Introduction

Peter Collins and Adam Smith

The combined aim of this volume is to highlight current research on variation and change in English usage around the world, and to celebrate the lifetime academic achievements of Pam Peters, whose groundbreaking work on English usage, World Englishes and corpus linguistics has informed the research of all the contributors to the book. Section 1 covers different approaches to the codification of English. It looks at the influence and stance of usage guides, including Peters' own *Cambridge Guide to English Us*age (2004), as well as the status of national dictionaries as codifiers of varieties and the differing approaches of British and Australian Hansards to the standardising of parliamentary language. Section 2 features chapters on the diversification of standards of English driven by its use among communities with different language backgrounds. In Section 3, a series of case studies are presented that trace the emergence of new usage patterns across a variety of language contexts and media. The Epilogue focuses on the implications for the development of World English standards in light of the studies in Sections 2 and 3, while this Introduction aims to contextualise the issues relating to usage variation and codification raised by the chapters in Section 1. It will also aim to substantiate the leading role that Pam Peters has played and continues to play in the investigation of these issues.

Prescriptive Traditions, Standardisation and Pluricentricity

The empirical research presented in this volume stands in contrast to the prescriptive tradition of authoritarian commentary on the 'proper' use of English that has prevailed since Lowth's *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762). In the early twentieth century, the tradition was reinforced by the publication of Fowler's *Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (1926), replete with proscriptions of expressions adjudged to be associated with 'vulgar' usage. The late twentieth century saw a rebirth of prescriptive activity, responding to perceived threats to established English standards presented by increasing diversity of usage. In the United States, the documentation of general American usage in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*

(Gove, 1961), regarded by many as condoning the use of slang and non-standard expressions, triggered a torrent of prescriptive usage guides such as Algeo (2006). In the United Kingdom, a 'new prescriptivism' emerged in the 1990s, prompted by the perception that the English language was deteriorating as a result of overexposure to the common usage condoned by descriptive linguists (Beal, 2004; Honey, 1997).

English differs from other major languages such as French, Chinese and Russian, whose standardisation is state-controlled, regulated by government language policies and used primarily as a means of unification. Within the United Kingdom, despite attempts in the eighteenth century to establish an English academy with the authority to manage the language, a national language policy for the use of English has never been implemented. This situation is explained by Peters (2016) as resulting from public resistance to any form of official language management in Britain, reflecting a general disrespect for authority, as observed by Samuel Johnson:

> The edicts of an English academy would, probably, be read by many only that they might be sure to disobey them. The present manners of our nation would deride authority. (Johnson, *Lives of the Poets* [1779 –1781] cited by Peters, 2016)

The gap left by the absence of any official policy or national institution in England to manage the standard language was filled opportunistically by individuals opting to satisfy the need for authority in language. The most notable of these was Samuel Johnson, whose *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) served, as observed by Peters (2016), as both a powerful instrument of standardisation and an expression of British identity forged by rampant imperialism. The imperialist dimension was reinforced as the English language became progressively entrenched as the medium of education and government in the various countries to which English was transported to destinations as far flung as South Africa, India, Australia and New Zealand, and as words and expressions were borrowed from the indigenous languages of these countries. In fact, according to Peters, it was the lack of a national policy on standard English in Britain that facilitated acceptance of these borrowings as legitimate entries in English dictionaries such as the OED. Early commentaries on the varieties of English emerging in the colonies tended to be conservatively prescriptive, dismissing usages that departed from British norms. Van Rooy and colleagues (Chapter 3, this volume) observe that this was the dominant perspective in South Africa until the end of the twentieth century, typified by Beeton and Dorner's (1975) *Dictionary of English Usage in Southern Africa*, which targets 'mistakes and problems characteristically South African' and censures local 'semantic blurring' and 'slovenly use'. Similar concerns are displayed by Mawasha (1982, 1984) and Watermeyer (1996), whose focus is on black learners and Afrikaans learners respectively.

The first Australian usage guides, Murray-Smith's *Right Words* (1987), and Hudson's *Modern Australian Usage: A Practical Guide for Writers and Editors* (1993), were also prescriptive in orientation, yet benignly so, setting the stage for Peters' landmark *Cambridge Australian English Style Guide* (1995), subsequently updated as the *Cambridge Guide to Australian English Usage* (2007). These publications, along with Peters' (2004) *Cambridge Guide to English Usage*, demonstrate how usage guides can present corpus-derived evidence of current usage in discussing points of variation. Appropriately, Chapman's analysis of Peters' work (Chapter 1, this volume) commends her for letting the data speak for itself, testing pronouncements from previous writers and operationalising appeals to usage for specific usage questions in such a way that readers can draw their own inferences.

