintain the variety which marks their individual and group identity and from the school system to abandon their dialect (Cheshire, Edwards, Münstermann & Weltens, 1989:5). The pressure to maintain the home variety is reinforced by the view that the standard, while acceptable in some situations, is not suitable for communication within the home and local community (Giles & Powesland, 1975:23). This is referred to as the "covert prestige" of the non-standard varieties. The pressure to use the home variety is countered through education and other public institutions which encourage the exclusive use of the standard variety and the association of non-standard language with moral and educational decline reinforces this counter pressure. Schools are an important site where the conflicting language demands of home and society become apparent.

Many arguments used to justify the dominant role of the standard language in schooling have historical roots. With compulsory schooling, education became associated with the moral improvement of the masses (Cheshire, Edwards, Münstermann & Weltens, 1989:5; Eggington, 1997:31-3). The eradication of the "inferior language" of the masses was seen as contributing to their moral improvement and to promoting educational equity. Historical principles persist in a number of modern arguments used to justify the position of the standard language in schooling. It is claimed that where children are allowed to use their home varieties they are denied equal opportunities for social mobility (Honey, 1983). Dialects are seen as "ballast" weighing down the

children from the lower socioeconomic classes (Ammon, 1978:270 cited in Rosenberg, 1989:79). There is also a modern version of the argument that a failure to demand "standards" in language leads to moral and educational decline (Honey, 1997:195).

The maintenance of the standard as the dominant code is also supported by the suppression of non-standard varieties of the language. An example of this is how Bernstein's (1971:8) ideas about "elaborated" and "restricted" codes have been used to explain why working class children fail in school. It is claimed that working class children only have access to a restricted version of the language while middle class children use the elaborated code which is needed for success in school and the wider society. Therefore, working class children fail in school because of their "restricted", or non-standard, language. Bernstein (1975), however, claims that this misinterprets his work and other research also challenges the "elaborated" versus "restricted" language hypothesis (Gordon, 1981:66-89; Tannen, 1982b:14; Lippi-Green, 1997:24; Wolfram, Adger & Christian, 1999:19).

## 2.8 Linguistic diversity and language policy

The complex relationship between language, power and education is also expressed through policies developed to control the teaching of language in schools. At the system level, these policies promote a particular view of language which is in turn reflected at the school level. Corson (1999:24) argues that to be effective school based language policies and practices must value and use the students' cultural capital, including the linguistic resources of the "nondominant" members of the local community. However, as system level policy frames the development of this school

level policy, it too must recognise and value linguistic diversity in order for schools to be able to respond, as Corson suggests.

The Western Australian state education system, the context of the current study, provides an appropriate setting to examine how particular views of language diversity are implicit in language policies. The state government has recently developed a new comprehensive education policy that for the first time applies to all government and private school systems and sectors. In 1997, this policy was mandated by unprecedented legislation which made school systems and sectors legally accountable for achieving the learning outcomes described in the policy document. A Curriculum Council was created and charged with the development and implementation of this policy. The policy was developed, endorsed and published in the document "The Curriculum Framework" (Curriculum-Council, 1998). Since 1999, this policy has been the focus of all the curriculum development activities in the state's schools. The policy statements in this document therefore have considerable influence in the way schools approach pedagogy and issues of linguistic diversity.

The particular view of linguistic diversity implicit in the Curriculum Framework is exemplified in the following extracts. The view reflected in the Overarching Statement appears to recognises variation:

**"Students read, view, listen, speak and write with an awareness of and responsiveness to different cultural conventions and interpretations. They understand the ways in which language is structured and use language effectively to deal with everyday situations. Their command of language includes an ability to use Standard Australian English appropriately. This ability is built upon and in addition to their home languages and dialects."** (Curriculum Council, 1998:20)

This statement, however, seems to simultaneously acknowledge and reject the "home" varieties, a strategy that Lippi-Green (1997:107-9) argues is part of the process of language subordination, for while linguistic diversity is recognised, the focus is on the learning and use of Standard Australian English. This policy conveys a view of language use which is based on notions of appropriacy. However, the nature of what actually is appropriate is not specifically defined in the Curriculum Framework nor in the Outcomes and Standards Framework<sup>6</sup>, the profiling instrument which assists educators to map student progress. The term "appropriate" used in the above context is open to a number of interpretations. Cameron (1995:234-5) warns that "appropriate" becomes synonymous with "correct". Moreover, she argues that because "appropriate" seems less prescriptive than "correct", it is less challenged. The way appropriateness is interpreted by Western Australian teachers and applied to their teaching and their judgements about learning outcomes has not yet been investigated.

On the other hand, the approach to variation implicit in the English Learning Area Statement would suggest a view that is even more tolerant of variation than that expressed in the Overarching Statement:

**"Teaching English involves recognising, accepting, valuing and building on students' existing language competence, including the use of non-standard forms of English, and extending the range of language available to students. In the English Learning Area, students develop functional and critical literacy skills. They learn to control and understand the conventions of Standard Australian English that are valued and rewarded by society and to reflect on and critically analyse their own use of language and the language of others." (Curriculum Council, 1998:82)**

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<sup>6</sup> This profiling instrument was developed from national documents by the Education Department of Western Australia and was widely called the Student Outcome Statements. In 2000, however, its implementation was taken over by the Curriculum Council and it became better known as the Outcomes and Standards Framework.



The Western Australian policy certainly represents a change from previous policies in that different varieties of English are recognised. The level of acceptance, however, appears to be limited to viewing "non-standard" varieties as providing a foundation for school-based learning, rather than as having intrinsic value. Only the "standard" forms are promoted as being "valued and rewarded by society".

## 2.9 Perceptions of student speech

It can be argued that the way teachers perceive student speech is a key consideration in equity issues surrounding the role of language in education. Moreover, because oral language is the primary means of communication and the mode where linguistic variation becomes most apparent, the way this is perceived is especially important. Teachers' perceptions of their students' speech may be influenced by background factors such as age, gender, training and teaching experience.

Teachers are products of their socio-cultural and language background (Barnes, 1976:16; Giles & Coupland, 1991:45). From this, they will develop a view of the world, of society and of themselves and others as members of groups (Feyerabend, 1975 cited in Sturm, 1989:315). This view is reflected in their own language use and influences their thought, behaviour and perceptions, including the way they respond to language in the schools where they teach. For example, it has been found that differences in the perception of the status of accents produce different behaviours in listeners. The higher the perceived status the more positive the behaviour (Giles & Coupland, 1991:39). Similarly, Lippi-Green (1997:69) claims that speakers of non-standard dialects are forced to accept more responsibility for effective communication because of the low status of their varieties. The relative status of students' accents may

influence the way teachers interact with them and subsequently perceive their speech. In fact, experienced teachers have been found to use judgements based on their students' speech above other sources of information, such as previous report cards, when assessing student ability (Eltis, 1978:XIV).

Gender may also influence how teachers judge speech. Hamilton-Kelley (1994:38) found that male teachers had more liberal attitudes than female. Evidence also suggests that females, more than males, may favour standard forms over non-standard forms (Münstermann, 1989:172-4; Labov, 1991:205-6). Research investigating the use of slang and swearing suggests that teachers may be influenced by different expectations for male and female students as regards language use (Hughes, 1992:300-1; Johnson, 1993:5, 11).

Teachers' years of experience and age may also influence their perceptions of speech, however the research findings are contradictory in this regard. On one hand, Eltis (1978:XV111-IV) found that years of experience did impact on teacher perceptions. However, this result could have been influenced by the age differences between the two groups of informants in the study. The first group included student teachers and the second very experienced teachers. Ammon (1989:135), in studies in Germany, also found that younger teachers tended to have a greater understanding of how language varied according to context which may be due to changes in the sociolinguistic content of training courses. On the other hand, Abbott-Shim, Lambert, & McCarthy (1998:5-11) found that there was no significant relationship between teacher beliefs about speech and educational level or years of experience. Their findings suggest that staff development training, management climate, local traditions of quality, and the informal

influences that staff members have on each other may be stronger determinants of teacher beliefs than formal education and experience.

That speech style, or accent, influences teachers' perceptions of pupil intelligence has been demonstrated in a study by Eltis (1978). He examined experienced teachers' and student teachers' attitudes to the three levels of the Australian accent, "Cultivated", "General" and "Broad" (as defined by Mitchell and Delbridge, 1965). The teachers rated samples of speech from students who were not known to them using Likert scales of social characteristics and rankings of intelligence. He found that both the experienced teachers and inexperienced student teachers regarded the spectrum as a hierarchy. That is, they rated students with broad accents consistently lower than those with general accents and those with accents at the cultivated end of the spectrum were rated the highest. This hierarchy applied to perceptions about both social characteristics and intelligence. Eltis did not, however, examine the basis on which the teachers' made their judgements nor how teachers perceived the speech of the students they were currently teaching. As this research was carried out over twenty years ago and there has been considerable social and educational change in the interim, the question of the influence of variation in Australian English on teachers' perceptions of student speech requires further investigation.

A study examining the impact of Spanish-influenced English on teacher judgements of performance also revealed bias (Ford, 1984:35-8). This study focused on writing skills and showed how teacher judgements were negatively influenced by stereotypes associated with the students' speaking style.

Hamilton-Kelley (1994) investigated the attitudes of African American and Caucasian preservice teachers towards students' Black Vernacular English (BVE). She found that standard American English (SAE) was preferred over BVE by both groups (Hamilton-Kelley, 1994:83). Further, the African American teachers held less tolerant attitudes towards language variation than did their Caucasian peers. This finding supports Jackson and Williamson-Ige's (1986:6) earlier one that Black teachers were highly critical of the Black students' use of the vernacular. Jackson and Williamson-Ige suggest that this may be deliberately done to prepare these students for the "reality of rejection" associated with the use of the vernacular.

In contrast, several other studies have found that the influence of the use of non-standard forms on judgements is attenuated when the teachers' first variety is the same as that of their students (Ford, 1984:37; Williams, 1973:149). For example, in research carried out in the municipality of Hirtshals, Northern Jutland (Hansen & Lund, 1983; Lund, 1986) teachers were familiar with the dialect spoken by the children as they had been born and raised in the area, although not in that particular community. While the teachers generally did not believe that the dialect significantly affected teaching or learning, about a third thought that it could make it harder for beginning reading and up to 60% felt that it made spelling more difficult. However, as noted by Jørgensen and Pedersen (1989:35), spelling is not as emphasised in these schools as may be the case elsewhere. The teachers in the Hirtshals Project believed that the dialect should be corrected in written work and in very formal oral tasks but accepted in everyday oral interactions. However, even given this high level of tolerance, only 2% supported the use of the dialect as a medium of instruction. It was also interesting to note that in classroom practice, some teachers were more tolerant than others which might suggest a

mismatch between the attitudes and the practices of some teachers. Edwards (1985:139-40) and Hagen (1989:57) also found that teachers' reported attitudes did not necessarily correspond to their behaviour in classrooms.

In a review of these studies, Jørgensen and Pedersen (1989:35) found no evidence of dialect forms being ridiculed or stigmatised. Rather, students were made aware that the form used was dialectal and asked to provide the corresponding standard form.

However, they also noted that although the teachers reported positive attitudes towards the dialects, they did not assist their students with the educational consequences of speaking a dialect. Similarly, in the Netherlands, liberal language policies have not led to assistance for dialect speakers to cope with the language demands of the curriculum (Hagen, 1989:59). Jørgensen and Pedersen argue that this lack of assistance could be addressed through training and in-service education for teachers.

Van de Craen and Humblet (1989:23-4) reported on Belgian teachers' attitudes towards language variation. They analysed previous data to identify four main aspects which influenced teachers' attitudes. First, linguistic insecurity was identified in the amount of hypercorrection in the teachers' talk and in their correction of students' written work. It was found that hypercorrect lexical items were introduced as the standard and expected to replace "incorrect" alternatives commonly used in the varieties spoken by the students. Second, Van de Craen and Humblet analysed reported linguistic shortcomings related to the teachers' own perceived linguistic inadequacy which was also expressed through the high incidence of hypercorrect forms in their speech. Many teachers, particularly those over 45 years old, reported feeling guilty about this perceived linguistic inadequacy. The third aspect discussed by Van de Craen and Humblet was

that teachers tended to "upgrade their language variant" (Van de Craen & Humblet, 1989:23). In some cases, they saw their regional variety as representing the higher status intermediate variety (Umgangssprache), and where they spoke the intermediate variety they saw it as representing the higher status variety of "Belgium Dutch" and similarly if they spoke Belgium Dutch they perceived themselves as speaking Standard Dutch. Finally, Van de Craen's and Humblet's analysis revealed that teachers were very tolerant of their pupils' speech. Correction of student speech was rare and even then confined to specific language lessons.

Van Calcar, Van Calcar and De Jonge (1989:256-68) investigated teacher attitudes as part of the Groningen Project in the Netherlands but did not find as much tolerance as was found in Belgium. The teachers reported that their students' vocabulary was inadequate because of their limited experiences (Van Calcar, Van Calcar & De Jonge, 1989:259). They also claimed that their students "dried up completely" when they spoke "proper" or standard Dutch, they pronounced words incorrectly, used unacceptable syntax and spoke in incomplete sentences (experiences (Van Calcar, Van Calcar & De Jonge, 1989:261).

A related source of information about teachers' attitudes to language variation is available in the results of "acceptability" studies. Eagleson (1972, 1977, 1989) has carried out a number of such studies in Australia and claims that teachers hold particularly conservative attitudes.

"...teachers can be remarkably outmoded in their knowledge of the current state of the language. In tests of acceptability in the last five years I have found them to lag behind the rest of the community time and again. ...It is these same people who, because of the elevated position of education in our society, have as imparters of learning an added impact in influencing others to see the dialect of

education -which is for us in Australia the standard dialect- as the prestige dialect in our community. Because teachers tend to be conservative in their own practice, the view of this dialect which they are going to present is a warped, possibly warping, one. If indeed it is a prestige dialect in the community, here is an added source of confusion hampering precise delimitation of its nature in the popular conception." (Eagleson, 1989:155)

He uses evidence from these studies along with reports in the press to argue that teachers promote prescriptive forms which are no longer used in the community and hold generally outmoded knowledge of current usage (Eagleson, 1989:154-5). These studies, however, ask teachers to determine the level of acceptability of variant forms in isolation and in controlled conditions. They do not establish how teachers view these forms when they are part of everyday interactions with students. In this way, they indicate an attitude toward; particular language forms and may not predict the behaviour which arises from that attitude. As other studies have shown, there is sometimes a mismatch between teachers' attitudes and their behaviour (Edwards, 1985:139-40; Hagen, 1989:57; Hansen & Lund, 1983; Lund, 1986).

An important consequence of teachers' negative attitudes towards language variation is the stereotyping of non-standard speakers. Research indicates that where teachers perceive children's speech as poor, they also take a negative view of their personalities, social background and academic abilities (Giles & Coupland, 1991:45). Corson (1997:152) and Wolfram, Adger and Christian (1999:23-4) have noted that dialect-based stereotyping is one of the major causes of educational disadvantage for students from linguistically diverse backgrounds. The stereotypes held about non-standard speakers include that they have lower intelligence, poor motivation and even low moral standards. The association of non-standard varieties with social and demographic factors such as living in low socio-economic status suburbs and holding low paid jobs

or being unemployed may increase the educational disadvantage of non-standard speakers (Eltis, 1978:23; Giles, 1991:59). Further, because of these attitudes, the cultural, social and linguistic knowledge that these children do bring to school is not valued in school-based learning (Bourdieu, 1974, 1991; Corson, 1999:23). As a result, there are lower expectations for the educational outcomes of these students.

A longitudinal study undertaken between 1973 and 1982 in the Dutch town of Kerkrade showed no differences between the educational achievement of standard Dutch speakers and non-standard dialect speakers other than in "standard" Dutch (Stijnen & Vallen, 1989:148-9). Despite this, teachers assessed the non-standard dialect speakers less favourably than standard Dutch speakers, including evaluations on their fluency in Dutch and their expected level of achievement. They also reported that non-standard dialect speakers were more reluctant to speak in class, particularly if they were also from a lower socio-economic background. Further, these students were awarded lower marks than standard speaking students in some subjects and more of these children were required to repeat levels of schooling. Stijnen and Vallen (1989:149) argue that the teachers' assessments were influenced by their attitudes to language. For example, six teachers were asked to assess the written work of two groups of students, one non-standard dialect speaking and the other standard dialect speaking without knowing about the students' backgrounds. There were no differences between the two groups in the assessments made by the teachers in this "blind" study.

In a similar study by Ammon (1989:128-131) teachers in Germany evaluated students who spoke a regional dialect while participating in small group discussions. The moderate dialect speakers whose forms were closer to the standard were rated higher



than the broad dialect speakers. In the same study, classroom observations showed that standard speakers participated in class discussions more frequently and non-standard dialect speakers were reprimanded more often.

In another task involving a group of low achievers, standard speakers scored lower in mathematics, suggesting that the dialect speakers may have fewer problems in subject areas requiring less standard language competency. However, despite these scores, the standard speakers were placed in higher streams than the non-standard dialect speakers.

Evidence suggests that teachers' negative beliefs about their students' abilities are taken on by students which in turn reduces their self esteem (Braun, 1976:209; Corson, 1997:152). In this way, teachers' beliefs become a self-fulfilling prophecy (Cambourne, 1990:295; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968, 1992). Wolfram, Adger and Christian (1999:23-4) suggest that this is worse where the students are placed in groups or streams with less able or intellectually disabled students.

Similarly, Hamilton-Kelley (1994:33-36) claims that where teachers make negative judgements about their students' abilities based on their language, the students form negative attitudes to school and are not motivated to participate. This in turn impacts on their educational achievement and reinforces the original negative attitudes. Hamilton-Kelley found that the teachers' negative attitudes toward non-standard varieties even influence the approaches they select for teaching. In this way, a lack of understanding of the linguistic issues may lead to inappropriate intervention.

Corson (1999:97-8) argues that assessment practices may be influenced by the way social advantage is mistaken for linguistic competence and students without these advantages are made to appear incompetent. One way in which this disadvantage happens is when the standard variety is the "norm" in language tests (Fasold, 1990; Corson, 1993:119-20;). Assessment that emphasises only one "correct" form exacerbates the injustice. An example of this is the over-representation of non-standard dialect speaking students in special education contexts which would appear to be the result of inappropriate testing procedures and assumptions about dialect inferiority rather than genuine language disabilities (Adger, Wolfram, Detwyler, & Harry, 1993:5-6). The measurement of a student's competence in only the "standard" form of the language is more a measure of social background than of ability or teaching effectiveness (Perera, 1993:10). This was illustrated in an example, used by Labov (1972a:213-20), which contrasts the speech of a Black Vernacular English (BVE) speaker with that of a middle class speaker to demonstrate that the arguments mounted by the BVE speaker were in fact clearer and more logical than those of the middle class speaker. Labov claimed that because the middle class speaker used forms of language associated with being well-educated and intelligent, the content of his speech was generally viewed to be more logical than that of the BVE speaker.

## 2.10 Conclusion

Language varies in systematic ways but non-linguists do not always understand this natural variation. Similarly, the differences between standard and non-standard varieties of a language are not well understood. A standard variety is less subject to variation because of the codification process and the higher level of consciousness that often accompanies its use. It also achieves higher status because of its use in the public

functions of society and its key role in education. In addition, the nature and role of the standard often leads to a negative view of variation away from it and the devaluing of non-standard varieties. This is demonstrated in the history of the English language, including Australian English, where the standardisation process has led to a common view of varieties as sub-standard. Negative views of variation continue into the present as seen in the extensive international research regarding linguistic prejudice. Education plays an important role in the perpetuation of this prejudice and is at the same time, influenced by it in that teachers' judgements of competence may be effected by the variety of English that their students speak.

In Western Australia a new curriculum framework has recently been developed and published and is being implemented over the next five years with extensive professional development. This curriculum policy places an additional emphasis on the role of oracy in teaching and learning processes and particularly in the assessment of student learning outcomes. While the policy recognises linguistic variation, it also emphasises competence in Standard Australian English. The combination of this new focus on spoken language and the emphasis placed on the standard variety means that student speech and how teachers judge it will become increasingly important in learning and assessment processes. However, there has been little Australian research and a dearth of Western Australian research investigating teachers' understanding of language variation and how this impacts on their practice.

### 2.11 The research questions

This research investigates how teachers perceive student speech. In particular, it investigates the influence of the students' socio-economic status and level of schooling

**on teachers' perceptions. In order to do this, answers are sought to the following questions:**

**What do teachers perceive to be problematic in the speech of their students?**

**What influences the teachers' perceptions of their students' speech?**

**Does a student's socio-economic status or level of schooling influence teachers' perceptions of their speech?**

**Do the teachers' backgrounds influence their perceptions and if so, in what way?**

## CHAPTER THREE

### Method

This chapter describes the research methodology. It includes the overall aims, a description of the informants and the procedures as related to the three studies that make up this research. First, the aspects of methodology common to all three studies are presented and then those aspects unique to each study are described.

#### 3.1 Aim

The purpose of this research was to determine how teachers perceive student speech. In particular, it sought to determine the relative influence of non-standard features in the students' speech. Additionally, the influence of the teachers' background, their general attitudes to language variation and the way they define Standard Australian English was considered.

#### 3.2 Informants

Thirty-six teachers participated in this research; eighteen were primary teachers, twelve secondary English learning area teachers and six secondary society and environment learning area teachers.

##### 3.2.1 Informant selection

The teachers in the study were selected from twelve schools representing a range of Western Australian metropolitan education districts. This was done to control for the possible influence that differences in policy and professional development between districts might make on teachers' perceptions of student speech.

An equal number of primary and secondary schools were selected on the basis of the socioeconomic status of their student populations. This status was identified using the H Index which gives a weighting to parental occupation, parental education, family structure<sup>7</sup>, accommodation tenancy and crowding to determine the degree of disadvantage. The Education Department of Western Australia uses the H Index as the allocative mechanism for the distribution of equity funding. Schools in the Perth metropolitan area have an H Index range of 86.53 to 118.52. Half of the schools in this research had an H Index of 95 or less and were referred to as 'low' ('L'). The remainder had a rating of greater than 100 and were referred to as 'high' ('H').

Primary School	A	B	E	F	I	J
Socioeconomic status	HIGH	LOW	HIGH	LOW	HIGH	LOW
Teachers	3	3	3	3	3	3
Secondary School	C	D	G	H	K	L
Socioeconomic status	HIGH	LOW	HIGH	LOW	HIGH	LOW
Teachers	3	3	3	3	3	3

**Figure 3.1 Selection of schools and informants**

Three teachers from each primary and secondary school were selected. In the primary schools this included a pre-primary (PP), year 4 and year 7 teacher; and in the secondary schools, an English learning area teacher for year 9 and year 11 and a society and environment (S&E) learning area teacher. The society and environment teachers taught either or both year 9 and year 11 classes.

These year levels were selected to make the sample representative and to provide the opportunity to collect data about issues related to a particular level of schooling as well as general issues.

The pre-primary level was identified as the entry point to institutionalised education for most children. Year 4 was chosen as representing the middle years of primary school where the curriculum generally becomes more cognitively demanding, language use more decontextualised and teaching methodology less reliant on concrete learning activities. The final year of primary school was selected because it is viewed by many as particularly important in preparing students for secondary school. At this level, students are often encouraged to become more independent in their learning and the demands on their language increase in anticipation of the specialist subjects to be studied in secondary school.

In the secondary school, year 9 was identified as being difficult for many students and their teachers. At this point, the students are dealing with the rapid changes brought on by adolescence, including changing relationships with peers and adults. Additionally, at the end of year 8, the students choose options from a range of subjects and are expected to meet increased performance demands in the areas chosen. Year 11 is the first year of post-compulsory education and students are seen as preparing for further education or vocational goals. As senior school students, they face a rapid increase in the expectations about their performance, including language use.

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<sup>7</sup> Family structure refers to the type of family such as 'original' or biological parents and children, step or blended families or single parent families.

A society and environment learning area teacher was included on the basis of evidence that English teachers may hold more conservative attitudes to language than teachers from other disciplines (Collins, 1989:141; Eagleson, 1989:155). In addition, the language demands within the society and environment learning area are very high.

A Teacher Background Questionnaire was used to collect information on the age, gender, teaching experience and level and location of each teacher's schooling. This information is presented by school in the following table.

Table 3.1 Background of informants

School and Year levels	Gender	Age	Schools attended	Qualification	Professional Development <sup>8</sup>	Years of Experience
A PP	F	50- 59	Perth HSE PS & SHS <sup>9</sup>	5 (IP) <sup>10</sup> ECE	FS <sup>11</sup> , ESL <sup>12</sup>	10
4	F	40- 49	Germany, Melb.-8 LSE -MSE schools	BEd	TESOL <sup>13</sup> , LOTE methodology	20+
7	F	50- 59	Perth MSES PS & SHS	3year Certificate	FS, Key teacher	23
B PP	F	40- 49	England - LSE	3 year Certificate	FS, ESL, Aboriginal Education	20
4	F	30- 39	Catholic primary, and secondary -MSE-HSE	5 (IP)* Policy & Administration	FS, Early Literacy, ESL, Literacy Net P-3, CF	10

<sup>8</sup> FS is First Steps, SO is Stepping Out, ESL is English as a second language, LOTE is languages other than English, CF is Curriculum Framework, SOS is Student Outcome Statements, SAER is students at educational risk.

<sup>9</sup> LSES, MSES and HSES refer to low, middle and high socio-economic status respectively. PS refers to primary school and SHS refers to senior high school.

<sup>10</sup> IP is degree at that level in progress

<sup>11</sup> First Steps was a comprehensive professional development course based on whole language and genre methodology. Student progress was mapped using continua for spelling, reading, writing and oral language and involved the teachers identifying student achievement on key indicators before they progressed to the next level of achievement. There is no reference to language variation in this course.

<sup>12</sup> The ESL training referred to is a one-day in-service course designed for mainstream teachers with a low number of ESL students in their class. Traditionally these courses have not included information about language variation except as it relates to interlanguage development.

<sup>13</sup> TESOL is teaching English to speakers of other languages



7	F	40-49	Large country town PS & SHS	3 year certificate Remedial, PE	FS, ESL, THRASS, CF, SOS	20+
C 9 E	F	40-49	Private Girls School (HSES)	BEd History/English	SO, ESL	15
11 E	F	40-49	10 schools (country and city) MSES	BEd (English & ESL)	SO ESL (+ a great deal of other)	9
S& E	M	50-59	UK (MSES)	Diploma Geography	SO	32
D 9 E	F	30-39	MSES-HSES metropolitan government schools	4: DipEd Media/English	FS, SO, Aboriginal English	6
11 E	F	20-29	MSE - HSE	4: Dip T TESOL	TESOL	2
S& E	F	40-49	Country PS Private girls high school (NSW)	4: Dip T History/economics	SO, ESL	21
E PP	F	30-39	WA rural catholic school Rural SHS	BEd ECE	FS, Blank Model Questioning	11
4	M	40-49	WA LSE	3 year Diploma	FS	20
7	F	40-49	UK private girls school	BEd PS + geography & English	FS, SO, Bookshelf (reading), Special Needs in Reading.	27
F PP	F	50-59	L-MSES PS L-MSES SHS	3 Cert ECE	FS, KOSP (oral language) Speech pathologist eg story train	25
4	F	40-49	Y1-6 Nth Ireland Y 6-7 LSES-MSES PS lower-middle SES SHS	BEd Reading	FS, SO, Focus Teacher	26
7	F	40-49	Country PS Country SHS	BEd Intercultural & Aboriginal studies	ERICA, FS, SO, English SOS	26
G 9 E	F	30-39	MSES PS MSES-HSES SHS	Dip of T BEd Honours Italian & English	SO LOTE re SOS	10
11 E	F	40-49	LSES-MSES PS, MSES-HSES SHS, Country SHS	BEd English	SO SAER	17
S& E	F	40-49	HSES SHS	BEd History	SO	17
H 9 E	F	40-49	LSES, Victorian PS LSES-MSES SHS	BEd English & History Grad Cert (IP)*	ESL TESOL	5
11 E	F	30-39	NSW 1 year WA (HSES)	BA Dip Ed (English)	SO	10
S& E	F	20-29	MSES SHS	BEd History/Aboriginal studies	SO Aboriginal English	5

I PP	F	40- 49	HSES PS, HSES Private girls school	BEd Psychology	FS	15
4	F	40- 49	SA MSES	BEd	FS SO	30
7	F	30- 39	MSES SHS	BEd Maths, special ed	ELIC, FS	14
J PP	F	30- 39	Malaysia PS WA HSES private girls school	ECE	FS, Abl Eng literacy	12
4	M	40- 49	NZ MSES	BEd Art/Craft	FS, SO	20
7	F	30- 39	HSES private girls school	Diploma Health	FS	11
K 9 E	F	20- 29	HSES SHS	BEd Drama	SO, ESL	6
11 E	F	40- 49	LSES-MSES PS & SHS	BEd English literature	SO	14
S& E	F	40- 49	HSES PS & SHS	BEd Geography	SO ESL	25
L 9 E	M	20- 29	MSES SHS	BEd Media	No PD	3
11 E	F	40- 49	M-LSES PS Private girls school	BEd English	SO	6
S& E	M	20- 29	MSES SHS	BEd Economics	Nil	4

The informants were divided into three equal groups to participate in the three separate studies. Schools A, B, C and D participated in Study One, Schools E, F, G and H in Study Two and Schools I, J, K and L in Study Three.

Teachers Schools	Study One Teachers				Study Two Teachers				Study Three Teachers			
	Primary Schools		Secondary Schools		Primary Schools		Secondary Schools		Primary Schools		Secondary Schools	
School	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
Socio- economic status	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	L
PS Year Levels (1 per year level)	PP 4 7	PP 4 7			PP 4 7	PP 4 7			PP 4 7	PP 4 7		
English (1 per year level)			9 11	9 11			9 11	9 11			9 11	9 11
S&E Teachers (1 per sch)			S/E	S/E			S/E	S/E			S/E	S/E

Figure 3.2 Informants in Study One, Study Two and Study Three

### 3.3 Procedure

The procedures common to all three studies are described in this section and those relating to the individual studies are described in the following sections.

Permission to conduct research in each of the schools was obtained from the principal and written consent was gained from the teachers. (See Appendix A)

A Language Attitude Questionnaire was designed to measure the informants' attitudes to language variation in general and to the use of particular variants of Australian English. The questionnaire was based on that used by Hamilton-Kelley (1994:63-4) in a study of teacher attitudes to African American Vernacular English (AAVE). However, some modification was required to reflect local conditions. It was then trialed with a representative group of 14 teachers and further modifications were made in response to their feedback (copy in Appendix B). All of the informants later completed this questionnaire and it was scored according to the Likert scale choices they made. This questionnaire was constructed so that in some items an "agree" response represented the most liberal attitude and in others the most conservative. This was done so the informants could not determine a particular pattern of expected responses. The most liberal response scored +2, a moderately liberal response +1, no opinion 0, moderately conservative -1 and conservative -2. The questions sought information on attitudes to variation in general and on attitudes towards specific alternative variant use. These two aspects were analysed separately by adding the scores for relevant items and averaging them. When the scores for each of these sections were averaged those above 0 indicated degrees of liberalism. Therefore, a score between 0 and 0.9 was slightly liberal, 1.0 and

1.5 was moderately liberal and 1.6 and 2.0 was very liberal. Similarly, scores below 0 demonstrated degrees of conservatism with 0 to -0.9 slightly conservative, -1.0 to -1.5 moderately conservative and -1.6 to -2.0 very conservative. This scoring system is illustrated in Figure 3.3.

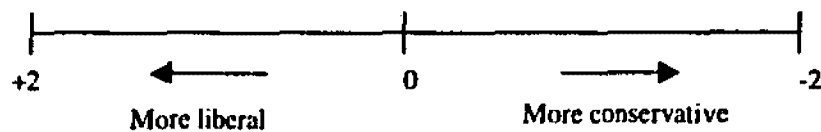


Figure 3.3 The scoring of the Language Attitude Questionnaire

Before doing the Language Attitude Questionnaire, each informant was required to complete a Background Information Sheet (Appendix C), to write their own definition of Standard Australian English and to identify what s/he believed to be the key features of that variety. The Language Attitude Questionnaire, the Background Information Sheet and the definitions of Standard Australian English were used in all three studies.

### 3.4 Study One

#### 3.4.1 Procedure

This study required the teachers to keep a written record of the linguistic features they identified as problematic in their students' speech for a period of a week. Firstly, the researcher met with the teachers and explained this data collection task to them. They were given Language Features Record Sheets to make notes on as they went about their normal teaching duties. The instructions on these sheets read "Please record the features, as precisely as you can, you identify as problems in your students' speech. Each time you identify a feature, note why you think it is a problem". Each sheet was divided into two columns, the first narrower than the second. The first column was

headed "Language Feature" and the second "Why is it a problem?" (see Appendix D for a copy of this sheet). During the initial meeting, any feature that the teachers were unsure of was discussed. However, specific examples of features were not given either verbally or on the sheet to avoid influencing the teachers' perception. During the week of the data collection, there was only one teacher who required further clarification and she provided an example of a feature she had observed and asked if it were appropriate to the task.

