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STRENGTHENING AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH THROUGH TELEVISION SERIES

A comparison of phonetic features in Australian English in
two Australian television series launched in 2001 and 2022

TIIVISTELMÄ

Jenni Tikkanen: Australianenglannin vahvistaminen televisiosarjojen avulla: vertailu australianenglannin äänteellisistä piirteistä kahdessa australialaisessa televisiosarjassa vuosilta 2001 ja 2022

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Amerikanenglannin vaikutus eri medioissa, kuten sosiaalisessa mediassa, on lisääntynyt etenkin viimeisen kahdenkymmenen vuoden aikana. Tämä aiheuttaa uhan muille englannin kielen varieteeteille, kuten australianenglannille, sillä amerikanenglanti alkaa hiljalleen vaikuttaa muiden varieteettien ääntämiseen, kielioppiin sekä sanastoon. Monet aiemmat tutkimukset keskittyvät australianenglannin amerikkalaistumiseen, jossa australianenglanti alkaa mukautua lähemmäs amerikanenglantia. Tämä tutkimus pyrkii kuitenkin selvittämään, onko australianenglannin ääntämisessä, kuten vokaalien pituuksissa sekä [ə]-äänteen käytössä australialaisissa televisiosarjoissa tapahtunut muutosta viimeisen kahdenkymmenen vuoden aikana ja voisiko mahdollinen muutos viitata australianenglannin vahvistamiseen eli kielen ainutlaatuisten äänteellisten piirteiden korostamiseen.

Tutkimusaineistona käytettiin kahta australialaista televisiosarjaa, joista ensimmäinen on nimeltään McLeod's Daughters vuodelta 2001 ja jälkimmäinen on nimeltään Savage River vuodelta 2022. Valittujen aineistojen sisältöä tutkittiin fonetiikan menetelmiä hyödyntämällä ja tutkimuksessa keskityttiin aineistoissa esiintyvien sanojen äänteellisiin piirteisiin, kuten vokaalien pituuksiin sekä [ə]-äänteen käyttöön. Tutkimuksessa eriteltiin kahden televisiosarjan välisten samojen sanojen äänteellisten piirteiden eroavaisuuksia sekä vertailtiin aineistojen sisältöä amerikanenglannin ja standardin australianenglannin äänteellisiin piirteisiin. Lisäksi tutkimuksessa tarkkailtiin, tukeeko aineisto teoriaa australianenglannin vahvistamisesta mediassa.

Tutkimus osoittaa, että australianenglannin ääntäminen on muuttunut viimeisen kahdenkymmenenvuoden aikana australialaisissa televisiosarjoissa. Muutos näkyy etenkin [ə]-äänteen käytön lisääntymisessä sekä vokaalien pituuksissa. Tulosten mukaan molempien televisiosarjojen ääntäminen on lähempänä standardia australianenglantia kuin amerikanenglantia. Lisäksi tulokset näyttäisivät osittain tukevan australianenglannin vahvistamista televisiosarjoissa. Tutkimuksessa pohditaan myös television roolia kielen vahvistamisessa. Tämä tutkimus osoittaa, että lisää tutkimusta tarvitaan, jotta saadaan luotua laajempaa käsitystä television ja muiden medioiden vaikutuksista kielen varieteetin äänteellisten piirteiden ylläpitämisessä sekä vahvistamisessa, esimerkiksi amerikanenglannin vahvaa vaikutusta vastaan.

Avainsanat: australianenglanti, foneettinen muutos, televisio, kielen vahvistaminen

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ABSTRACT

Jenni Tikkanen: Strengthening Australian English Through Television Series: A comparison of phonetic features in Australian English in two Australian television series launched in 2001 and 2022

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The role of American English in different forms of media, such as social media, has increased especially during the last twenty years. This causes a threat to other varieties of English, such as Australian English, because American English begins to affect the pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary of other varieties. Many previous studies concentrate on Australian English in terms of Americanization, in which Australian English accommodates towards American English. However, this study examines if the pronunciation of Australian English, such as vowel length and the use of schwa, in Australian television series has changed during the last twenty years and if a possible change could indicate the phenomenon of language strengthening in which the phonetic features unique for Australian English are emphasized in media representation.

