# ‘An evil version of our accent’: Language ideologies and the neighbouring other

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Stylized materials from mediated comedy texts are frequently salient carriers of language ideologies.[1] The comedy is often based on reimagining our relationship with an Other, in particular where the marginalized are able – at least briefly in the context of comic performance – to turn the tables on those who are positioned at a dominating centre. Even if the subversion does not and cannot last, its brief life has the potential to effect a slight, temporary shift in the balance of power, to lessen the domination of the centre and enhance the free space of the periphery. Comedy can function to bring to the surface ideologies that normally remain invisible. Mediated comedy which deals in some way with language, therefore, has the capacity to displace reigning linguistic ideologies, if only a little, and thus to contribute to the wider envelope of linguistic, sociolinguistic and social change.

While linguistic ideologies sometimes surface in open debates about language, more often they remain unspoken and unconscious. They may have major social and political effects – from individual discrimination through to armed conflict – but most of the time people are scarcely aware of their existence. These ideologies are ‘naturalized’: they represent commonsense views of language and society that people take for granted. They need no justification, they just describe the way the world is. But while self-presenting as neutral descriptions, ideologies have repercussions which are far from unaligned. In this chapter, I focus attention mainly on ideologies that are associated with dialect differences, and how those position speakers of different dialects.

## INVESTIGATING LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES

Explicit work on language ideologies has been an important strand of sociolinguistics since the publication of the foundational collections edited by Schieffelin,

[1] Thanks to the editors for their support and patience, and their many insightful suggestions on the material in this chapter, which are not acknowledged specifically.

Woolard and Kroskrity (1998), and Kroskrity (2000), together with Blommaert (1999) and Gal and Woolard (2001). Irvine and Gal's programmatic chapter (2000), in the second of these sources, proposed an approach which has been widely applied. It explicates how people routinely define themselves over against some real or imagined Other through three main processes:

i. Iconization is the process by which a linguistic feature – or even a whole variety or language – becomes symbolic of a particular group. Although the association between language and group is arbitrary, it is treated as somehow having a natural and inherent link with the group. If the 'best people' speak in a certain way, you will not become one of the best people without their speech, no matter that the actual linguistic indexes are arbitrary – why is /r/ pronouncing prestigious in the U.S. and denigrated in the U.K.? – and no matter that only a small minority of the population control the standard. As Irvine and Gal observe, "there is no 'view from nowhere,' no gaze that is not positioned" (2000: 36). Woolard's 1998 overview article adds that ideologies (including language ideologies) serve the interests of social groups and are differentiated according to those interests. In general, prevalent ideologies serve the interests of the social elite: they legitimate and sustain subordination.

ii. Recursion involves the projection of a distinction made at one level on to another level (Irvine and Gal 2000 use the precise but opaque geometrical term 'fractal recursivity'). Language choices made at the national level may be reflected in the choices made within individual families, for example over what language a child shall receive education in. Language choices may also be reflected in other semiotic dimensions such as appearance, for instance in the adoption of both particular fashions and a particular phonology (the 'burnouts' of Eckert's Detroit study, 2000, are an example).

iii. Erasure is the process by which facts which do not fit the ideology are rendered invisible. They are overlooked or explained away. The ideology works to disguise the operation of domination from the non-elite groups that it disadvantages (Woolard 1998). Even a language that is as highly standardized as French encompasses a large range of variety that is ignored in defining what the standard is. Yet standard French is not regarded as one variety among others – rather, it excludes the idea that variation even exists (Jaffe 1999: 78).

This three-part heuristic has been applied in numerous studies, and although it cannot claim to be comprehensive as a means of unpacking language ideologies, it serves as a good starting point. I will complement it with one of the most fruitful

templates for approaching language ideology, which long predates such developments in the Anglo-American academy by decades.

### *The centrifugal and centripetal in language*

Writing in the 1920s and 1930s, Bakhtin maintained that in society language is a site of struggle between the dynamic centrifugal forces which whirl it apart into diversity, and the centripetal forces which strive to prescribe the way language should be. Bakhtin acknowledges standardization as a force but celebrates the centrifugal – the divergence, individuality, creativity, even the chaos of language variety:

> Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward. (Bakhtin 1981: 272)

The centrifugal and centripetal forces operate at both social and individual levels, foreshadowing Irvine and Gal's 'fractal recursivity'. Bakhtin saw this as a crusade for the vernacular against the standard. It is a process in which scholars are not neutral in response to these forces, but can celebrate language as kaleidoscope – "a radical revolution in the destinies of human discourse: the fundamental liberation of cultural-semantic and emotional intentions from the hegemony of a single and unitary language" (Bakhktin 1981: 367). He calls up the concept of heteroglossia – all-pervasive linguistic variegation – to challenge the hegemony of standards in languages: "The entire dialectological makeup of a given national language, must have the sense that it is surrounded by an ocean of heteroglossia" (1981: 368). Such an approach aligns well with models that recognize centre and periphery in language dynamics. Adopted from postcolonial theory and put forward, for example, by Canagarajah (1999), this can function as a way of overcoming frequently perceived dichotomies between the western and the indigenous, the native and non-native.

The current study focuses on the ideologies associated with the Englishes of Australia and New Zealand. Australian English (AusE) may not function as a global 'standard' in the way British and American do, but because of the nation's size and economic strength relative to its neighbours, including New Zealand, it serves as a centre of linguistic dominance for regional Englishes. This is an instance of what pertains in many regions where some geographical periphery is contrasted with a notional centre: Scotland vs England, Canada vs the United States, the American South vs General American – and New Zealand vs Australia. Much linguistic ideol-

ogy has to do with periphery, minority and marginality. These situations are characterized not just by difference but by deficit. The periphery is home to groups that, in the contrastive context, are more or less denigrated Others. Being located on the geographical margins therefore consorts with social marginalization and minoritization, and projects discriminatory assumptions on to the area, its people and their dialect. The dialects of these disparaged peripheral areas are, in varying fashions and degrees, held up not just as subjects of interest but often as objects of mockery. Such denigration may range from the relatively benign to the clearly injurious.[2]

The performances I analyze below have their basis in the negative attitudes and behaviours of sociolinguistic peripheralization, which they set out to combat and invert. My aim is to tease out the linguistic and social ideologies involved in certain representations of New Zealand and Australian Englishes, how those are displayed, revealed and nuanced, how they are at once instantiated and challenged, and what this can tell us about the place of language variety in the operation of ideology.

