

# AUSTRALIAN STYLE

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## Australian Words in English Dictionaries

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Australian words have fascinated the rest of the world ever since the first Europeans set foot on our land, but they only made it into dictionaries relatively late. Initial contact between England and Australia came too late for Australian words to be included in early dictionaries such as Robert Cawdrey's *A Table Alphabetical* (1604), Nathan Bailey's *Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (1724), and Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755). But Johnson was good friends with Sir Joseph Banks, and soon after Banks returned to England with news of the Guugu Yimidhirr word *kangaroo*, which he had collected while the *Endeavour* was stranded at Cooktown for seven weeks in 1770, Johnson introduced the word to British high society by impersonating the animal at a dinner party. 'Nothing could be more ludicrous', wrote Boswell, 'than the appearance of a tall, heavy, grave-looking man, like Dr Johnson, standing up to mimic the shape and motions of a kangaroo. He stood erect, put out his hands like feelers, and, gathering up the tails of his huge brown coat so as to resemble the pouch of the animal, made two or three vigorous bounds across the room'.

### Webster's Dictionary

The first dictionary to include Australian words was Noah Webster's *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828). Although many Australian words were missing (*boomerang*, *dingo*, *koala*), Webster included entries for *kangaroo*, *platypus*,

*quoll*, *wombat*, as well as surprising words such as *vampire*, defined as an Australian 'species of large bat', and a sense of *rude* meaning 'ignorant; untaught; savage; barbarous; as the rude natives of America or of New Holland'. Webster never once used the words 'Australia' or 'Australian' in his dictionary. As was common in the early nineteenth century, he preferred the name 'New Holland', an anglicization of the name used by Dutch navigators in the seventeenth century. To help his readers understand what the Australian words signified, Webster made the strange familiar, and his definitions were delightfully 'American' in their expression and points of reference: *kangaroo* is defined as 'resembling in some respects the opossum', and *quoll* as 'resembling the polecat'.

### Colonial impurities

The main reason why Australian words were neglected in so many nineteenth-century dictionaries was that lexicographers lacked access to our words because they lacked access to our literature, and all dictionaries depend on written sources for their evidence. If lexicographers wanted to include Australian words, they needed actively to seek readers of Australian texts in Australia. Not only was this beyond the resources and vision of some British lexicographers, such as Charles Richardson who published *A New Dictionary of the English Language* in 1837 without a single Australian word, but it also may have challenged their view of the 'purity' of the English language which, many

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nineteenth-century scholars argued, was being 'corrupted' by the emergence and stabilization of Australian English and other colonial Englishes.

The first British dictionary to include Australian words was John Ogilvie's *Imperial Dictionary* (1848) but this was largely because Ogilvie's text was based on Webster's rather than any deliberate effort on his part. Australian words were not included in British dictionaries in any deliberate and comprehensive way until Sir James Murray's *A New English Dictio-*



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nary (1884-1928, later known as *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED)). Murray was intent on producing a dictionary that included *all* English not just British English. His first task, when he became chief editor of the OED in 1879, was to seek international readers for the Dictionary. Before he published any of the Dictionary, he wrote *An Appeal to the English-speaking and the English-reading Public in Great Britain, America, and the Colonies* in which he specifically asked people around the world to read local texts and send in quotations.

#### Antipodean readers

Hundreds of readers responded, including Edward Sugden (1854-1935) and Edward Morris (1843-1902) in Melbourne, both of whom - over a period of forty years - sent in thousands of quotations. In the 1890s, Morris, who had moved from being Headmaster of Melbourne Grammar School to join Sugden at the University of Melbourne, realised that he had collected enough quotations to compile his own dictionary of Australian and New Zealand English. He published *Austral English* in 1898 and sent duplicates of all his quotations to the OED. He wrote in its preface 'Dr Murray several years ago invited assistance from this end of the world for words and uses of words peculiar to Australasia, or to parts of it. In answer to his call I began to collect...The work took time, and when my parcel of quotations had grown into a considerable heap, it occurred to me that the collection, if a little further trouble were expended upon it, might first enjoy an independent existence'.

Murray also drew on the resources of individuals with significant private collections, including the Australian publisher and book collector Edward Augustus Petherick (1847-1917) who had the world's largest collection of Australian books (housed now in the Australian National Library where a reading room is named after him). Petherick moved from Melbourne to London in 1870 as manager of George Robertson Booksellers and the Colonial Booksellers Agency, returning to Australia in 1908. During this time, he was in correspondence with Murray and provided important etymological information on Australian words. Petherick's researches enabled Murray to determine particular Australian senses of words such as *bail up*, to secure a cow while milking, and (said of bushrangers) to rob travellers, and to provide detailed and exhaustive etymologies for Australian words such as *boomerang*.

Morris, Sugden, and Petherick are just three of hundreds of readers from around the world who read local texts for Murray and sent in quotations for the OED. They are the unsung heroes of the OED, without whom the Dictionary would have been no different from its predecessors. They helped produce a text that remained unsurpassed in its breadth and quality of coverage of general Australian words until the publication of distinctly Australian dictionaries such as the *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary* and the *Heinemann Australian Dictionary* in the 1970s, and the *Macquarie Dictionary* and the *Australian National Dictionary* in the 1980s. □

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# Faces, forms and functions of lexicography: Australex 2008

Adam Smith reports on Australex 2008 held at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, 13-14 November.