As materials, this study utilizes two Australian television series, which are McLeod's Daughters, launched in 2001, and Savage River, launched in 2022. This study utilizes phonetic methods and focuses on the phonetic features of words, such as vowel length and the use of schwa. This study investigates differences in phonetic features between similar words found in the two series and compares the phonetic features in the two series with those of American English and Standard Australian English. Moreover, this study observes if the collected data supports the phenomenon of language strengthening.

The study shows that the pronunciation of Australian English has changed during the last twenty years in Australian television series. This change can be seen in the increase of schwa and in vowel lengths. The results indicate that the pronunciation in both of the two series is closer to Standard Australian English than American English. Furthermore, the results would seem to slightly support the strengthening of Australian English in television series. This study also ponders on the role of television in language strengthening and notes that more research is necessary to improve understanding of the influence of television and other forms of media in sustaining phonetic features and strengthening a variation of a language, for example, against the strong influence of American English.

Keywords: Australian English, phonetic change, television, language strengthening

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Literature review	3
2.1 History of Australian English.....	3
2.2 Australian English and national identity	4
2.3 The weakening of Australian English	5
2.4 Language strengthening	5
3. Materials and methods	6
3.1 Materials.....	6
3.2 Methods.....	8
4. Results	9
4.1 Phonetic differences between the series.....	10
4.2 Similarities with AmE and SAusE	12
4.3 Strengthening AusE in television series.....	15
5. Discussion	16
6. Conclusion.....	19
Works Cited.....	21

1. INTRODUCTION

The present study investigates phonetic features, such as vowel length and the use of schwa, in Australian English and how they have changed during the past twenty-years in Australian media representation. The main reason for this study is the increasing influence of American English on other varieties of English during the twenty-first century. In the beginning of the twenty-first century the role of American English was not as wide as it has become during the twenty years leading to this day, because during the twenty-year time gap, the role of American English has increased in different forms of media such as television, YouTube, Spotify, social media, and podcast. Furthermore, the interactive perspective of social media might have stronger effects on phonetic change. As Taylor (2000, 335) also states, young people are influenced by American English more, because of the interactive aspects of computers whereas earlier generations experienced American English through passive TV watching.

First studies on Australian English surfaced in the 1960s (Yao & Collins 2019). This shows that research is rather new and still searching for more depth in relation to research topics. Most of the studies focus on the history and development of Australian English (Taylor 2000; Yao & Collins 2019; Delbridge 1999). The growing influence of American English in different forms of media is the reason why there has been discussion among scholars whether American English has gradually begun to affect the pronunciation and vocabulary of other varieties of English, such as Australian English (Blair & Collins 2001; Blackwood Ximenes, Shaw and Carignan 1999; Korhonen 2019; Taylor 2000).

There are several studies investigating the influence of American English on Australian English in terms of Americanization (Collins & Blair 2001; Korhonen 2019). However, there is little study about the actions against the influence of American English, such as language strengthening. The term language strengthening in this study refers to the increase of phonetic features unique for Australian English in language representation, such as in television series.

These unique features in comparison to American English are, for example, the use of longer vowels, such as /ɛ/ as in “said” instead of /e/ as in “dress” or /o:/ as in “sawed” instead of /ɔ/ as in “thought” (Blackwood Ximenes, Shaw and Carignan 2017, 364). The strengthening of Australian English is relevant because the language is an important part of the identity of Australians. As Collins and Blair (2001) state, the linguistic identity of Australians has been created during the years following the colonial history of Australia. Moreover, Cox and Palethorpe (2007, 341) state that Standard Australian English is used by many Australians and that it functions as a “marker of national identity”.

In this study, I will compare the phonetic features in Australian English (AusE) between two Australian television series launched in 2001 and 2022. The first series is called McLeod’s Daughters (2001) and the second Savage River (2022). I will examine whether the phonetic features, such as vowel length, in Australian English have changed during this period and if so, are they closer to American English (AmE) or Standard Australian English (SAusE) in these two television shows. The comparison of the phonetic features of the television shows with AmE and SAusE will enable the investigation of the assumptions of the possible language strengthening in Australian English in Australian television shows during the twenty-first century. This study is needed for the purpose of gathering more information about the influence of American English on Australian English and about the possible language strengthening of Australian English as a counterreaction to the strong role of American English. The results of this study can be applied to further research on the strengthening of Australian English and research on how television and other media could be utilized in the revival of varieties of English against the influence of American English. The research questions in this study are the following:

1. Are there phonetic differences, such as differences in vowel length and the use of schwa, between the language used in McLeod's *Daughters* (2001) and *Savage River* (2022), if yes, what phonetic differences are there?
2. Are the phonetic features in McLeod's *Daughters* (2001) and *Savage River* (2022) closer to AmE or SAusE?
3. Does the collected data support the phenomenon of the strengthening of AusE in television shows during the twenty-first century?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section begins with background on the creation and development of Australian English and the relationship between language and identity. Then this section discusses the effects of American English on Australian English and language strengthening.