At the end of the week, the researcher met with each teacher again to administer the Language Attitude Questionnaire, to collect background information and to have them write their own definition of Standard Australian English and identify its key characteristics. This also provided an opportunity for the teachers to discuss their observations. These discussions were hand written as field notes.

### 3.4.3 Analysis

First, the observational data recorded by each teacher was categorised and related to the information from the attitude and background questionnaires and to his/her definition of Standard Australian English. Next, this information was examined and a summary of the relationships between the different factors was made. A case study of one of the teachers was then prepared as an example of the way the relationships were considered. Finally, the information relating to each of the teachers was collated and trends in the relationships were noted.

Following this, the data for the three teachers from each school was collated using the categories suggested by the nature of the features they had identified as problematic,

both on their Language Features Record Sheets and in the discussion that followed the data collection. These categories included pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, language use and the causes of speech problems. Patterns across the four schools were then examined using a matrix which identified the features and the schools where teachers had nominated them as problematic (see Appendix E for sample of analysis).

### 3.5 Study Two

#### 3.5.1 Procedure

The teachers in this study participated in school-based focus groups to discuss those features they identified as problematic in their students' speech. The researcher used guiding questions (Appendix F) to facilitate this discussion where necessary. These focus groups were tape-recorded.

#### 3.5.2 Analysis

The tape recordings of each of the four focus groups were transcribed using standard orthography. Each area of concern identified by the teachers was then highlighted in each transcript and a note of the topic made in the margin (see Appendix G for sample of annotated transcript).

Each teacher's contribution to the topics of discussion was noted together with their perceptions of their students' speech. The contribution of each teacher was categorised and related to the information from the attitude and background questionnaires and to his/her definition of Standard Australian English. Next, this information was examined and a summary of the relationships between the different factors was made. A case study of one of the teachers was then prepared as an example of the way the

relationships were considered. Finally, the information relating to each of the teachers was collated and trends in the relationships were noted.

The features of student speech identified in the focus group discussions as problematic were summarised and categorised for each school. The categories included pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and language use. As in Study One, the patterns across schools were then examined using a matrix which identified the problem features by school.

### 3.6 Study Three

#### 3.6.1 Procedure

The teachers in this study participated in school-based groups to rank samples of student speech. The teachers ranked the speech of unknown students to control for the possible influence of background factors on their perceptions. Previous research suggests that teachers may judge on the basis of the assumed background of students or their appearance (Eltis, 1978:348-9; Ryan, 1980:1-19; Gordon, 1981:49; Giles & Coupland, 1991:49-53).

The researcher collected samples of student speech from years 4, 7 and 9. This minimised the need to find tasks easy enough for pre-primary students and complex enough for year 11 students. Also the age variation between years 4 and 7 for the primary ranking process and years 7 and 9 for the secondary ranking process was considered to be sufficient to demonstrate any judgements that were influenced by age.

The speech samples were collected in the following manner. Teachers from Study One who taught years 4, 7 and 9 selected two male and two female students with an Australian English speaking background (Figure 3.4). A signed permission slip was gained from each student's parent(s). Recordings were made at school because it was less disruptive to the students' class routine. Recordings were therefore not of extremely high quality but adequate for the task.

Tasks	Schools A & C HSES						School B & D LSES					
	Male			Female			Male			Female		
Year Levels	4	7	9	4	7	9	4	7	9	4	7	9
Sentence repetition task <sup>15</sup> [SR-y] [SR-o]	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Description task 1 (house) [DH]	2	2		2	2		2	2		2	2	
Description task 2 (activity) [DA]		2	2		2	2		2	2		2	2

Figure 3.4 Collection of student speech samples

The samples of student speech included a sentence repetition task and two description tasks, one describing the student's home and one describing leisure activities (Appendix H). The sentence repetition task was the same as that used in a study of variation in the speech of Western Australian school children (Oliver, McKay & Rochecouste, 1999). The 13 sentences contained phonological features identified as variable in studies of Australian English. A tape of these was played and paused after each sentence to allow the student to repeat that sentence. Each student's attempt was tape-recorded.

The first descriptive task required the students to describe the inside of their home.

They were told they could draw a floor plan of the house to assist them if they wished.

The second task required them to tell the researcher about a film they had recently seen.



A student who had not seen a film recently, was asked to describe a soccer match instead.

The researcher selected a representative sample of six recordings of each task. Each of these speech recordings was transferred to a separate tape and alphabetically labelled.

The order of the students was counterbalanced across the tasks to control for the influence of age, gender or class on the teachers' ranking. This is detailed in Figure 3.5.

Sentence Repetition [SR-y] A-F			Description House [DH] A-F			Sentence Repetition [SR-o] A-F			Description Activity [DA] A-F		
Yr	G	SES	Yr	G	SES	Yr	G	SES	Yr	G	SES
4	F	L	4	F	L	9	F	H	9	M	H
7	M	H	4	M	H	7	M	L	9	M	L
4	M	L	7	F	H	9	F	L	7	F	H
7	F	H	4	M	L	7	F	L	9	F	H
4	F	H	7	M	H	9	M	H	7	F	L
7	M	L	7	F	L	7	M	H	7	M	L

Figure 3.5: Organisation of speech sample tapes

The teachers met in school based groups to rank two sets of samples of student speech. They were asked to rank the speech samples using their own criteria and were given a record sheet for any notes made during the ranking process. In addition, the teachers' discussion during this task was tape-recorded.

The order of the tasks was counterbalanced (see Figure 3.6) so as not to influence the teachers to focus on particular linguistic features.

<sup>15</sup> The same sentence repetition task was completed by the year 4, 7 and 9 students. However, the teachers in the primary schools ranked samples from year 4 and 7 students [SR-y] and the secondary teachers ranked samples from year 7 and 9 students [SR-o].

The teachers in School I ranked the sentence repetition task by younger students and nominated the criteria used for that categorisation first. They then ranked the samples of the younger students describing their homes. The teachers in school J did their ranking in reverse order (see Figure 3.6).

The teachers in school K ranked the description of a leisure activity by the older students and nominated the criteria used for that categorisation first. They then ranked the older students' sentence repetition task. The teachers in school L did their ranking in reverse order (see Figure 3.6).

School Teachers	I PP, 4, 7	J PP, 4, 7	K 9, 11, S&E	L 9, 11, S&E
Task 1	SR-y	DH	DA	SR-o
Task 2	DH	SR-y	SR-o	DA

Figure 3.6 Order of tasks by school group

### 3.6.2 Analysis

The teachers' rankings were noted and the top three of each set of speech samples were analysed according to age, gender and socio-economic status.

The tape recordings of each of the four school groups were transcribed and analysed in the same way as for Study Two. Additionally, the data relating to each teacher's contribution to the discussion, his/her attitude to language variation and his/her background were analysed as for Study One and Two.

**Chapters Four, Five and Six will report the findings of each of the three studies but only discuss those aspects unique to each study. Chapter Seven will discuss the findings common to all three studies and discuss these with reference to the relevant literature.**

## CHAPTER 4

### Study One Findings

In Study One, twelve teachers from four schools were required to keep a written record of the linguistic features they identified as problematic in their students' speech for a period of a week. These notes were to be made as they went about their normal teaching duties. At the end of the week, the researcher met with the teachers to administer the Language Attitude and the Background Information Questionnaires. At this time, the researcher recorded as field notes any additional issues raised by the teachers.

In this chapter, firstly, the way the teachers defined Standard Australian English is described. Secondly, the results of the Language Attitude Questionnaire completed by each of the teachers are reported. Thirdly, the information provided by the teachers in their observation journals<sup>16</sup> is summarised and discussed in sections relating to their perceptions of their students' difficulties with pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and language use. Fourthly, the causes teachers ascribed to their students' speech problems are described. Finally, the relationships between the way the teachers defined Standard Australian English, their backgrounds, their attitudes to language variation and how they perceived student speech are explored.

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<sup>16</sup> These notes were recorded on a Language Features Record Sheet (Appendix D)

#### 4.1 Teachers' definitions of Standard Australian English

The teachers involved in this study were asked to write their own definition of Standard Australian English and to identify its key features. These have been collated by year level and school and are presented in Table 4.1, exactly as written by the teachers.

Table 4.1 Teachers' definitions of Standard Australian English (Study One)

School Teacher <sup>17</sup>	Definitions of Standard Australian English	Key features of Standard Australian English
A PP	Appropriate usage of spoken and written language to enable functioning efficiently in society - in Australia.	Grammatical Spoken language - clear, precise, well modulated, in correct form. Written language - readable, well presented with reference to format + content.
4	The language spoken by the newsreaders	Good grammar, clear pronunciation, correct syntax, logical flow of ideas.
7	The dialect of English that is spoken and written by the powerful dominant group in society eg Govt., media, law, education.	Standardised - described in grammar books and dictionaries. Also consists of colloquial as well as formal variant.
B PP	English which is correct grammatically and in pronunciation, encompassing changes to the English language which are recognised and accepted in Australia.	Genre, word awareness, grammar, syntax, vocabulary, pronunciation.
4	Forms and use of Australian English culminating the dominant languages of the government, education and everyday social interaction and communication in Australia.	Written conventions (spelling, vocab etc). Oral conventions (vocab, expression) The understanding and use conventions according to audience & purpose. Need to recognise the importance of using conventions to make communication easier.
7	A common language that is accepted and understood & allows people to interact socially, communicate and provides & supports a way of learning effectively and easier.	Common language Common acceptance Written conventions - spelling, grammar, punctuation. Oral conventions - tone, vocab.

<sup>17</sup> The teachers are coded with PP being pre-primary, 4 being year 4, 7 being year 7, 9E being year 9 English, 11E being year 11 English and S&E being society and environment.

C 9 E	In general, the ability to be understood by others. Technically, I expect it would mean using language as set out in eg Macquarie Dictionary and in grammar textbooks	Acceptance of some slang, idiomatic phrases peculiar to Australia. Conventional spelling of words (dictionary) Conventional use of grammar. Different language is appropriate for different circumstances
11 E	That which is acceptable to the majority in terms of everyday use.	Idiomatic speech Clear but not clipped - tends to drop final 'g' (goin' etc)
S&E	Australian Macquarie Dictionary	A mixture of North American and UK English with a unique set of indigenous Australian words. In addition, it has adopted Irish, Scottish and English dialects into its fold.
D 9 E	Standard Australian English is the conventional English prescribed in text books. It follows certain grammatical and linguistic rules. As spoken it requires an understanding of the socially acceptable conventions of dialect, tone, pace, pitch, expression etc. [As a teacher the above statement is made knowing that I have to conform to the expectations and standards set by the Education Department, curriculum council etc. (showing data of state levels etc)]	Written, speaking, reading.
11 E	The English that is accepted and used in Australia as the means of proper communication in formal and academic situations.	Correct grammar. Standard spelling - 's' not 'z' for example. Australian vocabulary
S&E	As standard English, but more colourful with colloquialisms accepted.	That you can use it to communicate well.

The teachers' definitions of Standard Australian varied widely. For example, some teachers defined it in terms of its common acceptability while others described it with reference to that which is "correct" according to grammar texts and dictionaries. The definitions also differed in the "standards" against which language is judged. The most common standard was that the language used be "*common, accepted and understood*"<sup>18</sup>. These general criteria were further defined with reference to key features which included the use of correct conventions and "*good communication*". Other definitions referred to its use by authorities such as the "*powerful, dominant group*", institutions and newsreaders. The standards of these authorities were characterised by certain

<sup>18</sup> Terms presented in "*italics*" are direct quotes from teachers in the study.

written and oral conventions and by the use of a logical flow of ideas. Some definitions also included reference to "appropriate" and further some suggested that this should be the key standard against which the language is judged. In turn, what was appropriate was defined with reference to grammar, format and context. Three of the definitions referred only to speech and two referred to both speech and writing while the others did not specifically refer to different modes of language.

#### 4.2 Teachers' attitudes to language variation

The teachers' attitudes to language variation in general and to the use of specific variants of Australian English were measured by a Language Attitude Questionnaire (see Appendix B). The teachers responded to 43 questions using a Likert scale from "agree" through "moderately agree", "no opinion", "moderately disagree" to "disagreement". Thirteen of the questions sought information on attitudes to variation in general and the other thirty on attitudes towards the use of specific alternative variants of Australian English. These two aspects were analysed separately by adding the scores for relevant items and averaging them. When the scores for each of these sections were averaged those above 0 indicated degrees of liberalism. Therefore, a score between 0 and 0.9 was slightly liberal, 1.0 and 1.5 was moderately liberal and 1.6 and 2.0 was very liberal. Similarly, scores below 0 demonstrated degrees of conservatism with 0 to -0.9 slightly conservative, -1.0 to -1.5 moderately conservative and -1.6 to -2.0 very conservative. Therefore, the higher the score, the more liberal the attitude to language variation and conversely, the lower the score, the more conservative the attitude. The scoring of this questionnaire is detailed on pages 97-8. The results for the teachers in this study are reported on the following table.

**Table 4.2 Teachers' ratings on the Language Attitude Questionnaire**

School	School A			School B			School C			School D		
Year	PP	4	7	PP	4	7	E9	E11	SE	E9	E11	SE
V <sup>19</sup>	-0.20	-0.15	-0.15	+0.69	+0.69	+0.92	+0.61	+1.00	+0.07	+1.00	+0.85	+1.00
U	+0.27	+0.10	-0.40	+0.90	+0.27	+0.60	+0.50	+1.40	0	+0.40	+0.40	+0.70

In this study, the mean for the teachers' attitude to language variation in general was +0.52 and for the use of variants was +0.43 or slightly liberal for both. In School A, all of the teachers had slightly conservative attitudes to language variation in general. The pre-primary and year 4 teachers had slightly liberal attitudes to the use of variants of Australian English while the year 7 teacher had a slightly conservative attitude to this aspect of variation. In School B, the teachers' attitudes were generally more liberal than those of the teachers in School A. The teachers had a slightly liberal attitude to both language variation in general and to the use of variants of Australian English. In School C, the year 11 English teacher had a moderately liberal rating to variation in general and to the use of variants of Australian English. The other two teachers had a rating of slightly liberal for both of these aspects of variation. In School D, both the year 9 English teacher and the society and environment teacher had moderately liberal ratings for variation in general while the year 11 English teacher had a slightly liberal rating. All of the teachers in this school had a slightly liberal rating for the use of variants of Australian English.

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<sup>19</sup> V refers to the measurement of the teacher's attitude to variation in general and U to their attitude to the use of specific variants of Australian English



### 4.3 Teachers' perceptions of student speech

#### 4.3.1 Teachers' perceptions of pronunciation problems

The pronunciation problems identified by the teachers varied according to the different socio-economic status (SES) of the school and levels of schooling. The teachers in low SES schools, both primary and secondary, identified the most pronunciation difficulties while the teachers in the high SES primary school did not nominate any problems with their students' pronunciation. Only one teacher in the high SES secondary school identified any problems and these related to "performance speech"<sup>20</sup>.

The teachers in the low SES schools noted the use of /n/ in the word final position instead of /ŋ/ and the contraction of words such as in "going to" as [gʌnə], "don't know" as [dʌnə] and "No, not doing that" as [Nʌp nɒt dɔɪn næt], as problematic. In some cases, they were also concerned that these forms would transfer to the students' writing.

The year 7 teacher in the low SES primary school also noted her students' pronunciation of difficult or unfamiliar words as problematic. Although the year 11 English teacher in the low SES secondary school also expressed a concern with her students' pronunciation problems, the example she gave did not seem to provide sufficient evidence to justify her concern. This example was a borrowed French word of low frequency, /debut/ which she claimed a student had pronounced as "deebutt". The teacher also claimed that this particular mispronunciation indicated that the student had "*poor word*

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<sup>20</sup> In this research, "performance speech" refers to the formal talks students are required to give as part of their assessment in upper primary and secondary school.

*recognition skills*". Again, this student speech example would not seem to provide strong evidence for the teacher's claim.

The teachers in both the low SES schools and the high SES secondary school were concerned about their students' problems with articulation. The teachers expressed this concern variously as "*mumbling*", "*slurred speech*", "*sounds not clearly articulated*" and "*incorrect articulation*". However, while pronunciation was a general concern for the teachers in the low SES schools, it was only referred to by the year 11 English teacher in the high SES schools. This teacher noted the problem in the context of "performance speech", that is when her students were giving prepared talks for assessment purposes. She called this tendency to "*speak through closed lips*", the "*Australian disease*".

The year 11 English teacher in the high SES school was also the only teacher to identify a problem with her students not placing emphasis on important words or varying the pace of their speech. Again these problems were noted in the context of "performance speech" and she claimed they made the students' voices boring and that their listeners consequently "*lost the point*".

#### 4.3.2 Teachers' perceptions of vocabulary problems

The teachers in the low SES schools identified the most vocabulary issues. Teachers in both of the low SES schools claimed their students used a limited range of vocabulary. They also suggested that their students lacked specific vocabulary, including that required by specialist subjects, and used inappropriate vocabulary. Some students were

also described as having difficulty where words had more than one meaning. The teachers' journal comments included:

*"Often limits effective sharing of ideas to others through limited vocabulary for specific purpose in situations."* (Year 4 teacher, low SES Primary school)  
*"Lack of vocabulary."* *"Negative, unsubtle vocabulary."* *"Lack of vocabulary or starting point."* (Year 11 English teacher, low SES secondary school)

These problems were seen to be of particular concern because of the students' failure to meet the vocabulary demands of the curriculum learning areas which would have serious implications for their educational success.

In contrast to the low SES schools, the only vocabulary issue identified in the high SES schools was one instance where the society and environment teacher reported that a student had used an inappropriate adjective for an unfamiliar food item. That is, she said "dead" instead of "raw" when referring to a pickled herring.

#### 4.3.3 Teachers' perceptions of grammar problems

The teachers in both the low and high SES primary schools noted that their students had problems with verb tenses. In the low SES primary school, the year 7 teacher nominated incorrect verb tenses as one of a number of examples of her students' grammar problems. However, although both the pre-primary and the year 4 teachers in the high SES primary school noted instances of this problem, neither saw it as widespread or serious. The pre-primary teacher saw it as a developmental feature which only effected immature children in the early years of schooling. The year 4 teacher noted only one instance of a student having said, *"I got bit by a dog"* which she identified as a problem of *"wrong tense"*. In actual fact, the error is not in the use of

tense but rather in the form of the past participle. This problem also may be developmental, especially as the child was only nine years old.

The year 11 English teacher in the low SES school was the only secondary teacher to identify that her students had problems with pronoun-verb agreement. She used the example of "*You was with some kids*" and suggested that this problem was due to the students' use of non-standard English.

There was a range of other grammatical features each of which was only nominated by one of the teachers. That is, the year 4 teacher in the high SES primary school recorded that her students were using "*wrong adverbs*", the year 7 teacher in the low SES primary school noted that her students used incorrect plurals and the year 11 English teacher in the low SES secondary school identified that her students use double negatives. The pre-primary teacher in the high SES school noted that one of her students used pronouns instead of articles and the other pre-primary teacher in the low SES school claimed that one of her students "*did not use function words*". However, both these teachers saw these problems as developmental as the children concerned were immature.

The year 9 English teacher in the high SES secondary school noted that her students use the terms "*could of*" and "*the woman that*" in speech. The use of "*could of*" is probably due to the reinterpretation of the contracted form of "could have" which although written as "could've" is heard as "could of" possibly because these forms share the same unstressed form [kudəv]. On the other hand, the use of "*a woman that*" instead of "*a woman who*" may be the result of the general loss of wh- relative pronouns. In many instances, the "which" has been replaced by "that" and goes relatively unnoticed in

reference to inanimate objects but in reference to people, it may be less acceptable. The teacher commented that while she did not view these forms as a problem when used in casual conversation with peers, she was concerned that they would transfer to writing. She was, therefore, not sure whether she should correct them in the students' speech. The teachers in the low SES high school also quoted the students' use of this feature but did not identify it as a problem or as an innovation but rather considered it part of the students' "*home*"<sup>21</sup> language.

The pre-primary teacher in the low SES primary school noted that one of her students used single or two word phrases to communicate but believed this was a developmental problem. However, the year 7 teacher reported that many of her students used short sentences in their speech and she considered this a serious problem for them. In contrast, in the high SES primary school only one instance of an immature child using incomplete sentences was noted. While the teacher viewed this as a problem because it affected the child's expression, she saw it as developmental and believed it would resolve itself with time.

### **Comparison of concerns across schools and levels of schooling**

There were a greater number of grammatical issues identified as problematic by the primary teachers than by the secondary teachers in this study. Further, the nature of these issues also differed: The primary teachers were more concerned about verb forms while the secondary teachers were more troubled by several language features which would seem to be undergoing change. The nature of the teachers' concerns also differed

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<sup>21</sup> Some of the teachers involved in this research referred to non-standard speech as a student's "home" language.

according to the SES levels of the schools where they were teaching. For example, there was a general concern with the form of the students' speech, particularly that relating to verb forms, however, the primary teachers working in the different SES schools viewed the cause of the problem differently. For instance, the examples quoted by the teachers contained variants associated with both syntactic development and social variation (eg *Meg done it*). However, while the teacher in the high SES school identified the problem as developmental, the teacher in the low SES noted it as a common syntactical error resulting from the influence of "*home language*".

#### 4.3.4 Teachers' perceptions of language use problems

Most of the problems teachers identified concerned their students' use of language. These issues included the students' speech when engaged in learning activities, their "performance speech", their reluctance to participate and their use of socially inappropriate speech.

#### **Teachers' observations of speech in classroom tasks**

Only the teachers in the low SES schools raised issues concerning speech in the context of classroom learning tasks. These issues included inappropriate volume and speed of speech, poor oral comprehension, students being unable to share understandings with sufficient detail to communicate effectively with an audience and not recognising the different spoken genres, where they were used and the particular linguistic features they required. The year 4 and 7 teachers were also concerned about how their students interacted during small group activities and when working one-to-one with peers and with other adults. For example, the year 4 teacher described one of her students as having "*difficulty sustaining communication with peers. In group sharing or activities,*

*she does not develop her ideas with others.*" The year 7 teacher described some of her students as being *"reluctant to engage in conversation"* and others as being unable to *"initiate class or group conversation"*.

The year 11 teacher in the low SES secondary school raised additional issues concerning her students' *"restricted range of spoken genre"* and their lack of creativity in language use. She believed her students' spoken language skills were inadequate for the demands of upper school English. The students were *"unable to support their opinions with substantive evidence from the text"* and an *"inability to express linguistically subtleties"*.

#### **Teachers' observations of "performance speech"**

A range of problems relating to students giving prepared talks were identified by the teachers in the high SES secondary school. The senior primary and secondary teachers in the low SES schools also mentioned a few similar problems. In the high SES secondary school, the year 9 English teacher noted that her students used the expression *"Do you know what I mean?"* and that this *"reflects a lack of confidence many students feel about their opinions and their need for reassurance"*. The year 11 teacher nominated a range of problems relating to the delivery of talks. For example, she noted that the students did not make eye contact with their audience, did not use gestures or variation in their expression and had poor posture with lowered heads. She also said that they shuffled or tapped their feet and generally accompanied their speech with distracting behaviour. She believed this sort of behaviour causes the audience to *"tune out"*, *"become bored"* or *"lose the thread"* of students' presentations. Both of these teachers and the society and environment teacher in the same school also noted that

many of their students spoke too quickly or too softly and were therefore difficult to understand.

The incidence of High Rising Terminal (HRT), which was reported in the high SES secondary school, is particularly interesting. The teacher noted that she had only recently become aware of HRT when students were giving formal talks as part of their assessment in the year 11 English course. The teacher also noted that that this was a characteristic of male more than the female speech and that it made the speakers sound unsure of their subject.

The only issue seen as problematic in the low SES schools concerned the overuse of fillers or discourse markers. The year 7 teacher noted that her students frequently used the terms "*all that*" and "*like*". The society and environment teacher also noted the discourse markers her students used, "*I reckon*", "*um um um*" and "*you know*", and suggested this was distracting to listeners.

### **Participation issues**

Teachers in both primary schools and in the low SES secondary school noted that they had students who were reluctant to speak. The year 7 teacher in the high SES primary school wrote that one of her male students was "*very shy about speaking*" and noted that this was disappointing as "*he is a clever student and could share more of his knowledge*". In contrast, all of the teachers in the low SES primary school noted that they were concerned about students who were either shy or reluctant to become involved in conversations or language activities in the classroom. Their comments included "*chooses to participate in a very limited range of activities*", "*fails to interact*



*with adults and classmates*", "*reluctant to [be] involved in conversation*". Similarly, all of the teachers in the low SES secondary school noted that they had students who were reluctant to engage in classroom-based language activities. Comments from these teachers included that the students are "*unwilling to participate*", "*avoid speaking their minds*", are "*reluctant to respond*", and "*not willing to explore*" (any new idea). They also reported that their students sometimes "*staged*" loud outbursts so they would be excluded from the class and so avoid oral assessment tasks.

### **Teachers' perceptions of socially inappropriate speech**

While the teachers in the low SES primary school raised most concerns relating to the language demands of learning tasks, the teachers in both secondary schools raised most of the issues concerning socially inappropriate language. Examples provided for the high SES student speech included "*She's a mole*", "*and he went spastic*", "*chill out*", "*Shove off*" and "*Piss off*", while in the low SES school examples included "*Oh fucking hell just shut up*" and "*Shut your hole*". Other examples concerned the use of sexist and racist terms such as "*gooks, chogs, mana mana*" and statements like "*She's dumb, she's a girl*" and "*all women are weak*".

**The comments made by the teachers about socially unacceptable language also differed.**

**For instance, a teacher in the low SES secondary school wrote:**

*"During oral assessments my weaker group of year 9 students would constantly put each other down. This is problematic when the comment is accompanied with a loud tone. The nasty or sarcastic inference towards themselves or others was very off putting to students. The girls would refuse to complete the oral task unless the boys were removed from the class. Students would avoid the oral assessment by these loud outbursts. Knowing the students as I do, I suspect it comes from a lack of self-confidence to perform in front of peers."*

In contrast, a teacher in the high SES secondary school wrote the following comment next to the record of "She's a dog...a mole.":

*"Students were making up a story and as it went around the room, a fictitious girl was described as both of these things. The derogatory name calling is indicative of gender stereotyping, the message being girls must be either pleasant and physically attractive or socially inept and ugly."*

Although both English teachers in the low SES school raised the issue of students swearing, their view of the nature of the problem differed. For example, the year 9 teacher commented;

*"Although most students respect the general rule of not swearing in class, many use it when they are upset or not thinking. Swear words slip out frequently. Often when students are released from class, I can hear them swearing (as part of everyday conversation). The most common times a student will swear is when they are frustrated with themselves or others. This is a problem as it is a difficult habit to break with some students. Sometimes swearing can escalate a management problem. For eg. students will use a swear word when their language levels are quite low (they can't think of an alternative word or expression). This can create a problem when the teacher sees it as bad manners, but the student sees it as slang-like."*

This teacher appears to be very tolerant and understanding, however, she still sees swearing as a "habit" that can be broken and as symptomatic of a lack of vocabulary. In addition, she later commented that she was concerned that she may be disadvantaging her students by being too tolerant of their non-standard speech and swearing. She reasoned that the wider society would not tolerate these behaviours and was concerned that students would not learn other ways to behave if she did not show them. The year 11 teacher in this school also posited a lack of vocabulary as a cause of swearing. She wrote that swearing:

*" - causes disruptions and raises negativity in classroom environment. Causes offence and even violence. Shows lack of understanding of appropriate discourse and lack of vocabulary."*

While the year 9 teacher reported that both males and females in her classes swear, the year 11 teacher only attributed this behaviour to males which suggests that although gender differences in swearing taboos would seem to be decreasing in the lower year levels (Trudgill, 1983a:163), females may still be subject to greater constraints in public situations (Johnson, 1993:5). This gender difference may also reflect the greater social maturity of the year 11 female students as compared to the year 9 females and hence their greater sensitivity to adult social taboos.

### **Comparison of concerns across schools and levels of schooling**

The nature of the concerns identified by the teachers in both high and low SES schools contrasted. Teachers in the high SES schools were generally more concerned about features to do with formal or "performance" speech where the students were required to present a prepared talk in front of the class as part of their course assessment. On the other hand, teachers in the low SES schools nominated issues related to the socially appropriate use of language. Some shared concerns included the speed of speech, the overuse of fillers or discourse markers such as "*like*" and the use of inappropriate social language such as sexist statements and "*put downs*".

There was also a contrast in the features identified by primary teachers compared to those identified by the secondary teachers. While the primary teachers mainly focused on issues to do with the use of speaking as a means of interacting with the teacher and peers to further learning, the secondary teachers were more concerned about "performance speech" and socially appropriate language use. The only concerns held in common across the two levels of schooling were the speed and volume of speech and the overuse of discourse markers. However, these issues were nominated by only the

upper primary teacher in the high SES school and as with the secondary level, related to the presentation of prepared talks or "performance speech".

The use of socially inappropriate language, especially derogatory terms and statements used to describe people unfavourably, concerned all secondary teachers. However, the quantity and nature of the language deemed to be problematic differed according to the SES status of the students. While the use of this language in the high SES school was seen as socially inappropriate, it was not seen as having a negative impact on the student's progress. Similar use of socially inappropriate language in the low SES school, however, was seen as reducing the students' capacity to meet assessment requirements. A further difference is seen in teachers' reactions to derogatory comments about females. On one hand, a high SES school teacher suggested that her student's comment reflected gender stereotyping which is present in society. On the other hand, a teacher in the low SES school suggested the problem was due to students' lack of competence and unwillingness to engage in classroom activities.

Teachers in both secondary schools were also concerned about the use of racist language. The year 9 English teacher in the high SES school noted that one of her students refused to prepare a bilingual newspaper article with a Chinese Australian peer, commenting "*I don't want to do a newspaper using Chinese writing*". The example provided by the year 9 English teacher in the low SES school contrasts with this in severity and the way it was judged. The terms the teacher noted her students using included "*gooks*" and "*chogs*" to refer to Vietnamese and "*mana, mana*" for Aboriginal students. The teacher also noted that the students generalised about groups referring to them as "*They - as in They always talk fast.*" She noted this language use as a problem

because it was directed at particular groups in her classes, was hurtful and reinforced stereotypes to which the students, in turn, conformed.

The teachers in the low SES schools also wrote about situations where speech problems led students to behave inappropriately. The pre-primary teacher noted that one of her students became frustrated when he could not communicate effectively and this sometimes escalated to the point where he became violent. The year 9 English teacher noted her students' use of "nasty" or "sarcastic" language which undermined other students' confidence and willingness to participate in learning activities. The year 11 English teacher suggested that by swearing male students caused "*disruptions and sometimes even violence*" in class. Similarly, the society and environment teacher noted how some male students "*insulted and offended*" other students when they swore.

#### 4.4 Teachers' perceptions of the causes of their students' speech problems

Following the period of observation, the teachers discussed what they perceived caused the problems in their students' speech. The researcher recorded these in field notes, then organised the causes into three sub-categories of home and community, student, and, educational factors.

The home and community factors included lack of background experience, parental unemployment, intolerance of non-standard speech in the wider society, a lack of exposure to models of Standard Australian English and exposure to American sitcoms. Student factors included problems caused by stress in performance situations, students' avoidance of challenge, rebellion and a lack of confidence. Educational factors included the language demands of the curriculum, the irrelevance of the current English

course, an inappropriate monitoring framework for assessment and inappropriate competition between schools.

### **Home and community factors**

The teachers in the low SES primary school identified lack of background experiences as one of the main causes of their students' speech problems. The year 9 English teacher in the low SES secondary school identified chronic unemployment, too few Standard Australian English role models and a lack of linguistic tolerance in the broader community as causes of her students' problems. She claimed that many of her students came from families with two and three generations of "*socially destructive*" unemployment. She described these families as "*trapped in state housing because they stay here and don't move on to better things. Other families move into the suburb but improve their circumstances and move on*". She believes her students are socially disadvantaged and this impacts on their speech and ultimately on their achievement in school. This teacher perceived herself as tolerant but feared her students would be disadvantaged because society expected speech that "*was of a higher standard than their [her students] non-standard speech*".

In contrast, the year 9 English teacher in the high SES secondary school claimed that constant exposure to American sitcoms and films was the cause of both student speech and behaviour problems. She believed language such as "*Chill out*" has become second nature to many students. She also feared that "*other aspects of American culture such as violence and consumerism are being absorbed by the students*".

### **Student factors**

The secondary teachers identified all of the student factors, although the nature of these differed between the teachers in the high and low SES schools. In the high SES secondary school, the year 9 English teacher believed that her students deliberately used inappropriate language as an act of rebellion. However, the year 11 English teacher identified stress in performance situations as causing many language problems.