The Australex (Australasian Association for Lexicography) conference was held in New Zealand for the first time in 2008. Hosted by the New Zealand Dictionary Centre at Victoria University of Wellington, a strong set of local and international speakers addressed the world of lexicography from a variety of angles.

## Historical perspectives and local flavours

Historical lexicography was well represented by keynote speakers Sarah Ogilvie (Oxford University), and Bruce Moore (Australian National Dictionary Centre). Both papers re-evaluated the work of particular lexicographers. Ogilvie looked at attitudes towards the inclusion of loanwords such as *aardvark* and *backsheesh* in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, with its most famous editor, James Murray, contrary to reputation, revealed to have a particularly reasoned and inclusive approach towards them. The New Zealand-born lexicographer Sidney Baker was the subject of Moore's paper, with the use and abuse of his evidence to document early Aus/NZ slang coming into focus.

New Zealand English was also the topic of Tony Deverson's (New Zealand Dictionary Centre) presentation on current challenges in establishing criteria for recognising distinctively New Zealand usage for the forthcoming *Oxford Dictionary of New Zealandisms*. The Maori language featured too, with Dave Moskovitz (Thinktank Consulting) and Huhana Rokx (Maori Language Commission) reporting on the first monolingual dictionary of Te Reo Māori. It was particularly pleasing to

see the recently published dictionary, after hearing of its development over previous Australex meetings.

Another perspective on New Zealand English was presented by Welby Ings (Auckland University of Technology). His lively talk on "the language, history and culture of male prostitution" introduced the audience to terms such as *bogspeak*, *tima moles* and *Jack nobi*. His was not the only paper that looked at specialised vocabularies, with Bernadette Hince (Australian National Dictionary Centre) presenting on a particularly circumscribed lexicon, Arctic food words. We even got to taste some Icelandic "hálfmánar" biscuits filled with sea buckthorn jam, in the tea break.

## Dictionaries and learners

A recurrent theme within the conference was the pedagogical use of dictionaries. The learner's perspective was variously addressed by Julie Baillie (Oxford University Press) in "The Words Children Write", and Noor Ida Ramli (UiTM Malaysia) who investigated the use of corpora to inform references designed for university students writing and using academic texts in Malay and English. Kerstin Lindmark (Stockholm University) spoke on the problems caused by prepositions for learners of a language, and the need for a cross-linguistic database to map the use of prepositions between languages. Julia Miller (Flinders University) looked at dictionary use from a different angle, reporting on a survey of Australian teachers' understanding of dictionary skills, and posing the question "is there a need to train the trainers?". The challenge of introducing dictionaries to African language classrooms in South Africa was presented by Juliane Klein (Leipzig University).

## New modes, new methods

South African languages also featured in Gilles-Maurice de Schryver's

(Ghent University) presentation. He focussed on the technological advances made in producing dictionaries for various Bantu languages. New technologies in lexicography were also considered by Aidan Wilson (University of Sydney) who demonstrated the advantages of mobile phone delivery for a dictionary of the indigenous Australian language, Kaurua.

Dorothy Jauncey (Australian National Dictionary Centre) looked at the treatment of Aboriginal language names in the *Australian National Dictionary*, with a particular focus on issues of spelling. Broader questions of categorisation were explored by Mary Salisbury (Massey University) in her report on the description of flora and fauna in Pukapuka (northern Cook Islands). Cherie Connor (New Zealand Dictionary Centre) showed how methodological issues concern lexicographers as much as inter-cultural ones in her account of attempting to organise a wordlist of historical New Zealand English marine terms.

Lexicographical methodology was also the topic of Marina Kaul's (Russian State University of the Humanities) and Marcin Ptaszynski's (University of Aarhus) presentations on bilingual, or "non-monolingual" dictionaries.

The final keynote speaker, Konrad Kuiper (University of Canterbury) shifted the boundaries of traditional lexicography by examining the phrasal lexicon, and how phrasal lexical items can be systematically identified.

The scope of Australex 2008 made for a hugely enjoyable and successful conference, opening outlooks on the past and future of dictionary-making and research that will be pursued further at Australex 2009. Under the title "Innovations in Lexicography", it will be held at Macquarie University, November 16-17. For further details see [www.australex.org](http://www.australex.org). □



# What's on the list! The Words Children Write:

Julie Baillie is Research Manager in the Primary Division, Oxford University Press. Her article is adapted from a presentation she gave at Australex 2008.

The Oxford Wordlist is the result of an extensive and rigorous research study designed by Professor Joseph Lo Bianco and Dr Janet Scull from the University of Melbourne, conducted by Oxford University Press in Australian schools and published in 2008. The general aim of the study was to document the words children first write, to examine these choices according to a range of the children's demographic characteristics, and to explore what these word choices indicate about children's personal identities and social experiences. These words, presented in order of frequency as used by all students, provide educators and publishers with a contemporary word list for Australian students that form the basis for much of the reading material, spelling lists, personal dictionaries, charts and tests currently used in our schools. The last study of this type had been conducted more than 30 years ago.

The Oxford Wordlist was derived from a list of 167,000 words contained in 3776 samples from more than 1000 children in their first three years of school in 95 Australian classes from schools in urban and rural areas, across a range of socio-economic groups, indigenous backgrounds, as well as English and non-English speaking backgrounds.

