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FOCUSSING AND LEVELLING IN THE AUCKLAND VOICES PROJECT

Some of Peter Trudgill's most influential work on the sociolinguistics of dialect contact has been tested against data on the earliest stages of the development of New Zealand English (Trudgill, 2001). Trudgill documents the facts about which phonetic and grammatical variants appear in the oldest recordings of New Zealand speakers of English born in New Zealand and the variants occurring in some of the adult emigrant peers. He shows that (i) the variants found in the speech of the first generation of New Zealanders differ from those found in the speech of their British-born peers, and (ii) the first generation of New Zealand-born speakers of English also diverge from the forms typical of 20th century speakers of New Zealand English. The parallels between the shape of New Zealand English and other Southern Hemisphere Englishes, and the fact that these varieties were not in contact with each other after settlement, provide the basis for Trudgill's arguments that the input ecology of a new colonial English strongly influences its eventual development.

There are six processes which Trudgill identifies as playing a role in the development of colonial Englishes. The most relevant of these for us are *levelling, unmarking, reallocation* and *focussing*. We follow Trudgill's definitions of these processes:

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> Levelling
> This involves the loss of demographically minority variants … in a newly settled colony, large numbers of variants from the different dialects involved in the mixture will abound. As time passes, the variants present in the mixture will begin to be subject to reduction. The point is, however, that this reduction will not take place in a haphazard manner or as a result of social factors such as status. In determining who accommodates to who — and therefore which forms are retained and which lost — demographic factors involving proportions of different dialect speakers present will be vital.… [This is a matter of] a particular dialect variant of an individual feature supplanting all other variants. (Trudgill, 2004, pp. 84–85)

> Unmarking
> The reduction of variants over time is also not haphazard from the point of view of purely linguistic factors. Degrees of linguistic markedness and regularity or simplicity may be involved, such that unmarked and more regular forms may survive even if they are not majority forms. Unmarking can be regarded as a subtype of levelling. (Trudgill, 2004, p. 85)

> Reallocation
> …even after levelling, more than one competing variant … may survive … [and] become social class variants, stylistic variants, or in the case of phonology, allophonic variants. (Trudgill, 2004, pp. 87–88)

> Focussing (see Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, 1985) is the process by means of which the new variety acquires norms and stability. Focussing is not the be identified with levelling. Although focussing implies levelling, the reverse is not the case: a reduction in the number of variants does not in itself lead to stability and societally shared norms. (Trudgill, 2004, pp. 88–89)

Note especially the proviso with respect to *levelling* and *focussing*. The acquisition of stable norms in a new variety requires that there be a reduction (levelling) of the number of variants at play, but a reduction of variation need not imply the emergence of new, stable norms.

This paper revisits previous (largely descriptive) analyses of syntactic variation in relative clauses in New Zealand English in order to explore whether and how the data corresponds to the theoretical framework Trudgill proposed to account for the emergence of new dialects. While Trudgill (2004) concentrated on the earliest stages in the emergence of New Zealand English, our data extends the new dialect formation paradigm to synchronic variation and change in a variety that now falls within Schneider's (2007) period of endonormative expansion. We conclude that focussing and levelling, in particular, remain relevant concepts for the evolution of new dialects such as New Zealand English.

Although Trudgill's work on new dialect formation and sociolinguistic ecology has primarily concentrated on evidence from phonological systems, Trudgill (2001) also includes some data on grammatical features in new dialect formation to strengthen his overall claims about dialect contact. By closely examining the form and distribution of relative clauses in New Zealand English today, this paper provides evidence in support of levelling and focussing as processes underlying the contin-

ued development of post-colonial English in New Zealand. Furthermore, our data suggests that speakers draw on linguistically motivated solutions to the unmarking, i.e. the specific variant that emerge as successful when focussing occurs. In other words, we will propose that the close examination of focussing actively contributes to the refinement of linguistic theory.

AUCKLAND VOICES

The Auckland Voices corpus consists of three components. Together, the recordings span speakers born between 1895 and 2009. Our detailed analysis of relative clauses draws principally on the recordings made in interviews conducted in three separate communities in Auckland between 2016–2019. The composition of the corpus used for the this paper is summarised in Table 1 (see also Meyerhoff et al., 2021).

