

# Relaxing the verbal dress code?

## The Hansard and language change in Australian, British and South African English (1900-2015)

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Just as we relaxed the dress code, we should also not force MPs into verbal suits and ties, or gloves and hats, which would be out of character. Hansard should reflect the character of our debates...

Frene Ginwala, Speaker of the National Assembly of South Africa, 1996

### Varieties of English, language change and register

- The processes by which new varieties of English diverge from their parent varieties are complex: **general processes of language change** interact with processes specific to local settings.
- Processes that have drawn particular attention are **colloquialisation, densification, and democratisation**.
  - Colloquialisation plays an important role in Australian English (Collins & Yao 2013).
  - Non-native indigenised varieties of English avoid colloquial features in formal registers (Collins & Yao 2013; Kruger & Van Rooy 2016).
- These kinds of changes are highly conditioned by **register** (Biber & Gray 2011, 2012), and may thus be construed as stylistic change or register change.
- As the communicative purpose and audience of a particular register changes, so do the ways in which patterns of language change play out.

### Our project

This project is placed at the intersection of research on language change, World Englishes, and register studies. It aims to investigate **language, stylistic and register change in three varieties of English:**

- British English
- Australian English
- South African English

in the period **1900-2015**, focusing specifically on how colloquialisation, densification and democratisation play out in the specialised register of the Hansard across these varieties.

It pays specific attention to the nature of the Hansard as a **written reconstruction of spoken interaction** (Slembrock 1992), and therefore compares the Hansard with verbatim transcriptions of audio recordings of parliamentary debates.

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### Why Hansard?

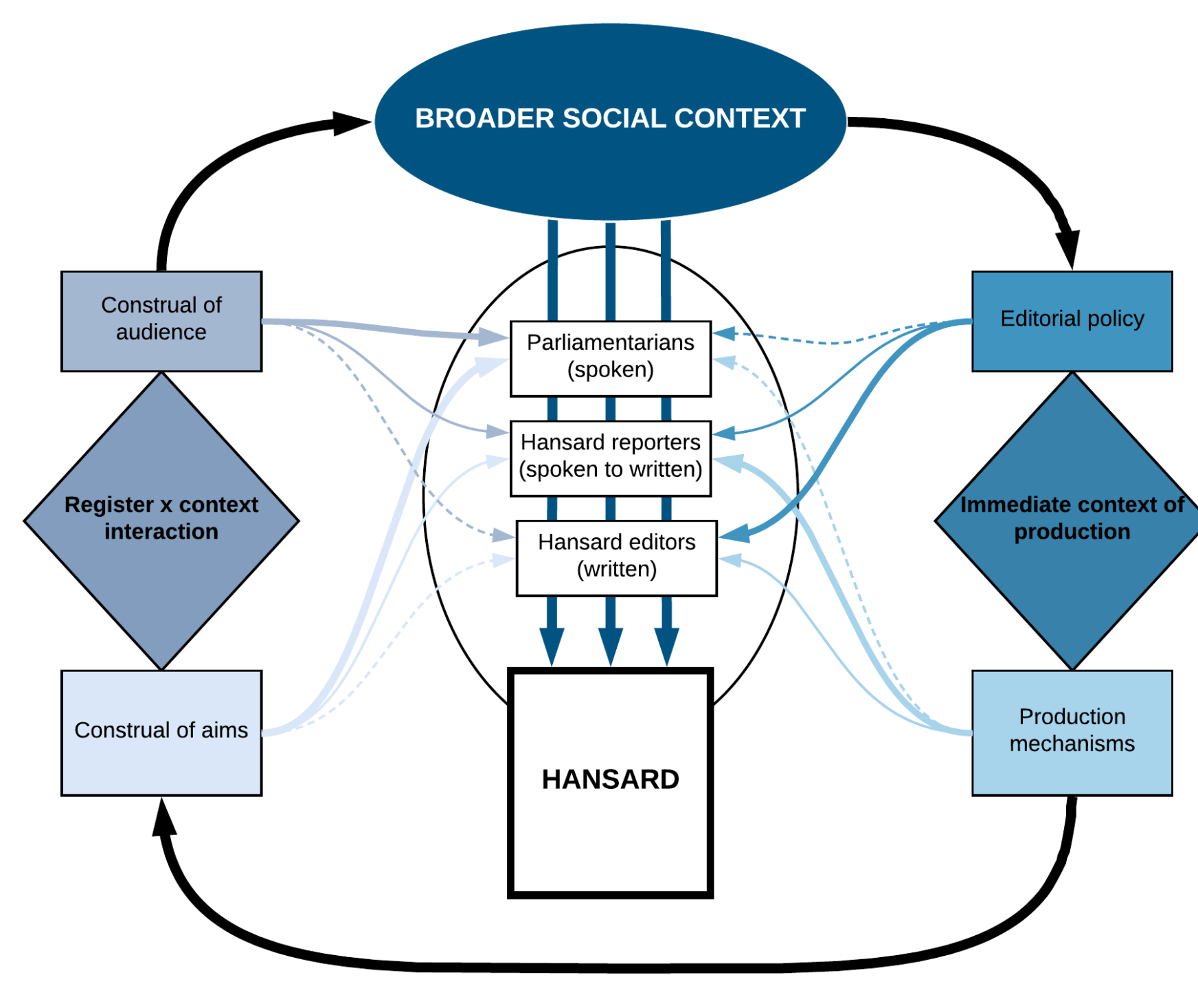
While the Hansard is presented as the "substantially verbatim" record of the proceedings of parliament, it is in fact an **edited written reconstruction of spoken interaction**. It is a specialised institutional register originating in Britain, transplanted to various Commonwealth countries through colonial expansion. The Hansard is thus a site where norms compete:

- informality vs formality
- speech vs writing
- local norms vs the norms of the "imperial centre".

It is particularly suitable to investigate whether an **exonormative or endonormative orientation** is evident in new varieties of English (Schneider 2007). The editorial practices involved in Hansard production provide a unique window on normativity in different varieties of English, since a goal of editing is to produce a rendition of the most prestigious form of each variety.

Does Hansard remain a stronghold of formal, British style (Mollin 2007), or does it move towards the norms of the local variety?

### The Hansard as hybrid register



The Hansard is the result of the fused production of three groups of language users:

- parliamentarians
- Hansard reporters
- Hansard (sub-) editors.

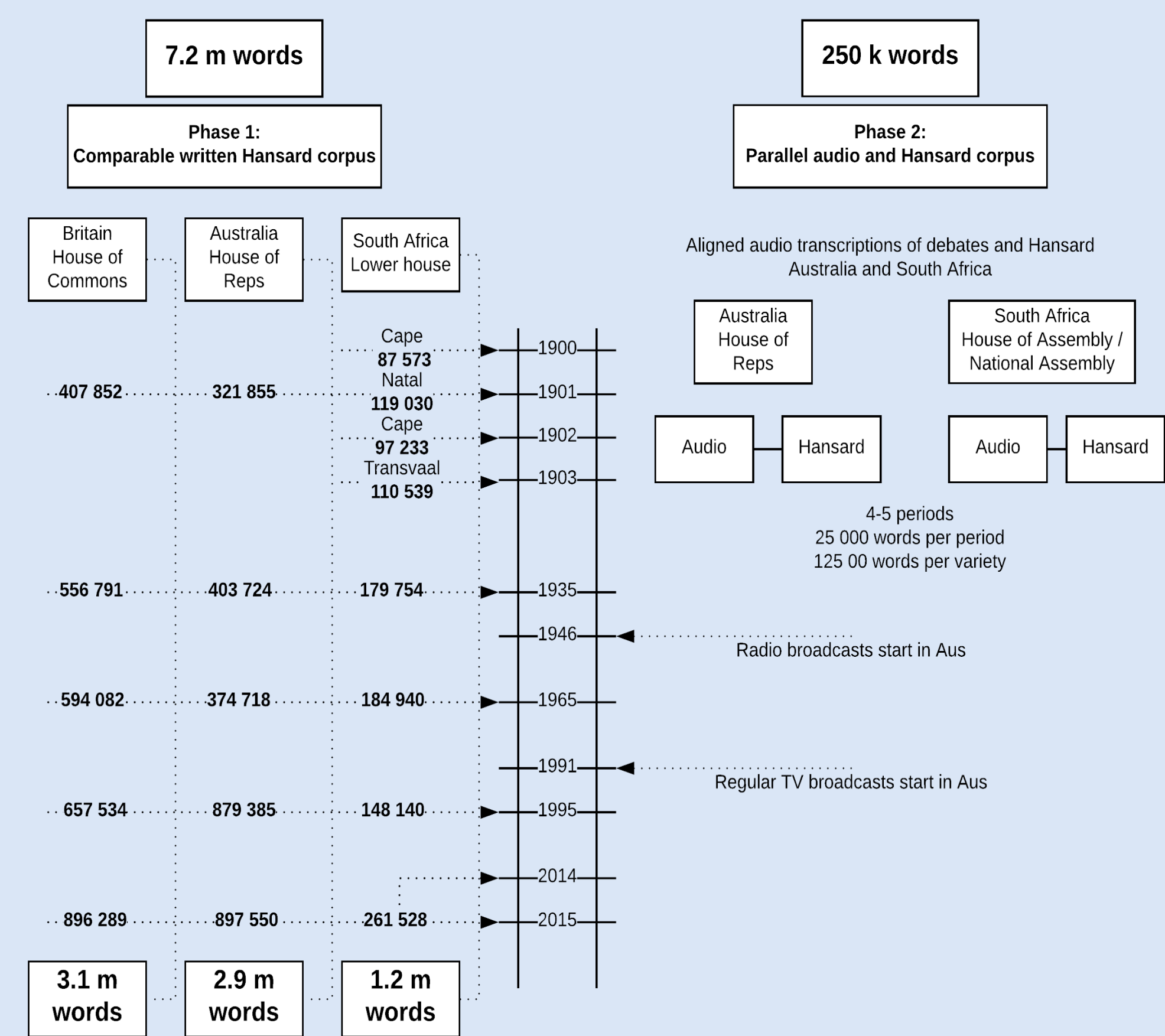
The language production of these three groups of people are affected in differential ways by **two sets of factors** (embedded in the broader social context):