So what words do our children write? Has there been a generational shift in the words young writers use? What important changes in the socialisation of young people are revealed? What does it tell educators about the teaching of reading and writing when examining children's interests, and the impact of influ-

ences such as family or ethnic background, gender or social opportunity or about where they live and go to school?

## Common patterns of language use and generational change

In the earliest stages of school, children read and write words that most easily fall within their spoken language experiences. Therefore the words documented in their earliest use of formal school communication such as their writing, reveal much about their oral grammar use, lexical range, interests and influences.

It is therefore not surprising to see the high incidence of past tense verbs in the top 307 words of the Oxford Wordlist. Just as children orally retell and recall events, their first attempts at writing tend to be recounting recent activities and events in their own lives. 52% of the text types written by all students in the study were recounts; therefore the use of past tense verbs reflects the dominant grammatical structure of recount texts. On 16 occasions the past tense form of the verb appeared higher in the list than its present tense pair.

Previous lists have not necessarily reflected this pattern, with educators encouraged to introduce the simple present tense form of a verb first and then introduce the use of *-ed* as a suffix signifying tense change. For literate adults this appears to be a relatively easy rule to follow. However considering the cognitive load faced by early writers when first putting pencil to paper, it does not appear as simple. Our young writers want to know how to spell *played* before *play*, *watched* before *watch* and the Oxford Wordlist reflects this order.

Other striking patterns in word use include the high incidence of words related to consumer and viewer activity. Shopping has become a family outing. Shopping centres have become entertainment venues. While many families have both parents working, going to the 'shops' is often done on the weekend and children appear to partake in this

activity with their families. Their writing includes the use of words such as *bought*, *wanted*, *new*, *shop*, *shops*, *want* and *shopping* with a high level of frequency as indicated by these words featuring in the top 307 words.

There is also a range of words featured to describe viewing activities both in the more traditional sense of viewing shown through words such as *watched*, *watch*, *san*, *TV* and *movie* and to describe children's engagement with the interactive, virtual world shown through the use of words such as *computer*. The use of the words *game* and *games* were also used to describe viewing when attributed to activities related to computers and interactive game consoles. Names of people, products and brands have not been included in the Oxford Wordlist. Many of the activities that engage our students and consequently feature in their writing include the use of product names such as Xbox® or PlayStation®. Although relevant today, the impact of fast moving technology will ensure that these will be words of yesterday in a very short time. I envisage it won't be too far into the future to find a 7-year-old staring quizzically as their 'old' teacher talks about listening to an iPod™.

The Oxford Wordlist also provides insight into the activities of children. In today's writing Australian children account for a varied range of organised and leisure activities outside their school life as reflected in their use of the words *football*, *park*, *played*, *playing*, *soccer*, *swimming*, *birthday*, *party*, *ball*, *bike*, *fun*, *game*, *games*, *won*, *Saturday*, *Sunday* and *weekend*. Birthday parties seemed to be highly anticipated and reported events. The desire for parents to provide entertainment at elaborate themed birthday parties was particularly noted. I did lament the struggle the parents of today's 5–8 year-olds will encounter when hosting their 'child's' twenty-first birthday celebration!



# Oxford Wordlist Research Study

When looking at lists formulated in a similar way 30 years earlier there is a change of word use to describe family members. The Oxford Wordlist does not feature the words *mother* and *father* in the top 307 words, but parents need not despair as *mum* and *dad* are still on the list. Discarding *mother* and *father* also goes along with the diminished use of the titles *Mr* and *Mrs*, reinforcing the possibility of a more general decline in formality.

The Oxford Wordlist also reflects children's frequent use of the apostrophe to signal word contractions. In the top 307 words the contractions *didn't*, *it's*, *don't*, *I'm*, *couldn't* and *that's* appear and perhaps show how children's oral language is replicated in written form.

## Influences of gender

When comparing the word use of girls and boys the most marked differences appear. Although family, friends and computers continue to figure prominently in the writing of both groups, there are some striking differences in boys' and girls' lists in relation to the attributed gender of animals, settings and characters, especially related to their mythical, magical and monarchical fantasy writing.

Boys often bring into their texts 'dangerous' animals such as the snake, shark, lion and crocodile, whereas the animals the girls refer to more often are the cat, horse and puppy. In general girls introduce more domesticated animals into their stories and refer to them more intimately, shown through the use of such words as *puppy*.

Despite many parents and educators attempting to ensure stereotyping is not evident in the home or school, the main characters in boys fantasy writing continue to be the dragon, monster and pirate, whereas the writing of girls feature the fairy, mermaid and princess.

Girls also make use of a wider range of possessive pronouns and al-

locate more detailed consideration to describing how people relate to each other. Girls refer to boys in their writing, but the favour is not returned by the boys.

## Summary

The Oxford Wordlist and the research on which it is based highlights the importance of considering text production for children based on text production by children. By capturing word usage in undirected writing of young writers we have been able to document the breadth of experience of children from differing demographic groups found in Australian schools and their engagement with written language. □

## References

Lo Bianco, J., Scull, J., & Ives, D. 2008. *The Words Children Write: Research Summary of the Oxford Wordlist Research Study*. Oxford University Press: South Melbourne, Victoria.

