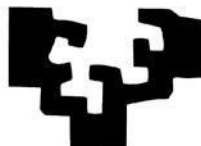


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**Degree in English Studies**

**Australian English:  
A linguistic description**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to provide a general description of the linguistic features of Australian English (AusE). For this purpose, the paper first focuses on the sociohistorical context that explains how and why the English language arrived in Australia in the late 18th century, as well as a brief overview of the influence of different languages and dialects AusE has received throughout the decades. The next section describes this variety phonologically, morpho-syntactically and lexically. The pronunciation subsection offers an explanation of the three accents of AusE, i.e. Cultivated, the most prestigious accent, Broad, consisting of the most distinctive AusE features, and General, the most widely used among speakers (Horvath, 2008). The subsection continues with a description of the vowel and consonant systems of AusE with reference to accent variation. The morphosyntactic description follows, which explains different phenomena that occur in AusE grammar. They are addressed by means of a comparison with British English (BrE) and American English (AmE) morphosyntactic features, which will help the reader to understand to what extent AusE is moving away from the tendencies of other major English varieties and forming its own grammatical characteristics. Lastly, the remaining subsection is devoted to the vocabulary of AusE. First, this part focuses on the influence of Australian Aboriginal languages, mentioning different native tongues from which AusE borrowed hundreds of words, giving several examples. The early borrowings from different BrE dialects as well as the late influence of AmE are also covered. This part follows with an explanation of lexical variation given in several words, a summary of the different abbreviation processes and a list of colloquialisms found in informal AusE.

*Keywords:* English Varieties, Australian English, phonology, morphology, syntax, lexis, descriptivism.

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## **1. Introduction**

Having been raised in a bilingual society as is the Basque Country, I have studied both Basque and Spanish since primary school. However, it was not until recently that I realised how differently they are taught in schools. In the Basque language lessons I attended, the students were taught about the major varieties of Basque through a descriptivist approach. We studied how the lexicon varied from region to region, what standard grammatical features did not apply to certain varieties and what sounds were characteristic of each accent. I believe this is one of the reasons why the Basque community embraces the diversity of varieties of Basque. It is inspiring to see how Basque people acknowledge the differences in our language and naturally talk about them, willing to learn more about our peers' speech.

This does not seem to happen among the Spanish speakers. My Spanish lessons in high school were mostly focused on the rules of standard Spanish grammar, and the teachers continuously used terms such as “correct Spanish” and “incorrect Spanish”. I cannot recall a time in my education in which I was taught about the features of different accents or dialects of Spanish. I have come to the conclusion that this type of education is somehow influencing the speakers' attitude towards the diversity of varieties. It is in fact common for speakers of Spanish not only to think that some people “cannot speak properly”, but also to make offensive assumptions of entire communities only based on their accent. There is an ongoing discussion about whose dialect is “the best one” or “the correct one” among the speakers of Spanish across the globe.

A language, as well as its different varieties, are part of a speaker's identity, and it is terrible to suffer discrimination because of them. I strongly believe that the teaching of languages should adopt a descriptivist perspective through which students can objectively learn about the range of dialects and unlearn any stigma associated with them.

As a student and teacher of English, I consider it vital to keep learning about English varieties. Despite having studied several of them at the University of the Basque Country, my first contact with Australian English was in Japan. During my year abroad, I had an Australian teacher of English who explained to me how there were three major accents in Australian English which varied in terms of social status rather

than regions. It seemed hard to believe that I had never heard or read about that piece of information in spite of being a student of English Studies, and I was amazed at how much I had yet to discover. On account of that, I returned to my home university hoping to learn about Australian English as deeply as I had been taught about African American Vernacular English or RP, and my final dissertation provided me with the opportunity to do so. This is how I opted for Australian English, a variety of English which is spoken in Australia.

The English language was brought to Australia in 1788 by the British. The people who arrived in this land came from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Their different accents and varieties of English provided the linguistic roots for Australian English (AusE) to develop as the distinctive variety of English spoken in Australia (Crystal 2003). Apart from the influence coming from Britain, another factor that played a significant role in the formation of AusE was the contact with several Australian Aboriginal peoples, from which this variety adopted a great number of words (Moore, n.d.). Nowadays, AusE continues evolving, developing new distinct features and following trends from other English varieties, such as American English (AmE).

The purpose of this paper is to provide a descriptive analysis of the Australian English variety. In order to do so, I will first focus on the socio-historical background of the British Isles and the reasons that led the British to colonise Australia in the 18th century, as well as on how other languages and varieties of English have influenced AusE. Then, I will proceed with the linguistic description of the variety, starting with the pronunciation. This subsection will offer an explanation of the vowel and consonant systems of AusE, outlining the most distinctive phonological features and focusing on the realisation differences found among the three different accents of AusE. I will continue with the distinctive morphosyntactic characteristics, providing a comparison with the features occurring in BrE and AmE grammar. The section devoted to the linguistic description will conclude with the lexical features of Aus. I will go over the impact received from different English varieties and I will also explain several lexical processes which are distinctive of AusE.

## 2. Australia and the English language

This section is divided into two parts that provide an overview of the socio-historical and linguistic context of Australia in the late 18th century. The first subsection is mainly based on the work by Ballyn (2011), whereas the second follows mostly Schneider (2010).

### 2.1. Sociohistorical context

The only occupants of what is nowadays called Australia were the Aborigines for several thousands of years until recently in history. In fact, it is believed that they first arrived in this land more than 50,000 years ago. The first explorers that are known to have landed in Australia were European. From the mid 15th century on, European nations started to send their fleets in search of new routes across the sea. That is how the Dutch, and other navigators who followed, found the land nowadays known as Australia (*Stage 2: HSIE: British Colonization of Australia*, n.d.).

The world map in Figure 1 shows the location of Australia on the globe. The Australian area is distinctly marked in red in contrast with the rest of the land, which is represented in white.