Table 1
Sample From the Auckland Voices Project Analysed for this Paper

	South Auckland		**Titirangi**		**Mount Roskill**	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Under 25 years	6	7	5	5	8	6
Over 40 years	4	3	8	2	5	6

The communities we targeted provide three different perspectives on the recent and ongoing patterns of immigration and internal mobility within New Zealand: Titirangi, South Auckland (Otara, Papatoetoe) and Mount Roskill. Although the communities are all part of the Greater Auckland region, Titirangi is 30 km from Papatoetoe and 10 km from Mount Roskill.

Titirangi, the most demographically stable community, is in West Auckland. Its population is predominantly of European extraction, and it is a more affluent and somewhat older community among the three we sampled. The composition of its population has not changed a lot in the last 30 years.

We also recorded speakers in Otara and Papatoetoe in South Auckland. South Auckland was the site of considerable population growth from the 1960s, and this part of Auckland experienced considerable immigration in the latter part of the 20th century from various Polynesian nations. In more recent decades, the diversity of the communities has continued to grow, with continued migration from the Pacific and also from a wider range of ethnic groups. While the specific ethnic composition of South Auckland has changed over time, what remains constant over time is that

there have continued to be significant numbers of residents who identify as something other than European (White New Zealander).[1]

The third community in our study is Mount Roskill, a part of Auckland that was, until the 1960s, largely farmland. Mount Roskill has experienced considerable demographic change since that time. Initially, the community was predominantly of European descent. But since the 2000s, the community has become super-diverse (in the sense of REF) and many ethnic groups now call Mount Roskill home. At the Roskill Youth Zone, in the heart of Mount Roskill, advertisements for food classes and exercise groups catering to South Asian, African, Polynesian and European traditions all compete for attention.

The demographic composition of the communities when we conducted our fieldwork, and indications of changes in demographics since the turn of the century, are given in Table 2.

Table 2
Summary of the Profiles of the Three Communities the Auckland Voices Project Recorded In

Community	Demographic profile (2013)2	Demographic change since 2001	Born overseas (2013)	Median household income (2013 rounded)
Titirangi (West Auckland)	74% NZ European 10% Maori 10% Pacific Peoples 9% Asian	Little; small increases in Pacific and Asian population	28%	$80,000
Papatoetoe-Manurewa-Otara (South Auckland)	26% NZ European 19% Maori 36% Pacific Peoples 23% Asian	Decrease in proportion of NZ European (15 percentage points); increase in proportion of Asian 11 points)	43%	$50,000
Mount Roskill (Central)	36% NZ European 5% Maori 15% Pacific Peoples 42% Asian	No longer NZ European majority; all increase in the internally-diverse Asian group	51%	$58,000

[1] We follow the terminology used in the New Zealand Census reports. Respondents have numerous label choices and can write in preferred labels, the label "(New Zealand) European" is used much more than "New Zealander". "Pakeha", another term used in the wider community, is not reported.

[2] Small percentages of Middle Eastern, Latin American and African respondents and people choosing to identify as 'New Zealander' omitted. Raw data taken from NZ.Stat, "Includes all people who stated each ethnic group, whether as their only ethnic group or as one of several ethnic groups. Where a person reported more than one ethnic group, they have been counted in each applicable group."

As Table 1 shows, in all three places, we recorded speakers over 40 years of age and between 16–25 years of age. The younger speakers in all three communities were uniformly native speakers of New Zealand English, though many of them in South Auckland and Mount Roskill had one or more other home language as well. Among the older speakers, all had acquired New Zealand English at least in their teens. In South Auckland, where, as Table 2 shows, there is a significant Pacific population, we had some difficulty locating Pacific residents over 40 years who were born and grew up in South Auckland, a typical migration story in the late 20th century was for people to spend their childhood in, e.g. Samoa or Tonga, and come to Auckland as a teenager to join parents working there. In order to obtain an ethnically representative sample in South Auckland, we therefore included some speakers from the Pacific community over the age of 40 who had moved to New Zealand in adolescence.

Interviews were primarily conducted by people who were members of the three communities.[3] As much as possible interviewers and interviewees were paired by age. They lasted between 1 and 3 hours and were transcribed in ELAN (Sloetjes & Wittenburg, 2008).