## FLIGHT OF THE CONCHORDS

My data come from media performances, specifically from the US television series *Flight of the Conchords*. The performance of New Zealand English (NZE), especially in comedy genres, has received a good deal of attention from local sociolinguists, e.g. Pasifika English in the television comedy *bro'Town* (Gibson and Bell 2010), and Māori English from the comedian Billy T James (Bell 2007). The *Conchords* concerns the mis/adventures of a duo of New Zealand comedians/musicians who are trying to make it in New York. They are played by Bret McKenzie and Jemaine Clement – a duo of comedians/musicians from Wellington, New Zealand, who are trying to make it in New York. The US series followed Conchords' live performances at festivals and comedy venues in New Zealand, Australia, the UK and North America, and drew on the duo's BBC radio show about a pair of New Zealand musicians/comedians trying to make it in London… The series went out on Home Box Office in the US, screening 22 episodes in two seasons, 2007–08 and 2008–09. It has been released in the UK, Canada and much of Europe as well as in

[2] In some contexts, my generalization above needs to be nuanced or even inverted. The periphery's varieties can gain status at the centre, for example in the relative prestige of Celtic-fringe Englishes in the British Isles. And what is periphery in one configuration may act as centre in a differently-bounded region. New Zealand English may be marginalized compared to Australian, but it tends to be dominant among the Englishes of the islands of the southwest Pacific because of New Zealand's large Pasifika populations, formerly immigrant but now resident long-term in New Zealand (Biewer 2015).

the US and New Zealand. It now circulates on DVD and in other digital formats, and extensive clips appear on YouTube.

McKenzie and Clement play the two lead characters, under their own names, with the third lead being their inept band manager, Murray (played deadpan by Rhys Darby) who is moonlighting from his day job at the New Zealand consulate in New York. The band have just one fan, who stalks them, and their main ambition is to get a gig somewhere – anywhere. Between one and three songs are interspersed into the plot line in each episode. Clement and McKenzie wrote the songs, and co-wrote the spoken scripts with others. Their songs in the show – and a good deal of the rest of the content – draw on a range of cultural and subcultural referencing, setting up complex visual, musical and linguistic intertextualities with earlier songs, performers, styles and genres (including, for example, *West Side Story* – this is New York). Some of the songs function as parodies of well-known singers and their hits, such as David Bowie and 'Space Oddity', and involve highly stylized pronunciations leveraging off those singers' original voicings. The phonetics of these performances, and their relation to McKenzie's and Clement's usual speech, and to the source performers' singing and spoken pronunciations, have been researched by Gibson (2011). He finds that McKenzie and Clement are adept at a range of phonetic imitation and manipulation, particularly in the service of comic effect.

In the series, the Conchords play versions of themselves. One disjunction between the performers and their characters is that the performed personas are unsuccessful, whereas the actual duo have, by virtue of the US TV series itself, achieved some success. The kind of self-aware reflexivity involved in making a success out of performing one's lack of success is consonant with the knowingness that permeates the show, as we shall see below. The Conchords have won various New Zealand and international awards (including a Grammy in 2008) both as duo and individuals. McKenzie received a 2012 Academy Award for best original song (in the Muppets film). The series achieved a cult following in North America and, predictably, a strong following in New Zealand.

The show is quirky in its style and content, frequently to the point of surrealism. It is played laconically and low key, with tongue quietly but firmly in cheek – not characteristics conventionally associated with mainstream American television comedies. There is a good deal of New Zealand self-deprecation, leveraging off the small size and global insignificance of the nation: the actor playing the New Zealand prime minister is shown driving a tour bus round New Zealand-related sites in New York. Arguably it is this deprecation of New Zealand, to the point of parody, which is the most consistent theme running through the show. Again, this approach is not obviously characteristic of US television, which has been known to satirize the neighbouring Canadians for their self-effacing behaviour.

Counter-pointing and interweaving with the self-presentation of New Zealand is the considerable amount of action and comedy which sparks off New Zealand's rivalry with its much larger neighbour, Australia. Few Americans will have any awareness of the differences between the two nations (or, in some cases, that they are indeed separate nations), let alone the nuances of the relationship between them, so this seems initially to be a strange recipe for success in the American market. Americans may however have some awareness of the relativities between the US itself and closer, smaller nations such as Canada. And the sometimes uninhibitedly racist-style discourse by New Zealanders about Australians (and *vice versa*) may resonate with Americans in that it says the unsayable through dealing with an intergroup relationship which is a) not based in colour, b) not based in race and c) is safely distant from the US itself.[3] Part of the locus of New Zealand/Australian contrasts is language, and in particular there are numerous and focal references to and performances of accent and its role in sociocultural othering between these two close neighbours.

The data I draw on from the *Conchords* are of two kinds:

i. performances of New Zealand and Australian Englishes by characters in the show, specifically Bret, Jemaine and Murray (NZE) and Jemaine's fleeting girlfriend, Keitha (AusE)

ii. metalinguistic discussions of the similarities and differences between NZE and AusE, involving Bret, Jemaine and a fruit seller, Sinjay.

## ICONIZATION AND ERASURE IN SOCIOLINGUISTIC OTHERING

Each episode of the *Flight of the Conchords* tends to focus quite tightly on a particular theme or cluster of concerns. The first extract below comes from an episode that deals throughout with race relations-type issues as seen through the lens of fictional discrimination against New Zealanders in New York by the fruit seller Sinjay. He ignores Bret and Jemaine, refuses to sell them fruit, and disinfects anything they touch. The two are also shown experiencing wider discrimination – being jostled on the street, having to travel at the back of a bus, and being denied access to a night club. They are, in short, on the receiving end of the kind of denigration historically directed against African Americans.

