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# ATTITUDES TO ACCENTS IN ENGLISH: A PACIFIC STUDY<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

The article reports on a study about the attitudes towards four accents in English of 156 students from Fiji and other Pacific nations for whom English is a second language. The respondents listened to gender pairs of speakers of middle-of-the-road varieties of Australian, New Zealand, North American, and English English, then rated them on 18 personality and voice traits, and tried to identify their nationality and socio-economic background.

Results indicate that the North American accent is the best recognized, followed by the Australasian, and there are differences in accuracy of identification between Indo-Fijians and Fijians. The American female leads in solidarity, competence, and most power traits, followed by the American male, while the Australian male leads in status traits. Female speakers are downgraded for status traits. The traditional external standard of the region, English English, is being replaced as the prestige variety, reflecting historical changes in geopolitical influence.

## **1. Introduction**

Since the 1960s social psychologists and sociolinguists have studied people's attitudes towards different languages and their speakers. The instrument first developed for this kind of research was the now classic matched guise technique, pioneered by Lambert and his colleagues (Lambert et al. 1960;

Lambert 1967). After hearing a recording of several speakers reading out loud a short passage, listeners indicate their impressions of the speakers' personality and socio-economic status by rating them on Likert-type semantic differential scales. The speakers, unbeknownst to the listeners, are bilinguals who are each recorded twice, in each of their languages or 'guises'. The aim is to control all variables except language, and to reveal listeners' attitudes without making them overly aware of the genuine purpose of the experiment.

Language attitude studies stem from an interest in finding out how languages of unequal status are evaluated in the society where they are used. Research has often focussed on majority and minority languages or diglossic varieties, but early studies also investigated perceptions of standard and regional accents. Thus, in their study of theatre-goers in Wales, Bourhis and Giles (1976) explored reactions not only to English and Welsh, but also to Welsh-accented varieties of English and RP. Similarly, El Dash and Tucker (1975) studied perceptions of Classical and colloquial Egyptian Arabic, as well as of American, British, and Egyptian English. The major conclusion of the early studies was that one language, the majority or standard language, is associated with power and status traits, and the minority or non-standard variety with solidarity and local affiliation.

As for attitudes towards different accents in English, the main finding until the 1980's was that the evaluation of RP as the prestige variety was common to the whole English-speaking world (Stewart, Ryan and Giles 1985:102). Research has been substantially extended in the past two decades, particularly by Bayard and his colleagues. Bayard first explored New Zealanders' attitudes towards their own accent and the other main 'standard' accents of English: RP 'English English', general Australian, and middle-of-the-road Inland North American (Canadian). He found that New Zealanders rated the RP speakers higher than their compatriots not only on power and status traits but also on some solidarity traits – a result he interpreted as evidence of a “cultural cringe” (1990, 1991b, 1995:89-114, 2000). At the same time near RP was being challenged as the traditional prestige accent by American English. His results also cast doubt on the common belief among New Zealanders that the closely related Australian accent, besides being unpleasant, is easily distinguishable from their own. However, the voices used were not all entirely satisfactory (see Bayard 2000: 303-307 for a critique).

This prompted Weatherall and her colleagues across the Tasman to study the extent to which Australians can distinguish a New Zealand accent from their own (Weatherall et al. 2000), and recently Bayard joined forces with

Weatherall and her colleagues, extending the research to evaluations of the four standard accents among New Zealanders, Australians and Americans, using a new set of voices (Bayard et al. 2001). These studies, which all dealt with the attitudes of native speakers of one of the standard varieties of English to their own and other accents, have in turn prompted an expansion of the research into an international project, coordinated by Bayard. 'Investigating English worldwide' (hereafter EEAWW) aims to survey both native and non-native speakers of English, and to include countries where English is a second or foreign language.<sup>2</sup>

This article reports on a study of how a group of Pacific Islanders, for whom English is a second (or a third) language, identify and evaluate the four standard accents. The participants were students at the University of the South Pacific (USP), a regional institution with 12 member countries: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

## **2. Background: English in the Pacific**

The Pacific is perhaps uniquely suited to such a study since English has had a presence in the region for over 200 years, and the four English speaking countries which are home to the standard accents have all had a role in the history of Pacific island nations. These historical links, however transformed, have survived into the present, and Pacific Islanders today, probably more than ever, are exposed to all four varieties of English.

English was introduced to the Pacific through European contact, first via explorers, then whalers, beachcombers, traders and missionaries. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both Britain and the USA, along with Germany and France, had a colonial presence, with Australia and New Zealand later taking over some of the British and German colonies.

The region is culturally and linguistically extremely diverse. Even if we exclude the Pacific Rim and Papua New Guinea, which has over 750 languages, the small island nations scattered over the Pacific Ocean can claim a large number of languages, in spite of small populations (see Lynch 1998). The region served by the USP alone boasts around 200 indigenous languages. Most of these are in Melanesia, with about 70 in the Solomon Islands, for a population of less than half a million, and over 100 in Vanuatu, for only about 200,000 people. Nearly all the other member countries, in Polynesia and