## Links

To download copies of the Oxford Wordlist, the research summary, customisable resources for educators, and to access the online Oxford Wordlist interactive tool go to <http://www.oup.com.au/primary/learning/thesuccessfulteacher>

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Language researcher Irene Poinkin summarises recent discussions at SCOSE, the ABC Standing Committee on Spoken English.

### The battle against jargon

It's an uphill battle to get broadcasters to recognise and avoid bureaucratese, jargon, clichés and sheer pomposity. Media releases are often the source of such language but reporters who use them should weed out and replace any stilted or unidiomatic expressions that they wouldn't normally use themselves.

A police officer may say, 'Victoria Police have *located* a man who went missing from his home' but in the reporter's version the more conversational word 'found' would be much better. The police may say, 'The *majority* of people got sick in the Commonwealth Bank ...' but in or-

dinary speech we'd say *most* of them got sick.

A politician may say, 'We expect to see more ships going in and out of Sydney Harbour *going forward*'. But journalists should be aware of how silly this cliché can make them sound, and realise that it's redundant anyway.

### Spelling & syntax

A story in ABC News Online highlighted a spelling subtlety:

'An Iraqi girl wearing an explosives vest turns herself into police in Baquba'

Turning oneself *into* police is not the same as turning oneself *in to* them.

Syntactic oversights can result in ambiguous or comical statements, thereby detracting from the message. Here's one that suggested the NSW Deputy Premier John Watkins would retire at a press conference:

'... Watkins has confirmed he will retire from politics at a press confer-

ence in Sydney with Morris Iemma.'

Sometimes the word order needs to be changed completely to avoid ambiguity and to put things in the proper order. A story that said, 'Victorian Upper House MPs have debated a bill to decriminalise abortion until late into the night' shouldn't have gone to air without an overhaul. A carefully edited version might have read, 'A bill to decriminalise abortion was debated by Victorian Upper House MPs until late into the night'.

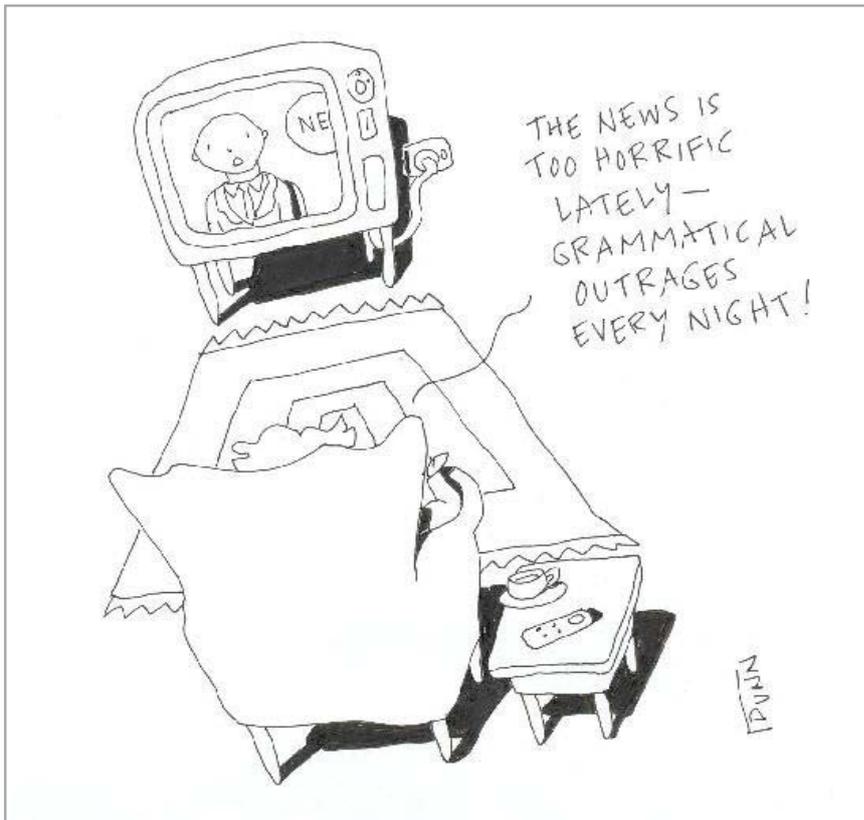
### Pronouns & passives

Listeners probably did a double-take when they heard this sentence, which suggests an exploding dinner:

'The owner of Islamabad's bomb-struck Marriott Hotel says there was no booking for a government dinner on the night it was blown up, despite a ministry statement to the contrary.'

The pronoun 'it' is meant to refer to the hotel but actually refers to 'dinner', and the crucial issue (of whether or not a hotel booking was made) is lost because 'no booking' and 'statement to the contrary' are such a long way apart. Sentences like this are hard for listeners to process. If you split them up and remove the confusing parts (like 'statement to the contrary'), the correct information is more likely to get through to the listeners. (Try: 'The owner of Islamabad's bomb-struck Marriott Hotel says there was no booking for a government dinner on the night the hotel was blown up. But a ministry statement contradicts this.')

On the grammar front we still hear what one listener described as 'profoundly wrong pronouns', as in '... a man who'd broken into her apartment and sexually assaulted she and her boyfriend'. Assaulted *she* indeed! In some ways this kind of error isn't surprising – we hear it all too often from people from all educational backgrounds – but we mustn't give up on trying to educate speakers about the correct use of pronouns.



