

Locating the Baseline of Linguistic Innovations: Dialect Contact, the Founder Principle and the So-called (-own) Split in New Zealand English

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ABSTRACT

Recent sociolinguistic approaches to language change have been extremely successful in their investigations of changes in progress, but are only recently beginning to get to grips with tracking the origins of changes. Here, I investigate one case, from New Zealand English (NZE), where a close sociolinguistic and socio-demographic study of the origins of a supposed innovation demonstrates a number of problems with past orthodoxy about the 'new' feature.

The literature to date often assumes that disyllabic forms of -own past participles (e.g. [grʌʊən] for 'grown', but [grʌʊn] for 'groan') evolved from the split of (ou), which, historically, had supposedly been formed by the merger of ME ou and ɔ:. I show here that this is very unlikely to be the case for a number of linguistic and socio-historical reasons, including the unsplittability of mergers and nature of the dialect mix brought by British and Irish settlers to New Zealand. A failure to pay close attention both to internal linguistic and external social factors can lead to inaccurate and implausible conclusions about the course and nature of language change, and it is highlighted how the NZE example is a case in point. (Keywords: New Zealand English, dialect contact, socio-historical linguistics, language change, mergers, splits, post-colonial dialects, analogy, English dialects).

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RESUMEN

Las recientes aproximaciones que se han hecho al cambio lingüístico han sido sumamente satisfactorias en lo referente a cambios en proceso, si bien sólo recientemente han empezado a aprender a rastrear los orígenes de los mismos. En el presente artículo examino un caso procedente del inglés neocelandés (New Zealand English, NZE), donde un estudio sociolingüístico y sociodemográfico detallado de los orígenes de una supuesta innovación ofrece toda una serie de desavenencias con la antigua creencia sobre el rasgo 'nuevo'.

La literatura publicada hasta la fecha frecuentemente asume que las formas disilábicas en -own de los participios de pasado (ej. [grʌuən] en 'groin', pero [grʌun] en 'groan') son el resultado de la fonologización de (ou), que, desde un punto de vista histórico, había tenido lugar supuestamente gracias a la desfonologización de ou y ɔ:. Aquí demuestro que es muy improbable que sea cierta esta explicación por distintas razones lingüísticas y sociohistóricas, entre las que se incluyen la imposibilidad de volver a fonologizar una desfonologización y la propia naturaleza de la mezcla dialectal llevada a Nueva Zelanda por los colonos británicos e irlandeses. No prestar una mayor atención a factores lingüísticos internos así como a factores sociales externos puede llevarnos a conclusiones erróneas e improbables sobre el curso y naturaleza del cambio lingüístico, y el caso de NZE es un claro ejemplo. (Palabras Clave: inglés neocelandés. contacto dialectal. lingüística sociohistórica. cambio lingüístico. desfonologización/escisión. fonologización/escisión. dialectos postcoloniales. analogía. dialectos del inglés).

INTRODUCTION

Probably the most important and foundational paper on the study of language change from a sociolinguistic perspective was that published by Uriel Weinreich. William Labov and Marvin Herzog in *Empirical foundations for a theory of language change* (1968). In the thirty years since its appearance, sociolinguists working within the paradigm it promoted have perhaps made most progress in understanding the 'embedding' problem –how linguistic changes are embedded in the *language* as well as in the *speech community* that uses that language. Variationists have often produced detailed and sophisticated analyses of innovations so complex in their linguistic and sociolinguistic structure that they have defied attempts at description using asocial approaches. One classic example is Labov's (1989, 1994) analysis of the structure of variation and change in short (a) in Philadelphia.

We have been less successful, however, in the social and linguistic location and investigation of language changes that are in their infancy. Here the embedding problem overlaps with the 'actuation' problem why a particular change (and not some other change) takes place at a particular time (and not at some other time) in a particular place (and not in some other place) in a particular variety (and not some other variety). A notable example is Trudgill's (1988) finding that a change in Norwich English the use of labiodental [ʋ] as a variant of prevocalic (r)– used by a considerable minority of young speakers in the 1980s, had been present in recordings made in the 1960s (Trudgill 1974), but had not been considered then as a change that would affect the linguistic system of the speech community as a whole. Part of the problem, as Milroy (1992) points out in quite some detail, lies in the distinction between

speaker-innovation and linguistic change. I intend here to look at a further problematic example of the actuation/embedding overlap, this time from New Zealand English, where a change in frequency of a particular form has led some analysts to claim that an innovation has occurred (see also Britain *fc. a*).

Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968: 176) also argue for 'social realism' in the resolution of the embedding problem, a strong claim for a detailed and meticulous search for the social factors that are inextricably linked with linguistic variation and change. Sociolinguistics has made great advances in this direction too: consider the progress made, for example, in the deconstruction of gender (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992), style (Bell 1984), and age (Eckert 1997) as social variables.

