

What New Zealand English teaches us about Sound Change

Abstract

The University of Canterbury holds several large collections of annotated recordings, which collectively span the history of New Zealand English. This talk outlines three recent studies which exploit the size and time-depth of these collections to make new breakthroughs in understanding how pronunciation changes over time.

The studies explore changes in word duration (Soskuthy and Hay in press), the pronunciation of medial /t/ (Foulkes and Hay 2016), and the interlinked changes in the New Zealand English short front vowels (Hay et al 2015) - responsible for the iconic NZ 'fush and chups'. I show in detail how these changes have unfolded over the history of New Zealand English. Together, they provide a uniquely detailed glimpse into how language change is propagated across words and across multiple generations of speakers.

References:

Hay J., Pierrehumbert J., Walker A. and LaShell P. (2015) Tracking word frequency effects through 130 years of sound change. *Cognition* 139: 83-91

Hay J. and Foulkes P. (2016) The evolution of medial /t/ over real and remembered time. *Language* 92(2): 298-330.

Soskuthy, M. and Hay, J (in press) Changing word usage predicts changing word durations in New Zealand English. *Cognition*.