

Why Norfolk folk can be confused for Australians

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Have you ever been taken for an Australian? It's not an uncommon experience for people with Norfolk accents.

We ourselves don't think we sound anything like Australians. We would never consider for a moment that Shane Warne might be from Swaffham. And we're not inclined to confuse the accents of Brisbane and Briston, or Melbourne and Melton.

So what is the reason for other people sometimes thinking we're Aussies? I reckon it's got to do with other English people's unfamiliarity with East Anglian accents.

The way it works must be something like this – English people hear us speaking and they think to themselves: this person is obviously not from Ireland or Scotland or Wales, so they must be from England. But which part of England?

Well, they don't pronounce luck with the same vowel as look – they don't say butter and up as bootter and oopp. Also, they don't pronounce grass and pass to rhyme with lass and mass – they have a long a sound in grass, laugh, path. They can't be from the North of England, then.

So whereabouts in the south of England



■ Australia: The Sydney Harbour Bridge is a symbol of Australia... but a Norfolk accent isn't.

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are they from? They don't sound like Cockneys – we all know what Londoners sound like. Go if they're not from the southeast of England, where does that leave? Well, the West Country – there isn't anywhere else.

But the West Country can't be right because this person doesn't pronounce their r's in words like car, girl, warm, beard. So, OK, I was wrong: not English all. What's more, the accent is obviously not American or Canadian. Therefore, by a process of elimination, this person can only be Australian.

The flaw in this reasoning is obviously the "there isn't anywhere else" part. Geographical notions like Norfolk or East Anglia don't seem to figure in some people's mental maps of our country. This may be why actors usually do such a bad

job of reproducing our speech, often simply substituting a West Country accent instead. We are the forgotten corner of England.

There are genuine similarities between the accents of East Anglia and the Southern Hemisphere. Like them, we pronounce roses and Rosa's the same, and Lenin and Lennon. Like them, we don't pronounce wanted as wantidd or horses as horsizz like Londoners do.

But only people who think so little of Norfolk that they don't even remember we exist could possibly think we really sound like Australians.

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■ Prof Trudgill's latest book is **Dialect Matters: Respecting Vernacular Language**, a collection of his EDP columns, published by Cambridge University Press.