In the study of post-colonial varieties of English, such as those spoken in New Zealand and Australia, the need for social realism in dialectological analysis also applies to the very origins of those dialects. As I show both here and in Britain (*fc. a*), differences between present-day New Zealand English (NZE) and British English are frequently analysed as if the New Zealand forms necessarily must be innovations, and often appear to take RP as their baseline for analysis. In Britain (*fc. a*), for example, I show how present-day NZE (*au*), realised today mostly as [ɛə] (Britain *fc. b*), has often been analysed as being the result of *raising* from [au]. Yet there is no evidence that [au] ever existed in NZE as a vernacular variant. An analysis both of the geographical origins of settlers to New Zealand, and the dialects they brought with them, shows that the majority settler form would have been very similar indeed to the present-day realisation, with a mid-open front onset. What has often been analysed as an innovation, is, in fact, no such thing. Both this article and Britain (*fc. a*) therefore argue that we must pay much more attention to the social reality of the settler speech community – as heterogeneous, with diverse geographical, social and linguistic origins (Mufwene 1996) – in order to fully understand the nature and course of linguistic change.

I. DISYLLABIC *-OWN* IN NEW ZEALAND ENGLISH

In the English spoken in New Zealand (Shircliffe 1985, Bauer 1986, 1994, Bayard 1987, 1991, Maclagan and Gordon 1998, Britain *fc. c*), Australia (Bradley and Bradley 1985), the Falkland Islands (Sudbury *fc*) and in some parts of England (Johnson, Hamilton, *pc*), Scotland (Johnston 1994, Watt, *pc*) and the US (Johns, Straight, *pc*), *-own* and *-ewn* past participle forms, such as 'grown', 'blown', 'sewn', etc. are often disyllabic with pronunciations containing a schwa between the vowel and the final /n/. Typical of NZE, for example, are realisations such as [flaʊən] and [blaʊən]. Such forms differ from other /o:n/ clusters which lack schwa. So whilst 'mown' and 'thrown', deriving from ME *ou* are [maʊən] and [θraʊən], 'moan' and 'throne', from ME *ɔ:* are [maʊn] and [θraʊn]. A distinction, absent in varieties such as RP, exists, therefore, in these varieties.

All available evidence suggests that the use of the disyllabic forms is on the increase. An apparent-time analysis of a one million word corpus of spoken New Zealand English (Britain *fc. c*) has demonstrated this diachronic development. Below in Figure 1, I present the results of this analysis for both speaker age and style (conversational versus formal) (see Holmes, Vine and Johnson 1998 for a detailed explanation of the different styles and text categories in which data were collected).

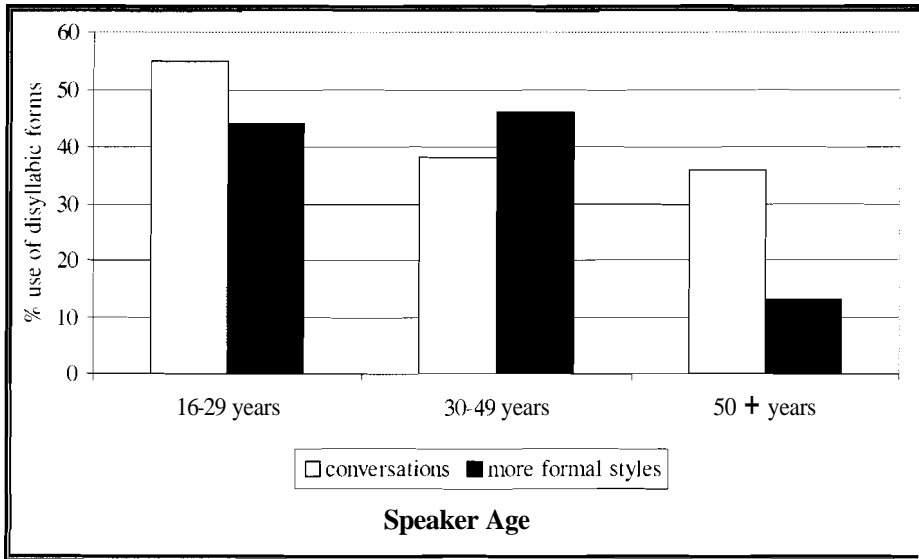


Figure 1: Disyllabic forms of *-own/-ewn*, *ape*, and *style* in New Zealand English (Britain *fc, c*)

The graph shows that, generally, disyllabic forms are more common in informal speech (though not among the middle aged groups – see Britain *fc, c* for more details) and in the speech of the young. Notable is the finding that even the oldest group, in conversational speech, had over one third of their realisations of (*own*) as disyllabic. Similar findings have been made in the other variationist studies of this phenomenon. Maclagan and Gordon's (1998) analysis of a small amount of casual speech found that their older informants had around 20% disyllabic forms, whereas younger speakers reached over 50%. For word list style Australian English, Bradley and Bradley (1985) found much lower levels of disyllabic usage, ranging from 8% for their oldest speakers up to 19% for their youngest.

