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Understanding the place of Australian English: Exploring folklinguistic accounts through contemporary Australian authors

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This paper explores Australian English (AuE) utilising a folklinguistic approach and engaging with its use in novel-writing. It is argued that discussions by contemporary Australian authors about their approaches to writing and voicing characters, and the actual voices authors give to their characters can be used as data to gain new understandings of what language forms have social meanings within AuE. The value of this analytical approach is then illustrated with interview and text extracts from one Australian author, revealing that this type of analysis provides insights into both the folklinguistic understandings of an author and how language variation is employed within the fiction series to index local types. It is concluded that such an approach can be generalised to better understand variation in AuE as accessed by other language focussed professions and their differing conceptualisations of language, as well as to further understand variation in other varieties of English, and in other languages.

Keywords: Australian English; folklinguistics; sociolinguistic variation; language ideologies; social meaning; Australian fiction

1. Introduction

This paper explores the current place of Australian English (AuE) through analysis of social evaluation of this variety in contemporary novels and accounts of Australian authors. Within Australia, and within AuE, there are many varieties of English, including ethnic varieties (see Leitner, 2004a, 2004b). The privileged place of some forms of AuE in a national ‘standard’ has been a result of the creation of uniformity for nation-building and nationalistic Discourses

(Joseph, 2004; Schneider, 2007). AuE, through these processes, now stands as an object of enquiry within linguistics and discussion beyond this. In Section 2 we explore this further, while in Sections 3 and 4 we look ‘beyond linguistics’. The approach in these later sections utilises folklinguistics, investigating speakers’ beliefs about AuE that are based on their understandings of their social world. *Folk-* does not imply incorrectness or ignorance, rather linguistic accounts that exist outside of linguistics, although these are not dichotomous (Niedzielski & Preston, 2000). In studying authors and their writing, the reference is in fact to people with detailed knowledge regarding language. The analysis utilises two data sources: (1) written materials by and a research interview with authors of Australian novels about writing, examined as metapragmatic discourse, and (2) constructions of fictional Australian characters within novels. Through these discussions, light is shed on understandings of AuE and its place in the world.

Research to date on folklinguistics (e.g. Niedzielski & Preston, 2000), has focussed largely on popular or common understandings of language, although there has also been attention to practices which enforce these (see Cameron, 1995) and their consequences (e.g. J. Milroy & Milroy, 1985/2012).The scope for engaging with discipline-based folklinguistics is fertile for opportunities to both better understand language in context and to allow linguistics to engage more deeply with other disciplines. To introduce an author’s perspective, in *Everything I know about writing*, John Marsden, a top-selling and highly awarded Australian author, advises:

> When you’re writing fiction, give each significant character an identifiable personal voice. The words you put in a character’s mouth should reveal a lot about that person to the reader…even more about the character than the character knows about herself. (1993/1998, p. 132)

This extract reveals the notion of *personal voice*, an understanding of *words* as a source of non-referential meaning, telling us something about a speaker and, in the final sentence, that this may be outside of a speaker's control but, from the advice, something that an author should be able to employ according to purpose. These comments provide insights into a particular way of thinking about language use and its effects.

Insights can also be drawn from the implementation of these ideas in narration and dialogue within novels. In the following excerpt from *Gunshot Road* by Adrian Hyland, the narrator is talking with Meg at the scene of a fatal car accident:

> 'How's the whitefeller?' I asked.
> 'Reckon this one'll be okay; bit of a bump on the head. Wanted to get up, but I made im stay down. Stop the blood.'
> Meg spent much of her life patching people up. Out at Stonehouse she was the health worker. And the teacher, come to think of it. And foster mother to half the dropouts and delinquents in the district. She'd done a bit of patching in her time.
> […]
> 'Nother feller bin finish, parnparr,' she added.
> (2010, p. 23)

The *personal voice* that Hyland gives Meg clearly establishes her ethnicity as an Aboriginal person to Australian readers. To do this, Hyland needs to not only draw on his own folklinguistic knowledge but to also accommodate that of his readers.

While data sources such as these are somewhat at odds with traditional descriptions of language varieties and their histories, their ideological saturation means that they are valid and rich sources in understanding these issues as long as their limitations are considered (Penry Williams, 2011). From this perspective, there is value in examining authors' metapragmatic discourse and the voices they give characters in relation to understanding the social meaning of contemporary and historical variation in AuE. This paper presents a short case study of such an approach.

