

## **Linguistic Upheaval on a Speck in the Ocean: The Development of English on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands**

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This sociolinguistic study is the first to investigate the development of English on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, and thereby contributes to existing research into lesser-known varieties of English (Schreier et al. 2010, Schreier & Schneider 2015).

The Cocos (Keeling) Islands are a small Australian territory in the Indian Ocean, and have a population of approximately six hundred. Cocos islanders are geographically and culturally divided into two communities: five hundred ‘Cocos Malay’ people live on one island and speak a unique dialect of Malay, whilst one hundred English-speaking Australian temporary government workers live on another. A turbulent colonial history and eventual integration with Australia in 1984 have resulted in the sudden introduction of English into the Cocos Malay community, amid language ideology and socio-political tension.

The resulting age-determined line that separates both proficiency levels and dialects (the limited British-influenced English of Cocos Malay born pre 1967 vs. the more fluent Australian English of those born post 1967) is blurred by social factors on the islands that include mass emigration to, and later repatriation from, Western Australia, and familial affiliation to the *Raja*, the former ruler of the islands.

In this paper I present cross-generational data collected on the islands that captures this apex of change. The dataset is constituted of semi-structured 45-minute sociolinguistic interviews with more than 16% of the total Cocos Malay community on the island. First, I will provide an overview of salient linguistic features, and explore the aforementioned range of sociocultural factors that are influential on this emerging variety of English. Second, I will present the results and a discussion of small-scale vowel analysis of the data, illustrating linguistic variation across three generations and both sexes. Finally, I will reflect on the applicability of Schneider’s Dynamic Model on this community (Schneider 2007), in light of its unusual colonial history and ongoing language contact conditions.