

Aspects of the Phonetics and Phonology of Aboriginal English

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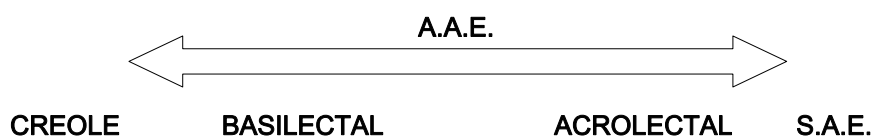
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Australian Aboriginal English

- 2006 Census:
 - 455,000 Australians identified as indigenous
 - 47,000 Australians (12 % of indigenous population) claimed to speak an Aboriginal language
 - as many as 30,000 could be creole (NILS)
- 78% of these were also “proficient English speakers”
- Thus great majority of Aboriginal population speak some form of Australian Aboriginal English (AAE) at least some of the time

Australian Aboriginal English

- AAE is the first (and only) language of most Aboriginal children
- Somewhere on continuum from very close to Standard Australian English (SAE) through to very close to creole



Australian Aboriginal English

- **AAE** shares number of features with other non-standard varieties of English (particularly at grammatical level)
- Has other features (particularly at lexical & phonological levels, but also at pragmatic level) which derive from traditional Aboriginal languages and culture
- Some of these features quite widely distributed across the country; others restricted to particular areas

Consonants of SAE

voiceless stop	p		t		k	
voiced stop	b		d		g	
voiceless fricative	f	θ	s	ʃ		h
voiced fricative	v	ð	z	ʒ		
nasal	m		n		ŋ	
lateral			l			
approximant	w		r	j		

Consonants of Australian Languages

voiceless stop	p	t̪	t	ʈ	c	k
nasal	m	ɱ	n	ɳ	ɲ	ŋ
lateral		ɭ	l	ɮ	ʎ	
approximant	w		r	ɻ	j	

Consonants of basilectal AAE

- Areas of difference from SAE entirely within obstruent class
- AAE does not distinguish between voiced and voiceless stops
- Strong tendency to voice intervocalic obstruents and devoice word-final ones
- Initial stops generally identified as voiced (no glottal pulsing, but unaspirated)

Consonants of basilectal AAE

	<u>SAE</u>	<u>AAE</u>
Paul	[p ^h o:t]	[pɔ]
ball	[bo:t]	[pɔ]
bought	[bo:t]	[pɔt]
board	[bo:d]	[pɔt]
cut	[k ^h et]	[kɛt]
good	[gʊd]	[kʊt]
happy	['hæpi]	['ɛbi]
bigger	['bɪgə]	['pɪgɛ]
water	['wo:ɹə]	['wɔɹɛ]
ladder	['læɹə]	['lɛɹɛ]

Consonants of basilectal AAE

- AAE does not distinguish between stops and fricatives
- /f, v/ typically replaced by [p]
- /s, z, ʃ, ʒ, tʃ/ & /dʒ/:
 - in lighter varieties /s/ & /ʃ/ may be interchangeable (with [s] appearing to predominate)
 - /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ often pronounced as [tʃ] in initial position but as [ts] word finally in heavy accents appear as stops, especially in final position (e.g. both 'catch' and 'cadge' = [kɛtʃ])
 - in heaviest varieties all six phonemes may be represented by alveopalatal stop [tʃ]

Consonants of basilectal AAE

	<u>SAE</u>	<u>AAE</u>
berry	[ˈbeɪɹi]	[ˈbɛɪɹi]
very	[ˈveɪɹi]	[ˈbɛɪɹi]
leaf	[li:f]	[lip]
fall over	[fo:ɫ ˈəʊvə]	[pɔɫ ˈobə]
other	[ˈeðə]	[ˈɛpə]
thing	[θɪŋ]	[tɪŋ]
that	[ðæt]	[ɔt]
with	[wɪð]	[wɪt]

