
PERCEPTIONS OF REGIONAL DIALECTS IN NEW ZEALAND

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Abstract

This paper describes a study designed to investigate New Zealanders' attitudes toward (perceived) regional dialects in New Zealand. Participants from four University campuses were asked to rate a range of New Zealand regions for the 'pleasantness' and 'correctness' of their speech. Despite the fact that very little regional variation has been documented in New Zealand, participants displayed considerable variation in the ratings they gave to different regions. Wellington, Canterbury and Nelson/Marlborough tended to elicit high ratings for both pleasantness and correctness, whereas Northland and Westland elicited lower ratings. In general, pleasantness and correctness ratings were well correlated, but Auckland proved an exception to this rule, faring reasonably in 'correctness' but receiving extremely low 'pleasantness' ratings. Participants displayed a tendency to give a region a higher rating for correctness, and – particularly – pleasantness, if that region was where they grew up.

1. Introduction

The study of language attitudes has had a healthy history in New Zealand. This is due in no small part to the work of Donn Bayard, who conducted a series of studies probing the attitudes held by New Zealanders toward various varieties of English (see, eg. Bayard 1990, 1991, 1995, 2000, Bayard et al. 2001).

The results of these studies show a tendency for New Zealanders to rate RP voices high on scales relating to power and/or status. North American and Australian voices lead in solidarity-based ratings. New Zealand voices do not fare particularly well on any dimension, a result which Bayard relates to a 'cultural cringe' (1991, 2000).

While a lot of work has been done on attitudes to NZE as compared to other varieties, very little has been done on New Zealanders' perceptions of regional varieties in New Zealand. Only one study has investigated attitudes toward a regional variety. Bayard and Bartlett (1996) conducted a matched guise experiment, in which they considered perceptions toward the Southland dialect. They played people recordings of a speaker with or without a rhotic NURSE vowel. They found that the rhotic version of the voice tended to be rated lower on both solidarity and status/power variables.

It is not surprising that the only attitudinal work focussing on regional varieties has focussed on Southland, as this is the only well-documented regional variety that New Zealand has (see, e.g. Bartlett 1992). While other regional variation is not well documented, there is some suggestion that there may be existing or emerging variation in other parts of the country. For example Mary Durkin's 1972 study indicated differences between Canterbury and West Coast schoolchildren (Durkin 1972). More recent analysis indicates possible differences between vowel sounds in Wellington and Hamilton, (Warren 2004), and a comparison of rural and urban Taranaki and urban Wellington has shown different patterns of intonation (Ainsworth 2004). Bauer and Bauer (2002) document considerable regional variation in the playground vocabulary used by New Zealand children. A dental /s/ has also been reported in Auckland (Starks 2000).

Much further work is required to establish the degree to which regional variation in New Zealand may exist. However in this paper we examine the question of regional variation from a different perspective – we ask whether New Zealanders hold linguistic stereotypes about different regions. These stereotypes could potentially exist even in the absence of any linguistic evidence. As Preston (2002) points out, linguistic attitudes tend to reflect, as much as anything else, attitudes about groups of people.

To investigate the degree to which regional linguistic stereotypes may hold, we follow the methodologies pioneered by Dennis Preston (1986, 1988, 1989, 2002, Niedzielski and Preston 1999, and elsewhere). Preston presents two fundamental methodologies for studying folk dialectology. One is to present participants with hand-drawn maps, and ask them to annotate the maps

with where they think people speak differently from themselves. A second is to elicit judgements for 'pleasantness' and 'correctness' of speech from different regions. Judgements of this kind are often well aligned with information from attitudinal studies using recorded voices, such as those conducted by Bayard (Preston 1999).

The use of hand-drawn maps and/or pleasantness and correctness ratings has now been extended to a large number of communities. These include California (Fought 2002), Japan (Long 1999), Germany (Dailey O'Cain 1999), France (Kuiper 1999), Turkey (Demirci and Kleiner 1999), Canada (McKinnie and Dailey O'Cain 2002), as well as the study of Cubans in Miami (Alfaraz 2002), and Francophone Swiss responses to French (L' Eplattienier-Saugy 2002).