*Figure 1.* Map of Australia in the world (Australia on World, 2022).

In the year 1770, the English sailor James Cook and his crew arrived in Australian land after departing on an expedition (Crystal, 2003). Despite a rough

encounter with the Aborigines, who opposed their arrival, Captain Cook and his sailors stayed on the Australian east coast for over a week, exploring the area and taking notes, as well as drawing the newly discovered plant species. Cook claimed the land for England and the crew headed back home, where the findings about this fertile land were considered appealing, and, therefore, the British decided to settle in this new land (*Stage 2: HSIE: British Colonization of Australia*, n.d.). For one thing, their industrialised cities were facing high rates of unemployment while receiving more and more people moving from rural areas. For another, the rates of criminality were ascending uncontrollably, and the excessively congested prisons could not incorporate any more convicts (Ballyn, 2011).

In light of this necessity of extra land, after considering several locations, Britain opted for Australia for several reasons: apart from the convenient conditions of the green and fertile land described by Cook, the encounters with Aborigines there had been few and not too problematic, as opposed to other possible alternatives such as West Africa, where the locals seemed too aggressive to establish a penal settlement. In addition to that, another reason that led to the decision was the potential opportunity to obtain materials such as timber. Consequently, the Australian territory began to be used by the British as a place to deport their prisoners. This way, the first ships sailed from England carrying around 1,500 people, 700 of which were convicts, and anchored on the Australian coast in 1788 (Ballyn, 2011).

The transportation of deportees proceeded for decades. As soon as they arrived, they were inquired about their background and abilities. The convicts who arrived first had to build the framework for the prison settlements, and then they were assigned different tasks such as farming and household labour. The same happened to the following convicts. They worked for free travellers, who often mistreated them, but they could request relocation should they be denied basic rights such as food and rest. Moreover, the prisoners were provided with medical assistance and a balanced diet (Ballyn, 2011).

After serving their sentence, the majority of the prisoners decided to stay in the territory. They became part of the community and performed all kinds of jobs (Ballyn 2011). Additionally, free settlers started to migrate from the British Isles as well in search of opportunities the new colony seemed to promise. Eventually, the population of Australia grew bigger and more diverse, bearing a larger number of free settlers than

prisoners (Schneider 2010). By 1850, when the transportation of convicts concluded, the inhabitants of Australia had reached 400,000 people (Crystal, 2003).

On the other hand, the British colonisation of Australia resulted in an attempt to eliminate the indigenous people from their own land. They were exiled or imprisoned, as well as raped and separated from their children, who were captured and forced to learn the colonisers' customs, language and religion. The natives were treated as slaves and subjected to genuine genocide (Ballyn, 2011).

## **2.2. Linguistic context**

In the 19th century, the linguistic situation of the British Isles was rather diverse. The population that spoke English did not speak a standard form, but their own dialects, which differed from region to region; the rest spoke their own Celtic languages (Burridge, 2010).

As a consequence of the British settling in Australia, the primary linguistic influence AusE obtained came from Britain. A large number of settlers arrived mainly from London and Ireland, contributing to the formation of new English varieties by providing, among others, some characteristics of Cockney accent and Irish English that can still be observed in AusE (Crystal 2003). An estimated number of 200 words from different British English accents became common expressions of AusE (Moore, n.d.). Thus, the formation and development of AusE can be explained as a process called 'koinéization', through which distinct varieties of English gradually arose as a result of the mixing of British dialects such as those from south-east England, Scotland and Ireland, but especially London (Burridge, 2010). Even though the process occurred slowly, it is believed that such varieties had appeared by the 1850s. They were characterised by their similarity to the English spoken in southern England, and to other dialects spoken by the underclass and working class, as it was the speech of criminals and farm workers (Schneider, 2010)

Nevertheless, there is another significant factor affecting the formation of English dialects in Australia: the contact with the indigenous people. When the British first arrived in Australia, there were about 600 Aboriginal groups, each with hundreds of members. There were around 250 different languages and at least 600 dialects (Moore, n.d.). Although such contact was rather limited initially, many of the Aboriginals had no alternative but to merge with the whites, acquiring their culture and



language. The two peoples influenced each other and, hence, the English of white Australians was considerably altered, especially by the large amount of lexical borrowings obtained from the languages of the Aboriginal people. As a matter of fact, Australian English borrowed a substantial number of nature-related terms, terminology of quotidian indigenous culture and place names. It is in fact believed that one third of the toponyms of Australia come from indigenous languages (Schneider, 2010).

During most of the twentieth century, Australians adopted an exonormative perspective on their language. They considered British accent to be the “correct” one, the one which was appropriate to be used in formal contexts as opposed to the local spoken variety. Nonetheless, that attitude gradually became endonormative as the country approached political autonomy. Although Australia gained political independence in 1901, Australians still felt a special connection with Britain, perceiving themselves as part of it in some way. But after an incident during World War II in which Australia did not receive protection from its mother country, it appeared obvious that they needed to redefine themselves as an entirely independent nation. This decision entailed a process of linguistic independence: Australian style manuals and dictionaries were published, contributing to the acceptance of the local English varieties as symbols of the nation’s culture, and Australians ceased looking for linguistic guidance in the rules of British English (Schneider, 2010).

Regarding language variation, Standard Australian English is particularly uniform, as regional variation can practically only be found in the lexicon. However, it varies rather noticeably within the social scale, presenting differences in pronunciation. In fact, Australian English can be phonologically categorised into the following three accents: Broad, General and Cultivated. According to Burridge (2010), the factors determining the use of a specific accent over another are generally “education, gender identification and location (urban versus rural)” (p. 135). I will discuss this aspect in more depth in the pronunciation section of this paper.

