An understanding of the role of Australian English in both Australian society and the wider global context of its place in relation to International English has implications for numerous sectors of society, in particular those involved in service industries such as education, tourism, health providers and so on. To acquire this understanding requires a familiarity with the way in which Australian English has developed over the past two centuries and come to represent a central pillar of the national identity of mainstream Australia. It also requires an understanding of the local and global forces that have influenced or continue to influence the evolution of Australian English. In *Australian English* / A National Language, the first volume in a two part series entitled Australia’s Many Voices, Gerhard Leitner provides a comprehensive overview of the development of Australian English beginning with the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 through to its place in the language habitat of Australia today. The approach is multidisciplinary in nature, allowing the author to focus on both linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects of the development of Australian English, and thereby trace the numerous influences involved in its evolution.

The book is divided into four chapters. The first chapter introduces the notion of the Australian language habitat, and draws out the notion of mainstream Australian English (mAusE) that is the focus of this volume. He does not neglect building a picture of the Australian language habitat that encompasses indigenous languages, contact languages, migrant languages, and ethnic varieties of Australian English, but leaves detailed discussion of these aspects to the second volume, *Ethnic Englishes, Indigenous and Migrant Languages. Policy and Education* (Leitner 2004b). The first chapter also provides the theoretical background of Leitner’s study with a thought-provoking model of the stages involved in the development of language in new habitats (p. 21). The concepts involved in this
model are not new, thus Leitner’s contribution comes from the manner in which he has drawn disparate elements into a comprehensive and coherent overview of the development of languages in new habitats, an approach that could be applied beyond the context of the development of mAusE.

In the second chapter, the historical and social background of Australia necessary for understanding the latter discussion is outlined. While this overview may not be of such interest to those already familiar with the general history of modern Australia, it is an essential addition for the wider international audience who may not be so conversant with Australia’s demographic history.

In Chapter 3, which is composed of six major sections addressing various dimensions of the development of mAusE, the discussion begins in earnest. To a large extent this chapter is essentially a comprehensive review of the literature to date on Australian English, including reference to Leitner’s own considerable body of work. However, embedded in this review of research are a number of hypotheses about the development and status of mAusE.

In the first section of Chapter 3, Leitner examines attitudes towards Australian English from the perspectives of both speakers of British English (BrE) and users of the evolving variety of AusE, from its beginnings as a deviant form of BrE through to the full acceptance of mAusE as a member of the international family of Englishes. Three broad sociolects of mAusE are identified as generally recognized at this point, Broad AusE, Middle or General AusE and Cultivated AusE, providing the basis for later discussion about how these three accents arose.

In the next section mAusE is compared with BrE in order to establish the extent of differences as well as similarities with its parent language. Changes in accent, vocabulary and grammar are often subtle, with some mAusE variants being traced back to features of northern EngE. Leitner also offers a tantalizing proposition when he claims that the core of mAusE ‘is particularly strong in norms underlying communication’ (p. 149). Much of the work on varieties of English around the world focuses on phonological, morphological, syntactic or lexical features, or on sociolinguistic concerns
(such as language attitudes), with little in the way of any systematic investigation of differences in pragmatic features (such as norms underlying communication or politeness) (for example, Blair & Collins 2001). Unfortunately, rather than comparing pragmatic features of mAusE with other varieties of English, Leitner relies on cross-cultural comparisons with languages such as French or Polish, which does little to support his claim. As Leitner points out, this area is potentially very significant for our understanding of different Englishes, but it remains a vastly under-investigated area of research.

In Section 3.3, the contribution of other languages to the lexicon and communicative norms of mAusE are examined, including indigenous languages, migrant languages and other varieties of English, in particular American English (AmE). The influence of language contact has primarily been on the lexicon of mAusE and its communicative norms, and less on phonological or syntactic features (the HRT in intonation and clause-final but found in the less standard forms of mAusE being a notable exception to this), according to his analysis. This section also serves to link the study of mAusE with the discussion of Australia’s ‘other voices’ in the second volume (Leitner 2004b).

In the following section of Chapter 3, the internal stratification of mAusE is addressed, an issue closely related to the language attitudes discussed in Section 3.1. Leitner presents a view of this stratification in terms of accent (broad, general, cultivated) and dialect (formal, informal-colloquial, slang), with standard AusE primarily encompassing the first two accent groups, and the formal and informal-colloquial dimensions of dialect (p. 239), although he does allow that aspects of broad AusE and slang enter into mAusE, and indeed this movement between different sociolects and registers is quite characteristic of mAusE. From his discussion of regional variation, Leitner concludes that while regional accents and dialects are emerging, mAusE remains remarkably homogeneous across the Australian continent.

The standardization of mAusE is discussed in Section 3.5, with the influence of institutions as varied as the ABC through to the Macquarie dictionary project or the English language industry being cited
in the process through which a standard form of AusE has emerged over the past century. The importance of global forces in the continuing evolution of mAusE is also highlighted in the overview of the emergence of non-discriminatory language and plain English, which ‘re-affirms the norms of international English and re-embeds mAusE into the wider Anglophone context’ (p. 307).

The final major section of Chapter 3 gives a summary of the social and linguistic history of mAusE, combining the preceding discussion into a coherent overview of its development. The origin of the accents of mAusE, as well as various sociolects and registers, is discussed. Leitner’s major hypothesis is that there are two distinct formative phases in the development of the accent and dialect of mAusE, a proposal that is summarized more succinctly in a recent paper (Leitner 2004a).

The remainder of the chapter gives a brief overview of recent developments in mAusE, before entering Chapter 4, which gives some broad conclusions to Leitner’s study. He concludes that mAusE is an epicentre of English in the Asia Pacific region, and while not rivalling the international prestige of BrE or AmE, will have increasing importance in the Asia Pacific region in the years to come, which means global pressures, as well as local ones, will continue to exert influence on the development of mAusE.

This volume provides a very comprehensive discussion of the development of Australian English, with an extensive list of references that should prove invaluable to anyone wishing to further investigate this area. While there is too much detailed analysis and linguistic terminology to recommend this book to readers without some background in linguistics, it is a valuable contribution to the study of varieties of English, as well as to our understanding of Australian society itself, and thus is an extremely useful reference book for both researchers and educators who face the issue of defining the role of Australian English both within Australia and internationally.

References
Blair D & P Collins 2001 English in Australia John Benjamins Amsterdam.