The demographic facts just outlined and shown in Table 2 mean that our three communities represent three different profiles for exploring the possible impact of ongoing changes in the demographic composition of communities on the continued evolution and current shape of New Zealand English.

RELATIVE CLAUSES IN AUCKLAND VOICES

It is well-known that English allows for three options with relative clauses — *wh-* forms, *that* and zero (Huddleston, Pullum & Peterson 2002), as shown in (1).

(1) [The children (*who, that, Ø*) I love] kissed me.

Our interest lies in the variation between the use of these three relativisers in the Auckland Voices corpus. English is typologically unusual in offering speakers three variants to choose from — *wh-* forms, *that* and zero. Comrie and Kuteva (2013) observe that the option of a relative pronoun (*wh-* forms) is almost exclusively restricted to Indo-European languages.

[3] Our interviewers were: Ingrid Dubbelt, Anusha Malavalli, Victoria Marchant, Miriam Meyerhoff, Fa'alei Pailegutu, Ruby Papali'i-Curtin, Ruchika Rajkumar, Brooke Ross.

Subject relatives in Standard English do not allow the zero relativiser (Trudgill & Hannah 2008), although zero with subject relatives is possible in some British dialects and creole Englishes (Cheshire, 1982):

(2) I love [the children (*who, that, *Ø*) kissed me].

Our first finding with respect to relative clauses in the Auckland Voices corpus is that speakers in all communities reduce the choice of relativiser from the possible three forms in both subject and non-subject relative clauses. Subject relatives allow either *wh-* or *that*, that is, the corpus has vanishingly few tokens of zero subject relatives (Birchfield, 2019). In addition, speakers seldom make use of *wh-* relativisers with non-subject relative clauses, so the pool of variants for non-subject relatives is effectively between *that* and zero.

Table 3
Distribution of Relativisers Across the Three Communities Studied

	Ø		*that*		*which*		*who*		**Total**
	N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	
Titirangi	221	26	470	56	39	5	112	13	842
South Auckland	119	17	457	66	28	4	88	13	692
Mount Roskill	126	17	446	61	46	6	109	15	727
Total	466	21	1373	61	113	5	309	14	2261

This reduction of variants to a contrast between two relativisers in both types of relative clause can be seen as an instance of *unmarking* (Trudgill, 2004, p. 85). The zero relativiser in subject relative clauses is restricted to only a few varieties of English, and the use of a pronoun as a relativiser is typologically marked cross-linguistically. We identified all relative clauses in the transcriptions of the interviews. Two coders were involved in this process.[4]

The clear tendency not to use zero with subject relatives or *wh-* forms with non-subject relatives allowed us to model the variation as binary choices. (The very small numbers of zero subjects and *wh-* non-subject relatives are not amenable to statistical analysis.) The data was analysed using the multivariate regression

[4] Birchfield was primarily responsible for the identification of relative clauses and their coding. We thank Helen Charters for her help in this stage of the data analysis. Examples (including problematic instances) of relative clauses in the corpus were workshopped and discussed by the entire Auckland Voices team (Ballard, Charters, Meyerhoff, Watson).

tool Rbrul (Johnson, 2009), which takes advantage of standard R packages such as generalised linear mixed effects (glmer) packages. This enables us to model the influence of various linguistic and non-linguistic factors on the distribution of the different relativisers. All p values in the discussion of results are derived from the multivariate regressions and indicate the relative significance of a predictor given its distribution in the corpus relative to all other predictors.

VARIATIONIST ANALYSES OF ENGLISH RELATIVE CLAUSES

There is a fine tradition analysing English relative clauses within a variationist framework (Cheshire, 1982; Tagliamonte et al., 2005; Hinrichs, Szmrecsanyi, & Bohmann, 2015). From this work, a number of linguistic factors have emerged repeatedly as constraints on the form of the complementiser that speakers select in a relative clause. There is an obvious animacy constraint with respect to the use of *who* forms, but previous studies have also observed syntactic constraints on the use of *wh-* forms, such as the length and complexity of the relative clause (Hinrichs, Szmrecsanyi, & Bohmann, 2015) and the grammatical role of the noun heading the relative clause (Fox & Thompson, 1990). Some recent surveys of relative clauses have concluded that the *wh-* relativisers are disappearing and the norm across varieties of English is increasingly towards generalisation of *that* (Hinrichs, Szmrecsanyi, & Bohmann 2015). To the extent that this is true, it would represent a case of *focussing* across varieties of English overall. Since Trudgill defines *levelling* as the loss of variants associated with a demographic minority, the patterns of relativiser selection in English overall do not constitute levelling. The *wh-* forms are not associated with a demographic minority in English. Hence, a reduction in the use of *wh-* forms does not satisfy the definition of *levelling*. Instead, if *wh-* forms are retreating, this would be a good example of Trudgill's observation that focussing can occur without prior levelling.