- Factors related to the immediate context of production
  - production mechanisms (e.g. live shorthand vs transcription of recorded audio)
  - editorial policy.
- Factors related to the construal of the register and context, specifically the
  - audience of parliamentary debates and the Hansard
  - aims of the Hansard.

Are linguistic and stylistic changes the result of

- changes in the language production of parliamentarians
- changes in the production mechanisms for the Hansard, including editorial policies
- a combination of these two factors?

### Corpus design

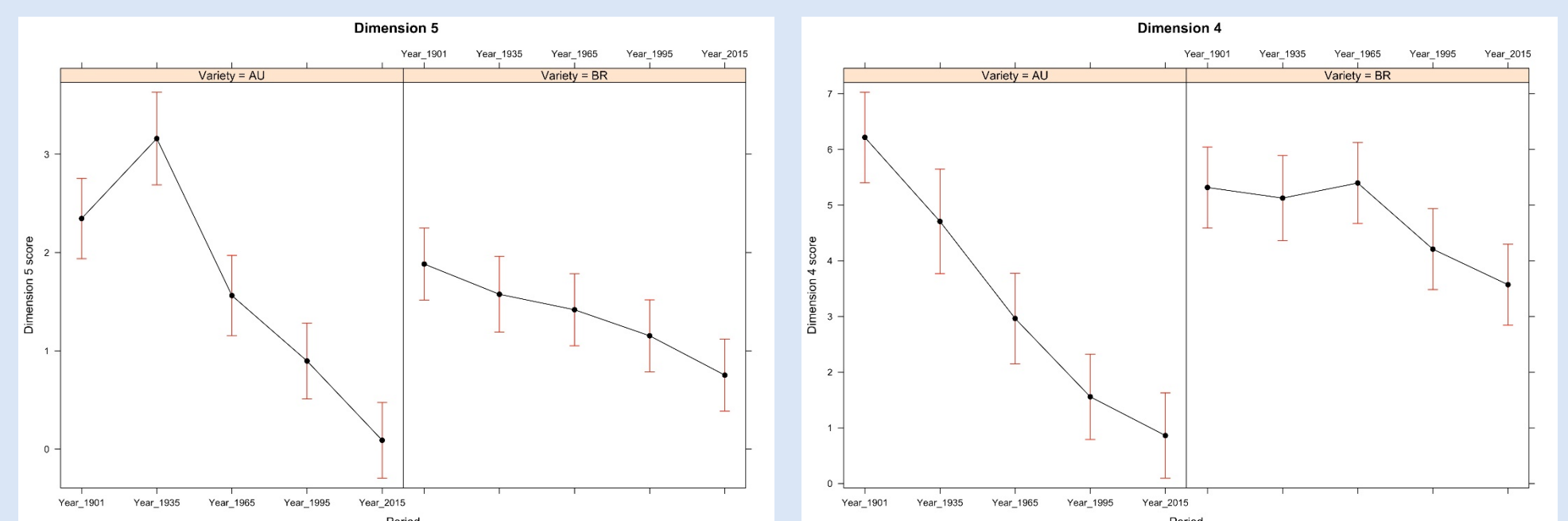


### Example findings

Use of Biber's (1988) multidimensional method for analysis of register variation – co-occurrence of sets of linguistic features.

