

ABSTRACT

While previous research has explored the relationship between national identity and language in Australia, it has not been examined on language data through history. This dissertation thus aims to trace linguistic manifestations of emerging local identity on a corpus of canonical Australian literature from 1830 up to the present. The corpus is divided into four periods based on the stages of development of postcolonial Englishes as per Schneider's Dynamic model (2007). The central hypothesis is that local identity manifests linguistically in an increased presence of the vernacular and domestic frames of reference in periods of heightened nationalism. Consequently, the nature of this study is interdisciplinary, combining linguistics with literary and cultural studies to offer a complex picture of the relationship between language and identity via a quantitative as well as qualitative analysis.

The quantitative analysis concentrates on keywords, exploring both keywords generated from the corpus, using an analogically created corpus of British literature as reference, and culturally significant keywords, following Wierzbicka's (1997) theory of every culture having a set of keywords that reflect its core values. The generated lists reflect the socio-historical and cultural context, revealing common environments and preoccupations of the period, thus providing more context for the cultural keywords analysis. In general, among the cultural keywords, the correlation between frequency and periods of increased nationalism holds, but only *mate* and *bush* are sufficiently frequent to draw any meaningful conclusions. Besides the frequency correlation, most of the keywords also appear to have acquired their specifically Australian meanings mainly in the nationalistic period around the Federation in 1901. Changes in their meaning associations or contexts of usage appear to reflect societal developments.

The qualitative analysis consists of close readings of two novels from each period (one by a female and one by a male author), where the language is examined more generally with respect to specifically Australian features. The analysis confirms that the degree to which the authors use the Australian vernacular reflects the socio-historical and cultural context. The discussion also shows that the distinctive Australian landscape has from the beginning been one of the most important themes in Australian literature that is strongly tied to the national character, which is linguistically foregrounded through all the periods, although in varying degrees depending on the same factors as the presence of the vernacular.

Keywords: language and identity, Australian English, cultural keywords, Australian literature, corpus linguistics, close reading, stylistics of landscape