

Unwinding the verbose skein: Editorial influence on the Hansard record

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Hansard presents a potential goldmine for researchers in linguistics, giving us access to records of spoken data over an extended period of time. But how close to spoken language is it really? A Select Committee of the UK House of Commons in 1907 defined the Hansard report as “... one which, though not strictly verbatim, is substantially the verbatim report, with repetitions and redundancies omitted and with obvious mistakes corrected, but which on the other hand leaves out nothing that adds to the meaning of the speech or illustrates the argument”. This definition is clearly open to interpretation. What counts as a redundancy? What is an “obvious” mistake? What kind of elements can be discounted as not adding meaning or providing illustration? A team at Macquarie University is looking into changes in parliamentary language by investigating linguistic features in Hansard records from various countries (Australia, Britain, New Zealand and South Africa) since 1901. Clear changes in editorial policy have been found in the recent inclusion of features that don’t appear in the early records such as split infinitives and contractions (Kruger & Smith, 2018) – pointing to a shift away from applying written language standards towards the representation of a more spoken style. However, the comparison of transcripts of broadcast material with the official record shows that features of spontaneously-produced speech, such as false starts and repetitions, and some discourse markers are still edited out – perhaps giving a false impression of the fluency of our parliamentarians. This seminar will present data from the compiled Hansard corpora, particularly from the House of Representatives in Australia and New Zealand, to demonstrate the extent of editorial influence on the Official Hansard over time, and the impact this has on how we perceive the language of parliament.

Kruger, Haidee & Adam Smith. 2018. Colloquialization and densification in Australian English: A multidimensional analysis of the Australian Diachronic Hansard Corpus. *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 38(2).