2.1 History of Australian English

The birth of Australian English originates from the times under the British colony in the late eighteenth century until the twentieth century. According to Delbridge (1999, 259) the British settlers brought English to Australia in 1788. The early speakers of Australian English were the children of the colonists (Zuraiq & Amer 2023, 152). Furthermore, according to the founder of the study on Australian English, A. G. Mitchell, Australian English was formed during the fifty years after the beginning of the colonial times (Blair & Collins 2001, 2). This would indicate that Australian English has been created during the presence of British settlers and therefore Australian English and British English would share qualities such as pronunciation. The apparent difference between Australian English and American English is that Australian English and British English share certain patterns in their pronunciation. However, Australian

English became independent in the twentieth century with the rise of its own literacy and discussion on the lexicon (Yao & Collins 2019). Therefore, Australian English has been able to differentiate itself from British English and create a self-image of its own.

2.2 Australian English and national identity

As Collins and Blair (2001,1) comment, Australia does not yet have a clear self-image although the linguistic identity of Australians has been present since the colonial times. A basic assumption would be that any language is an important part of the self-image of a person, because it creates a bond with the speakers of the same language and therefore is a part of a person's identity and feeling of belonging to a group. In the case of Australian English, the speakers have had a rocky relationship with the language. Delbridge (1999, 259) states that in the 1940s Australian English was considered by Australians as “deformed and objectional product” with “its vocabulary outlandish, and its accent regrettable”. The development of a new variety might cause concern and doubt in the speakers of the variety because the variety undergoes multiple changes, such as changes in phonetic features, sentence structures and vocabulary, which might indicate chaos and uncertainty. However, after the variety begins to have structure and clearness, the speakers’ attitudes towards the variety might also change. Moreover, Yao and Collins (2019) note that the use of Australian English in forms of entertainment, such as television, created a self-confidence in the Australian English. The role that, for example, television has had in the acceptance of Australian English is significant. This raises the question of how the public representation of a language, or a variety of a language also affects the feeling of identity of its speakers.

2.3 The weakening of Australian English

The worries relating to the weakening of Australian English emerged at the end of the twentieth century. As Taylor (2000, 324) observes, in the late twentieth century, Australians began to be concerned with American English replacing Australian English in terms of, for example, vocabulary and spelling. As Blair and Collins (2001, 4) state, developments, such as the Internet, have increased the influence of American English on Australian English. I would assume that the new forms of media have boosted the influence even more in the twenty-first century because the presence of American English has increased. This is supported by Korhonen (2019, 197) showing that Australians blame TV, movies, and computers for the influence of American English on Australian English. The effect of the influence of American English is visible in the lexicon with words, such as *fries*, and in the grammar, such as the use of passive, of Australian English (Yao & Collins 2019). There has been heated debate about the influence of American English on Australian English and many scholars argue that the influence has been exaggerated. As Blair and Collins (2001, 4) note, people differ in their opinions about “the extent and impact of American influence on AusE”. Furthermore, Korhonen (2019, 193) observes that the public and linguists view the influence and effect of American English differently, because according to the public the effects are viewed as stronger. This would suggest that the public view of the effects is seen as more threatening than it is from the point of view of professionals and researchers.

2.4 Language strengthening

The identity of Australians is the main reason for the desire to keep Australian English vital and distinguished from other varieties of English, especially American English. Language strengthening could be a means to decrease the strong influence of American English on Australian English and therefore even establish a stronger language identity. In this study

language strengthening refers to the increase of phonetic features unique for Australian English in, for example, television representation. According to Cox and Palethorpe (2007, 342) in comparison with other Englishes, vowels vary more than consonants in Australian English. Furthermore, Blair and Collins (2001, 8) state that the focus of phonetic studies has been on vowels, because vowels are most prone to phonetic change. This indicates that vowels are one of the unique features of Australian English and their variation might be easy to notice because of their wider variation. This suggests that vowels could be utilized as agents for language strengthening. In television series, for example, the active molding of vowels and especially vowel lengths in the lines of the actors might be a means to strive for language strengthening in television representation. Moreover, for example, pronoun choices have been actively adjusted in media representation to establish non-sexist language use (Wrightson and Pauwels 2001). This raises the question if media, such as television, could also be utilized as an agent to actively mold the use of language to strive for language strengthening.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The materials of this study are two Australian television series. The materials section gives reasoning for the selection and some important background on the two series. The methods section explains the process of the study.