Sociolinguistically, as both Maclagan and Gordon (1998) and Britain (*fc, c*) have argued, (*own*) is a rather atypical variable, demonstrating unusual and complex interactions of speaker variables such as sex, ethnicity and age, interactional variables such as style, and linguistic constraints. Its patterning show signs of being neither a typical change from above nor a change from below. In Britain (*fc, c*), I argue that in many ways the sociolinguistic analysis portrays a linguistic marker undergoing a process of destigmatisation and standardisation.

II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF DISYLLABILITY

Here I wish to concentrate on where this development came from. Very often, as Maclagan and Gordon (1998) highlight in the title of their paper «How *grown* grew from one syllable to two», and given the apparent-time increase in the use of the disyllabic form, its emergence is treated as an *innovation*, and a *split*, with one merged /*ʌu*/ form breaking up into two distinct

realisations, /ʌu/ in words such as 'groan', 'moan' and 'throne', and /ʌuə/ in 'grown', 'mown' and 'thrown' (see, for example, Bayard 1991: 163).

It appears that the *-own/-ewn* past participle forms were disyllabic in earlier times in the history of English. Mossé (1952: 73), for example, shows that forms such as 'blowen', 'growen', 'knowen' and 'sowen' occurred in 14th century texts such as Richard Rolle of Hampole's *The Bee and the Stork*. Dobson (1957) cites a number of 16th and 17th century orthoepists and language commentators who highlight the presence of disyllabic forms: Laneham finds 'knoen' contrasting with 'knowen': *-oën* and *-owne* are used to represent *-owne*, 'knowne', 'sowne' in *Adresses bien briefves pour aider aux estrangers à prononcer la langue angloise*, attached to Sherwood's Dictionarie (in Dobson 1957: 377), and from the work of William Bullokar, 'in flowN, knowN, owN... sowN, the N seems to stand for 'un' and to show a glide [ə] before [n]. Such a glide is somewhat surprising but similar evidence is given by Sherwood in 1632 who shows [a] after ME **ou** in *own, known and sown*' (cited in Dobson 1957: 106).

Many writers argue, however, that ME **ou** and **ɔ:** merged in early modern English. Lass (1987: 129) claims that **ou** and **ɔ:** had 'fallen together' at that time. Strang (1982: 113) claims that the 'coalescence of o and ou resulted in the homophony of grown/groan', Ekwall (1975: 47) suggests that 'towards the end of the 17th century, ME /ou/ had normally fallen together with with ME /o:/ and has shared its subsequent development', and Wells (1982: 193), in reviewing a range of linguistic changes that had consequences for the development of phonological variation around the English speaking world, claims that the two merged (his so-called GOAT-merger) shortly after 1600. In addition, Maclagan and Gordon (1998) cite a personal communication from Minkova who claims that 'the past participle grown, ordinarily disyllabic in Chaucer and Gower, was fully syncopated by Shakespeare's time'.

Given these accounts of the development of (ou), it is not surprising that the disyllabic form as used in Australasian English is perceived as an innovation. I want to argue here, however, that for two main reasons, it is very unlikely indeed that present-day disyllabic forms in New Zealand English are the result of a split of a merged (ou) form. The first relates to the relationship between linguistic mergers and splits, discussed in great depth by Labov (1994), and the second relates to the beginnings of the English-speaking speech community in New Zealand, the sociolinguistic backgrounds of the settler populations there, and the nature and outcomes of the resulting dialect mixture.

III. MERGERS, SPLITS AND THE UNSPLITTING OF MERGERS

If we accept the accounts of the merger of ME **ou** and **ɔ:** which are supported by much of the research outlined above, we are left with the history of **ou** and **ɔ:** in English presented below in Table 1.

We begin in Middle English with two distinct forms. These are merged during a period of a couple of hundred years following the Long Mid Mergers and including the process of Long Mid Diphthonging before splitting again as part of the NZE disyllabification. A distinction is merged and then reappears.