One generalisation that arises from this work is that respondents from areas which are very linguistically secure tend to rate their local area as much more correct than other areas, but include a wider area in the regions rated most pleasant. Respondents from linguistically insecure areas tend to rate the local area top in terms of pleasantness, but include a wider range of areas as most correct (see Preston 1999).

As a first step in the investigation of the perceived regional variants in New Zealand, it seemed worth following this well-established methodology.

2. Methodology

Questionnaires were distributed around campus at four different New Zealand Universities – Massey University (Palmerston North), Otago University, Auckland University and the University of Canterbury. A total of 168 responses were collected. Of these 144 were from individuals born and raised in New Zealand, and these are the responses analysed here. 30 of the analysed participants were based on Auckland campus, 42 were from Canterbury, 37 from Otago, and 35 from Massey (Palmerston North). All participants completed a simple background information sheet regarding their age, gender, and where they grew up.

The questionnaire featured a map of New Zealand divided into 9 regions – Northland, Auckland, Taranaki, Gisborne-Hawke's Bay, Wellington, Nelson-Marlborough, Canterbury, Westland and Otago-Southland. Participants were invited to write comments on the map about the way people speak in each of those regions. It was hoped this would give some insight into what people's

perceptions are about what distinguishes one particular region's speech from another.

They were then asked to rate each region's correctness and pleasantness of speech on a scale from one to five. The correctness and pleasantness ratings were provided on separate pages, and the correctness ratings were always collected before the pleasantness ratings.

3. Map annotations

The majority of respondents in fact provided no comments on the map. This may be due to a lack of strong intuitions about the nature of regional variation in New Zealand. Some of the maps were definitely left blank for this reason, as several respondents explicitly commented that they didn't feel that there was much regional variation in New Zealand. Curiously, the majority of these respondents nonetheless provided 'correctness' and 'pleasantness' ratings which varied by region.

However the fact that many maps were left unannotated may also reflect a methodological issue. The map was intended to serve two purposes – both as a slate for annotation, as well as an illustration of the regions that the participants were asked to rate. The request to annotate the map appeared as part of the overall instructions, and on a different page from the map itself.

Eliciting judgements, then, may have been more successful if we had more explicitly separated the questionnaire into two separate tasks – an annotation task and a separate rating task, each with clearly separate sets of instructions.

Examples of maps which participants did annotate are given in figures 1. and 2.

Unsurprisingly, the most commonly annotated area was Southland/Otago, with comments usually relating to the production of /r/, or a more general 'Scottish' influence. Many also identified a Maori influence on speech particularly in Northland and Gisborne/Hawke's Bay. These regions, together with Westland, were also often described as having a 'relaxed' or 'lazy' way of speaking. Westland was also 'rural', and 'isolated'. Canterbury was often identified as having an 'English' style of speech – and being relatively 'upper-class', 'proper' or 'pretentious', and Wellington was often 'official' or 'sophisticated'. Aucklanders speak 'business-speak', and in Taranaki the speech is slow, and 'farmer speech'. As familiar from the work by Preston, many 'linguistic' descriptors provided in fact contain no linguistic information

Figure 1. Example of a New Zealand map, annotated by one of our respondents.