Micronesia, have only one indigenous language each (Samoan, Niuean, Nauruan, Marshallese, etc). The indigenous languages all belong to the Austronesian family, except for a handful of Papuan languages in the Solomons. Other languages with an important role are French in Vanuatu, formerly a British-French condominium, and Melanesian Pidgin and Fiji Hindi, whose presence is the result of the 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial economy, which brought together speakers of many different languages to work on plantations. Melanesian Pidgin is spoken by nearly all 700,000 inhabitants of Vanuatu — where it is known as Bislama — and the Solomon Islands — where it is called Pijin. Fiji Hindi, a koine which developed out of the dialects of Hindi spoken by indentured labourers brought to Fiji from India, has about 350,000 speakers, nearly as many as Fijian. Many countries have small groups of speakers of minority languages, both from other parts of the Pacific (e.g. Tuvaluan in Fiji, Kiribati in Nauru) and beyond (e.g. Chinese). English has official status in all the countries of the USP region, alongside the national language (plus French in Vanuatu and Hindi in Fiji).<sup>3</sup> It has an important place in government, business, the media, and especially in education. For nearly everyone, English is a second language, which children usually start studying in their first year at school and which quickly becomes also a medium of instruction. In Polynesia and Micronesia, the vernacular continues to be used alongside English through high school, but in much of Melanesia, English is the sole language of instruction after the first three years (Mugler and Lynch 1996). Many Melanesian children grow up speaking both their father's and their mother's language, and sometimes also Pidgin, so English is in fact their third or fourth language.

Pacific varieties of English are not recognized by their speakers as having any standing, so the standard continues to be an external one. Traditionally this was British English, the former colonial language.<sup>4</sup> Although strong diplomatic ties with Great Britain remain, in part through the Commonwealth, most Pacific island nations now have far stronger political and especially trade links with Australia and New Zealand, the colonial and post- (or neo-) colonial surrogates and our closest neighbours. Precarious economies encourage emigration and the major countries attracting migrants are the English-speaking nations of the Pacific Rim: New Zealand, Australia and also the United States and Canada (especially the West Coast, e.g. California and the Vancouver area). The 1987 and 2000 coups in Fiji have also led to large numbers of Indo-Fijians migrating. But family ties remain strong and while foreign remittances keep many island nations afloat, the ease of modern travel

encourages frequent visits back and forth. The influence of this on language cuts both ways, encouraging the maintenance of Pacific languages among migrant communities abroad, while providing a vector of influence for the different varieties of English in the islands. New Zealand, for instance, continues to have particularly close ties to the Cook Islands, Niue, and Tokelau, and looks after their foreign policy. Nationals of the three countries have New Zealand citizenship and indeed more Niueans and Tokelauans live in New Zealand than in their home islands. The constant movement back and forth helps spread the influence of New Zealand English to the three nations, where it is the *de facto* standard. Another important avenue for contact is tourism, an area where neighbouring Australia and New Zealand lead.<sup>5</sup> As for the USA, it came on the scene early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with New England-based whalers, then beachcombers, and traders, and again during World War II in the Pacific theatre. American English is particularly important in the Marshall Islands, a US territory until recently, and in Samoa, with the proximity of American Samoa. The major vector of influence of American English in the entire Pacific nowadays is probably the media, including film and television, one of the manifestations of the US's global reach.

### **3. Methodology**

Over 150 students at the University of the South Pacific listened to a tape recording of a passage read out loud by male and female English speakers with four different accents: New Zealand (NZE), Australian (AusE), English (EE), and North American (NAme). They were then asked to fill out a questionnaire in which they rated each speaker on a number of personality and voice traits on Likert-type scales, and tried to identify the speaker's nationality and socio-economic status.

#### *3.1. The participants*

The respondents were 156 students enrolled in a first year course on the Laucala Bay campus of the University of the South Pacific, in Suva, Fiji. Students on that campus include citizens from the 12 member countries, along with small numbers of foreign students (expatriates residing in Fiji and exchange students from outside the region).

The sample for this study is multinational and includes students from 10 of the 12 member countries. The bulk are from Fiji (131), with small numbers from

Tonga (6), Vanuatu (6), Tuvalu (4), Solomon Islands (3), Samoa (2), Cook Islands (1), Kiribati (1), Marshall Islands (1). There is also a student from Nigeria.

This is not a random sample, but rather one of convenience, as with all other university samples in EEAWW, consisting of an essentially ‘captive’ audience. Nonetheless, it is broadly representative of the University’s student population in a number of respects. Fiji is by far the biggest member country, and contributes about 75 % of the students, with the balance made up of small numbers from the other 11 countries. In the sample 84% of the students are from Fiji. The numbers of students from the other countries are obviously too small to warrant separate statistical analysis, so only the sample as a whole (hereafter the ‘Pacific sample’) and the Fiji sample will be analysed.

The sample is also multiethnic. The two biggest ethnic groups in the Pacific sample are of course those in the large Fiji sample. Among the 131 Fiji students, 60 identified themselves as Fijians and 56 as Indo-Fijians, while the remainder would be classified in Fiji — for census or voting purposes, for example — as ‘Others’ or ‘Generals’ (for ‘General Voters’). The balance between Fijians and Indo-Fijians in the sample is roughly representative of the general population of the country, which at the last census (1996) comprised 52% Fijians and 44% Indo-Fijians. The 15 ‘Others’ belong to small ethnic groups, and include students who identify themselves as Rotumans, Banabans, Part-Europeans, Part-Fijian Chinese, Indian Part-Fijian, etc. These numbers also are too small to warrant statistical analysis. The same is true of other ethnic groups within the small samples from countries other than Fiji (for example Polynesians from predominantly Melanesian countries, like Vanuatu or the Solomon Islands). The linguistic diversity follows a very similar pattern, with 26 languages identified as vernaculars, the two most frequently named being Fijian (61) and Fiji Hindi (55), and the others mentioned by less than 6 individuals each, including English, by two. The sample broadly reflects the ethnic diversity of the USP student body, and the Fiji sample will be analysed for any differences between the two major ethnic groups.