2. Background

In approaching the study of variation in AuE, it is important to recognise that a range of languages and English varieties have had, and continue to have, an impact on the development of AuE, and that attitudes to AuE and ideological views about variation in AuE, both within and outside the discipline of linguistics, have had, until comparatively recently, a fundamental impact on the recognition and study of variation in AuE.

Whilst there has been much discussion about just how AuE developed into a distinct variety from numerous input varieties, most linguists agree on some sort of mixing-bowl model wherein various regional forms from the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland melded together to create a new set of norms, with the majority of what eventually was privileged to be codified as a national ‘standard’ originating from south-eastern England, specifically London and East Anglia (Kiesling, 2004; Leitner, 2004a; Trudgill, 1986). However, in actual fact *all* of the input regional varieties, including most notably Irish English, Scottish English/Modern Scots and northern English English varieties, have contributed to contemporary AuE (e.g. Bradley, 2003). Even more critically, the input of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island languages in the development of AuE remains under-researched. While approximately 250 different languages were spoken across approximately 700 different political groups at the time of invasion (Thieberger & McGregor, 1994)), and the 2011 Census counted about 61,800 people, representing 11.8% of the Indigenous population, speaking an Indigenous language at home (Karidakis & Kelly, 2018), the documentation of AuE remains an unpardonably white one. Correspondingly, in contemporary Australia, the rising prominence of languages from Asia and the Middle East and the simultaneous decline in the number of speakers of more established community languages from Europe (Karidakis & Arunachalam, 2016), argue that the input of migrant language speaking communities in the evolution of AuE deserve to be heard as well. While many features inherited from these various inputs remain as variants used by various, though not necessarily all, AuE speakers, such features, along with understandings of their social meaning, have frequently been marginalised in the face of a codified AuE.

In terms of attitudes about AuE, the first discussions of AuE being a variety were met with outrage from many Australians, as differing from ‘motherland’ English varieties was seen as error. Change began in the early 1940s, with more positive views about AuE becoming somewhat mainstream by the 1970s, and celebration of AuE as a variety beginning in the 1980s. However, diversity in opinion on its legitimacy remains, especially when compared to (the ideals of) British English (Penry Williams, 2011). (For further discussion see Leitner, 2004a).

Schneider (2007) models such changes as evidence of the five phases through which a postcolonial society transforms English from a borrowed language into its own variety. Whilst contemporary AuE is in Phase 5 (Differentiation), looking back, he views both the need in the 20th century to emphasise that AuE was a standard variety of English, able to be compared with northern hemisphere varieties but stand in its own right, along with frequent reports of homogeny within AuE as ideological, an exercise in nation-building, remnant from Phase 4 (Endonormative stabilisation). Furthermore, Leitner argues that ‘most of what is considered typical of [AuE] has been pushed down to a socially inferior position’ (1984, p. 78). What we find then is that many of the most recognised features of AuE remain on the fringes both in terms of their grammaticality and social position, but at the same time they are viewed as indexing Australianness (Mulder & Penry Williams, 2014).

The following sections explore social meaning and how authors recognise diversity in voicing characters when they deploy social meanings that are associated with specific language forms. This in turn enables us to address larger questions of how people in contemporary Australia use AuE to negotiate cultural identities.

3. Analysing social meaning via folklinguistics

Broadly, social meaning gives information about speakers, such as their salient social groups, and can be conceptualised as linking identities to linguistic forms via language ideologies and indexicality (Penry Williams, 2011). Language ideologies, can be described as the sets of beliefs about social and linguistic relationships that speakers draw on in their use, metapragmatic comments on language structure and use, and their linguistic evaluation of social groups (Irvine, 1989; Silverstein, 1979, 2003). While language ideologies can be created through different processes (Gal & Irvine, 1995; Irvine & Gal, 2000), the process of iconisation is most relevant to the analysis below. Iconisation involves a linguistic form being so connected to a social type or group that it is seen as embodying the characteristics attributed to them; for example, a vowel realisation can be 'quaint' (Irvine & Gal, 2000).

In the model developed in Penry Williams (2011), different indexical orders (Silverstein, 2003) are associated with different types of identities. Following Bucholtz and Hall (2005), this encompasses interactional, societal and local identities. These can include *locally salient Others* as social types to compare speakers against. The key points for the discussion below are that existing indexical relationships with macro societal categories such as gender and social class can be used creatively to link form and identities, and that this relies on ideological reinterpretation of the previous indexicalities (Silverstein, 2003). As correlations between form and social groups become *enregistered* by folklinguistics and ideology (Agha, 2007), linguistic forms can be understood as having social meaning. For this to work for authors, the understandings of the social meanings must be shared with readers as those not bound by the same ideologies may miss some of this.