Table 1: The history of ME *ou* and *o*:

	ME <i>ɔ</i> :	ME <i>ou</i> + Past participle -n
Middle English	[ɔ:]	[ouə]
Schwa deletion (complete by around 1400 (Barber 1993:157)).		[ou]
'Great Vowel Shift' (in ME <i>ɔ</i> : in the '16 th and 17 th Centuries' (Barber 1993: 192)).	[o:]	
'Long hlid Mergers' (Barber 1993: 194: '17 th century'. Wells 1982: 192-194).	[o:]	[o:]
	↓	↓
'Long hlid Diphthonging' ('around 1800'. Wells 1982: 193)	[ʌu]	[ʌu]
New Zealand English disyllabification	[ʌu]	[ʌuə]

Lahov, in his 1994 book *Principles of Linguistic Change*, goes to great efforts to remind us that such unmergings of mergers do not occur. He states (1994: 311), quite forthrightly, that 'it is generally agreed that mergers are irreversible: once a merger, always a merger ... mergers are irreversible by linguistic means', and cites Garde (1961: 38-9), the founder of this principle, who claimed that 'a merger realized in one language and unknown in another is always the result of an innovation in the language where it exists. Innovations can create mergers, but cannot reverse them'. Lahov provides substantial evidence which supports this claim, including:

- reanalyses of a number of reported unmerged mergers which, on closer inspection, have involved **near rather than actual mergers**, and hence did not represent unmergings at all (1994: Chapter 10);
- evidence from dialect geography that **mergers expand at the expense of distinctions** (1994: Chapter 11);
- evidence from the **unlearnability of distinctions** (1994: Chapter 10: see also Payne 1980, Chambers 1992, Britain 1997a).

In order to strongly support the unmerging of a merger scenario which Table 1 demands, we must accept that the development of disyllabicity in NZE *-own* forms a major and serious counter-example to Lahov's claims. Given the weight of evidence behind Lahov's principles, and given that the sorts of changes typical of recently formed post-colonial varieties such as NZE tend to be of the simplifying, koineising, unmarked kind (Trudgill 1986), one would imagine that we need to seek out some more plausible explanation.

IV. NON-STANDARD BRITISH DIALECTS, DIALECT CONTACT AND (ou) IN NEW ZEALAND ENGLISH

The principal problem with the above outlined picture is that it presents a history of **standard** English, rather than a history of the mostly non-standard varieties which shaped the emerging

new dialect in New Zealand. I would like to argue here that given the diverse backgrounds of the settler populations of New Zealand, early NZE would have been characterised by considerable variability, and that rather than being merged, most settlers would have brought with them **distinct variants** of the offspring of ME *ou* and **3**.

Many researchers studying dialect contact situations such as that experienced by New Zealand from the early to mid 19th century onwards have emphasised the need to fully take into consideration the social and geographical make-up of the input populations (migrants, settlers and so on) and the dialects they brought with them, if we are to fully understand the dialects which emerge as a result of the contact between these speakers (see, for example, Trudgill 1986: 126, 161; Montgoniery 1989; Siegel 1993; Mufwene 1996). Mufwene (1996) has coined the useful term 'founder principle' to capture this concern for socio-demographic and sociolinguistic accountability when assessing the genesis of new languages and dialects. He suggests that a fully accountable description of the ecology of the new variety would include:

... the characteristics of the vernaculars spoken by the populations that founded the colonies in which they developed. (1996: 84)

... the ethnographic setting in which the [...] displaced population has come into contact with [...] other populations whose structural features enter into competition with its own features. (1996: 85)

... the demographic proportion of the newcomers relative to local populations, their attitudes towards each other, and their social status. (1996: 86)

It is obviously not always possible to find uncontroversial evidence of all these factors for speech communities which developed a long time in the past. However, I believe that in the case of (*ou*) in the newly emerging NZE of the 19th century, we have adequate demographic and linguistic evidence to nail the coffin on claims that ME *ou* and **3** were merged there. I begin by presenting the demographic evidence we have about the geographical origins of settlers from the British Isles to New Zealand in the 19th century, highlight the variants of (*ou*) that they would have likely brought with them, and demonstrate that disyllabic forms may well have emerged as a result of the koineisation process that sets to work in such situations of dialect contact (Trudgill 1986, 1998, Britain 1997a, 1997b, Kerswill and Williams *fc*).

A number of sources provide us with a picture of the geographical origins of the New Zealand settlers of the 19th century. In an analysis of the origins of settlers to Canterbury - a large area of the east of New Zealand's South Island - Pickens shows that the southern counties of England, as opposed to the Midlands and the North, were more heavily represented in the early NZ population than we would expect given the population that these counties contributed to the country's total. Figure 2 provides a more detailed breakdown for England. For later in the 19th century, Arnold (1984), in his now famous work entitled *The farthest promised land*, claims that 'clearly the great majority of the emigrants came from a wide stretch of southern England, with almost all counties south of a line from Herefordshire to the Wash feeling the pull fairly strongly. North of this line, only Lincolnshire was much affected, and the industrial North was little influenced' (1984: 102).