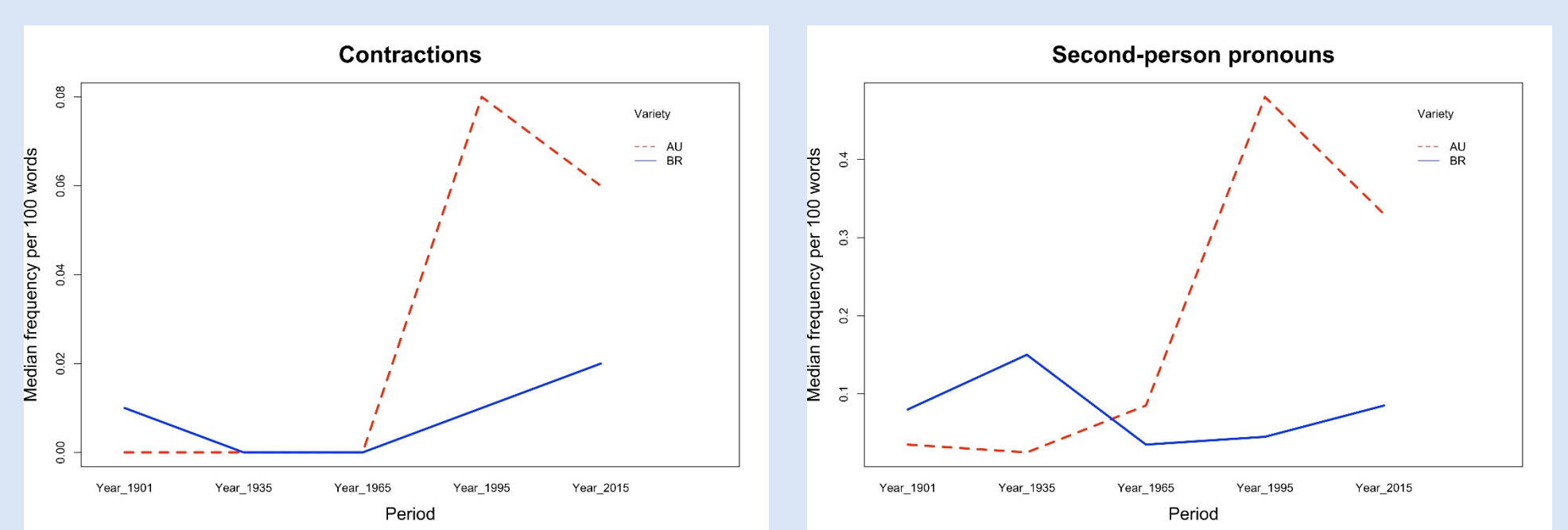
#### Overall

- Tendency towards colloquialisation evident on **Dimension 5 (Abstract versus non-abstract information)**
- Other rhetorical changes, e.g. a move away from persuasive, involved style evident on **Dimension 4 (Overt expression of persuasion)**



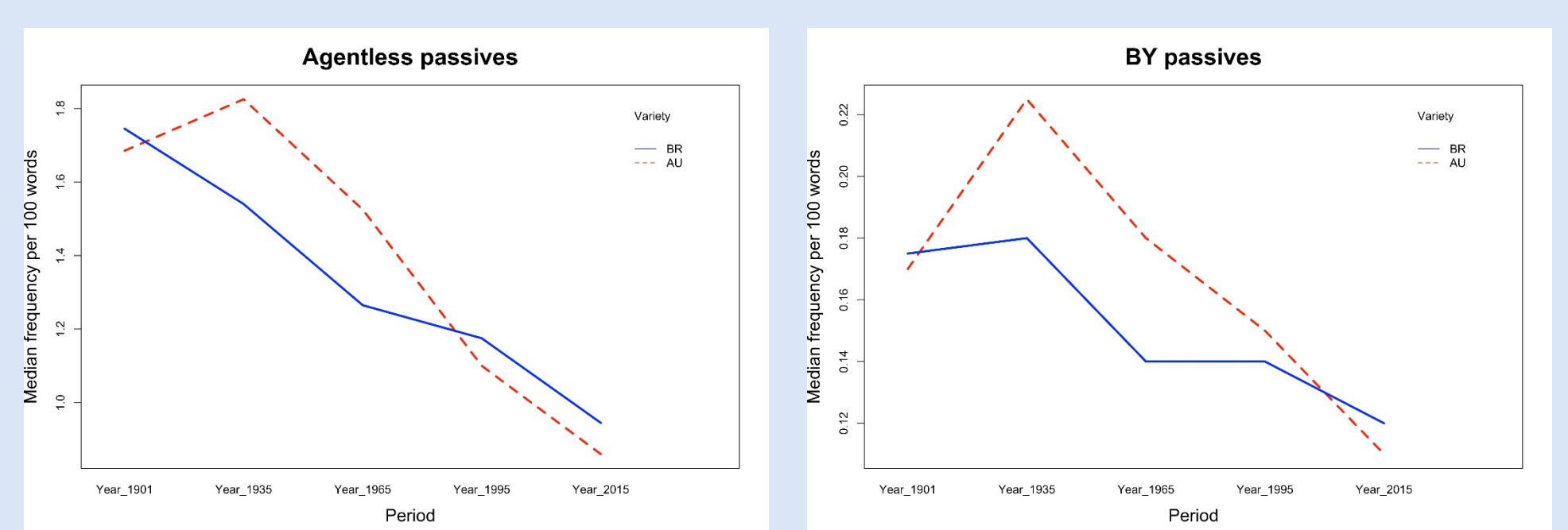
#### Colloquialisation unique to Australian Hansard

