Introduction

Eliza: You told me, you know, that when a child is brought to a foreign country, it picks up the language in a few weeks, and forgets its own. Well, I am a child in your country. I have forgotten my own language, and can speak nothing but yours.[1]

In *Pygmalion*, George Bernard Shaw traces the fate of Eliza Doolittle, a working-class Cockney flower girl who is removed from her humble circumstances and groomed for social mobility and advancement by assuming the manner of speech of the upper classes. Writing in 1916, Shaw lamented that the 'English have no respect for their language' – he believed they could neither speak it nor spell it – and thus the 'hero' in his play – Professor of Phonetics, Henry Higgins, represents the 'reformer we need most today . . . an energetic phonetic enthusiast'.[2] Shaw observed that the transformations he charted in the play were common, and many have 'sloughed off their native dialects'.[3] But, he warned, the task of transforming shop assistants and domestic servants into ladies through a refinement of their speech needed to be done scientifically. To do so by mere imitation was misguided for an 'honest slum dialect is more tolerable than the attempts of phonetically untaught persons to imitate the plutocracy'.[4]

The themes that Shaw addresses in his highly successful and enduring play written in 1912 – of social advancement through the refinement of speech; the parlous state of spoken English; the desirability of eradicating local accents; the feminine sound of a 'lady'; and the science of acquiring what was deemed to be 'correct' speech – were cultural preoccupations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century throughout the British Empire.

Colonial Voices explores these and other themes in considering the dissemination, reception and challenge to British English in Australia during the period from the 1840s to the 1940s when the art of oratory, eloquence and elocution was at its peak in the empire. It examines this phenomenon at a time when the

[1] George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion: A Romance in Five Acts* (1916; London: Penguin, London, 1978), p. 128.
[2] Ibid., p. 5. [3] Ibid., p. 9. [4] Ibid., p. 10.

idea of 'Australian speech' was evolving, and being contested and negotiated. This study encompasses a number of themes that have been a part of the cultural landscape but which have not previously figured centrally in cultural history. These include, perhaps most prominently, the importance of voice and pronunciation in informing and defining both individual subjectivities and wider cultural views of class, race and gender. My aim has also been to address broader issues of oratory, public speech, oral culture and national identity. Conversely, elocution in particular is explored as a way of examining the formation of the philosophy of the self and the body – that is, how individuals used its practice as a tool to enhance and mould personal character, and enable social mobility.

From a nation-shaping perspective, I consider the role of language in the greater 'civilising' project of the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century British Empire. I examine the way in which literacy and verbal articulation were considered to be two of the key criteria of being civilised, and how these criteria were used during this period in relation to Indigenous Australians. How Australians attempted to define themselves nationally through their speech in relation to correct English speech and, later, through American speech, and the role that eloquence, oratory and elocution played in helping to create an imagined 'national character', is also central to my approach.

One of the themes underpinning the study then is the relationship between language and empire: the ways in which this imperial relationship moves from dependency to independency, but also the ways in which, in that transition, definitions and understandings of the meaning and place of oratory, eloquence and elocution shifted. Language became a metaphor for dependence as well as independence. The British Empire found its voice and power through colonialism, so to speak, and the emergence of Australian English was a challenge to the hegemony of British speech. These trends can be traced through the history of elocution as the perfect expression of a particular form of British English, and as the ideal towards which colonists should aspire as citizens of the empire. The rise and the fall of elocution as an ideal could be traced to its relation to the fortunes of empire. With the latter's demise, the impact and influence of elocution diminished.

Elocution, or the art of clear and expressive speech, was in its heyday throughout the English-speaking world in the period covered by the current study. Not only considered to be an entertainment and an art form, elocution was also viewed as a type of physical discipline and a training regime. While some individuals may have taken up its study in order to recite literary material or for public-speaking purposes, more often than not elocution was learned as a means of self-improvement and enhanced communication; or, as the elocution manuals of the day would portray it: a science of the body and the mind. But this was by no means the whole story. For, like any art form, elocution was

also an apotheosis – in this case, the embodiment of the ideal expression of the English language. As such, elocution was so much more than the sum of its parts. It was not merely a teaching and learning tool, but a template for speech, expression and behaviour throughout English-speaking society in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

From our particular social and historical viewpoint it is hard to imagine that elocution was ever anything more than an exercise in perfecting grammar and accent. These days, elocution seems a quaint notion. It brings to mind the instructive classes of the 1950s and 1960s in which children were taught to speak properly and enunciate their vowels. Undertaken along with other extra-curricula pursuits such as piano lessons and Scottish dancing, elocution lessons were a mark of middle-class post-war Australia. But, for much of its roughly 100-year history, elocution had been much more than a pastime; it had been a subtly powerful social force, acting as both a reinforcer and shaper of culture through the expression of the English language within the English-speaking world.