To illustrate, we consider the excerpt from *Gunshot Road* presented in the previous section. Hyland (2010) uses a range of linguistic forms in creating a *personal voice* for Meg. In turn these forms can be examined regarding their social meanings. For example, forms such as *im* ‘him’, *stop*/*finish*+ø past tense, *feller* ‘fellow’, and *bin* ‘is’ are distinctive features in some varieties of Aboriginal English (Eagleson, Kaldor, & Malcolm, 1982) and index Aboriginal ethnicity, a first order indexicality. Likewise, when inventing the word, *parnparr* ‘poor bugger’, Hyland draws on language ideologies about what Indigenous languages look/sound like. In ascribing Meg’s speech with these linguistic forms, he recognises that they will convey Meg’s Aboriginality to readers. The dialogue also includes forms which are understood, via ideological reinterpretations of indexes of social class, to index informality. These include pronoun dropping and the use of *reckon* which are understood this way across many varieties of English. In indexing Meg’s ethnicity to the reader, Hyland draws on well-known features of Aboriginal English that could be understood as enregistered as such, and recognisable to those without a lot of knowledge of this variety. Arguably, the use of the pseudo-Indigenous language vocabulary makes this clear for less familiar readers, or minimally they might recognise the informal forms as showing difference. In addition, the narrator’s description of Meg works in tandem with her speech and existing social imagery to present her as a no-nonsense and salt of the earth type character (a common type in Australian fiction with ideological links to national identity).

To summarise, the social meanings of a linguistic form can be drawn on by an author for creative purposes. Furthermore, through readers’ understandings of the forms, the related language ideologies are reinforced. Authors’ comments on how they create their characters’ voices, can make these processes more transparent. For these reasons, discussions of authors about their approach to writing and voicing characters can be studied to gain new understandings of what language forms have social meanings accessible to ‘do work’ and what those social meanings are.

4. Voice and social meaning

This section examines the processes of novel writing and voicing characters, and how they can provide insights into AuE. It starts by drawing on Australian authors' comments about their approaches to writing, before moving to an analysis of one author.

4. 1 Writers on writing voices

Marele Day, whose Claudia Valentine series has become a classic of Australian crime writing, observes: 'We read fiction to know what it is to be human, to experience, through this parallel universe, the lives of others' (2013, pp. 29-30). As authors acknowledge, an important means of drawing readers into this *parallel universe* is to create characters that they can believe in as real people. Geoffrey McGeachin, whose first novel, *Fat, Fifty & F***ed!* won the inaugural Australian Popular Fiction Competition, says:

> For me, a very big part in creating believable characters is giving them their own voice; making sure they speak in their own way with their own rhythm, so that it's not my voice readers hear when a character talks. (2013, p. 132)

It is not uncommon for writers to speak of needing to hear a character's voice before they can begin writing. Marsden (1993/1998, p. 125), for example, maintains that:

> For me, the single most important thing is to get the voice of the characters. Once I've got that I can usually start writing the book, even if I don't know much else. I might have only the vaguest idea of the plot, the setting and the factual details of the character's life. But if I know how they talk, if I know the words they use and the rhythms and patterns of their speech, if I can hear their voice, then I'm ready to hit the word-processor.

Such discussion highlights the importance of characters' *voices* in both the readers' 'buy in', and so the quality of the novel, and the writing process. Far more than about constructed dialogue, the way people talk is a way into worldbuilding and can even be the starting point for the process of writing the novel.

Characters' voices are frequently described as drawing upon voices from the author's life, for instance Marsden (2000) asserts that most of his characters are in-part at least based on people he has known. In the *Tomorrow* series, which centres around a group of Australian teenagers, the voices of Homer, Corrie and Fi are based on individual students he taught, Lee on a good friend at university, and Robyn on his older sister, while the voice of the narrator, Ellie, is based both on Charlotte Austin, a student he taught at several stages, as well as Norah Linton, a character in Mary Grant Bruce's much-loved Billabong books (set and published in the early 1900s), He states that: 'Most of my characters would be only ten or twenty per cent based on real people, although the correlation between Ellie and Charlotte is a bit higher' (p. 75). As characters' voices build on observations and reinterpretations of voices from real life, authors thus display what they notice and how they understand this.