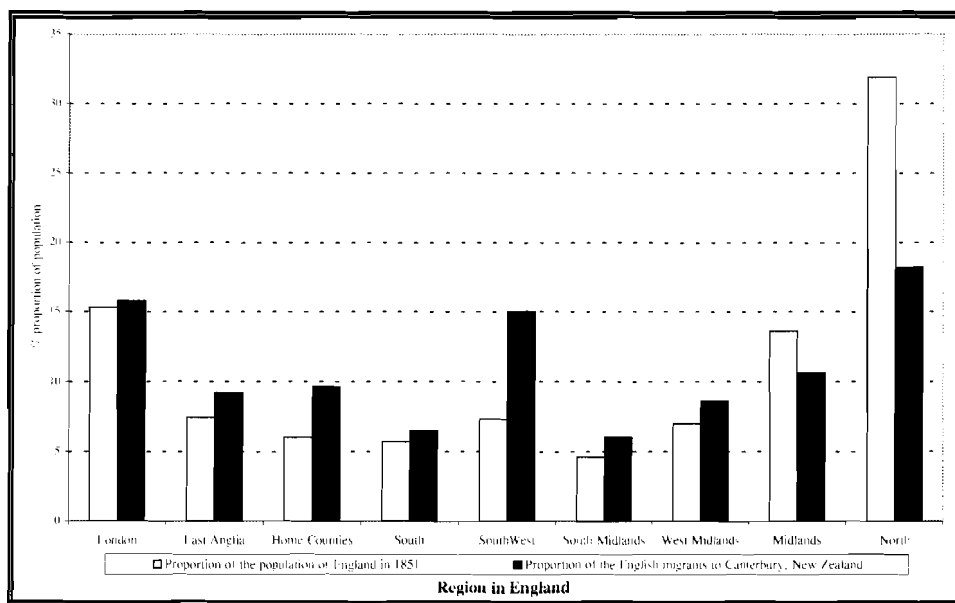


Figure 2: Where did the migrants to New Zealand come from?: the populations of English regions compared to the numbers of NZ settlers coming from those regions (based on Pickens 1977).

Figure 3, based on Arnold's research, shows the number of settlers coming from each county of England per 100,000 residents in 1871. It shows that the west and south-west were particularly well represented in the settler population, as were the south-east and East Anglia. The midlands were less well represented and the numbers from the north relatively low. In addition to settlers from England, many came from Scotland and Ireland. Pickens, for example, claims that whilst around 54% of mid-19th century migrants were from England, around 16% were from Ireland, and 15% from Scotland (Pickens 1977: 70).

When looking at the dialect evidence from the 19th century, therefore, looking for which features would have been well represented in early New Zealand English, we need to look in particular at those areas which sent relatively high numbers of settlers. We have three sets of evidence which may shed some light on which forms were taken to New Zealand. The earliest source we have at our disposal is Ellis (1889). This is a dialect survey of the traditional type, based on information from over 1100 locations in Great Britain. Data in the form of spontaneous transcriptions of reading passages and word lists were sent to Ellis by a combination of trained dialect enthusiasts (such as Thomas Hallam) and interested locals. In some locations Hallam was sent to check the validity of the local data collectors' work and investigate some features more thoroughly. Since these data were collected primarily from older people, it gives us a picture of the vernacular dialects of people born in the early part of the 19th century. For the variables in question, Ellis gives quite good detail, although he does not necessarily provide equal amounts of evidence from each of the locations studied. Secondly, we have the evidence, for southern England, from Kurath and Lowman (1970). Here, traditional dialectological questionnaire-based data collection of 56 speakers was carried out in the mid-1930s. These data give us an insight into dialects of the mid to late 19th century.

The authors provide a map of the realisations of ME *ɔ*: both in 'stone' (1970: 11. Figure 7). and in the group 'stone. home. road. coat and clothes'. and of ME *ou* in 'prown' (1970: 12. Figure 9), and explicitly discuss whether *ou* and *ɔ*: are merged. Finally. we have the data from the Survey of English Dialects. presented for our purposes here in Anderson (1987). These data were collected mostly in the 1960s of older speakers. and hence give us an indication of the vernacular speech of the turn of the century. Unfortunately. the SED questionnaire did not elicit *-owm* past participles. The comparison between *ou* and *ɔ*: below is based on Anderson's (1987) comparison of ME *ɔ*: with other ME *ou* words.