The participants range in age from 19 to 47, with 70% (108 individuals) in the 18-23 range, 20.5% (32) between 24-35, and 10% (16) over 35. This is fairly close to the percentages in these ranges of the population of on-campus students (65%, 20%, 13% respectively; data is missing for 2%). The mean age of the sample is 23.2, compared to 24 for the on-campus population.

Like several other EEAWW samples, this Pacific sample is not well balanced for sex, with 96 females and 56 males – a ratio which corresponds neither to that of the population of the Pacific region nor to that of the USP student body,

where females are still underrepresented (45%). This may be due to the nature of the course that these students are taking, a liberal arts subject traditionally attracting more female students.

As for other factors of potential interest, such as socio-economic level, no information was sought and it is difficult to speculate. The sample undoubtedly includes both students on scholarship and private students, with a range of socio-economic levels likely in each category. In terms of education, these university students, by definition, have reached an educational level far higher than the mean population of their home nations.

While there is no intention to claim that the sample is representative of the population of the Pacific at large, results can be suggestive. Indeed, the study may be of interest precisely because the sample consists of young educated people who are likely to constitute an elite and to play an influential role in their societies, as much through their attitudes as through the knowledge and skills they may acquire at university.

### 3. 2. *Instruments*

#### 3.2.1. The stimulus tape

On the tape are recorded the voices of 9 speakers. The initial voice is for practice in filling out the questionnaire, and the following 8 comprise one male and one female each with 4 accents of English: English (EE), Australian (AusE), New Zealand (NZE), and North American (NA<sub>m</sub>). Each accent is a phonetically described middle-of-the-road variety which approximates what is considered standard in each country (see Bayard et al. 2001 for details). The 8 stimulus voices are randomized. One might fear that participants' ratings could be affected by boredom or fatigue by the time they are listening to the last speakers, and that there is a need to vary speaker order. But significant order effects are not consistently present in previous research (see e.g. Bayard 1990: 78). To avoid possible order confounds, a single speaker order was used for this study, as it was for all but the New Zealand and Australian samples in EEAWW (see also /sounds.html).

The 9 speakers read the same passage (a letter home), so that there are no differences in length, lexical or phonological content. Care was taken to minimize differences in such paralinguistic features as speed and pauses but there was no attempt to control others, such as voice quality or intonation, which are far more difficult to deal with. There are indeed perceptible differences in expressiveness of delivery, in particular between the NZE male's flat, very 'read' delivery, with little variation in pitch, and the almost acted out perfor-

mance of the NAm female who uses a wide range of intonation.

Such differences could be avoided, or at least considerably reduced, by using the classic matched guise design, but while this can be done with bilinguals, it seems impossible to find speakers of both genders who control the four guises naturally (see Bayard 1990: 76).

### 3.2.2. The questionnaire

Participants were asked to rate their impression of each speaker on 6 point semantic differential scales (from 1 ‘not at all’, to 6 ‘very’) for 18 traits, 13 characterizing the speaker (reliable, ambitious, humorous, authoritative, competent, cheerful, friendly, dominant, intelligent, assertive, controlling, warm and hardworking) and 5 describing the voice (pleasant, attractive, powerful, strong and educated). They were also asked to identify the speaker’s age group, nationality and ethnicity, educational level, type of occupation, income, and social class from a series of options.

In a background section, participants were asked to indicate their sex, age, student status (full-time or part-time), birthplace, nationality, ethnicity, vernacular language(s), time spent in English-speaking countries (and which ones), time spent watching English-language TV/films each week, and the three English language TV programs they watch most.

### 3.3. Procedure

The test was administered to students during their regular class time. After a general introduction about the study, they were asked if they were willing to participate and given the option of leaving class if they were not. All present agreed to take part — a total of 156, out of about 200 enrolled. They were then asked to fill out the background section, after a few clarifications. A few examples were given to illustrate possible answers relating to the terms ‘vernacular’, ‘nationality’, and ‘ethnicity’. The word ‘vernacular’ was chosen to elicit the students’ native language(s) because it is the most common in the Pacific. The term was clarified through the use of synonyms and paraphrases such as first language, “mother tongue”, and the language first acquired at home. Students were asked to indicate if they had more than one vernacular, since some may have been raised with both their father’s and their mother’s languages, as is often the case in Melanesia, and in other situations where parents are from different ethnic and language groups (as sometimes occurs in Fiji, in particular).

Similarly, examples of nationality were given (Fiji citizen, Solomon



Islander, Samoan) in contradistinction to ethnicity, which was defined as ‘the ethnic or cultural group you feel that you belong to’ (e.g. Polynesian, Melanesian, Micronesian). Students were also encouraged to use whichever term they preferred to indicate their ethnicity, and a few alternative labels were mentioned to illustrate the point: ‘Fijian’, ‘indigenous Fijian’ or the Fijian term ‘Taukei’, ‘Indo-Fijian’ or ‘Fiji Indian’, ‘Part-European’ or the Fijian ‘Kailoma’, etc.

Instructions were then given about how to fill out the two main sections of the questionnaire. The initial practice voice was played once, after which students filled out the section on personality and voice traits, then the same voice was played again, and students filled out the section on nationality and socio-economic status. The set of 8 stimulus voices was then played once, after which students filled out Part I, then replayed so that they could fill out Part II. The entire process took about 45 minutes and went smoothly. This procedure was identical to that used with all other EEAWW groups (see/Questionnaire).

## 4. Results

### 4.1. *Identifying nationality*

Respondents identified each speaker’s nationality/ethnicity from a set of 12 options: New Zealand European, [Anglo-]American, New Zealand Maori, Canadian, Asian, English, Australian European, South African, Australian Aborigine, Black American, Scottish, and Other European. Responses were recoded, combining the minority and majority ethnic labels into nationality categories for New Zealander (European and Maori), Australian (Aborigine and European), and American (Anglo- and Black). English and Canadian were left intact, and Asian, Scottish, South African, and Other European were recoded as Other.