## Having a dekho, taking a squiz or doing a shoofy

The forms of words can sometimes trick us into an assumed familiarity. *Dekko* and *shoofy* both sound as though they could be Aussie slang because their endings ally them with the typically Australian abbreviations known as hypocoristics. *Dekko* might belong with *ambo* or *arvo*; *shoofy* should really have an *-ie* ending to go with *barbie* and of course *Aussie*. In fact they are from Hindi and Arabic respectively, both entering the English language through British military slang, and both being forms of the native language verb “to look”.

The typically Australian equivalent of these slang expressions for “look” is *squiz*, as in “Take a squiz over here”. Thought to be a blend of *squint* and *quizz*, it has its origins in Devonshire dialect, according to the *Macquarie Dictionary* (2005). Though a transported word, squiz has thrived

here and is labelled “Australian and N.Z. slang” in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

You can *take* or *have* a dekho or a shoofy, and even *give* something a squiz, but what would *doing* a shoofy involve? Former prime minister, Bob Hawke – always a champion of the vernacular – employed this phrase after he’d denied having “detailed discussions” with his treasurer, saying his use of the word “detailed” did not mean he was “trying to do a shoofy by adjectivalizing my way out of it” (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 17.3.1990). Here it is the adjective *shoofy* in the (uniquely Australian) sense of “shifty” or “cunning” that is being put to work as a noun. They can be shoofy things, words.

Adam Smith

*A version of this article was first published in Campus Review (8.4.08). We would like to establish a regular word column, and if any of our readers have an original idea for a name for this column, or queries/ observations about new words or word origins, please contact us.*

*Continued from previous page*

Another thing that’s creeping into journalists’ copy is a kind of double passive construction consisting of the adjective ‘unable’ and a verb in the passive form. A story about a man and his two children drowning at the Tathra wharf said that the man ‘*was unable to be revived*’. This is illogical, and again the construction seems to be taken from police statements. ABC journalists have been encouraged to use the standard English one: ‘he *could not be revived*’ or ‘(paramedics, etc.) *could not (or were unable to) revive him*’.

### Word choices

If you haven’t heard of a ‘temblor’, you can be forgiven. The term is seldom used in Australia. The meaning was fairly obvious from the context of this report:

‘An earthquake has struck downtown Los Angeles, shaking tall buildings. The temblor was felt at least 20 miles away.’

It means ‘earthquake’. The

*Macquarie Dictionary* labels it as ‘chiefly US’, and the *New Oxford Dictionary of English* says it is ‘from American Spanish’. SCOSE was unanimous in declaring that broadcasters shouldn’t use it because it’s unfamiliar to Australians.

When an ABC presenter used the expression ‘kick in the guts’, one listener was enraged. He complained that it was ‘gutter language’. A pity, because broadcasters will continue to use it where the context calls for it. It’s a good Australian expression. In fact, the presenter was simply quoting the Queensland Premier Anna Bligh who had said that ‘this decision by Qantas [to cut some of its services] is a kick in the guts for the Queensland tourism industry’.

### De-gassing Degas

Lastly, if you’re planning to go to the exhibition of Degas’s paintings at the National Gallery in Canberra over the coming months, you may like to prepare yourself for any hot debates

about the pronunciation. In *The 7.30 Report*’s story on the exhibition the reporter, Thea Dikeos, pronounced it /duh-GAH/ while Kerry O’Brien pronounced it /DAY-gah/. Kerry O’Brien wisely ended the report by saying, ‘I say “Degas” (“Day-gar”), you might say “Degas” (“De-gar”)’. This was an excellent example of two equally valid pronunciations in action, one being the standard anglicised version (/DAY-gah/) and the other the more authentic French one. (Degas’s name was in fact originally ‘De Gas’, which is also pronounced /duh-GAH/.) After ten years as the ABC’s Language Research Specialist the one thing I’d wish for is that people would be more tolerant of such variations. They’re a natural part of English. □





## Speaking our Language

Pam Peters reviews Bruce Moore's *Speaking our Language: the story of Australian English* Oxford University Press 2008.

Dictionary-makers are slaves of the alphabetic system and largely prohibited from making connections between the words listed, except via crossreferencing. But anyone who works with words is aware of the larger groups among them, and the stories that they tell collectively. In *Speaking our Language*, lexicographer Bruce Moore liberates himself and his readers from the tyranny of the alphabet, and brings to life phases of Australian culture, society and history since the days of settlement.

His raw material, in terms of words to be discussed and source materials from which they were extracted, comes from the *Australian National Dictionary* (1988) and research towards its future second edition. The dictionary offers rich pickings since it contains only "Australianisms", i.e. words and word senses which "have originated in Australia, which have a greater currency here than elsewhere, or which have a special significance in Australia because of their connection with an aspect of the history of the country" (*AND* Introduction, p.vi). The Australian vocabulary projects the whole range of novel experiences encountered by the antipodean pioneers and settlers, beginning with words borrowed from Aboriginal languages such as *wallaby*, *bunyip*, *mulga*; the vocabulary associated with the convict settlement and the pastoral era: *muster*, *station*, *boss cockey*; as well as the gold rush: *fossick*, *mullock*, *shiser*; participation in two world wars: *digger*, *furphy*, *plonk*; and that greater independence from Britain and multicultural identity found afterwards, before the close of C20.