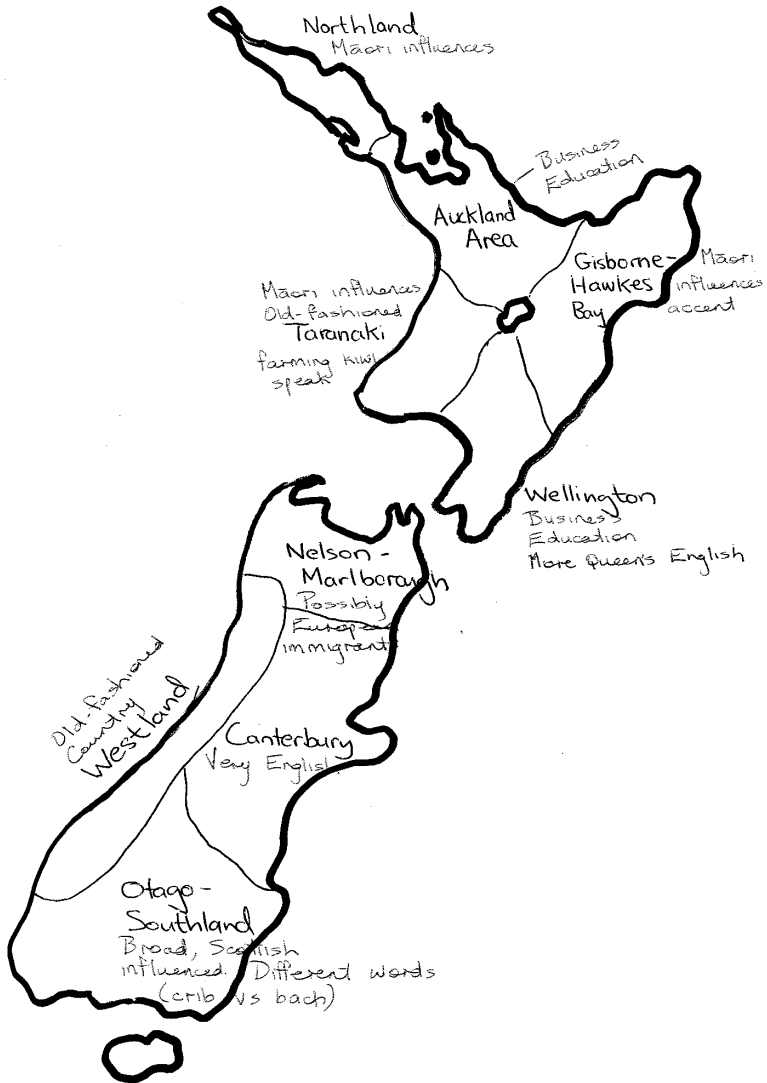
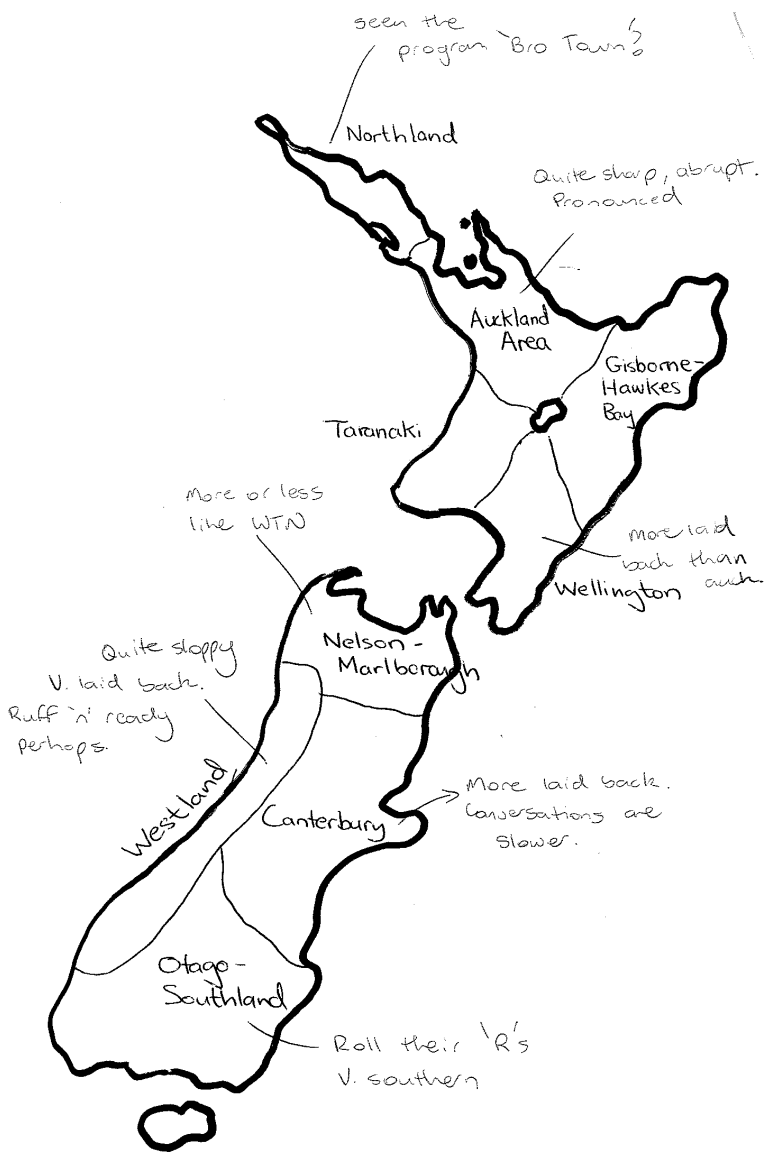