Authors are also able to provide insightful metacommentary on a range of factors that influence a character's voice, such as age, gender, ethnicity, and status, along with personality and mood. They comment on perceived correlations between these and actual language forms in discussing ideas such as *speech rhythms, sentence length, words* and *voice* and via the provision of examples.[1] For instance, Marsden asserts that status is one of the strongest determinants of a character's voice:

> High status can be pompous ('it has come to my attention that some of your recent behaviour …') or aggressive ('you can get stuffed mate') or confident ('Put it there thanks'). High status people often use long words and long sentences, because they know that they won't be interrupted. (1993/1998, p. 128)

Thus, an author may use language variation to create high status via long words and long sentences. This serves as a shorthand to personality or context by tapping into associated social meanings.

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[1] Note that authors may have more technical and specific ways of speaking about language than shown here as the materials consulted in this section are aimed at novice writers.

The relationship between talk and fictional dialogue is complicated by the recognition that the latter is not truly emulating speech, but needs to appear to be. As internationally celebrated Australian author Michael Robotham (2013, p. 238) remarks: ‘Great dialogue only “sounds” real. The dialogue used by good writers is stylised and unexpected. It is shorter, snappier and funnier than in real life.’ Other considerations relate to the restrictions of publishing. As Marsden (2000, p. 113) points out: ‘… most teenagers swear a lot. And yet that’s never properly reflected in books. There’s also far more personal abuse, and sexist and racist exchanges between most teenagers than normally appear in fiction.’ Finally, in her six mysteries featuring Corinna Chapman set in contemporary Melbourne, Kerry Greenwood pragmatically ‘doesn’t use any really super contemporary slang as it will be out of fashion the next year’ (interview data) and unnecessarily date the books. Thus, authors do not represent all elements of talk and focus on their purposes in presenting it.

Above we explored writers’ ways of speaking about, and apparent understandings of, ways of speaking. Although these beliefs are professional and highly considered, they draw on systems of understanding outside of linguistics and thus can be classified as folklinguistic. Across Australian novelists, similar ideas emerge suggesting shared language ideologies but, following the conceptualisation here, this does not suggest these cannot be contested or subscribed to with differing levels of commitment. This allows for individual difference, which is often key in creative work.

There are several points to highlight regarding writers’ accounts and how these relate to social meanings emergent in the narration and speech within their novels. First, contemporary, established Australian authors appear to privilege individual experience and personal contact in discussions of sources or references for ways of speaking. As people who also live within larger cultures, they no doubt rely also on media representations, circulating talk about talk, as well as existing fictional literature. In fact, there is a difference to non-writers in that the last of these is likely to be of increased significance and study as the discourse in novels is also in dialogue with previous novels and writers (Bakhtin, 1981). Furthermore, it is highly likely that portions of a character that are not based on perceptions of individuals encountered, will draw on social types. This is not due to lack of imagination but in order for readers to quickly be able to access such information, authors recreate and interact with established and shared conceptualisations of people, especially when these go unnamed (Agha, 2005). This is even the case in science-fiction and fantasy where completely new types of 'people' are introduced. Thus, new social meanings are made from old in indexical cycles.

Second, the social meanings of ways of speaking work through contrast with other ways of speaking (Irvine, 2001). This means that variation is constantly relevant in interpretation. Voices in the novel interact with those surrounding them in the diversity of society (Bakhtin, 1981). A further point, not recognised in the short account we give above, is that the relationship to the author's voice works in dialogue with others presented within the novel, with the novel heteroglossic as 'another's speech in another's language, serving authorial speech but in a refracted way' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 324).

In terms of authors' purposes, in addition to establishing character, they are showing context, building worlds and advancing narrative through dialogue. This makes it necessarily different to everyday talk. For one, it does not contain the false starts and repetitions of naturally occurring speech, except when they serve particular purposes (in situations in real life in which usage may be markedly increased). Thus, while the voices authors give to their characters can give us insights about variation in AuE, there are also limitations due to fundamental differences.[2]

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[2] In fact, anyone who has taught discourse analysis is highly aware of the great success of writers in achieving an appearance of real talk: despite the constant contrary evidence of the speech people

Via the necessity of playing with social types and shared correlations, authors engage with prevailing language ideologies, even if set in another time or world of which the reader may have little or no experience. In doing this and through speaking about these processes, they also instantiate language ideologies, including those linked to communities of writers. Social meanings thus can be uncovered in how authors then employ this in forming their characters and this can be drawn on in analysis for rich understandings of variation.