During the last few decades, AusE has been influenced by the languages spoken by different migrant groups that have been settling in Australia (Crystal 2003), but the most evident recent influence comes from American English (AmE). In fact, the younger generations of AusE, especially teenagers, have acquired a range of AmE colloquialisms, as well as the spelling rules of this variety. This tendency is increasing thanks to the exposure to AmE through mass media and the easy access to it through

the internet (Hagley, 2012, p. 6). I will cover this matter in more depth in the vocabulary section.

### **3. Linguistic features of Australian English**

#### **3.1. Pronunciation**

Australian English can be classified into three accents that form a continuum of pronunciations. Since Mitchell (1945, as cited in Horvath, 2008) referred to them as Cultivated, General and Broad, this classification has been used by linguists to describe the pronunciation differences present in AusE. Cultivated is considered to be the most prestigious accent, although it is only used by 10% of AusE speakers. At the same time, Broad, which shows the most distinctive AusE features, is perceived as the least prestigious of the three. Between these two accents lies General, being the most widely used among Australians (Horvath, 2008).

In the 1960s, a research project was undertaken by Mitchell and Delbridge (1965) with the aim of analysing the speech of thousands of Australian adolescents. The results concluded that the pronunciation of the consonants did not vary significantly among the three AusE accents, nor did it show great distinction from other varieties such as British or American English. On the other hand, the data displayed notable variation in the vowels. This led these scholars to claim that Cultivated, General and Broad are not different dialects of AusE, and they defined AusE as a single dialect with three major accents.

In this section, I will deal with the vowel system of AusE based on Wells (1982). I will describe the monophthongs and diphthongs while focusing on the variation among the three AusE accents. A study of the consonants will also be presented, which will explain the most characteristic features following the phoneme classification by Cox (2006). Although accent variation is not so abundant in the consonants, I will make reference to the differences that can be found in the Cultivated, General and Broad regions of the spectrum of the dialect.

##### **3.1.1. Vowels**

The vowel sounds of AusE coincide with those of RP. However, phonetically, AusE is not close to RP. Significant differences are also found among the three AusE

accents. Although Cultivated Australian English stays close to RP realisationally, Broad and General lack such resemblance (Well, 1982). Table 1 displays the vowel sounds of AusE, together with a series of keywords in which they can be found.

**Table 1**

*Vowel System*

Keyword	Vowels	Keyword	Vowels
KIT	ɪ	FLEECE	i:
DRES	e	GOOSE	u:
TRAP	æ	FACE	ʌɪ
LOT	ɒ	GOAT	ʌʊ
FOOT	ʊ	PRICE	aɪ
CLOTH	ɒ	MOUTH	æʊ
STRUT	ʌ	CHOICE	ɔɪ
START	a:	NEAR	ɪə, i:ə, i:
BATH	a:	SQUARE	eə
PALM	a:	CURE	ʊə, ɔ:, u:ə, u:
NURSE	ɜ:	<i>happY</i>	i:
NORTH	ɔ:	<i>lettER</i>	ə
FORCE	ɔ:	<i>commA</i>	ə
THOUGHT	ɔ:		

*Note.* Adapted from *Accents of English 3 Beyond the British Isles* (p. 596) by J. C. Wells, 1982, Cambridge University Press. Copyright 1982 by Cambridge University Press.

### 3.1.1.1. Monophthongs

AusE front short vowels are usually raised in comparison to other major English varieties, which is particularly noticeable in Broad accent. This is the case of the vowels of KIT, TRAP and DRESS, the vowel of the latter sounding virtually as closed as [e] (Wells, 1982, p. 598). Not only is Broad the accent with the most obvious closing of these vowels, but it also has nasal and pharyngeal realisations (Wells, 1982).

On the other hand, fronting is a feature of the vowel STRUT, which is pronounced [a-]. This is not exclusively a characteristic of AusE, as the phenomenon is present in Cockney English too. Another vowel undergoing some fronting is that of START and PALM, realised as [a-:]. This vowel is also found in the words that belong to the lexical set BATH, which in some English accents like RP are pronounced with [ɑ:] while in others, such as General American English, are pronounced [æ]. Hence, AusE speakers produce *pass* as [pa:s] and *laugh* as [la:f] (Wells, 1982, p. 599). However, some Australian speakers use [æ] in certain BATH words, especially before a nasal followed by one more consonant; for example, *chance* and *example* (Wells, 1982, p. 599).

The vowel /ɜ:/ of NURSE is not excluded from the AusE fronting tendency. Apart from being quite front, it is also considerably closed, commonly as much as [e]. On the other hand, the only back long vowel that does not undergo fronting is the one occurring in the lexical sets NORTH, FORCE and THOUGHT, where the vowel quality is [ɔ:] (Wells, 1982, p. 599).

#### 3.1.1.1.1. Weak vowels

The sound /ə/ is used in weak syllables in AusE. It does contrast with all other vowels except for /ɪ/. In fact there is not a clear opposition between /ə/ and /ɪ/ except when the weak vowel is followed by a velar (Wells, 1982, p. 601). In this environment, /ɪ/ is used in the suffixes *-ic* and *-ing* (e.g. *panic*) (Wells, 1982, p. 601). In other environments, AusE speakers use /ə/ rather than /ɪ/. That is the reason why pairs of words like *boxes-boxers*, *Alice-callous* or *valid-salad* rhyme in AusE, since all of them have /ə/ in the weak syllable (Wells, 1982, p. 601). Likewise, the suffixes *-ate*, *-ess*, *-est*, *-et*, *-id*, *-ist*, *-less*, *-let*, *-ness* and *-age* have /ə/ (Wells, 1982).

Words that have both a weak and a strong pronunciation, such as *it*, *is* and *him*, have a very evident contrast between the two forms. Consequently, the strong form of *it* is /ɪt/, while the weak one is /ət/ (Wells, 1982, p. 602).