While they are agonizing about this, their friend Dave suggests they repay Sinjay for his 'prejudism' by poisoning his fruit to frame him for murder, so that he

[3] My thanks to Chris Hutton for this point.

will get sent to Alcatraz. As an alternative, he then teaches them to perform insulting gestures, and they return to Sinjay's fruit stand for a showdown:

**Excerpt 1: 'Our accents are completely different'**
***Flight of the Conchords,* Series 1, Episode 7**
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zs_rXxi0zhM

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Sinjay | How dare you come here and give me those offensive hand gestures |
| 2 | | at my fruit stand. |
| 3 | Jemaine | It was either this or getting you sent into Alcatraz. |
| 4 | Bret | How dare you treat us like second-hand [sic] citizens? |
| 5 | Jemaine | It doesn't matter what country someone's from, or what they look or |
| 6 | | the colour of their skin. It doesn't matter what they smell like, or that |
| 7 | | they spell words slightly differently, some would say more correctly. |
| 8 | Sinjay | Yeah. |
| 9 | Jemaine | Let me finish. I'm a person, Bret's a person. |
| 10 | Bret | Yeah. |
| 11 | Jemaine | You're a person, that person over there's a person, |
| 12 | | and each person deserves to be treated like a person. |
| 13 | Sinjay | It's a great speech. Too bad New Zealanders are a bunch of cocky A- |
| 14 | | holes descended from criminals and retarded monkeys. |
| 15 | Jemaine | No, you're thinking of Australians. |
| 16 | Bret | Yeah that's Australians. |
| 17 | Jemaine | Australians. |
| 18 | Sinjay | No no no, New Zealanders. They throw another shrimp on the barbie, |
| 19 | | ride around on your kangaroos all day. |
| 20 | Jemaine | No, no. |
| 21 | Bret | That's Australians. |
| 22 | Jemaine | You're thinking of Australians, that's not us. |
| 23 | Sinjay | I've totally confused you with Australians. I, I feel terrible. |
| 24 | Jemaine | Oh no, oh no. |
| 25 | Sinjay | Your accents, they're just kind of similar. |
| 26 | Jemaine | Our accents are completely different. They're like 'where's the car', |
| 27 | | and we're like 'where's the car' [pronunciations identical]. |
| … | | … |
| 28 | Sinjay | Neela you can you can uncover your eyes, they're not Australians, |
| 29 | | they're New Zealanders. |

Broadly viewed, the participants conduct their dialogue in the accents of their characters. Bret and Jemaine perform in their vernacular NZE. Sinjay speaks in a contrasting general American accent but not, interestingly, with any obvious New York City features.

In the context of the episode as a whole, the racist-style practices and discourse displayed in this extract are clearly an extrapolation from the negative side of US

race relations, complete with ideological loading and intertextual reference. Bret and Jemaine overtly class the situation as racism: they accuse Sinjay directly of being racist, and tell their manager Murray they are in the middle of a race war. They perform a song/sketch about 'Albi the racist dragon', who is eventually converted from his evil ways. While the focus of the exchange is on the differences between New Zealanders and Australians, the discrimination is practised by an American in this episode rather than by an Australian (although other episodes do show plenty from that quarter). But eventually, over the closing credits, Sinjay joins them in aiming an extended exchange of gestural insults at a guard outside the Australian embassy.

In response to the discrimination directed at him, Jemaine's eloquent plea (lines 5ff.) follows the tradition of well-known American orations on racial equality, most obviously Lincoln's Gettysburg address (1863) and Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' (1963). The structure of cadence and repetition reflects the high rhetorical style of those historic speeches. Compare Jemaine's "It doesn't matter what … it doesn't matter what…" (lines 5–7) with Lincoln: "It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to … It is rather for us to be here dedicated to …". This intertextuality with what are possibly the two best-known public addresses in US history is handled carefully, echoing sentiment, structure and rhythm rather than directly quoting such iconic texts (which might risk offending American viewers). This is presumably because Jemaine's speech proceeds to immediately undermine its own rhetoric. The second section (lines 9–12) is scripted to push the rhetorical devices over the top into banality. Jemaine uses the word 'person' seven times in three lines, and the speech anti-climaxes in the tautology of line 11: 'that person over there's a person'.[4] Gibson (2011) found this kind of self-parodic exaggeration to be frequent in the show's songs, where Bret and Jemaine will push a pronunciation or repetition over the edge into conscious, displayed absurdity. In an exchange where the two singers both play the character of David Bowie, we get: "Do you hear me man … I read you loud and clear man … Ooh yeah man" (Gibson 2011: 612).

Sinjay's response to Jemaine's oratory acknowledges that "It's a great speech" (13), pointing up and confirming the intertextuality with the historical addresses. However for him, the rhetoric is regrettably nullified by the cultural characteristics that he associates with New Zealanders – "a bunch of cocky A-holes descended from criminals and retarded monkeys" (13–14). But the target of the fruit seller's prejudice turns out to be a case of mistaken identity: it is Australians he abhors rather than New Zealanders. Although he cannot tell the difference between the two

[4] The over-use of 'person' may also be referencing – perhaps satirically – politically-correct, gender-neutral usage.

groups, his conscious discrimination is targeted overtly towards one nationality and not the other.

Sinjay's response reveals the Conchords' proclaimed egalitarianism to be only skin-deep. As New Zealanders, Bret and Jemaine are now in the clear, and quite happy to ditch their egalitarian rhetoric and see Australians discriminated against in the most derogatory terms. 'Descended from criminals' in fact double-voices an only-partly-humorous New Zealand characterization of Australians. It references the stereotype that the founding white settlement of Australia was as a penal colony, compared to the voluntary nature of British migration to New Zealand. 'We came, they were sent', the New Zealand saying runs. Jemaine and Bret have no need to reflect on how this description has come to be targeted at them – they recognize at once that the fruit seller must have confused them with Australians, since these fit his description so perfectly. They share Sinjay's prejudice: Australians are non-persons – "descended from ... retarded monkeys" (14).

There are three things to be said about the performance so far. First, it is a parodically self-evident case of ideological erasure (Irvine and Gal 2000). The misfit between the Conchords' rhetoric and their prejudice against Australians is instantly rendered invisible to all three participants, and therefore all the more visible to the audience. Once it is established that none of the actual interactants are members of the 'offending' group, the prejudice is free to live on unchallenged and unchanged – except for being deflected away to Australians.

Secondly, there is a strong case of 'strategic inauthenticity' (Coupland 2007) involved in much of this. Hard upon delivering an apparently heartfelt speech in the style of iconic American oratory, the Conchords immediately undercut the sincerity of their own performance. Self-satirization of New Zealand and its ways here goes hand in hand with derogating Australia. This knowingness, and the reflexivity of which it is one manifestation, suffuses the entire show, including many of the very intentionally stylized songs. In the 'Space Oddity' sequence (Gibson 2011: 612), for example, they recycle vocabulary reminiscent of Bowie, or at least of the seventies at large:

> Jemaine: How far out are you man?
> Bret: I'm pretty far out.
> Jemaine: That's pretty far out man!