Today our existences are endlessly mediated by audio and audio-visual technology. Public oral communication in the twenty-first century is rarely live, and much of it is pre-recorded and manipulated; although we communicate with more people more often, much of that contact is not face-to-face, but through communication devices, such as mobile phones. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, verbal communication was almost always an immediate and physically proximate experience. Whether it be conversation, lectures, theatre performances, readings, recitals, debate or parliamentary speeches, the content of speech was instant, and, frequently, highly interactive. The power of the orator or speaker to engage and hold his or her audience under these circumstances was imperative; the perfection of eloquent speech and elegant delivery was a necessity. The art of speaking through oratory defined cultural practice; the way it was received through listening to speech was also central to cultural experience. Listening was central to the art of elocution. Thus the practice of elocution was a more effective means through which the Victorians aimed to be *listened to*, in order to get their message across to their audiences.

This study, then, links with a wider historiography of the history of the auditory in cultural life. Historians have long prioritised the written over the spoken and the visual over the auditory. A shift of the historical imagination from seeing to hearing past societies offers a further perspective for examining the complexity of everyday life – especially when we consider how crucial the auditory aspect of life indeed was during those times. Recent studies by historians have taken up the initial challenge thrown up by Alain Corbin and Peter Bailey, who identified the auditory as one aspect of cultural life vital to historical research.

In his pioneering study, *Village Bells*, Corbin argues for the importance of the auditory in cultural history. A history of representations of the social world, he argues, 'can no longer afford to neglect materials pertaining to auditory perception'.[5] Through an examination of the meaning of the sounds of village bells in the nineteenth-century French countryside, Corbin suggests that the ringing and listening to village bells constituted a language and a form of communication which 'gave rhythm to forgotten modes of relating between individuals and between the living and the dead. It made possible forms of expression, now lost to us, of rejoicing and conviviality'. Listening to the sound of ringing bells was a way of inscribing and experiencing time and space; it constituted the identities of individual and collective communities.[6]

Peter Bailey similarly alerts us to 'the whole range of sounds that enliven the past and contribute to its changing sensory orders'.[7] Listening to social noise during the pre-modern period in the West tells us much, he claims, about the ways in which the control and selection of sound defined genteel identity. Sounds that were unwelcome or deemed offensive were suppressed or partitioned off, such as the noise of petitioners, attendants and servants.[8] Tuning into the noise of Victorian England Bailey found 'a continuing struggle between refinement and vulgarity'.[9] Yet, in 1996, he also observed punningly that sounds in history 'rarely receive more than lip service'.[10]

In the ten years since these studies, there has been a growing body of historical work that aims to capture the auditory environment of the past. Historians in many fields have begun to listen to the past and in doing so have developed new arguments about the history of sensory experience. Each of these studies consider the ways in which listening to sound can provide new insights. These include, for example, a history of the soundscape of slavery, which considers the significance of the sounds of music and language to the identities of African slaves in America during their experience of slavery and of freedom. A study of the sonic environment of the public and private worlds of Victorian London – from the noise of the streets and public spaces to the chatter of middle-class parlours and private homes – sheds light on how they heard their environment, a crucial aspect of how Victorians understood themselves. Histories of the introduction of new technologies and sound reproduction have further sharpened the importance of the auditory. In early twentieth-century America, the arrival of new technologies and the rise of modernity provide the context for an examination of a history of acoustics as a way of exploring

[5] Alain Corbain, *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the 19th-Century French Countryside*, trans. Matin Thom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994/ repr. 1998), p. xi.
[6] Ibid., p. xi.
[7] Peter Bailey, '"Breaking the Sound Barrier": A Historian Listens to Noise', *Body and Society*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1996, p. 64.
[8] Ibid., p. 56. [9] Ibid., p. 60. [10] Ibid., p. 64.