Previous variationist studies of relative clauses have argued that social constraints are, and always have been, significant factors in the selection of *wh-* relativisers (Romaine, 1984; Tagliamonte et al., 2005). However, it is worth noting that the social correlates of relativiser selection differ across studies (Ball, 1996; Sigley 1997; Levey, 2014). Meyerhoff et al. (2020) review data from more recent work on the historical development of *wh-* relativiser across a number of European languages. Following Sakalauskiate (2016) and Gisborne & Truswell (2017), they observe there that there are empirical problems with the proposition that English *wh-* forms were introduced as a change from above through contact with French. We will not review those arguments again here. We merely note that in the Auckland Voices data we

find only limited evidence that social factors constrain the selection of relativiser. We do find different preferences across communities, but we will suggest that these are related to demographic factors, rather than prestige, as suggested by Tagliamonte et al., for instance.

Trudgill (2004) argued that in the early stages of New Zealand English, demography played a major role in determining which forms survived and which ones disappeared. Our data on relative clauses suggests that demographic factors did not cease to be important after the earliest stages of new dialect formation. Rather, they continue to be important to the ongoing development of New Zealand English.

FOCUSSING OF RELATIVISERS — THREE AUCKLAND COMMUNITIES COMPARED

Our results show that when we aggregate speakers from all three communities, the selection of relativisers is constrained mainly — but not exclusively — by linguistic factors. For **non-subject relatives**, the significant constraints favouring the use of Ø rather than *that* are:

- an indefinite pronoun as the antecedent noun ($p < .001$)
- a short relative clause (3 words or less)[5] ($p < .05$)
- male speakers are more likely to use Ø than female speakers are ($p < .05$).

For **subject relative clauses**, the significant constraints favouring the use of *wh*- forms instead of *that* are:

- community (only Titirangi speakers favour use of *wh*) ($p < .001$)
- an indefinite pronoun as the antecedent noun ($p < .01$)
- object antecedent NPs in the matrix clause ($p < .01$).

Speakers in Titirangi — the most ethnically homogeneous and demographically stable community — were most likely to use *wh*- forms in subject relatives, while the speakers least likely to use *wh*- forms ($p < .001$) were those from South Auckland, the community which has had the greatest demographic diversity for the longest period of time.

When we looked closer at the non-subject relative clauses, we found that community membership approached significance. When we modelled speaker as a random

[5] We followed Tagliamonte et al. (2005) in this coding.

effect,[6] community was not a significant predictor, but if we did not model speaker as a random effect, community was highly significant. This is because there was a lot of inter-speaker variation in how many relative clauses occurred in an interview. This is probably an issue with all quantitative studies of relative clauses in interview data. Individual speakers in the Auckland Voices corpus produced between 7–30 non-subject relative clauses in their recordings. However, there were two outliers, one from Titirangi, who produced 39 non-subject relative clauses, and one from Mount Roskill, who produced 80 non-subject relative clauses. This means that we need to interpret differences on the basis of community cautiously, and relative to other factors.