Thirdly, there is an ironical inversion embedded in the group labelling used here. Sinjay recognizes 'New Zealanders' as the default category of all antipodeans. The reality is the opposite: New Zealanders are routinely classed as Australians – since Australia is the very much more populous country – while Australians are rarely classified as New Zealanders. Here and in later excerpts the normal polarity is reversed, so that New Zealand becomes centre and Australia periphery. New Zealand

as the margin briefly turns the tables on the centre, an inversion which is made possible because the encounters are taking place in the neutral territory of North America rather than in either group's home land.

The part that language overtly plays in this discrimination is first foreshadowed not with reference to accent but to orthographic difference, and with a US–New Zealand comparison rather than an Australian one: "spell words slightly differently, some would say more correctly" (line 7–8). The line is targeted at American–New Zealand differences, since New Zealand orthography allies with British not American conventions. Erased in this contrast of orthographic ideologies is the fact that Australian English also mostly follows the British model, and therefore New Zealand and Australia are implicitly allies here in their alignment against the common enemy of the locally prevalent American norm. The implication is also that the British norm may itself be superior to the American, representing the constant tension between these two as competing standards of international English.

The 'spelled more correctly' evaluation elicits a demurring attempt at interruption from Sinjay, which Jemaine brushes aside to continue his declamation (11). He first espouses an ideology of difference in orthographic conventions – "spell words slightly differently" – which accords with his overall equality rhetoric. He then upgrades this to a deficit evaluation through the "more correctly" claim, albeit governed by a hedged expression ("some would say") which implies the relativity of such prescriptive assessments. The hedging also chimes with the stereotype of New Zealanders' self-presentation (compared to Americans') as reticent and self-effacing. Jemaine's wording here functions in fact as the opposite of erasure. Rather than concealing the ideological underpinning of the position he is expounding, he makes it fully visible in his attempt to occupy the orthographic high ground.

The implied alliance in orthography between New Zealand and Australia is immediately sundered when Jemaine and Bret affiliate with the characteristics offered by Sinjay as descriptive of Australians not New Zealanders. First the fruit seller instances the barbecue as a stereotype of Australian culture (although he takes it at this point to be New Zealand), transferring attention to Australian–American lexical difference, here focused in the diminutive *barbie.* The cliché 'throw another shrimp on the barbie' (18)[5] has nothing to do with dolls. He follows this with the clinching identifier – emblematic fauna – in line 19, since kangaroos are indigenous to Australia but not found in New Zealand. Sinjay then moves deeper into linguistic territory as he makes it clear that accent has been the key signifier which has led

[5] The phrase was used in Australian tourism television commercials in the US in the 1980s by the actor Paul Hogan ('Crocodile Dundee'). Ironically, the native Australian term would be *prawn* rather than *shrimp*, but the latter was used for US consumption to avoid audience confusion. The phrase is therefore a mis-transmitted stereotype – but that presents no problem to a target audience.

him to this mis-identification: "your accents they're just kind of similar" (25). The accent is iconized not just as representative of but in fact diagnostic of group membership.

The incident embodies a dialectal truism of disjunction between the production and perception of Australian and New Zealand Englishes. As with many neighbouring varieties, the accents are overwhelmingly similar, distinguished by a handful of features – iconizations – which are generally noticed only by the members of the two speech communities themselves but remain unremarked by speakers of other English varieties. In reality, few Americans notice any difference between the two accents, and many identify NZE or AusE as some variety of British English (in another episode, Bret is congratulated on his British accent). Sinjay at least does know enough about Australia and its English to produce lexical items for local fauna and cultural practice as cues to who he is talking about.

Stung by the allegation of accent similarity, Jemaine springs to an instant assertion of how "completely different" the two accents are, and offers an exemplar of this (lines 26–27). Unfortunately for this declaration, the segmental phonetics of his repeated phrase "where's the car" are identical in both renditions (although the intonation changes), therefore providing proof not of accent difference but of the similarity which he is contesting. Jemaine has open choice on what features with which to illustrate the contrasts between the two accents, but he produces a string which offers none of the obvious differences such as the stereotypical NZE centralized KIT or raised DRESS vowels. The NEAR/SQUARE merger was available as an option on the word *where*, but is not realized by Jemaine. Elsewhere the Conchords do focus on the NZE close front realization of the DRESS vowel and the comprehension problems this causes for Americans. A young woman tries repeatedly to decode *Bret* as a proper name (is it short for *Britney*?), and succeeds only when he spells it.

At another level, however, we can interpret Jemaine's performance here as demonstrating – through voicing the two accents as identical – his self-knowledge that they are indeed largely the same. Elsewhere the Conchords show themselves to be closely aware of phonetic nuances, and Gibson's analysis (2011) demonstrates how adept they are at the fine detail of linguistic performance. We can therefore attribute the failure to demonstrate accent difference to intentional scripting and performance rather than to either ignorance or inability. Jemaine has deliberately produced identical pronunciations, indicating the Conchords' awareness that the accents in fact do not differ much. On the surface of the show itself, however, the ideology remains contrastive, focusing on an aspect of language as a key signifier in constructing national difference. Even where difference is minimal, the performance seeks to enhance and maximize what is there in the interests of maintaining inter-

group distinctiveness. In the pursuit of this, similarity is erased. Difference is created where there is none, and exaggerated where there is little.