3.1 Materials

As my materials I will use two Australian television series. The reason for examining television series is that they are scripted, which might allow the language used in the television series to be conscientiously or actively molded. I am interested in the molding of the language because molding allows the language to be used, for example for the goal of strengthening a variety,

which is what I am studying. The two Australian television series I chose are called McLeod's Daughters, which was launched in the year 2001, and Savage River, which was launched in the year 2022. My choice of the television series has two main reasons. First, I chose two series from the twenty-first century, because I am focusing on the phonetic change during that time period. This time period is the main focus, because during the twenty-first century the influence of American English has increased significantly with the rise and popularity of new forms of media, such as YouTube and social media. Second, I want to utilize two television series with the longest possible time gap between them during the twenty-first century to notice more variation in the language used in the television series. Furthermore, they are both accessible to me, because I have McLeod's Daughters (2001) on DVD and Savage River (2022) can be found on one of the public streaming services in Finland called MTV Katsomo.

The episodes last for about forty-five minutes each, however, I used merely fifteen minutes of the first episodes of the two series, because I focused on the phonetic features of all characters, which produced a considerable amount of data. McLeod's Daughters (2001) included the pronunciation of three characters from which two were the main characters Tess and Claire who were the characters most actively included in the first episode. Savage River (2022) included the pronunciation of six characters. In the case where the same word occurred twice or more in one series, I focused on the pronunciation more carefully and attempted to create a general phonetic transcription that was close to the pronunciation of the majority of the characters. However, the characters in each series respectively did have a similar pronunciation and no significant differences were found in the pronunciation of the words, which creates consistency for the data. Furthermore, the focus on all characters allowed to gain a better understanding of the general pronunciation of the same words in Australian English in the two series.

The shows have a similar feature, because they both take place in small towns in rural settings in Southern Australia, which might create a common ground for the pronunciation. McLeod's Daughters (2001) is an Australian drama television show that sets in a cattle station in South Australia called Drover's Run. The two main characters are sisters named Claire and Tess McLeod who inherit the property from their father and begin to run the farm together while encountering incidents relating to both their personal lives and farm life. The series is exceptional for it follows an all-female workforce showing that females can work hard and survive on their own without the help of men. The series has run the number one drama spot in Australia and has been nominated for, for example, the most popular Australian Drama Series. The show has also been popular in other parts of the world, such as in Europe, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Savage River (2022) is an Australian crime drama, which takes place in Victoria, which is in the south-east corner of Australia. The show tells the story of Miki Anderson, who returns to her hometown after ten years in prison and wants to live her normal life again. However, a murder is committed, and Miki is the main suspect, which is why she must prove her innocence.

3.2 Methods

I began gathering data by watching the first episodes of the first seasons of the two series and creating transcriptions for the first fifteen minutes of each show. After this I compared the transcriptions, searched for similar words, and took into consideration the words in their textual context. This was important, because the pronunciation of words can vary according to the context of the words, for example *you look like your mother* (McLeod's Daughters 2001), and *you look well* (Savage River 2022) have similar meaning for the word *look*. After examining the words, I found thirty-two similar words, which is enough for a small-scale study. The words include, for example, pronouns, adverbs, verbs, and nouns, which I grouped together to help

analyzing the words, because words from the same word group have similar phonetic features, such as longer vowels in the pronunciation of pronouns or the sound /t/ in words such as *can't* and *shouldn't*. The grouping also created a structure for the phonetic transcription tables that I created for the data, which helps to search for a certain word from a certain word group from the tables.