#### 4.1.1. The Pacific sample

The NAM accent is the most commonly correctly identified, followed by the EE. As for the AusE and NZE accents, they are identified correctly and mistaken for each other in almost equal measure. No speaker is correctly identified by the majority, although the NAM male comes close, with 48% (Table 1).

The AusE and NZE speakers are correctly identified by just under 20% of

**Table 1: Students' accent guesses**majority/plurality percentage for each speaker in **boldface**major erroneous guesses *italicised*

	F NZE	M NZE	F AUSE	M AUSE	F NAM	M NAM	F EE	M EE
NZer	<b>31</b>	19	<b>25</b>	16	9	13	15	14
Australian	29	<b>20</b>	19	18	13	12	14	14
Canadian	10	13	9	10	7	8	6	8
American	12	15	20	14	<b>42</b>	<b>48</b>	9	13
English	11	11	16	14	17	12	<b>32</b>	<b>29</b>
Other	4	19	10	<b>25</b>	8	7	20	16
Missing	3	3	1	3	4	1	4	6

respondents, except for the female NZE, who gets 31%, essentially the same level of accuracy as for the EE speakers. The two Antipodean accents are of course difficult to distinguish from each other for outsiders, and sometimes even for New Zealanders and Australians themselves, as we have seen previous research shows (e.g. Bayard 1990; Weatherall et al. 2000). It is probably unrealistic to expect our respondents, who are not only outsiders but non-native speakers of English, to identify them with a high degree of accuracy, in spite of the proximity of the two countries. About as many respondents identify the two accents correctly as mistake them for each other. This means that they are at least able to narrow down the possibilities to two, 'either Australia or New Zealand'. If we combine the two sets of percentages, the AusE male is identified as, let us say, 'Australasian' by 34%, the NZE male by 39%, and the AusE female by 44%. The percentages for the two males are slightly higher than for the EE speakers, and the AusE female's is within the NAM range. As for the NZE female, she is identified as Australasian by 60%, by far the most accurately identified speaker by that measure.

Although Canadian and American accents are also indistinguishable to most outsiders, few respondents misidentify the American speakers as Canadians, probably because the Canadian accent – unlike the AusE and NZE – is not widely known. Combined percentages would not greatly improve accuracy for the two NAM speakers (as 'Canadian or American'), although it would tip the male over the half-way mark (with 56%) and bring the female

within a whisker of it (49%). Nonetheless, the two recodings are probably a fairer reflection of the respondents' ability to identify the main accents of English (Table 2).

Finally, the male and female speakers of each nationality are not identified

**Table 2: Students' accent guesses, recoded**

majority/plurality percentage for each speaker in **boldface**

major erroneous guesses *italicised*

	F NZE	M NZE	F AUSE	M AUSE	F NAM	M NAM	F EE	M EE
Aus./NZ	<b>60</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>34</b>	22	25	29	28
Can./Amer.	22	28	29	24	<b>49</b>	<b>56</b>	15	21
English	11	11	16	14	17	12	<b>32</b>	<b>29</b>
Other	4	19	10	25	8	7	20	16
Missing	3	3	1	3	4	1	4	6

with the same level of accuracy, but there seems to be no consistent pattern. The NAM male is better identified than the female but the female NZE far better than the male, while the difference between the EE pair is negligible (Table 1). So is the difference between the AusE pair, although the female is better identified as Australasian than the male (Table 2). These gender pair discrepancies indicate the need for caution in drawing conclusions about accent recognition.

#### 4.1.2. The Fiji sample

There is a marked difference in accuracy of accent identification between the two samples, with higher percentages among the Fijians for all four accents, but especially the NAM and the EE (Tables 3 and 4).

The percentages of correct identification vary far more widely in the Fijian sample (from 58% for the NAM male to 22% for the NZE male) than in the Indo-Fijian sample, where they are in the 14%-29% range. Both NAM speakers are in fact correctly identified by the majority of Fijian participants (the male by 58%, the female by 50%), as is the female EE (50%). Six voices are correctly identified by at least a plurality of Fijian students, and the two

**Table 3: Fijian students' accent guesses**majority/plurality percentage for each speaker in **boldface**major erroneous guesses *italicised*

	F NZE	M NZE	F AUSE	M AUSE	F NAM	M NAM	F EE	M EE
NZer	<b>36</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>26</b>	12	9	7	5	14
Australian	32	22	23	<b>27</b>	15	13	17	<i>20</i>
Canadian	7	8	10	8	5	12	—	8
American	15	20	20	18	<b>50</b>	<b>58</b>	9	15
English	5	8	8	10	12	10	<b>50</b>	<b>28</b>
Other	3	20	13	25	9	—	19	12
Missing	2	—	—	—	2	—	—	3

**Table 4: Indo-Fijian students' accent guesses**majority/plurality percentage for each speaker in **boldface**major erroneous guesses *italicised*

	F NZE	M NZE	F AUSE	M AUSE	F NAM	M NAM	F EE	M EE
NZer	<b>29</b>	<b>20</b>	21	21	14	20	<b>27</b>	10
Australian	21	11	14	16	12	11	11	13
Canadian	16	19	11	9	9	11	9	9
American	11	5	<b>25</b>	9	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>	13	18
English	13	16	23	18	25	18	14	<b>23</b>
Other	7	<b>25</b>	4	<b>23</b>	9	10	21	18
Missing	4	2	2	2	4	2	5	9

that are not are cases of mistaken 'Australasian' identity. The female AusE is identified as a New Zealander by 26% (as against 23% recognizing her as an Australian), and the male NZE is correctly identified, and mistaken for an Australian, by the same percentage of listeners (22%).