4.2 Australian English via the microcosm of Kerry Greenwood's **Phyrne Fisher** *series characters*

To see how this works, we give a short case study of some of multiple award-winning author Kerry Greenwood's metapragmatic comment, together with how her ideas play out within her novels. The quotes in-text below are from a 90-minute interview conducted by the first author in December 2013, while the excerpts are from some of Greenwood's 20 mysteries featuring the amateur detective Phryne Fischer, set in Melbourne in 1928–1929.

Greenwood describes the setting and world of Phryne Fischer as borne from her life experiences. Greenwood explains that through her father, who was a wharf worker, she became interested in the 1928 strike on the Melbourne docks and completed a legal history thesis about it as part of her combined law degree at the University of Melbourne. For the thesis she spent a year researching in the Waterside Workers Federation archives,

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are surrounded by every day, they generally seem to think that it *is* like fictional dialogue. Students new to seeing transcriptions of talk are often surprised by the shortness of turns, commonness of overlaps, frequency of pragmatic markers, and so on. They are also often struck by the idea that talk is mundane, ritualised, and may be just about maintaining relationships rather than profound information sharing or displays of personality and emotion. This suggests that models from fiction loom large in understandings of speech.

interviewing old ‘wharfies’ (dock/wharf workers) from that era, and reading *The Argus* and *The Age*, ‘the respectable newspapers’, alongside *Table Talk*, and the *Hawklet*, ‘an incredibly grubby little rag, full of divorce evidence and all that sort of stuff.’ Greenwood asserts it is from her early experiences in the company of her father and his friends and her research for her degree that the voices of the Phryne Fisher series are drawn.

The analysis here focuses on Bert and Cec, wharf workers (when not caught up in the strike), who Phryne employs to do some of the ‘rougher’ work on her investigations. Greenwood says that, like most of her characters, Bert and Cec are ‘stolen from the real world’. They were developed from Tom Hills [*Red Tom*[3]] and Tip O’Hays [*Tippo*] respectively, two old *wharfies* Greenwood interviewed extensively for her thesis. She describes their voices as those of ‘uneducated working-class men who don’t write much’, ‘talk out of the corner of their mouths’, and ‘hoard their words, as if they only have a certain number of words and that’s all they are going to use, otherwise they would be giving something away’. When these men started talking to each other about the strike, ‘their voices changed, got slower and deeper, back to what they would have been at the time.’ ‘You get the impression you’re just opening a window on 1928, listening, sticking your ear through.’ Thus, Greenwood sees the interviews as providing tastes of language authentic to that time. More specifically, working-class language forms that Greenwood comments on as coming through in Bert and Cec’s voices include rhyming slang (e.g. ‘Sit down and rest your plates.’[4]), ‘the beautiful understatement of the working-class’ (describing difficult times as e.g. ‘Them times were a bit ordinary.’), and being ‘much influenced by whatever they were reading so Bert uses a lot of Communist manifesto phrases’ (e.g. ‘Sucking a living from the bleeding and starving poor.'). She also comments on the use of sentence-final *but*, highlighted in the interview due to her use of this being of particular interest to the current authors, as in the following extract:

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[3] *Red Tom* was a communist (a reference to the red flag).

[4] A shortening of *plates of meat*, rhyming slang for *feet*.

> …Got a few mates who play jazz. Not my kind of music, **but**. And them musos drink like wharfies, a man can't hardly keep up with them. (Greenwood, 2002, p. 244)

She states that the use of *but* here: '...doubles it. It is emphatic. If you're just saying, "They drink like wharfies." it's a straight statement. "They drink like wharfies, but." means **I** [emphasised] am overwhelmed by how they drink. It lends the sentence a different caste.' She further linked the form to people from Queensland[5] and being working class.