Figure 2. Example of a New Zealand map, annotated by one of our respondents.



at all, but rather reveal more general stereotypes, e.g. two respondents wrote 'summer' in the Nelson/Marlborough region.

In this paper, we focus on analysis of the correctness and pleasantness ratings.

4. Ratings

In order to analyse participants' ratings we fit separate linear regression models to the 'correctness' and 'pleasantness' scores. Independent variables considered were: the region being rated, the age and gender of the participant, the campus that the participant was recruited from, and whether the region being rated was the participant's own home region. The home region is the region in which the participant was born and raised. Individuals who moved considerably throughout their childhood were not assigned any home region.

The resulting regression models are shown in tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Regression model for predicting participants' 'correctness' ratings.

FACTOR	D.F.	PARTIAL SS	MS	F	P
Age	1	9.985949	9.985949	14.86	0.0001
Region Assessed	8	191.6246	23.95307	35.65	<.0001
Is Region Assessed Home	1	3.801669	3.801669	5.66	0.0175
Campus	3	5.245383	1.748461	2.6	0.0507
REGRESSION	13	227.6759	17.51353	26.06	<.0001
ERROR	1210	813.0641	0.671954		

Table 2. Regression model for predicting participants' 'pleasantness' ratings.

FACTOR	D.F.	PARTIAL SS	MS	F	P
Region Assessed	8	92.54954	11.56869	14.38	<.0001
Campus	3	9.393967	3.131322	3.89	0.0088
Is Region Assessed Home	1	11.43129	11.43129	14.21	0.0002
REGRESSION	12	111.6885	9.307376	11.57	<.0001
ERROR	1211	973.9714	0.80427		

The region being assessed significantly affected both the correctness and pleasantness ratings. This demonstrates that even a very simple task, such as having people provide ratings for a list of NZ regions, can reveal interesting patterns regarding NZers’ linguistic stereotypes.

Figure 3. The effect of the region being rated on the correctness ratings (top panel) and pleasantness ratings (bottom panel). Dashes show 95% confidence intervals.

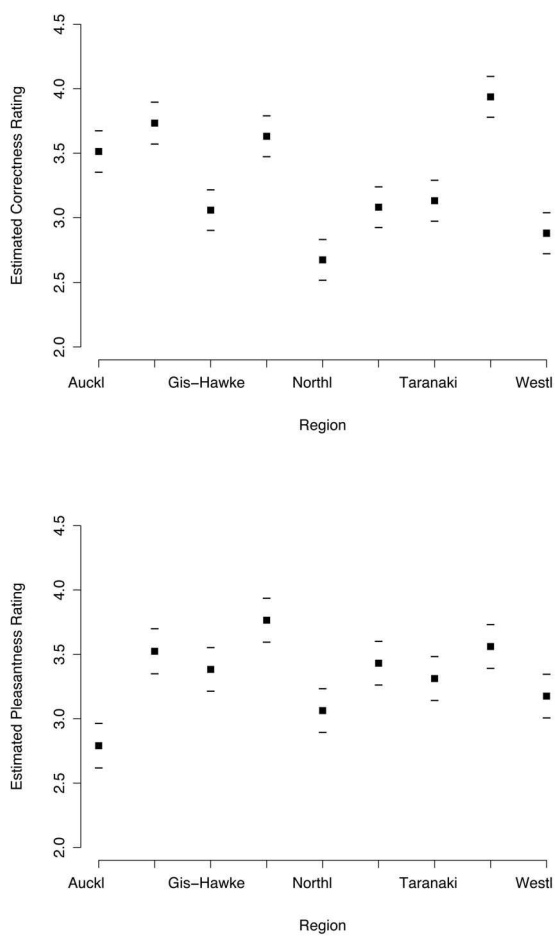
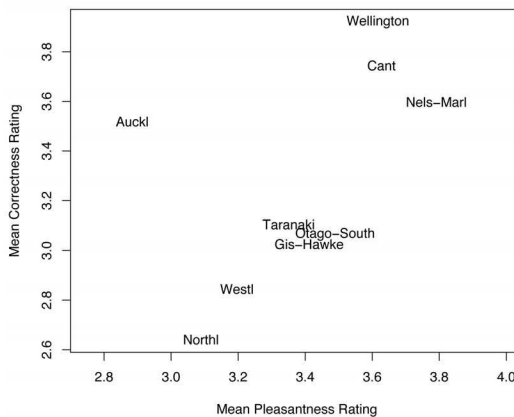