## IDEOLOGICAL RECURSION AND THE MORALITY OF ACCENT

The projected depth and sharpness of the New Zealand/Australia divide is further reinforced in an episode in the second series titled 'Unnatural love', in which Jemaine inadvertently sleeps with an Australian woman, Keitha. The repercussions of such an event are explored in cross-racial terms which raise the stakes in relations between the two nationalities. Jemaine is shown dancing wildly at a club, then waking up in Keitha's bed surrounded by Australiana. The camera pans from a large photo of the iconic Ayers Rock, to a koala bear on the bedside table, to the Australian flag used as a bedspread. Jemaine tip-toes from the bedroom and phones for help to Bret, who is shown – improbably, but in visual counterpoint to the Australian iconography – reading an old school textbook entitled *Native Animals of New Zealand*:

**Excerpt 2: 'She's definitely Australian'**
***Flight of the Conchords,* Series 2, Episode 5**
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hoF_fa9TMDk

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Bret | [on phone] Hello Bret speaking. |
| 2 | Jemaine | Bret, it's Jemaine speaking. |
| 3 | Bret | Hi man where are you? Did you run away? |
| 4 | Jemaine | No, I went home with a girl. |
| 5 | Bret | What? |
| 6 | Jemaine | [whispers] Bret, I think she might be Australian. |
| 7 | Bret | Are you sure she's Australian? |
| 8 | Jemaine | Either she's Australian or she, she really likes Australia. |
| 9 | Bret | Oh you got to get out of there, just get out of there. |
| 10 | Jemaine | [tries apartment door] I'm, I'm, I'm locked in, she's trapped me. |
| 11 | Bret | I'm not surprised. Okay um keep calm, jump out the window. |
| 12 | Jemaine | Good idea [looks out]. Oh it's too high. |
| 13 | Bret | Okay, well do one of those dive rolls when you land. |
| 14 | Jemaine | Okay I'll try. |
| 15 | Keitha | [appears through bedroom door] G'day. |
| 16 | Jemaine | Oh, hey. |
| 17 | Keitha | Jesus, got a tongue like a badger's arsehole. What you doing there |
| 18 | | Big J? |
| 19 | Jemaine | Um just talking to a friend of mine. |
| 20 | Bret | [on phone] Don't talk to her, she's definitely Australian. |
| 21 | Jemaine | Ah, I'm not sure I got your name. |

22 Keitha Keitha.
23 Jemaine Pardon?
24 Keitha Keitha.
25 Jemaine Keitha?
26 Keitha Yeah it's like Keith but with an -a at the end. I was named after me
27 Dad.
28 Bret [on phone] She's got a man's name?
29 Jemaine [to her] 'Keitha', that's a lovely name.
30 Keitha So how about we go back to bed?
31 Jemaine Um.
32 Bret [on phone] Definitely don't do that.
33 Jemaine Whew, no I can't.
34 Keitha Oh.
35 Jemaine Would you be able to unlock the door?

This scene arguably winds up the intergroup aggravation by several degrees. The self-evident foundational presupposition is that New Zealanders do not have sex with Australians (lines 6–9). The concept represents itself as so shocking that when Jemaine later confesses to Murray that he "accidentally slept with an Australian", Murray declares "I can't believe what I'm hearing". Bret's immediate reaction to the news is as abrupt as if Jemaine had announced he had just discovered Keitha represented a physical threat: "you got to get out of there, just get out of there" (9). Jemaine seconds this statement with "she's trapped me", imputing malicious intent to Keitha for locking her apartment door. Bret in turn reinforces that with "I'm not surprised", as they collaboratively inscribe Keitha as a physical threat to Bret.

There can be no doubt for Bret that Jemaine has to leave: he should not even talk to Keitha (20) and certainly not have sex with her again (32). Promiscuity and venereal disease are here presumed to be characteristic of young Australian women. Keitha is portrayed as sexually rampant – "how about we go back to bed?" she proposes (30), and her nicknaming of him as "Big J" (18) seems unlikely to refer only to Jemaine's well-built external physique. In a later scene she invites him to stop talking, "get in that bedroom and root me again". Counterpointed to this, however, is the fact that she at least knows his name, while he has gone to bed with her without even knowing hers (21). It seems that the New Zealander is at least as responsible for the casualness of this sexual encounter as is the Australian.

In addition to being sexually licentious, Keitha is characterized immediately as verbally crass by her comment on her hung-over state: "Jesus, got a tongue like a badger's arsehole" (17). Such lexical vulgarity is also a New Zealand stereotype of Australians, which Keitha continues to embody in her lines in later scenes, alongside parodically gross behaviours such as pouring milk from a bowl full of muesli into a cup of tea. Linguistically, Keitha's informality – for example in the pronunciation 'me' for 'my' in line 26–27 – is counterpointed by the strikingly formal lexi-

con and idiom used by Jemaine as he extracts himself from the situation. In the exchange in lines 21–35 his phrasing is notably remote and stilted: "I'm not sure I got your name?"; "Pardon?"; "that's a lovely name". This culminates in the hyper-polite, indirect request "would you be able to unlock the door?". In spite (or arguably, because) of their recent intimacy, he distances himself from her verbally in the process of setting about leaving her apartment. This contrasts not only with her own informality but also with the casual register of his phone exchanges with Bret (e.g. 12, 14).

Throughout, from his position at the far end of the phone, Bret takes pains to cast Keitha in the worst possible light. She has, for example, "a man's name" (28), a charge that the band manager Murray will also make free with in a later scene. Bret continues to take this overtly hostile stance towards her as the couple's relationship develops across the episode. He leaves a phone message which purports to be Keitha announcing she is breaking off with Jemaine and quitting the country to go back to Australia. This degree of othering obviously carries the seeds of its own parodization: interwoven with the mocking of Australians is a complementary self-satirization of New Zealanders displayed precisely through the exaggerated line that Bret is taking.

Dialect also stereotypes Keitha from her first appearance. Her opening line, the clichéd Australian greeting 'Good day', is delivered as 'G'day' in fully dialectal pronunciation with an almost elided first syllable, and a very open realization of the FACE diphthong [ʌ:ɪ]. Bret diagnoses her as Australian just from overhearing her accent down the phone line (20) despite Jemaine's presumed difficulty in identifying it the previous evening. That is followed immediately by her repeating her name "Keitha" (22), strongly marked by its diphthongisation of FLEECE as [ə:ɪ], one of the few phonetic differences between AusE and NZE. Jemaine's repetition in line 24 performs *Keitha* with the contrasting NZE [i:] pronunciation. The character's name has probably been scripted not just for the opportunity it provides for gender mockery but also for display and contrast on this salient vowel. Keitha is clearly set here to perform a markedly 'broad' Australian accent (Mitchell and Delbridge 1965; Wells 1982). Her accent is at the most vernacular end of the spectrum, but stops short of parodic stylization (whereas the lexical choices mentioned above are self-evidently stereotyped). She sounds Other but still 'authentic'. Her accent is styled (as Australian) but not stylized (as hyper-Australian).