After collecting the words, I closely examined the pronunciation of the words in the television series and created phonetic transcriptions for the words in McLeod's *Daughters* (2001) and *Savage River* (2022). Then I compared the phonetic transcriptions from McLeod's *Daughters* (2001) with the phonetic transcriptions from *Savage River* (2022) to examine the phonetic differences between the two series. I created a table with all the words I collected, and I color coded the words that differed in their phonetic features, with green. Then I created phonetic transcriptions for the same word lists in AmE and SAusE. I created the phonetic transcription for AmE with the dictionary by Cambridge University Press and Assessment (2024) and the phonetic transcription for SAusE with the help of Cox and Fletcher (2017). After this, I compared the phonetic transcriptions from McLeod's *Daughters* (2001) and *Savage River* (2022) with the phonetic transcriptions of the same words in AmE and SAusE to examine if the phonetic features of the words, such as vowel length and the use of schwa, in McLeod's *Daughters* (2001) and *Savage River* (2022) is closer to AmE or SAusE. I created a table and color coded the words with blue and yellow according to the phonetic features. Blue marks the pronunciation that is closer to AmE and yellow marks the pronunciation that is closer to SAusE.

4. RESULTS

The results of this study are divided into three subsections and each section focuses on one research question. The subsections are in the same order as the research questions in section one so that the first section covers the first question.

4.1 Phonetic differences between the series

The first research question of this study aims to examine if there are phonetic differences, such as differences in vowel length and in the use of schwa, between the language used in McLeod's Daughters (2001) and that of Savage River (2022) and to discover what phonetic differences there are. The results show that there are phonetic differences between McLeod's Daughters (2001) and Savage River (2022). Table 1 shows all the collected words and the words that had phonetic differences between the two series are highlighted with green.

Table 1

Word	McLeod's Daughters (2001)	Savage River (2022)
I	/aɪ/	/aɪ/
You	/jʊ:/	/jʊ:/
She	/ʃi:/	/ʃi:/
Her	/ə/	/hɜ:/
We	/wi:/	/wi:/
Here	/hiə/	/hiə/
After	/a:ftə/	/a:ftə/
That	/ðæt/	/ðæt/
This	/ðis/	/ðis/
Really	/ri:lɪ/	/ri:li/
Guess	/gɛs/	/gɛs/
Hello	/hələʊ/	/hələʊ/
Some	/səm/	/səm/
Yeah	/jɛ:ə/	/jɛ:ə/
Just	/dʒʌst/	/dʒʌst/
Like	/laɪk/	/laɪk/
What	/wɒ/	/wɒə/
Can't	/kɑ:n/	/kɑ:ə/
Don't	/dʌʊn/	/dʌʊn/
Didn't	/dɪdən/	/dɪdən/
Doesn't	/dəzn/	/dəzən/
Believe	/bəli:v/	/bəli:v/
Know	/nəʊ/	/nəʊ/
Have	/əv/	/həv/
Was	/wɒs/	/wɒs/
Look	/lʊk/	/lʊk/
Remember	/ɪmɛmbə/	/ɪmɛmbə/
Mom	/mʌm/	/mʌm/
Hand	/hænd/	/hænd/
People	/pi:pəl/	/pi:pəl/
Everyone	/evriwɒn/	/evriwʌn/
Money	/mʌni:/	/mʌni:/

The results can be divided into five differences. The first difference is the h-dropping. In McLeod's Daughters (2001) the sound /h/ is dropped in words, such as *her* and *here*, whereas in Savage River (2022) the sound /h/ appears in the same words. The second difference is the change of the sound /v/ as in the word *what*. In McLeod's Daughters (2001) the sound /v/ is present and noticeable in words, such as *what* and *was*, whereas in Savage River (2022) the

sound /ɒ/ has a schwa following as in the word *what* and the sound /ɒ/ is replaced with a schwa sound /ə/ in the word *was*. The third difference is the t-dropping. In McLeod's Daughters (2001) the sound /t/ occurs in words, such as *that* and *doesn't*, whereas in Savage River (2022) the sound /t/ is replaced with either schwa /ə/ as in the word *that* or the pronunciation stops at the previous letter as in the word *doesn't* in /n/. The fourth distinction is the use of schwa. In Savage River (2022) the use of schwa is noticeably more active in comparison to McLeod's Daughters (2001). The use of schwa appears in Savage River (2022) in words, such as *like*, *can't* and *really*, whereas in McLeod's Daughters (2001) the same words do not have the schwa sound. The fifth and final difference between the two series is the length of the vowels. The data would suggest that McLeod's Daughters (2001) has longer vowels such as /i:/ in the word *really*, /i/ in the word *here* and schwa in *I* and in Savage River (2022) the sound /ɪə/ in *really*, /ɪ/ in *here* and /ɪ/ in *I*. However, the word *her* has a schwa in McLeod's Daughters (2001) and an /ɜ:/ sound in Savage River (2022), which would indicate a change towards longer vowels.