Figure 3 shows the effect of region. These graphs plot the overall affect of region on perceived correctness (top panel) and pleasantness (bottom panel) while holding the other significant factors in the models constant. This reveals that the urban centres tend to be seen as relatively correct (with Wellington topping the scale of correctness). Westland and Northland are perceived as least correct.

The pleasantness rating reveals that Auckland, while it rated in the top four for correctness, is regarded as producing the least pleasant speech of all the regions. Nelson/Marlborough slightly outdoes Wellington in pleasantness, and while Westland and Northland still lag behind the other centres (with the exception, of course, of Auckland), this difference is much less dramatic. Only Wellington, Canterbury and Auckland are perceived as more correct than pleasant – the other regions score more highly for pleasantness than correctness.

When we consider them together, we can see that the pleasantness scores and the correctness scores are reasonably well aligned with one another, with the notable exception of Auckland. Figure 4 plots the mean pleasantness ratings against the mean correctness rating, in order to more directly demonstrate the fact that Auckland does not pattern with the other regions in this regard. For all other regions, their pleasantness rating can largely predict their

Figure 4. The mean pleasantness rating for each region, plotted against the mean correctness rating.



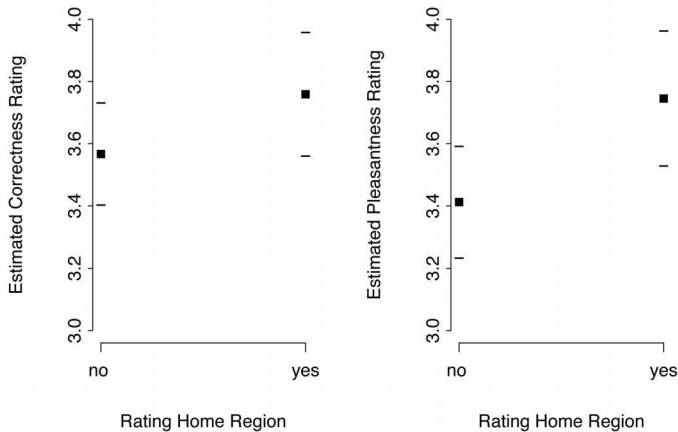
correctness rating. This is not true of Auckland. The overall correlation shown in figure 4 does not reach significance. However if we omit Auckland, the association between correctness and pleasantness ratings is robustly significant (Spearman's $\rho = .83$, $p < .02$).

Aucklanders are often (mostly jokingly) chided for their yuppie lifestyles, Auckland-centric views, and inability to look 'south of the Bombay Hills'. These perceived traits are implied by the use of the affectionately used, but not particularly complimentary nickname 'Jafa' (just another fucking Aucklander). Belich (2002: 525) writes: 'In 1951, Auckland was less than twice as big as Christchurch and little more than 50 per cent bigger than Wellington. By 1996, at almost a million people, it was three times the size of either. It had shifted from first among peers to New Zealand's only really big city. Like it or not, the Big Four is becoming the Big One. Quite a number of New Zealanders do not like it.' Evidence of this dislike abounds in NZ popular culture. For example a beer company recently erected an advertising billboard in Wellington containing the slogan 'Let's go to Auckland for the holidays... Yeah, right'. While this anti-Auckland sentiment is largely affectionate within New Zealand, it is certainly articulated more often than negative assessments of New Zealanders from any other region. For this reason, it is perhaps not surprising that our participants seized the opportunity to provide a low rating for the 'pleasantness' of speech from Auckland. It is worth noting, however, that participants from the Auckland campus were also harsh on Aucklanders. While they provided a slightly higher rating pleasantness to Auckland than participants from other regions did, they still gave Auckland a much lower rating than they did to any other region.