In the Indo-Fijian sample no voice is correctly identified by a majority of participants. The highest percentage of correct identification by a plurality is 29% (for the female NZE), and only half the voices are correctly identified by

**Table 5: Fijian students' accent guesses, recoded**majority/plurality percentage for each speaker in **boldface**major erroneous guesses *italicised*

	F NZE	M NZE	F AUSE	M AUSE	F NAM	M NAM	F EE	M EE
Aus./NZ	<b>68</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>39</b>	24	20	22	<b>34</b>
Can./Amer.	22	28	30	26	<b>55</b>	<b>70</b>	9	23
English	5	8	8	10	12	10	<b>50</b>	28
Other	3	20	13	25	9	—	19	12
Missing	2	—	—	—	2	—	—	3

**Table 6: Indo-Fijian students' accent guesses, recoded**majority/plurality percentage for each speaker in **boldface**major erroneous guesses *italicised*

	F NZE	M NZE	F AUSE	M AUSE	F NAM	M NAM	F EE	M EE
Aus./NZ	<b>50</b>	<b>31</b>	35	<b>37</b>	26	31	<b>38</b>	23
Can./Amer.	27	24	<b>36</b>	18	<b>36</b>	<b>39</b>	22	<b>27</b>
English	13	16	23	18	25	18	14	23
Other	7	25	4	23	9	10	21	18
Missing	4	2	2	2	4	2	5	9

a plurality: the two NAM voices, the female NZE, and the male EE. Pluralities mis-identify the four other voices, as follows: the female AusE as an American, the female EE as a New Zealander, and the male NZE and male AusE voices variously as 'Other'. Pluralities — of both accurate and inaccurate identification — are all in the 20% range. This is not much better than chance.

If we again look at how well respondents identify the NZE and AusE speakers as Australasian, the combined percentages range from 39% to 68% in the Fijian sample and 31% to 50% in the Indo-Fijian sample (Tables 5 and 6). Combining the Canadian and American percentages increases the Fijians' lead in accuracy, with 70% identifying the NAM male and 55% the female as 'Canadian or American', while the percentages among the Indo-Fijians

are only in the 30% range. These two recodings also mean that the EE male, who was identified correctly by low percentages in both groups, is now misidentified by pluralities in both: as Australasian by Fijians and as Canadian/American by Indo-Fijians. With these two recodings, 7 voices are identified correctly by at least a plurality of Fijians (including 4 by a majority), against 6 by Indo-Fijians (only one by a majority).

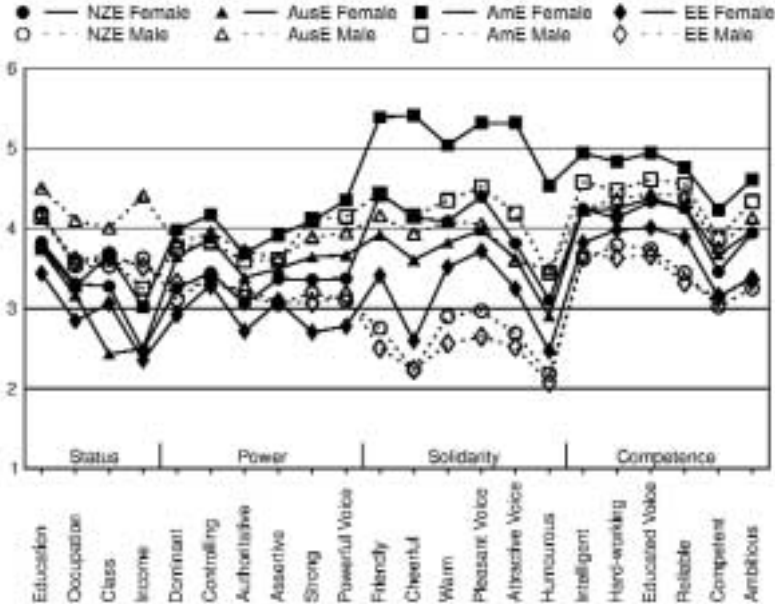
4.2. Evaluation of personality traits and socio-economic status

The 18 personality and voice traits and 4 socio-economic variables (occupation, income, education, social class) cluster into four dimensions: power, solidarity, competence (or ‘charisma’, see Bayard et al. 2001), and status. All 22 variables are grouped into those four dimensions in the diagrams below, which represent the means for the 8 speakers, first for the whole Pacific sample, then for the two Fiji sub-samples.

4.2.1. Overall evaluation

- The NAM female leads in solidarity, competence, and most power traits,

Figure 1: Personality trait means for all 156 Pacific Island students



- followed by the NAm male voice — although the NAm female lead is by no means as marked in power and competence traits as it is in solidarity.
- The four male voices almost always rank above the female ones in the four status traits.
  - The AusE male voice ranks at the top in status, and in some power traits, while the AusE female voice ranks low in status traits.
  - The EE male voice ranks very low in almost all traits excepting status, and even there he is below the AusE male. The EE male is tied with the low-ranking NZE male in solidarity and competence traits.
  - Ratings for all eight voices dip markedly in the “humorous” trait, including the two NAm voices.

Only two results for the Fijian sample are markedly different from those in the Indo-Fijian sample: The NAm male ranks relatively lower in solidarity traits, and the NZE male scores higher in status and power traits (Figs. 2 and 3).