Regarding the weak vowel in *happY*, AusE speakers produce /i:/, whereas the prefixes *be-*, *de-*, *e-*, *pre-*, and *-re* seem to have both /ə/ and /i:/. The prefix *se-* is excluded from this trend, presenting only the /ə/ pronunciation, as in *select* (Wells, 1982, p. 602).

### 3.1.1.2. Diphthongs

#### 3.1.1.2.1. Closing diphthongs

The most noticeable realisation differences among Cultivated, General and Broad Australian English happen in the closing diphthongs /i:, ʌɪ, aɪ, u:, ʌʊ, æʊ/. In Cultivated AusE these diphthongs are akin to the RP ones. Even though the other two accents of the continuum have undergone a noticeable sound shift, their diphthongs vary most obviously in regard to duration, as Broad has slower closing diphthongs while General has the shortest of the three (Wells, 1982).

Table 2 presents the phonetic realisations of the closing diphthongs in the three accents of AusE (Wells, 1982).

**Table 2**

*Variation in closing diphthongs*

Vowel	Keyword	Cultivated AusE	General AusE	Broad AusE
/i:/	FLEECE	[i:]	[i]	[ə:i]
/u:/	GOOSE	[u]	[iu], [ou]	[ə:u]
/ʌɪ/	FACE	[ɛɪ]	[ʌɪ]	[ʌ:i], [a-:ɪ]
/ʌʊ/	GOAT	[öʊ]	[ʌu]	[ʌ:ʊ], [a-:u]
/aɪ/	PRICE	[a-ɪ]	[pɪ]	[p:ɪ]
/æʊ/	MOUTH	[a-ʊ]	[æʊ]	[ɛ:ʊ], [ɛ̃:ɥ]

*Note.* Adapted from *Accents of English 3 Beyond the British Isles* (p. 597) by J. C. Wells, 1982, Cambridge University Press. Copyright 1982 by Cambridge University Press.

The vowels in FLEECE and GOOSE are realised in Cultivated accent as the monophthongs [i] and [u] respectively, especially before a voiceless consonant. This would be the case of *keeping* /ki:pɪŋ/ and *loofah* /lʊfə/ (Wells, 1982, p. 598). As a result of a development called Diphthong Shift in General Australian, the vowels of FLEECE and GOOSE share the same first target [ɪ]. In Broad Australian, the first target of these diphthongs is also the same, namely, [ə:] Moreover, the diphthongs of FACE and GOAT have undergone Diphthong Shift as well, which means that they share the same starting point [ʌ] except in Cultivated accent. As for the diphthongs of PRICE and MOUTH, the first target is the same in Cultivated, i.e. [a-], whereas in General and Broad it is retracted and rather rounded for PRICE, i.e. [ɔ] and [ɔ:], while it is front in the diphthong of MOUTH, that is, [æ], [ɛ:] and [ɛ:] (Wells, 1982).

As for the second target or ending point of these diphthongs, there is not such a noticeable accent variation, but it is worth mentioning that it is [ɪ] in FACE but a lower [ɪ] in PRICE. In addition, regarding the realisations of the diphthongs of GOAT and MOUTH, General and Broad move away from /ʊ/ to [o] and even [ɤ] (Horvath, 2008).

Harrington et al (1997) gathered additional data about the pronunciation of the closing diphthongs related to variation between genders. It appears that the first target of the GOAT diphthong, that is, [ʌ], is more fronted among female speakers of Broad. As for the second target of that diphthong, that is, [ʊ], it is somewhat raised among the male speakers of General, while it is especially raised among female Broad speakers.

#### 3.1.1.2.2. Centring diphthongs

The centring diphthongs are the glides occurring in NEAR, SQUARE and CURE. In the case of /ɪə/ and /eə/, there are two possible realisations produced by Broad AusE speakers. On the one hand, they are usually monophthongised, especially before an alveolar consonant (Harrington et al, 1997). In this phonetic environment, the realisations of the vowels of NEAR and SQUARE resemble the vowels /ɪ/ of KIT and /e/ of DRESS respectively but with a longer quality. Two examples of this are *weary* realised as [wɪ:ɪəɪ] and *vary* as [ve:ɪəɪ] (Wells, 1982, p. 600). On the other hand, General and Broad show a preference for a two-sound variant, particularly when in final position (Harrington et al, 1997). This can be exemplified with the word *beer* realised as [ˈbɛəɪ] in Broad, which remains [ˈbɪə] in Cultivated (Wells, 1982, p. 600).

Regarding the CURE diphthong, Cultivated AusE produces either [ʊə] or [u:] in words such as *boorish*, and [ʊə] in words like *poor* (Wells, 1982, p. 600). For the latter, General and Broad speakers show an increasing tendency for a long, back, rounded monophthong [ɔ:]. In fact, the variant [ʊə] does not exist in Broad accent (Wells, 1982). The realisation [u:] is also found in Broad in a \_\_rV environment, as in *security* (Wells, 1982, p. 600).

### 3.1.2. Consonants

The AusE consonants are not considered to be a distinctive feature of the variety, which is why research on the features of AusE consonants is not as abundant as that into the vowels. In fact, the consonant phonemes of AusE, which can be observed in Table 3, are the same as those of two major English varieties, i.e., General American English and Southern British English. Nevertheless, there are several characteristics worth mentioning (Cox, 2006).

**Table 3**

*AusE consonant phonemes*

	Bilabial	Labio - dental	Dental	Alveolar	Post- alveolar	Palatal	Labial -velar	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b			t d				k g	
Affricate					tʃ dʒ				
Nasal	m			n				ŋ	
Fricative		f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ				h
Approxima nt				r		j	w		
Lateral Approxima nt				l					

*Note.* Adapted from *Australian English pronunciation into the 21st century*, p. 5, by F. Cox, 2006. National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research.