Apart from using these Australian

words to highlight points of Australian history, Moore often relates them to larger themes to remind us of the wider sociocultural context in which they were coined. Thus the nomenclature associated with the Australian environment represented the pervasive British view of Australia as "down under", inverted, raw and untamed, as in the numerous compounds using *wild* and *native*, as in *wild carrot/fig/tobacco* and *native cat/hedgehog/porcupine*. These phenomena express a "world upside down", which Moore uses effectively as the title for early chapters on the environment and on early Australian society, with its unprecedented concentrations of convicts, *ticket-of-leave men*, *emancipists*, with whom *free immigrants* had to rub shoulders.

As Australian society consolidated, a new ethos emerged with the notions of *currency* and *sterling*, whereby locally born Australians of whatever origin could claim superiority over recently arrived *poms*. The combinatory phrase is used in the headings of two of the book's chapters: first as *currency versus sterling* which provides a sketch of *colonial* identity in C19, and again as *currency and sterling*, in the account of the polarisation of cultural attitudes within the Australian population in the first half of C20. Moore finds "currency" in the Australian slang associated with the digger heroes of World War I and popular culture (silent films and radio serials such as "Dad and Dave"; and "sterling" in the cultural cringe in the 1920s and 30s, which found British cultural practices and modes of speaking unquestionably superior.

Australian coinings are used by Moore as narrative cues in twelve out of the fourteen chapters of the book. The other two focus on the origins and development of the Australian accent, based on recent research by New Zealanders Margaret McLagan and Elizabeth Gordon, and Australians Felicity Cox and Sally-Ann

Palethorpe at Macquarie University. The earliest comments on the Australian accent (during the first two-thirds of C19) were positive about it, as a "purer, more harmonious form" than the English regional dialects out of which it had been forged. But the tide of criticism begins to rise with school inspectors' reports in the late C19 and swells with the cultural cringe of the 1930s. This explains why the ABC preferred to appoint British news readers until well after World War II. By then AG Mitchell had succeeded in demonstrating that there was in fact a scale or "spectrum" of Australian accents, ranging from the stereotypical broad accent to the "educated" one, and that the latter was an eminently suitable voice for Australian broadcasting.

Two of the closing chapters of *Speaking our Language* move away from the notional mainstream of Australian English, and focus on (i) regional variation, featuring items compiled in association with the *Australian National Dictionary*; and (ii) on "other" Australian Englishes, i.e. ethnic varieties such as those spoken by Aborigines and immigrants. The discussion of the latter is mostly about the assimilation of their speakers, and words such as *wog* which are used to refer to them – but in half of a short chapter it is difficult to do justice to the topic. The final chapter looks forward into C21 to the potential impacts of global English on "our language". There Moore argues for the resilience of Australian English, and its ongoing value as a bearer of Australian identity.

The book is stylish in its design, with large red quote marks on front and back covers (presumably to underscore the notion of "speaking" in the title). Its narrative woven around Australian words will appeal to many readers, and Moore's themes provide fresh interpretations of some familiar episodes in Australian history. □





## From the Editor

*Australian Style* is moving into a new online era, after almost 17 years and 30 issues appearing in print. It began as a project in Australian English, sponsored by the National Language and Literacy Institute of Australia (NLLIA), and as part of a set of research projects investigating the range of Australian usage, spoken and written, by younger and older citizens. The sense of open inquiry has been maintained in successive issues of *Australian Style* with its articles on current research on English usage in Australia and New Zealand, SCOSE notes on what ABC listeners are saying about broadcast language, reviews of new publications, letters from correspondents on new usages observed, and always a Feedback survey on variable aspects of Australian English, to elicit reactions from readers to new developments. The linguistically adept cartoons of Judy Dunn, and the Rubicon puzzles of David Astle are also long-established assets of the magazine.

With this mix of ingredients, the *Australian Style* readership grew steadily from about 3000 in the early 90s to about 7000 in 1999. By that time, NLLIA had been disestablished, and we were glad to acquire new sponsorship from the Department of Finance and Administration, which was then and continues to be responsible for the publication of the Australian government *Style Manual*. Results from the Feedback surveys were used as input to the writing of the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Style Manual* (2002), and the survey attached to this first online edition will provide evidence on current usage for the 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Now as the Department of Finance and Deregulation, it continues to support the publication of *Australian Style* through its AGIMO subsidiary, in a research partnership with Macquarie University's Faculty of Human Sciences.

During *Australian Style's* print phase I have been continually de-

lighted by the wealth of material we could publish on Australian English, and the lively responses of our readers to it, especially the Feedback surveys. It has made it an amazing vehicle for exchanging news and views on the state of our language. As I retire from the role of Editor, Adam Smith who has worked with me on *Australian Style* since 1996 will be taking over, and this first online edition on the new website has been designed and executed by him. I know that as an e-zine *Australian Style* will be in very good hands. Adam will maintain the tradition of open inquiry into Australian usage through all the regular features, but will add items of his own inspiration as well, to make the most of the online medium. This is of course a virtual handover, and time for him to introduce his plans for 2009 and beyond.

First of all, my thanks to Pam for her role in establishing *Australian Style* as a constantly stimulating forum for discussing issues of language usage, and an invaluable research tool to investigate trends in Australian English. I'm lucky that she will still be available in a consultative role, to offer help, advice and deep reserves of knowledge.