Consonants of basilectal AAE

	<u>SAE</u>	<u>acrolectal AAE</u>	<u>basilectal AAE</u>
same	[sæɪm]	[sæɪm]	[t̪ ^ɛ ɪm]
shame	[ʃæɪm]	[sæɪm]	[t̪ ^ɛ ɪm]
fish	[fɪʃ]	[fɪs]	[pɪt̪ ^ɛ]
face	[fæɪs]	[fæɪs] or [fæɪʃ]	[pɛt̪ ^ɛ]
cheeky	[ˈtʃi:kɪ]	[ˈtʃɪkɪ]	[ˈt̪ ^ɛ ɪgɪ]
catch	[kʰætʃ]	[kɛts]	[kɛt̪ ^ɛ]
picture	[ˈpɪkt̪ɹə]	[ˈpɪtsə]	[ˈpɪt̪ ^ɛ ə]
just	[dʒəst]	[dəs]	[t̪ ^ɛ ət̪ ^ɛ]

Consonants of basilectal AAE

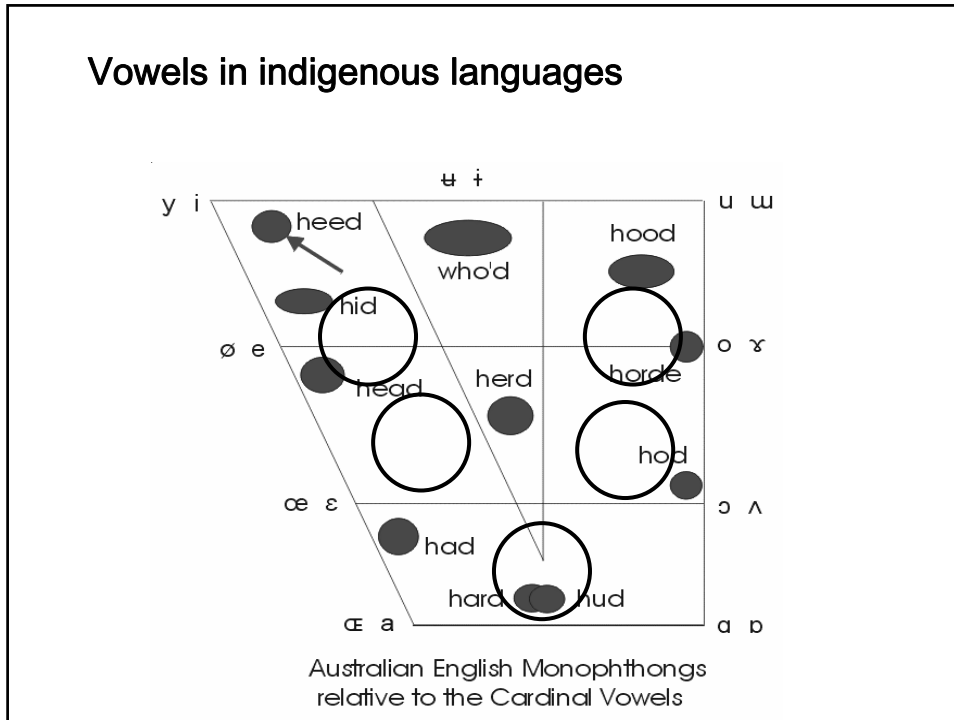
- /h/ generally omitted in AAE, but hypercorrection common – e.g.:
 - hard → [ɛd], happy → [ˈɛpɪ]
 - uncle → [ˈhɛŋkəl], angry → [ˈhɛŋgɪ]
- complex syllable onsets liable to reduction or simplification – e.g.:
 - stopping → [ˈtɒpɪn]; driving → [ˈdɛbɪn]
 - sleeping → [səˈlɪpɪn] (or [t̪^ɛəˈlɪpɪn]); splashing → [pəˈleʃɪn] (or [pəˈleʃt̪^ɛɪn])
- medial liquid+stop and nasal+stop sequences unchanged – e.g.:
 - bumper, under, helping

Consonants of basilectal AAE

- complex codas with more than one obstruent reduced – e.g.:
 - fast → [fəs] or [pəs]; soft → [sɔf] or [sɔp]; cask → [kəs]
- many indigenous languages allow only open syllables - reflected in forms of English words passing into language and hence into AAE - particularly names of introduced animals – e.g.:
 - bullock → ['pʊlɪkɪ]; pig' is ['pɪkɪpɪkɪ]; sheep → ['ʃɪpɪ] (['jɪpɪjɪpɪ] in 19th century)

Consonants of AAE

- At phonetic level one particular consonantal allophone strikingly different from SAE:
 - /l/ is realised as 'clear' alveolar lateral in all positions
 - does not become velarised (or vocalised) in coda position
 - thus wall always [wɔl], rarely [wɔɫ], and never [wɔʊ] (as in South Australian and other varieties of SAE).