#### 4.2.2. Perceptions of socio-economic status

Figure 2: Personality trait means for the 60 Fijian students

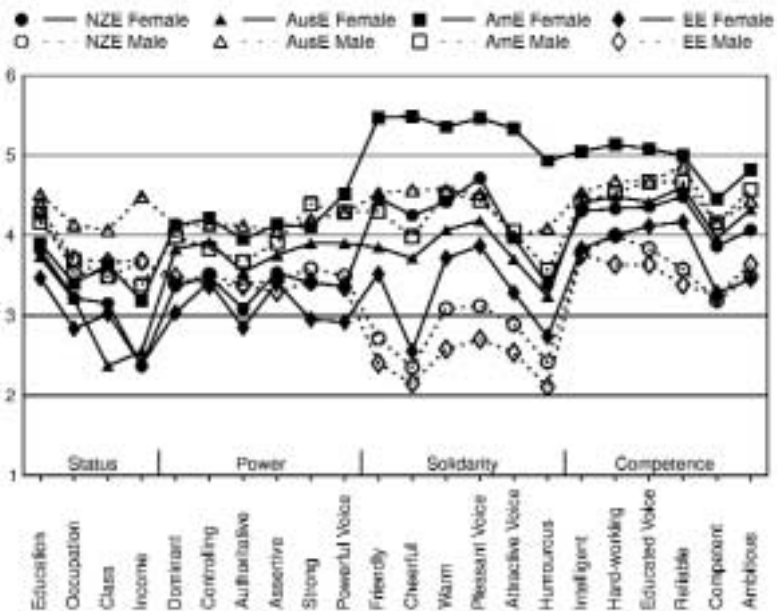
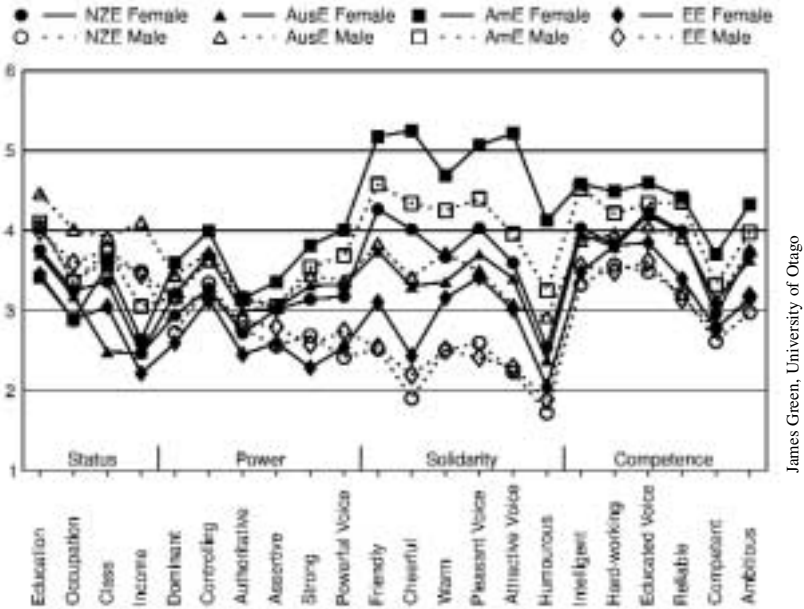


Figure 3: Personality trait means for the 56 Indo-Fijian students



James Green, University of Otago

The four socio-economic variables (occupation, income, education, and social class), and the speakers’ age, were identified from a fixed set of options. For social class, for example, participants had to choose one of five categories: lower class (LC), lower middle class (LMC), middle class (MC), upper middle class (UMC), and upper class (UC).

No one is identified as LC by a plurality of respondents and only the AusE female is identified as LMC by a plurality (Table 7). The seven other speakers are identified by a plurality as either UMC (5 speakers) or MC (2 speakers), and for all except the AusE male, the next highest percentage is in the other one of those two categories, so that these two social classes combined receive large majorities (between 62% and 82%). At the other end of the spectrum, no one is classified as UC by a plurality either, although the AusE male gets a high percentage in that category (33%), far higher than anyone else. This bunching up of responses may indicate that the participants find the task difficult and generally go for the safe middle. Nonetheless, the relatively high rating of the AusE male is clear.



**Table 7: Attribution of social class**

	NZE		AUSE		NAM		EE	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
LC	1	3	10	1	0	1	3	0
LMC	12	16	46	5	10	8	20	11
MC	51	28	34	22	31	32	50	32
UMC	31	34	10	40	40	45	21	36
UC	5	20	0	33	19	13	6	21

But the most striking pattern is the disparity in speaker gender. For all accents but one, the female speaker is downgraded by at least one social class, so that she is classified by at least a plurality in the class category below that of her male compatriot. Thus the NZE female is classified as MC by 51% but her male counterpart as UMC by 34%. This is nearly identical to the EE pair, with the female identified as MC by 50%, and the male as UMC by 32%. The gap is widest between the two AusE speakers, with the female classified by 46% as LMC, two categories below the male, who is identified by 40% as UMC. Only the NAM speakers are assigned to the same class — UMC — although the female gets a lower plurality than the male (40 versus 45%). The difference in social class attribution between female and male speakers is highly significant (Mann-Whitney U 4824.5, tied Z-value  $-8.848$ , tied P-Value  $<.0001$ ).