In contrast, the teachers in the low SES school identified a lack of confidence as a major cause of their students' speech problems. They also believed their students often misbehaved to avoid oral assessments. That is, their fear of the performance was so great, that they deliberately broke classroom rules in order to be excluded and so avoid the assessment.

### **Educational factors**

The year 9 English teacher in the low SES secondary school believed educational factors caused problems for her students. She claimed that inappropriate comparisons are made between the educational outcomes achieved by low SES students and those in middle and high SES schools. She claimed that this comparison puts pressure on both the students and teachers to accept and use the more unfamiliar Standard Australian English forms of language promoted by the Curriculum Framework and the Student Outcome Statements. The English teachers in this school do not believe that these documents, nor the syllabi and course materials previously used, match the needs of their particular students. They also see the English taught in schools as too far removed from their students' lives. The year 11 English teacher recounted an incident where she

had allowed a student to show part of a video he had brought to school because half the class was away on a special project. She was not familiar with the material, from the series called "South Park", and after ten minutes of viewing was so disturbed by it she stopped the video. However, the students were so engaged that she decided to use the opportunity and asked them to analyse the humour used in the production. She said, "*I was amazed at the insights they had.*" She claimed that her students were able to understand multimedia material much more easily than written texts and that the subject matter was of great interest to them. After the viewing, she said, "*they talked about really intelligent, complex ideas using non-standard English*". She noted that these same students had not offered creative ideas in response to written text material or when required to use Standard Australian English. However, when the researcher asked if she would be using this experience to change her approach to teaching these students, she said she would not because it did not fit with the English course. Part of her reluctance came from a fear of a negative reaction from the English moderator<sup>22</sup>.

#### 4.5 Relationships between background factors and teachers' perceptions

The relationships between the way the teachers defined Standard Australian English, their backgrounds, their attitudes to language variation and how they perceived student speech were analysed to determine whether or not any patterns emerged. First, the information relating to each teacher was examined and a summary of the relationships between the different factors was made. An example of the way the relationships were considered is presented here as a case study. Secondly, the information relating to each

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<sup>22</sup> Secondary learning area moderators evaluate courses and assessment practices in schools to ensure they meet the criteria established by the Curriculum Council.



of the teachers was collated and trends in the relationships were noted. The results of this analysis are presented in the section following the case study.

#### 4.5.1 Case study

Jane<sup>23</sup> teaches year 11 English in School C and is aged in her early forties. During her education, she attended ten different Western Australian schools, in both rural and metropolitan middle SES areas. She has a Bachelor of Education Degree in English and TESOL and had been teaching for 9 years at the time of the study. Jane has had extensive in-service training in the area of language education. Her attitude ratings for both variation in general and the use of variants were very liberal, much more liberal than the averages for the study.

In the journal she kept for this study, Jane noted concerns about the prepared talks her students give as part of their assessment in upper school, and in particular, problems related to articulation, prosody and paralinguistic behaviour. Her concern was mainly with the way in which these speech problems detracted from the content of the students' talks and how this resulted in lower grades for them.

After the week of observation, Jane also spoke about her perceptions of student speech. From what she said, her attitude to speech generally would seem to be tolerant of variation as is consistent with both her very liberal language attitude rating and the way she defines Standard Australian English. In her definition, Jane stressed what is "*acceptable to the majority in terms of everyday use*" and included as examples, the use of idiomatic speech and the "omission of sounds such as the final /ŋ/ in words such as *"somethin"*". This definition would also appear to reflect Jane's own speech as she reported that her students sometimes say to her, "*You're not an English teacher. English teachers don't talk like you.*" She suggested that this is because she uses "slang" (her examples included idioms and colloquial forms such as "*Fell off his perch*" and "*That's OK, no worries*") and because she accepts its use in her students' speech. She also made a

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<sup>23</sup> Pseudonyms are used for all case studies.

comment about "youse" saying, "*It is a useful term, but doesn't it sound awful!*" and remarked, "*Grammar changes over time. What is acceptable changes over time*".

Jane also described having changed her mind about the relative importance of speech and writing in the assessment of students' language learning outcomes. She described this change in the following way: "*This [involvement in the research] has been really interesting. It's made me think about oral language. I used to think it was unfair that students who did well on their orals, but were poor writers, had their marks 'pulled up'. Not anymore, the oral is really important.*" She also said she had begun to think about the differences in the performance of her students in speaking and writing. She said that some of her students could speak '*brilliantly*' but have poor writing. She also discussed how some students communicated much more effectively in everyday learning situations than they did during formal assessment tasks. She regretted that nerves spoilt so many students' performance and described how she tries to assist the students by encouraging them, helping them prepare thoroughly and giving credit for their preparation as well as their oral presentation. However, she did not question the effectiveness of the performance situation as a means of assessing students' oral language proficiency. From what she said, it seemed that she did not view her students as having problems with their speech per se, only their oral performance.

#### 4.5.2 Summary of the relationships

An examination of the relationship between the way the teachers defined Standard Australian English and how they perceived student speech revealed that most of the teachers' definitions of Standard Australian English were consistent with their perceptions of students' speech. For example, at a general level many of the primary teachers' definitions referred to correct pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar and this emphasis was reflected in the concerns they expressed about their students' speech. An example at a more specific level, comes from the secondary teachers whose definitions referred to the acceptability of idiomatic speech and characteristics such as the

"dropping of final sounds" - these very features being the same that they accepted in their students' speech.

The teachers' attitude ratings were generally consistent with how they perceived their students' speech. This was particularly so for those teachers who had a conservative attitude rating. It would also seem that the teachers' attitude ratings for language variation in general better reflected their perceptions of student speech than did their attitude ratings for the use of specific variants of English. Most of the teachers had a slightly to moderately liberal rating for variation in general which was reflected in the way in which they saw much of the variation in their students' speech, especially that related to social class, as problematic. In a number of cases, the teachers' ratings for the use of specific variants of English, which indicated the degree to which they accepted the use of specific features not considered "standard", were slightly higher than their general attitude rating. However, when talking about their students' speech, these same teachers identified many of these features as unacceptable. The difference between the two different attitude ratings and the teachers' perceptions of their students' speech was particularly apparent with the older teachers and is reflected in the findings related to age. That is, the older teachers tended to have less liberal attitudes to variation in general but more liberal attitudes in the use of specific features than did the younger teachers. The younger teachers, however, were more tolerant of the variation in their students' speech than were the older teachers.

The relationships between the teachers' backgrounds, their attitudes to language variation, the way they defined Standard Australian English and their perceptions of student speech were also examined. There was a general trend for younger teachers to

be more liberal in the way they defined Standard Australian English, in their attitude ratings and in how they perceived their students' speech. The teachers who had a greater amount of professional development in the area of language education also tended to be more tolerant of language variation. It also was interesting to note that the only teachers in this study to report recognising that their students spoke a non-standard variety of English and to describe using innovative approaches with their students, had TESOL training and had attended professional development related to Aboriginal English. There were no discernible trends in relation to the teachers' own educational background or level of training and how they perceived language variation. While interesting, these trends should be treated with a great deal of caution because of the small sample size and the large number of factors being considered.

#### 4.6 Conclusion

This study investigated what teachers judged to be problematic in the speech of their students. The teachers kept observation journals for a period of a week and identified pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and language use problems in their students' speech. Language use problems were of greatest concern with grammar and pronunciation also frequently identified as problematic. Although only four vocabulary concerns were noted, they were viewed by the teachers as serious. Some of the problems the teachers nominated were identified by them as developmental, some as due to "*performance nerves*" and others as incorrect usage. Incorrect usage was often associated with what the teachers perceived to be the students' inadequate knowledge of the type of language required for school.

The study was conducted in both high and low SES schools to see if social class influenced the way teachers judged the speech of their students. Differences were found in both the number and nature of issues teachers identified in these two different types of schools, which seems to suggest that the students' social class may have an influence on teachers' perceptions of student speech. While many of the features identified in the high SES schools were viewed as developmental problems, this was not the case in the low SES schools. Here the problems were seen as the result of a lack of knowledge or language skill in the students. Further, some of the features identified as problematic were non-standard variants in common use. For example, the word final /n/ variant used as an alternative to the written standard ng /ŋ/, the use of "gunna" and past tense variants such as done/did were all nominated as speech problems. Other features also noted as problems in the low SES schools included a limited range or lack of vocabulary, incomplete or simple sentences, a restricted language repertoire, a failure to logically link ideas and failing to provide adequate detail to meet the needs of the audience. What the teachers see as the cause of these difficulties also differed across socio-economic class. Teachers in the high SES schools saw the problems to be the result of developmental factors, performance pressure or adolescent rebellion. However, teachers in the low SES schools were more likely to see these problems arising from poor language models provided by parents and local community members, chronic intergenerational unemployment and negative peer influences.

The problems teachers perceived in the speech of students across the levels of schooling was also investigated and differences were found in both the number and nature of the problems. The greatest difference was in grammar issues, with the primary teachers raising many more concerns than did the secondary teachers. Similarly, the primary

teachers raised a greater number of pronunciation issues than did the secondary teachers. Moreover, the concerns raised by the secondary teachers were mainly concerned with performance speech and the grammar forms were items which would seem to be currently undergoing change. Although the vocabulary and language use issues raised by the teachers at both levels differed little in number, there were differences in the nature of the concerns. The primary teachers were concerned about their students' language use in the context of learning while the secondary teachers were more concerned about their students' use of socially inappropriate language.

There also were differences in what teachers perceived to be the causes of their students' problems. The primary teachers identified fewer causes and mostly attributed their students' difficulties to developmental factors. However, some teachers in the low SES primary school identified a lack of background experiences as a causal factor. On the other hand, the secondary teachers identified a range of factors including negative peer, home, community, media and educational influences.

The relationships between the way the teachers defined Standard Australian English, their backgrounds, their attitudes to language variation and how they perceived student speech were examined. Patterns in these relationships included that the teachers tended to perceive their students' speech in a way that was consistent with the way they defined Standard Australian English and with their attitudes to language variation as measured by the Language Attitude Questionnaire. While the younger teachers tended to be more liberal in their attitudes to language variation, there were no clear relationships between the teachers' educational backgrounds, their level of training, their attitude to language variation or the way they perceived their students' speech.

## CHAPTER 5

### Study Two Findings

In this study, twelve teachers from four schools participated in school-based focus groups to discuss those features they identified as problematic in their students' speech. The teachers also independently completed Language Attitude and Background Information Questionnaires.

In this chapter, firstly, the way the teachers defined Standard Australian English is described. Secondly, the results of the Language Attitude Questionnaire completed by each of the teachers are reported. Thirdly, the information provided by the teachers in the four focus groups is summarised and discussed in sections relating to their perceptions of their students' difficulties with pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and language use. Finally, the relationships between the way the teachers defined Standard Australian English, their backgrounds, their attitudes to language variation and how they perceived student speech are examined.

#### 5.1 Teachers' definitions of Standard Australian English

At the completion of the focus group discussions, the teachers wrote their own definition of Standard Australian English and identified its key features. These have been collated by year level and school and are presented in Table 5.1, exactly as written by the teachers.

Table 5.1 Teachers' definitions of Standard Australian English (Study Two)

School Teacher <sup>24</sup>	Definition of Standard Australian English	Key features of Standard Australian English
E PP	Spoken language of the general community (not ESL or Aboriginals)	Language spoken in all forms & levels ie in courts; offices and playgrounds. SAE is used in all contexts - letters etc hence the MacQuarrie (Sp?) dictionary. SAE is not incorrect but includes idiom & colloquialism
4	Australian language is unique and recognised in countries throughout the world esp. UK. USA	Relaxed nature of language eg G'day and dropping off endings eg Chrissy for Christmas and not sounding some specific sounds eg 'stralian' not Australia.
7	English used in communication - written, spoken incorporating standard rules and conventions of English.	Knowledge, confidence and application of standard conventions of English - grammar, punctuation. Clearly spoken English in Australian context. Teacher modelling of oral communication in different contexts. Clear assessment of language in teaching.
F PP	English language as used and understood by the average Australian - the 'man in the street'	Rising inflection (inflexion?) when making a statement, to the statement then become a question. Lack of knowledge of correct grammar usage.
4	English as spoken by 'middle class' Aust. Newsreaders probably speak it (possibly not the more 'cooth' ABC readers.)	Full sentences - verb noun tense, plurals etc agreement, non-repetition. I'd probably feel more comfortable recognising non-SAE - than I feel describing SAE.
7	Common speech patterns in English so that your audience understands what you are communicating.	Grammar, spelling, sequencing.
G 9E	Spoken and written English that is grammatically correct (no American influences!)	correct grammar correct spelling correct sentence structure appropriate use of colloquialisms
11E	SAE is the language and mode of speech generally accepted within a society. It is the employed by, if you like, the establishment.	It has a grammatical structure. Based on the "Queen's English" The way I speak. (joke) It is semi-phonetic. It is culturally biased. It includes colloquialisms but not slang. We abbreviate words/sounds. It is not as formal as 'English' English.

<sup>24</sup> The teachers are coded with PP being pre-primary, 4 being year 4, 7 being year 7, 9E being year 9 English, 11E being year 11 English and S&E being year 9/11 society and environment.



S&E	What is generally accepted by the 'establishment' as Standard Australian English.	Basic understanding of how to write and speak (ie communicate) in English to enable a person to function in society.
H 9 E	English that is not swearing or slang and is spoken in Australia and or by Australians.	Follows basic conventions/guides of English language. Form used by Australians. Not swearing, slangy language.
11 E	As formal English requiring use of correct grammar and conventions.	correct grammar spelling convention/format/genre
S&E	A combination of "proper" English - English language defined by grammatical conventions.	Grammar, Punctuation, Synonyms, Antonyms, apostrophes, tenses, prepositions (very technical and confusing to people who are 2 <sup>nd</sup> language SA English)

The teachers' definitions of Standard Australian English varied according to the modes of language that were included. Eight of the twelve teachers make a direct reference to the different modes of language in their definitions, with half referring only to speech and the other half including speech and writing. The remaining four definitions do not directly refer to either speech or writing. It is possible that the particular references to speech in the teachers' definitions are the result of their participation in the study as they wrote their definitions immediately after the focus group discussions.

The definitions also differed in the "standards" or language models mentioned by the teachers. These include reference to "*middle class*" Australians, the "*establishment*", to institutions such as courts and to newsreaders. Although most of the definitions refer to "*correct*" conventions or "*proper*" English, there is only one reference to the Macquarie Dictionary and none to grammar texts as the source of these "rules". Rather, the teachers seem to assume that the conventions they refer to are generally understood and accepted. Furthermore, although most of the conventions mentioned are associated with writing, these teachers seem to be applying them equally to speech. This association was particularly evident in the definitions that not only referred to speech, but also

mentioned aspects of written English such as the conventions of letter writing and spelling.

The key features of Standard Australian English identified by teachers varied in a number of ways. Many of the teachers referred to "conventions", but quoted different "standards" for these including what is "*proper*", the "*Queen's English*" and "*correct*" grammar. The correct use of verbs, nouns, verb agreement, tenses, plurals, synonyms, antonyms, apostrophes and prepositions were mentioned specifically as key features. One of the teachers noted that she found it easier to say what Standard Australian English was not, rather than what it is. Others similarly defined the standard as being "*not swearing or slang*". Although, the key features the teachers nominated varied, many implied that they should apply to all contexts where speech or writing is used. For example, one teacher claimed that the key features of Standard Australian English included "*Language spoken in all forms & levels ie in courts; offices and playgrounds. SAE is used in all contexts*". A few of the teachers, however, identified different levels of formality and accepted that colloquialisms and idioms could be used appropriately according to the context. Some teachers also noted standards of speech production with reference to the use of clearly spoken English, speaking in full sentences, speech that is appropriately sequenced and that is not repetitious.

## 5.2 Teachers' attitudes to language variation

The teachers also completed a Language Attitude Questionnaire which measured their attitudes towards both language variation in general and to the use of variants of Australian English. As described earlier, the teachers responded to 43 questions, thirteen of which sought information on attitudes to variation in general and the other

thirty on attitudes to the use of specific alternative variants of Australian English. As described in 4.2, the teachers' scores were calculated to show the degree of liberalism in attitudes to language variation generally and to the use of specific variants. Therefore, the higher the score, the more liberal the attitude to language variation and conversely, the lower the score, the more conservative the attitude. The results for the teachers in this study are reported on the following table.

Table 5.2 Teachers' ratings on the Language Attitude Questionnaire

School	School E			School F			School G			School H		
	PP	4	7	PP	4	7	E9	E11	SE	E9	E11	SE
V <sup>25</sup>	+0.46	+0.54	+0.46	+0.07	+1.61	-0.15	-0.38	+0.46	+0.31	+0.92	+1.69	+1.00
U	+0.53	+0.33	-0.03	+0.30	+0.83	-0.16	+0.10	+0.90	+0.63	+0.97	+1.10	+0.30

In this study, the mean for the teachers' attitude to language variation in general was +0.58 and for the use of variants was +0.48. These scores were slightly more liberal than those of the teachers in Study One. In School E, all the teachers had slightly liberal attitudes to language variation in general and the pre-primary and year 4 teachers also had this rating for their attitude to the use of variants of Australian English. However, the year 7 teacher had a slightly conservative rating for this aspect. In School F, the teachers had a range of ratings with the pre-primary teacher having a slightly liberal rating for both aspects while the year 7 teacher had a slightly conservative rating for both. The year 4 teacher, however, had a very liberal rating for variation in general but

<sup>25</sup> V refers to the measurement of the teacher's attitude to variation in general and U to their attitude to the use of specific variants of Australian English.

a slightly liberal rating for the use of variants of Australian English. In School G, all the ratings were slightly liberal except for the year 9 English teacher who had a slightly conservative rating for variation in general. The teachers in School H were generally more liberal in their attitudes than the majority of teachers in the other schools. The year 9 English teacher had a slightly liberal attitude to both aspects of variation but this rating was very close to being moderately liberal. The year 11 English teacher had the highest rating in the study for both aspects of variation. The society and environment teacher had a moderately liberal rating for variation in general but a much lower rating for her attitude to the use of variants of Australian English.

### 5.3 Teachers' perceptions of student speech

#### 5.3.1 Teachers' perceptions of pronunciation problems

The pronunciation problems identified by the teachers in the focus groups included "*poor pronunciation*", the incorrect use of the initial /h/ phoneme and the influence of American English pronunciation. While only a few problems were discussed, some of them were very broad and a number of teachers believed they had a serious impact on the students' educational outcomes.

#### **"Poor" pronunciation**

Teachers in the low SES primary school nominated most of the pronunciation difficulties. They were concerned about their students' "*poor*" pronunciation and the impact they believed this had on reading and written work. For example, the year 4 teacher commented,

*"Poor pronunciation creates problems all the way across any written language, doesn't it? (Mmm)<sup>26</sup> Whether they're writing or they're reading or whatever because if they haven't got an idea what a word...what sounds make a word they are going to have trouble when they're trying to decode."*

The year 7 teacher added that poor pronunciation also had an impact on spelling. The pronunciation examples noted by the teachers, such as the use of medial /d/ instead of /t/, are common in non-standard speech. Although the non-standard pronunciation is mutually intelligible and does not interfere with oral communication, the way the teachers discussed the issue suggests they see it as a serious problem for their students.

In contrast, the teachers in the high SES primary school seemed to accept that non-standard pronunciation was appropriate in some social contexts and that this variation did not create a problem for students' writing. For example, the issue of the pronunciation of "gunna" was raised in the context of a discussion on the use of speech appropriate to the social context. The year 4 teacher remarked that it would be inappropriate for him to correct this term in an informal social situation and the year 7 teacher agreed. Later, the pronunciation of "gunna" was raised again in the context of the transfer of speech patterns to writing. Unlike the teachers in the low SES school, the year 4 teacher did not see a direct link between variation in pronunciation and spelling errors. He claimed that while grammatical forms transferred from speech to writing, some pronunciation forms did not;

*"- if they use the term 'gunna. I'm gunna do this' they don't write 'gunna' in their writing. They write 'going to'."*

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<sup>26</sup> Content in brackets (...) refers to comments made by the other teachers during the quoted speakers' turn. Observation notes taken during the focus group discussions recorded that most of these interjections seemed to suggest agreement with the speaker and engagement with the topic being discussed.

### **Addition and omission of /h/**

In the low SES primary school, the pre-primary teacher noted that some of her students were adding and omitting initial /h/. The teacher suggests that in the case of this particular feature, the non-Aboriginal children were being influenced by their Aboriginal peers' speech and that generally there were not a lot of differences in the speech patterns of the two groups of children.

*"...we have three children down there who are putting 'aitches' where they shouldn't be you know how the Aboriginal kids do (Yeah) and dropping them off. And I've I've (Houch) never had such a big group of kids saying 'heaster heggs' (laughter) 'and put it on your 'ead' (laughter) and I mean (laughter) but we've got this big group of them saying it. I don't know where it's coming from but it's quite strange it's quite strange. It's shocking."*

The other teachers noted that their students also "drop" the initial /h/ sound from words. The omission and addition of /h/ may have been singled out by the teachers because even though the dropping of the initial /h/ sound is common in all but the most formal speech (Stubbs, 1980:41), it is socially stigmatised (Ekwall, 1965:36-40). The pronunciation of /h/ in speech became associated with "standard" speech and education and therefore its absence with "careless" speech and a lack of education. This may be because as formal education became universal and writing was emphasised, the influence of spelling led to an expectation that the initial /h/ sounds would be pronounced in speech (Stubbs, 1980:39).

It is also interesting to note the use of Aboriginal English forms by non-Aboriginal children in this example. The teachers noted that the community was characterised by racial harmony and that Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal children mixed well at school. Rampton (1995:59) noted a similar transfer of features from one cultural group to

another in a study of adolescent speech in Britain. He saw this phenomenon as conscious "we-coding" by the adolescents. It is possible that these much younger children are also signalling friendship with their Aboriginal classmates by adopting some of their speech characteristics. Lippi-Green (1997:123) also reports that students acquire phonological patterns from their peers.

### **American English influence on pronunciation**

The only pronunciation issue raised by the teachers at the secondary level was in the high SES school and concerned the influence of American English as in "zebra" pronounced with an /i/ rather than /ɛ/. The use of "zee" instead of "zed" by adolescents could be an American "style" affectation using a form sufficiently well known to be available for relatively consistent use. This form may have been learnt during childhood from "Sesame Street" where this particular pronunciation of "zebra" was often repeated as part of teaching the alphabet. The strong link with the name of the letter "z" in the alphabet and therefore its association with writing may influence teachers to view the alternative pronunciation as particularly problematic.

### **5.3.2 Teachers' perceptions of vocabulary problems**

The vocabulary issues identified included what the teachers described as a lack of vocabulary, the need for students to learn specialist vocabulary, student resistance to new vocabulary, and the inappropriate use of slang and swearing. The secondary teachers raised most of these concerns.

The teachers in the high and low SES schools discussed different aspects of their students' control of vocabulary. The low SES schools identified a lack of vocabulary,

resistance to learning new vocabulary and an over-reliance on colloquial and slang terms and expressions. In contrast, the high SES school saw the lack of knowledge of the subject-specific vocabulary and a reluctance to learn it as problematic. Both types of schools shared a concern with the students' use of socially inappropriate swearing.

The teachers in the low SES schools saw the students as having an "absent" or "narrow" vocabulary and believed this impacted on their success in schooling. For instance, the pre-primary teacher in School F expressed the concern as,

*"One of the other things that I didn't mention is that they don't have um they don't have um.. How can I put it? They don't have a vocabulary. Like everything at home is 'that' or 'pass me that' so a simple thing like a jug - the children won't know what a jug is. We use a jug everyday to pour water but if I say to them 'Go and get the jug.' they don't quite know, just little words you take for granted that we use all the time they don't have those skills."*

The low SES secondary teachers were also concerned about their students' vocabulary. However, while the primary teachers see their students' vocabulary as "absent" the secondary teachers in the low SES school claim their students' vocabulary is "narrow" as described by the year 11 English teacher:

*"Yeah, I find umm opportunities of my students of using words they don't understand but I actually find that the case is really they have a really narrow vocabulary"*

These English teachers also described how, while they love new words, their students are frightened of them, especially if they have to spell them.

*E 9 [rising tone and volume] and in your head and see if you can use it and maybe muck it up but it doesn't matter. But these kids are resistant to it. They are not welcoming new (Oh hugely resistant.) words into their vocabulary (No, /no /no). They're frightened of them-*

*E 11 [Cuts across E9 and continues] -they are. Because even umm with the spelling of a word that they know they want you to give them the spelling (Yeah) rather than looking it up. (Yeah) And it's not a physical laziness that they've had to walk to*



*the front of the room it's that they don't want to get it wrong. They're frightened that they won't find it."*

The English teachers seem to view this problem as related to the students' fear of what is new and of being incorrect. The year 11 English teacher sees the students' requests that she provide the spelling for any unknown terms as evidence that they are afraid they will not find the term they need in a dictionary. The possibility that the students may be too embarrassed to walk to the front of the room in order to use the dictionary is not considered.

Later in the discussion, the society and environment teacher suggests that the students are resistant to the new vocabulary because they see it as a "*psychological break*" with their community.

*"So do the students do the students see if they're increasing their vocabulary and using those big words, as they say. Do they see that as a psychological break from you know break um from (their allegiance) their community, yeah? A break that's what I'm sort of getting at."*

The English teachers, however, interpreted her argument as suggesting that the students do not value academic attainment.

*"Well it's very uncool though it's very uncool to be academic and successful."*

The society and environment teacher does not accept this interpretation and continues to argue that the students' do not use complex language because they see it as excluding other members of their community and as a judgement on their community's language.

*"or a break you know a break from everybody else because you're standing out there and using those words and saying, 'I don't value that word that you guys use.' Maybe this approach, this is how students interpret it. And they think, 'Ah so we're not good enough for you anymore, heh?' You know, 'Oh you're using them big words'. I mean, that's amazing. I don't know if that gives you any idea-"*

However, the year 11 English teacher still insists it is resistance to academic success that causes the problem and the year 9 teacher agrees;

*"-but any measure of academic success in this school (Mmm) is frowned upon (Mmm) by the majority of students (Mmm) that we are dealing with (Mmm). Not by all clearly, and you know if they use a different word they are immediately jumped upon and put down (Mm) within the classroom structure. You can hear it, 'Oh, that's a big word' [sarcastic tone] or yeah, no I mean I think it's the lack of 'cool' which makes them not desirous of trying out the new words or getting the spelling even correct. It's really uncool to use the dictionary."*

Whereas in the low SES schools the teachers were concerned about their students' lack of specialist vocabulary, in the high SES school, the teachers were concerned that the vocabulary demands being made on their students were not appropriate to their age. A further issue was that the students were reluctant to learn the special terms and the teachers' use of them impacted on classroom rapport. The society and environment (S&E) teacher in the high SES school talked about this situation and the conflict it caused her,

*"I know something that I think that distances me from the kids that I do consciously because they have. In history for example, you have to use the language that they're gonna get in the examination paper (Yeah, that's right) you've got to use it all the time (Yeah) and you've got to keep saying the words and they just, for example, words like 'hegemony' and 'salient' and you know they say, 'If you mean the main point why don't you just say 'main point'?' and I say because you've got to recognise this word, you've got to you know if that's in a question in an exam and you've forgotten what it means then you're in trouble, you know. So the more often you hear it, the more the familiar you are you'll know what it means but to them the simple the word is better, and it's like you're showing off if you use the other word, or trying to make out that you're better, or something and I find that's a bit distancing. And you're trying to say, 'I'm just trying to get you used to this language because you're not hearing it anywhere else. You know, This is subject specific stuff and if you don't hear it from me or if you're not reading widely enough you're gonna put yourself in the situation where you might get a document or even the question itself the way it's worded. It's written by you know, history professionals (mm) and they are not really taking into account the fact (Mmm) that you are seventeen or sixteen years old (Mmm) and you know what's the sort of things that you read (Mmm)'. So..."*

The teachers went on to discuss how unfair this situation was and how they too had experienced such difficulties in their own schooling. They felt that the subject area professionals who prepared exams did not appreciate how difficult such technical vocabulary was for adolescents. They suggested the students should be allowed to have dictionaries in the exam to help them with the unfamiliar terms. They argued that just as students studying languages other than English were allowed dictionaries and mathematics students were allowed graphic calculators, such aids also should be available in all subjects. They claimed that the language of the examination papers may prevent students demonstrating content knowledge.

### **Slang**

The secondary teachers in both schools raised the issue of their students' use of slang, although the nature of their concerns differed. Whereas the teachers in the low SES school related their students' over-reliance on colloquial and slang terms and phrases to a lack of vocabulary, the teachers in the high SES school generally viewed the use as part of adolescence.

The discussion by the teachers in the low SES school suggested the students did not know when it was appropriate to use slang and when they should use formal language. Further, the students were seen as lacking the vocabulary used in formal registers. This discussion led to a more general one about the students' lack of knowledge of social conventions. The teachers also seem to be concerned that the students only use informal language and are unaware of when formal speech is required or of the forms that should be used in these situations. The example of "informal" student speech given by the year 9 English teacher, "ow's it goin, Miss?" "Wot we doin' today?", contains

many forms associated with non-standard speech. These forms include deletion of initial /h/, the substitution of /n/ for /ŋ/, /w/ for /ɥ/ and /ə/ for /u/, and the deletion of the auxiliary verb "are". The example was also spoken in a harsh, rough tone. In contrast, the example of the "formal" language required, "How are you? What are we doing today?", was spoken with very careful articulation in a pleasant tone which might be thought of as standard Australian English spoken with a very "cultivated accent". These examples suggest that in some circumstances the teachers may be comparing their students' speech with a type of idealised speech used by only a small number of speakers in very formal social situations. For instance, the norm in Australian speech is to pronounce the wh in "what" as /w/. The teacher, however, pronounced this as /ɥ/ in her example, an uncommon form associated with highly "cultivated" speech.

Further, the teachers noted that the use of "informal" speech is not only a problem for their students but also for them. The teachers commented that in trying to establish rapport with their students, they change their speech style and then worry about the deteriorating "standard" of their own speech. The society and environment teacher expressed it this way;

*"I'm conscious of it now and I ..and I didn't realise how many ah how much colloquial sort of slang stuff that I use you know in my teaching until I was teaching it today ...and I'd always thought myself to be you know a fairly well educated person like I speak correctly you know ..."*

She described being in a dilemma because she sees her speech as deteriorating and feels she is denying her students access to the "correct" forms she is trying to teach them.

She also sees the non-standard forms as "pidgin" or linguistically inferior to the standard forms;

*"And I'm getting a bit concerned at the moment because I find that some of my language is beginning to like my language is starting to deteriorate not my standard Australian English the way I speak its like I slip into a pidgin sort of thing subconsciously like..."*

The teachers described themselves as "Standard Australian English" speakers and in turn Standard Australian English as the "correct" language of the educated. It is against this standard that they seem to be measuring their own deteriorating speech and the non-standard speech of their students.

The inappropriate use of slang was also an issue in the high SES secondary school although the teachers' view of the problem differed in some respects to that expressed in the low SES school. The high SES year 9 English teacher also reported absorbing a lot of colloquial language and slang from her students and seeing its use as a way of building rapport. However, the language used was not seen as "bad" but just "colloquial teenage language". The year 11 teacher held a similar view, however she said that she did not use these forms in her own speech. She also described how her students ask her about the meaning of words they read and so she asks them about the meaning of words they say. She suggested that teenagers coin new vocabulary as part of the process of establishing a separate identity;

*"Because that's ...that's one of the kids..kids have always done that, haven't they? One way you separate yourselves and you know, have your own identity and create an identity ..through language-"*

Although the teachers accept that the students will use "colloquial teenage language" as part of adolescent identity marking, the teachers still apply their own standards to its use. The year 9 English teacher thinks the use of the term "wicked" is "going too far" while the year 11 teacher shows an interest in the terms used but does not use them

herself. Similarly, the teachers expressed concern that the students saw some expressions such as "suck" as acceptable. The teachers also expressed some ambivalence about accepting slang. They felt such forms might be acceptable in casual speech, but not in writing. However, because they believed that speech forms transferred to writing, ignoring the terms in speech posed a problem for them.

### **Swearing**

The teachers in both of the secondary schools shared a concern about the socially inappropriate use of swearing. However, the nature of their concerns differed according to the SES status of the schools. For while the teachers in the high SES secondary school raised swearing as the first issue in their focus group, they did not discuss it at length or seem to see it as a serious problem. Although swearing was seen as widespread, it was not viewed as having educational or behaviour management implications. Rather, it was linked to other speech characteristics that annoyed the teachers such as the use of "like" as a discourse marker.

