Aims

- outline the traditional description of the Australian English (AusE) accent.
- present some recent data showing the new changes to the dialect.
- discuss inadequacies of the traditional descriptions.
- reflect on the process of creating a new model which more accurately describes the speech of Australians in the 21st century.
Australian English defined

- **Australian English** is spoken by people who
  - are born and raised in Australia  
  - who immigrate at an age prior to early puberty 
  and primarily interact with an AusE speaking peer group.

- It is the standard and dominant variety of English spoken in this country and is a salient marker of Australian national identity.

- It is not the only dialect spoken by native-born Australians.
Varieties of English used by native-born Australians

• Standard Australian English (AusE)

• Aboriginal English

• Various ethno-cultural Australian English dialects yet to be adequately described. e.g. Lebspeak (n.b. this is not foreign accented AusE)

“Alan took a ham sandwich to school”
Some examples of Australian born speakers

- Elderly Tasmanian, born 1880 recorded 1965
  “Tin kettlin’ oh ho ho dear oh dear..”

- 15 year-old girl from Wangaratta recorded 2002
  “Helen picked a good spot near the water and spent the morning surfing and relaxing in the sun”

- 20 year-old man from Sydney recorded 2005
  “The plane flew down low over the runway then increased speed and circled the airfield a second time.”

- 20 year-old man from Sydney recorded 2004
  “Helen picked a good spot near the water and spent the morning surfing and relaxing in the sun”

- 35? year old man from Sydney recorded 1964
  “The varieties of Australian English…”
How did AusE develop?

AusE probably developed through a process of koineisation: the creation of a new contact dialect based on mutually intelligible forms of the same language.

New dialect formation has a number of defined stages (Trudgill, 2004) and can be well developed by the second generation of native born settlers (Kerswill, 2002).

Written sources reveal that a distinct form of AusE was in use within the first 30 years of the colony. Bernard (1969) refers to this as “proto-broad”.

The dialect spread and diversified around the 1880s. (Yallop, 2004; Leitner, 2004).
How does the Australian English accent differ from other English accents?

- Vowel system
  - inventory and phonetic characteristics
  - relationships between elements
  - allophonic and reduction processes

- Consonantal modifications
  - phonotactics
  - connected speech processes
  - allophonic processes

- Suprasegmental and voice quality differences
Australian English Monophthongs relative to the Cardinal Vowels

Adapted from Cox (1996)
Australian English Non-Centring Diphthongs relative to the Cardinal Vowels

Adapted from Cox (1996)
Some other phonetic characteristics of AusE

- **non-rhotic:** no pre-pausal/pre-consonantal /r/

- **stop weakening processes** are variable, e.g.
  - intervocalic flapping, “butter, water”
  - final non-release, “hat, had”
  - pre-consonantal glottalling, “butler”, “not now”

- **pre-nasal and pre-lateral vowel effects**
  - vowels in “man” and “noun” are raised
  - vowel in “road” -> [ɔo] prelaterally (“roll”)
- rounding of /ɔː:/
- /j/ occurs after coronals before /uː:/ e.g. /njʊːːz/
- linking /r/, intrusive /r/ e.g. “car is”, “banana is”
- syllabic nasals and lateral e.g. “button”, “cattle”
- coalescence /tʃ/ -> /ʧ/ /dʒ/ -> /dʒ/ “tune, due”
- variable vocalised /l/ e.g. “milk”, “noodle”
Many of these individual characteristics may appear in a number of different English dialects.

It is not the individual features but the constellation of co-occurring characteristics that make each dialect unique.
The Australian English Accent

• AusE is traditionally described as a single dialect displaying accent variation along a continuum of Broadness from the most distinctively local variety through to the form having some resemblance to Received Pronunciation of British English (RP).

• This “broadness continuum” has been said to account for a large proportion of the variation present in the Australian English accent.

• Some regional variation in accent can be observed but, by global standards, remains quite restricted.
• The broadness continuum is divided into three categories:
  - Cultivated
    - “Fellow Australians”
  - General
    - “Well may we say ‘God save the Queen’.
  - Broad
    - “Oh, ah, several cups of tea”

Unfortunately these are evaluative labels.
What is “broadness”?

Mitchell and Delbridge (1965), the architects of this classification scheme, identified the three types based on observations from their large survey of the speech of Australian adolescents.

The broadness continuum was simply a convenient way of categorising the major variations that had been identified.
What is the basis for the categories?