This pattern is echoed for the other three socio-economic variables. Thus female speakers are perceived as having a lower education level, a less skilled and prestigious occupation, and a smaller income than the males, with the greatest gap between the AusE pair and the smallest between the NAM speakers. Levels of significance are similar to those for social class: ((Mann-Whitney U 5101, tied Z-Value  $-8.305$  for education; U 6413.5, tied Z-Value  $-6.944$  for occupation; U 4595, tied Z-Value  $-9.046$  for income; all tied P-Values  $<.0001$ ). The gender disparity is even true of age, with female speakers seen as younger than the males (Mann-Whitney U 1748, tied Z-Value  $-12.625$ , tied P-Value  $<.0001$ ). Finally, there is no significant difference between male and female respondents' rating of male and female speakers.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

### 5.1. Accent recognition

Overall, the NAM accent is the most commonly correctly identified, but its lead is not clear cut since one of the four Australasians (the female NZE) is identified as such by more respondents. The NAM accent may be the most recognizable accent of English worldwide, but for these Pacific islanders, the Australasian accent comes a close second, a token of the influence of New Zealand and Australia in the Pacific. The traditional prestige accent, EE, is only third, and is often mistaken for one of the Antipodean accents or ‘Other’.

In the survey at large, the NAM accent is identified more accurately by native speakers of English – unsurprisingly – but also by the European speakers of English as a foreign language, with percentages in the samples from Finland, Sweden, and Germany in the 71%–81% range. The results of this Pacific study are closer to those for Singapore and Hong Kong, where percentages range from 39% to 56% for the NAM accents. But the Australasian accent is identified better only by Australasians themselves (see EEAWW website “Results”).

What makes the NAM accent the most recognizable? Exposure through the media is a strong possibility, which is discussed below. But the extent to which identification is based on the saliency of the stereotypical post-vocalic *r* is also a matter for speculation. My students often indicate that they consider it the unequivocal diagnostic feature, yet many of the respondents who listened to the voices on the tape either did not hear it or did not interpret it that way. Another intriguing question is whether a larger sample would show that, say, Cook Islanders identify NZE most accurately, or Samoans NAM, reflecting different influences of these co-existing, or perhaps competing, standards in the Pacific.

Finally, the fact that gender pairs for most accents are not identified at the same level of accuracy, with more respondents sometimes recognizing the male, sometimes the female, limits the validity of generalizations about the recognition of accent per se, and raises the question of whether other voice characteristics influence identification. Current experiments with digital voice manipulation by Sullivan and Bayard designed to ascertain the effect of speaker intonation on listener evaluation may also help reveal any influence on accent recognition (see also EEAWW website “Current research”).

### 5.2. *Evaluation of speakers*

The respondents' impressions of the speakers reveal a similar pattern of relative influence of the different varieties of English, with the NAM speakers leading in most traits and one of the Australasians (the AusE male) in the others, including status. The EE male has a high ranking only in status, albeit in second place. As for the NZE male's low ranking, it is probably due to his monotonous reading.<sup>6</sup>

It seems then that EE is being displaced as the traditional prestige accent. Yet it is still regarded, at least overtly, as *the* standard in most of the region. This is certainly true in Fiji, where EE is seen as the variety taught in schools and teachers usually reject American spellings. Most people seem to consider that what they speak is 'British English' and there is little awareness that some lexical items have their origin in other varieties.<sup>7</sup>

As in the rest of the region, the local variety of English is not considered standard and the label 'Fiji English' is normally used only for the basilectal end of the speech continuum and considered sub-standard.<sup>8</sup> The local accent is downgraded by its own speakers in comparison with British, American, and Australian varieties even on solidarity dimensions (Pillai 1993). This means that not only deference but also a kind of 'accent loyalty' (Giles and Powesland 1975) is to an external standard. This is not entirely unexpected in a post-colonial society. Language attitudes reflect history, and the 'cringe' is one more feature that Fiji shares with its Australasian neighbours. If, as Bell says, NZE speakers are likely to fall 'out of the British frying pan into the American fire' (1982:254) before they have a chance to develop respect and attachment to their own brand of English, it seems that the Pacific, or at least Fiji, might have been tossed onto an Australasian 'barbie' in between.

The downgrading of females relative to the males has been noted in other studies (Gallois et al. 1984; Bayard 1991a, 1991b). The gender bias seems even more pronounced here, which may indicate a stronger negative stereotype of females in the Pacific. In one of his studies Bayard (1991a: 45) suggests that speaker gender may be more important than accent variation in listener evaluation. A cross-cultural study would help shed light on whether this gender bias is universal or co-varies with differences in the status of women in different parts of the world. *Perceptions* of that status may also be important, and the fact that the NAM female is not downgraded as much as the others in this study perhaps reflects a perception that there is greater gender equality in the US. Alternatively, listeners may be reacting positively to the greater variation in intonation of the NAM female.

### *5.3. The influence of the media*

The mass media in the Pacific is dominated by English. In Fiji, where our respondents were all living at the time of the study, there are currently three daily newspapers in English but only one weekly each in Fijian and Hindi. These two languages have long fared better on radio, as the government-run Fiji Broadcasting Corporation (FBC) broadcasts in the three official languages on separate channels, and there is an ever increasing number of private stations, some broadcasting in Fijian, some in Hindi, others in English. Television is increasingly important, if only in the sense that it seems to take up a lot of people's free time, if our participants' responses are anything to go by. As for the Internet, Fiji-based websites are all in English, with only an occasional paragraph in Fijian, and one must go to the website of the Pacific Languages Unit of the University of the South Pacific to find an extended text in Fijian.<sup>9</sup>

Television was introduced in Fiji in 1991, with the free-access channel Fiji One, and was initially entirely in English. Pay channels have recently been added, including one in Hindi, but Fiji One is still overwhelmingly dominated by English, with a tiny share of airtime for the other two official languages. Currently there are two daily 2-min. summaries on weekday evenings, one in Fijian and one in Hindi, and two half hour programs each in Fijian and Hindi on Sunday afternoon. Commercial ads and public service announcements are nearly all in English, with an occasional one in Fijian or Hindi. On the main news bulletin, interviewees speaking in Fijian or Hindi used to be upstaged by a voice-over English translation, but this is increasingly being replaced with English sub-titles. Interviewees have included Fijians speaking Fiji Hindi to Indo-Fijian reporters and Indo-Fijian interviewees speaking Fijian – a nice reminder that English is not the only lingua franca in the country.

