THE ‘AUSTRALIAN INTERVIEW TUNE’ IN AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH INTERVIEWS: SOME HRT MYTHS DEBUNKED?

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Abstract

The question of the omnipresence of the HRT in Australian English (AusE) is investigated upon a sample of a mixed AusE-AmE (American English) radio interview. The investigation focuses on the distribution of HRT events in the interview by Australian speakers interspersed with the AmE speech of the interviewee. It tries to answer the question whether a non-HRT speaker triggers a reduction of HRT events on the side of the interviewer. The findings will be interpreted for a new positioning of the HRT as a socio-cultural phenomenon (and thus object of inquiry for sociolinguistics) and/or as an affective cognitive phenomenon (and thus object of inquiry for psycholinguistics).

Key words

intonation, high rising tone, HRT events, discourse quotatives, Australian English, conversation, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics

1 Introduction

This study originated in conception and idea from data work on the wealth of recordings in Australian English collected by Michel in Australia which subsequently led to her description and analysis of the Australian ethos (Michel 2009). In this study, the High Rising Terminal (also: High Rising Tone, henceforth: HRT) falls within a range of observations of characteristics considered typical for Australian English (in the following: AusE, for an overview cf. Burridge & Mulder 1999 and Blair & Collins 2001) such as the abundance of hypocoristics (Simpson 2001), the group bonding function of the concept of mateship (Rendle-Short 2009), the use of ludicity with language (Sussex 2004), especially in spoken AusE and the frequent swearing (Dabke 1977, Wierzbicka 2002). The emerging picture of the Australian ethos of a society which formed under harshest conditions in a relatively short time-span is one of constant reflection of the self within a peer group, typical of egalitarian societies (which the “white” population in Australia represented from its foundation beginning in 1788).

This reflection is expressed in frequent high rises even for assertive and declarative statements which create the impression of a constant self-questioning tone that, on the surface, readily invites disagreement and disapproval. It marks