the aural aspects of modernity. Studies of the inventions of sound technologies such as headsets, the radio, the stethoscope, the telephone, the phonograph and the cinema highlight the ways in which techniques and patterns of listening to modern technology have dramatically changed over time. Understanding the impact of these technologies has also ushered in a heightened awareness of the centrality to Western cultures of listening to the human voice, as a way of shaping individual and collective identities.[11] The focus on listening in this literature is a further frame of reference for current research and draws on the insistence of Steven Connor, Emily Thompson and Jonathan Sterne, on the need to consider impact of the auditory (with particular attention to sonic landscapes and the history of listening) on the formation of individual and collective subjectivities.[12]

The connection between speaking and listening has not been studied in Australia. W. K. Hancock discussed Australian intonation and Australia's convict past in his brief examination of the evolution of Australian words and expression. Several decades later, A. G. Mitchell pioneered the study of Australian speech and sound, while Russel Ward identified distinctive Australian speech patterns from the 1820s. Alan Atkinson's work stands out as one of the few recent scholarly efforts to capture the auditory in Australia in his discussion on talking and listening in colonial and contemporary Australia. Bruce Johnson's research into the introduction of jazz, the microphone and modernity has made a similar contribution to histories of sound, but he is concerned with music rather than language.[13] In the Australian context, the collection of essays

[11] See Veit Erlmann (ed.), *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening and Modernity* (London: Berg, 2004); Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999); Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Mark Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2001); Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead (eds.), *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-garde*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992); Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Susan J. Douglas, *Radio and the American Imagination: From Amos'n' Andy and Edward R Murrow to Wolfmann Jack and Howard Stern* (New York: Times Books, 1999); Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson (eds.), *Discographies: Dance Music, Culture and the Politics of Sound* (New York: Routledge, 1999); James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995); R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1997); Richard Cullen Rath, *How Early America Sounded* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); James Latra, *Sound Technology and the American Cinema: Perception, Representation, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

[12] Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Steven Connor, 'The Modern Auditory I', in Roy Porter (ed.), *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Middle Ages to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1997), 203–23.

[13] See William Keith Hancock, *Australia* (London: Ernest Benn, 1930); Alexander George Mitchell, *The Pronunciation of English in Australia* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1946); Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1958); Alan

edited by Joy Damousi and Desley Deacon entitled *Talking and Listening in the Age of Modernity: Essays on the History of Sound* is the first major study to address the issues of listening and talking directly.[14] In this book, the English sound is seen as a projection of being English.

Another body of scholarship the present work draws on is the rich tradition of the history of Australian speech and expression, slang, colloquialisms and folklore. The seminal works by Sidney Baker, A. G. Mitchell, W. S. Ramson, Graeme Seal and, more recently, Bruce Moore, trace the historical developments which saw the emergence of Australian vocabulary and its distinctive sound and evolution. This study contributes to this scholarship by considering the wider social and cultural contexts which created the linguistic hierarchies within Australian society by focusing on elocution and the relationship to oratory and eloquence.[15]

In examining the spread of English, this project also draws on recent scholarship which insists on the need to position Australian within a trans-national context of the circulation of ideas and practices beyond the nation state. In considering the intimate and dialectic relationship between the metropole and the centre, this work examines the way in which the empire was crucial in shaping practices about speech in the Australian colonies, but also how paradoxically, an Australian form of speech emerged from this dynamic colonial exchange. The relationship between the metropole and its far-flung colonies has been the subject of recent histories of the British Empire and provided a fuller context to its civilising mission. Ann Stoler, Catherine Hall, Alan Lester, Ann McClintock, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds – to name a few – have framed their studies around the articulation of citizenship, discourses, ideas, material exchange and other aspects of the metropole–colony relationship.[16] As Catherine Hall has noted, colony and metropole 'are terms

Atkinson, *The Commonwealth of Speech: An Argument about Australia's Past, Present and Future* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2002); Alan Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia: A History*, Volume 2 (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2004); Bruce Johnson, *The Inaudible Music: Jazz, Gender and Australian Modernity* (Sydney: Currency Press, 2000).

14 See Joy Damousi and Desley Deacon (eds.), *Talking and Listening in the Age of Modernity: Essays on the History of Sound*, (Canberra: ANU EPress, 2007).