Mitchell and Delbridge (1965) identified 5 variables in accent differentiation:

- vowel realisation
- assimilation / elision (connected speech processes)
- pitch range
- nasality
- rate

Vowel realisation was considered the most salient of the variables.
Most variation was found in the vowels in

“hay”
“he”
“high”
“hoe”
“how”
“who”

These vowel sounds were considered the major markers of broadness. An acoustic analysis by Bernard (1969) verified that the first 5 of these vowels separated the accent types.
Mitchell and Delbridge (1965) suggested that there was some socially relevant variation related to accent but they did not go so far as to identify social dialects.

Social variation was found according to gender, school type, father’s occupation, and the city/country distinction.

More recent examination of social characteristics and accent type (Horvath, 1985; Cox & Palethorpe, 1998) have revealed a reduced influence of socio-economic group.
# Classifications in 1965

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broad</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Broad/General</td>
<td>1568</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>3939</td>
<td>56%</td>
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<tr>
<td>General/Cultivated</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultivated</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>3%</td>
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After re-classification based on degree of assimilation and nasality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broad</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivated</td>
<td>11%</td>
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</table>
The distribution of broadness.

- Horvath’s (1985), impressionistic study, showed that the General category was increasing at the expense of Broad and Cultivated. The broadness continuum appeared to be contracting.

- The young were avoiding the extremities of the continuum in favour of General.

- General had a distinctly Australian flavour but without some of the less desirable characteristics that had come to be associated with Broad or Cultivated.
Accent is a powerful symbol of identity and has intrinsic personal value. It is also potent in its reflection of socio-demographic speaker characteristics.

- Broad carried connotations of masculinity, lack of culture, and ockerism.
- Cultivated was associated with femininity, affectation, snobbishness, affinity with Britain

In the post WWII era, Australia began a gradual cultural shift away from Britain. The external standard of British English increasingly lost power with the result that fewer social advantages were to be gained by speaking with a British-like accent.
Horvath (1985) made the additional claim that many migrants from Southern Europe who arrived after WWII were using a form of accented English that she referred to as Ethnic Broad.

She claims that the shift away from Broad could, in part, be explained by the desire for young people (including the migrants’ sons and daughters) to create distance between themselves and speakers of the Ethnic Broad variety.
In the late 80s, General AusE was gaining ground amongst the younger generation; i.e. those who initiate change. General Australian had become the standard.

It was also clear that young Australians didn’t sound the same as older Australians nor did they sound like young people from previous generations.

Innovations enter a dialect through the speech of young people. During adulthood, an individual’s accents changes far more slowly than changes occurring in the dialect through evolution.
1960

- “Beat, boot, say, so, high, how”
- “The plane flew down low over the runway then increased speed and circled the aerodrome a second time.”

2005

- “The plane flew down low over the runway then increased speed and circled the airfield a second time.”
Two interrelated questions arose from these observations.

1. What was happening to broadness? Was homogeneity to be the result?

2. What other changes were occurring in the accent that could account for the generational differences?
More Recent Examination Of Broadness

Harrington, Cox and Evans (1997), in an acoustic analysis of vowels from the ANDOSL Corpus (Vonwiller, Rogers, Cleirigh and Lewis, 1995), found significant differentiation between accent types for the vowel in “how” and “hi” with only minor variation for “hay, he, hoe, who”.

They also proposed substantial revisions to the transcription system for AusE vowels on the basis of phonetic accuracy. (The Macquarie Dictionary (1981) had codified AusE lexis but had retained a system based on British English for pronunciation)
Mitchell and Delbridge (1965) state:

“where pronunciation is indicated by phonetic transcription there is no intention to suggest by the choice of symbol anything about the articulatory or acoustic nature of the sounds in question” p. ix

Recent acoustic analyses have highlighted problems with using this transcription system (Mitchell, 1946) to accurately describe AusE.

Clark (1989), Durie and Hajek (1994) and Ingram (1995) have also commented on the need to revise the system to meet Australian needs.
Australian English Monophthongs relative to the Cardinal Vowels
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Adapted from Cox (1996)
Australian English Non-Centring Diphthongs relative to the Cardinal Vowels

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<td>who'd</td>
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<td>/ɜː/</td>
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Diphthongs


[æi]  [ei]  say
[əu]  [ou]  so
[æi]  [ai]  high
[æɛ]  [au]  how
[ɛi]  [ɛi]  toy
[ɛi]  [ɛi]  here
Our recent AusE studies have relied on acoustic techniques to more accurately describe phonetic variation.

The standard technique is sound spectrography.

This allows us to establish a representation of the resonant frequencies in an acoustic speech signal.

The first (and lowest) two of these frequencies provide an indication of articulatory vowel space due to the very high correlations with vowel height (F1) and vowel fronting (F2).
“Alan took a ham sandwich to school”
Monophthong Spectrogram
Throughout the 1990s it was becoming increasingly difficult to find broadness marker vowel variation among young Australians.