A second factor which was significant in both the correctness model and the pleasantness model was whether the particular region being rated was actually the respondent's home region. Figure 5 shows the effect of rating one's home region on correctness (left panel) and pleasantness (right panel). In each case, when a participant was rating their home region they gave significantly higher ratings than other respondents did for the same region. The strength of this effect is more pronounced for pleasantness than for correctness, but is significant in both cases.

The fact that participants rate their own region highly is consistent with previous work on other languages and dialects. That this tendency is somewhat stronger for pleasantness than for correctness indicates that New Zealanders as a whole may be slightly more invested in 'pleasantness' than the 'correctness' of their own speech (cf Preston 2002), a result which can perhaps

Figure 5. The effect of rating one's home region on correctness ratings (left panel) and pleasantness ratings (right panel). Dashes show 95% confidence intervals.

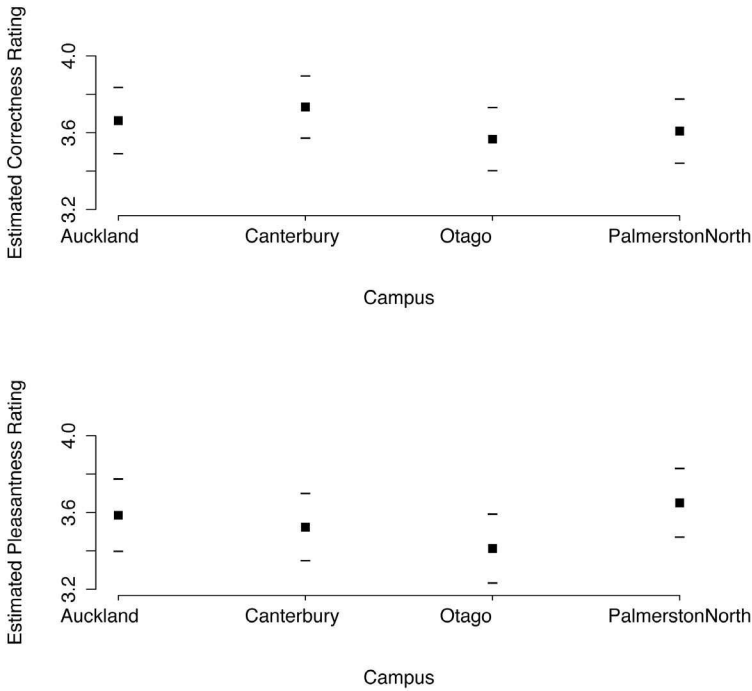


be seen as parallel to the findings of Donn Bayard, where the New Zealand voices tend fare somewhat better in the solidarity ratings than in the status ratings (see e.g. Bayard 2001).

Thirdly, the campus that the participant was recruited from had a near significant effect on their correctness rating ($p=.0501$), and a significant effect on their pleasantness rating. This was an unexpected result. The effects are plotted in figure 6 (top panel: correctness, bottom panel: pleasantness). Comparing the top and bottom panels of figure 6 reveals that University of Otago participants are low scorers – giving low ratings for both correctness and pleasantness. Participants from Palmerston North, while they do not give particularly high correctness ratings, tend to be more generous with their pleasantness ratings. The reverse is true for participants from Canterbury, who provide higher correctness ratings than pleasantness ratings.