- **The liquids /r/and /l/**

Like RP, AusE is non-rhotic. This means that post-vocalic /r/ does not occur in words that have orthographic ‘r’; for example *far* /fa:/ (Cox, 2006, p. 5). Linking /r/,

however, is usually pronounced in connected speech if the next word begins with a vowel and thus *far out* is pronounced /fa:ræt/ (Cox, 2006, p. 5).

On the other hand, a non-orthographic pronunciation of /r/ called intrusive /r/ occurs in AusE as well as in other varieties of English. In connected speech, /r/ is used after certain vowels when the next word begins with a vowel. An example of this phenomenon is *draw it* /drɔ:ræt/ (Cox, 2006, p. 6).

Another common feature is the vocalisation of /l/. In pre-consonantal and word-final positions, dark /l/ can be pronounced very close to the back vowel /u/. Hence, words such as *milk* and *pill* are pronounced [mɪuk] and [piu] respectively (Burrige, 2010, p. 137).

- **Yod phenomena**

The palatal approximant /j/ is present after coronals before /u/. For example in *news* /nju:z/ the yod is not dropped (Burrige, 2010, p. 137). Another yod phenomenon which is found in AusE as well as in other varieties of English is Yod Coalescence. In the environment of a following palatal approximant /j/, the alveolar plosives /t, d/ and the alveolar fricatives /s, z/ merge with /j/, which results in the sounds [tʃ, dʃ] and [ʃ, z] respectively. This can be observed in words such as *assume* [ə'ʃu:m], where [ʃ] is used instead of [sj] (Burrige, 2010, p. 137).

- **The pronunciation of /t/**

In word initial position, the only realisation of /t/ is generally the alveolar plosive [t]. The tap [ɾ] is very frequent between vowels, either within words or in word final position followed by a vowel sound. The alveolar plosive [t] is used as a variant alongside [ɾ] before syllabic /n/ and /l/, the tap being the most common among young speakers. In addition, /t/ can be fricated, especially in pre-pausal positions. This is more common among older speakers, mostly in slow speech.

Glottalised /t/, namely [t̚], shows a tendency to appear in pre-consonantal positions in non-intervocalic contexts within words, i.e. the glottal stop can be present in words such as *catflap*. It is also common to happen before pauses, preceded by words beginning with consonant sounds (e.g. *sit down*) (Tollfree, 2000, p. 47). The use of the glottal stop is widely spread in the context of a pre-syllabic /n/, as can be observed in *smitten*, but it does not appear in the environment of pre-syllabic /l/ and /m/ (Tollfree, 2000, p. 59).



- **/h/ deletion**

The deletion of /h/ in words with little or no stress is common in the different varieties of English. The pronouns *her*, *him*, *hers* and *his* very frequently tend to drop the /h/ when unstressed. This phenomenon is also present in AusE. Nevertheless, /h/ dropping in initial position can happen even in lexical words, which are stressed. This is especially common in the speech of Broad male speakers but rarely heard in Cultivated accent. As a matter of fact, the deletion of /h/ in initial position is severely stigmatised (Horvath, 2008).

- **Other consonants**

The substitution of [f] for /θ/ and [v] for /ð/ in AusE has been studied by Horvath (1985), who concluded that the frequency of these variables is very low. Only 5% of AusE speakers present it, and it never occurs in the Cultivated end of the spectrum. Moreover, the scholar states that a lot of speakers are aware of the feature and consciously avoid it. In fact, whenever children presented this pronunciation in the past, they were often referred to a speech therapist. I offer the following examples of these phenomena: the production of [fæŋks] for *thanks* and [wɪv] for *with*.

Finally, in the suffix *-ing* in words like *something*, *everything* and *nothing*, Broad AusE speakers replace the final velar sound /ŋ/ with [ŋk]. This pronunciation is not found in Cultivated Australian. (Horvath, 2008).

### **3.2. Morphology and Syntax**

In the following section I will study the most characteristic features of the morphology and syntax of AusE. Comparison with American English (AmE) and British English (BrE) features will be provided in order to show that AusE is following some trends of other major varieties, as well as developing its own distinctive elements. This will help to understand to what extent AusE is moving towards its endonormativity in grammar.

### 3.2.1. Irregular verbs

- **Past tense**

Several varieties of English are undergoing a reduction process in their irregular verb conjugation. Verbs consisting of three different forms such as *give/gave/given* are being reduced to two forms, e.g. *bring/brought*. This change is happening rather rapidly in American English (AmE) in several other verbs such as *mow, stride and thrive*, whereas the tendency is taking more time in British English (BrE) (Collins & Peters, 2008, p. 343)

In the case of AusE, this occurrence has been analysed through a survey conducted in 2002 by *Australian Style* (2002, as cited in Collins & Peters, 2008). According to the study, the tendency to reduce irregular verbs from three to two forms appears to be considerably advanced. It is particularly evident among speakers under the age of 25, the majority of whom used *shrunk, sunk* and *sprung* as the normal past tense form (*Australian Style*, 2002, as cited in Collins & Peters, 2008, p. 343).

- **Past participle**

Data regarding irregular past participle use was also obtained from the *Australian Style* survey (2002, as cited in Collins & Peters, 2008). The majority of the studied verbs, some of which are *gotten, proven, shorn, stridden* and *woven*, were shown to be used by most of the speakers, especially by those over the age of 45. Some exceptions were *proven* and *gotten* (intransitive), preferred by the youngest surveyed over *proved* and *got*, and less used by the oldest (Australian Survey, 2002, as cited in Collins & Peters, 2008, p. 344).

### 3.2.2. Mandative subjunctive

The use of the subjunctive differs noticeably among the English varieties. When it comes to the mandatory subjunctive, which is used after expressions of demand, request, recommendation or suggestion, AmE shows a preference for its usage. Hence, sentences such as *I recommend that he talk to a specialist* are common in the variety. Conversely, BrE is more likely to make use of the modal auxiliary *should* in such expressions, therefore producing structures such as *I recommend that he should talk to a specialist* (Collins & Peters, 2008, p. 347)

Regarding the information obtained from a 1993 survey conducted by *Australian Style* (as cited in Collins & Peters, 2008), AusE is positioned between the two patterns, although it is more inclined to the AmE one.