Once Jemaine escapes Keitha and her apartment, he goes immediately to the doctor, the assumption being that medical attention will be an automatic requisite after sex with an Australian. The scene cuts to the doctor's waiting room, one hour later:

**Excerpt 3: 'Kind of like an evil version of our accent'**
***Flight of the Conchords,* Series 2, Episode 5**
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hoF_fa9TMDk (as for Excerpt 2)

36 Jemaine Thanks for coming.
37 Bret How do you feel?
38 Jemaine Fine, just ashamed.
39 Bret How could you not know she was Australian?
40 Jemaine I don't know, we started in a night club.
41 Bret Did she look Australian-y then?
42 Jemaine Not particularly, no, only in the face I suppose, but not bodily not at all.
43 Bret Did she sound Australian? Australian accent?
44 Jemaine Yes yes.
45 Bret What did it sound like?
46 Jemaine Ah, kind of like an evil version of our accent.
47 Bret Did she mock your accent?
48 Jemaine Not that I remember.
49 Bret She may have subtly mocked your accent. You didn't notice?
50 Jemaine She may have subtly been mocking me.
51 Bret [leans forward, whispers] Did you use protection?
52 Jemaine Yes but only on my penis.
53 Bret [points to Jemaine's lip] What's that? What's that?
54 Jemaine What what?
55 Bret What's that red mark on your lip?
56 Jemaine What where where?
57 Bret There there's all red.
58 Jemaine It's lipstick.
59 Bret It's crabs.
60 Jemaine It's not crabs.
61 Bret It's crabs.
62 Jemaine Da uh da, it's not crabs.
63 Bret And your wallet? She didn't steal your wallet?
64 Jemaine Yes, no, she's got my wallet.
65 Bret She probably tried to steal your wallet.

To the prohibition against New Zealanders having sex with Australians is added the expectation that, if they do, they can anticipate coming out of the encounter without their wallets (63–65) and with a sexually transmitted disease (53–62). Jemaine's expression of shame (38) is presented as a natural reaction, as if he had been caught in a lewd act. The 'Australians were all criminals' stereotype that we met in Excerpt 1 is individualized to the presumption that Keitha will have stolen Jemaine's wal-

let.[6] Bret accuses Keitha of stealing Jemaine's wallet, although Jemaine will endorse only the fact that she has it (64). Murray will independently re-introduce this allegation in a later scene.

Later, after their relationship has progressed, Jemaine attempts to discover if Keitha has some – any – non-Australians in her family tree. She says that her dad is in prison, then lays claim to a descent which is scripted to fulfil and buttress the prejudices that surfaced in the earlier excerpts:

> Listen, Big J, you couldn't get more Australian than me. My great-great-grandpa was a renowned rapist, and they shipped him out to Australia, and that's where he met my great-great-grandma. She was a prostitute. I mean I said met, but you know, he raped her.

Lines 39–42 above presuppose that an Australian should be physically identifiable by appearance, seemingly distinguishable from all other caucasian types. Beginning with the face, then the accent (42–43), it is taken for granted that an Australian will be contrastively recognizable through physical markers. This is presumably by comparison with New Zealanders, but also with the Americans who would have been the majority nationality present at the nightclub where Jemaine and Keitha picked each other up. Accent is thus aligned, in an act of recursion, with projected sexual and verbal behaviours to stereotype Keitha's Australianness.

The accent performance of the earlier scene gives way in the waiting room to meta-commentary as Jemaine and Bret discuss the encounter. If appearance had not been enough to alert Jemaine to Keitha's Australianness – Bret asks – perhaps her accent did? (43). Jemaine now agrees readily that she did sound Australian. It seems that either he did not recognize this at the time, or that he was in fact – contra Bret – prepared to go to bed with a known-to-be-Australian woman. Jemaine offers the gloss that Keitha's accent sounded like "an evil version of our accent". This moves us on to another plane from the 'completely different' claim made in Excerpt 1. It acknowledges openly the relatedness of the two varieties. Rather than being absolutely different, Australian is now heard as a recognizable relation of NZE. AusE is a version of NZE – but not *vice versa*. Again the hierarchy is inverted, and the peripheral variety becomes central. But Australian English is characterized as not just any version of NZE – it is a perversion. The moral judgment that tends to tone all folk commentary on language (Niedzielski and Preston 2000) is here explicit. The pure pronunciations of New Zealand English have been turned not just to difference but twisted to distortion. To elevate NZE to the status of language standard is no

[6] It later transpires that Jemaine had left the wallet behind in Keitha's apartment in his haste to leave, and she returns it on the first opportunity.

small irony in the historical context of its traditional denigration within New Zealand itself as 'debased speech' compared to Received Pronunciation, as chronicled by Gordon and Abell (1990). The moralistic descriptions which the centre so often uses to characterize peripheral peoples and their varieties are here turned against it, and instead the regional centre is morally othered for its accent.

Such a discourse also echoes the frequent language evaluations which surface in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, now famously associated with New Zealand through the Peter Jackson films. In both novel and films, the languages of the forces of good are characterized as positive and pleasant sounding, and the languages of the enemy as disagreeable and evil sounding. Tolkien – a philologist – declared that the motivation for creating his mythologies was a linguistic one: to provide a context for his imagined languages. In *The Lord of the Rings,* the Black Speech of the dark lord Sauron and his minions is said to sound repellent, and Tolkien has furnished it liberally with harsh fricatives and velar stops. The fighting orcs speak "an abominable tongue" (Tolkien 1968: 466), "hideous" and "full of hate and anger". By contrast, Elvish is presented as a language of limpid liquids and front/high vowels, and the Old Entish of the tree-herds is described as "lovely" (*ibid.*: 486). As an academic, Tolkien wrote about the "beautiful phonologies" he had constructed in his imagined languages (1983: 212), and the creation of "sounds to give pleasure" (*ibid.*: 218). Given the salience of the *Lord of the Rings* films for New Zealand, Jemaine's labelling AusE as an 'evil version' of NZE summons up these polarized evaluative associations.