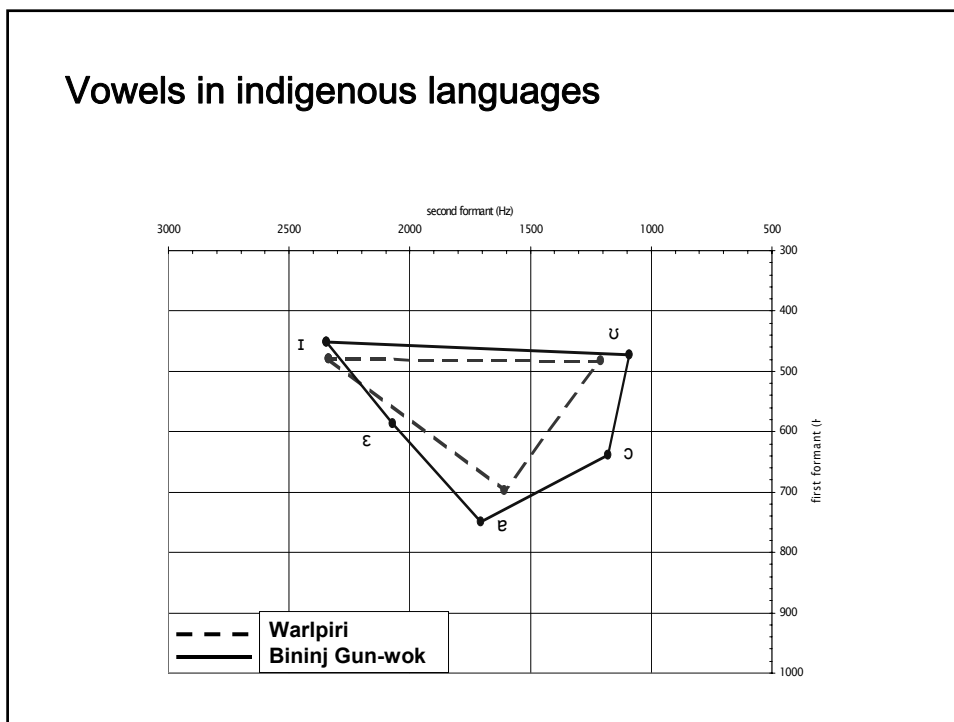


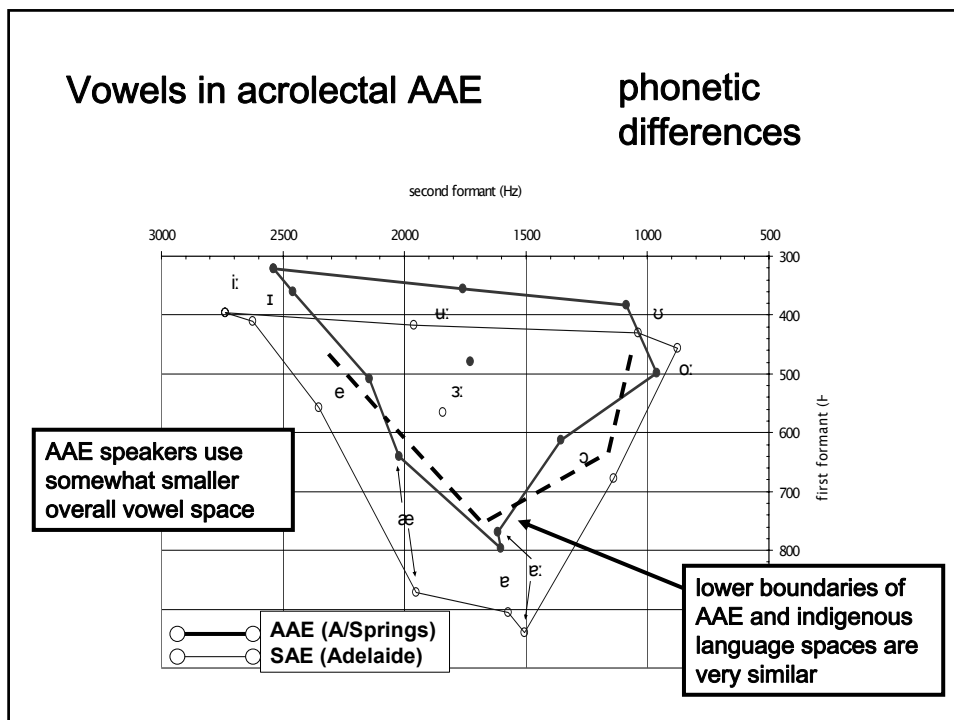
	key word	SAE	AAE (5V)	AAE (3V)
Vowels in basilectal AAE	fleece	i:	ɪ	ɪ
	kit	ɪ		
	near	ɪə		
	face	æɪ	-----	
	dress	e	ɛ	
	square	e:		
	trap	æ		
phonological differences	nurse	ɜ:	-----	ə
	strut	ə	ə	
	palm	ɛ:		
	price	æɛ		
	mouth	æɔ		

Vowels in basilectal AAE

key word	SAE	AAE (5V)	AAE (3V)
lot	ɔ	ɔ	ʊ
thought	o:		
goat	əʊ	ʊ	
foot	ʊ		
goose	u:		
choice	ɔɪ		