These differences suggest that individuals from different parts of New Zealand may place differing value on these different factors. Preston's work in the US shows considerable variation across groups. Participants from Michigan, for example, regard their own speech to be more correct than that from any other State, whereas participants from Alabama appear more invested in

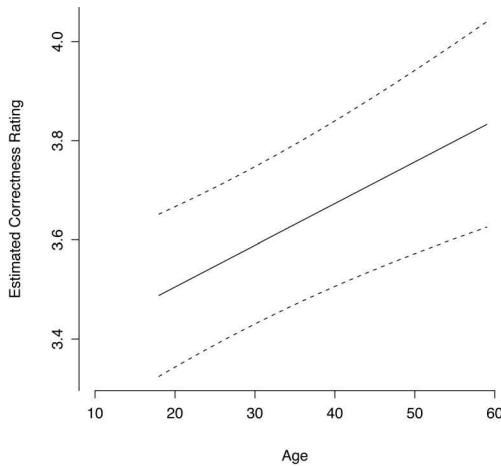
Figure 6. The effect of the campus from which the participant was recruited on their correctness ratings (top panel) and pleasantness ratings (bottom panel). Dashed lines indicate 95% confidence intervals.



the pleasantness of their own speech than on its correctness (see e.g. Preston 2002). Perhaps we are seeing an effect here of students from Canterbury, for example, placing a higher premium on correctness, whereas students from Massey place a higher premium on pleasantness? It is difficult to say. One thing we can conclude, though, is that these results suggest some interesting avenues for future research.

Finally, for correctness, but not for pleasantness, there was a significant effect of respondent age. This is shown in figure 7. Older participants had a tendency to give higher ratings for correctness.

Figure 7. Effect of age on correctness ratings. Dashed lines indicate 95% confidence interval.



When we probed further into the effect of age, we found that, while older participants tend to give higher correctness ratings, younger participants tend to vary more in their responses for correctness. In order to establish this, we calculated each individual's standard deviation over their responses for 'correctness'. Thus, this number would be zero if they give each region the same score, and it would be high if they gave the regions radically different scores. The higher an individual's standard deviation, the more they differentiated the regions by correctness. We found that this number correlates significantly (and negatively) with age. The younger a participant is, the more variability they display (Spearman's $\rho = -.17$, $p < .05$; Wilcoxon test between 'younger' and 'older' participants, $p < .02$).

Older participants, then, tend to provide uniformly high ratings for correctness, whereas younger participants differentiate more between the regions. For the pleasantness ratings, on the other hand, age was not a predictor of participants' mean responses nor their variability. Future work will be needed to determine whether this reflects age-graded behaviour, or whether it is an indication of increasing sensitivity toward regional differences in New Zealand.

5. Conclusion

Donn Bayard pioneered the study of New Zealanders' attitudes to their own language. This simple study extended this research to investigate the possibility that New Zealanders may hold regional stereotypes about language in New Zealand. The results indicate that this is true, with regions faring differently in both perceived correctness and pleasantness. Whether these folk-linguistic reactions reflect actual linguistic variation, or simply more general cultural stereotypes is not clear, although we can be sure that the latter are certainly playing some role.

The New Zealanders in this study generally regarded the speech of their home region as both more pleasant and more correct than other New Zealanders' assessment of the region. In this respect, the results reported here parallel those of similar studies conducted elsewhere. A particularly interesting result is that Aucklanders, despite being rated as producing relatively correct speech, score very lowly on the 'pleasantness' scale.

Intriguingly, respondents from different campuses tended to vary in how high their 'correctness' and 'pleasantness' ratings were. There was also an effect of age, with younger New Zealanders discriminating more readily between the regions in assessing 'correctness'. We can speculate that this may reflect an increased sensitivity to (perceived) regional variation in New Zealand.

This small study suggests that further work into the language attitudes of New Zealanders is likely to bear fruit, and reminds us that even in the absence of documented linguistic variation, individuals can hold strong linguistic stereotypes about regional variants.

One interesting avenue for future work will be to follow Bayard's lead in using actual voices in experimental work. It would be interesting to conduct a task, for example, in which participants were asked to identify the regional origin of voices. If we manipulate some of the features identified as stereotypical (e.g. Taranaki speakers speak 'slowly', Aucklanders speak 'fast') could this influence peoples' classifications of the origins of a speaker?

Donn Bayard has left a considerable legacy of work investigating how New Zealanders perceive their own speech in the context of other varieties of English. Our project suggests there may be considerable scope for building on this legacy to include work on attitudes to varieties (or perceived varieties) which exist within New Zealand.

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