A further level of linguistic meta-discourse is accessed in an exchange about one of the other strands of New Zealand–Australian sociolinguistic relations – accent mockery. New Zealanders who migrate to Australia, or who encounter Australians during their travels, find their accent frequently ridiculed, often in terms of the centralized KIT vowel as represented by the stock phrase *fush and chups* (Bell 1997). Jemaine does not voluntarily recall Keitha mocking his accent (48), but readily endorses Bret's suggestion that she may indeed have been doing so in a subtle fashion. Bret utilizes accent mockery as diagnostic – if Keitha did make fun of Jemaine's accent, that would be evidence that she is indeed Australian (the correlation is not unlikely). Although Bret and Jemaine may retrospectively suspect Keitha of accent mockery, here again the tables are turned because the thrust of this metalinguistic discourse is to mock Australian English.[7]

[7] Other sociolinguistic situations may or may not play out in the same way. I happen to be writing this while in Canada, and have been struck by many parallels between the New Zealand/Australia and Canada/US relationships. In both cases accent and sporting rivalry are strong focuses of national rivalry. However, in contrast to its relationship with AusE, NZE may elsewhere be quite highly valued against other local accents rather than denigrated, for example in the UK (Coupland and Bishop 2007).

## ERASING THE PERSON: ACCENT AS ALIENATION

Despite Bret's earlier warnings of the inappropriateness of having an Australian girlfriend, Jemaine and Keitha are soon a couple. Jemaine introduces her to Bret and Murray at a café. It is no surprise that the meeting does not go well. Jemaine arrives dressed in a safari suit in the style of Steve Irwin, the Australian one-time 'crocodile hunter' and television personality. This parodical costume implies his switching of allegiance to Australia, and produces a volley of hostile questions from Murray and Bret. They launch a global attack on Jemaine's attire, relationship and his introduction of Keitha to their circle. In tune with Bret's response in the previous excerpt, he and Murray cast Keitha as alien, even as non-person.

**Excerpt 4: 'I've got a real Aussie accent'**
***Flight of the Conchords,* Series 2, Episode 5**
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjXVELPIq5k

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Jemaine | Murray, Bret, this is my girlfriend Keitha. |
| 2 | Murray | What are you doing Jemaine? |
| 3 | Bret | What is that you're wearing? |
| 4 | Murray | What are you wearing? |
| 5 | Bret | Where'd you get that? |
| 6 | Keitha | Hi guys. Ha, you can call me Keith by the way. |
| 7 | Murray | It's a man's name. |
| 8 | Jemaine | It's a, it's a female name, it's got an -a on the end. |
| 9 | Murray | You got quite the accent, don't you, Kevina. |
| 10 | Keitha | Yeah I got a real Aussie accent. Ah, except it's um not as strong as it |
| 11 | | used to be since I lived here because every time I'm on the phone my |
| 12 | | with mum, she says I sound like Marilyn MONroe. |
| 13 | Murray | (to Bret) Did you catch that? |
| 14 | Keitha | What, are you deaf? Marilyn MONroe. |
| 15 | Murray | Oh, Marilyn MonROE. |
| 16 | Keitha | Yeah yeah. |
| 17 | Bret | What about her? |
| 18 | Keitha | I talk like her. |
| 19 | Jemaine | She sounds like her. |
| 20 | Murray | She does sound a bit like her. |
| 21 | Keitha | I talk like her. |
| 22 | Murray | I suppose if you squint your ears, yeah. |
| 23 | Keitha | [to Jemaine] I told you. |

The othering of Keitha by the rest of the band proceeds here through a range of strategies to which different aspects of language are central. The first attack is based on her name and the use of the feminizing suffix *-a*. They reject *Keitha* because it is

"a man's name", the objection that Bret had already voiced on the phone to Jemaine (Excerpt 2). Jemaine responds with the morphological argument that "it's a female name, it's got an -a on the end" (8). This is indeed a common enough strategy for re-gendering names in English, for example *Philip/Philippa*. But Murray undermines Jemaine's claim by deliberately misconstruing her name as *Kevina*, taking another male name with initial *k* and tacking on the suffix to create a non-existent female name. Challenging gender identity is a strongly alienating tactic aimed at holding Keitha out, breaking the relationship and bringing Jemaine back into the fold of the band.

This leads into a sustained attack which focuses on Keitha's accent for the rest of the excerpt. Murray begins with a rhetorical question (9) "You got quite the accent, don't you, Kevina". This neatly-turned phrase reifies her accent with the skewering pejorative inflection that the expression *quite the* brings to the class of objects it defines (compared with the rather straighter negativity of *quite an*). Keitha's accent is recognizable, the expression says, it is in a class that deserves attention, inspection, comment – and rejection. The accent mockery of New Zealanders by Australians debated in Excerpt 3 is here turned back on the available Australian.

Keitha agrees, pleasantly enough – "yeah, I got a real Aussie accent" (10). The label 'Aussie' locates this interestingly in socio-geographical space as an encounter between relative intimates, even though they may be intimate enemies. It is an ingroup diminutive, used primarily between Australians and New Zealanders, but may also be applied by British, South Africans and Canadians – that is, the people of the (formerly) white mother country and colonies. 'Aussie' is not a common term in the U.S. – although its reference is clear enough here. This use of an intimate's nickname marks this as an ingroup exchange between relatives or neighbours. The flip-side of the New Zealand–Australia rivalry and enmity which is the focus of the Conchords' comedy and of this chapter is their high degree of shared cultural commonality and familiarity, of which the largely-shared dialect is one dimension.

At this point Keitha asserts that her accent is less Australian than it used to be. She is, however, performing such a hearably broad accent, on Mitchell and Delbridge's (1965) continuum of Cultivated – General – Broad, that New Zealanders would find it hard to believe they are hearing a modified version of her old accent. Keitha then claims that she has taken on traits of American accent as emblematized by Marilyn Monroe, and Murray uses the occasion to correct her pronunciation of *'Monroe* with the stress on the first syllable to stress on the second, *Mon'roe*, and to challenge her claim to be sounding American.

This triggers a sharp exchange which ends in Keitha's "I told you" to Jemaine (23), indicating she has predicted to him that the others will not accept an Australian. The scene plays out through sequences which cast Keitha as someone who is

non-present or non-hearing. When Murray doesn't – or pretends not to – understand Keitha, he doesn't ask her for clarification, but addresses Bret about whether Bret has understood her (13). The scene continues with extended instances of Murray and Bret othering Keitha. Murray stage-whispers to Jemaine about Keitha in front of her as if she was not there. Keitha leaves soon after, and in the ensuing discussion the others grill Jemaine with parodic projections of how his future will unfold: has he told his mother? what will the children do? where will they spend Christmases?

