Cycles of Australian Aboriginal English

This invited Colloquium centres Australian Aboriginal English (AE), a variety of English spoken by approximately 80% of First Nations people in Australia (Rodríguez Louro & Collard, 2021a: 1). Since the early 1970s, there have been systematic investigations into this variety. Foundational work dramatically increased awareness of AE (Eades, 2000; Konigsberg & Collard, 2007; Ober & Bell, 2012), making it possible to understand how cultural frameworks have survived in the face of colonization (Malcolm, 2000), and how First Nations people have been silenced as witnesses in court (Eades, 2000).

In the last decade, the field has blossomed to include sociolinguistic research carried out using culturally responsive decolonial methods (Rodríguez Louro & Collard, 2021c), statistical modelling of variation and change (Rodríguez Louro & Collard, Under contract; Rodríguez Louro, Collard, Clews & Gardner, 2023), studies of voice quality (Loakes & Gregory, 2019), corpus analysis of scripted TV data (Bednarek, 2023), synchronic and diachronic corpus trends (Mailhammer, 2021), multilingual repertoires (Dixon, 2021), sociolinguistic ethnography (Fraiese, in prep.), and projects which interrogate the place of AE in First Nations Australia (Tudor-Smith, Williams & Meakins, In press). Recent research has also begun to consider how voice-operated automated technologies may be enhanced by ethical datasets to catalyse successful First Nations Futures (Rodríguez Louro, Collard & Hutchinson, 2023-2026).

This Colloquium includes a selection of work that honours the many cycles of AE, from foundational research across the state of Western Australia in the 1970s, to how AE is used in First Nations schools and the media, to AE use beyond WA, through to variation and change in storytelling. The Colloquium consists of five 30-minute-long presentations, followed by a concluding 30-minute-long discussion.

1. **The story continues: Youth quotatives in contemporary Aboriginal English**

Celeste Rodríguez Louro, Glenys Collard, Matt H. Gardner, Lucía Fraiese

The advent of *be like* across World Englishes has been likened to a storm (Tagliamonte, 2012: 248), but the literature is scant on how quotation is used in indigenised English-lexified varieties in the southern hemisphere (Rodríguez Louro, Collard, Clews & Gardner, 2023). In this paper, we consider constructed dialogue by young speakers of Australian Aboriginal English (AE).

We focus on two newly collected synchronic corpora of AE which feature naturalistic talk-in-interaction data obtained during culturally safe storytelling sessions (Rodríguez Louro & Collard, 2021). Statistical modelling of quotative frames shows that young AE speakers favour *be like* (58% [385/666]) and *say* (25% [165/666]) over all other quotative frames. AE *be like* is however not favoured in the reporting of inner thought and attitude, which the literature has referred to as 'a parallel internal constraint' (Tagliamonte, D'Arcy & Rodríguez Louro, 2016: 841). Here, we find that 88% (509/579) of all AE quotation encodes direct speech, while internal thought and attitude reporting represent a mere 3% (17/579) of the data. Additionally, *be like* is overwhelmingly favoured by AE youth to introduce direct speech (65% [331/509]) – a finding against quotative trends in both mainstream (Tagliamonte & D'Arcy, 2007) and minoritized varieties (Cukor-Avila, 2002).

The continuity of reported speech aligns well with the existence of multiple First Nations speech genres (Tudor-Smith, Williams & Meakins, In press) and more generally with the vast oral tradition underpinning AE. This tradition has allowed the transmission of remarkably accurate historical information, including memories of inundation of the Australian coast dating from more than 7,000 years ago (Nunn and Reid 2016). Our AE stories preserve direct speech reporting in the midst of a worldwide preference for psychological monologue.

2. Aboriginal English Repertoires: A conceptual framework and method for exploring language in use

Sally Dixon

Australian Aboriginal English (AAE) has been characterised as a vast continuum of varieties, ranging from basilectal varieties spoken in remote locations, to acrolectal varieties spoken in urban and regional centres (e.g., Butcher 2008). Another feature of language use by speakers of AAE is the strategic management of their repertoires, drawing on basilectal and acrolectal features (sometimes known as talking 'heavy' or 'light') (Dickson 2020). This excerpt from an interview with First Nations actress Shari Sebbens illustrates attitudes to both types of shifting:

...when you're around your community, that you identify with most, that you spend the most time with you speak a certain way, and then when you go into [...] a world where society's standards are different and um you can turn on, like you know, probably the dominant culture, which is white people in this country, like that way of speaking. [...] You do that thing where you visit other mob on their country and you learn very quickly what their words [...] It's a sweet way of identifying with someone and empathising with them and that kind of thing.