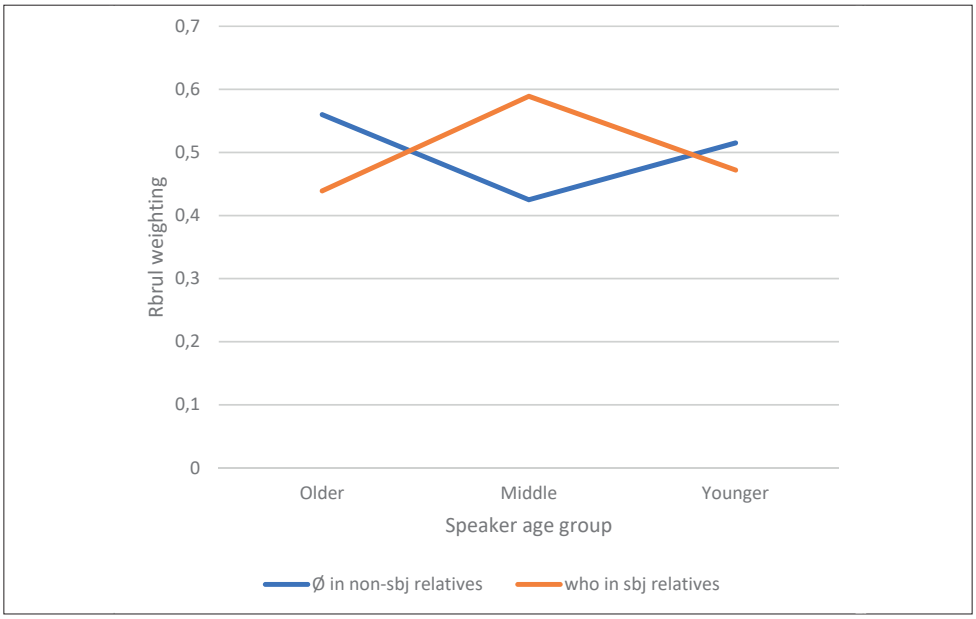
In order to probe possible focussing over time, Birchfield (2019) reclassified speakers into three age groups: under 25 years, speakers between 40–65 years (potentially active in the work force) and over 65 years (retirement). The choice of relativiser showed a pattern associated with age-grading (Sankoff, 2018)—middle aged speakers were more likely to use *who* (rather than *that*) in subject relative clauses than older or younger speakers were. They were also more likely to use *that* (rather than zero) in non-subject relative clauses than younger and older speakers were. If we assume that any overt relativiser provides more information than a zero, and if we assume that *who* (which is [+human]) provides more information than *that*, then we can say that the middle-aged speakers in the Auckland Voices corpus are more likely to use informationally rich relativisers than the other age groups are.

Birchfield's (2019) unpublished, detailed analysis of the linguistic constraints on the three communities provides evidence suggestive of the relevance of the community demographics. In South Auckland, we find that no linguistic constraints on relativiser selection are significant. It is clear that the effects of the definiteness of the head noun and the length of the relative clause in South Auckland trend in the same direction as in Mount Roskill and Titirangi, but these predictors only achieve significance in Mount Roskill and Titirangi. It is reasonable to interpret the lack of any significant linguistic constraints in South Auckland as indicating the community has focussed more thoroughly on *that* relativisers in all contexts than speakers in Mount Roskill and Titirangi have.

We have argued elsewhere (Meyerhoff et al. 2020) that the favouring of Ø relativisers in non-subject relatives with indefinite pronoun antecedents and *wh-* relativisers in subject relatives with indefinite pronouns antecedents is linguistically coherent. That is, the cases where speakers do not focus on *that* relativisers are precisely

[6] As Birchfield (2019) discusses, the non-normal distribution of the data across speakers raises questions about whether it is appropriate to model speaker as a random effect at all. We have tried to be transparent about the distribution of the data when making quantitative generalisations here.

Figure 1
Weighted Probability of Zero Relativiser in Non-subject Relatives and Who *in Subject Relatives Across Three Age Groups*



the cases where the indefinite head noun selects a relativiser that has compatible open-set features, i.e. the *wh-* and Ø operators. Indeed, we argue that the data from the Auckland Voices project provides the first independent, empirical evidence to support the, hitherto theory-internal, postulation that both *wh-* and zero relativisers are operators (e.g. Parodi & Tsimpli, 2005, p. 262).

In short, the thorough investigation of focussing informs linguists about the importance of demographics, and the exceptions to the expected patterns of focussing provide clues for further advances in linguistic theory-building.

FURTHER DIRECTIONS

The lasting, explanatory power of Le Page's notion of focussing has been demonstrated by many researchers investigating language or dialect contact and creolistics. Trudgill's work on new dialect formation in the Southern Hemisphere was a significant step forward in two respects: first, he strengthened Le Page's earlier work with data from a range of different contexts resulting in new dialect formation and

thereby demonstrated its broader sociolinguistic relevance. Second, he expanded the paradigm and gave greater specificity to the mechanisms involved.