Today's instruments embrace the descriptive approach associated with the discipline of linguistics, and particularly in the codification instruments for varieties that have reached the differentiation phase in Schneider's framework, namely American English (AmE), Canadian English (CanE), Australian English (AusE), and New Zealand English (NZE). The most notable evidence-based advances have occurred with usage guides which draw on corpus data, including *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage* (1989) for AmE, Peters (1995, 2004) for AusE, and Fee and McAlpine (1997) for CanE. Two landmarks in empirical lexicography, identified as such by Peters (2021: 621) for the wealth of citational evidence that they embrace, are the *New Oxford Dictionary* (1884–1928) and *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (Gove, 1961). Meanwhile early landmarks in grammatical descriptions were Jespersen (1909–1949), which uses a wealth of historical citations, and Fries (1940), which draws on a corpus of bureaucratic correspondence. More recent corpus-informed milestones include Quirk and colleagues (1985), which makes use of the Survey of English Usage corpus, and Biber and colleagues (1999), which makes systematic use of the Longman Spoken and Written English Corpus. These comprehensive grammatical accounts target BrE and/or AmE: no comparable usage-based description of any other English variety has been undertaken thus far.

Finally let us consider the relationship between the notion of standardisation and that of 'pluricentricity'. Clyne (1992) identifies pluricentric languages as those that cross borders into neighbouring countries, or are spoken in different countries around the world. Pluricentricity is used by Dollinger (Chapter 2, this volume) as the underlying conceptual framework for his exploration of Standard CanE. The central criterion for pluricentricity is standardisation, and as Dollinger astutely observes, the type of imperialist institutional backing that has facilitated the standardisation of national varieties in the past more often now comes in the form of involvement from school boards, media outlets or even influential commentators. Dollinger's focus is on Canada's

lexicographical experiences, and in particular the 'war' waged between two types of dictionaries available to Canadians. The first type is that which embraces distinctively Canadian words and expressions, beginning with the 'Gage dictionary' published in 1967 by Walter Avis and colleagues, and followed two decades later by the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (1998). The second type consists primarily of American dictionaries whose omission of Canadianisms generates the impression that the national variety is not worthy of consideration or promotion. Dollinger's statistics indicate that since 2015 such dictionaries have come to dominate the Canadian market with the result that Canada finds itself, for the first time since 1967, without an up-to-date full-size genuinely Canadian dictionary. The unacceptability of this situation is reflected in the results of a 2023 survey cited by Dollinger & Hinrichs 2026 that yielded overwhelming support by Canadians for the linguistic autonomy of CanE.

Norms and Codification

Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model is often invoked in association with the evolution of regional norms, and particularly with reference to Phase 4 'endonormative stabilisation'. This stage has been completed by only four postcolonial Englishes – AmE, CanE, AusE and NZE – all of which have evolved as regional standards. However, in addition to these settler varieties, several others – Singapore English (SingE) and South African English (SthAfrE) – are drawing close to completing Phase 4 (Leimgruber, 2009; Van Rooy & Terblanche, 2010).

There has been much comment on the evolution of AusE within the framework of Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model (see e.g. Burridge, 2020; Peters, 2020), with some suggesting modifications to Schneider's (2007) account. One such suggestion concerns the onset time of Phase 4, which Schneider dates from an 'event X', the fall of Singapore in 1942, which he conceives as setting Australia on the path to political and linguistic independence. This contention has been questioned by – inter alia – Collins and Yao (2018), who concur with Moore (2008) in identifying a constellation of occurrences in the 1960s and 1970s as the trigger for a new norm-establishing era. This suggestion derives support from the findings of Collins and Yao's diachronic study, which identified: '[i]dentifiable shifts in mean AusE colloquiality scores in the 1961–1991 period [that] coincide with an upsurge of nationalistic fervor in Australia at this time, epitomised most colourfully and infamously in the cult of "Ockerdom" of the 1970s, and heralding the decline of Britishness in Australia' (p. 273). While it is undeniable that the 1942 fall of the British garrison in Singapore signalled the expiry of the assumption that Australia could depend on Britain for strategic defence, foreshadowing the

impending 'decline of Britishness' in Australia, it was not until the 1960s/1970s that the seismic shifts in national identity that saw Australians embracing their own linguistic norms and codifying them in dictionaries and usage guides were to take place.