### 3.2.3. Modality

- ***shall/will***

The use of *shall* over *will* is most frequent in BrE, and it is to some extent present in AmE too. However, in AusE *shall* is virtually no longer used, as its substitution for *will* is gradually becoming prevalent. Even in the case of first-person interrogatives, in which *shall* is the norm in other varieties of English, AusE inclines towards *will*, as happens, for instance, in the suggestion ***will I call a taxi?*** (Burrige, 2010, p. 141).

- ***may/might***

AusE speakers make use of *may* to express both past possibility and hypothetical possibility as an alternative to *might* or *could* used in standard English grammar (Collins & Peters, 2008). Hence, both *may* and *might* can be used in sentences such as *I think he **might/may** come* (Burrige, 2010, p. 141).

- ***must***

Although *must* does not usually have a negative form when used epistemically, AusE speakers do use epistemic *mustn't*. It is present in the same situations as epistemic *can't*, so *he **can't** have arrived yet* and *he **mustn't** have arrived yet* are both heard in AusE (Burrige, 2010, p. 141).

- ***could/should/would have***

After the past modal forms *could*, *should* and *would*, AusE tends to use *of* instead of *have*. This pattern, which appears for example in *I would **of** waited*, is becoming more popular among AusE speakers (Burrige, 2010, p. 141).

- ***have (to) and need (to)***

AmE mostly uses the *do*-periphrasis with *have (to)* and *need (to)* in negative and interrogative sentences. Alternatively, in BrE, *have* and *need* remain auxiliary forms (Collins & Peters, 2008). As for AusE, it shows an evident proximity to the AmE

pattern, thus producing sentences like *he doesn't need to leave* (and not *he needn't leave*) (Burrige, 2010, p. 141). However, this tendency towards the *do*-periphrasis is more advanced among the younger speakers of AusE (Collins & Peters, 2008).

#### 3.2.4. Possessive *have (got)*

Whereas BrE commonly uses *have* to express ideas such as possession, in AusE, *have got* is preferred. For this reason, AusE speakers have a tendency for expressions such as *I've got a new car*, as opposed to the more common in BrE *I have a new car* (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008, p. 20).

#### 3.2.5. Negation

Some speakers of AusE use *don't* where *doesn't* would be used in standard grammar, i.e. in agreement with *he*, *she* or *it*. This can be seen in '*E don't run away with it, y'see*' (Burrige, 2010, p. 141). In addition, cases of double negation can be frequently found in AusE, which are even more common with indefinite pronouns, e.g. *I never said nothing* (Burrige, 2010, p. 141).

There are two uses of *never* in negatives. Apart from being an adverb used to negate verbs, this negative word can be used as an alternative for a negative auxiliary such as *didn't*. On account of this, the expression *you never opened it* is natural to many speakers of AusE instead of *you didn't open it* (Burrige, 2010, p. 141).

#### 3.2.6. Comparative structures

- ***different from/to/than***

Among the prepositions that can follow *different* in English (*to*, *from* and *than*), *to* is historically the oldest. However, *from* is the one suggested in grammar manuals as the "proper" one. Even though the use of *from* is also recommended in several Australian English manuals such as *Modern Australian Usage* (1993, as cited in Collins & Peters, 2008), it appears that speakers of AusE prefer to use *to*. Nonetheless, this preference for *different to* is most noticeable in colloquial speech (Collins & Peters, 2008).

- ***less/fewer***

The use of *less* with plural count nouns in BrE is not as common as *fewer*, and the trend does not seem to be changing. *Less* is still considered unacceptable in BrE

even though it is now used in informal English. AusE speakers also make use of *less* in informal spoken speech, and despite the fact that *fewer* is still more common in writing, the use of *less* with plural count nouns is increasing, as it can even be found in printed material such as newspapers (Collins & Peters, 2008).

- ***like/as***

The conjunctive use of *like* is very common in AmE, but not accepted in formal BrE by the New Oxford English Dictionary (1998, as cited Collins & Peters, 2008). AusE is closer to AmE in the use of *like*. In fact, conjunctive *like* is not restricted to the informal register in either of these two varieties (Collins & Peters, 2008).

- **Doubly marked comparatives**

It is common for some AusE speakers to form comparative forms which are marked twice. This is also found in superlative forms, in cases such as ***most rottenest*** (Burrige, 2010, p. 141).

### 3.2.7. Pronouns

- **Plural *you***

Some of the plural forms of the second person pronoun that are used in several varieties of English are also found in AusE. That is the case of *yous* and *you guys*, which appear in informal AusE, e.g. ***Yous'd worked on it*** (Burrige, 2010, p. 141).

- **Gendered nouns**

Moreover, AusE shows cases of gender marking on several nouns. This phenomenon can be clearly noted in nouns related to food and drinks, which can be referred to by using the feminine pronoun *her*, as in the following example: ***I put 'er*** [the bottle of beer] ***down that bloody chick that I blew the top off 'er. And*** [he] ***took 'er*** [leg of lamb] ***in and put 'er on the plate*** (Burrige, 2010, p. 141).

- ***who/whom***

As is happening in other English varieties, the use of *whom* is decreasing in AusE. It is regarded as formal, so most of the speakers limit its use to such registers, showing a preference for *who* in colloquial speech (Burrige, 2010, p. 141).

- **Other uses of pronouns**

There are several pronouns which take a form that is different from the one expected in standard varieties of English. One of those is the pronoun *them*, which can take the place of demonstrative *those*, e.g. *one of **them** things* (Burrige, 2010, p. 141).

Another non-standard use of a pronoun is the case of *me* for possessive *my*, as in *He's **me** youngest* (Burrige, 2010, p. 141).