The feedback we received from readers when it was announced that the print publication was discontinuing was a testament to how much Pam's work has been valued and appreciated over the years. While many also expressed disappointment that the newsletter would no longer be printed, I would like to see this as an opportunity to take advantage of online resources. Along with the regular features, mentioned above, we'd also like to include occasional items such as a word column (for which queries and suggestions are welcome) and correspondence that can be updated more regularly than biannual print publication allowed. Online links can serve to connect our readership to a wider community of language experts and enthusiasts. The PDF archive of the newsletter sup-

plies a new resource that brings together a rich and varied commentary from a wide range of writers.

Most importantly, the new mode of delivery gives us a chance to interact with our readership so that we can make *Australian Style* as responsive as possible to your needs and interests. We would welcome any feedback on the current content, and suggestions for what you would like to see included. I hope that the e-version of *Australian Style* will become as essential reading as the print version clearly was for many of you. □



# FEED BACK

## Report

Some of the questions in Feedback 30 (2007/8) matched those used in earlier (2002/3) surveys of variable verb forms (Feedbacks 19 and 20), so it is particularly interesting to see whether the results are much the same or different. Here we focus especially on those where there are notable differences across the age range, ones that suggest ongoing trends in Australia are slightly different from those in northern hemisphere Englishes.

Feedback 30 asked about the past forms of several of the *shrink/shrank/shrunk*, *spring/sprang/sprung* group of verbs, which in standard English present those three forms. But there is a lot of evidence from C18 and C19 that people were using just two forms for them: *shrink/shrunk*, so that *shrunk* was used instead of *shrank* for the past tense. Fowler's (1926) *Dictionary of Modern English Usage* notes with several of them that the third form has been reaffirmed for the past tense from C19 to C20, and this accounts for

their status in current written English. But the use of *shrunk*, *sprung*, *sung*, *sunk* etc. for the past tense is noted as a variant in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (1961), and its survival in American and Australian English may be explained as the speech forms transported by C19 immigrants.

Table 1 below presents the results from Feedback 30 (n = 428) which can be compared with those from Feedback 19 (n = 1101). First let's put the spotlight on the use of *shrunk*, *sprung* for the past tense instead of *shrank*/*sprang*. In each case the total percentage for the *u* forms is below 50%, though closer to it in the earlier, larger survey. But in both surveys the use of *u* forms is relatively greater among younger citizens (Age 1 + 2, i.e. those under 45), and declines among the over 45s. In both sets of data the usage of those under and over 45 is differentiated, though it is more pronounced in the results from Feedback 19, where continuous stratification can be seen across all three age groups. Yet the level of

acceptance is relatively higher in Age 4 (over 65s) in Feedback 30 than in Feedback 19, especially for *sprung*.

These results show that there is ongoing use of the *u* past forms in the Australian community which would move verbs like *shrink* and *spring* into the set to which *cling*, *fling*, *sling*, *slink*, *sting*, *wring* etc. already belong.

Feedback 30 also questioned Australian preferences on the spelling of past forms of verbs such as *burn* etc. for which both *burned* and *burnt* are current. Here the *-ed* forms are quite regular, and the *-t* forms are "irregularized". Research shows that their use in the northern hemisphere has fluctuated over the last 300 years, but as the *-ed* form became established in the US, the *-t* form gained the upper hand in the UK, especially during C20. Gowers, in his 1966 edition of Fowler's *Modern English Usage* commented on this. In Australia too, it seems that *-t* is a popular spelling, though not the dominant one except for *spoil*, as shown in Table 2 on the next page.

TABLE 1	Total %	Age 1 + 2 %	Age 3 %	Age 4 %
<i>shrunk</i> (FB30) The heat ____ the plastic plate to a tiny disk.	28	48	24	25
<i>shrunk</i> (FB19) My old woolly jumper ____ in the wash.	44	65	31	21
<i>sprung</i> (FB30) The ginger cat ____ the mousetrap.	35	49	25	38
<i>sprung</i> (FB19) In heavy seas the ship ____ a leak.	47	68	35	24



TABLE 2	Total %	Age 1 + 2 %	Age 3 %	Age 4 %
<i>burnt</i> (FB30) The fire had ____ out of control for three days.	38	42	39	37
<i>burnt</i> (FB20) The bush fire ____ out of control for days.	36	43	35	32
<i>leant</i> (FB30) The tree had ____ precariously over the road.	37	30	38	38
<i>leant</i> (FB20) After the explosion the wall ____ precariously over the street.	47	58	49	39
<i>learnt</i> (FB30) In the Depression they had all ____ to do without.	50	55	50	48
<i>learnt</i> (FB20) In those two years they ____ nothing of any use.	51	59	54	43
<i>spoilt</i> (FB30) They ____ the child with expensive toys.	57	60	59	55
<i>spoilt</i> (FB 20) They told us the end of the story which ____ it for us.	58	58	59	56

The data here again from Feedback 30 (n = 1101) and Feedback 20 (n = 731) show that preference for *-t* spellings for the past forms is stronger among the younger respondents (under 45), except in the case of *leant* (FB30) and *spoilt* (FB20). Older Australians are less inclined to use *-t* spellings, except for *spoilt*, where their level of endorsement is not very different from that of younger Australians. There is noticeable age stratification in all

instances but *leant* (FB 30) and *spoilt* (FB30), and the two sets of data are aligned in this respect.