These selected insights from the interview show again a highlighting of personal experience here coupled with academic research for a separate purpose. Her reading of a year of newspapers of the time, with different target readers, no doubt also was a valuable resource in creating the voice of the diverse characters within the Phyrne Fischer series. Her comments on her interviewees which were the basis of Cec and Bert index social class. They can also be more indirectly tied to common ideas about AuE such as the importance of non-standard language (difference from norms of writing, set by higher status groups) (Penry Williams, 2011), laconic men (hoarding words) (Sussex, 2004) and literally being tight-lipped or close jawed with the possible understanding of this being associated with speaking in a muted or muffled manner. Her comments on the use of sentence-final *but* align with common ideas on this form (Mulder & Penry Williams, 2014; Penry Williams, 2011) but further its role of achieving her aims in-text whilst establishing Bert via indexing a type of man partially familiar to those who engage with Australian creative arts and media. That is, although Bert has a *personal voice*, the readers have a short-cut into this via established identities of social types strongly linked to national identity (intentionally singular) and a rough characterisation of him before they increasingly learn about his political views and experiences in World War 1. Thus, in writing these characters and in speaking about them, Greenwood reveals language ideologies related to AuE and who uses which forms.

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[5] Within the state of Victoria, the state of Queensland is associated with 'bad language' use (Mulder & Penry Williams, 2014; Penry Williams, 2011)

The following excerpt from *Death at Victoria Dock* illustrates how some of Greenwood's reported beliefs about working-class language of the late 1920s play out in the voices of Bert and Cec, and by comparison, the absence of such features is felt in the voice of the refined and worldly Phryne.

[Phryne] '…What's wrong with Little Billy?'
[Bert] 'Nothing, if you like murderers, and I don't. He's got them pale blue eyes that look straight through yer. Give a man the grues,[6] he would.'
[Phryne] 'Does he give you the grues, Cec?'
[Cec] 'You bet, Miss.'
[Phryne] 'An impressively nasty character, evidently. Were you in any danger?'
[Bert] 'Nah, he don't like the commos,[7] he says that the anarchists are giving crime a bad name. Wasn't it Little Billy that did for that cop outside the Olympic Games pub?'
Cec nodded.
[Phryne] 'Olympic Games' I don't know a hotel of that name.'
[Bert] 'Nah, it's called the Railway Hotel. In 'Roy.[8] They have an SP[9] in the courtyard, see, and when the cops raid 'em there's lots of Olympic events for the blokes who are running away. The long jump, the hundred yard dash, the high-jump over the wall.'

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[6] To give someone the *grues* is to make them shiver.

[7] 'communists'.

[8] 'Fitzroy', a suburb of Melbourne.

[9] *SP*: 'starting price bookmaker', an illegal practice involving an unlicensed bookmaker who operates off racetracks and pays starting price odds.

> Phryne laughed.
> (Greenwood, 1992, pp. 91–92) (speaker identification added).

While a full discussion of all the social meanings uncoverable within this short extract would require more space than we have here, there are several patterns of use that are key in illustrating our analytical approach. First, there are multiple instances of 'non-standard' forms, which as stated above is a notion closely tied to AuE. In the extract they help provide a clear contrast between the language use of Bert and Cec and that of Phryne. They are further internationally recognisable and ideologically associated with lower social classes (as 'standard' forms intentionally exclude and marginalise them). There also marked informal forms, including spelling of reduced forms which have a similar effect (*nah*, *'em*, *yer*). Uses of hypocoristics (initialism *SP,* clipping *'Roy*, embellished clipping *commo*s) are also iconised as distinctly Australian and associated with supposed national characteristics (Mulder & Penry Williams, 2014; Penry Williams, 2011). In addition, Bert uses forms uncommon in contemporary AuE which provide a feeling of another time (most of the words footnoted). Together, and with lexical choices and other devices (such as renaming of the pub), Bert's speech engages with the creativity and colourfulness often associated with the most iconic speakers of AuE (Sussex, 2004). The comparison of Bert and Cec's speech with Phryne's *An impressively nasty character, evidently* and *I don't know of a hotel of that name*, for instance, recognises that there is not just these other ways of speaking AuE and that there is variation and diversity, here largely engaged with ideologies of class and to a lesser extent gender. Greenwood thus voices her unique characters via existing ideas about variation in AuE, allowing them to be recognisable and familiar at the same time as new.

5. Conclusion

This paper brings innovative methodology to the study of variation in AuE. Specifically, it has been argued that discussions by authors about their approach to writing and voicing within novels, and the voices they give characters can be used as data to gain new understandings of what language forms have social meanings and what these are. The value of this analytical approach has been illustrated with interview and text extracts from one Australian author and what they tell us about variation in AuE. Such an approach can be generalised and applied in better understanding variation in both other language focussed professions and their differing conceptualisations of language as well as other varieties of English, and, indeed, also other languages.

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