### **3.3. Vocabulary**

The use of borrowings from Australian Aboriginal languages is one of the salient features of AusE. The use of a set of words and expressions that, existing in other varieties such as British English, have acquired different meanings also characterises the lexicon of AusE.

On the other hand, the vocabulary that differs most from that of other major varieties is found in colloquial speech. In this respect, American English has greatly influenced the slang of young AusE speakers. Finally, the use of diminutive forms of words resulting from various abbreviation processes and colloquialisms that are exclusive to AusE are also distinguishing features of this variety.

In this subsection, I will deal with all these aspects of the lexicon of AusE that make this variety differ from other English varieties. In order to do so, I will mainly follow the work of Hagley (2012), Moore (n.d.) and Trudgill & Hannah (2008).

#### **3.3.1. Influence of Australian Aboriginal languages**

Once the British established their colony in Australia at the end of the 18th century, the Aborigines were forced to learn the settlers' language and culture. Because of the contact between the two peoples, the English of white Australians borrowed a large number of terms from many indigenous languages (Schneider, 2010).

After a century since the British settlement started, AusE had borrowed around 400 words from 80 different Aboriginal languages. Most of these borrowings are nouns that denote elements of the environment such as animals or plants, as well as terms for religious and cultural ceremonies (Moore, n.d.).

Some of the indigenous languages that influenced AusE lexicon are Kamilaroi, Yuwaalaraay and Wiradhuri. However, the most influential Aboriginal language was

Dharuk, spoken in the area nowadays known as Sydney. The words AusE obtained from this tongue are commonly known words like *boomerang* (Moore, n.d., p. 3) and *koala* (Moore, n.d., p. 4).

Another Aboriginal language from which AusE borrowed a large number of words is Nyugar, spoken in the south-west of Western Australia. The majority of these words are related to flora and fauna, among which *wambenger* stands out (Moore, n.d., p. 5), used to denote a ‘flying phalanger’ (Collins Dictionary, 2022).

Most of the borrowings adopted from these languages are nouns. However, the Australian pidgin spoken in the nineteenth century borrowed a few adjectives and verbs as well. Even though the majority of them have disappeared, there are two borrowings still used nowadays in AusE. One of them is the adjective *bung* (Moore, n.d. p. 6), meaning ‘useless’ (Collins Dictionary, 2022). The other word is the verb *yakka* (Moore, n.d. p. 6), which means ‘work’ or ‘hard work’ (Collins Dictionary, 2022).

### **3.3.2. Influence of different British English dialects**

In the nineteenth century, AusE incorporated a large number of terms used in various English dialects spoken in the British Isles, mainly in northern England, Scotland and Ireland. The words borrowed in the first few decades of the settlement were mostly related to the settlement itself and to the tasks assigned to convicts such as farming or mining. Some of these terms are *barrack*, *crib*, *cronk*, *mullock*, *nark*, *nugget* and *smooch* (Moore, n.d., p. 15-16).

There are also words that AusE adopted in the past from British English slang used in London and its surroundings. Although many of these are no longer used in AusE, there are several terms that remain in the variety with their informal meanings. Some of those are the following: *bludger*, *cow*, *lumber*, *ripper*, *skinner* and *tucker* (Moore, n.d., p. 17).

### **3.3.3. Lexical variation**

There are a number of expressions of AusE also existing in BrE which are used in different contexts or with different meanings. I have made a selection of some of these words based on Trudgill & Hannah (2008).

- **AusE *footpath* for BrE *pavement***

Whereas in BrE *footpath* and *pavement* are two terms for different types of paths, AusE uses *footpath* with both meanings, i.e. a path in a field and a path in a street (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008, p. 21).

- **AusE *get* for BrE *fetch***

Although the use of *get* is common in both varieties, in BrE expressions such as *I'll fetch it for you*, AusE prefers *get* rather than *fetch* (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008, p. 21).

- **AusE '*goodday*' for BrE *hello***

In AusE, '*goodday*' is widely used as a way of greeting in informal contexts, where BrE speakers usually prefer *hello* (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008, p. 22).

- **AusE *lolly* for BrE *sweet***

Whereas in BrE the term *lolly* (abbreviation of *lollipop*) denotes a specific type of sweet, AusE speakers use *lolly* for any kind of sweet. Although the word *sweet* is used in AusE as well, it only takes place in formal speech (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008, p. 22).

- **AusE *picture theater* for BrE *cinema***

Even though *cinema* exists in both BrE and AusE, it is seen as posh in the latter, and *picture theater* is more widespread among AusE speakers (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008, p. 22).

- **AusE *station* for BrE *stock farm***

Apart from the meaning *station* has in all the varieties of English, for example in *railway station*, the noun *station* is also used in AusE to name an animal farm, usually referred to in BrE as *stock farm* (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008, p. 21).

- **AusE *stroller* for BrE *push-chair***

Rather than the common BrE word *push-chair*, AusE uses *stroller*, although some speakers do use *push-chair* as well as the abbreviation *pushy*. (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008, p. 23).



- **AusE *singlet* for BrE *vest***

BrE speakers use both *singlet* and *vest* to refer to the piece of clothing known as an undershirt. However, AusE speakers use mostly *singlet*, while *vest* is barely used (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008, p. 22).

- **AusE *gumboots* for BrE *wellington boots***

While *rubber boots* is a term known in both BrE and AusE, it has become old-fashioned among the speakers of both varieties. In fact, BrE speakers use *wellington boots*, whereas AusE speakers prefer *gumboots* (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008, p. 22).

- **AusE *thanks* for BrE *please***

AusE speakers usually use *thanks* in requests, in place of BrE *please*, as in *Can I have a cup of tea, thanks?* (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008, p. 24).