In the lead-up to Phase 4 in Australia, in Schneider's Phase 3 'nativisation', there were some lone voices defending the distinctiveness and authenticity of Australian words and idioms (Baker, 1945) and Australian speech (Mitchell, 1946). Some evidence is also presented by Smith and Brew (Chapter 4, this volume) that in the early days of Federation, at least some linguistic features in the language of parliamentary Hansard distinguished AusE from BrE. However, this period bore witness to a phenomenon that is not usually associated with this phase in the Dynamic Model, a rise in linguistic and political conservatism. As noted by Peters (2020), the manifestations of this development, including Australia's infamous White Australia policy and 'cultural cringe', reinforced the view that Britain was 'home' for Australians. One linguistic reflection of this situation was the predilection for the RP accent, which was taught to school students in elocution lessons, and required by the Australian Broadcasting Commission (later Corporation) for its radio announcers and newsreel voiceover staff. It was, as we have argued, not until the 1960s that it could be claimed that an unselfconscious and confident acceptance of Australian individuality began to emerge and AusE was genuinely on track to endonormativity. The 'cultural nationalism' (Moore, 2008: 158) of this period saw influential Australian works projecting a strong sense of national identity through the extended use of Australian idiom (e.g. plays such as Hibberd's *Dimboola* (1969) and Williamson's *Don's Party* (1971) and movies such as *Breaker Morant* (1980), *Gallipoli* (1981) and *The Man from Snowy River* (1982)). At the same time, the ABC's Standing Committee on Spoken English determined to support 'educated Australian' speech, the formation of the Australian Government Publishing Service (that published a series of style guides from 1966) lent support to local Australian publishing, and local commercial publishers such as Angus and Robertson were established. It could be argued that the culmination of this sense of linguistic identity was the publication in 1981 of the first edition of Australia's first national dictionary, the *Macquarie Dictionary*, for which Peters was one of the members of the editorial board.

One remaining question for the Dynamic Model remains, one raised by the reorientation of Australia's outlook described above. Collins (2015: 38–39) argues that the dissolution of Australia's traditional British ties during the twentieth century paved the way for the forging of a new identity that included 'a certain exonormative shift' towards the US, with Australia's new state of military, cultural and economic 'dependent independence' reflected in linguistic patterns that show AusE to be following in the footsteps of AmE

(see further the discussion of 'Americanisation' in Section 3). Does this putatively normative reorientation challenge the principle of phasal monodirectionality that is a cornerstone of the Dynamic Model (Schneider, 2007: 30)? Or is the putative shift simply a reflection of the 'transnational attraction' of global English (Schneider, 2014: 28), a phenomenon closely associated with the allure of the US and AmE? Similar questions regarding the Schneiderian principle of monodirectionality are raised by Dollinger (Chapter 2, this volume) with respect to Canada's lexicographical regression from a CanE-oriented to an AmE-dominated marketplace in the present century. Dollinger argues that this Canadian development requires the Dynamic Model to accommodate the possibility of 'reversals'.

Usage and Attitudes

The descriptive work on English usage applied in preparing instruments of codification has been increasingly facilitated by the compilation of computer corpora. The earliest corpora – the American Brown Corpus and the British Lancaster–Oslo/Bergen (LOB) Corpus – were based on written texts alone, from 1961. Parallel versions (Frown and FLOB) with material from the 1990s were subsequently followed by others representing the 1930s and 2006, along with counterparts for AusE (Australian Corpus of English, or ACE) and NZE (Wellington Corpus). From the 1990s the International Corpus of English (ICE) project began producing regional corpora containing spoken as well as written material. The size of corpora has increased exponentially over the years, with web-derived contributions running into billions of words, including GloWbE (Global Web-based English) comprising 1.9 billion words and NOW (News on the Web) comprising currently more than twenty billion words.

In the Australian context Pam Peters has played a pioneering role in the preparation of AusE corpora (ACE and ICE-Aus), and in making regular use of them as a primary source for formulating advice in her landmark (2004) *Cambridge Guide to English Usage*, following in the footsteps of Priestley (1761), Leonard (1929), Fries (1940) and others. Chapman (Chapter 1, this volume) supports the legitimacy of Peters' claim that her guide 'is the first of its kind to make regular use of large databases (corpora) of computerised texts as primary sources of current English' (2024: vii). However, he makes the legitimate observation that, by comparison with the corpus tools available today, those to which Peters had access were limited. For example, context-dependent searches based on POS-tagged corpora are needed to identify the grammatical rules relevant to the choice between relative *that* vs. *which*, and in the absence semantic parsing there is no (semi-)automatic way to capture meaning-based distinctions, as for example those relevant to the uses of *infer* and *imply*. It is plausible to anticipate that, in the future, usage guides will

become available that move beyond opportunistic 'corpus-informed' methodologies to comprehensively 'corpus-based' approaches using syntactically parsed and semantically annotated corpora.