4.2 Similarities with AmE and SAusE

The second research question aims to discover whether the phonetic features in McLeod's Daughters (2001) and Savage River (2022) are closer to the phonetic features of AmE or SAusE. Table 2 shows the collected words in which the similarities with AmE are highlighted with blue and the similarities with SAusE are highlighted with yellow. Cases where the phonetic transcription is similar in both AmE and SAusE were not color coded either way. The phonetic transcriptions for AmE were created with the dictionary by Cambridge University Press and Assessment (2024) and the transcriptions for SAusE with the help of Cox and Fletcher (2017).

Table 2

Word	McLeod's Daughters (2001)	Savage River (2023)
I	/aə/	/aɪ/
You	/ju:/	/ju:/
She	/ʃi:/	/ʃi:/
Her	/əɪ/	/hɜ:/
We	/wi:/	/wi:/
Here	/hiə/	/hiə/
After	/a:ftə/	/a:ftə/
That	/ðæt/	/ðæə/
This	/ðis/	/ðis/
Really	/ri:li/	/riəli/
Guess	/ges/	/ges/
Hello	/həlbəʊ/	/həlbəʊ/
Some	/səm/	/səm/
Yeah	/je:ə/	/je:ə/
Just	/dʒʌst/	/dʒʌst/
Like	/laɪk/	/laək/
What	/wɒ/	/wɒə/
Can't	/kɑ:n/	/kɑ:ə/
Don't	/dʌʊn/	/dʌʊn/
Didn't	/dɪdəʊn/	/dɪdəʊn/
Doesn't	/dəznt/	/dəzən/
Believe	/bəli:v/	/bəli:v/
Know	/nəʊ/	/nəʊ/
Have	/əv/	/həv/
Was	/wɒs/	/wəs/
Look	/lʊk/	/lʊk/
Remember	/ɪməmbə/	/ɪməmbə/
Mom	/mʌm/	/mʌm/
Hand	/hænd/	/hænd/
People	/pi:pəl/	/pi:pəl/
Everyone	/evriwɒn/	/evriwʌn/
Money	/mʌni:/	/mʌni:/

The results seem to include some words, such as *this*, *just*, *have*, *look*, *mom* and *hand* that do not correspond to the phonetic features of merely AmE or SAusE, because these words have similar phonetic features in both the AmE and SAusE phonetic transcriptions. Another issue is that some of the phonetic transcriptions of the words in the two series have differences, such as in the words *can't*, *what* and *really*. In these instances, the words are color coded according to

the phonetic transcription that the words are the closest to whether that of AmE or SAusE. Most of these words consist of unique phonetic features, such as vowel sound, which separate the words from AmE and are therefore closer to SAusE. The word *can't* in both two series is closer to SAusE because of the long vowel sound /a:/. The word is pronounced /kænt/ in AmE and /ka:nt/ in SAusE. Here the pronunciation of the word is similar except for the vowel sound. The word *what* is pronounced /hwʌt/ in AmE and /wɒt/ in SAusE. Neither of the two series include the /h/ sound at the beginning of the pronunciation. Therefore, the pronunciation is closer to the SAusE because the /ɒ/ sound is the feature that separates the two transcriptions. In the case of the word *really* the use of the /ɪ/ sound creates a pronunciation that is closer to the SAusE /riəli/ than the AmE equivalent /riəli/.

The results do show that the phonetic features in McLeod's Daughters (2001) have more phonetic features that correspond to those of AmE than Savage River (2022). McLeod's Daughters (2001) has five words that have a similar phonetic transcription with AmE whereas Savage River (2022) has three words that correspond to the phonetic transcriptions of AmE. There appears to be five phonetic features that are closer to AmE in the data collected from both series. The first feature is the sound /ʌ/ as in the word *everyone* in Savage River (2022). The second feature is the sound /t/ at the end of the word in words, such as *that* and *doesn't* in McLeod's Daughters (2001). The third feature is the sound /ɒ/ in the word *know in* both McLeod's Daughters (2001) and Savage River (2022), which is replaced by the schwa sound in SAusE. The fourth feature is the use of schwa in the word *her* in McLeod's Daughters (2001) instead of the sound /ɜ:/ as in Savage River (2022) that is a unique feature of SAusE. The fifth and final phonetic feature that corresponds more strongly with AmE is the sound /ɪ/ in words such as *like* in McLeod's Daughters (2001) and *I* in Savage River (2022) instead of the schwa sound that is used in SAusE.