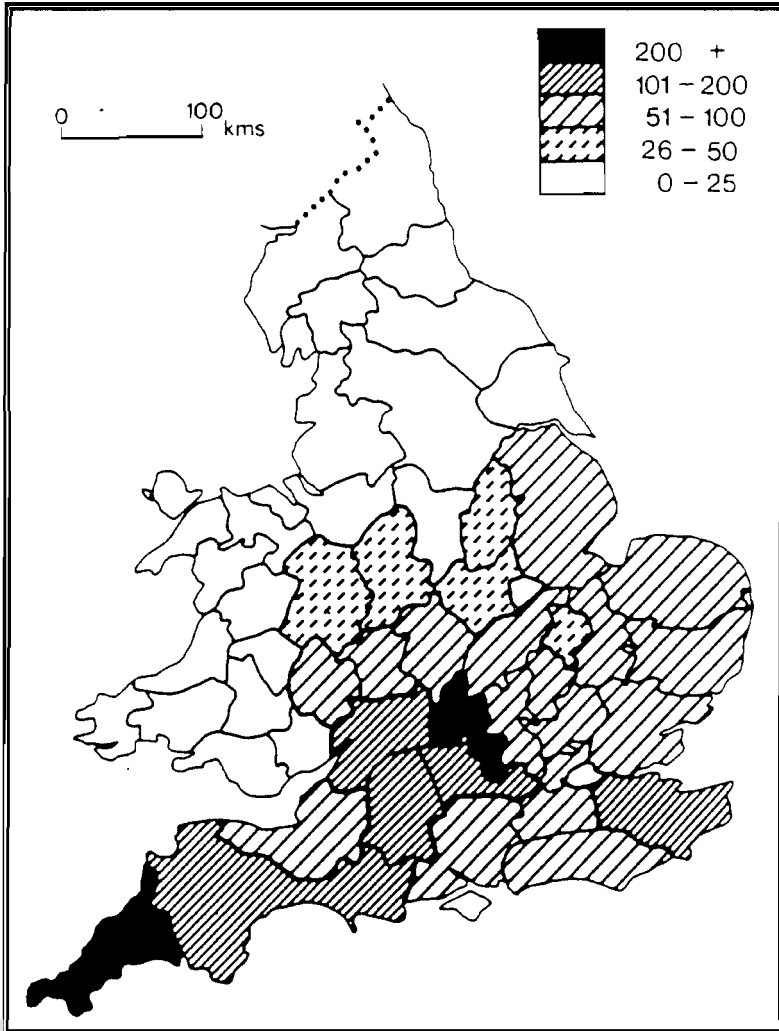


Figure 3: The origins of emigrants to New Zealand between 1873 and 1876. Figures represent the numbers of emigrants per 100,000 of the county population of 1871 (based on Arnold 1984: 103).

