

# New Zealand

## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT.

A DISTINCT NEW ZEALAND VARIANT OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE HAS BEEN IN EXISTENCE SINCE AT LEAST 1912, WHEN FRANK ARTHUR SWINNERTON DESCRIBED IT AS A "CAREFULLY MODULATED MURMUR," THOUGH ITS HISTORY PROBABLY GOES BACK FURTHER THAN THAT. FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE BRITISH SETTLEMENT ON THE ISLANDS, A NEW DIALECT BEGAN TO FORM BY ADOPTING MĀORI WORDS TO DESCRIBE THE DIFFERENT FLORA AND FAUNA OF NEW ZEALAND, FOR WHICH ENGLISH DID NOT HAVE ANY WORDS OF ITS OWN.

AUDIO RECORDINGS FROM THE 1940S OF VERY OLD NEW ZEALANDERS CAPTURED THE SPEECH OF THOSE BORN TO THE FIRST GENERATION OF SETTLERS IN NEW ZEALAND, WHICH MEANS LINGUISTS CAN HEAR THE ACTUAL ORIGIN OF THE ACCENT. FOR EXAMPLE, A RECORDING OF 97-YEAR-OLD MRS HANNAH CROSS, WHO WAS BORN IN NEW ZEALAND IN 1851 AND LIVED THERE HER WHOLE LIFE, SHOWS SHE HAD A SCOTTISH ACCENT. EVEN SOME SECOND GENERATION NEW ZEALANDERS DID NOT HAVE A NOTICEABLE "NEW ZEALAND ACCENT", SUCH AS MR ERNIE BISSETT, WHO WAS BORN IN KAITANGATA IN 1894 AND LIVED IN NEW ZEALAND HIS ENTIRE LIFE. BUT PEOPLE GROWING UP IN THE MINING TOWN OF ARROWTOWN, WHERE THERE WAS A MIXTURE OF ACCENTS, DEVELOPED A RECOGNIZABLE NEW ZEALAND ACCENT, SUCH AS ANNIE HAMILTON, WHOSE PARENTS ARRIVED THERE IN 1862. THE CHILDREN GROWING UP EXPOSED TO DIFFERENT ACCENTS PICKED UP DIFFERENT FEATURES OF THESE, BUT IN THEIR CHILDREN, THE SECOND GENERATION, THERE IS A UNIFICATION TOWARDS THE 'FOUNDATION ACCENT'.

# PRONUNCIATION

## Vowels

### Short front vowels

In New Zealand English the short-*i* of KIT /ɪ/ is a central vowel not phonologically distinct from schwa /ə/, the vowel in unstressed "the", both of which are a close-mid central unrounded vowel /ə/. It thus contrasts sharply with the /i/ vowel heard in Australia. Recent acoustic studies featuring both Australian and New Zealand voices show the accents were more similar before the Second World War and the KIT vowel has undergone rapid centralisation in New Zealand English. Because of this difference in pronunciation, some New Zealanders claim Australians say "feesh and cheeps" for fish and chips while some Australians counter that New Zealanders say "fush and chups"

Like Australian and South African English, the short-*e* /ɛ/ of YES has moved to become a close-mid vowel /e/, although the New Zealand /e/ is moving closer to /ɪ/. This was played for laughs in the American TV series *Flight of the Conchords*, where the character Bret's name was often pronounced as "Brit," leading to confusion.

The short-*a* /æ/ of TRAP is approximately /ɛ/, which sounds like the short-*e* of YES to other English speakers. The sentence "She is actually married to a happy man" said by a New Zealander is heard by other English speakers as "She is ectually merried to a heppy men." The only other English-speaking country that has a similar alteration of pronunciation for this vowel sound is South Africa but recently an increasing number of younger generations in New Zealand do not have this certain pronunciation. Thus many New Zealanders travelling abroad are often initially mistaken for South Africans, based on this vowel pronunciation alone. It is also the main reason why New Zealanders can be hard to understand to other English speakers, especially Americans and non-native English-speaking Europeans and Asians.

# CONDITIONED MERGERS

The vowels /ɪə/ as in *near* and /eə/ as in *square* are increasingly being merged, so that *here* rhymes with *there*; and *bear* and *beer*, and *rarely* and *really* are homophones. This is the "most obvious vowel change taking place" in New Zealand English. There is some debate as to the quality of the merged vowel, but the consensus appears to be that it is towards a close variant, [iə].

Before /l/, the vowels /i:/:/ɪə/ (as in *reel* vs *real*), as well as /ɒ:/:/oʊ/ (*doll* vs *dole*), and sometimes /ʊ:/:/u:/ (*pull* vs *pool*), /ɛ:/:/æ/ (*Ellen* as *Alan*) and /ʊ:/:/ɪ/ (*full* vs *fill*) may be merged

# RHYTHM

Rhythm has been important in determining the existence of the dialect of Maori English. Bauer for instance, observed in 1995 that Maori English is more syllable-timed—the rhythm units are syllables—than other forms of NZE, though NZE in general is more syllable-timed. Maori school children were found by Benton to use a full vowel rather than a reduced vowel, creating what he described as “a jerky rhythm.” Essentially, “the unstressed syllables are not skipped over as is normal in English Speech” .On “home gardens,” for example, the children would place the primary stress on secondarily stressed syllables. One possible explanation for this can be found by examining Te Reo Maori, which has been acknowledged as a mora-timed language, a mora being a unit of time similar to a short syllable. Consequently, it “might be expected to exhibit a timing pattern that is more like syllable—than stress-timing, with less variation in syllable length.

# USAGE

New Zealanders will often reply to a question with a statement spoken with a rising intonation at the end. This often has the effect of making their statement sound like another question. There is enough awareness of this that it is seen in exaggerated form in comedy parody of New Zealanders. This rising intonation can also be heard at the end of statements, which are not in response to a question but to which the speaker wishes to add emphasis. High rising terminals are also heard in Australia and are more common. In informal speech, some New Zealanders use the third person feminine *she* in place of the third person neuter *it* as the subject of a sentence, especially when the subject is the first word of the sentence. The most common use of this is in the phrase "She'll be right" meaning either "It will be okay" or "It is close enough to what is required". This is similar to Australian English.

# DIALECTS

Recognisable regional variations are slight, with the exception of Southland, where the "Southland burr" is heard. It is also common in the southern part of neighbouring Otago. This southern area formed a traditional repository of immigration from Scotland . Several words and phrases common in Scots or Scottish English persist in this area: examples include the use of *wee* to mean "small", and phrases such as *to do the messages* meaning "to go shopping". Taranaki has also been said to have a minor regional accent, possibly due to the high number of immigrants from the South-West of England, however this becoming less-pronounced.

Some Māori have an accent distinct from the general New Zealand accent, tending to use Māori words more frequently. Bro'Town was a TV programme that exaggerated Māori, Polynesian, and other accents. Linguists recognise two main New Zealand accents, denoted "Pākehā English" and "Māori English"; with the latter strongly influenced by syllable-timed Māori speech patterns. Pākehā English is beginning to adopt similar rhythms, distinguishing it from other stress-timed English accents.