In contrast, the teachers in the low SES secondary school discussed the issue of swearing at length. They reported seeing swearing as inappropriate in the classroom, but having a tolerant attitude towards its use outside. In addition, they took the type of terms used and the context of their use into account when judging acceptability. For example, the year 11 English teacher reported that she did not worry if a student dropped something and said, "Oh, shit! I dropped my pen." However, other expletives such as "Fuck off, you're a c-u-n-t!" are not acceptable and she tries to explain to the students why this is so. She also reported swearing a lot herself but setting an example by not swearing in front of the students. Another strategy she used was to react to the

words as if the students were using them literally. She described an incident where a student called someone a "faggot" and she said, "*Oh, we haven't got any faggots in the room. I can't see any little pieces of wood*". The society and environment teacher said she does not "*make a big deal about swearing*" in her classes but lets the students know it is inappropriate by exclaiming and pulling a face when they swear. The teachers appeared to be applying the "standard" of their own speech in modelling appropriate behaviour and determining what is acceptable as regards swearing.

### 5.3.3 Teachers' perceptions of grammar problems

Most of the teachers' concerns about grammar differed according to the level of schooling and socio-economic status of the students and even where some issues were shared, the nature of these issues differed. Teachers in the low SES primary school identified the greatest number of issues. These included the use of "youse", poor verb use, limited preposition and conjunction knowledge and use, failure to speak in sentences and inadequate text construction. The high SES primary school teachers also registered a concern about the use of "youse" and personal pronouns. However, the examples of incorrect grammar discussed by the teachers referred to students they had previously taught in low SES schools. The high SES secondary teachers shared the primary teachers' concern about their students not speaking in full sentences and their students' poorly constructed texts. They also raised the issue of students confusing homophones such as "their", "there" and "they're" in written texts. Teachers in the low SES secondary school noted their students' use of "youse" and the lack of complexity in their oral texts.

## **"Youse"**

Although the use of "youse" was identified as an issue in all the schools, the way the problem was perceived by the teachers differed. The contrasting views on the use of "youse" held by the teachers in the two primary schools provides an interesting example of how the same linguistic behaviour can be differently interpreted. While the teachers in the high SES primary school saw it as a problem of "*lazy*" colloquial speech, those in the low SES primary school saw it as grammatically incorrect and identified it, along with other grammatical features, as typical of the "*poor*" English spoken by their students. Further, while the students in the high SES school were seen to have learnt the term from their peers at school despite good language models at home, the low SES students were seen to use the term because of poor home models.

The views held by teachers in the two secondary schools differed but not according to the SES of their students. In the high SES secondary school, the year 11 English teacher thought "youse" was acceptable in some situations despite naming it as a "*pet hate*" and claiming it made her students sound "*uncultured*". However, the other two teachers deemed "youse" unacceptable but did not discuss why this was the case or their response when the term was used. In the low SES secondary school, while the year 11 English and the society and environment teachers saw the term as unacceptable, the year 9 English teacher was ambivalent about its acceptability in some situations. The teachers did not comment on any possible causes of the problem or how they treated it.



### **First person pronouns, verb tenses and noun/verb agreement**

The views of the primary teachers regarding their students' problems with first person pronouns differed according to the SES of their students. While the pre-primary teacher in the high SES primary school noted that some of her students used first person pronouns incorrectly, she saw it as a developmental issue. She reported responding to errors by repeating the child's utterance with the incorrect form changed. If the error persisted past the first term, she referred the child to a speech pathologist. On the other hand, all the teachers in the low SES primary school reported that their students used first person pronouns incorrectly. They saw this as one of a range of grammatical errors that persisted in the students' speech despite their efforts to teach the "correct" forms. Other forms mentioned included verb tenses and noun/verb agreement. The teachers cited these as examples of speech problems and discussed the source of the problems and how they dealt with them. Although they recognised that they were community speech patterns, they still saw them as errors they needed to correct.

*"Y 4<sup>27</sup> That's what they are hearing at home. That's what the speech patterns are at home. They're not it's almost impossible and you'll hear them ' Me and my family oh My family and I' but it's only 'cause I'm-. They just look at your face you don't have to say anything. They think 'oh that's right, I've got that one wrong. So they can actually they've got it in there they realise they are making those mistakes but they-*

*PP [speaking over Y4]-I have it too when they-*

*Y 7 [speaking over PP]-I've got it to the stage where if they say 'I done it' and a choir of kids all going 'I did it' (laughter). So, you hope that you know, something might rub off somewhere along the line.*

Later the year 4 teacher raised another problem that concerns her;

*"And there's also-. I'm noticing a lot actually this year a lot of noun verb disagreement more than I think I've noticed before. Umm I don't know why."*

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<sup>27</sup> Y 4 refers to the year 4 teacher, while Y 7 refers to the year 7 teacher and PP refers to the pre-primary teacher.

Although the teachers felt that modelling and correction of their students' speech did have some effect, they did not think they would ever be successful in changing it. They gave this as the reason why they "jumped" key indicators in 'First Steps'. 'First Steps' is a language program which uses developmental continua to monitor each student's progress and links their level of achievement to comprehensive teaching materials. Students have to demonstrate achievement of all the key indicators at each developmental stage before they move to the next. The teachers in this school did not follow that directive when using the oral language continua but rather disregarded the key indicator which required students to self-correct grammar errors. They argued that the students "weren't going anywhere" if they had to "get rid of the dones and the seens". Despite being initially developed for low SES schools, this continuum used non-standard speech forms as examples of poorly developed speech and was criticised for doing so (Oliver & O'Donoghue, 1994:17-8).

### **Prepositions**

The pre-primary teacher in the low SES primary school talked about how her students lacked knowledge of prepositions and how she did a lot of physical activities to teach them these forms.

*"We do a lot of work on 'in front', 'behind', 'next to', 'between', 'on top', 'on the bottom', and I get them I take them in groups outside and I get them to climb to the top of the ladder and say, 'Where are you?', 'I'm at the top', and they come down the fireman's pole, 'Where are you now?', 'I'm at the bottom.' And that type of thing. A lot of them haven't got a clue. They do not know the difference between top and bottom and in front and behind and inside and outside, front and back and all that type of thing. (Mmm) They don't they just don't come with it, so they need a lot of that. (Yep) [Pause] A lot .. a lot of skills to use so that once they want to talk, they've got something to fall back on."*

In this context, the students seemed to be expected to put their "language on display" (Corson, 1983:218) by describing their position to a teacher who could see them. This particular use of language is associated with schools but may be unfamiliar to many young children. However, when the children did not demonstrate that they understood these school-based language rituals, they were seen as coming to school "*without any language*" and when they acquired the "language on display" as having "*got something to talk about*".

The year 11 English teacher in the high SES secondary school complained about her students' use of "*off of*" saying "*How can anybody 'off of' anything*" and naming it as one of her "*pet hates*".

### **Conjunctions**

The teachers in the low SES primary school believed their students' had a problem with conjunctions. As often happened in the focus groups, the discussion began with reference to speech but flowed on to writing. As the year 4 teacher remarked;

*"We're right into conjunctions at the moment. It's a - It's a trick. I find that it's quite a difficult area to teach. Quite a difficult thing to teach."*

She went on to say;

*"You used to have to refer up and refer down and I used to think good grief I don't know what they're talking about."*

The year 7 teacher agreed that it was very difficult and they both believed this was because they had not been taught it properly during their own education. This situation is similar to that of the technical vocabulary in the high SES secondary school where the teachers had also experienced difficulty. From this it would seem, that where teachers

also have trouble with an aspect of language there is greater understanding of the students' problem.

### **Homophones**

The high SES secondary school teachers identified the use of homophones such as "there, their and they're" as a problem for their students. This issue was raised, along with "off of" and "youse" as the teachers' "pet hates". However, the incorrect use of homophones is a spelling rather than a speech issue and in this case, relies more on grammatical than grapho-phonetic knowledge. This might indicate that the teachers do not understand the complex relationships between speech and writing.

### **Speaking in full sentences**

The teachers in the low SES primary school and the high SES secondary school raised the issue of not speaking in full sentences. However, while the primary teachers saw the problem arising from the students' "deficient" language background, the secondary teachers saw it as a "young person's" problem perhaps influenced by advertising. In the primary school, the pre-primary teacher described it like this:

*"Yeah the biggest problem I find is with probably half of them is: A - getting them to speak in the first place because a lot of them have been in the situation where they're good if they sit in front of television and they don't talk and annoy mum. So a lot of them have come from that and the ones who do speak there's the pronunciation problem and there's also the talking in um like not in full sentences so it's um 'going home' instead of 'Are we going home?' that type of thing so they're really they're very language deficient (emphasis added) when they come and they really need to be talked to a lot."*

Once more, this teacher returned to the theme of language deprivation suffered by her students previously discussed with reference to vocabulary and the lack of knowledge of prepositions. Her perceptions seem to be influenced by her belief that the child

rearing practices in her students' homes reward them for sitting quietly in front of television and that they are deprived of interaction. She sees the solution as her speaking to them constantly and goes on to describe this method;

*"I've found one of the things I have to do when they first come is to get them to actually talk to me. I have to go and sit with them in maybe the block corner or whatever and talk to myself and I'll do things like I'll build something and I'll say 'Now I'm going to build a house and oh I think it needs something for the roof. What can I use for the roof? What can I use for the roof? Oh I might put that on the roof. Oh I think it needs a path. So I'm going to put ..' so I'll talk like that and gradually they'll start to hand me something and say 'You can have this for a path.' Or you know 'You can have that for the roof or the trees' you know. And I really literally have to talk to myself so they hear somebody speaking. And which initiates them joining in really. So.."*

These examples, like those quoted about the students' use of prepositions, suggest the use of ritual classroom speech forms which may not be familiar to pre-primary children. The teachers seem to stress "full sentence" responses in the genuine belief that speech patterns transfer directly to writing. This also seems to lead teachers to judge their students' speech against the norms of writing.

The secondary teachers share the primary teachers' belief that full sentences are required in speech. However, they see the problem as a change in society speech patterns. They expressed it this way:

*"E 11 And what was I going to say about talking, speech? Oh.. one of the things that really bugs me about young people's..the way they speak, is they don't speak in sentences any longer.*

*E 9 They get that from advertising. [high rising tone - incredulous]*

*E 11 I suspect that may well be the case. They same way they can't spell because night is 'n-i-t-e' down on the board...outside that shop*

*S&E [indecipherable]*

*E 9 It is, it's advertising [high tone and increased volume]*

*E 11 But they don't speak in sentences -*

*E 9 [Speaking over E 11] It's OK to put a sentence-*

*E 11 [Speaking over E 9] -And that's reflected in their writing (Yeah/Mmm) and that's why I think the quality of kids written work (Mmm) is perhaps on the decline."*

The teachers suggested that advertising may influence this deterioration in language use. The intensity of the discussion suggests the teachers see this deterioration with something of a sense of outrage. Further, from what the teachers said it would seem that they attribute a decline in writing standards to the lack of full sentences in their students' speech. Thus, it would seem that the teachers see a direct relationship between speaking and writing and that consequently think the norms of writing must be applied to speech if standards are to be maintained.

### **Text construction**

The teachers in the low SES primary school claimed their students lacked creativity in text construction while the teachers in the low SES secondary school were concerned about a lack of appropriate complexity in their students' texts. In contrast, the high SES primary teachers did not identify any issues of concern and although the secondary teachers identified poorly constructed oral texts, this only referred to the students' formal prepared talks.

#### **5.3.4 Teachers' perceptions of language use problems**

The teachers in the low SES schools shared concerns about their students' socially inappropriate speech, their restricted range of registers and their language being insufficient to fulfil their present and future needs. In addition, the secondary teachers claimed their students lacked an understanding of what speech was socially appropriate and of the potential power of language and that their male students depended on abusive language rather than reasoned evidence when arguing. An additional concern of the primary teachers was that their students had "poor" speech. The high SES secondary school teachers shared the low SES secondary school teachers' concern that their

students lacked knowledge of socially appropriate speech and had inadequate language to meet future needs. They also were concerned that their students were not able to respond to the demands of different audiences nor able to use appropriate volume when giving prepared talks for assessment purposes and that they had poor listening comprehension. In contrast, the high SES primary school teachers did not identify any concerns about their students' use of language.

### **"Poor inappropriate" speech**

The teachers in the low SES primary school discussed at length how their students had "poor" speech that was "inappropriate" for school and for future needs. They claimed that both the structure of the students' speech and the way they interacted with others was problematic. Home language behaviour was blamed for this and the teachers felt they had failed to overcome this difficulty despite their best efforts. The following quote from the year 7 teacher discussed how she tries to correct the students' speech and to tell them why they must try to speak "properly";

*"Yeah, I guess from my point of view it's just the continual ...pounding away at it that umm you just hope that at some stage in their life it's going to click 'cause it's unacceptable. I mean I often say to them, 'Look when you go for a job it doesn't matter whether you're going to be at the counter down at Kentucky Fried or behind the checkout or going to university, if you say 'I' as soon as you walk in and say 'I done it, real good.' You know these people have an impression of you. So you just need to be up-front and try to speak properly [emphasis added]. That's what's accepted in the wider community or whatever.' But umm it may be so much in the time that we have them. And it's been modelled for an awful long time. We don't want to totally blame the parents but umm it if it's not corrected I mean the only reason that I don't say anything is that my parents corrected it. I don't remember anyone telling me at school. [She laughs] And it was an ongoing battle, so I don't know."*

The idea that parents are responsible for their children's poor speech was raised frequently by teachers in the low SES primary school focus group. It was mentioned by

the teachers when they were discussing pronunciation and again with reference to grammar. The teachers also reported being "*shocked*" and "*absolutely appalled*" at the "*incorrect*" language used by the parents and expressed this a number of times. The pre-primary teacher provided an illustration by describing the way parents of her students contribute to a daily story activity. Everyday one of the children takes home a class toy, the child draws a picture, and a parent writes a narrative about the illustration. The next morning, the teacher reads the story to the class.

*"And I show the picture and the child will say what they wrote and some of the stories that come back are absolutely appalling. They really are. ( Oh.) They are really really difficult to read. And sometimes when I'm reading them out, I have to reconstruct the whole story because the the grammar is appalling, there are no full stops, there are dones and seens and all these things. Now, that's the parents, they can't speak it, they can't write it either."*

Despite the teachers recognising that the parents speak just as their children do, they still argue that parents should "correct" their children's speech.

### **Lack of knowledge of socially appropriate speech**

The secondary teachers perceived their students as lacking knowledge of socially appropriate speech. However, these perceptions differed according to the socio-economic status of the students. In the low SES school, the teachers expressed a concern that their students did not know what was appropriate for different social contexts. An example, cited by the year 11 English teacher, described how students asked socially inappropriate questions of both teachers and peers.

*"I mean even they do it to teachers as well some students that not knowing contextually what's appropriate. Asking a student or a teacher 'Have you got your period?' Umm is clearly inappropriate and yet some students feel that 'Why can't I?' I mean that they feel that that's normal discourse."*



Later this issue was raised again and expressed as a lack of knowledge of appropriate speech. However, although the teachers agreed that students lacked these skills they differed in their view of the nature of the issue. In the following example, the teachers discuss their belief that the students did not have "language for life skills" with reference to the range of contexts in which they will be required to speak.

- "E 11 ...But I really feel strongly that they don't recognise the context for when you would apply a different register. I really feel that they're not cued to a lot of my students are not-*
- E 9 But T (the S&E teacher) just made the point though that around her with all those boys if they swear by accident they look up and they apologise (Mmm) which suggests to me that they do know. (Mmm) And there are some days when I've seen students who know exactly how to be very polite and very cooperative and other days when they apparently don't but they do. (Mmm) They do know. They haven't had enough practice at it. They're not familiar enough with it so they can do it comfortably and that's the problem I think."*

The year 9 English teacher went on to describe how she had two students in her class whose families were involved in a landlord versus tenant dispute and how these families did not have the language skills required to solve the problem. Similarly, the year 11 teacher described the inappropriate manner in which her students treated a relief (or substitute) teacher claiming it was because the students were not aware of how to speak politely to people not known to them. However, the year 9 English teacher disputed this claiming that they treated her in the same manner when she did internal relief<sup>28</sup> in that class and they all knew her. The teachers eventually agreed that it is a matter of choice and moved from seeing the issue as the students not knowing alternative ways of talking, to them making deliberate choices. The year 11 English teacher claimed that the students make the choice based on their relationship with that person and while the others agreed they also argued that it is not appropriate to discriminate in this way. The

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<sup>28</sup> When an outside relief (or substitute) teacher is not available to teach a class where the regular teacher is absent, other staff members take the class in periods when they do not have a scheduled class of their own.

notion that students vary their language behaviour according to the relationship they have with their interlocutor is supported by research. For example, Cheshire (1982a) found that students used fewer non-standard forms with teachers that they respected.

In the high SES secondary school, the students were also seen to lack socially appropriate speech although the teachers' view of the problem differed considerably from that of the teachers in the low SES school. For example, the high SES teachers made general statements about students' use of polite forms as part of a series of observations related to the deterioration of both speaking and listening skills in young people:

*"E 9 And the words 'please' and 'thank you' have disappeared from the English language.*

*E 11 Totally [laughter]*

*E 9 And 'you're welcome'."*

However, although these remarks applied to all students, the examples cited all referred to ESL students. The teachers expressed an understanding of the difficulties the ESL students faced because of their lack of cultural knowledge. It would seem that in the case of the native speakers of English, the deterioration in the standards of polite speech was seen by the teachers as a "*young person's issue*" and possibly related to intergenerational change. However, with the ESL students, the failure to use polite forms appropriately was seen as due to their lack of understanding of Australian social conventions.

### **The use of socially inappropriate speech**

There seems to be two aspects to the issues the teachers raised in relation to social appropriacy. The first is the teachers' in the low SES schools view that the students lack

sufficiently formal speech to meet the requirements of some social situations such as interacting with one another, making requests, attracting attention, eating in restaurants or attending job interviews. For example, the year 4 teacher spoke about her students not interrupting appropriately and needing to learn appropriate social protocols:

*"It's protocol. They don't have I mean and it's that 'Listen,' 'Pass me that.' Or shoe laces. They don't have a set of acceptable speech conversation stuff that's there."*

They also discussed how the students spoke to each other without regard for each others feelings.

*"No, no concern for the other person's feelings or no- and basically they've got to take it on the chin and accept it."*

They were concerned that without the intervention they provide, the students might believe that their "informal" speech was "normal and acceptable" in the "world".

*"...all this stuff and we talk about you know about what's an appropriate way to speak but I do worry that these children will get into the world and they will believe that that is the normal and acceptable way to just interact at that more informal umm level and it's horrifying."*

It would seem that the teachers associate the use of non-standard forms with inappropriate informality and view this as a stylistic rather than sociolect issue.

The second aspect of the issue of social appropriacy is the way "poor" speech was associated with "bad" behaviour. The teachers identified the linguistic choices being made by the students as symbolising rebellious behaviour. This is implied in the discussion about the students' treatment of staff members and relief teachers. It is also referred to in terms of the way students use language to "put other students down" or to be abusive or coercive. The teachers in the low SES primary and secondary schools

raised the issue of "put downs" and how this behaviour impacts on the classroom. In the primary school, it was discussed in relation to the negative atmosphere created and is described here by the year 4 teacher;

*"I shudder at the way they speak to each other. And the patterns of language (Mmm) you know [loudly and roughly] 'I told you.', 'Yeah', 'Yeah' and umm big put-downs umm just being right. Yeah, just the basic lack of being nice to each other and treating each other with respect. And we push really hard here for (Oh, yeah) problem solving and respect each other."*

In the low SES secondary school, it is seen in a similar way, but in addition, they spoke about how the students talk "at each other" rather than to each other. However, they all agreed that adults tend to do that also. As the society and environment teacher expressed it;

*"And you listen to their conversations out there in the yard and like there's nothing. Sometimes they're not even communicating to each other they're talking at each other and I think that adults we do that a lot too."*

The teachers went on to discuss how teachers in staffrooms were particularly guilty of this type of communication.

The low SES secondary school teachers also referred to how "put downs" impact on the students' oral assessment tasks and discourage student participation in learning activities. This was the first issue raised by the teachers who returned to it several times during the focus group discussion. The year 11 English teacher expressed her concern as;

*"Of concern at the moment for me are put downs within the classroom and outside the classroom. It really affects students' confidence um particularly if you want to assess their oral umm work or their speaking, their speaking/listening skills. They're very unwilling to speak except for one to one. So that's one of my primary concerns within the classroom in terms of language."*

The teachers saw this as a serious issue and discussed it at length. They argued that the students' backgrounds had desensitised them to the hurtful nature of their behaviour. As in the following example:

*"I guess with any class there are students who are very vocal and very ready to speak up and if they happen to have a nasty streak as well that can be very destructive to encouraging participation by all members of the class. Umm with some of the home environments that I know that the students come from they aren't able to discriminate particularly about where to use that language (Mmm) and how destructive it can be (Mm). They've sort of hardened themselves to it and for the more sensitive kids it is ..it is as M (E 11 teacher) says, it's devastating, I think."*

### **Restricted range of registers**

Teachers in both the low SES primary and secondary schools identified a problem with their students' restricted range of registers. Although related to comments about the generally restricted nature of their language use, this problem particularly focussed on the spoken registers required in schooling. In the primary school, the teachers discussed how the students' restricted range of registers was due to limited life experiences and that they therefore needed additional experiences before they were able to meet the requirements of written language.

In the low SES secondary school, the issue of a restricted range of registers was also raised and as with the primary school, it was in reference to writing. The teachers were discussing whether the current approach to speaking and listening as described in the 'Student Outcome Statements' was suitable for their students. The year 11 English teacher takes up the discussion;

*"and I I don't really think..I don't want to abandon a whole educational approach in preparing them as a citizen (Mmm) but I do think that we're not preparing them enough for realistic situations that they're gonna encounter where they have a range of registers (Yep) that they can draw on (Yes) (Mmm) and which are in (Mmm) appropriate language to the situation."*

The teachers did not mention specific registers they believed the students needed to learn to control but they did discuss the dilemma they faced with regard to modelling "appropriate" language.

*"S&E But this is ..we're caught. Because on one hand do [we] encourage acceptance and belonging and confidence within them with the speech that they have (Mmm/Mmm) and then it sort of stays the same. Or do we push to introduce them to foreign language, foreign concepts and I know you'd have to do this when they're ..they take that ..when they may feel not good enough and to change. Why can't we accept this*

*Y II Urr [imitating sarcastic utterance of students]*

*S&E and it's just just not realistic. It's not practical. (No) I find with myself I am encouraging and accepting and stuff and they feel comfortable and I get good responses with it because of that. But I know that you know when they're out there... that umm you know they will be in .. I have done them a destruction*

*Y II discrimination*

*S&E I have built them up built them up and then when they go out there they will possibly somebody will make them feel phew they're failures."*

These teachers are torn between accepting their students' non-standard speech and building a good rapport with them on one hand, and providing a standard language model and correcting the students' speech on the other. They fear that the broader society or "out there" will judge the students by their speech and make them feel like failures. It is as if the teachers suspend their own judgements of their students' speech in order to maintain good relationships with them and teach them effectively. However, they do not believe others outside the school will do likewise and so worry if they are failing their students by not "correcting" their speech.

### **Lack of language to fulfil age appropriate functions**

The teachers in both the low SES schools expressed a concern that their students lack the language required to fulfil age appropriate functions. This included both the social and academic language demands which increase over levels of schooling. The pre-primary teacher expressed it in terms of her students having "absent" language. The

year 4 teacher reported that her students were "*keen to talk*" but that their language was "*deficit*". The year 7 teacher agreed and said she continually reminds students of appropriate language use. At the secondary level, the teachers were also concerned about their students' capacity to meet the linguistic demands of situations such as interviews, the work place and formal social situations. They believed the students' language was inappropriately "*informal*" both in form and content.

The low SES secondary school teachers were concerned about the males in their classes relying on sarcasm and "*power*" rather than reasoning to win arguments. This is seen as a problem in that the students are not able to argue in a more constructive manner and also because it creates a negative atmosphere in the classroom. The society and environment teacher expressed the issue in the following way:

*"Umm in my upper school classes mm the likes of LT and PM will rely [on] the boys' power and especially sarcasm to defeat the ah the ah you know the suggestions or the comments..(mmm) and I think sarcasm in language is huge (Mmm)"*

However, she goes on to admit that this is not a problem confined to the students but that teachers are sometimes sarcastic;

*"...at our school and not just with students. I will be sarcastic to a student well I don't use it as much as I used to but I still know that sometimes you know when I'm in one of my annoyed days or this student is just-"*

Although the teachers in the focus group said they tried to avoid being sarcastic with students, they suggested that other teachers on their staff frequently used sarcasm when interacting with students.

### **Inadequate language to meet future needs**

The teachers in the low SES primary school and both of the secondary schools believe their students lack the language they require to meet their future needs. In the primary school, it was expressed as the teachers trying to prepare the students for future language requirements which are seen in terms of appropriacy.

*"It certainly raises their awareness of what's appropriate whether we're going to ..and maybe when they get into high school, or maybe if they do go to tertiary, if they do go to another place, another walk of life, they've got um some skills and some knowledge there that they can actually transpose and go with them I guess that's got to be useful."*

In the high SES secondary school, the discussion of the future language requirements for students was raised in the context of a debate about the value in students doing prepared talks. The teachers argued that public speaking was a skill only required of a very small number of people in the wider community and there were more important skills the students needed to learn. These skills include those required for telephone use, for success in an interview, to make a complaint, to seek information and to talk with a superordinate. They suggested these are *"skills that those kids are not taught"* and that teachers have not *"put 'em in that situation"*. The discussion surrounding the use of the telephone was interesting in that it raised several issues which were frequently referred to by this group of teachers. Firstly, that there was one *"correct"* way to do things and usually that was the way the teachers did it. Secondly, *"incorrect"* language use was due to *"deterioration"* in standards and children not being appropriately trained. In this case, the inappropriate use of the telephone was seen as due to its ready availability and the fact that children nowadays are not taught to use it



properly in the way the teachers had been. For example, the year 11 English teacher said:

*"...but nowadays I mean, everybody's used to the phone you just pick it up it's automatic you walk around with your mobile and you do your grocery shopping with your mobile (That's right), you sit in the cinema with it good gracious me. So basically our standards are declining and that's reflected in the way the kids speak (Mmm/Mmm)."*

Later in this particular discussion, the teachers again discussed the situation of ESL students. As with the earlier discussion on conventions of politeness, they suggested that ESL students' responses on the telephone could reflect cultural differences. They did not, however, consider that their native English-speaking students' expressions or way of talking might also be the result of differences in background.

In the low SES secondary school, the issue of inadequate language to meet future needs was related to the problems of inappropriate speech and a lack of language to fulfil age appropriate functions. These teachers, like those discussed earlier, expressed a concern that their students would not be able meet the language demands of situations such as interviews or work contexts. As with other concerns in this school, this related to the use of non-standard forms, "informal" and "inappropriate" language. The teachers claimed that the students' lack of knowledge of appropriate language was a result of not having "correct" language models at home. They suggested that this made their modelling of appropriate language particularly important but that it also created a dilemma for them. For while they felt they needed to model the use of "formal registers", they also believed that doing so reduced the rapport necessary for successful teaching.

### **Audience demands, volume of speech and listening comprehension**

The high SES secondary school teachers were concerned that their students did not understand the demands of different audiences and that the volume of their speech was not always appropriate to the situation. The teachers argued that the students did not know how to adjust the level of formality in their speech according to the audience and the context. The teachers claimed the students needed to use "standard" pronunciation, "correct" grammar, and "appropriate" vocabulary, volume and paralinguistic gestures. The students also needed to omit discourse markers such as "like" from their speech. The teachers argued that students need to demonstrate these skills in the formal talks they give as part of their assessment and in formal interactions such as interviews or when speaking with superordinates.

The teachers in the high SES secondary school argued that listening comprehension was a necessary skill for effective interaction but that their students had poor listening skills and that the situation was deteriorating. They claimed that this was because the students' attention spans were short which in turn was due to "video games" and "computing stuff" making listening unnecessary. They went on to discuss how it was just as well that the tertiary institutions no longer required interviews or oral assessments because the students' would fail these.

*"E 11 I think there's been horrifically ..deterioration. I think they are very lucky they don't have to do interviews, you know, for tertiary institutions or oral assessments (Mmmm) as part of the final exams because most of them would fall in a heap."*

There was then a discussion on the students' performance in interviews and how they did not talk and listen as well because families did not talk as much.

*"You know, I wonder how much kids, I mean families, talk to each other nowadays. When I was a kid we had to have dinner together OK (yeah) we all sat around the table and we'd discuss the day's events. It was as boring as hell I tell you. [laughter] But that's how it was."*

There was a short discussion about this and then she went on to say:

*"But it seems to me talking to the kids you know and we talk quite a bit, they hardly ever have a meal with their whole family or even see their whole family. (Mmm/Mmm) Their parents are often gone before they get up and you know they're in bed before they get home especially with some of the kids from you know particularly the Asian backgrounds because you know they work very hard and so I wonder how used to talking with anybody (Mmm) outside their own peer group they are. (Yeah) Well if they have that sort of experience (yeah)"*

### **Language and power**

The teachers in the low SES secondary school raised the issue of students not recognising the power of language. The teachers were discussing how the students failed to engage with the meaning of language even when they were discussing things of interest such as the lyrics in songs. The society and environment teacher argued that this was common with teenagers and had been so for her, too. However, she also suggested that the students at their school did not understand the power of language.

*"I think that's the key thing. They don't really understand the power of language (No, they don't. No they don't) and the use of language. And you listen to their conversations out there in the yard and like there's nothing."*

### **Language and behaviour**

Some of the features identified by the teachers during the focus group discussions referred to the students' behaviour in classroom situations where the teachers assessed their skills in speaking. These included their students' level of confidence, poor behaviour, restricted range of interests and reluctance to speak, especially for assessment tasks. The teachers in both the low SES schools nominated most of the issues. There were two issues nominated by the year 7 teacher in the high SES primary

school, however, these related to students she had previously taught while in a low SES school. The three issues raised by the high SES secondary teachers related to speech performance tasks.

### **Lack of confidence**

The teachers in both primary schools and in the low SES secondary school discussed issues related to confidence in speaking. However, as already mentioned, all the comments referred to low SES students. The year 7 teacher in the high SES primary school spoke about the students she had previously taught in "*a very low socio-economic area*":

*"You know, once once the children sort of realise once a lot of them lack so much confidence in communication any.. I mean they were scared to speak. They were scared to write. They just couldn't communicate..."*

She went on to say she did not correct their speech because they were so lacking in confidence.

The teachers in the low SES primary school also spoke at length about their students coming to school with "*no language*" or "*restricted language*" and how they struggled to get them to speak. According to the teachers, however, the students' confidence grew with the help of programs such as drama and school assemblies as they progressed through the school. However, the teachers reported that despite all of these programs, some of the senior students remained shy and were reluctant to speak in front of their peers.

The teachers in the low SES secondary school claimed that student "put downs" of each other impacted on their confidence, especially in performance situations. They also suggested that the students' confidence increased when the way they spoke was accepted. However, this raised a dilemma for them because they believe such acceptance conflicts with their responsibility to teach the students Standard Australian English.

*"But this is ..we're caught. Because on one hand do [we] encourage acceptance and belonging and confidence within them with the speech that they have (Mmm/Mmm) and then it sort of stays the same. Or do we push to introduce them to foreign language, foreign concepts and I know you'd have to do this when they're ..they take that ..when they may feel not good enough and to change. 'Why can't we accept this?'"*

### **Overconfidence**

In contrast, the teachers in the high SES school talked about how confident their students are, even when they do not speak well. The society and environment teacher noted:

*"They are supremely self-confident (Mmm) and although there's lots of things they can't do very well (Mmm/Mmm) maybe you know speak, speaking's one of them but it doesn't faze them (Mm/No)."*

And later the Year 11 English teacher also remarked;

*"If you said to a kid, you know, your speech is very very poor, the kid'd turn around and say, 'But you understand me.'"*

The teachers also claimed that when they were students, teachers had not repeated information students had not understood and certainly did not ask a student to repeat something they had not understood. As with similar discussions in this focus group, the teachers compared their students' behaviour with their own when they were at school and seemed to see the differences in terms of deterioration.

### Poor behaviour

The teachers in the two low SES schools suggested that poor behaviour is associated with ineffective communication skills and with students of lower ability. Once more, the students' background is seen to be providing a poor model. The primary school teachers described the behaviour of a student who was known to them as an example of this:

*"He's pretty keen to say something (oh yeah) and I think he gets pretty frustrated when he can't speak. (Mmm) When he's got something to say he gets very frustrated and he'll often speak and it'll come out back to front and upside down. He does that a bit too. (Mmm) He's possibly not the smartest child and maybe it's the way it's being modelled at home. (Mmm) There's a few short fuses kicking around there. (Ah mm)"*

Similarly, the secondary teachers associated inappropriate behaviour with students of lower ability. The society and environment teacher described how *"in the lower ability class there is a much greater tendency to have a go at each other personally. They're a lot more defensive"*. The year 11 English teacher said her classes were not streamed according to ability so she had to make them *"a no-put down zone, and have that is...as part of [the] teaching strategy"* to ensure the behaviour of the varied ability groups did not impact on the class atmosphere. The relationship between the students' poor academic performance and their use of negative language such as *"put downs"*, sarcasm and expletives was discussed on a number of occasions. The teachers also reported that the lower ability students reacted to learning activities with comments such as *"Oh, why do we have to do this? This is stupid, Miss"*. The teachers thought that these students needed to *"chill out"* in order to cope better and by doing so may not have to resort to inappropriate behaviours. One of the teachers translated this belief into action and

introduced her "*bottom tens*" to meditation, herbal teas and relaxing music in order to change their behaviour.