Cox (1996), in a stepwise regression analysis of adolescents’ vowels, found that the only broadness marker to show social associations was the vowel in “how”.

However, socially conditioned variation could be seen for some vowels not previously considered markers. e.g. /æ/. 
This new variation suggested change in progress and we were encouraged to more closely examine vowel evolution.

Cox (1999) conducted an acoustic analysis that compared vowel data collected from matched groups of speakers at each end of a 25 year time interval (real time analysis).

Highly significant differences were found in both monophthongs and diphthongs. This is an indication of change.
Cox and Palethorpe (2000) were able to replicate these results in a synchronic (apparent time) study where speakers from different age groups were compared.
Vowel data from the 1960s (Bernard, 1969)
Vowel data from the 1990s (Cox, 1996)
Vowel change and the system

• Change to any vowel will have systemic consequences as a result of adaptive dispersion (Lindblom, 1986)

• Chain shifts (push and pull chains) and parallel shifts occur to ensure sufficient perceptual separation and to maintain the integrity of phonemic relationships.

• Monophthongs as well as the movement of diphthongs through the vowel space are affected.
➢ /æ/ has lowered over the past 40 years and we have now begun to see changes to surrounding vowels.

➢ The lowering of /æ/ has made available space for the descent of /e/ (via pull chain shift). This effect is still in the incipient stage but appears to be progressing rather rapidly in some groups of speakers.

“head”

Hyper-general

“had”

General

“hud”
Apart from shift within vocalic subsystems (monophthongs and diphthongs), we have also observed evolutionary interdependence between these vowel types and this has become a recurring theme in our work (Cox, 1996, 1999, Cox and Palethorpe, 1997, 2000).

The principles that govern the relationship between monophthongs and diphthongs are yet to be established.
Vowel data from the 1960s (Bernard, 1969)
Vowel data from the 1990s (Cox, 1996)
Data from the Australian Ancestors Project

Old

Modem

/æ/
Old

Modern

/æ, æɛ/
• The previous plots show that diphthongs are moving in response to a linked interaction with the monophthongs. In the previous slide, /au/ appears linked to /e/ and /ai/ to /ɔ/.

• Diphthongs also display remarkable symmetry and often behave synchronously.
Our work shows that numerous changes have occurred in AusE and the associated variation is not isolated to the broadness marker vowels.

Variations not associated with broadness are becoming more common in young speakers.

Such observations have prompted us to question the validity of the broadness continuum as a descriptive tool in the examination of the speech of young Australians.
Work is currently in progress on:

- /l/ vocalisation
- stop weakening processes
- new vowel variation
- intonation patterns
- regional variation
- ethno-cultural variation
Aims of our current research

• A new model which accurately accounts for the variations present in Australian speakers is required.

• This model must acknowledge the presence, and emergence, of new AusE dialects used by the native-born.

• The new model must clearly describe variation within and between the dialects and show the inter-relationships across speaker groups.
Important questions to address in a new model

- What phonetic variations and processes are present?
  - must include both vowel and consonant processes.

- What socio-demographic, ethnographic and stylistic variables account for this variation?

- What labels should be used to describe any groups of similar speakers?

- How do the various co-existent systems interrelate?
Preliminary model for Australian English Accent

Model from above

Broadness variation radiates from the hub.
A preliminary model for Australian English accent variation into the 21st century

3D model
Australian English today comprises various inter-related dialects.

- The dominant dialect is Standard AusE which displays phonetic variation in
  - vowel and consonant realisation
  - allophonic and connected speech processes
  - suprasegmental features and voice quality

- Regional variation is present but not extensive

- Gender differentiation is maintained primarily through consonantal, stylistic and prosodic effects
Other Australian English dialects interact with Standard AusE.

- Co-existent Australian dialects are based on the standard form but diverge from it in predictable ways.
  
  e.g. Lebanese AusE
  - similar phonetic and articulatory vowel characteristics to those of Standard General AusE
  - different connected speech processes, timing and prosody.

- Co-existent dialects display a continuum of variation with a common intersection at Standard General AusE.
Dynamic Model of the Evolution of New Englishes

Schneider’s (2003) model can be used to help explain the phenomenon of new variation in AusE.

Australia is now in the final of five phases of new dialect evolution. This is the differentiation phase where diversity appears after a period of homogeneity.

Such diversity is the result of identity construction becoming increasingly based on immediate community of practice rather than national norms.
Australian English in the 21st Century

Predictions:

- AusE will continue to be a powerful marker of national identity.
- It will continue to evolve in response to new social pressures but always within the constraints imposed by phonetic pressures of intelligibility.
- It will not be consumed by other global dialects.
- Ethno-cultural and regional variability within Australia will increase.
Thank you