15 Sidney Baker, *The Australian language: An Examination of the English Language and English Speech as Used in Australia, From Convict Days to the Present* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1945); W. S. Ramson, *Australian English: An Historical Study of the Vocabulary 1788–1898* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1966); Graham Seal, *The Lingo: Listening to Australian English* (Sydney, UNSW Press, 1999); A. G. Mitchell, *The Pronunciation of English in Australia* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1946); Bruce Moore, *Speaking Our Language: The Story of Australian English* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

16 See Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler (ed.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997); Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Oxford: Polity, 2002); Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks:*

which can be understood only in relation to each other, and that the identity of coloniser is a constitutive part of Englishness, could [be] . . . explored on many different sites'.[17] Elocution and language was part of the representation of empire and Englishness which circulated throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

These writers have shown that, while this metropole–colony relationship has been understood as trans-national and dynamic, it is also evident that it was at the local and everyday level that the values of the empire were transmitted, fractured, reworked and renegotiated. An analysis of speech at the level of the everyday can reveal how the influence of the empire through social relationships – through the public, personal and political – was pronounced and negotiated in the setting of one colony.[18]

Although *Colonial Voices* takes a chronological approach to the imperial spread of English, it is fair to say that certain themes appear more prominently at certain times. As the epitome of nineteenth-century voice culture, elocution and eloquence played a key role in the civilising mission of the British Empire. A brief prologue provides a context and overview of the development of the values and philosophy behind the spread of British English. Language and speech helped to define, promote and empower an imagined 'British' community. Chapter 1 considers the way in which the missionaries and educators between the 1840s and 1890s not only identified the importance of teaching English to the Indigenous population, but saw it as a means of Aborigines *becoming* English. The dichotomous relationship between the 'oral and primitive', as opposed to the 'literate and civilised', informs these discussions since debates about whether the indigenous population could be 'civilised' inevitably drew on assumptions about the 'savage', illiterate and primitive 'other'. This was dramatically enacted in the courts, where a lack of understanding of English, and of court proceedings, was interpreted as evidence of the uncivilised state of Aborigines. The translations that missionaries undertook of Indigenous languages were part of the effort to impose a Western paradigm onto an oral culture. The values of eloquence and elocution – correct pronunciation and prioritisation of 'Englishness' – provide the backdrop to understanding definitions of otherness and savagery.

Creating Identities in Nineteenth Century South Africa and Britain (London: Routledge, 2001); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000); Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

17 Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 12.

18 Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in late-Victorian Britain* (Berkeley: CA, University of California Press, 1998), p. 15.

Chapter 2 considers the emergence of the public sphere of speech in Australia during the 1840s, as reflected in the parliamentary arena, stump oratory, the church and the stage. Public meetings and debating societies of the time were instrumental in shaping the context for a robust parliamentary democracy. Although it was one made up almost entirely of men – whether they be speakers or audience – women were increasingly agitating to learn debating skills. The need to speak well publicly was also of vital importance to the clergy, whose ability to deliver stirring sermons and dramatise the Bible was crucial to engaging their parishioners. The practice of elocution was essential for actors, readers and reciters who earned their livelihood from their ability to be able visually and vocally to inhabit the stage – the focal point of entertainment in the nineteenth century.

In Chapter 3, the focus shifts to the study of elocution as the ideal of British speech. The elocution manuals of the day highlighted the force of the body as well as the mind: the discipline of elocution aimed to build character and stamina and yet also reflect refinement. Elocution is also a means to be *listened to* more effectively. The public sounds of speech defined class and gender boundaries; they became a framework through which ideas about character and the body were formed. A striking feature of elocution was its international reach. Whether elocution manuals were written in London, New York, Melbourne or Sydney, the Australian–American–British connection spread across the globe. The world of manners, deportment and etiquette was closely tied to elocution and to the culture of speaking correctly, and listening well and politely. In Chapter 4, the ways in which speech and voice defined aspects of femininity and masculinity throughout the English-speaking world is examined. At the same time, the characteristics of speech and voice were also seen as ways of identifying class. In a world where manners and etiquette where highly valued, elocution was one factor that could define the middle class anywhere.

The centrality of speech and oral culture is again manifested in speech days at schools, which in turn defined class and gender identity in particular ways. Chapter 5 considers the way in which an oral education was an important aspect of the school curriculum in the nineteenth century, and how, around speech days, we can see its auditory performance. The elite schools in particular stressed the cultivation of class distinction through linguistic performance. These were modelled on English schools, but Australian texts were becoming increasingly popular.