By linking Trudgill's earlier work on the foundation of New Zealand English with our synchronic work suggests that demographic factors not only played a formative role on the shape of New Zealand English phonology and grammar, but they continue to do so in apparent time data collected for the Auckland Voices project.

One cannot fail to be struck by the efficiency with which speakers across the Greater Auckland region have focussed on the same form of relativisers in subject and non-subject relative clauses, and (crucially) the regularisation of specific constraints on relativiser selection. When we have presented this data in New Zealand, audiences have suggested that the widespread of use of social media that includes audio, video and the opportunity for (more or less individualised) responses to other people's contributions might mean that younger speakers of Auckland English constitute a coherent speech community despite their geographic spread. That is, focussing might be accelerated or promoted by online contact.

This may be true (it remains an intriguing hypothesis at present), but we may not need to look for external explanations for the focussing observed. We are also see find levelling and subsequent focussing that cuts across older speakers and younger speakers in the Auckland Voices data. In South Auckland — the community that has, since the 1960s, been the most demographically diverse of all three that we looked at — older speakers lead in focussing on *that* and the community as a whole appears to have quickly eliminated all linguistic constraints on the selection of relativiser. The focussing on one relativiser suggests the linguistic strategy of *unmarking* which Trudgill proposed was a mechanism by which focussing happens. This suggests to us that more than modern social media is at play here. More fundamental principles relating to linguistic typology and demographics, as outlined by Trudgill's research on early New Zealand English, have clearly been at play for some time. In Mount Roskill, where there have been significant demographic changes since the start of the twenty-first century, the younger speakers appear to be more advanced in a focussing on *that* than the younger speakers in Titirangi are. This specific contrast reinforces the conclusion that demographics continue to play a strong role in the development and shape of New Zealand English today.

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FOCUSSING AND LEVELLING IN THE AUCKLAND VOICES PROJECT

Summary

Levelling and focussing are well-documented processes, central to the emergence of new dialects, including to the emergence of New Zealand English as a distinct variety in the last hundred and fifty years. We draw on recent recordings from three areas in Auckland to examine the extent to which levelling and focussing continue to be relevant today. Most work on NZ English as a new dialect has concentrated on phonology; we extend the analysis to syntax. We consider the structure of relative clauses used in communities which have very different demographic profiles and histories of immigration. We find evidence that levelling and focussing continue to underpin the development of post-colonial English in New Zealand. Our data suggests that speakers draw on linguistically motivated solutions to the choice among variants when focussing occurs.

Keywords: dialect levelling; focussing; generational change; language and migration; New Zealand English; relative clauses.

AKCENT ZDANIOWY I NIWELACJA W PROJEKCIE AUCKLAND VOICES („GŁOSY AUCKLAND")

Streszczenie

Zmiany w akcencie zdaniowym i niwelacja to dobrze udokumentowane procesy kluczowe dla powstawania nowych dialektów, w tym dla pojawienia się odrębnej nowozelandzkiej odmiany angielszczyzny w okresie ostatnich stu pięćdziesięciu lat. Niniejszy artykuł wykorzystuje najnowsze dane z trzech obszarów Auckland w celu ustalenia, w jakim stopniu niwelacja i akcent zdaniowy są nadal procesami aktywnymi. Większość prac nad angielszczyzną nowozelandzką jako dialektem nowym koncentrowała się na fonologii — my poszerzamy analizę o składnię. Rozważamy strukturę zdań przydawkowych względnych (*relative clauses*) używanych w społecznościach o mocno zróżnicowanym profilu demograficznym i tle imigracyjnym. Znajdujemy dowody na to, że niwelacja i akcent zdaniowy nadal stanowią podstawę rozwoju postkolonialnej odmiany angielszczyzny w Nowej Zelandii. Przedstawione dane sugerują, że użytkownicy języka dokonują motywowanych językowo wyborów między wariantami tam, gdzie zachodzi zmiana w akcencie zdaniowym.

Słowa kluczowe: niwelacja; akcent zdaniowy; zmiana pokoleniowa; język i migracja; nowozelandzki dialekt języka angielskiego; zdania względne.

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