With only 5 years between Feedback 30 and Feedbacks 19 and 20, we shouldn't make too much of differences in the levels of endorsement of *u* and *-t* forms in the two data sets. In fact they are quite comparable. What is more significant is the fact that in both surveys there is substantial, acknowledged use of these alternative past forms, and that they

are the majority usage for the under 45s in 7 of the 12 data sets. The use of *u* for the past tense of verbs like *spring* contrasts with standard written English, while the use of *-t* goes against the linguistically regular spelling for the past form. In both cases younger Australians seem to reserve the right to diverge, and their usage is shared by older Australians as well. □

**Please note:** Feedback 31, on Style Practices, is available online at <http://www.ling.mq.edu.au/survey/survey.php>. Apologies for not providing a printable copy of the questionnaire, but having it exclusively online enhances the speed and efficiency of processing.

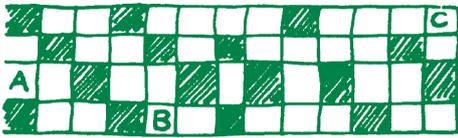
It is intended that results from this survey will help to update advice in the 7th edition of the Australian Government *Style Manual*, so we really appreciate your participation.

#### Feedback Acknowledgements

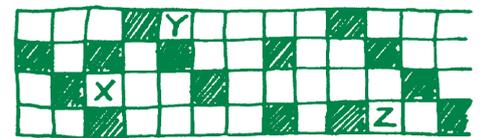
Many thanks to the following, who sent in batches of FEEDBACK questionnaires on behalf of others.

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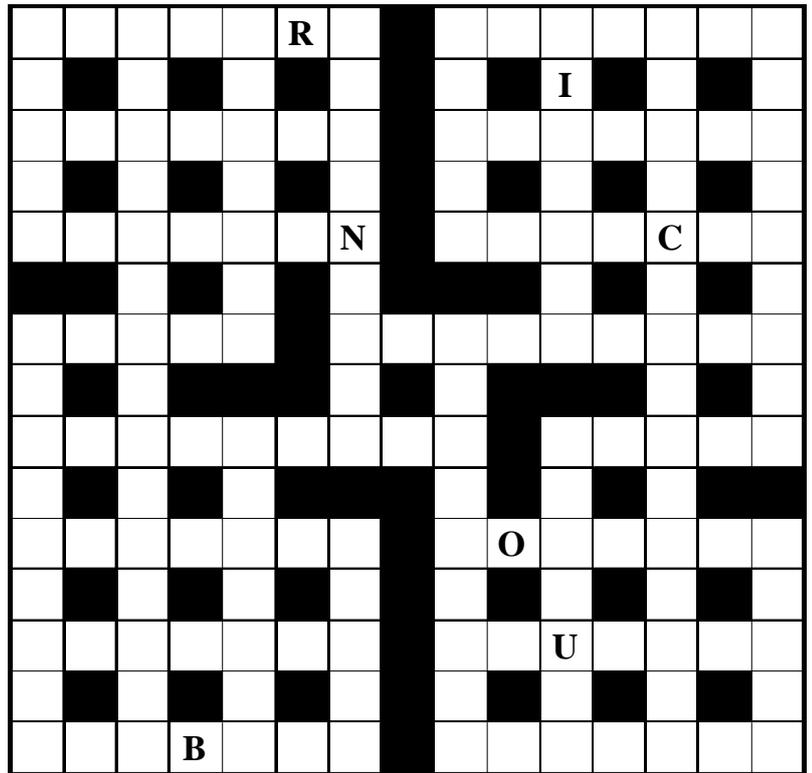


# RUBICON



RUBICON, devised by David Astle, is a hybrid of crossword, jigsaw and acoustic. First, solve as many clues as you can and begin to fit the answers inside the grid. (The scattered letters of RUBICON should give you a toehold.) When the grid is completed, arrange the *clues* from the first Across to the last Down – their 30 initial letters will spell a category. As a bonus, which six of your answers belong to the category in question?

- I say, "Shackles away!" (15)
- State of owning two valid passports (4,11)
- Bosch made the first high-voltage example in 1902 (5,4)
- Converts to eunuch (9)
- Flipside of withdrew? (9)
- Locale saddling southern Chile and Argentina (9)
- Ones staying true to the existing government (9)
- Tripoli: Libyan, as Santo Domingo:?? (9)
- Apprehended – mentally or manually (7)
- Dr Freud's treatment? (7)
- Efficacy; knack (7)
- Elder matriarch, familiarly (7)
- Extra cover, say (7)
- Extremist (7)
- Guffawed (7)
- Involving Islam's holy book (7)
- Nervously – or idly – play with (7)
- One who rejects religion (7)
- Receptacle for the brain (7)
- Recipe (7)
- Strap-lines crafted by copywriters (7)



- Stuff of novels (7)
- Vernacular for a non-scoring delivery (3,4)
- Wilful opponent of change – or an 'action franchise' (7)
- Inhume (5)
- Nitwitted colleague of Doc (5)
- Overwhelms (5)
- Reek (5)
- Roasted brew minus the kick (5)
- Yielded (5)

**Solution to Rubicon in last issue**  
 WORDS THAT CAN SIT  
 BEFORE 'CONTROL': damage,  
 remote, birth, crowd, quality,  
 climate