Information on usage can also be obtained via elicitation tests. Leonard (1929), Mittins and colleagues (1970) and Greenbaum (1977) used this technique to investigate acceptability judgements on disputed usages. Such data can complement corpus-derived data with supplementary information on users' age, gender, socio-economic status and so on, especially in cases where these are not provided in the corpus. One example of this approach is Peters' use of elicitation results of an *Australian Style* survey (2021: 626–627) to confirm the Australian preference for the accusative over genitive pronouns with *-ing* gerund-participial constructions as noted in ACE and ICE-Aus, and to associate this preference particularly with people under the age of forty-five years. Smith and Brew (Chapter 4, this volume) also comment on this feature, showing that there is a growing preference for the accusative form even in AusE, and even in a formal parliamentary setting. *Australian Style* survey data has also been used in researching, inter alia, the subjunctive in AusE (Peters, 1998), irregular verb morphology (Collins & Peters, 2008; Peters, 2009a) and variation between the perfect and preterite (Elsness, 2009).

A vexed question relating to English usage, one on which Peters' (2014, 2021) research has shed light, is the extent to which it may be impacted by prescriptive writings. Studies on the subjunctive by Auer (2009) and on irregular verb forms by Anderwald (2016) comparing commentaries in historical grammars with historical usage data have found scant evidence to suggest the influence of the former on the latter. Similar findings are reported by Peters, whose 2014 study examines the following three variable usage items: (1) the suffixes *-ise* vs. *-ize*: Fowler recommends the Latinate *-ise* over the French *-ize* on the grounds that the former has fewer exceptions; (2) *all right* vs *alright*: despite the commonness of the latter, whose formation is parallel to that of *almost*, *already*, *also*, *altogether* and so on, the OED recommends always using *all right*, while Fowler's acceptance of *alright* is confusingly qualified by a number of conditions; (3) *this data* vs. *these data*: the singular use of *data* as a mass noun, is gaining increasing acceptance, despite objections from those standing by its etymology as a Latinate plural. Peters found strikingly different treatments of these items in a set of British and Australian codification instruments, the former demonstrating a considerably higher level of acceptance of the formerly proscribed alternants over time than the latter. Interestingly however, evidence adduced from text corpora and the internet, suggests that these differences were not reflected in significant differences in actual usage between the two varieties. Peters' findings demonstrate 'the limited power of prescriptive style manuals and usage guides to dictate the paths of change against the tide of common usage' (p. 597).

Also relevant to this question are the findings of Van Rooy and colleagues (Chapter 3, this volume), who investigate the effects of editorial intervention – as influenced by grammars, usage guides and dictionaries – in homogenising texts published in subvarieties of South African English. The study focuses on a single grammatical category, modal auxiliaries, one whose members are often the target of prescriptive rules (e.g. those involving the use of *can* vs. *may*, and of *shall* vs. *will*). Van Rooy and colleagues find that editorial intervention has little effect overall on the normative orientation of the texts, and particularly in the case of texts produced by BSAfE authors. In another context where proscriptive influence on the editing of texts would be expected to be particularly strong – the production of parliamentary Hansards – Smith and Brew (Chapter 4, this volume) find an increasingly permissive attitude in AusE towards the inclusion of several of the traditionally proscribed variants mentioned earlier.

Intimately tied to the development of a national variety, and more generally to that of the nation itself, are the attitudes of its speakers. In Australia language attitude research over the past fifty years has confirmed increasing acceptance of AusE, with speakers today less often comparing it unfavourably against other varieties (see e.g. Bradley & Bradley, 2001; Burridge, 2010; Leitner, 2004b; Reeve, 1989; Willoughby et al., 2013). More specifically, acceptability tests applied to AusE by Watson (1978), Lee (2002), Severin (2017) and others record positive reactions to features of standard AusE that may not be regarded as standard in other varieties of English.

Leitner (2004a: 114) proposes four phases in the evolution of Australians' attitudes towards their use of English, which correspond to those identified by Delbridge (1998), and intersect those of Schneider (2007): (1) 'English in Australia' (AusE primarily viewed negatively in terms of its deviations from BrE); (2) 'AusE Awareness' (increasing interest and pride in the individuality of AusE, from the end of the nineteenth century); (3) 'Mainstream AusE I' (ambivalent views on AusE from the 1930s, with incipient acceptance of the local accent); (4) 'Mainstream AusE II' (acceptance of standard AusE as the local norm, beginning with the accent in the 1970s and expanding from there to other aspects of the language). In Australia, as elsewhere, attitudes to the national variety are often closely associated with cultural stereotypes, including a penchant for anti-authoritarianism and anti-intellectualism, and a distaste for pretentiousness.