The share of locally produced programs is also tiny, as is typical in a cash-strapped developing country with a very small population. Currently, a typical weekday program during prime time - from 6pm to 11pm - features a half hour local news bulletin (played twice an evening) with 3 brief news summaries (in each official language), a half hour BBC World News bulletin, a half hour episode of the New Zealand soap opera *Shortland Street*, and 3 or 4 other shows (situation comedies, drama, etc). All such shows aired over the course of the week are American-made except one, the Australian *Water Rats*. While programs change over time, the number of locally made programs and the ratio of American-made versus other foreign-made programs has remained constant between March 2001 and March 2002, with American programs

accounting for 40% of air time on an average week night, and local programs for less than 25% (see also Bayard 2000 and EEAWW website "Influence").

While it is tempting to speculate about whether our respondents would have recognized the NAm accent as easily before the days of television, we must keep in mind that films and videos were already very popular then – as they continue to be. The bulk of 'English' movies (ie in the English language) are of course American. The other major global film industry – in fact larger than that of the US – thrives in Fiji too. Hindi movies are widely available both in theaters and on video, and although the language is significantly different from Fiji Hindi, it is understood well enough, thanks in part to the fairly predictable plot lines. While Indo-Fijians tend to divide their viewing between Hindi and English language TV and movies, Fijians do not have a similar choice since there is no production in Fijian. Their greater exposure to media English may account, at least in part, for the better performance of Fijian respondents on accent recognition.<sup>10</sup>

Most of the respondents report watching TV several hours a week, with only 13% not watching it at all, probably because they don't have access (see Table 8). The mean among TV viewers is 9.6 hours a week. The favorite program by far is the New Zealand drama series *Shortland Street*, mentioned by 69 respondents as one of their top three programs. Other favorites include *The X Files* (named by 39), *The Practice* (30), *Dawson's Creek* (27), and *Full House* (22) – all American programs. The local news is cited by 21, and 'the news' (which could be the local news, BBC or both) by 25.

We may muse about the popularity of *Shortland Street*. It has the advantage of airing in an excellent time slot and also every weekday, which favours addiction. When asked why they watch it, people often say, 'it's just like in

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**Table 8: Television viewing**

NUMBER OF HOURS A WEEK	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS
0	13
less than 1	1
1–4½	29
5–9	22
10–19	25
more than 20	10

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Fiji', rather than mention any particular fascination with a putative New Zealand culture. Whatever the reason for the program's popularity, it may be too much of a stretch to conclude that this substantial exposure alone accounts for the lead in accent recognition of the NZE female. The difficulty of establishing any direct influence of the media on different aspects of language has been noted before (Trudgill 1986; Wober 1990) and remains a major challenge.

## Notes

- 1 My thanks go to the late Donn Bayard, for inviting me to contribute to 'Investigating English worldwide'. Donn provided the tape and master questionnaire, did much of the statistical analysis, and made comments on a previous draft of this paper. Thanks also to two anonymous reviewers for their comments. I also thank the students who agreed to participate in the study. I am grateful to Veena Khan, Rajni Chand and Mohammed Sameer for help in administering the questionnaire, and to Sameer also for data entry. Robin Taylor, as always, was ready to answer many questions on statistical tests and their interpretation. The study was supported by the School of Humanities at the University of the South Pacific.
- 2 Full details on the project available at <http://www.otago.ac.nz/anthropology/Linguistic/Accents.html>
- 3 On English in the South Pacific, see Lynch and Mugler 1999.
- 4 Among the countries of the USP region, only Tonga was never a colony, although it was a British protectorate.
- 5 In 1999, a typical year, 29% of tourists arriving in Fiji were from Australia, 18% from New Zealand, 15% from the USA, 10% from the UK, 3% from Canada, and 15% from elsewhere (Fiji Islands Statistics Bureau <http://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/>). Figures for 2001 are not available, and those for 2000 are atypical, reflecting a decrease in tourism after the 19 May coup, particularly in the numbers of Australasian tourists.
- 6 According to Bradac (1990) slow readers are more likely to be rated unfavourably, but the NZE male is faster than the other speakers, so intonation may be more important than speed.
- 7 There is still a great deal of sentimental attachment to the former colonial power, particularly among Fijians. Until about 10 years ago, Fiji was one of the only countries where Prince Charles' birthday was celebrated as a public holiday. (He also has a nice stretch of beach on the island of Taveuni named after him.) The funeral of the Queen Mother in April 2002 was televised live and I am told that many older Fijians cried.
- 8 On Fiji English, see Siegel 1989, 1991, Tent and Mugler 1996, Mugler and Tent 1998, Tent 2000, 2001 a, and 2001b.
- 9 [http://www.vanuatu.usp.ac.fj/about/fijian\\_version.html](http://www.vanuatu.usp.ac.fj/about/fijian_version.html)

- 10 One reviewer has suggested the greater involvement of Fijians in the tourism industry as a possible contributing factor. The tourism industry certainly relies almost exclusively in its marketing on the stereotypical image of the friendly Fijian and the ‘bula’ smile, and many Fijians are indeed employed in the industry, particularly in jobs where they are highly visible to tourists. Nonetheless, there are also many Indo-Fijians (and ‘Others’) who work in tourism. Whether the Fijian respondents would have had any involvement in tourism remains a matter for speculation.

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