### **Range of interests**

The teachers in the low SES secondary school also saw their students as having a narrow range of interests. They spoke about this in relation to the students' "narrow" vocabulary and the fact that the reading they do is very limited, as is their access to television programs such as current affairs programs, documentaries and the like. They claimed the students were only interested in "*soaps*" like "*Home and Away*" and popular music. This view is not surprising and is consistent with research which suggests that adolescents' interests are mainly centred around school, intoxicants and music (Chambers, 1995:172).

### **Performance**

In contrast to the earlier comments about their students' high level of confidence, the teachers in the high SES school noted their students' reluctance to "*perform*" - giving prepared talks or reading aloud in front of their peers. The teachers reported that some students even resort to inappropriate behaviour to avoid the task. The year 11 English teacher in the high SES school described this situation;

*"and then you have some kids who will [do] anything not to read. I've had kids burst out swearing and run out of my room to get out of having to read out loud. (Mmm) They just can't handle the thought of doing it. Lack of confidence or whatever it is."*

In the same way, the students in the low SES school are sometimes so afraid of the comments their peers might make that they refuse to perform. To overcome this, some

teachers let students present their talks in front of friends. Other teachers allow several students to present their talks together so there is less pressure on individuals.

### **Gender**

Issues related to gender difference with respect to language were also raised by the teachers. The issues identified included: male students tend to dominate some classes; females are more confident and competent; and the relative performance of male and female students varies with the context and subject matter at hand.

The teachers in the low SES secondary school discussed how male students often dominate in their classes, using abusive and sarcastic language. The teachers said they find that where there are more females in the class, the atmosphere is much more positive. The year 11 English teacher commented that she needs to put strategies in place to ensure the male students do not dominate in her unstreamed classes;

*"...encourage all students to be able to participate and not just the mouthy trousers who are dominating the classroom or who are effectively putting down other students and therefore not giving them voice."*

The year 9 English teacher reported that the males, especially those of "lower ability", also tended to dominate in her classes.

*"But I find the boys tend to dominate and drown out the girls. They don't give them the chance to umm speak up and participate as well."*

The society and environment teacher finds an even more marked contrast between her classes because of academic streaming. The higher ability classes tend to have more females and the lower ability classes more males. In the higher ability classes, the girls are "outspoken, very vocal, willing to get in there and have a go" whereas in the lower



ability classes "*boys' power and especially sarcasm*" is used to "*defeat*" any suggestions or comments made by the female students.

Female students are also seen to be more confident and to perform better orally than male counterparts. In the high SES primary school, the teachers suggest that this is because the males are more likely to conform to peer expectations and because it is not "*cool*" to speak well, they choose not to do so.

*"I've got some boys who write very well but they don't speak very well cause none of their friends I mean they speak the way their friends speak. It's a mm It's a gender thing a girl boy thing.*

In the high SES secondary school, the teachers described how the males choose to do their presentations in pairs or groups while the females are happy to perform independently. In addition, when given the choice, the male students also prefer to use technology (tape recorder, video or PowerPoint) to present rather than doing it "live". However, teachers did report exceptions. For example, one male of limited ability was noted as being very confident and using a "*comedy routine*" to disguise his problems.

The teachers in the low SES secondary school noted, however, that the male students performed at a higher level when they were interested in the content. The society and environment teacher described the response of a class with a number of troublesome male students to an activity about contemporary culture. She spoke at length about their enthusiasm and engagement and how they encouraged one another rather than resorting to the usual sarcastic comments. After listening to her account, the other teachers agreed that the engagement of these males was unusual.

*"That is amazing (Totally amazed) because B is very cool in my English class. (Totally) "Oh, why do we have to do this? This is stupid, Miss." [harsh tone] That's more That's more the comment from that style of student."*

#### 5.4 Relationships between background factors and teachers' perceptions

As in Study One, in this study the relationships between the way the teachers defined Standard Australian English, their backgrounds, their attitudes to language variation and how they perceived student speech were analysed to determine if there were any patterns. First, the information relating to each teacher was examined and a summary of the relationships between the different factors was made. An example of the way the relationships were considered is presented here as a case study. Secondly, the information relating to each of the teachers was collated and trends in the relationships were noted and these are presented in the section following the case study.

##### 5.4.1 Case study

Elizabeth is a pre-primary teacher in School F and is aged in her mid-fifties. She had been educated in lower middle class schools. She has a three year Teaching Certificate in Early Childhood Education and twenty-five years experience. She has attended recent professional development courses related to language education. Her attitude rating is slightly liberal for variation generally and for the use of variants, but is more conservative than average for Study Two.

It is interesting to note that although Elizabeth was educated in low to middle SES schools, she speaks with a relatively "cultivated" accent. Her comments also suggest that she sees her own speech as providing a model for her students. She spoke about spending a great deal of time talking to her students and modelling the language she believes they lack so they will have "*something to talk with*". She also explicitly corrects the students' speech and will not respond to their requests until they use "*correct*" forms.

Elizabeth's perceptions of student speech would also seem to be influenced by the written form of English, particularly its conventions. In the focus group, she made many references to "correct" usage and described her interest in grammar and how she had been in a special group at school because of this interest and because of her language ability.

The way Elizabeth defined Standard Australian English, however, contrasts with the criticisms she made of her students' speech. She defines Standard Australian English as English language used and understood by the average Australian, the "man on the street". She said its key features included such things as rising inflection on statements and a lack of knowledge of correct grammar usage. This definition better matches how she views her students' "home" speech than the speech she is trying to develop through the learning activities she provides. She described her students as beginning school "very deficient" in language, unable to pronounce words correctly, to speak in sentences with correct syntax or to communicate their needs appropriately. Her attitude ratings were well below the average for the study, suggesting that she has a generally more conservative attitude to language variation than many of her colleagues. This conservative attitude is consistent with the judgements she made on her students' non-standard speech.

#### 5.4.2 Summary of the relationships

As in the previous study, the relationships between the way the teachers defined Standard Australian English and how they perceived student speech were examined. Once again, the analysis revealed that in most cases the way the teachers defined Standard Australian English was consistent with their perceptions of their students' speech. In this study, some teachers' definitions emphasised "correct" conventions and this was reflected in their identification of many "incorrect" forms in their students' speech. For example, those teachers who identified correct sentence structure as a key feature of Standard Australian English also spoke about being very concerned that their students had many grammatical problems and did not speak in full sentences. Other

teachers', however, emphasised what was "acceptable" and they tended to refer more to "appropriacy" when discussing their students' speech. For example, a number of teachers noted that slang was not acceptable in their definitions of Standard Australian English and during the focus groups these same teachers saw their students' inappropriate use of slang as a major problem.

As in Study One, the teachers' attitude ratings generally were consistent with how they defined Standard Australian English and how they perceived their students' speech. Those teachers who had generally liberal attitude ratings tended to define Standard Australian English and perceive their students' speech in terms of whether it was "appropriate" or not. Conversely, those teachers with generally conservative attitude ratings tended to emphasise "correct" forms and conventions in their definitions and to identify pronunciation, grammar and discourse problems in their students' speech.

The relationships between the teachers' backgrounds, their attitudes to language variation, the way they defined Standard Australian English and their perceptions of student speech were also examined. As in Study One, there was a general tendency for younger teachers and those with less experience to have slightly more liberal attitudes to language variation generally and to be more tolerant of variation in their students' speech. It also was interesting to note the way a number of teachers drew on their own background experiences when judging their students' speech; comparing their own life experiences with what they perceived their students' to be like. Where there were similarities between their students' experiences and their own, such as having trouble with specialist vocabulary or with cohesive devices in texts, they attributed the problem to school-based factors. However, where there were differences, such as in their

perceptions of their students' home experiences or in how teachers had interacted with them during their schooling, they attributed the problem to these differences. For example, a number of teachers claimed that students did not speak appropriately because their parents did not interact with them in the same way as their own parents had done in their upbringing. It is also interesting to note that the teachers who had participated in professional development related to TESOL or Aboriginal English had generally more liberal attitudes to language variation than the rest of the cohort and were the only teachers in the study to report having used innovative practices in dealing with language variation in their classrooms.

### 5.5 Conclusion

This study investigated teachers' perceptions of their students' speech. The teachers participated in four school-based focus groups and identified pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and language use problems in their students' speech. While the teachers did not identify many pronunciation problems, those they did were considered to have a serious impact on reading and spelling. A number of teachers identified their students' restricted vocabulary as a serious problem. Other teachers were particularly concerned about their students' difficulties with the specialist vocabulary required by subject areas in school. There was a range of grammar problems identified including the incorrect use of verbs and personal pronouns, especially "youse" as a second person plural. Some teachers were also concerned that their students had an inadequate knowledge of prepositions and conjunctions. The teachers also were concerned that their students did not speak in sentences and that their spoken texts were poorly constructed. These problems were seen as particularly serious because they impacted on the students' writing. The students' use of socially inappropriate language and restricted range of

registers also concerned the teachers. Some teachers noted that their students lacked confidence in speaking and others behaved badly because of their poor speech.

It would appear that the teachers' perceptions of speech were influenced by the SES of their students. This was evident in differences in the number and nature of the problems the teachers identified and in the causes they ascribed to those problems. The teachers in the high SES schools identified fewer problems in their students' speech than did their colleagues in the low SES schools. They saw many of the problems to be either developmental or the result of poor models and a general deterioration in standards. In the low SES schools, however, there were many problems identified and these were seen to have a serious impact on the students' education. The teachers in these schools tended to see the students' home environments, or backgrounds, as causing many of their problems. Even where the same problems were identified as concerns in both high and low SES schools, the way they were viewed differed. For example, the students in the secondary schools were seen to have an inadequate knowledge of the vocabulary required by specialist subjects. In the high SES school, the teachers saw this as a problem because inappropriate expectations were being made of students. In contrast, the teachers in the low SES school suggested their students had vocabulary problems because they lacked interest in words and they had inappropriate attitudes to learning. A teacher also suggested that perhaps the students resisted learning new vocabulary because they believed the requirement that they use these "foreign" terms implied their "home" language was inadequate.

The level of schooling also appeared to influence teachers' perceptions of their students' speech. While the primary teachers tended to be more concerned about the form of their

students' speech, the secondary teachers were more concerned about their students' use of the language. However, some teachers in the upper primary and secondary levels identified similar issues. For example, that their students did not have an adequate range of registers to meet their present and future needs and that they used socially inappropriate speech.

The relationships between the way the teachers defined Standard Australian English, their backgrounds, their attitudes to language variation and how they perceived student speech were examined. Patterns in these relationships included that the teachers tended to perceive their students' speech in a way that was consistent with their definitions of Standard Australian English and with their attitudes to language variation, particularly where those attitudes were conservative. The younger teachers with less teaching experience tended to be more liberal in their attitudes to language variation, however, there were exceptions to this pattern. There was no clear relationship between the teachers' educational backgrounds and the way they perceived their students' speech. It was interesting to note, however, that those teachers who had attended professional development in TESOL or Aboriginal English demonstrated liberal attitudes and were the only teachers to report using innovative practices to address issues related to language variation in their classrooms.

## CHAPTER 6

### Study Three Findings

This chapter reports the findings of Study Three. In this study, twelve teachers from four schools participated in school-based groups to rank tape-recorded samples of student speech using criteria they developed within their group as part of the process. The teachers also independently completed the Language Attitude and Background Information Questionnaires.

Firstly, the way the teachers defined Standard Australian English is described. Secondly, the results of the Language Attitude Questionnaire completed by each of the teachers are reported. Thirdly, the teachers' rankings of the student speech samples are presented. Fourthly, the criteria the teachers used when ranking the speech samples are summarised and discussed in sections relating to pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, language use and the content of the students' descriptions. Finally, the relationships between the way the teachers defined Standard Australian English, their backgrounds, their attitudes to language variation and how they perceived student speech are explored.

#### **6.1 Teachers' definitions of Standard Australian English**

As part of this study, the teachers wrote their own definition of Standard Australian English and nominated its key characteristics. These definitions are presented exactly as the teachers wrote them in the following table.



Table 6.1 Teachers' definitions of Standard Australian English (Study Three)

School Teacher <sup>29</sup>	Definition of Standard Australian English	Key features of Standard Australian English
I PP	The queens English with an Australian flavour eg barby for barbecue, okay, beaut.	well pronounced eg coming not coming good articulation and clear acceptable grammar ie we were not we was words found in the Macquarie dictionary.
4	English spoken and written by educated Australians.	Correct pronunciation, spelling and grammatical use of English language.
7	Clearly spoken/written, well structured grammatically correct, clearly sequenced speech.	correct pronunciation - hear the correct ends of words being grammatically correct logical sequence clear - with audience in mind
J PP	Language (English) that uses correct grammar, structure and form.	Correct grammar Proper pronunciation Based on expected standards/rules
4	Because our differing backgrounds and other cultural influences it means that Australian standard English is always being modified and changed.	[no content- argued always changing]
7	Sound	colloquial influenced by socioeconomic status
K 9 E	Basic level of education Slang, colloquial - abbreviated language Relatively informal	Slow to medium pace Dialect influences Abbreviated language
11 E	Educated English - formal	As a teacher I guess we try to make available an educated, formal language because this gives them access to a larger body of people. Not colloquial Not limited to a small group/local area/ethnic group Of English; not American base.
S&E	A version of English in speech and writing that is readily communicated and understood in the Australian context.	Use of Australian colloquialisms Tendency to abbreviate words Unaffected speech Straightforward use of language.
L 9 E	English language usage for formal written/verbal interaction within the Australian context.	Universally (within the Australian context) accepted vocabulary, speech patterns, syntax and grammar.
11 E	The system of language used by the majority of the Australian population at that point in time.	A combination of American and English dialects. A tendency for colloquialism.
S&E	Language that is commonly used by Australians that has been accepted by Collins	Generic colloquialisms accepted by the majority of people within a specific geographical area.

<sup>29</sup> The teachers are coded with PP being pre-primary, 4 being year 4, 7 being year 7, 9E being year 9 English, 11E being year 11 English and S&E being society and environment.

The way the teachers defined Standard Australian English varied considerably. The descriptions ranged from calling it the "*queen's English*" to a "*language that is commonly used by Australians*". Similarly, the key characteristics of the variety ranged from "*well pronounced*" English, "*correct grammar*", or "*based on expected standards/rules*" to "*colloquial*" English with "*abbreviations*".

The "standards" referred to in the definitions also varied. On one hand, they included the "*queen's English*", what was "*correct*", "*proper*", "*appropriate*", "*expected*" and "*formal*". On the other hand, what was "*readily communicated*", "*unaffected*", "*straightforward*" and "*commonly used*". While in some definitions, teachers claimed Standard Australian English was characterised by "*colloquialisms*", others claimed these forms were unacceptable.

The teachers' definitions were not consistent in how they recognised the different modes of language. Of the twelve definitions, four referred to both speech and writing, four to speech alone and four did not specifically refer to either. There was no reference to any differences in the conventions of speech and writing in the definitions.

## 6.2 Teachers' attitudes to language variation

The teachers also completed a Language Attitude Questionnaire which measured their attitudes towards both language variation and to the use of specific alternative variants of Australian English. As described in 4.2, the teachers' scores were calculated to show their degree of liberalism in attitudes to variation generally and to the use of specific variants. Therefore, the higher the score, the more liberal the attitude to language

variation and conversely, the lower the score, the more conservative the attitude. The results for the teachers in this study are reported on the following table.

Table 6.2 Teachers' ratings on the Language Attitude Questionnaire

School	School I			School J			School K			School L		
	PP	4	7	PP	4	7	E9	E11	SE	E9	E11	SE
V <sup>30</sup>	+0.77	+0.77	-0.54	+0.69	-0.15	+0.85	+0.61	+0.67	+1.15	+0.15	-0.23	+0.46
U	+0.63	+0.80	-0.47	+0.67	-0.60	+0.50	+0.23	+0.90	+0.33	+0.10	+0.13	+0.47

In this study, the mean for the teachers' attitude to language variation in general was +0.43 and for the use of variants was +0.31. These ratings were slightly less liberal than those of the teachers in both Study One and Study Two. In School I, the pre-primary and the year 4 teachers had slightly liberal ratings for both their attitudes to language variation in general and to the use of variants of Australian English. However, the year 7 teacher had a slightly conservative rating for both of these aspects. In School J, the pre-primary and the year 7 teachers had slightly liberal ratings for both aspects of variation while the year 4 teacher had a slightly conservative rating for both. In School K, the teachers all had slightly liberal ratings for both aspects of variation with the exception of the society and environment teacher who had a moderately liberal rating for variation in general. In School L, all the teachers also had slightly liberal attitudes for both aspects except for the year 11 English teacher who had a slightly conservative attitude to variation in general.

<sup>30</sup> V refers to the measurement of the teacher's attitude to variation in general and U to their attitude to the use of specific variants of Australian English

### 6.3 Ranking of student speech samples

The teachers in this study worked in school-based groups to rank two sets of six tape recordings of students' speech. These samples included an equal number of male and female students from low and high SES backgrounds. The primary teachers ranked samples from an equal number of year 4 and year 7 students while the secondary teachers ranked an equal number of year 7 and year 9 student speech samples. In one set of six tapes, the students were repeating sentences and in the other set they were describing their house (younger students) or a film they had recently seen (older students). The student characteristics of the sets of sentence repetition speech samples are summarised in Table 6.3 and those for the description speech samples in Table 6.4.

Table 6.3 Sentence repetition task speech samples

Primary Speech Samples			Secondary Speech Samples		
	Male	Female		Male	Female
High SES		Year 4	High SES	Year 7	
	Year 7	Year 7		Year 9	Year 9
Low SES	Year 4	Year 4	Low SES	Year 7	Year 7
	Year 7				Year 9

Table 6.4 Description task speech samples

Primary Speech Samples			Secondary Speech Samples		
	Male	Female		Male	Female
High SES	Year 4		High SES		Year 7
	Year 7	Year 7		Year 9	Year 9
Low SES	Year 4	Year 4	Low SES	Year 7	Year 7
		Year 7		Year 9	

The teachers ranked the tapes, according to criteria they determined, from what they considered to be the best (1<sup>st</sup>) to the worst (6<sup>th</sup>). In ranking the samples, some groups of teachers came to a consensus on the order of the tapes, but others found this too difficult and submitted different rankings.

**Ranking of the sentence repetition samples**

The teachers in School I did not reach a consensus in the rankings of all the samples. They differed in the first to fourth rankings but agreed in the final two rankings. The teachers in School J ranked the samples in the same way as the teachers in School I for the first and final two rankings but differed for the middle rankings. The teachers in School K were the only ones to reach consensus on the ranking of all the sentence repetition speech samples. In School L, the teachers' first ranking was the same as for the teachers in School K, but the remainder differed. This is shown below in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5 Teachers' rankings of sentence repetition speech samples<sup>31</sup>

		Primary Schools						Secondary Schools					
		School I (HSES)			School J (LSES)			School K (HSES)			School L (LSES)		
		PP	4	7	PP	4	7	E 9	E 11	S&E	E 9	E 11	S&E
Ranking 1-6	4 FH	7 FH	4 FH	4 FH	4 FH	7 FH	9 FH	9 FH	9 FH	9 FH	9 FH	9 FH	9 FH
	7 FH	4 FH	7 FH	7 FH	7 FH	4 FH	9 MH	9 MH	9 MH	7 ML	7 ML	7 FL	
	4 FL	4 FL	7 MH	7 MH	7 MH	7 MH	7 ML	7 ML	7 ML	7 FL	9 MH	7 ML	
	7 MH	7 MH	4 FL	7 ML	7 ML	7 ML	9 FL	9 FL	9 FL	9 MH	7 FL	9 FL	
	7 ML	7 ML	7 ML	4 FL	4 FL	4 FL	7 MH	7 MH	7 MH	9 FL	7 MH	7 MH	
	4 ML	4 ML	4 ML	4 ML	4 ML	4 ML	7 FL	7 FL	7 FL	7 MH	9 FL	9 MH	

<sup>31</sup> The characteristics of the students whose speech was recorded for the samples are coded for year level, gender and the socio-economic status of their background. 4, 7 and 9 refer to the year level, M and F refer to male and female respectively and H and L refer to high SES and low SES respectively.

### Ranking of the description samples

There were many differences in the rankings of the description samples by the teachers in the two primary schools. While the teachers in School I did not reach a consensus on any of the rankings, the teachers in School J reached consensus on all of their rankings. The rankings themselves also differed widely.

In the secondary schools, the teachers in School K reached a consensus on all their rankings but those in School L only reached a consensus on the first two rankings and all the others differed. However, unlike with the primary teachers, the secondary teachers in both schools ranked the same speech samples in the first two positions. All of these rankings are reported in Table 6.6 below.

Table 6.6 Teachers' rankings of description speech samples

	Primary Schools						Secondary Schools					
	School I (HSES)			School J (LSES)			School K (HSES)			School L (LSES)		
	PP	4	7	PP	4	7	E 9	E 11	S&E	E 9	E 11	S&E
Ranking 1-6	4 MH	7 MH	7 MH	7 FH	7 FH	7 FH	9 MH	9 MH	9 MH	9 MH	9 MH	9 MH
	7 MH	7 FL	7 FL	4 MH	4 MH	4 MH	9 FH	9 FH	9 FH	9 FH	9 FH	9 FH
	7 FH	4 MH	4 ML	7 MH	7 MH	7 MH	7 FL	7 FL	7 FL	9 ML	7 FL	9 ML
	4 ML	7 FH	7 FH	7 FL	7 FL	7 FL	9 ML	9 ML	9 ML	7 FL	7 ML	7 FH
	4 FL	4 ML	4 MH	4 ML	4 ML	4 ML	7 FH	7 FH	7 FH	7 ML	9 ML	7 FL
	7 FL	4 FL	4 FL	4 FL	4 FL	4 FL	7 ML	7 ML	7 ML	7 FH	7 FH	7 ML

### Student background factors and the teachers' sample ranking

The results of the teachers' rankings were further analysed to ascertain the relationship between the students' background factors and the teachers' ranking of their samples of speech. The top three rankings of all twelve teachers were categorised according to the

age, gender and SES background of the student providing the sample. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 6.7.

Table 6.7 Age, gender and SES background of students in top three rankings

	Age		Gender		SES	
	Younger	Older	Male	Female	High	Low
Sentence repetition	16	20	14	22	26	10
Description	10	26	20	16	27	9
<b>TOTAL</b>	26	46	34	38	53	19

### Age

For the purposes of this analysis, the student speech samples ranked by the primary and the secondary teachers were categorised as younger or older student samples. For the primary teachers, the year 4 samples were classified as younger while the year 7 samples were classified as older. For the secondary teachers, however, the year 7 samples were classified as the younger and the year 9 as the older. The proportion of younger to older student samples in the top three rankings for the sentence repetition and for the description samples were then determined. The teachers placed 16 younger student samples compared to 20 older student samples in the top three rankings of the sentence repetition samples. This differed from the description samples where only 10 younger student samples compared to 26 older student samples were placed in the top three positions. The difference between the two types of samples is understandable when the nature of the tasks used in the samples is considered. That is, the description task is more cognitively and linguistically demanding than the sentence repetition task and so provides the students with a greater opportunity to demonstrate differences in

their abilities. In turn, maturity, life experiences and level of education of the students all interact with age to influence the teachers' perceptions of their different linguistic and cognitive capacities.

### **Gender**

It appears that there were few gender differences in the rankings. When both rankings are considered together, there are 34 male samples compared to 38 female samples in the top positions. However, the differences are greater when the type of speech sample being ranked is considered. That is, in the ranking of the sentence repetition samples, there were 14 male compared to 22 female samples in the top three positions. However, with the description samples the situation was reversed with 20 male samples compared to only 16 female samples in the top positions.

### **SES background**

The SES background of the students would appear to have a greater effect on the teachers' rankings than either age or gender. In the teachers' ranking of the sentence repetition task, 26 of the samples in the top three rankings were from students with high SES backgrounds compared to only 10 samples from students with low SES backgrounds. Similarly, in the description task, 27 samples from students with high SES backgrounds were ranked in the top three positions compared to only 9 samples of students with low SES backgrounds. In total, the teachers ranked 53 samples from students with high SES backgrounds in the top three positions compared to only 19 samples from students with low SES backgrounds.



#### 6.4 Criteria used to determine rankings

In each of the four schools, the teachers were audio taped while they discussed the ranking of the student samples. These recordings were transcribed and analysed to determine the criteria teachers used to rank the samples. In turn, these criteria were categorised into sections relating to pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and language use. The criteria are reported here with reference to the way the teachers applied them.

##### 6.4.1 Pronunciation

The criteria related to pronunciation used by the teachers included the students' general articulation and pronunciation, the omission and substitution of sounds and nasality.

The teachers also noted rising and falling intonation, the tone of speech, the use of stress and the flow and speed of the students' speech.

##### **Articulation**

Teachers in all the schools referred to the students' "articulation" when ranking the speech samples. However, their views on the relative importance of this criterion varied. The teachers in the high SES primary school discussed how the appropriate articulation of sounds and words is a concern with younger students. They said that in their school, young students with articulation problems are usually referred to a speech therapist. In most cases, this is no longer a problem by year 4. They claimed that the teachers in the higher year levels are more concerned about the content of the student's speech than articulation. Teachers in the low SES primary school also discussed the relative importance of articulation and content in their judgements of speech.

Interestingly, in this case it was the year 7 teacher who placed greater importance on

articulation and the pre-primary teacher who challenged this and suggested that the content of the speech was more important. In the high SES secondary school, the teachers all used "articulate"<sup>32</sup> to refer to formal speech where sounds normally reduced or omitted in spontaneous speech were carefully enunciated. Articulation was an influential criterion used by the primary teachers despite them having been told that the students were taped in an informal situation. This was also the case with the English teachers in the low SES secondary school. However, in this instance the importance of articulation as a criterion was challenged by the society and environment teacher who argued that how something is said should not matter. He maintained that articulation was simply a matter of dialect difference and as such was a "class issue". The year 11 English teacher argued that it was important in the sense of what was appropriate to particular contexts and the year 9 English teacher claimed there was a right and wrong way to pronounce words and student speech should be judged accordingly. Although, the society and environment teacher reiterated his opinion a number of times, he usually conceded to the English teachers saying that they had greater expertise in the area.

It is interesting to note that the teachers used "articulate" [atɪkjulət] to refer to the quality of the students' speech rather than the eloquence or the quality of what the students said as the term often is used in everyday conversation. For example, the year 9 English teacher in the high SES secondary school said;

*"She had a very even tone but I think she ..umm was quite articulate..I thought she was clear."*

Also of interest, is the way the teachers associated articulation with particular types of

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<sup>32</sup> Italics and quotation marks denote the exact words used by a teacher during the ranking process.

accents and in turn appeared to be influenced by the status of these. For example, teachers in Schools J, K and L associated careful articulation with a "*cultured English*" accent, with being "*polite*" or with being "*posher*". On the other hand, less formal articulation of particular sounds was associated with an "*Aussie accent*", an "*ocker accent*" or a "*poor accent*" and given as a reason for ranking some speech samples lower than others.

### **Pronunciation**

The criterion of "pronunciation" was closely related to that of articulation but also included reference to the way particular words were pronounced. Some of the teachers referred to the way students did not follow the model of alternative pronunciations of /a/ and /æ/ in "dance" and "plant" while repeating the sentences<sup>33</sup>. Some of the teachers also noted the "omission" of sounds as problems in the student speech samples. These included the pronunciation of "going to" as [gʌnə], "dropped consonants" from the ends of words, the shortening of words and the contraction of medial sounds such as in "Saturday" pronounced as [sætədeɪ].

During the ranking process most of the teachers also used "*incorrect pronunciation*" to discriminate between samples. They noted that some students' pronunciation of /ɛs/ was "*too long*". They claimed that some students were incorrectly pronouncing [tu] as [tə] while others were omitting an initial /h/ sound. The teachers also discussed what

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<sup>33</sup> As described in the methodology, the sentence repetition task included two sentences which were the same except for the alternative pronunciation of [dance] and two others with the alternative pronunciations of [plant].

they deemed to be inappropriate substitutions such as /t/ for /d/, /f/ for /θ/, /d/ for /ð/, /ŋk/ for /ŋ/ and /w/ for /r/. Although many of these particular features are associated with non-standard speech, the teachers criticised them for being examples of "poor" or "careless" pronunciation or as being inappropriately casual or informal. In some instances, the teachers associated the use of these variants with immaturity. In all cases, the teachers ranked samples containing non-standard variants lower than those where the students used the "standard" pronunciation.

The use of the American English pronunciation of "new" as [nu] rather than the Australian English [nju] was also criticised. Interestingly, the same teachers who responded positively to a "British sounding cultured accent", claimed the Americanisation of "new" was a case of "cultural imperialism".

Some secondary teachers were also concerned about the nasality of the speech in some of the samples. One teacher described a student's nasal speech as having a "mucus sound". The teachers in School L commented that nasal speech was a common characteristic of the students' speech in their school.

### **"Expression" and intonation**

All of the teachers referred to the expressive quality of the student speech although the way they described this varied. Some teachers talked about whether the speech had "poor" or "little" expression while others saw it in terms of the amount of "life and energy" in the speech. Other teachers described the samples as either "monotone", "flat" or "mechanical" on one hand or "varied" in expression on the other. The teachers

in School J also spoke about how the use of "*appropriate expression*" indicated that the student had understood the meaning of the sentences they were imitating.

Many of the teachers identified student certain speech samples as having "*sentences that went up at the end*". In most cases, the teachers associated this intonation contour with a lack of confidence and with seeking approval from the listener and said this was why they viewed it negatively. Interestingly, many of these teachers themselves demonstrated high rising terminals (HRT) during the taping of the ranking process.

Some of the same teachers who criticised the high rising terminal also negatively evaluated other speech because the "*sentences dropped off at the end*". The teachers called this intonation pattern "*fading out*" and saw it as a problem because it made speech unclear and difficult to hear. The teachers also claimed that this type of speech made the speaker sound unsure of what they were saying and, in turn, the teachers associated its use with a general lack of confidence.

The teachers also criticised some students for not placing stress on the appropriate part of the sentence. In some cases, the teachers claimed the speech was "*lacking in character*" because the student did not place the stress appropriately.

The pace and flow of the students' speech was noted by many teachers who claimed some students spoke without appropriate pauses and others spoke very quickly. In some cases, rapid speech was negatively associated with the contraction of sounds such as "*they will to they'll*". In some cases, however, it was seen to indicate that a student

was confident. Rapid, but clear speech, was also favourably contrasted with "*slow, boring*" speech.

#### 6.4.2 Vocabulary

The aspects of vocabulary discussed by the teachers during the ranking process included the "*breadth*" or "*narrowness*" of the student's vocabulary, their use of imprecise descriptors and informal terms, word replacements and the "*use of character names*" when describing a film.

The teachers in Schools I and L referred to the extent of the students' vocabulary when ranking the description samples. The teachers ranked the students who did "*not [use] many descriptive words*" lower than those who provided a "*more detailed description*", used "*more words correctly*" and were not "*searching for words*".

The teachers in School I, also viewed the use of "*words such as stuff, heaps and heaps [and] like this and that*" negatively and associated their use with a lack of vocabulary. They claimed the samples containing these terms were "*not very descriptive*" and the students using them were seen as "*not having much to say*". The teachers in School K also criticised a student for using "*sort of*" at the end of a sentence while those in School L criticised its use at the beginning of a sentence. The extent of this criticism, however, contrasts with the teachers' own behaviour because they also frequently used these forms. For instance, the teachers in Schools I, K and L used "*sort of*" a total of 54 times during the ranking process.

The teachers in Schools I and K criticised students who replaced words in the sentence repetition task. In School I, the year 4 teacher suggested that the student who replaced "father" with "dad" could have done so because of "*a short-term auditory memory problem*". In School K, the teachers also saw this particular replacement as being caused by a poor memory although in this case, it was not described in pathological terms. The teachers in Schools I and L also noted that some students said "*brought*" instead of "*bought*" in the sentence repetition task. Several times when this substitution was noted, the teachers discussed the level of confidence of the students concerned. This would seem to indicate that the use of this particular incorrect term influenced the teachers' perception of the students' level of confidence. This perception could in turn have been influenced by the students' backgrounds which, in the instances, were all low SES. However, as the correct use of these terms is also associated with language development, it is difficult to determine which of these aspects was influencing the teachers' perception.