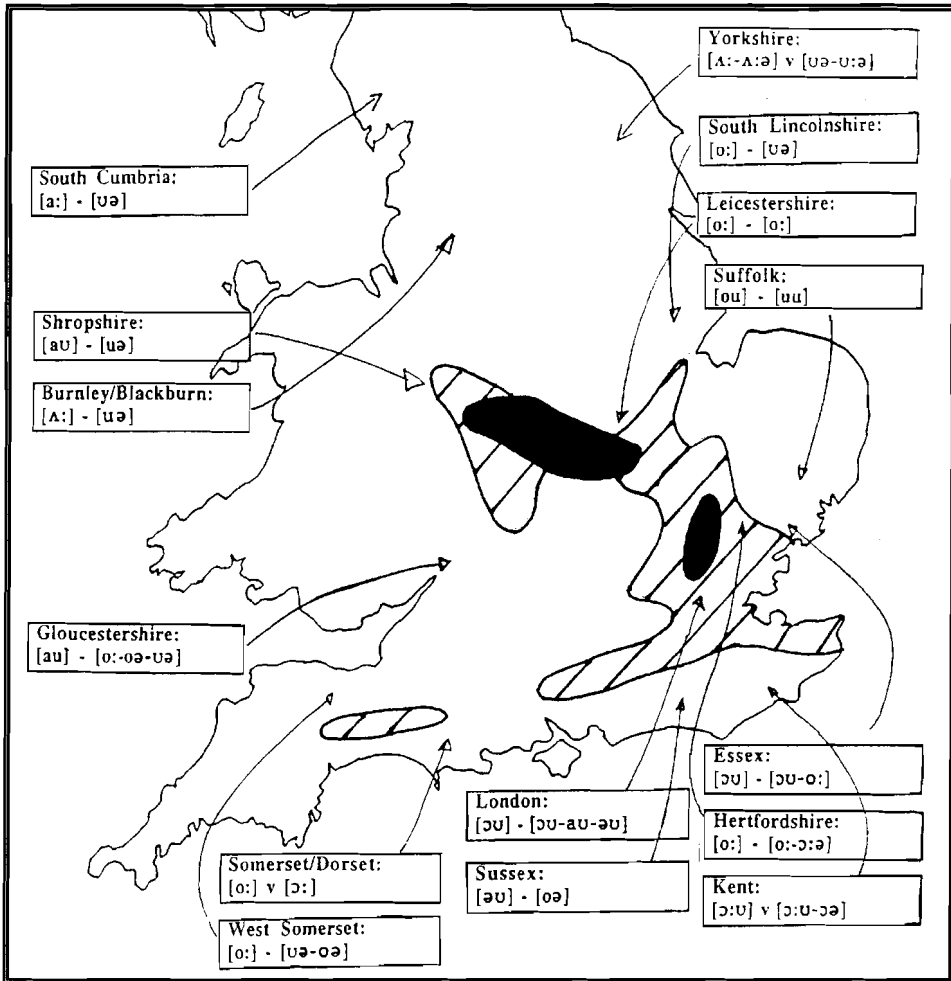


Figure 4: The merger of ME ɔ and ME ou in England, based on an analysis of Ellis's (1889) *On Early English Pronunciation*. BLOCKING denotes areas where there is no positive evidence to suggest that ME ɔ and ME ou are distinct; SHADING denotes areas where there is evidence of a *partial merger* of ME ɔ and ME ou ; in the BLANK areas, there is considerable evidence to suggest that ME ɔ and ME ou were *distinct*.

Figure 4 shows the results of my analysis of the data in Ellis (1889). The only area in which ME ou and ɔ appear to be fully merged are in an area of the Home Counties north of London, and in parts of the Midlands. Other parts of the south-east show a partial merger, but generally the data in Ellis show that ME ou and ɜ were NOT merged in the early 19th century. Figure 5 compares the data for ME ou and ME ɜ in Kurath and Lowman (1970). Their data shows an area of merger again in the southeast, mostly to the north of London, and extending up to the Wash. Again, a large swathe of southern England remains unmerged. They conclude that 'ME ɜ and ou are partially merged [...] in the Home Counties, so that 'stone' rhymes with

'grown' whence also in Standard British English. Elsewhere, they remain separate phonemes, phonically realised in a rather bewildering diversity' (1970: 10). Finally, the Survey of English Dialects data presented in Anderson (1987). The area of merger has expanded covering most of the south-east and the Midlands, and reaching parts of Cheshire and Lancashire. Large areas of the north and the west, as well as parts of East Anglia, remain unmerged.

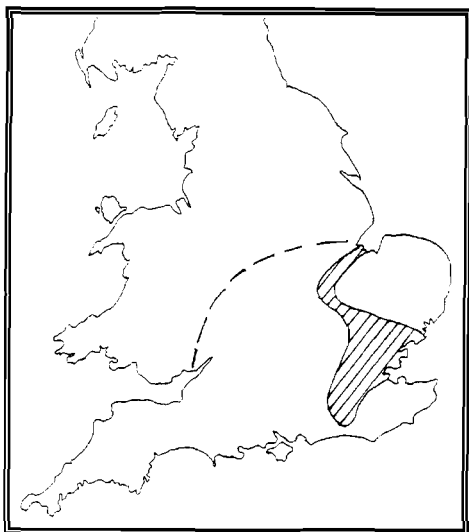


Figure 5: The (partial) merger of ME ɔ: and ME ou in southern England, based on Kurath & Lowman (1970). The shaded area shows the area of merger on [ou-ʌu].



Figure 6: The merger of ME ɔ: and ME ou in England in data from the Survey of English Dialects (based on Anderson 1987: 130). The shaded area shows where the merger is complete.

One reassuring point about these three data sets is that they seem to confirm the gradual geographic expansion of merged (ou) from London northwards and to the Midlands. It is clear, however, that many settlers to New Zealand would have departed before the merger had affected much of the country, and they would have taken with them a range of distinct variants of ME **ou** and **ɔ:**. Other variants would also have been present in the dialect mix. These include weak forms of *-ow* verbs, such as 'growed', 'showed', which were 'not at all uncommon in earlier modern English' (Ekwall 1975: 112), and are still found today. In Norfolk English, ME ɔ: has been involved in a near-merger with ME ɔ:, so 'moon' and 'moan' have more similar realisations than 'nioan' and 'niown' (see Trudgill 1974, Lahov 1994). In Scottish varieties, distinctions can take two forms. Firstly, 'groan' and 'grown' are distinct in terms of length. 'Aitken's Law' demands a short [o] before /n/, except if the /n/ is preceded by a morpheme boundary – hence 'groan' [grɔn], but 'grown' [gro:ɳn]. In addition, some Scottish dialects have disyllabic forms. Watt (pc) reports that for some 'growing' and 'grown' are homophones, and are both distinct from 'groan'.

To recap, given these contributions to the dialect mix that was early New Zealand English, the following forms would have been present in the 19th century speech community:

- i) The clearly distinct forms of the west, south-west, north and east of England.
- ii) The partially merged forms of the Home Counties and the Midlands of England.
- iii) Merged forms from parts of the Home Counties and the Midlands of England, as well as from speakers of Standard dialects.
- iv) Disyllabic forms, from parts of rural England and Scotland, noted in early recordings of NZE analysed by Maclagan and Gordon (1998).
- v) Weak forms, such as 'blowed', 'growed'.
- vi) Celtic English forms with an Aitken's Law length distinction.