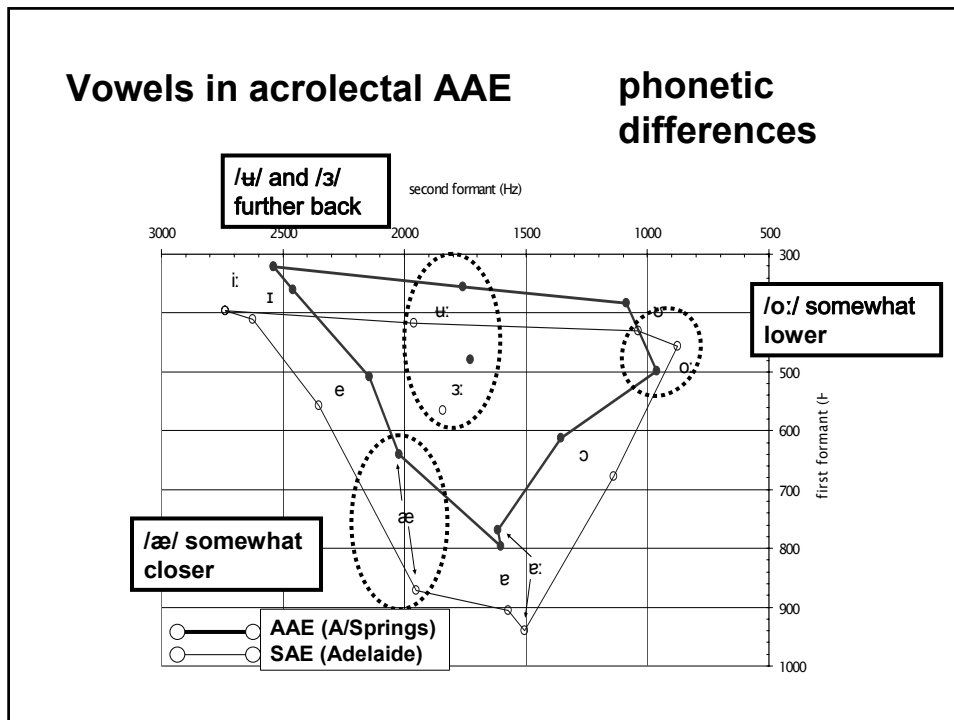
phonological differences