The teachers in School K noted that several of the students used the characters' names when describing a film they had recently seen. In one instance, two descriptions where students had used characters' names were played one after the other. After the first tape, which was of a year 9 student from a high SES background, the teachers claimed that this feature showed "*a greater level of language formality*" and thus a higher level of competence in the student concerned. However, the next tape was a year 7 student from a low SES background whose film description was also very detailed. Following that tape, the teachers modified their views and evaluated the use of the characters' names relative to the amount of detail provided. The capacity of the student to provide

sufficient detail in a summarised form was then deemed more important than the use of specific characters' names in the ranking process.

### 6.4.3 Grammar

The grammar-based criteria referred to by the teachers included the use of full sentences, tense changes within a sentence, incorrect irregular past tense use, the use of the second person pronoun "you" instead of the second person possessive "your", and the use of "youse" as a second person plural pronoun form. Additional criteria included jumping from one concept to another or being disjointed, speaking in short bursts of words, using a narrative structure or a chronological structure, backtracking and the overuse of discourse markers.

#### **The use of full sentences**

The teachers in Schools I, K and L all referred to the students' sentence structure when ranking the description samples. In School I, the teachers spoke positively about students who "*formed sentences*" and descriptions that contained "*sentences that were rounded off*". The teachers in School K ranked student speech samples which showed "*no sentence structure*" lower than those with sentence structure. Similarly, in School L, the teachers criticised samples which lacked "*full sentences*" or were "*all one sentence linked by 'and'*". The teachers also criticised some samples because the students used sentences with more than one idea expressed in them.

#### **Incorrect forms**

The teachers in School L also noted that some students would start a sentence in one tense "*then finish the sentence but like in a completely different tense*". A teacher also



noted that one of the students used the incorrect irregular past tense form for "rang" and quoted her as saying "*They ranged up the airforce.*" Another teacher went on to suggest that this student used a "*little kid's speech pattern*".

The teachers also discussed how a student had substituted *you* for *your* in his description;

*"and 'your' he said 'you' in one of them I got. (Mmm) He somehow changed 'your' it wasn't ..pronunciation."*

The teachers ranked those students whose speech had grammatical "errors" lower than those whose speech was seen as grammatically "correct".

### Youse

Only the teachers in Schools I and K noted the use of "*youse*" as a plural form for the second person pronoun "you". The teachers in School I discussed its use in relation to the speech of students in low SES schools and compared the speech of those students to that of their current students. For instance, the pre-primary teacher remarked;

*"In this area the children tend to come in speaking quite nicely and they don't use 'cum' and 'gow' and 'twenny'<sup>34</sup> and 'youse' guys."*

It would seem that in this primary school the use of "*youse*" was strongly associated with the use of other non-standard forms, such as in pronunciation, and with low SES. However, in School K, it was discussed in relation to the use of inappropriately informal language, one teacher describing it as "*cops and guys and youse and these slangy things*". In this case, the secondary teachers associated this pronoun with

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<sup>34</sup> These words were said with a pronounced non-standard accent and in a harsh tone so that come was [kɒm]; go was [gəʊ] and twenty was [tweni].

inappropriate and informal language and contrasted its use with the speech of another student who the teacher believed spoke in a more formal manner and in a way that was better adjusted to the audience.

### **Cohesion**

During the ranking of the descriptive samples, the teachers discussed the cohesion of the students' speech in a number of ways. In Schools I and L, the teachers described some students as "*jumping from one concept to another*" or their descriptive texts as being "*disjointed*". The teachers in School L also criticised some students for "*speaking in short bursts of words*".

On the other hand, the teachers in Schools K and L were positive about the speech of those students whose descriptions were structured as a narrative or in a linear or chronological way. However, the teachers were critical if a student backtracked to add more information.

### **Fillers or discourse markers**

The teachers in all of the schools were very critical of the students who used fillers or discourse markers such as "*umm*" in their descriptions. In School I, the teachers put a student last in the rankings "*simply because of the number of umms, umm*" in her description. In School J, the absence of "*umms and ahs and things like that*" in a student's speech was viewed positively. In School K, the use of "*umm*" at the end of sentences was criticised and one student was ranked very low because her description was deemed to be "*all umm and then umm and umm and umm*". This characteristic was also associated with a lack of structure in the student's speech. Finally, in School L the

teachers associated the use of *umm* with the slurring of words in one student's speech and criticised the use of *umm* as a conjunction in another student's description.

As with the use of "sort of", the teachers criticised the use of discourse markers but used them frequently in their own speech. The following extracts from the teachers' discussions provide some examples of this.

*"umm (pause)...mm..the umm I thought some of the children ..words like umm when they heard 'dance' and they said 'dance'"*

*"Umm sort of and then he went ...ah.."*

*"Lots of 'ands' (Oh, right)..lots of 'ands'...she even began sentences with and..and this..and that umm and a handful of asides like she would say a sentences a..n..d she'd like you know, like go ah..umm then they're hiding from Cal, whose her ..um fiance. And then back over to the umm you know then back over to the story. (Mmm) sort of thing. You know a handful of those asides throughout it. Umm confident. Certainly. "*

#### 6.4.4 Use of language

The criteria related to language use included students' descriptions matching what the teachers expected, the use of an "appropriate" amount of detail, having an "appropriate" introduction and using "appropriate" volume.

#### **Appropriate descriptions**

The teachers in School L spoke about the students' speech in terms of what they deemed appropriate in a description task. However, what was "*appropriate*" was never explicitly stated but the term was used as if understood by the other teachers involved in the ranking. The teachers talked about the structure of the discourse; whether it had a narrative structure, or was linear or chronological. The amount of detail provided by the students was also frequently used as a criterion for judging the relative merit of the

samples. Some samples were deemed too detailed, giving "*blow by blow detail*" that was "*painful*". On the other hand, some were deemed to be not detailed enough, relying too heavily on the listener to fill in the details. As one of the teachers commented:

*"Kids obviously think we're very very good at filling the gaps."*

The students were also criticised if they did not "*name their topic*" before they started the description. This criticism was made despite that fact that the teachers had been told that the topic had sometimes been named during discussion about the task and that this dialogue had been cut from the sample.

### **Appropriate volume**

All of the school-based groups discussed the volume of the student speech and whether they considered it appropriate or not. During these discussions, there were a number of references to other characteristics, particularly to those associated with a soft voice. In School I, the teachers thought the soft voices lacked expression. In School J, the teachers thought the soft voice of one speaker indicated that she was quiet and shy. However, a different speaker who had a soft voice was thought to articulate well and so to be quite clear. In School K, one of the English teachers thought the students with soft voices were hard to hear and therefore should be considered to have poor communication skills. However, the society and environment teacher objected saying that it "*depends on the audience*". Later, these same teachers associated a student's soft voice with sounding "*naïve*" and another's with appearing to have "*slurred*" speech. Lastly, in School L, the teachers thought a soft voice suggested the speaker was shy and lacked confidence. A different soft voice was seen to have "*no character*" and to "*lack variation*". Another student with a soft voice was seen to have "*never said anything*".

The teachers in School L were the only ones in the study to comment on a student's loud voice, saying that it indicated he was confident. It was also associated with gender as one of the teachers immediately commented, "*Oh boom, that's a boy!*" The teachers went on to say that this volume indicated that the student was "*really trying*" but later they were very critical of his efforts, finding fault with many aspects of his pronunciation and intonation.

#### 6.4.5 Content of student descriptions

The teachers also referred to the content of the students' descriptions while they were ranking the samples. In many cases, however, this was accompanied by on-going discussion about the relative importance of content and quality of speech as competing criteria in the ranking process. Although some groups of teachers agreed they would consider only the quality of speech in judging the samples, they continued to refer to the content when ranking the descriptions. On the other hand, some groups who agreed that it was the content of the descriptions that was the important aspect, continued to rank according to the quality of the students' speech.

The criteria the teachers applied when judging the students' speech included whether they seemed to understand the task, their ability to summarise the film, how well they expressed their ideas, the structure and sequencing of the content of their descriptions, the quality of the content and whether their oral descriptions would support their writing.

### **Task requirements**

When ranking the samples, several teachers in School K referred to what was required by the description task. Where the students were felt to have met the requirements they were viewed favourably. On the other hand, the teachers in School J negatively viewed a student who was *"not really answering the ...what's being asked of him"*.

The teachers in the different schools appeared to have a range of expectations which they applied when judging how well the students had completed the task. In School I, the teachers favoured those samples where the students provided *"sufficient detail"* and whose descriptions were *"clear"* and *"explicit"*. Conversely, those samples which *"lacked information"* or were *"too short"* were viewed negatively.

In School J, the teachers spoke positively about those samples where the students structured their description of their houses to help the listener orientate. The teachers were particularly positive where the students did this by *"sequencing"* their content. These teachers, like those in other schools, also referred to the amount of detail the students provided. They appeared to have a common understanding of what was *"enough"* detail and when a student had provided *"too much"* or *"not enough"* detail. The teachers also positively viewed descriptions that were *"precise"* and *"created an image easily"*.

In School K, the teachers made many references to the content of the students' descriptions during the ranking process. They referred to the students' ability to summarise the film they were describing and to how well the students *"told the story"* of

the film. Students who only spoke about how they felt about the film and did not retell the story or refer to characters or ideas were criticised. On the other hand, where a student provided too much detail and did not summarise or provide "*key points*" they were also criticised. The teachers also evaluated the content of the description in terms of its structure. Where a student had presented his description in a manner the teachers described as a "*stream of consciousness*", he was criticised for his lack of structure. The teachers also referred to whether the content was entertaining or demonstrated a student had a sense of humour or was relaxed. Another interesting discussion in School K related to the value of the content in terms of whether it would transfer readily to writing. The year 11 teacher used this criterion but when reminded by the year 9 English teacher that they were assessing speech, was willing to discount this aspect. However, she later returned to it in discussing a different speech sample and on this occasion was not challenged. The teachers in this school also had a number of debates about the relative importance of the content and the quality of the speaking voice or the "*clarity*" of the speech. Although content was considered very important, the sample which was deemed to have the better quality of speech was usually ranked above the one which had "*better content*".

In School L, the teachers also ranked the samples with reference to the content. They referred to the ideas the students expressed in their descriptions of a film. Where a student was deemed to have expressed their ideas well, the teachers ranked them above another who had not done so. Other students were criticised when they did not provide enough information or when the information was poorly structured. The teachers would seem to have expected the students to construct their descriptions like a narrative.

During the discussion, the teachers negatively referred to descriptions in the following

ways: "non-narrative", "certainly non-narrative" and "completely non-narrative". On the other hand, samples were positively viewed where they were described as "certainly narrative", "slightly more narrative" or "the most narrative". One of the teachers wanted to rank a sample higher than another teacher had suggested because, "-it was more narra- for me it was more narrative, it at least had a conflict".

### 6.5 Relationships between background factors and teachers' perceptions

The relationships between the way the teachers defined Standard Australian English, their backgrounds, their attitudes to language variation and how they perceived student speech were analysed to determine if any patterns existed. First, the information relating to each teacher was examined and a summary of the relationships between the different factors was made. An example of the way the relationships were considered is presented here as a case study. Then, the information relating to each of the teachers was collated and examined for trends in the relationships and is presented in the section following the case study.

#### 6.5.1 Case study

David is a society and environment teacher in School L and is in his mid-twenties. He was educated in government schools in a middle SES metropolitan area. He holds a Bachelor of Education Degree, majoring in economics and has been teaching for four years. He has not attended any professional development courses related to language use. His attitude to variation in general and to the use of variants is slightly liberal.

David defined Standard Australian English as "Language that is commonly used by Australians that has been accepted by Collins" and its key characteristics as "Generic colloquialisms accepted by the majority



*of people within a specific geographical area*. There are some interesting seemingly contradictory aspects to this definition which are reflected in the criteria David referred to when ranking the student speech samples. David's definition appeals to two different standards, firstly general acceptance, and secondly codification, as exemplified in the Collins dictionary. This tension between the standards he applies was also evident during the ranking process when David argued that any pronunciation only needed to be "acceptable" but then claimed that it must also be "consistent with spelling". While David saw pronunciation as a matter of "dialect", the English teachers in his group argued that there was a "correct" way to pronounce words. Although David challenged the English teachers' judgement of pronunciation several times during the ranking process, he conceded to their judgements on the basis that they had "more expertise" in the area. During these arguments, David cited his English born parents' correction of his "Aussie accent" as evidence that judgements about pronunciation were arbitrary. He also spoke about the variation in his own speech and of his acceptance of the non-standard features in the students' speech.

David argued for the use of criteria which emphasised how well the students could be understood when his group were ranking the student speech samples. These criteria included clear articulation, a varied tone, appropriate pace and appropriate intonation patterns.

David's perceptions of variation in speech were generally more liberal than indicated by his slightly liberal attitude rating. For example, when a colleague argued that the students' "poor" speech was evidence that the English language was "deteriorating", David claimed that it could just as easily be seen as "developing". Similarly, when the use of terms such as "stuff" was criticised and associated with a lack of vocabulary, David asserted that it was just something "kids do a lot when they describe things".

At other times, however, David did attribute characteristics to the students on the basis of their speech. For instance, he described students who spoke softly as lacking confidence and claimed they "hid behind their words".

However, generally David's perceptions of student speech reflected his

liberal attitudes and were influenced by his life experiences. They were also consistent with general findings that younger teachers with less teaching experience are more tolerant of language variation than are older, more experienced teachers.

#### 6.5.2 Summary of the relationships

The relationships between the way the teachers defined Standard Australian English and how they perceived student speech were examined. The analysis revealed, as in Study One and Study Two, that the definitions of Standard Australian English written by the teachers generally were consistent with their perceptions of students' speech. On one hand, those teachers who described Standard Australian English as "*correct*", "*proper*", "*appropriate*", "*expected*" and "*formal*" also applied these standards when ranking the student speech samples. On the other hand, the teachers' whose definitions emphasised "*readily communicated*", "*unaffected*", "*straightforward*" and "*commonly used*" tended to be more tolerant of variation in the students' speech.

In this study, as in the previous two, the way the teachers judged the student speech samples was generally consistent with their attitude ratings and the way they defined Standard Australian English. The teachers in this study had the lowest attitude ratings of all the studies and their definitions of Standard Australian English tended to emphasise "correct" forms, especially pronunciation. This conservatism was reflected in their perceptions of the student speech samples, particularly in the way their rankings favoured "*well-enunciated*", "*cultivated*" speech.

The relationships between the teachers' backgrounds, their attitudes to language variation, the way they defined Standard Australian English and their perceptions of

student speech were also examined. The patterns in the relationships between factors in this third study were difficult to discern. For example, one of the youngest teachers in the study had only a slightly liberal attitude to language variation and defined Standard Australian English in terms of both common usage and codification but was very liberal in his judgements of student speech. On the other hand, another of the young relatively inexperienced teachers had an attitude rating that was more conservative than most of the other participants but, in his case this was reflected in his judgements of student speech. Moreover, he defined Standard Australian English in terms of general acceptance which was consistent with his age but not with his judgements of student speech. This aptly demonstrates the complexity of the factors impacting on teachers' perceptions and at the same time highlights the problems in analysing a large number of factors with only a small sample size. Nevertheless, while the patterns may be difficult to discern, there is considerable evidence that teachers are influenced by their own backgrounds, by how they view Standard Australian English and by their general attitudes to language variation. In this study, the influence of students' accents, especially their pronunciation, on teachers' perceptions of their speech was particularly apparent and has important pedagogical implications.

## 6.6 Conclusion

This study investigated how teachers judged the tape-recorded speech of unknown students whose age, gender and socio-economic status differed. The teachers participated in school-based groups to rank two sets of student speech samples, one having required the students to repeat sentences and the other to describe their house or a film they had recently seen. The rankings suggest that the socio-economic status of the students strongly influenced the teachers' rankings. The age of the students was also

influential, especially on the ranking of the description samples. Overall, the gender of the students had little influence on the teacher rankings, however, there were gender differences according to the task. That is, a greater number of females were ranked higher than males in the sentence repetition task while more males than females were ranked higher in the description task.

The discussion that accompanied the ranking process was tape-recorded, transcribed and analysed to identify the criteria used by the teachers. These were categorised into criteria relating to pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, language use and content of the descriptions. It would seem that the most influential criteria related to pronunciation, both in a general sense and as related to how particular sounds and words were pronounced. The teachers expressed this generally in terms of the quality of the students' *"articulation"*, *"enunciation"* and *"pronunciation"*. They described the students' pronunciation on what appeared to be a continuum with *"cultivated"*, *"enunciated"* *"polite"* speech at the positive end and *"ocker"*, *"Aussie"*, *"poor"* speech at the negative end. Consequently, the greater the degree of *"enunciation"* in the student sample, the higher the ranking. When referring to the pronunciation of particular sounds or words, most of the teachers claimed there was a *"correct"* or *"appropriate"* way to pronounce sounds and words in English. However, while they criticised those speech samples where the student used an alternative pronunciation which was associated with non-standard speech, they favoured those where the alternative pronunciation was associated with *"cultivated"* English. The teachers also referred to whether the student's speech was *"expressive"*, describing some speech with terms like *"boring"* and other samples with terms such as *"lively"*. Intonation patterns were also referred to with both high rising tone and sentences *"falling off at the end"* being

criticised. The use of stress, the rhythm and the speech of the speech were also referred to in the ranking process.

The teachers also referred to lexical criteria when ranking the tapes. When ranking the sentence samples, the teachers were very critical if the student substituted a word; even where this did not change the meaning of the sentence and the word was more commonly used. For example, one student substituted the word "dad" for "father" and some teachers even claimed he had a short-term memory problem. The criteria used when ranking the description samples were broader, referring to the "*breadth*" or "*narrowness*" of the student's vocabulary, the amount of detail provided and the use of terms such as "*lots of stuff*", "*like this*" and "*sort of*". It was interesting to note that while the teachers were very critical of the students' use of these sorts of terms, they also used them in their own discussions.

The teachers' criteria also included reference to the form of the students' descriptions. The teachers' referred to the correct use of verbs and pronouns, to the use of full sentences and to the appropriate structure of the students' descriptions. The teachers seemed to expect the students' descriptions to be either narrative, chronological or linear in structure. They also criticised the use of discourse markers in some students' descriptions despite using them frequently in their own discussions. The teachers appeared to have a shared understanding of what was an "appropriate" description although the specific criteria used to determine this were not explicitly discussed. It seemed that the descriptions were required to have the "appropriate" amount of detail, the "appropriate" structure and be spoken with "appropriate" volume.

In most of the school-based groups, the teachers had an on-going discussion about the relative importance of criteria related to the content of the students' descriptions versus the quality of their speech. Although some groups agreed to focus on the content, their discussion and rankings suggest that the quality of the students' speech was more influential. The criteria related to content used by the teachers included the students' understanding of the task, their ability to summarise, appropriately structured discourse, the quality of the content in terms of interest and appropriateness and the degree to which the oral description would support a student's writing.

The relationships between the way the teachers defined Standard Australian English, their backgrounds, their attitudes to language variation and how they perceived student speech were examined. Most of the teachers tended to perceive student speech in a way that was consistent with their definitions of Standard Australian English. Their perceptions of student speech also were generally consistent with their attitude ratings, particularly where those attitudes were conservative. The other relationships between the factors were difficult to discern. Although there were trends such as the younger, less experienced teachers holding views that were more liberal and being more tolerant of variation in student speech, there were also exceptions.

## CHAPTER 7

### Major Findings

This chapter will report the main findings common to the three studies undertaken in this research and discuss these with reference to the literature. Firstly, the differences in the way the teachers defined Standard Australian English and the impact of this on their perceptions of student speech are discussed. Next, the relationships between the teachers' backgrounds and their attitude to language variation are explored. Finally, key themes which emerged from the teachers' perceptions of student speech in the three studies are discussed.

#### 7.1 Teachers' definitions of Standard Australian English

As part of this research, the teachers wrote their own definitions of Standard Australian English. These definitions differed greatly and represented a range of perspectives. These included: the appropriate use of language, a stress on codification, reference to a common, widely understood form of the language, characterised by use in institutions, or as it stood in contrast to other forms of English. Some teachers stressed very formal, prescriptive language use while others emphasised colloquial language which was seen as characteristically Australian. There was also a range of authorities appealed to in the teachers' definitions. These included the "*powerful, dominant group*", the "*educated*", institutions and newsreaders. One definition referred to the "*Queen's English*" as the standard. A similar difficulty with defining a standard variety has also been described in the literature (Macaulay, 1977:68; Kaldor, 1991:69; Trudgill, 1999:117).

The key features of Standard Australian English that were identified by teachers also varied in a number of ways. Many of the teachers referred to "conventions", but applied different standards to these including what is "good", "proper", "acceptable" and "correct". The correct use of verbs, nouns, verb agreement, tenses, plurals, synonyms, antonyms, apostrophes and prepositions were mentioned specifically as key features. One of the teachers noted that she found it easier to say what Standard Australian English was not, rather than what it is. Others similarly defined the standard as being "not swearing or slang", "not colloquial" and "not abbreviated". Although, the key features the teachers nominated varied, many implied that they should apply to all the contexts where speech and writing are used. For example, one teacher claimed that the key features of Standard Australian English included "*Language spoken in all forms & levels ie in courts; offices and playgrounds. SAE is used in all contexts*". A few of the teachers, however, identified different levels of formality and consequently accepted that colloquialisms and idioms could be used appropriately according to the context. Some teachers also noted standards of speech production with reference to the use of clearly spoken English, speaking in full sentences, speech that is appropriately sequenced and that is not repetitious. Only two of the teachers' definitions noted differences between the conventions of speech and those of writing.

A common understanding of what Standard Australian English is and what its conventions are is particularly important given its role in education. In Western Australia, students are expected to demonstrate competency in Standard Australian English as an outcome of schooling. The Curriculum Framework provides guidelines for the education system in achieving this and other outcomes mandated by law. According to this framework, the definition of Standard Australian English is:



*"Standard Australian English refers to those forms and usages of Australian English that make up the dominant languages of government, business, education and public life in Australia. It includes both oral and written language." (Curriculum Council, 1998:87).*

However, in this research, very few of the teachers' definitions of Standard Australian English reflected that of the Curriculum Framework. Furthermore, all but five of the teachers judged student speech in a way that was consistent with how they defined Standard Australian English. This suggests that how teachers define the standard variety has important implications for education as will be discussed in the next chapter.

It would seem that many of the teachers in this study have an idealised view of Standard Australian English. The tendency to idealise the standard may be the result of the process by which it develops. That is, standard varieties of a language develop as a result of intervention in natural language processes (Hudson, 1980:32; Joseph, 1987:16; Cheshire & Milroy, 1993:5; Baldauf, 1998:5). As part of this intervention, a set of abstract norms is created and these do not consistently reflect actual usage (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985:244; Milroy & Milroy, 1991:22-3; Fromkin & Rodman, 1993:284; Baldauf, 1998:5; Carter, 1999:70). It would seem that these abstract norms in turn become idealised "levels of excellence" which are very difficult to achieve in spontaneous speech. In the current research, an example of the idealised levels of excellence was the way some teachers expected students to speak in complex sentences and to speak without hesitation or repetition. The difference between the "ideal" standard and the "actual" use may increase where the standard variety is also the official written variety, as is the case in Australia. In the current research, the difference between the idealised norms and actual usage was also demonstrated by the fact that the teachers' own speech often did not reflect the standards they expected of their students.

## 7.2 The relationship between the teachers' backgrounds and their attitude to language variation

The relationship between the teachers' attitudes to language variation<sup>35</sup> and background factors<sup>36</sup> such as gender, age, education, teaching experience and professional development was investigated. While the results specific to each particular study are reported in its findings chapter, the overall results are presented here. Perhaps the most important finding from this analysis was that although this group of teachers appeared to be relatively homogenous, they were in fact quite diverse. The small sample size does not allow for any strong claims to be made. Trends in the data, however, are interesting.

### **Gender**

Gender was a particularly difficult factor to examine, because of the small numbers involved. With that caveat in mind, the five male teachers were found to be more conservative in their attitudes to language variation than were the females. This cannot be explained by differences in age because the general spread of ages for the male teachers was consistent with that for the female teachers. The average number of years of teaching experience for the males was also similar to that for the females. However, there was a greater proportion of less experienced male than female teachers which should have favoured more liberal attitudes. This is not consistent with research which suggests that male teachers are generally more tolerant towards variation than female teachers (Hamilton-Kelley, 1994:38). Other research has also found that females favour

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<sup>35</sup> A summary of all the teachers' attitude ratings for both variation in general and for the use of specific variants of English is provided in Appendix I.

<sup>36</sup> The teachers' background is detailed in the Method (pp94-6) and a collation is provided in Appendix J.

the standard forms over the non-standard ones more so than do males (Münstermann, 1989:172-4; Labov, 1991:205-6).

### Age

While the younger teachers were generally more liberal in their attitudes to language variation than the older teachers, there were exceptions to this pattern. As Figure 7.1 shows, the 30-39 year old teachers were slightly less liberal than the 40-49 year olds in their general attitude to language variation. The 40-49 year old teachers had the most liberal attitudes to the use of variants, followed by the 30-39 year olds, the 20-29 year olds and then the 50-59 year olds.

It is also interesting to note that all the age groups except for the 50-59 year olds had higher attitude ratings for language variation in general (V) than for the use of specific variants (U).

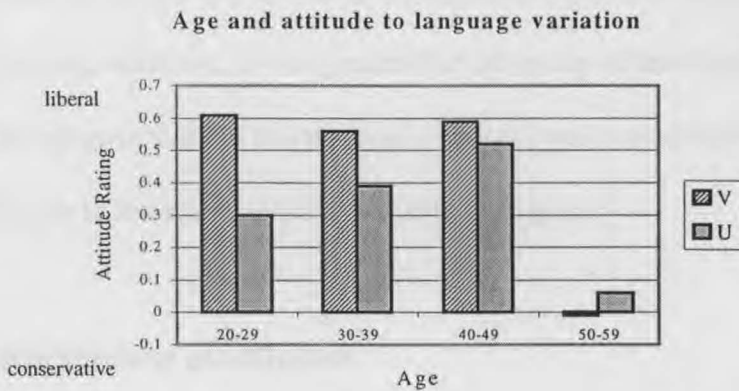


Figure 7.1 Age and attitude to language variation

Other research also has reported varied results for the effect of age on attitudes to language variation. For example, Ammon (1989:135) found that in Germany younger teachers had generally more liberal attitudes and he attributed this to their receiving

more information about variation in their training programs. On the other hand, Hamilton-Kelley (1994:37-8) did not find any differences related to age in her study of teachers in the United States.

### **Education**

The teachers involved in the research received their education in a variety of schools - in government and private schools, in urban, rural and overseas locations and in low to high SES areas. However, the majority of teachers had been educated in middle SES government schools and this group tended to hold attitudes that were more conservative than those educated in other types of schools, although it should be noted that within this group there was a wide range of ratings for variation in general and for the use of specific variants. Interestingly, the teachers who had attended government schools in high SES areas held the most liberal attitudes to variation in general while the teachers educated in rural government schools held the most liberal attitudes to the use of variants. While all the groups showed some difference between the ratings for the two aspects of language variation, it was greatest for the group of teachers educated overseas. This group's attitude to variation in general was considerably more liberal than their attitude to the use of specific variants of English.

### **Level of teaching qualification**

The relationship between the teachers' level of qualification and their attitude to language variation was also examined but there were no discernible patterns. This finding is similar to that by Abbot-Shim, Lambert and McCarthy (1998:5-11) who investigated the influence of teachers' level of education together with age and years of experience and found these factors not to be influential. In the case of the present

research, this may be because none of the teachers reported learning about language variation as part of their training.

### Teaching experience

An examination of the relationship between the teachers' professional experience and their attitude ratings for variation in general (V) showed that the less experienced teachers had generally more liberal ratings than those with more experience. However, the exceptions to this trend were the teachers with more than twenty years experience who had more liberal attitudes than those who had between sixteen and twenty years experience. In the case of the teachers' attitudes to the use of specific variants (U), the trend was similar but with the exception of the teachers with eleven to fifteen years experience who had the most liberal rating for this aspect.

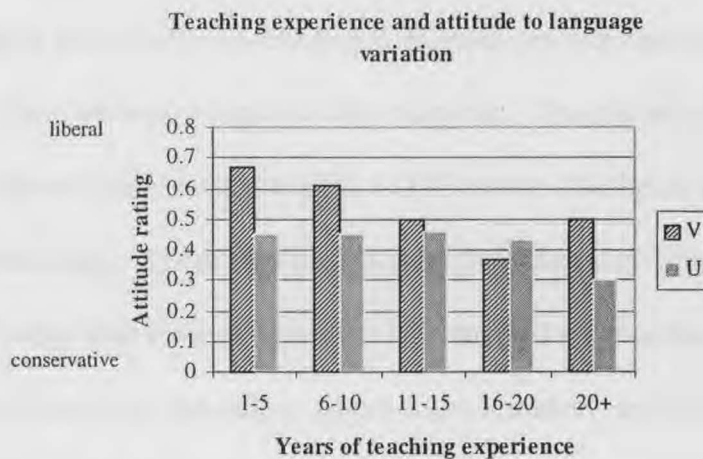


Figure 7.2 Teaching experience and attitude to language variation

These results may be influenced by the relationship between years of experience and age, although again here caution should be exercised as there were five teachers who had entered the teaching profession later in life and whose age and years of experience

did not correlate in the same way as for the other teachers. Three of these mature entry teachers had considerably more liberal ratings than their colleagues of similar age, but with more experience, while the remaining two teachers had ratings that were more conservative than their more experienced peers. As with the influence of age on attitude, the findings of other research into the relationship between teaching experience and attitudes to language variation are mixed. In Australia, Eltis (1978:295) found that the experienced teachers in his study relied more on their perception of students' speaking voices in making evaluative judgements about them than did the inexperienced student teachers. In contrast, in a study investigating the attitudes of teachers involved in the Head Start Program in the United States, Abbot-Shim, Lambert and McCarthy (1998:5-11) found that years of teaching experience was not a significant factor.

### **Professional development**

The relationship between the in-service professional development attended by the teachers and their attitude ratings was also examined. The teachers who had attended professional development related to ESL, LOTE and or Aboriginal English had the most liberal attitude ratings. Those who had attended 'First Steps' or 'Stepping Out' also had a more liberal rating than most of those who had attended other forms of professional development in language education. Abbot-Shim, Lambert, and McCarthy (1998:5-11) suggest that staff development training, together with other school-based factors, may be more influential on teacher attitudes than formal education or experience. This finding is certainly supported by the results here which suggest that training in related areas such as ESL, LOTE and Aboriginal English does influence attitude formation. It is also interesting to note that the only teachers in the present research to discuss innovative teaching practices used in response to the linguistic diversity of their

students, had attended professional development related to teaching speakers of Aboriginal English<sup>37</sup> or ESL. This may be because these particular professional development courses raise teachers' awareness of language variation and encourage teaching practices that assist students to learn Standard English while retaining their "home" varieties.

### **Summary**

While the findings of this current research can only be considered as trends owing to the small sample size, there were a number of interesting relationships between the teachers' backgrounds and their attitude to language variation. The younger teachers tended to be more liberal in their attitudes than were the older teachers although there was not a consistent relationship between age and attitude. The majority of teachers had been educated in government schools in middle SES areas and they had generally the most conservative attitudes to language variation. This research also found that the greater the teaching experience, generally the less liberal the attitude. Although the level of the teachers' qualifications was not influential, the type of professional development undertaken by the teachers did seem to make their attitudes to language variation more tolerant. This was particularly so where the teachers had attended courses related to ESL or Aboriginal English.

### **7.3 Key themes in teachers' perceptions of student speech**

This research was undertaken as three separate but related studies using three different data collection methods with similar populations of teachers. The findings common to

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<sup>37</sup> The Education Department of Western Australia has recently extended the professional development program in this area of education.

all three studies are reported here and discussed as key themes because this seemed to be the most accessible way to present the complex issues which emerged from the research. It is recognised, however, that many of the themes are closely interrelated.

### **Language of low SES students**

A recurring theme in teachers' comments about the speech of students in low SES schools was the concern that they had "*restricted*" language. However, the teachers in the high SES schools did not generally share this concern. The notion that standard and dialect speakers control a different range of language has been discussed by Ammon (1989:121). The model he developed can be adapted to demonstrate that some speakers, such as those from low SES backgrounds, may control a different range of language forms than others, such as those from middle to high SES backgrounds. Further, the proportion of standard as compared to non-standard features typically used by speakers would also differ according to social class. This idealised model, however, shows tendencies rather than predicts an individual's use of particular variant forms. It suggests that although speakers from different SES backgrounds may use many variants in common; the range they control is different and the proportion of standard and non-standard features they use also differs. That is, the middle to high SES speakers tend to use variants from mainly the standard end of the continuum and some of those in the upper portion of the non-standard sociolect end. The low SES speaker on the other hand, would tend to use those at the lower end and only the lower portion of the standard forms. The repertoire of variants used by the two groups of speakers would therefore be different, as would the variants used in particular contexts. For example, the variants used by a middle to high SES speaker in a formal situation would tend to be close to the idealised standard whereas those used by a low SES speaker are more likely



to include a greater proportion of non-standard forms. Similarly, at the informal end of the continuum, a middle to high SES speaker is unlikely to use the same non-standard variants in the same proportion as a low SES speaker.