As the processes of dialect focussing and koineisation (Trudgill 1986) began to take hold in New Zealand, some sort of levelling of this diversity was inevitable. As far as we know, considerable levelling has taken place, and NZE at the end of the 20th century is substantially more homogeneous with respect to (ou) than it was 100 years before. We expect, as part of koineisation, for mergers to expand at the expense of distinctions. This has happened to the extent that it appears many of the minority variants of (ou) (such as the Norfolk [ʊ] forms of ME $\text{ɔ}:$, and weak forms, such as 'growed') have been levelled away, leading to the focussing of a merged form in most words around [ɐʊ] (Bauer 1994).

Disyllabic forms in *-own* past participles appear to have prospered, however, Maclagan and Gordon (1998), in analysing their data from speakers born in the mid-to-late 19th century, claim that 5 out of 54 (9%) speakers had disyllabic forms. Today, this figure has reached over 50% (Maclagan and Gordon 1998, Britain *fc*, c). In one sense, the survival of such forms appears to contradict what we expect from koineisation – Disyllabicity in *-own* forms represents the retention of a minority form in a small closed lexical set, a prime candidate for levelling away¹. However, Trudgill (1986, 1992) claims that one outcome of dialect contact can be lexical or grammatical transparency, or an increase in the degree of correspondence between a grammatical category and its expression (1992: 203). In differentiating between [grʌʊn] and [grʌʊən], NZE (and Australian English) speakers are ensuring the grammatical distinction of the two is clear, with the latter becoming analogous with a number of other past tense pairs, such as 'eat–eaten', 'shake–shaken', 'take–taken'. It is interesting to note in Maclagan and Gordon's (1998) research that many speakers feel a distinction needs to be made between the two forms for these very same reasons. It appears, then, that the disyllabic form, an originally minority form of (ou) in the dialect mix in New Zealand, has, albeit slowly, been adopted as a characteristic of the koineised 20th century variety.

CONCLUSION

Some previous commentators on the use of disyllabic forms of *-own* have claimed it is an innovation in New Zealand. Here I have argued that this could not have been the case, partly because of the nature of mergers and splits, partly because of the settlement (and, hence, dialect) history of New Zealand. Disyllabic forms were brought to New Zealand along with a wide range of other realisations of (ou). Over time, the disyllabic form has become more popular, and is today (Britain *fc*, c) the majority form among the young. Although it is unusual for such minority forms to win in a dialect contact situation, the outcome can be explained once we accept both the sociolinguistic complexity of the early New Zealand speech community as well as grammatical transparency and analogical levelling as possible results of

dialect koineisation.

More generally, it has been shown that, firstly, we must not assume RP or standard English form the baseline for the linguistic 'innovations' we find in our contemporary apparent time analyses of post-colonial varieties. Secondly, but perhaps most importantly of all, we must pay considerable attention to what Mufwene (1996) calls the 'Founder Principle' – the need to research carefully the socio-demographic and sociolinguistic make-up of any communities which have come into contact and generated a new variety. Failure to do so, as has been shown here and elsewhere (Britain *cf.* a), can lead to inaccurate and implausible conclusions about the course and nature of language change.

NOTES

1. One difficulty we have, beyond the distinction between ME *ou* and *o:* is that there is often very little data indeed on the difference, if any, between *-own* words from ME *ou* and other ME *ou* words. Did 'know' and 'known' have the same vowel, for example? It has been claimed by some (Johnson, *pc*; Straight, *pc*) that perhaps instead of seeing the pre-*ir-da* NZE form as being the result of *schwa insertion*, it could be viewed as being the result of the *removal of a schwa deletion rule* that affected RP and many other varieties. Since *-own* forms were once disyllabic, it could then be claimed that:

- a rule deleting *schwa* in such forms was applied in dialects such as RP and General American;
- this rule did not apply in dialects which appear to have retained disyllabic forms (e.g. rural Essex);
- the rule has been deleted in present-day Australasian English.

However, since disyllabic forms were almost certainly contributing to the dialect mix, the rule deletion may well be redundant.

2. Unfortunately, no analysis of NZE (*ou*) has yet been carried out which distinguishes the different origins of (*ou*) words. We therefore do not know whether ME *o:* and ME *ou* in words other than the *-own* set are fully merged even today.

3. In accordance with Labov's (1994) principles of vowel shifting, NZE (*ou*) appears to be undergoing considerable fronting, as it is in Australia and in the South-east of England.

3. Siegel (1997), however, cites a number of examples from varieties of Hindi where minority forms have 'won' in the dialect mixing that followed their transportation to places such as Fiji, Mauritius, South Africa and Trinidad.

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