These themes continued into the twentieth century. The teachers and pupils of elocution provide the theme of Chapter 6, which sheds light on the philosophies and practices of leading elocutionists. During the early twentieth century, manuals continued to advocate correct speech and enunciation; the cultural performance of speech and reading aloud also continued. Speech was promoted as a key marker of Australian cultural identity. In Chapter 7, the twin arguments

of character defined by speech and the use of eloquence as a form of social change can best be articulated through the political careers of Alfred Deakin and Vida Goldstein. Both were at their peak when political speech was the key way of communicating and agitating for political change, and at a time before technology was able to alter oratory. The shifting relationship in listening to speech – between audience and speaker – also emerges in this context, as the etiquette between the two changes as the listeners become a part of the evolution of oratory in the public sphere.

In Chapter 8, the First World War is seen as a time of major transformation of public speech. There is a move to a less formalised form of public speech. The anti-elocution literature that emerged at this time emphasised the need to move to a less formalised mode of communication. As a cultural form, elocution is a distancing mechanism – it does not invite engagement with the audience – except through listening. In contrast, the war created the environment for the 'monster' public meetings – especially around the conscription debates – which were unprecedented in Australian history, and a new language in public to suit the times. Mourning and commemoration, soldiers' slang and patriotism in the schools: each of these created a particular speech and pattern of language which drew on English models but also developed a distinctive Australian eloquence. At the same time, the expectations of elocution were beginning to be challenged, and more relaxed attitudes to the body, gesture and enunciation were appearing in manuals.

The inter-war years ushered in a new and revolutionary way of speaking and listening through technology. Chapter 9 suggests the context within which there emerged a heightened debate about the 'Australian sound' and the Australian drawl. This debate was also pronounced in literary circles and manuals about etiquette.

More than any other medium, radio intensified these debates about correct speech, the Australian sound and listening to language. The medium created a new and vibrant form of the expression of Australian identity, which in turn allowed a new forum for debate about Australian speech. Within this landscape (or, perhaps more aptly, this soundscape) elocution took on a new purpose and a new expression. Chapter 10 charts the importance of the radio in listening to language – and paradoxically, while it helped to connect the British Empire, radio also created a new Australian sound.

Chapter 11 charts the influence of another medium, one that sharpened discussion about Australian speech: the coming of sound to film. American films flooded into Australia in the 1930s and their language and speech were frequently challenged and dismissed as disrespectful and disgusting, spreading disgraceful values and morals in the community. As a culture that viewed Englishness in all its forms as being the pinnacle of sophistication, Australia was affronted by the American twang and its connotations of informality and

classlessness. Speech was seen by most people at the time as carrying a moral dimension and was reflective of character and culture. On the eve of the Second World War, the presence of the American voice on Australian screens had the effect of making Australians question what exactly it was that constituted good Australian speech.

The study of eloquence, elocution and oratory promoted during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provides an opportunity to discuss the ways in which voice and speech were highly politicised and contested areas, around the self, the body, and national and international identities. There is now an ever-increasing literature on aspects of speech, public oratory, and speechmaking in Australian history. Biographies of leading colonial figures, the birth of democratic institutions, collections of the best speeches and of other aspects of the history of the English language have been published in recent times.[19] However, in these works, elocution remains peripheral if considered at all. By discussing the practice, philosophy and debate around elocution and eloquence, this study aims to illuminate a further dimension of the importance of speech and its instruction that has hitherto been overlooked.

By considering aspects of eloquence, oratory and elocution, language is identified as a metaphor of colonialism, power, dependence and independence. In what follows, I aim to capture the shift in emphasis from the British attempt to create an outpost of empire in Australia through correct language, to the forging of an Australian form of the English language.

[19] See A. W. Martin, *Henry Parkes: A Biography* (Melbourne University Press, 1980); Don Baker, *Days of Wrath: A Life of John Dunmore Lang* (Melbourne University Press, 1985); Peter Cochrane, *Colonial Ambition: Foundations of Democratic Australia* (Melbourne University Press, 2006); Terry Irving, *The Southern Tree of Liberty: The Democratic Movement in New South Wales before 1856* (Sydney: Federation Press, 2006); John Hirst, *The Sentimental Nation: The Making of the Australian Commonwealth* (Melbourne: Oxford Unversity Press, 2000).