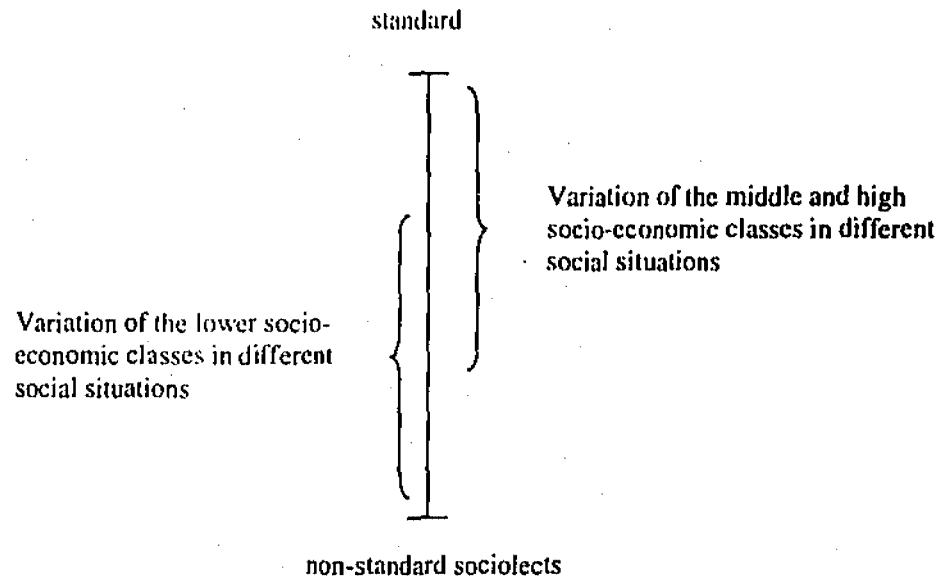


Figure 7.3: Use of sociolect and standard language forms according to social class

The students' use of standard and non-standard forms as reported by the teachers in high and low SES schools would certainly seem to fit the pattern described by the model. In the case of the low SES students, their use of non-standard forms was seen as due to their "*restricted*" language with the teachers being most concerned about the students' "*limited*" vocabulary and range of registers. Some primary teachers were also concerned that their low SES students were shy and reluctant to speak. The teachers in the high SES schools, however, did not report as many student speech problems. Moreover, where the students did use non-standard forms, their speech was considered inappropriately informal rather than inadequate.

The primary teachers in the low SES schools described their students as having "*restricted*" or in some cases "*absent*" vocabulary, a problem commonly associated with working class speech (Creber, 1972:76-7; Hughes, 1992:291) and with dialect speakers (Van Calcar, Van Calcar & De Jonge, 1989:261). From the way the teachers described the situation, it would seem that the vocabulary valued at school may not match that of the children's homes, especially if they come from a different social and cultural background. If this is the case, the lack of vocabulary valued by the teachers seems to have led them to the judgement that the children "*don't have a vocabulary*". This would also suggest that the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1974, 1991), in the form of lexical knowledge, which children bring to school is not recognised or valued. In many of the examples quoted by teachers, it would seem that there was an expectation that students would provide elaboration even when the meaning was obvious in the context. When the students did not do this, their language was considered "*restricted*". For example, the teachers were critical when pre-primary students did not name objects that were present but referred to them as "that" or did not accompany their actions with verbal descriptions of what they were doing. The judgements made by the teachers were also reminiscent of Bernstein's (1975) ideas regarding "*restricted*" and "*elaborated*" codes. It would seem that, like Bernstein (1975:176), the teachers are demanding elaboration in the belief that this will free the students from their "*local restricted structure*" and give them access to context-independent meanings.

In contrast, those teachers in high SES primary schools did not identify any major problems with their students' vocabulary. However, secondary teachers in both types of SES schools identified the lack of vocabulary as a problem for their students although the nature of their concerns differed. While the teachers in the low SES schools had a

general concern with their students' "*restricted*" vocabulary, those in the high SES schools noted only the specific instances of inappropriate use which they described as either "typical" of teenagers or related to the establishment of identity. In some cases, teachers also associated this aspect of student speech with the perception of a general deterioration in language standards within the community.

Teachers in both types of secondary school also shared a concern about their students' problems with the vocabulary as demanded within specialist subjects. This type of vocabulary problem has been described by Corson (1983:213-7) as the "lexical bar". The teachers in the present research expressed a concern that their students' failure to meet these vocabulary demands had serious implications for their future success in schooling and in the wider society. Corson (1983:218; 1999:22) suggests this may well be the case but also argues that teachers contribute to this disadvantage by judging student potential on the basis of "language on display".

The secondary teachers also spoke about their students' reluctance to learn specialist vocabulary. This may be partly explained by the fact that, depending on the content area, some 65 to 100 percent of it is based on Graeco-Latin words (Corson, 1981:189), many of which are not commonly used in everyday life. English is unusual in the way that there is a clear delineation between specialist and general use vocabulary (Corson, 1999:22). It may be that the students resent this division, as indicated by the teachers' reports that the students asked why they could not use everyday words instead of the complex vocabulary being demanded of them. According to the teachers, this resistance to new vocabulary was even more intense in the low SES schools. The teachers suggested that this resistance might be due to the students' seeing the complex,

unfamiliar language as "foreign" and the requirement that they use it having an implied criticism of their "home" language. Corson (1983:214-44) argues that such resistance has a long history and is due to the differences in terms of sound, appearance and meaning between the Graeco-Latin and Anglo-Saxon lexes of English.

Once again, the teachers in the low and those in the high SES schools tended to view the vocabulary issue differently. The teachers in the high SES school sympathised with the students and claimed the vocabulary demands being made on them were unreasonable. On the other hand, the teachers in the low SES schools saw the problem as the result of the students' restricted background experiences and their reluctance to learn new vocabulary. The difference in judgement between the teachers seems to be related to the students' SES and may indicate that students in low SES areas do indeed need special assistance with meeting the vocabulary requirements of the curriculum. However, it may also be that the teachers in low SES schools are interpreting the particularly "*limited*" style of adolescent speech (De Klerk, 1992:287; Rowe, 1992:9) as indicating a general lack of vocabulary.

A number of secondary teachers, regardless of the SES status of their students, were concerned about their students' use of slang and swearing. However, once more, the students' SES influenced the teachers' views on the issue. The teachers in the high SES school did not tend to view the problem as serious but rather as a matter of inappropriate register. On the other hand, those teachers working in low SES secondary schools saw the use of such terms as further evidence of their students' lack of vocabulary.

As with vocabulary, the teachers in low SES schools spoke about how their students had a restricted range of registers, insufficient to meet present or future communicative requirements. Robinson (1976:17) suggests that this type of judgement may be due to a misinterpretation of Bernstein's (1970) work which associated the use of particular linguistic forms with a restricted range of registers. Robinson argues that speakers may choose to use these linguistic forms as a preferred speech style rather than because they have a restricted range of registers. De Klerk (1992:287) and Rowe (1992:9) also suggest that adolescents may prefer a particularly "limited" style of speech. Students may also be using the vernacular forms to express loyalty to their "group". Cheshire (1997:186) suggests that the expression of vernacular loyalty is more important to many adolescents than is the use of the speech styles expected in school.

Interestingly, "non-standard" pronunciation was also associated with a "restricted" repertoire of language, particularly when the students came from low SES backgrounds. This was apparent in Study Three when teachers associated "non-standard" pronunciation in the speech of a student with a restricted range of registers. Moreover, in Study One and Two there appeared to be a greater expectation for students to use formal speech in the low SES schools. That is, the teachers expected the students to use formal speech even in informal contexts. For example, the teachers' criticised the way the students greeted them informally.

### **Labelling of alternative forms as developmental or "incorrect"**

In this research, the primary teachers noted many of the forms identified as pronunciation and grammar "problems". As in the previous section, how they viewed the issue differed according to the SES of their students. The teachers in the high SES

primary schools tended to consider the problem features to be either developmental or isolated instances which were of little concern. On the other hand, many of the teachers in low SES primary schools were very concerned about the widespread and serious problems their students had with "*incorrect*" pronunciation and grammar forms. However, many of the examples quoted by the teachers were alternative non-standard forms although this was not recognised by them. Cheshire (1982a) and Castilleja (1986:6) suggest that young children may not yet be sufficiently aware of stylistic variation to use the "standard" form in situations that are more formal. Although the control of these variants of pronunciation and grammar may be developmental, some of the teachers in the low SES school do not appear to view them as such. However, it may also be that the teachers of older students in the low SES schools were concerned because their students had not yet learned the alternative "standard" forms. This could indicate that they had not been taught, although some of the teachers claimed they corrected their students' speech. School based research by Cheshire (1982a:63-4) and Williams (1989:182-9) found that teachers' correction of written non-standard forms is inconsistent even within one piece of work. It may be that teachers are similarly inconsistent in the way they correct speech, especially given its "ephemeral" nature when compared to writing. Further, learning Standard Australian English may be very difficult as the students must discriminate between those forms in their current speech which are different from those in the "standard" variety and those which are the same. In any communication, they must select from among alternative language forms according to their knowledge of how the audience, purpose and context of the communication determine appropriate use. For example, some non-standard speech forms may be acceptable in casual but not formal speech. Moreover, the selection processes would be additionally difficult in spontaneous speech.

### **Low SES students' reluctance to speak**

A number of primary teachers in low SES schools spoke about their students' reluctance to speak which the teachers perceived to be related to the students' lack of confidence. In fact, the perception that students from low SES backgrounds are reluctant to speak, are shy in speaking and lack confidence was a recurring theme in the research. So prevalent was this perception, that it occurred in Study Three where the teachers ranked samples of speech of unknown students. In this context, students with soft voices, with rapid speech or whose speech had non-standard features were deemed to be lacking confidence. For example, one of the teachers in School J said, "*I don't know..he was really had no confidence at all and was speaking very low and... not really pronouncing the words properly*". This tendency to ascribe shyness to speakers of other varieties has also been reported in the literature (Malcolm, 1989; Harkins, 1990). Malcolm (1989) suggests that this perceived "shyness" may in fact be the result of students adapting to a communicative situation which differs from that which they experience in their home and community. This perception may also be due to the stereotypes teachers have about children from low SES backgrounds. Gordon (1981:51) suggests that such stereotypes may give rise to myths about speakers of other varieties.

Many teachers also discussed the impact of correcting speech errors on student confidence and how this made the decision whether to do this or not difficult. On one hand, the teachers felt overt correction would reduce their students' confidence as Carter (1995:3) suggests it may do. On the other hand, the teachers felt if they did not correct the students that their "poor speech" would persist and restrict their life opportunities. Some teachers compromised by only correcting those students whose confidence they

felt would not be affected. Other teachers corrected the students privately, which they felt preserved their confidence and the good relationship they had with them. Others corrected the students' writing but not their speech.

### **Deficit versus difference**

The contrast between what teachers said about students in high compared to low SES schools seems to indicate that deficit views are held about students from low SES areas. Several of the teachers working in low SES schools remarked that newly appointed teachers have negative attitudes towards the students and low expectations of them before they even begin teaching at the school. The teachers suggested that these new colleagues were influenced by the "reputation" of the low SES area. Other research has suggested that socio-structural factors, such as status and demography, do indeed influence attitudes (Giles & Coupland, 1991:49-53). In the current research, these attitudes would appear to be reinforced by the social and linguistic differences the teachers encounter when they work with such students. The teachers appeared to view language differences as due to deficiencies in the students and in their backgrounds and this led them to make many negative value judgements about the students and their families. Gordon (1981:51) suggests that it is common to make this sort of judgement about a speakers' cultural values based on their speech. It would seem that this view of the students led some teachers to misinterpret their behaviour and this caused conflicts in the classroom and playground. It also undermined the building of good interpersonal relationships so important to successful teaching and learning.



### **The influence of accent**

Many of the teachers identified students' general articulation and their pronunciation of particular sounds and words as problematic. However, the students' socio-economic background would appear to have influenced the way the teachers viewed these problems. The students from low SES backgrounds were often judged to have "*incorrect articulation*" or "*slurred speech*". Other judgements were expressed in moral and quasi-moral terms, as for example when the teachers called students' speech "*lazy*" or "*careless*". The concern that many of the teachers had with the "non-standard" pronunciation of the low SES students is contrary to the claim that the standard variety can be spoken with any accent (Stubbs, 1976:26; Sato, 1989:263; O'Donnell & Todd, 1991:35; Carter, 1995:146). In contrast, students in high SES areas were seen as having speech which was characterised as "*careful*" or "*good*" or as having "*correct*" articulation. The influence of "*good articulation*" on the teachers' judgements of student speech was particularly apparent in Study Three. In this study, pronunciation was the criterion teachers used most often when ranking samples of student speech. While this may have been an artefact of the task, it was the dominant criterion even when the teachers claimed to be judging the samples according to the accuracy with which the students were repeating the sentences. Similarly, it remained the dominant criterion even when the teachers claimed to be judging the description samples according to their content.

In all three studies, many of the problems teachers identified as incorrect pronunciation of sounds or words were features which are more prevalent in non-standard varieties. While teachers in low SES schools noted most of these features, some of them were

also present in the informal or casual speech of "standard" speakers. Examples commonly nominated by the teachers included the /ŋ/ sound in the word final position being pronounced as [n], "going to" as [gʌnə] and "don't know" as [dʌnoʊ]. The teachers working in a high SES school tended to see these features as examples of inappropriately casual speech or as indications of students being influenced by deteriorating community standards in speech. In contrast, those in low SES schools tended to see them as examples of the generally poor speech of their students. It may be that non-standard forms such as these were associated with the "careless" speech of low SES children. Thus, such features might be acting as a marker (Labov, 1972a:179) of social class for some of the teachers. Similarly, the association of the correct form with writing may lead to a belief that the use of an alternative spoken form reflects a poor level of literacy and education which in turn are associated with the lower or working class. However, the view taken of "non-standard" pronunciation in low SES schools may also be due to the teachers' concern that the students used these forms all the time and did not adjust their speech in formal situations. Many of these teachers expressed a concern that their students would be negatively judged if they went "*out into the world*" speaking as they did at home. Interestingly, many of the teachers themselves used these forms, particularly "going to" pronounced as [gʌnə], as evidenced in transcriptions from Study Two and Three<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Palmer (1983:199), in his seminal text "Grammar", describes [gʌnə] as a spoken form of the future verb "going to" in Standard English. He notes, however, that [gʌnə] is not acceptable in the case of the progressive form of the verb.

### **The relationship between speech and writing**

**The teachers' understanding of the relationship between speech and writing seems to have influenced the way they perceived student speech. They expressed a number of concerns which would seem to be based on the belief that forms used in speech transfer directly to writing. Other concerns would appear to have arisen because of the expectation that student speech was subject to the conventions of writing. For example, some primary teachers were concerned that students' pronunciation affected their spelling. They saw this as an important issue perhaps because spelling is perceived as being associated with full literacy and good education (Stubbs, 1980:44) and as bestowing social prestige (Scragg, 1974:Chapter 6). Further extrapolation of this association makes incorrect spelling a contravention of both written language and social conventions (Stubbs, 1980:69).**

**The influence of writing was also seen in relation to the teachers' concern about the use of "incorrect" grammar forms such as "youse", "could of" and "the woman that" in casual speech. The teachers suggested that although such forms might be acceptable in informal contexts, they may need to be corrected to prevent their use in writing. Some teachers claimed this was also the reason they criticised their students' use of non-standard verb tenses in spontaneous speech. Cheshire and Milroy (1993:11) suggest that this type of criticism of spoken forms of English commonly used for centuries may be due to the influence of the norms of written English.**

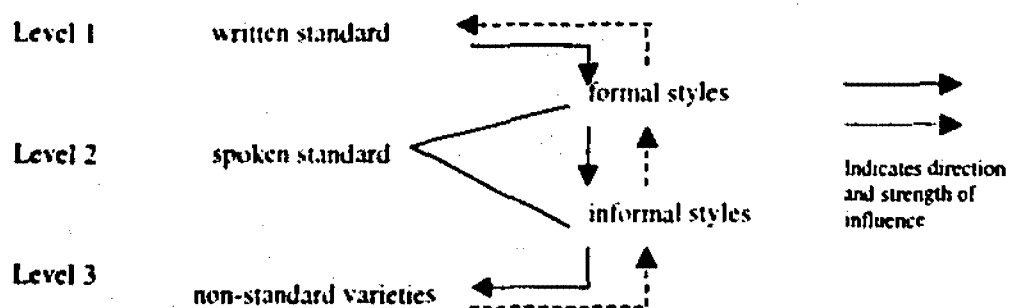
**The teachers' insistence on the need for "full" sentences in speech may also be due to the influence of writing on speech. Teachers criticised students for using "incomplete", "simple" and "short" sentences in speech. This criticism could be due to both the**

expectation that the structures used in speech will transfer to writing and the application of the conventions of writing to speech. Linguists, however, suggest that speech does not have the same structure as writing (Kress, 1979:29; Stubbs, 1980:13; Tannen, 1980; Lakoff, 1982:256-58; Tannen, 1982a; Halliday, 1985; Biber, 1988:9; O'Donnell & Todd, 1991; Georgakopoulou & Goutsos, 1997:36; Lippi-Green, 1997). Some also suggest that these two modes of language may need to be described in different ways. For example, Kress (1979:29) and Chafe (1985:103-23) suggest that the clause or idea unit, is a more appropriate structure to describe speech than a sentence. As with other aspects of language identified as problematic, it is somewhat ironical that the teachers' speech did not conform to the expectations they had for their students but rather was also characterised by the use of incomplete sentences, or phrases.

The written form of the language may also influence the teachers' expectation that students produce highly structured spoken texts. For example, the teachers discussed how oral texts needed to have a "*narrative, linear or chronological*" structure. They were critical when student oral texts were "*simplistic*", when arguments were not substantiated and when the ideas expressed were not "*logically linked*". In terms of the linguistic elements, the use of cohesive devices such as "and" and "but" were criticised as well as the more general complaint that the text "*lacked cohesive ties*". Similarly, the use of elements common to speech, such as fillers, or discourse markers, and repetition, were criticised. The conventions teachers expected in speech would seem to be more appropriate to written texts, or at least, to the most formal and planned of oral texts. The tendency to judge speech against the norms of writing is not unusual and has been reported by a number of researchers (Halliday, 1985:97; Gee, 1990: 32-6; Milroy & Milroy, 1991:65-6; Lippi-Green, 1997:23).

From the judgements made by the teachers, it seems that they may not have a thorough understanding of the differences between speech and writing yet these differences, both in form and function, have been extensively explored in the literature (Stubbs, 1980; Tannen, 1980, 1982a; Halliday, 1985; O'Donnell & Todd, 1991; Lippi-Green, 1997). Further, it would seem that the teachers are not aware of the relationships between the written standard, the spoken standard and the sociolects (or dialects) used by some students. Van Marle (1997:21) suggests there are three main areas of difference between the standard and the other varieties of a language and it would seem that these three aspects were reflected in the teachers' criticisms of student speech. The first difference refers to those aspects of the standard language which are the result of codification and so are not part of non-standard varieties. These aspects relate particularly to the written form of the standard. The influence of this aspect was seen in the way the teachers demanded that spoken texts be complex and use a variety of cohesive devices. The second area of difference refers to the characteristics present in the non-standard varieties but not the standard due to the greater ease with which change takes place in these varieties. An example of this was the use of "youse" as a second person plural form, particularly in the speech of adolescents. The final area of difference includes characteristics present in the non-standard varieties but not the standard because of the natural processes of speech. Instances in this study included, the students' use of alternative pronunciations of final /ŋ/ or the use of discourse markers such as "like" in their speech. The relationship between speech and writing in terms of these three differences is illustrated in an adaptation of van Marle's model (see Figure 7.4 below). Van Marle suggests that the standard variety exerts a stronger influence on the non-standard varieties than they do on it as is shown in the model by the solid line.

Similarly, the influence of the written form of the language is stronger than that of the spoken. In contrast, the influence of the non-standard varieties is considerably less and is represented by the broken line. The relationships illustrated by this diagram may also explain, at least in part, why the teachers' expectations were for very formal student speech, standards they themselves did not meet. It would seem that they were comparing their students' speech to an idealised form of "standard" speech which in turn was influenced by the written standard.



Adapted from van Marle (1997:19)

Figure 7.4 The written standard and the spoken non-standard varieties

### "Performance speech"

A further influence on upper primary and secondary teachers' judgement of student speech was the current practice of assessing student speech through formal talks. From the way this was discussed by the teachers, it would seem that this activity demands that speech be like "writing read out loud" and as such could be called "performance speech". The influence of these expectations would seem to have led teachers to criticise features noticed in this context, some of which are common in spontaneous speech.

The senior primary and secondary teachers spoke about aspects of speech such as intonation patterns, fluency, speed and volume mainly in the context of "performance speech". Paralinguistic aspects such as eye contact, posture and the use of gestures were also emphasised. While it is understandable that teachers might expect students to attend to these aspects in formal situations, it would seem they were also applying these demands to other situations usually associated with informal speech. This led them to criticise features such as hesitancy or the use of discourse markers which are usual in spontaneous speech.

Some teachers said they first noticed "*sentences going up at the end*" in the context of "performance speech" and then later in other contexts. The teachers tended to see students who used rising intonation patterns on statements (High Rising Terminal or HRT) as lacking in confidence and as being unsure of what they were saying. This is consistent with Horvath's (1985:118) claim that a speaker with HRT is generally seen as being in a position of powerlessness. However, while Horvath (1985:122-3) found this characteristic was more strongly associated with female teenagers from low SES backgrounds, in this research, males and females from high and low SES backgrounds were noted as using HRT. The difference between Horvath's findings and the current research may be due, at least in part, to the teachers having noticed the HRT when students were giving formal talks. The students may also be more likely to use this pattern when giving a formal talk because of their nervousness about performing such a task.

Nervousness was seen as being partly responsible for the problems associated with "performance speech". It was also associated with the students' reluctance to participate

in speech assessment tasks. However, despite it being frequently discussed as a serious problem, only one teacher reported trying to assist her students to deal with their nervous reactions. Research suggests that training and counselling can assist students deal with nervousness and may improve student performance on assessment tasks (Mandeville, 1991; Schilling-Estes, 1998).

A number of teachers in the secondary schools also identified a problem with articulation associated with "closed lips". The perception that the students had articulation problems may be related to the formal assessment situations in which the teachers identified them. For instance, one teacher noted the problem while assessing her students' speech through tasks that required them to present a formal prepared monologue to their peers. Therefore, the performance pressures felt by the students' may have led them to speak in this manner. It could be argued that the students, inexperienced in public speaking, lower their heads and mumble because of their nervousness. The teachers would also be more likely to notice and negatively evaluate this behaviour in an assessment task. These teacher observations may, however, challenge Mitchell's (1970:5) and Baker's (1970:453) assertions that this common complaint about Australian English is an unsubstantiated stereotype.

#### **Forms undergoing change**

Many of the teachers involved in this research identified forms which would seem to be undergoing change. The most noted form was the second person plural form "youse" which is also interesting because of the different ways it was viewed by the teachers. The extensive use of "youse" as reported in this research suggests that it may be a



change in progress in Australia as it is in other English speaking countries (Trudgill & Chambers, 1991:8). Chambers (1995:158-9) suggests that adolescents are language innovators and so may be using the new form more readily than their middle-aged teachers. The teachers in the low SES schools tended to treat "youse" as one of the many incorrect grammatical forms their students used in speech. In many cases, the teachers used it as a typical example of these grammatical problems. On the other hand, the teachers in the high SES schools tended to see this form as an example of speech that was inappropriate in the classroom. It was associated with slang and generally seen as acceptable in casual conversations with peers but in few other contexts.

#### **The social appropriacy of student speech**

Many issues related to the students' use of socially inappropriate speech were identified in the low SES primary schools and in both high and low SES secondary schools. Often when this issue was discussed, the teachers seemed to have a shared understanding of what was "appropriate". This understanding did not seem to recognise that what is deemed "appropriate" is culturally determined (Wolfram, Adger & Christian, 1999:75-6). Cameron (1995:17) suggests that members of complex societies must fulfil a range of "performances" according to norms or "regulatory frames" which dictate acceptable styles in such things as dress, demeanour and speech. It would seem that the teachers were expecting their students' speech and behaviour to conform to such norms. However, the teachers' discussion of this issue suggests that their norms differed from those held by their students. It would seem that some of the conflicts with students reported by the teachers were due to these differences in norms or "regulatory frames".

The teachers in the low SES primary and secondary schools were concerned that their students' only source of information and training for socially appropriate language behaviour was the school. They spoke at length about how they felt responsible for preparing their students for the language demands of "society". They discussed how their students would be negatively judged if they used their current speech patterns "out in the world" and indeed, the literature suggests that this may well be the case (Joseph, 1987:30; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988:13; Cambourne, 1990:290; Hodge & Kress, 1993:66; Cameron, 1995:30; Lippi-Green, 1997:72-3).

Some of the teachers believed that the students' non-standard speech should be changed; a view that has been debated by educators and linguists for decades. For example, Barbour (1987:242) and Noguchi (1991:30) argue that the students' speech should be changed to conform to "standard" norms. However, many other linguists argue that this is not appropriate in terms of either linguistics or natural justice (Sledd, 1983:667; Long, 1996; Fillmore, 1997; Wolfram, Adger & Christian, 1999:20-2). The teachers also discussed how the students resisted learning the "standard" forms they tried to teach them. Lippi-Green (1997:113) and Campbell (1994:8) argue that in many cases this resistant behaviour makes changing the students' speech untenable.

The teachers in the high SES schools talked about the negative influences on their students' linguistic and social behaviour as coming not from impoverished backgrounds but rather from falling standards in the media and other cultural institutions. They interpreted some features which would appear to be in the process of change, such as the use of the second person plural "youse", mentioned previously as symptoms of both linguistic and social deterioration. The contexts in which this issue was discussed

suggest that the teachers were seeing their adolescent students as "victims" of change rather than, as has been suggested in the literature, initiators of change (Chambers, 1995:158-9). Some of the secondary teachers also acknowledged that these behaviours, such as the use of slang, were due to an adolescent's need to express a separate identity. Such an opinion is in accord with Eckert's (1988:205-6) suggestion that adolescence is a time when there is a great need to assert a particular identity and differences in speech have an important role in this process. Further, Rowe (1992:6) suggests these linguistic innovations are necessary for adolescents to not only mark membership of their peer group, but also to show separation from the social groups of children and adults.

Most of the secondary teachers shared a concern about their students' swearing.

However, the way the problem was viewed differed according to the SES of the school where they were teaching. The teachers in the high SES secondary schools did not speak about the issue at length nor suggest that it might be a serious problem for their students. It was merely mentioned along with other features of student speech which annoyed them. In contrast, the teachers in the low SES school were very concerned about their students' swearing which according to their discussion was used in the classroom as well as the playground. The teachers' concern is understandable, particularly as swearing is often viewed as a matter of morals, not just etiquette (Johnson, 1993:6). However, the degree of concern contrasts with research which suggest that adolescents do not view swearing in the same manner as adults, but rather use it as socially coded language which solidifies them with their peer group (Rowe, 1992:9). In addition, the words may not hold the same vulgar connotations that adults ascribe to them (De Klerk, 1992:287).

### **The association of "poor" speech and "poor" behaviour**

Many of the teachers in low SES schools viewed their students' use of non-standard variants as indicative of poor language skills. Further, they in turn associated poor language skills with poor behaviour. This association between "incorrect" speech and poor behaviour also has been reported in the literature (Giles & Coupland, 1991:38; Cameron, 1995:82-5; Bex, 1996:39-40; Eggington, 1997:31). It would seem that teachers expect the students with many non-standard features in their speech to have poor language skills and in turn to behave badly and this may influence their behaviour towards the students. In this way, the expectation may become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Adolescents may also use vernacular speech to express anti-authoritarian attitudes (Chambers & Trudgill, 1980:98-100). It was interesting to note that in Study One and Study Two, many of the teachers in the low SES areas, particularly in the secondary schools, described instances where their students were "rebellious" as examples of their speech problems. For example, the society and environment teacher in School D recorded a student who said, "Nup, not doin' 'at" as having both a pronunciation and an attitude problem. Similarly, in School H, the teachers described their male students as frequently making judgements such as, "Urrr, this is stupid" and as referring to many class activities as "uncool". On the other hand, the teachers in the high SES secondary schools tended to see this type of language use as typical of adolescents or to be the result of a general deterioration in language standards.

### **Gender issues**

There were a number of issues related to gender differences raised by the teachers. As with other concerns these differed according to the level of schooling and socio-economic status of the students. In the primary schools, reference was made to the fact that the middle and senior boys were more influenced by their peers than were the girls. For instance, the teachers suggested that boys in their classes did not demonstrate oral language competence because it was not "cool" to do so. In the secondary schools, some teachers reported that their male students were more likely than were the female students to make derogatory comments, particularly those expressing sexist and racist attitudes. The teachers in the low SES schools raised additional gender issues not mentioned by teachers working in the high SES schools. Many of the teachers were very concerned about their male students' use of socially inappropriate language, especially where it was used to intimidate other students. The teachers felt this was not only offensive, but created a negative learning environment and discouraged other students' participation in lessons and assessment tasks. The teachers in low SES schools also reported a gender bias in the use of taboo language. Some teachers suggested that males generally used more abusive language than did females. Other teachers, however, suggested that although both younger male and female students swore to excess, by year 11 the females swore less than the males.

In Study One and Study Two, there was a tendency for teachers to attribute better developed oral language skills to female students. For example, the teachers spoke about their female students as being more confident and more willing to do oral presentations independently, rather than with other students. Where there was a choice

in format offered, the females would usually choose to present their material orally, while the males preferred to use technology such as tape recorders or PowerPoint. The teachers in the low SES secondary school also reported that their higher ability classes had a greater proportion of female students and were much easier to teach. Conversely, the lower ability classes were male dominated, both in numbers and atmosphere. The teachers contrasted the female students' behaviour in these two types of classes, commenting that in the higher ability classes they were confident and participated more readily than the males. On the other hand, in the lower ability classes the females were very reluctant to participate unless the males were removed from the class.

Interestingly, several teachers also recounted instances when their male students were very engaged in a learning activity and the female students joined in enthusiastically. This would suggest that when the learning activities gain the interest of the students, gender problems are less likely to occur.

The gender differences in the ranking of the student speech samples in Study Three are also interesting. While the female students generally were ranked higher than the males in the sentence repetition task, the males were ranked higher in the description task. It could be argued that although the teachers were strongly influenced by the students' accent during the ranking of both tasks, it was more influential in the sentence repetition task. In this task, the highly ranked females had what the teachers described as "cultivated" speech while the male students tended to have a "general" to "broad" accent. The content of the students' speech was more influential in the ranking of the description task and generally, the males were ranked higher than the females. This latter finding is inconsistent with the general belief, expressed in Study One and Two, that female students are more confident and competent speakers than male students.

### **Non-standard language use and educational success**

The teachers generally associated a failure to speak Standard Australian English with lower ability in students. Both primary and secondary teachers in the low SES schools spoke about these students as experiencing the most problems with communication and with behaving "appropriately" in school. The tendency to ascribe negative characteristics, both social and intellectual, to speakers of non-standard varieties has been reported in the literature (Eltis, 1978; Giles & Coupland, 1991:38; Garrett, Coupland, & Williams, 1999:321-50). This situation is exacerbated when non-standard varieties have low prestige and are associated with a lack of education, such as is the case in Australia. Further, some teachers in this research appear to assume that if a student does not use the standard variety and behave in "appropriate" ways then they lack the ability to do so. This assumption has also been made about dialect speakers as reported in the literature (Ammon, 1989:134). The assumption ignores the possibility that the students choose to use their home variety. Martin-Jones (cited in McKay, 1996:204-6) argues that bilingual speakers draw on the full range of their linguistic resources when meeting the demands of social communication. It may be the case that non-standard speakers also use alternative variants in creative ways. It has been found that some students are in conflict because of the competing pressures from their families and community to retain their home variety and from the schooling system to abandon it in favour of the standard variety (Romaine, 1984:20; Cheshire, Edwards, Münstermann & Weltens, 1989:5; Rickford, 1996:184). Adolescent students, who appear to be more resistant to learning the standard variety than younger students, may also be using vernacular speech to demonstrate membership of their peer group (Cheshire, 1997:186). The association between the use of non-standard varieties and lower academic ability is

a form of linguistic discrimination (Bex & Watts, 1999:7-8; Corson, 1999:14) and has serious educational implications for non-standard speakers (Cheshire, Edwards, Münstermann & Weltens, 1989:4; Gordon, 1981:97).