Once again, dialect difference is foregrounded as central to New Zealand–Australia relations. This excerpt has no overt ideologizing of the Australian accent as evil, but it aligns with Excerpt 1's positioning of Australians as beyond the range of normal human classification and consideration: they are people who can be discussed in their own presence as if they were not there. *Contra* Jemaine's oration in Excerpt 1, this person Keitha is not a person. We see here all three of Irvine and Gal's linguistic-ideological dimensions brought to bear: the iconization of accent as essentialized Australian, the recursive nature of the links between accent and other semiotic forms, and the erasure of the mismatch between the Conchords' behaviour and their egalitarian ideology.

## CONCLUSIONS

To overview what we have found: it is clear from the analysis that one function of the *Flight of the Conchords* series has been to mediate images of New Zealanders and NZ English to Americans. Much of that is achieved through contrastive othering, so the series also mediates parallel images of Australians and AusE. The Conchords have circulated NZE in a country where it is scarcely known – but may presumably now be better known as a result of the series itself. There is a reflex therefore between the Conchords' performances and the exposure which their success has provided. NZE could well now be iconized – in groups or sectors of American society which watched the series – in the persons of the Conchords themselves. It is easy to imagine an American who wants to know what NZE sounds like being sent off to listen to a YouTube clip from the Conchords. The duo have therefore functioned as agents of some perceptual sociolinguistic change through their media exposure in the US.

The American location is crucial to the way the series operates. It is important for the framing of Australia–New Zealand relations that the series was made and aired 'on neutral ground' in the United States and not in either of the two countries themselves. It was targeted at an *American* audience and needed to elicit their understanding and acceptance. This is not a New Zealand ingroup product – in fact

before their international success, the Conchords were reputedly refused television funding in New Zealand on the grounds that their work would not have a broad enough appeal (see http://www.lumiere.net.nz/reader/item/1509).

The US location projects American tropes on to the New Zealand–Australian relation. Placement in an unfamiliar milieu is able to reveal local American practices as contingent and questionable. This is most obvious in the way the series displays clichéd practices of historical American racism. And although the 'engine' of this racism is the Australia–New Zealand relation, in the episode we examined it is Americans who are exercising it. By projecting these practices on to a group who have never experienced them, namely anglo New Zealanders, and whose skin colour makes them indistinguishable from European Americans, the character and prejudice of the practices is deconstructed, and the underlying ideology is made visible. This is an exercise of Brecht's theatrical technique (1963) of 'defamiliarisation' *(Verfremdungseffekt*) which he put to such effective political use on stage – transplanting a set of behaviours into another milieu in order to expose their character. It is the self-aware complement to Irvine and Gal's ideological erasure. The juxtaposition of the othering of Australians with Jemaine's egalitarian rhetoric in Excerpt 1 serves to display the erasure for all the audience to see, and therefore to register what it means.

We can note that the evaluation of what is going on between New Zealanders and Australians in the *Conchords* is different for the third-party Americans than for the two protagonist groups. The third-party locale, where both groups are largely unknown, neutralizes the Australian advantage of the country's greater size and strength. And in the context of the show, it more than neutralizes how Australia is seen. Here Australia is shown through a New Zealand – albeit comic – lens. The comedy rewrites the relationship from the periphery to the disadvantage of the centre.

Following distribution of the series and its circulation through multiple channels and genres, the *Conchords* has, for obvious reasons, been particularly popular in New Zealand. Its continuing circulation, then, is likely to be more in the markets that it is about than in the market that it was made for. There is undoubtedly a feedback loop to New Zealand itself through this. In that country the series probably serves a dual, contradictory set of outcomes – to focus and reinforce New Zealand–Australia antagonism, alongside exposing the mutual prejudice that this may represent precisely through the level of exaggeration with which it is carried through. Circulation of the series has certainly affected the positioning of the Conchords as performers in Australia. When they were planning a live tour there in 2012, Clement was quoted as saying they were doing it 'mostly to apologize' – not that the apology should be taken at face value (http://www.noise11.com/ news/flight-of-the-conchords-to-tour-australia-in-july-20120410).

The series also rework the relation of the centrifugal and centripetal. Linguistically and culturally, the Conchords revalue New Zealand as centre and Australia as periphery, NZE as default variety and AusE as a version of it. This is effectively an attempt, albeit temporary and local, to 're-enregister' the standing of the two varieties, in the sense of Agha (2003). NZE is given status as the pure dialect. Presentation of such an underdog-strikes-back scenario operates in terms that are here dictated both culturally and linguistically by the marginalized. They are able to the turn the tables on the usually dominant larger nation, representing a reweighting of the influence and exposure of the two countries, including their dialects. It revalues accent prejudice – it is not NZE that is a twisted version of AusE, but *vice versa*.

We should also note the role of the Conchords as characterological figures in this kind of styled, mediated performance. As Agha has argued (2003), enregistered varieties are often focused in a group or individual who act as flagbearers for the variety. The role has often been taken by comedians, certainly in New Zealand. Local comic creations of the late 20th century such as Fred Dagg (by John Clarke), Lynn of Tawa (by Ginette McDonald) and Billy T James have served as citable definitions of (respectively) rural male, urban female and Māori varieties of NZ English. Such a definitional function for NZE may now have been taken up in the US mediascape by the Conchords.

Central to the material I have presented here is the moral dimension of accent othering and its interweaving with other behaviours. As part of the othering of Australians along with their English, all manner of ills are projected on to them, both historical and contemporary, and these align with the 'evil sound' of the accent in a comprehensive act of cultural and linguistic recursion. At its most extreme, this classes Australians as completely non-persons, even non-humans. National distinctiveness is projected on to the dialect as a whole, and specifically on to the exemplary string that Jemaine uses to evidence it, even though that is bogus.

My aim has been to lay out the linguistic and social ideologies involved in these representations of New Zealand and Australian Englishes, how those are displayed, revealed and nuanced, how they are simultaneously instantiated and challenged, and what this can tell us about the place of the linguistic in the operation of ideology. We have seen Irvine and Gal's three dimensions of linguistic ideology playing out in the Conchords' performances: the iconization of accent as diagnostic of national affiliation, and the moral valuation of accent and other linguistic difference; the recursiveness which reinforces sociolinguistic evaluations at different levels of language (phonology, orthography, onomastics) and across other semiotic modes such as dress and physical objects; and the erasure, within the comic script, of behaviours and language which clash with overt statements, here concerning equality. These stylized media representations contribute to sociolinguistic characterization, and perhaps to sociolinguistic change.

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