How can we capture, explore, and understand this type of repertoire management and its impact on the maintenance of AAE? I will present a response to this question by examining recent research on Alyawarr children's language repertoires. Informed by Variationist Sociolinguistics, these studies draw on a method of using naturalistic interactions in a range of contexts, partitioning data sets according to interactional criteria, and examining patterns of morphological variation across contexts. Insights from this methodology are applied to the collection and interpretation of AAE repertoires.

3. *Because they proper black, they go, "Unna, true!"*

Snapshots of a sociolinguistic ethnography at a First Nations boarding school

Lucía Fraiese

The participation of First Nations people in boarding schools is often associated with a brutal history of assimilation throughout colonised lands. Yet, in Australia, First Nations enrolment in boarding schools continues to thrive, with over 2,200 yearly enrolments (Independent Schools Australia, 2021). While previous research on students' experiences in boarding has noted that identity and language use are greatly impacted by boarding school experiences, the sociolinguistic practices of boarders remain to be explored. What language varieties are spoken in boarding schools among First Nations people? What are these varieties used for? What happens when teens with diverse linguistic repertoires come to live *outta country* under one roof (Fraiese, Rodíguez Louro & Collard, 2022)? What linguistic features are meaningful, and how do boarders employ them to construct social identities within the school?

In this presentation, I begin to explore these questions by introducing a bespoke ethnographic corpus of spontaneous conversation among First Nations boarders collected over 14 months at a Western Australian boarding school. The field site, renamed by the students as 'St Mary's Hills', is in Whadjuk Nyungar country, and is the home away from home for boarders from across Western Australia and the Northern Territory. While some students speak traditional First Nations languages such as Walmajari and Miriwoong, and new languages such as Kriol, most boarders are L1 speakers of Australian Aboriginal English, a post-invasion contact-based variety of English used by approximately 80% of First Nations people in Australia (Rodríguez Louro & Collard, 2021b: 2). The dataset captures the speech of 34 female and 6 male speakers aged 12-18 years old in conversation with friends and kin. Inspired by Eckert's (1989) canonical work with adolescents in a Detroit high school, this work provides the first sociolinguistic exploration of the linguistic experiences of First Nations communities in boarding.

4. Salient features of Australian Aboriginal English(es) in the public sphere

Samuel Herriman and Monika Bednarek

Salient features of minority/minoritized varieties of English such as Australian Aboriginal English (AAE) are informed by in-group use but can become 'enregistered' (Agha 2003) through their promotion in the public domain as the most important or the most essential features of the variety. This includes their use in performed speech in media texts such as film and television (see Meek 2006). In this talk, we first examine which features of AAE are promoted and disseminated through online resources such as word lists, podcasts, Wikipedia, and quizzes. We identify 150 unique linguistic features, of which 44 are included in more than one source, and 21 items feature in three or more sources (e.g. *deadly, mob, gammon, tidda*) and can thus be considered as particularly salient in the public sphere. Following an overview and categorisation of these features, we investigate their use in the context of fictional television series that address a mainstream target audience. To do so, we draw on a corpus with dialogue from 16 television narratives (e.g. *Redfern Now, Total Control, 8mmm Aboriginal Radio* – see Bednarek 2023). We investigate both the frequency of these salient items (how often they occur) and their spread (in how many different narratives they are used). A special focus will be on the Western Australian context and the television series *The Warriors*, *The Heights*, and *Mystery Road*. This will allow us to consider local contexts and potential variation among series that are set in different regions of Australia. Together, the analyses will provide new insights into stable and variable features of AAE that are promoted and enregistered in the contemporary public sphere across online and broadcast media.

5. Cultural identity and knowledge transfer in education

Ian Malcolm and Patricia Konigsberg

Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the Australian education system is beset with challenges both for the teachers and for the learners. These include the transfer of mutual knowledge between Aboriginal English-speaking learners and their teachers.

One of the key elements behind this is the way in which learners respond to the challenges the education poses to their pre-existing cultural identity, and its associated patterns of thinking and linguistic expression.

This presentation attempts to look more closely at some of the challenges Indigenous learners must face with respect to cultural assumptions and their expression in language and discourse. In particular, it examines, on the basis of linguistic evidence, the ways in which Aboriginal English speakers perceive themselves and their environment and how they use language to sustain their cultural identity.

Recommendations are made as to how non-Aboriginal educators can achieve goals of knowledge transfer while also supporting their learners' need to sustain cultural identity. Fundamentals of a two-way approach to education, involving due recognition of both Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English, and input from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators, are put forward.