### **Concern about the judgements of others**

Some of the teachers in this research expressed a concern that their students' would be judged negatively when they used particular features of speech in contexts outside the school. In some cases, the teachers talked about this placing them in a difficult position. On one hand, they felt responsible for protecting their students from the negative judgements their speech would elicit if it did not conform to the standards the teachers believed society demanded. Trudgill (1975) suggests that while teachers' attitudes reflect those of the community, they may also be more strongly held because of what they perceive to be a custodial role with regard to what is "right" in English. On the other hand, the teachers wanted to accept and value the way their students spoke and focus on what they had to say. Campbell (1994:1), Corson (1999:17) and Lippi-Green (1997:131) also report this type of conflict in their research.

### **Teachers' perceptions of their role**

A number of teachers involved in this research expressed concern that they were not meeting their students' needs through the English courses currently offered in schools. However, they felt they could not change that situation. One of the reasons the teachers gave for not being able to change the English courses was that they must meet society's expectations regarding standards of student speech and behaviour. Corson (1999:17) reports that teachers are indeed limited by the social roles imposed on them by society. In the current research, the teachers argued that they had to teach Standard Australian



English because this is what society and prospective employers of their students expect. Lippi-Green (1997:131) claims this type of rationale makes teachers often unwilling promoters of a standard language ideology. Several of the teachers reported innovative and effective teaching strategies they had discovered by "serendipity". These strategies utilised the students' understanding of and interest in language and the teachers spoke about their surprise at the enthusiasm they generated. However, when asked if they would continue to use such strategies they said they would not because they did not fit in with the current courses being offered in their schools.

## CHAPTER 8

### Conclusion

#### 8.1 Summary of the major findings

The major issues raised by this research largely concern the speech of students in low SES schools and of adolescents. The way teachers describe these issues suggests that their perceptions of speech may be influenced both by the students' socioeconomic status and their level of schooling. The teachers' perceptions would also seem to be influenced by a number of other factors including the way they define Standard Australian English, their attitude to language variation, their age and teaching experience and for some the nature of the professional development they have undertaken.

There were differences in the number and nature of the problems teachers identified in the speech of students in low SES schools compared to those in high SES schools. The teachers identified many aspects of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and language use which they considered were serious problems for students in low SES schools. Many of the features of student speech criticised by the teachers were non-standard forms in common use such as final /n/ variant used as an alternative to the written standard /ŋ/, the use of "gunna" and past tense variants such as done/did. The teachers tended to view the speech of students in low SES schools as being generally "restricted" and "inappropriate". The teachers, however, identified fewer problems in the speech of students from high SES schools. Moreover, the features identified were not considered serious problems for the students.

The causes teachers ascribed to the speech problems also differed according to students' socioeconomic status. The low SES students' appeared to be viewed as the "victims" of poor home and community language models, "restricted" life experiences, chronic parental unemployment and negative peer influences. On the other hand, the high SES students' problems were seen to be mainly developmental, related to school curriculum demands, the result of adolescent rebellion or due to generally deteriorating standards in society.

Differences were also found in the way teachers at the different levels of schooling perceived student speech. There was a general tendency for the primary teachers to focus on pronunciation and grammar while the secondary teachers talked more about the students' use of language, particularly as related to social appropriacy. However, these differences were not categorical. While teachers at all levels raised a range of concerns about speech, there was a gradual shift in emphasis as the students moved through the levels of schooling. For example, the upper primary teachers were less concerned about pronunciation than the pre-primary teachers but more concerned about their students' ability to control a range of registers, a concern they shared with the secondary teachers. Interestingly, the changing emphases generally reflected the traditional hierarchical levels used to describe language, from pronunciation to vocabulary to grammar and then to language use.

There were also influences on the teachers' perceptions of speech which were consistent despite differences in both the students' socioeconomic status and level of schooling. The first of these was the influence of the written form of English on the way the teachers viewed speech. The teachers identified many speech features as problems

because they did not conform to the conventions of written English. These included criticising the use of pronunciation features such as contractions and the omission of final sounds in connected speech, expecting elaborated, well-structured oral discourse and seeing the use of common discourse markers such as "like" as a serious problem. The teachers also discussed how they corrected some features they recognised as acceptable in their students' speech because otherwise that feature would be used in writing where it was unacceptable. Many of the teachers also spoke about particular features in their students' speech as being a serious problem because they impacted negatively on the development of their reading and writing skills.

The teachers' perceptions of student speech also appeared to be influenced by their own speech. This was evident the way many teachers compared their students' speech to their own and then identified the differences they saw as problems in their students' speech. There were also teachers who interpreted these differences as evidence of deterioration in "standards". Where this was the case, the teachers' speech and the way they had learned to speak "correctly" were seen as the "standards" against which their students' speech and learning experiences were measured. Other teachers spoke about the importance of modelling "correct" speech for their students, particularly when those students came from low SES backgrounds. It was interesting to note that many of the teachers appeared to have an idealised view of their own speech. This was reflected in the differences between what they said about how they spoke and their actual speech as recorded on the audiotapes of the discussions. Moreover, many of the features they criticised in the students' speech, such as the contraction and omission of sounds and the use of "fillers" or discourse markers, were present in their own.

The relationships between the teachers' backgrounds, their attitudes to language variation, the way they defined Standard Australian English and their perceptions of student speech were also examined. Most importantly, this analysis found that although this group of teachers appeared to be relatively homogenous, they were in fact quite diverse. A number of interesting patterns in the relationships between the different factors were found. The younger teachers tended to be more liberal in their attitudes to language variation in general but less liberal in their attitudes to the use of specific variants of English than were the older teachers. It also would seem that the attitude rating for language variation in general better reflected the teachers' perceptions of student speech than did their attitude to the use of specific variants. The more experienced teachers tended to hold the more conservative views on language variation. It is, however, difficult to determine the influence of this factor as it was closely related to age. Although the level of the teachers' qualifications was not influential, the type of professional development undertaken by the teachers did seem to influence their attitudes to language variation. This was particularly so where the teachers had attended courses related to TESOL or Aboriginal English.

## 8.2 Pedagogical Implications

Of primary concern in the findings of this research is teacher perceptions that the speech of students from low SES backgrounds is deficient rather than different. It would seem that this perception is influenced by the students' use of non-standard English. If this is the case, then these students may be subject to linguistic bias. This is of particular concern where the use of non-standard varieties is also associated with lower academic ability (Bex & Watts, 1999:7-8; Corson, 1999:14) as it was in the present research. This has serious implications for the education of these students (Cheshire, Edwards,

Münstermann & Weltens, 1989:4; Gordon, 1981:97). One way to address this concern would be to increase teachers' and their students' understanding of the way language varies. In particular, it seems that teachers need to understand the relationships between standard and non-standard varieties, written and spoken forms, formal and informal registers and developmental and non-standard features.

The teachers' perceptions of student speech were also influenced by how they defined Standard Australian English. The teachers' definitions varied widely and generally did not reflect that of the Curriculum Framework. This is a particularly important issue in the current situation given that Standard Australian English is the medium of instruction, the means by which students demonstrate achievement and an expected outcome of schooling. Although, at least in Western Australia, the curriculum documents offer a broad definition this does not seem sufficient to guide the teaching of Standard Australian English. It is apparent from this research that teachers need to develop an awareness of the differences between Standard Australian English and the other varieties spoken by their students and the differences between the conventions of spoken and written language. They also need to understand that Standard Australian English has both informal and formal registers and that despite codification, it does allow for the use of a variety of forms.

Students, who come from low SES backgrounds and have non-standard features in their speech, may be disadvantaged by the predominant use of Standard Australian English in schooling. If this is the case, then the relative roles of the students' home varieties and Standard Australian English should be considered by education systems. Some researchers have argued that students should not be required to speak the standard

variety but only to write it (Gordon, 1981:102; Stubbs, 1986:95-6; Perera, 1993:10). Others have suggested that learning the standard language may lessen a student's disadvantage because it removes non-standard varieties which trigger prejudice (Barbour, 1987:242; Noguchi, 1991:30). Even if this were the case, however, students may resist learning the standard as was reported by the teachers in the current research and elsewhere (Campbell, 1994:8). This type of approach also fails to address linguistic inequity both within schools and the wider society (Sledd, 1983:667).

There were a number of issues raised about adolescent speech which indicate that teachers and their students require a better understanding of important differences in the way they communicate. For instance, the teachers were concerned about their students' use of slang and swearing. As discussed earlier, research indicates that adults and adolescents interpret the use of taboo language in different ways and these different interpretations are causing conflict in schools.

While the teachers placed an emphasis on "performance speech", they also claimed that students, particularly those from low SES backgrounds, had a restricted range of spoken registers which were inadequate to meet present and future communication needs. This suggests that the school curriculum needs to take account of the diverse spoken language needs of their students and develop courses and assessment practices that better reflect those needs.

The social appropriacy of student speech was also an important issue identified by teachers in this research. The nature of the issues raised indicated that teachers may need to understand that not all groups share the same views of what behaviour is

appropriate and therefore that the frames of reference that guide their behaviour may differ from those of their students. Some of the conflict teachers reported having with students could well have arisen because of this lack of understanding. Research also suggests that this type of conflict may impact negatively on a student's sense of identity (Rickford, 1996:184). This has important implications for how teachers interpret and carry out their role as "language guardians" (Corson, 1999:17) and for the way they manage student behaviour.

The findings of this research also indicate that teachers and students need to increase their understanding of the way language varies and how this affects their use of language. They also need a greater understanding of how particular types of language use might be judged by others. This suggests a need to develop pedagogical approaches and materials which will assist students to learn the language required to meet their present and future needs. However, this should be done in a way that values and uses the students' current linguistic knowledge.

Many of the teachers involved in this research discussed how their involvement had made them think a lot more about speech and its importance in education. After being involved in the research, one of the English teachers working in a low SES secondary school, took her interest further and decided to do a course in sociolinguistics at a local university. As part of her assignment work, she investigated her students' use of speech, focussing on spoken language choices they made and their use of slang and swearing. She involved her students in her investigations, noting their enthusiasm and interest in what the research revealed. She shared these findings with the school staff and this led to changes in the way taboo language was managed in the school. Her investigations



also led to other changes in her planning, teaching and assessment practices. She reported that her students were enthusiastic and were achieving improved learning outcomes. This suggests that an understanding of language variation has a great deal to offer teachers and, in turn, may lead to more equitable educational outcomes for students.

### 8.3 Future research

The results of this research indicate a need for further research into the varieties spoken by school students, and in this case by those in Western Australia. Such information is required to assist in the development of appropriate pedagogical practices.

Ethnographic research conducted by teachers and their students might be a helpful way to investigate this type of language variation. Ideally, this would involve both teachers and their students, with assistance as necessary from others such as sociolinguists and curriculum officers, and be part of the regular language program of the school.

The current research also points to the need for further understanding of the particular linguistic demands faced by adolescent students, both in school and in the wider society. At the same time, teachers need to know about their students' current communicative competencies so they can plan effective learning programs to address present and future linguistic needs. Again, ethnographic research, conducted by teachers and students with appropriate assistance, may be a useful way to investigate both these aspects of spoken language.

The issue of whether or not to teach the standard to speakers of other varieties needs to be addressed. If it is decided that the standard language should be taught, then

questions such as when is the best time to teach it and how might this be done need to be investigated. This would indicate the need for more research into issues such as the influence of maturational constraints on the learning of a second variety of the same language and the influence of the metalinguistic development of children on this type of language learning. Such a decision may also require additional research to develop and evaluate pedagogical practices which are effective in promoting the learning of the standard variety. In the interests of social justice, these practices should reflect respect for the students' home varieties.

#### 8.4 Concluding comments

The teachers who participated in these studies gave generously of their time to support research related to student speech. They also openly shared their views, opinions and perceptions. In some cases, the findings of these studies could lead others to judge these teachers for the views they expressed. It is therefore, very important to recognise that teachers are subject to the language bias in a society as much as are others (Lippi-Green, 1997:131). This is particularly the case in the absence of appropriate pre-service and in-service training in linguistics (Cheshire, Edwards, & Whittle, 1993:35).

Teachers are also limited by the social roles society imposes on them, especially with regard to their perceived role as "language guardians" (Corson, 1999:17). Therefore, the teachers' perceptions reported in this research should be seen as a mirror of the broader society's views.

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## APPENDIX A

### Consent Forms

#### Consent Form

I have been asked to participate in a research project that is concerned with teachers' perceptions of student speech. I understand that this project is supervised by Edith Cowan University and is subject to ethical standards.

The purpose of the research is to investigate teachers' perceptions of student speech. It will identify those aspects of student speech which teachers find problematic and examine why this is so.

This will involve my noting of the problematic features in the speech of my students for a period of a week. I will also complete a Language Attitude Questionnaire (10-15 minutes) and a background information sheet (5-10 minutes).

I understand that I will not directly benefit from the research but that it may inform future approaches to improving the educational outcomes of students.

Any questions concerning the project entitled 'Teacher perceptions of student speech' can be directed to Yvonne Haig on 9245 1339.

I have read the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, realising that I may withdraw at any time.

I agree that the research data gathered in this study may be published provided I am not identifiable.

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Post-graduate Suite  
Edith Cowan University  
2 Bradford Street  
MOUNT LAWLEY 6050

Dear Parent/Caregiver

I am a teacher with the Education Department of Western Australia. Currently, I am on study leave.

I am trying to find out about the different ways children's talk in school is judged by teachers. The Education Department and Edith Cowan University approve this research. It is supervised and must meet strict ethical standards.

To do the research, I need to collect samples of children's speech. I will use the types of learning activities they normally do in school for this. The activities will only take a short period of time.

The children will be tape-recorded doing the activities. The children will not be named. All data will be kept anonymous.

If you agree to your child participating please sign the form below and send it back to school in the envelope provided. If you have any questions about the research please phone me on 9245 1339 day or evening.

Thank you for giving this your attention. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Yvonne Haig

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I give permission for my child (name) \_\_\_\_\_ to  
participate in this research. I understand that my child's name will not be used and that  
all data will be kept anonymous.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



## **Consent Form**

I have been asked to participate in a research project that is concerned with teachers' perceptions of student speech. I understand that this project is supervised by Edith Cowan University and is subject to ethical standards.

The purpose of the research is to investigate teachers' perceptions of student speech. It will identify those aspects of student speech which teachers find problematic and examine why this is so.

This will require me to participate in a teacher focus group (60 minutes) where the speech of students will be discussed. I will also complete a Language Attitude Questionnaire (20-30 minutes) and a background information sheet (10 minutes).

I understand that I will not directly benefit from the research but that it may inform future approaches to improving the educational outcomes of students.

Any questions concerning the project entitled 'Teacher perceptions of student speech' can be directed to Yvonne Haig on 9245 1339.

I have read the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, realising that I may withdraw at any time.

I agree that the research data gathered in this study may be published provided I am not identifiable.

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Consent Form

I have been asked to participate in a research project that is concerned with teachers' perceptions of student speech. I understand that this project is supervised by Edith Cowan University and is subject to ethical standards.

The purpose of the research is to investigate teachers' perceptions of student speech. It will identify those aspects of student speech which teachers find problematic and examine why this is so.

This will involve me in ranking and categorising student speech samples (40-60 minutes). I will also complete a Language Attitude Questionnaire (20-30 minutes) and a background information sheet (10 minutes).

I understand that I will not directly benefit from the research but that it may inform future approaches to improving the educational outcomes of students.

Any questions concerning the project entitled 'Teacher perceptions of student speech' can be directed to Yvonne Haig on 9245 1339.

I have read the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, realising that I may withdraw at any time.

I agree that the research data gathered in this study may be published provided I am not identifiable.

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### Language Attitude Questionnaire

Using the scale below, please circle the letter that most nearly represents your response to each of the statements that follow. Wherever the question concerns usage, consider the statement in relation to Standard Australian English unless otherwise specified.

- A= Agree means definite agreement, complete or nearly so, with the statement  
 B= Moderately agree means agreement with the statement but with some reservations.  
 C= No opinion means you have no opinion either way or you are neutral.  
 D= Moderately disagree means disagreement with the statement but with some reservations.  
 E= Disagreement means definite disagreement, complete or nearly so, with the statement.

A B C D E	1	Teachers should insist on standard English in the classroom, both in speaking and writing.
A B C D E	2	Even though <i>It's me</i> is accepted in informal English, the expression <i>It is I</i> is really right.
A B C D E	3	Dialect is not a negative term. Many people who hold prestigious positions speak dialects.
A B C D E	4	An expression such as " <i>youse</i> " cannot be proper usage.
A B C D E	5	People who speak differently from the majority follow some pattern of regularity in the English language.
A B C D E	6	The use of words like 'terrific' and 'okay' for approval is sometimes in good taste.
A B C D E	7	Meanings of words are based on consent (acceptance) within the speech community.
A B C D E	8	We should have an Australian Academy to regulate language.
A B C D E	9	Non-standard dialects are socially stigmatised because they are illogical. They cannot be used to talk or write about abstract or logically complex ideas or processes.
A B C D E	10	Standard English allows for no choices in language form.

A B C D E	11	As soon as we take present-day usage for a guide in determining what is acceptable English, we break down all standards.
A B C D E	12	As non-standard English is a distortion and corruption of standard English, it is a less efficient system of communication.
A B C D E	13	If 20 <sup>th</sup> Century standards in language were higher, there would be no instances of different pronunciation being used.
A B C D E	14	The usual English textbook is a guide to facts about Australian English usage.
A B C D E	15	To most people <i>He's not going nowhere</i> means that the person spoken about is going somewhere.
A B C D E	16	The English language is limited mainly to <i>shall</i> and <i>will</i> to express future time. The correct forms for expression of future time are: <i>I shall</i> , <i>you will</i> and <i>he will</i> .
A B C D E	17	Standard English is needed to replace non-standard dialects to help with global communication.
A B C D E	18	The use of non-standard English is a reflection of unclear thinking on the part of the speaker.
A B C D E	19	In giving a talk on his future employment goals, a student consistently used 'gonna'. His teacher corrected him and said such lazy speech was not acceptable in an English class. More teachers should use this same method.
A B C D E	20	The following sentence is not acceptable in English because of the preposition at the end. <i>This young man now had something to work for.</i>
A B C D E	21	Most people who speak non-standard English have not had stimulating experiences in their homes. This explains why they are usually less verbal than people who speak standard English.
A B C D E	22	Standards in English are relative, not absolute.
A B C D E	23	When a child's non-standard English is replaced by standard English, she is introduced to concepts which will increase her learning capacity.

A B C D E	24	It is up to teachers to see that our language does not change.
A B C D E	25	To say that an expression is colloquial is to say that it is not entirely acceptable.
A B C D E	26	The title "It makes a Difference" needs to be restated because the pronoun has no antecedent.
A B C D E	27	Since only standard English is useful in getting a job, it should always be preferred over non-standard English.
A B C D E	28	Grammatical rules stated in grammar books determine what is acceptable and what is not.
A B C D E	29	Splitting the infinitive may sometimes enable the writer to express her ideas with greater clarity and force than otherwise.
A B C D E	30	The following sentence is being analysed: <i>John will look up the correct date in the encyclopaedia.</i> It seems sensible to consider will look up as a verb; however, it is not correct to do so, since up has to be either an adverb or a preposition.
A B C D E	31	A person should be criticised for the use of <i>if</i> instead of <i>whether</i> in a sentence like <i>I'll see if there is a tape recorder in the room.</i>
A B C D E	32	Standard English is superior to non-standard English in terms of grammatical structure.
A B C D E	33	Contractions are inappropriate in any form of written English.
A B C D E	34	A teacher should teach students <i>Whom do you mean?</i> as the correct form.
A B C D E	35	Teachers who correct oral speech and evaluate student writing according to prescriptive rules of standard English may be requiring students to violate the grammatical rules of their own dialects.
A B C D E	36	Acceptance of non-standard dialects of English by teachers would lead to a lowering of standards in school.
A B C D E	37	Children who speak a non-standard dialect are advantaged; it makes them bidialectal.

A B C D E	38	Teachers who conscientiously teach the rules for correct standard usage and consistently correct all grammatical errors usually succeed in changing their students' non-standard dialects.
A B C D E	39	A child who asks permission by saying <u>Can I go too?</u> should not have her English corrected by being told to say <u>May I go too?</u>
A B C D E	40	Children who speak a non-standard dialect can learn to read in spite of the fact that most reading texts are written in standard English.
A B C D E	41	A truly cultivated person will pronounce either as <u>i-ther</u> rather than <u>e-ther</u> .
A B C D E	42	There is more than one variety of accepted Australian English usage.
A B C D E	43	Changing teachers' attitudes toward language that is socially stigmatised; helping them come to respect the intrinsic linguistic worth and the social and cognitive functions of all languages and dialects; is crucial for the achievement of inclusive education.
44		Use a tick ( ✓ ) to indicate the place(s) where it is most appropriate to use non-standard speech: A ___ anyplace B ___ socialising at school C ___ at a formal dinner D ___ during Christmas dinner E ___ no place

## APPENDIX C

### Background Information Sheet

1. Gender: \_\_\_male            \_\_\_female
2. Age: \_\_\_20-29    \_\_\_30-39    \_\_\_40-49    \_\_\_50-59    \_\_\_60+
3. Where did you attend school?

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4. What is your highest academic qualification?

Teachers' Certificate or Diploma       Bachelors' Degree

Masters' Degree       PhD

Other \_\_\_\_\_

What was your area of specialisation? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Have you participated in professional development related to language? (eg. ELIC, First Steps, Stepping Out, ESL, Aboriginal English etc)

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6. Years of teaching experience: \_\_\_\_\_ years

7. I am currently teaching year \_\_\_\_\_. Learning Area: \_\_\_\_\_

8. How would you define Standard Australian English?

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9. What do you view as the key characteristics of Standard Australian English?  
(Please use the back of the page if you need more space.)





## APPENDIX E

### Sample of data analysis

	<input type="checkbox"/> High SES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Low SES		Primary	Primary	Secondary	Secondary
	School		A	B	C	D
<b>Problems identified by the teachers</b>						
<b>Pronunciation<sup>40</sup></b>						
'ing' not pronounced correctly				X		
use of 'gunna' instead of 'going to'				X		
use of 'dunno' instead of 'don't know'						X
confusion with rhyming sounds and words				X		
no understanding of natural sounds of English sentences and phrases						X
unable to pronounce difficult/unfamiliar words				X		X
mumbling				X	X	X
slurred speech						X
sounds not clearly articulated (closed lips)					X	X
incorrect articulation						X
word stress not used					X	
no variation in pace					X	

<sup>40</sup> These "problems" are expressed in the teachers' own words.

## APPENDIX F

### Focus Questions

1. Have you noted any features in your students' speech which concern you?
2. Why do these particular features cause concern?
3. Why do you think these features are present in the students' speech?
4. Do you think there is a solution to the problems?
5. How do you deal with speech issues in your classroom?
6. Discussion of language issues generally.

## APPENDIX G

### Sample of an annotated transcript

<p><b>S/E</b><sup>41</sup> It is..it does..it really is I think, you know, and I'm conscious of it now and I ..and I didn't realise how many ah how much <u>colloquial sort of slang stuff</u> that I use you know in my teaching until I was teaching it today and I thought and I'd be saying something and I'd be like umm "Oh look there's another saying I've just said it." You know, like go out and have a look and see <u>what you're hearing</u>. And it was about the prize, now what did I say? Umm I can't think now what it was. You know, umm the reward ...the I can't remember what the exact the exact word was but (mmm)...there <u>was</u> so many words that ...and I'd always thought myself to be you know a fairly <u>well educated</u> person like I <u>speak correctly</u> you know that that sort of..</p> <p><b>9</b> <u>self image</u></p> <p><b>11</b> then I realised that yeah that <u>image</u> and and..</p> <p><b>9</b> One thing I noticed that I like finding out the definition of words I don't know (Mm /Mmm) It's It's a <u>treasure</u> that comes along and an opportunity to look something, up listen to it roll it around in your mouth</p> <p><b>11</b> [together with 9] Oh yes absolutely</p> <p><b>9</b> [rising tone and volume] and in your head and see if you can use it and maybe muck it up but it doesn't matter. But these kids are <u>resistant</u> to it. They are <u>not welcoming new</u></p> <p><b>11</b> [comment background of 9's talk] Oh <u>hugely resistant</u>.</p> <p><b>9</b> words into their <u>vocabulary</u> (No, /no /no). They're <u>frightened</u> of them-</p> <p><b>11</b> [Speaking over 9 and continuing] They are. Because even umm with the <u>spelling</u> of a word that they know they want you to give them the spelling (Yeh) rather than looking it up. (Yeh) And it's not a physical laziness that they've had to walk to the front of the room it's that <u>they don't want to get it wrong</u>. They're <u>frightened</u> that they won't find it.</p> <p><b>S/E</b> [speaking over 11] Do you think Do you think though now I'm just looking at how ah teachers different teachers teachers that are moderately successful you know in the classroom um teachers who have cracked the [indecipherable] and who don't have as much time as some others do (Mm) I think it might be more of a <u>cultural thing</u> you know like their <u>language is an indication of their culture</u> and the <u>the ownership their belonging-</u> [said softly, seriously]...</p> <p><b>11</b> [interrupting] Or are they able to adapt? [Part of page 7 (out of 24 pages/14,900 words)]</p>	<p>S&amp;E teacher concerned that own speech is deteriorating</p> <p>hearing this language from students</p> <p>view of self-related to speech - part of self-image recognised by 9 11 agreed 9 shifts topic to vocabulary issue-related to own experience</p> <p>11 agrees 9-student resistance to vocab 11 agrees</p> <p>frightened of new words - all agree 11 - relates resistance to spelling - fear of being wrong</p> <p>S&amp;E raises issue of relationship between language, cultural identity and the students' sense of identity</p> <p>11 suggests it may be students' inability to adapt</p>
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<sup>41</sup> 9 represents year 9 English teacher, 11 year 11 English teacher and S/E the society and environment teacher.

## APPENDIX H

### Tasks for speech samples

#### **Sentence Repetition Task**

1. First we will plant some trees down there.
2. They will need water out there.
3. The Year Twos went on a tour of the National Park.
4. The Year Sevens had a bush dance.
5. John asked his father if he could go out in the car.
6. There were fewer students to support the new basketball team.
7. I bought some milk to school.
8. First we will plant some trees down there.
9. You have to sit still when you have your hair cut.
10. I will go and see the film alone on Saturday.
11. The Year Sevens had a bush dance.
12. Sue doesn't have good eye sight or something.
13. I bought some milk at the canteen.

[The underlined words are alternative pronunciations of the /a/ and /æ/]

#### **Description Task 1**

Can you tell me about your house?

What does it look like?

What is it made from?

Can you describe the layout of your house?

If you like you can draw a plan on this piece of paper as you tell me about your home.

#### **Description Task 2**

What did you do last school holidays?

Did you see any movies? Could you tell me about it?

## APPENDIX I

### Summary of results of Language Attitude Questionnaire

School	Informants	Variation in general	Use of variants
<b>A</b>	PP	-0.20	+0.27
	4	-0.15	+0.10
	7	-0.15	-0.40
<b>B</b>	PP	+0.69	+0.90
	4	+0.69	+0.27
	7	+0.92	+0.60
<b>C</b>	9 ENG	+0.61	+0.50
	11 ENG	+1.00	1.40
	S&E	0	+0.07
<b>D</b>	9 ENG	+1.00	+0.40
	11 ENG	+0.85	+0.40
	9/11 S&E	+1.00	+0.70
<b>E</b>	PP	+0.46	+0.53
	4	+0.54	+0.33
	7	+0.46	-0.03
<b>F</b>	PP	+0.07	+0.30
	4	1.61	+0.83
	7	-0.15	-0.16
<b>G</b>	9 ENG	-0.38	+0.10
	11 ENG	+0.46	+0.90
	9/11 S&E	+0.31	+0.63
<b>H</b>	9 ENG	+0.92	+0.97
	11 ENG	+1.69	+1.10
	9/11 S&E	+1.00	+0.30
<b>I</b>	PP	+0.77	+0.63
	4	+0.77	+0.80
	7	-0.54	-0.47
<b>J</b>	PP	+0.69	+0.67
	4	-0.15	-0.60
	7	+0.85	+0.50
<b>K</b>	9 ENG	+0.61	+0.23
	11 ENG	+0.67	+0.90
	S&E	+1.15	+0.33
<b>L</b>	9 ENG	+0.15	+0.10
	11 ENG	-0.23	+0.13
	S&E	+0.46	+0.47
<b>Average</b>		+0.40	+0.51

#### Summary of Average Results

Average	Study1	Study2	Study3	Primary	Secondary
<b>General</b>	+0.43	+0.48	+0.31	+0.28	+0.53
<b>Specific</b>	+0.52	+0.58	+0.43	+0.40	+0.63

## APPENDIX J

### Information from Background Information Questionnaire

School and Year levels	Gender	Age	Schools attended	Qualification	Professional Development	Years of Experience
A PP	F	50- 59	Perth HSE PS & SHS	5 (IP) ECE	FS ESL	10
4	F	40- 49	Germany, Melb.-8 LSE -MSE schools	BEd	ESL, LOTE methodology	20+
7	F	50- 59	Perth MSES PS & SHS	3year Certificate	FS, Key teacher	23
B PP	F	40- 49	England - LSE	3 year Certificate	FS, ESL, Aboriginal Education	20
4	F	30- 39	Catholic primary, and secondary -MSE-HSE	5 (IP)* Policy & Administration	FS, Early Literacy, ESL, Literacy Net P-3, CF	10
7	F	40- 49	Large country town PS & SHS	3 year certificate Remedial, PE	FS, ESL, THRASS, CF, SOS	20+
C 9 E	F	40- 49	Private Girls School (HSES)	BEd History/ English	SO, ESL	15
11 E	F	40- 49	10 schools (country and city) MSES	BEd (English & ESL)	SO ESL (+ a great deal of other)	9
S& E	M	50- 59	UK (MSES)	Diploma Geography	SO	32
D 9 E	F	30- 39	MSES-HSES metropolitan government schools	4: DipEd Media/English	FS, SO, Aboriginal English	6
11 E	F	20- 29	MSE - HSE	4: Dip T TESOL	TESOL	2
S& E	F	40- 49	Country PS Private girls high school (NSW)	4: Dip T History/ economics	SO, ESL	21
E PP	F	30- 39	WA rural catholic school Rural SHS	BEd ECE	FS, Blank Model Questioning	11
4	M	40- 49	WA LSE	3 year Diploma	FS	20
7	F	40- 49	UK private girls school	BEd PS + geography & English	FS, SO, Bookshelf (reading), Special Needs in Reading.	27

F PP	F	50- 59	L-MSES PS L-MSES SHS	3 Cert ECE	FS, KOSP (oral language) Speech pathologist eg story train	25
4	F	40- 49	Y1-6 Nth Ireland Y 6-7 LSES-MSES PS lower-middle SES SHS	BEd Reading	FS, SO, Focus Teacher	26
7	F	40- 49	Country PS Country SHS	BEd Intercultural & Aboriginal studies	ERICA, FS, SO, English SOS	26
G 9 E	F	30- 39	MSES PS MSES-HSES SHS	Dip of T BEd Honours Italian & English	SO LOTE re SOS	10
11 E	F	40- 49	LSES-MSES PS, MSES-HSES SHS, Country SHS	BEd English	SO SAER	17
S& E	F	40- 49	HSES SHS	BEd History	SO	17
H 9 E	F	40- 49	LSES, Victorian PS LSES-MSES SHS	BEd English & History Grad Cert (IP)*	ESL TESOL	5
11 E	F	30- 39	NSW 1 year WA (HSES)	BA Dip Ed (English)	SO	10
S& E	F	20- 29	MSES SHS	BEd History/ Aboriginal studies	SO Aboriginal English	5
I PP	F	40- 49	HSES PS, HSES Private girls school	BEd Psychology	FS	15
4	F	40- 49	SA MSES	BEd	FS SO	30
7	F	30- 39	MSES SHS	BEd Maths, special ed	ELIC, FS	14
J PP	F	30- 39	Malaysia PS WA HSES private girls school	ECE	FS, Abl Eng literacy	12
4	M	40- 49	NZ MSES	BEd Art/Craft	FS, SO	20
7	F	30- 39	HSES private girls school	Diploma Health	FS	11
K 9 E	F	20- 29	HSES SHS	BEd Drama	SO, ESL	6
11 E	F	40- 49	LSES-MSES PS & SHS	BEd English literature	SO	14
S& E	F	40- 49	HSES PS & SHS	BEd Geography	SO ESL	25
L 9 E	M	20- 29	MSES SHS	BEd Media	No PD	3
11 E	F	40- 49	M-LSES PS Private girls school	BEd English	SO	6
S& E	M	20- 29	MSES SHS	BEd Economics	Nil	4