- Effects of changing **editorial policies**: Written record becomes more reflective of spoken-language features (e.g. **contractions, second-person pronouns**).



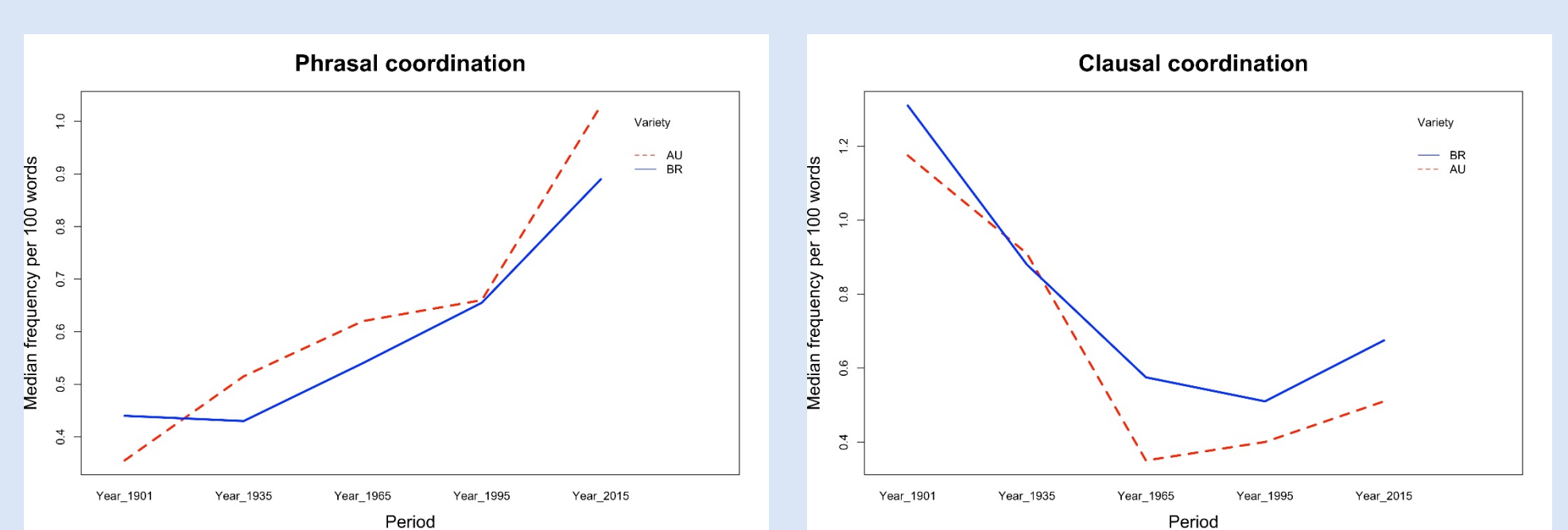
#### Colloquialisation across British and Australian Hansard

- More likely also related to **changing norms for speech** shared across varieties (e.g. **passives**).



#### Densification

- Phrasal coordination**, a clear sign of densification, increases across both regions while **clausal coordination** (typical of spoken language) decreases.
- Possibly because of increasing reliance on **scripted speeches**.



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