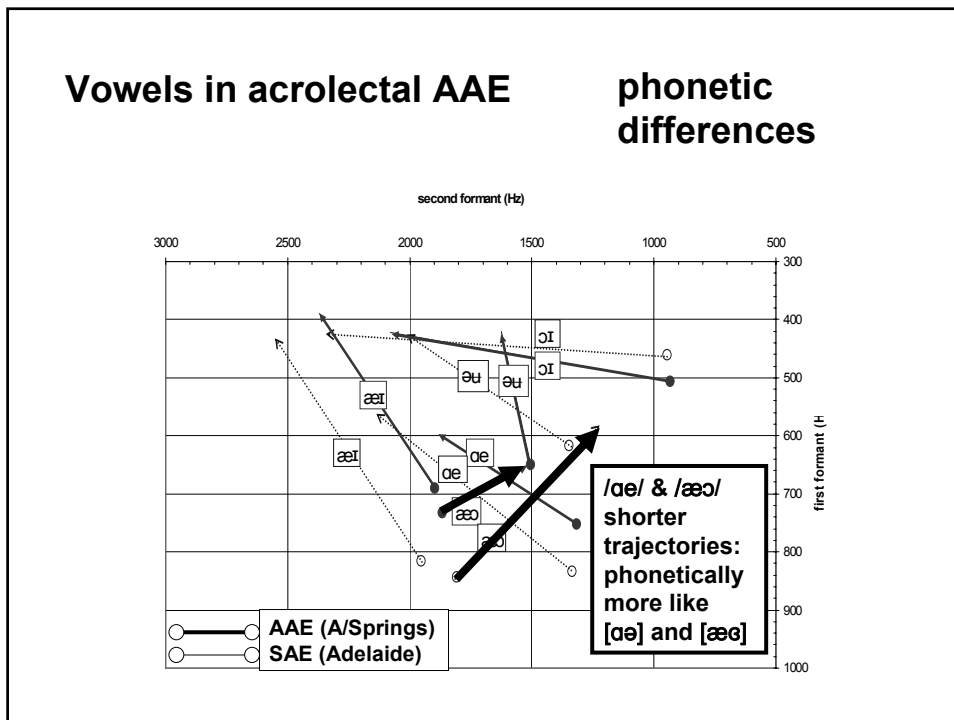
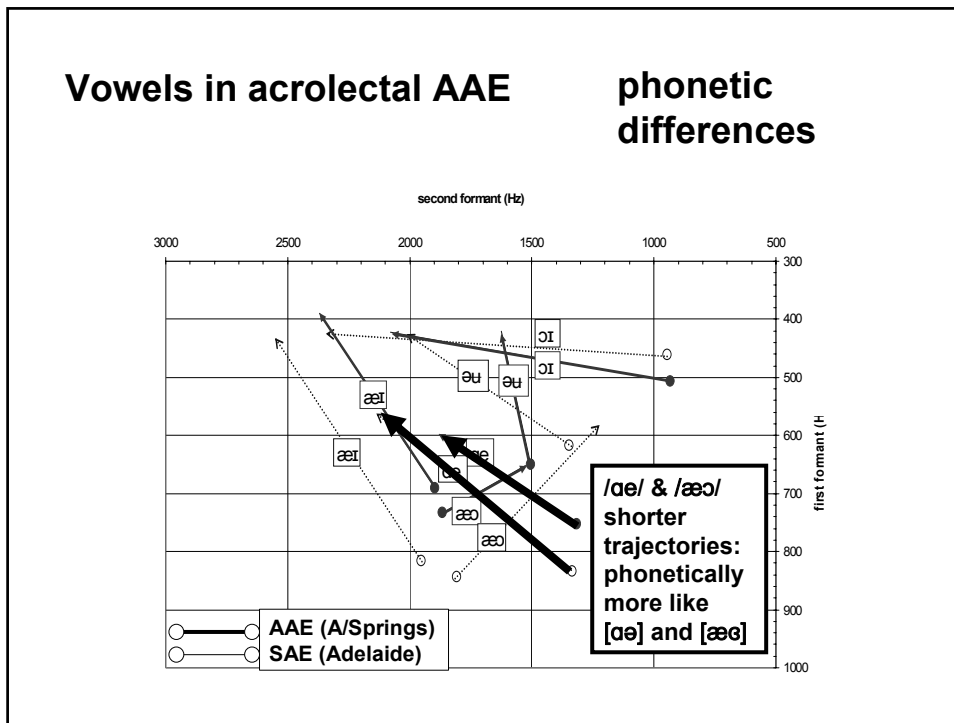
Vowels in acrolectal AAE