Although there are some phonetic features in the data collected that correspond to the phonetic features of AmE, the results strongly indicate that the data in both McLeod's Daughters (2001) and Savage River (2022) is closer to the phonetic features of SAusE than AmE. The phonetic features that are equivalent to SAusE have five clear attributes. The first feature is the deletion of the sound /t/ at the end of words, such as *didn't* and *don't* in both McLeod's Daughters (2001) and in Savage River (2022). The second feature is the use of the sound /ɪ/ as in *remember* in both series, which is a darker sound than the sound /r/, because it is further back when mouthing the sound. The third feature is the use of the sound /ɒ/ as in the words *everyone* McLeod's Daughters (2001) and *was* McLeod's Daughters (2001) instead of the AmE equivalent /ʌ/. The fourth feature is the use of schwa and /r/ dropping especially at the end of the words in words such as *here*, *after* and *remember* in both series whereas AmE adds the sound /r/ after the schwa sound in the same words. The fifth feature is the length of the vowels. In SAusE the vowels are longer than in AmE and this can be seen in the data collected in this study as well. The data shows a comparison between SAusE and AmE, because SAusE prefers the sound /ɑ:/ instead of AmE /æ/ in words such as *after* and *can't*, the sound /ɜ:/ instead of AmE /u/ as in the word *you*, and the sound /i:/ instead of AmE /i/ as in the words *really*, *believe* and *we*.

4.3 Strengthening AusE in television series

The third research question relates to the phenomenon of language strengthening. The results show that McLeod's Daughters (2001) has slightly more phonetic features that correspond to the phonetic features in AmE in comparison to the phonetic features in Savage River (2022). Although the data does not indicate a radical change in the language used in the two series towards SAusE during the twenty-year time gap, the data does show a slight change towards

SAusE. Moreover, this could suggest that AusE has been strengthened in television representation.

Another factor that might support the phenomenon of language strengthening is the consistency of phonetic features unique for AusE in the data. Cox, Palethorpe, and Bentink (2014) remark that the pronunciation of the /i:/ sound has become stronger among young people, because the sound is an important and unique feature in Australian English. The data collected in this study would seem to support the vitality of the sound /i:/ as in words *believe*, *we*, *she*, and *money*. Another unique feature is the deletion of /r/ at the end of the words. As Zuraiq and Amer (2023, 158) notice, a unique feature in the pronunciation of Australian English is the deletion of the /r/ sound at the end of the words, because Australian English is non-rhotic. The data collected does show that the dropping of the /r/ sound appears in words such as *here*, *there* and *remember*. Furthermore, the increase in the use of schwa at the end of the words in Savage River (2022) in comparison to McLeod's Daughters (2001) could suggest that the deletion of the /r/ sound could be actively molded to emphasize the unique features of non-rhotic Australian English.

5. DISCUSSION

The results show that there are phonetic differences between McLeod's Daughters (2001) and Savage River (2022). This might suggest that the phonetic features in Australian English in television representation have changed during the twenty-year time gap between the two series. These changes in the phonetic features appear especially in the use of schwa, which has increased over the years and in the vowel lengths, which have become shorter in some words. The increase in the use of schwa would suggest that the data is closer to SAusE, however, the shortening of vowel lengths would suggest that the data is closer to AmE. Nevertheless, the results on the similarity of the phonetic features with AmE and SAusE would suggest that the

language in the two series is closer to SAusE and the number of phonetic features similar to the features in AmE in the two series is not significant. The results should be analyzed by being aware of the settings of the two series. Both series take place in Southern Australia and in the countryside instead of bigger cities. This could suggest that the series attempt to show real Australian English and maintain a small-town appearance in the series. From this perspective, the influence of AmE would have been less intense in smaller towns because there might be less exposure to people that speak AmE, such as travelers. This raises a question whether the producers of the two series have decided to place the television shows in smaller cities to show the Australian English and its unique features, which could suggest the possibility of language strengthening in television representation.