### **3.3.4. Influence of American English**

Because of the impact of American mass media and the worldwide communication that the internet provides nowadays, younger AusE speakers are acquiring features of AmE in their speech. This is noticeable especially in the lexicon. An example is the word *cool*, lately used in teenage slang to express that something is good, rather than *beaut*, which used to be more common among young AusE speakers (Hagley, 2012, p. 6). A few other popular words adopted from AmE in the last decades are, among others, *cookie*, *guy* and *dude* (Collins, 2012, p. 77).

The effects of exposure to AmE are also seen in spelling. Whereas BrE spelling has been the norm until recently, AmE orthography patterns have become more popular among the younger generations in the last decades. Hence, *colour* is the correct spelling for the older speakers, while the youngest prefer *color* (Hagley, 2012, p. 6).

### **3.3.5. Abbreviations**

It is very common for AusE speakers to use diminutive forms of words in informal speech, which in general indicates a close or friendly attitude from the speaker (Burrige, 2010). Many Australians consider this feature as part of their Australian identity, while others dislike the idea of their country being identified with the use of abbreviations (Hagley, 2012, p. 6). There are several types of abbreviation processes.

- **Dropping of last syllables**

The trend in colloquial speech to abbreviate words like *beautiful* and *university* to *beaut* and *uni* respectively is more common in AusE than in BrE (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008, p. 24).

- **Nouns ending in -y or -ie**

There is a tendency to maintain the first syllable of nouns and add -y or -ie at the end of the word. Common examples of this phenomenon are *barbie* ('barbecue'), *bickie* ('biscuit'), *rellie* ('relative'), *sunnies* ('sunglasses'), *pokies* ('poker machines' or 'gambling machines') and *truckie* ('truck driver') (Burrige, 2010, p. 134).

- **Nouns ending in -o**

Other abbreviations are formed by adding the letter *o* to the first syllable of nouns, which can be seen in the following examples: *garbo* ('garbage collector'), *muso* ('musician'), *rello* ('relative'), *demo* ('demonstration') and *rego* ('car registration') (Burrige, 2010, p. 134).

- **Proper names ending en -zza**

Although the above mentioned diminutives ending in -y and -o can be used with personal names, e.g. *Suzy* (Susan) or *Robbo* (Robert) (Burrige, 2010, p. 135), it is also frequent for proper names to undergo abbreviation with -zza (pronounced [zə]). This can be seen in the nicknames *Bazza* (Barry) and *Mezza* (Mary), for example (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008, p. 24).

### **3.3.6. Colloquialisms**

As previously mentioned, most of the lexical features that make AusE differ from other varieties of English are found in colloquial speech. Here is a selection of expressions considered part of AusE slang which are only used in this variety. A list of verbs and nouns with their meaning is displayed on Table 4 and Table 5 respectively.

**Table 4***Examples of AusE slang verbs*

<b>Verb</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<i>to chunder</i>	‘to vomit’
<i>to shoot through</i>	‘to leave’
<i>to front up</i>	‘to arrive’
<i>to shout</i>	‘to buy something for someone’
<i>to chyack</i>	‘to tease’
<i>to bot</i>	‘to cadge/borrow’
<i>to dob</i>	‘to plonk’
<i>to fine up</i>	‘to improve’ (weather)

*Note.* Adapted from *International English: A guide to the Varieties of Standard English* (p. 23), by P. Trudgill, & J. Hannah, 2008, Hodder Education. 2001 by Arnold a Member of the Hodder Headline Group.

**Table 5***Examples of AusE slang nouns*

<b>Noun</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<i>a dag</i>	‘an eccentric person’
<i>a drongo</i>	‘a fool’
<i>a sheila</i>	‘a girl’
<i>tucker</i>	‘food’
<i>a wog</i>	‘a germ’
<i>a spell</i>	‘a rest/break’
<i>a park</i>	‘a parking space’
<i>a humpy</i>	‘a shelter/hut’
<i>an offsider</i>	‘a partner/companion’
<i>a chook</i>	‘a chicken’

<i>a larrikin</i>	‘a young ruffian’
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*Note.* Adapted from *International English: A guide to the Varieties of Standard English* (p. 23), by P. Trudgill, & J. Hannah, 2008, Hodder Education. 2001 by Arnold a Member of the Hodder Headline Group.

All in all, the lexicon of AusE shows a strong influence of BrE and AmE. However, it presents a number of distinct elements, such as the borrowings from indigenous languages and the various abbreviation processes.

#### 4. Conclusion

The better understanding of the characteristics of AusE might encourage scholars, students and teachers of English to continue learning, teaching and doing research on different varieties of the English language. I believe this is the first step to take in order to achieve an objective, non-judgmental perspective of language teaching.

This paper has provided a description of the linguistic features of AusE. After giving an overview of the socio-historical background of the variety, I have described its pronunciation, morpho-syntax and vocabulary. Many of the features I have explained seem to follow the tendencies of BrE or AmE, as for example the conjunctive use of *like*, used in the same way in AmE, the plural forms of the second-person pronoun *yous* and *you guys*, which appear in other English varieties too, and the colloquialisms borrowed from AmE slang. However, several other features are clearly distinctive of AusE or are moving away from the BrE and AmE influence. Some of these are the borrowings from Australian Aboriginal languages, the absolute preference for *will* over *shall* and the use of the adverb *never* as a negative auxiliary. This shows that AusE is developing a few distinctive elements of its own, which suggests that AusE might be moving towards its endonormativity.

However, the present paper leaves scope for further discussion, as there are several aspects of AusE which have not been covered. Research on possible regional variation in the pronunciation and vocabulary as well as on additional prosodic features such as intonation has not been done for this paper. This would provide a clearer conclusion on the extent to which AusE is becoming endonormative. Nevertheless, while AusE is forming its unique linguistic features, globalisation continues to develop,

urging the English varieties to influence each other. In other words, even if AusE keeps creating its own elements, it cannot avoid the homogeneity towards which English varieties seem to be moving.

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