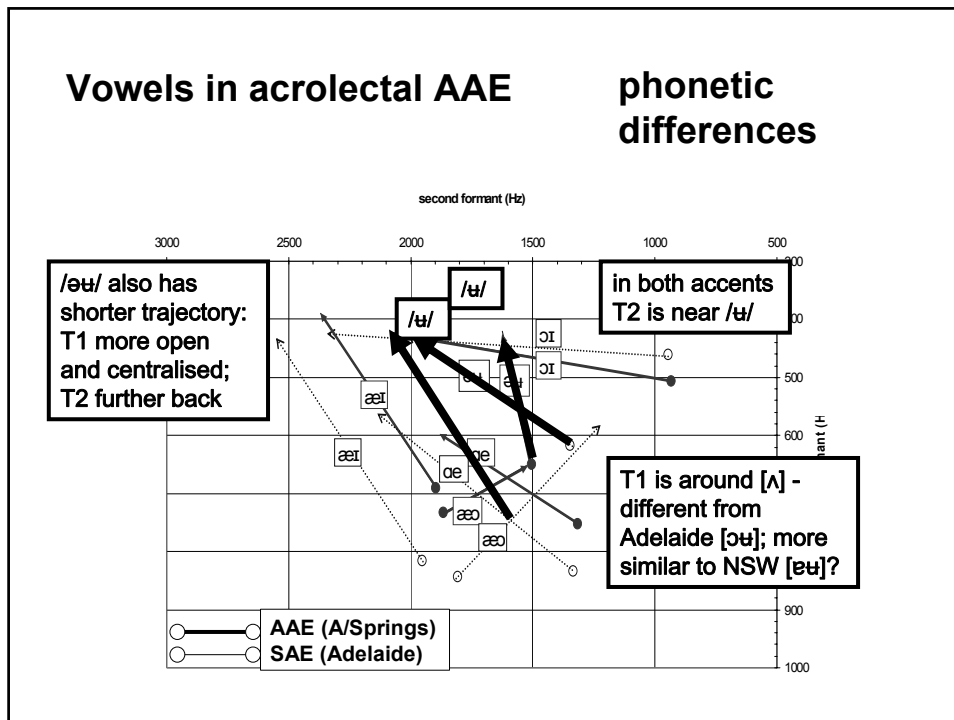
- AAE speakers use somewhat smaller overall vowel space
- lower boundaries of AAE and indigenous language spaces are very similar
 - /e:, e/ in AAE very close to /e/ of indigenous languages
 - /e/ & /o:/ of AAE are close to indigenous /ɪ/ & /ʊ/
- compared with indigenous vowel space
 - SAE space represents expansion in all directions
 - AAE space represents expansion in 'upward' direction only.



Vowels in acrolectal AAE

- AAE /æ/ is rather closer and /o:/ rather more open relative to neighbours than in SAE
- AAE /ɜ:/ and /ɜ:/ are slightly further back than in SAE
- these differences can be viewed as more conservative features – i.e. lowering of /æ/, raising of /o:/, fronting of /ɜ:/ and /ɜ:/ have occurred comparatively recently in SAE.





Vowels in acrolectal AAE

- /æɪ/ and /æɔ/ have somewhat shorter trajectories than SAE. Phonetically more like [aɪ] and [aɔ] in AAE.
- /əʊ/ looks more different than it actually is!
 - second target much further back than in SAE, nevertheless corresponds closely to monophthong /ʊ/ target in both speaker sets
 - first target lower and more centralised, but probably typical of most accents of SAE (see e.g. Cox 2006); it is the more retracted and rounded target of the South Australian accent which is the less typical pronunciation
 - symbol sequence /əʊ/ now used for SAE is reasonably accurate phonetic representation of AAE sound, but SA equivalent more accurately [ɔʊ]