The results of this study seem to support other research on the rather small amount of influence that American English has had on Australian English (Korhonen 2019; Taylor 2000). The results indicate that the phonetic features unique for Australian English and the state of Australian English have remained vital under the strong influence of American English. Korhonen (2019, 201-02) states that the influence of AmE on AusE is most visible in vocabulary and that the phonetic features in AusE do not show any indication of Americanization. The results of this study seem to support that the presence of Americanization in the phonetic features in AusE is not very strong. Moreover, I would argue that the influence on vocabulary is most notable because changes in pronunciation often occur on an unconscious level, which might be more difficult to notice. Trudgill (2014, 217) confirms that phonetic change is a slow process that occurs without people conscientiously realizing the change. This could also indicate that during the twenty-year time gap between the two series there has been gradual change in Australian English towards SAusE, however, the change occurs on the unconscious level. Therefore, Australians might not realize the change and the vitality of AusE,

which is the reason Australians are more concerned about the influence of American English on Australian English than the influence is from the point of view of academics.

The data has increased interest in the use of television representation to establish language strengthening. Trudgill (2014, 220) suggests that language change and more specifically phonetic change would require interaction, which is not possible through television. This would indicate that television does not affect language change, however, Stuart-Smith et al. (2013, 528) state that television might affect language change if the person watching television is engaged with the television on an emotional level, such as talking to the television while watching the show or naming a television show as the person's favorite show. This would suggest that the role of television in phonetic change is controversial and not easy to interpret. Nonetheless, television could affect phonetic change if the person truly is engaged, for example, with a television series. Furthermore, why could media or television not be utilized to emphasize certain phonetic features of a variety of a language to establish language strengthening? The role that television has in phonetic change and language strengthening requires further study to understand the volume of effects that television might have on language. This field would be important especially, because the use of streaming services, such as Netflix and Viaplay, is increasing and therefore television might have an even stronger influence on phonetic change than before.

Limitations of this study are the quantity of data, diversity of data, limited personal experience in the field of phonology and the natural change in language. Firstly, the quantity of data in this study is rather small, which might affect the accuracy of the results, because more data would be necessary to receive a wider understanding of the current state of Australian English and allow the results to be generalizable. Secondly, the lack of diversity in the data might also be a drawback because both series set in Southern Australia. Other series that set in other parts of Australia might offer more diverse data. Thirdly, my personal experience in the

field of phonology is rather scarce, which might affect the results of this study. Furthermore, natural changes in language must be taken into consideration. Zuraiq and Amer (2023) observe differences between two phonetic transcription systems for the vowel sounds in AusE, which are MD (1964) created by Mitchell and Delbridge and HCE (1997) created by Harrington, Cox, and Evans. Their comparison of these two systems shows a movement in Australian English vowels towards longer vowel sounds, such as HCE (1997) the sound /u:/ instead of MD (1964) sound /u/ and changes in diphthongs, such as HCE (1997) /æ/ instead of MD (1964) /aɪ/ (Zurairq & Amer 2023, 153). The data collected in this study shows that language might do a swinging motion between phonetic features, because language might be undergoing natural change. In McLeod's *Daughters* (2001) *I* is pronounced with a schwa, which is closer to HCE (1997) system whereas *Savage River* (2022) the pronunciation of *I* is closer to MD (1964). This does not necessarily indicate a weakening of a language but a natural change in the pronunciation over time.

6. CONCLUSION

In this study, I have compared the phonetic features in Australian English between two Australian television series. This study shows that the phonetic features in AusE have slightly changed during the twenty-year time gap between the two series, however, the phonetic features in the two series remain closer to SAusE than AmE. This might indicate that the growing influence of American English on different forms of media, such as YouTube, has not significantly affected the phonetic features in Australian English. Further this study provides more depth and a balancing effect on the field that studies Australian English in terms of Americanization, because this study focuses on the actions against the influence of American English through language strengthening. The results seem to support the phenomenon of language strengthening slightly, which appears to be important from the point of view of the

identity of Australians. This study has also aimed to understand the possibilities that television might have in language strengthening.

The current study gives valuable insight to the current state of Australian English in television representation and the data collected gives more insight to previous studies on Australian English (Taylor 2000; Blackwood Ximenes, Shaw, and Carignan 1999; Korhonen 2019; Yao & Collins 2019). The results of this study can be applied to further research on the influence of American English on Australian English and on the strengthening of Australian English. Nonetheless, further study is required on the influence of television and other media in phonetic change and the possibilities that media might have in strengthening a variety of a language. Another interesting field of study would be the benefits of media in the revival of unique phonetic features of other varieties of English against the strong role of American English.

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