An oft-cited attitudinal phenomenon in the Australian context is the alleged 'Americanisation' of AusE (see Korhonen, 2020). As Korhonen observes, the often strident public commentary in Australia directed at American influences tends to be out of step with the more subtle findings of linguistic studies. Post-WWII Australian–American military relations were bolstered by economic and cultural ties, with an influx of Americanisms entering Australia via film,

television, radio, advertising and sport. Unfortunately, scholarly attitudinal studies are scarce. Age-graded studies by Ferguson (2008) and Korhonen (2017) indicate that younger Australians are no more tolerant of Americanisms than are older ones. Furthermore, as observed by Peters (2014), there is general consensus that the main impact of Americanisms is to be found in the vocabulary, where younger Australians tend to be the most prolific borrowers. The impact on pronunciation, spelling and morphosyntax is minimal at best.

Epicentrality and Extraterritoriality

Not all language varieties in a pluricentric language are equal. When they interact, some exert influence on others, and these in turn tend to be more 'evolved', more advanced in the development of their own norms of usage. Following Leitner (1992) the term 'epicentrality' has been used to describe the linguistic impacts of one variety on another/others within a given area such as South Asia, South-East Asia, Southern Africa or Australasia. Pam Peters has contributed greatly to discussions on, and research into, this phenomenon. In Peters (2025) she examines different types of linguistic features that have been observed to participate in epicentral relationships between varieties of English. The hypothesis that India is an epicentre in South Asian English has derived support from studies of syntactic variables such as 'dative alternation' (Gries & Bernaisch, 2016), of lexicogrammatical variables such as the 'light verb' construction (Hoffmann et al., 2011), and of lexical variables as investigated in Mukherjee and Bernaisch's (2015) study of 'cultural keywords' such as *government* and *religion*. The hypothesis that Australia exerts epicentral influence on New Zealand draws support from the body of loanwords taken up in NZE in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Peters, 2025: 225), but research on phonological variables (such as Przewozny and Viollains' (2016) study of front vowel systems) and on morphosyntactic variables (such as Peters and colleagues' (2022) study of *-ed/-t* past forms) point in a different direction, suggesting a dissipation of the epicentral relationship between Australia and NZ in the twenty-first century, with the NZ patterns of use reflecting extraterritorial but not epicentral forces.

Peters (2025: 227–229) argues convincingly for the fruitfulness of researching multiple linguistic variables in tandem in investigating epicentrality. For example Gonçalves and colleagues' (2018) study of Americanisation investigated heteronyms such as *diaper* vs. *nappy*, and spelling alternations such as *-or* and *-our* in thirty world languages, including nine World Englishes, using data from Google Books and Twitter. The remarkable rate of adoption of words and spellings from AmE attests to its influence as a global language, while at the same time raising challenging questions about the nature

of its influence in different countries. While in countries geographically close to the US such as Canada and the Bahamas, the influence of AmE is extraterritorial – and more specifically epicentral – it may be due to what Schneider (2014) refers to as 'transnational attraction' wherein elements that are assimilated as extraterritorial inputs into varieties of English are no longer perceived as borrowings from AmE as a distinct regional variety but rather as by-products of the pervasive phenomenon of globalisation.

The majority of studies on epicentral relationships to date have invoked frequencies derived from synchronic corpora such as ICE and GloWbE. However, as argued convincingly by Hundt (2013) and Gries and colleagues (2022), sociolinguistic analyses are also essential in epicentral research. Studies that have investigated attitudes towards extraterritorial forces in order to explain the motivations for the adoption of features include Bernaisch and Koch (2016) and Hundt and colleagues (2015). Unfortunately, while the resources for synchronic investigations are readily available, the same cannot be said for the detailed investigation of epicentral relationships over time, for which suitable diachronic corpora are in limited supply. As a result, putative historical cases of epicentrality have largely been dependent on small numbers of lexical borrowings. Witness for example the cross-Tasman relationship between Australia and New Zealand in the nineteenth century, when terms relating to military and convict management such as *outstation*, *muster* and *mob* were borrowed from AusE into NZE, where they were applied to agricultural practices (Peters, 2009b). Crucially for the claim of epicentrality, it was AusE, the closest geographical neighbour of NZE, that was the only possible source for the loanwords in question.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have discussed four interrelated areas of English language research: prescriptive traditions, standardisation and pluricentricity; norms and codification; usage and attitudes; and epicentrality and extraterritoriality. In all four areas the seminal contributions by Pam Peters loom large. We congratulate her for her achievements and trust that this volume will bear witness to the high esteem in which she is held by her colleagues.

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