

**Kryvenko I.S.**

a student, National University of Life and  
Environmental Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv

**Babenko O.V.**

PhD in Philology, National University of Life and  
Environmental Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv

## SOME FEATURES OF AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH

This article claims to offer a brief analysis on etymological and some linguistic features of Australian English.

This phenomenon has been described in some detail in a number of studies, including Harrington, J., F. Cox, and Z. Evans, Mitchell, Alexander G, Peters, Pam, Nikolenko A. G.

*Australian English (AusE)* has a short history, reflecting some 200 years of European settlement, and an even shorter period of recognition as a national variety, the term being first recorded in 1940. It is only since then that features of AusE have been regarded as distinctively and respectably Australian, instead of as evidence of colonial decline from the norms of the Standard English of England. Initially, and uniquely, a majority of the British colonies in Australia were penal. As they expanded and as free colonies were developed, immigrants using languages other than English were insignificant. Relations with the Aborigines were generally poor and after an initial intake of words from their languages (such as *boomerang*, *dingo*, *kangaroo*, *koala*, *kookaburra*, *wombat*) were not conducive to extensive borrowing.

The most marked feature of the Australian accent is its homogeneity, with no regional differences as marked as those in BrE and AmE, though recent studies have associated particular phonological characteristics with state capitals. There is, however, a social continuum in which three varieties are generally recognized: *Broad Australian*, *General Australian*, and *Cultivated Australian*. Of these, *Cultivated Australian* most closely approaches British RP and *Broad Australian* most vigorously exhibits distinctive regional features. It is generally assumed that the *Australian accent* derives from the mixing of *British* and *Irish* accents in the early years of settlement. However, although most convicts and other settlers came from *London*, *the Midlands*, and *Ireland*, the influence of the original accents cannot be conclusively quantified.

The major features of AusE pronunciation are: (1) It is non-rhotic. (2) Its intonation is flatter than that of RP. (3) Speech rhythms are slow, stress being more evenly spaced than in RP. (4) Consonants do not differ significantly from those in RP. (5) Vowels are in general closer and more frontal than in RP, with /i/ and /u/ as in *tea*, *two* diphthongized to /ɪ/ and /əʊ/ respectively. (6) The vowel in *can't dance* may be /æ/ or /a/. (7) The schwa is busier than in RP, frequently replacing /ɪ/ in unaccented positions, as in *boxes*, *dances*, *darkest*, *velvet*, *acid*. (8) Some diphthongs shift, RP /eɪ/ towards /ʌɪ/, as in *Australia*, *day*, *mate*, and /aɪ/ towards /ɒɪ/, as in *high*, *wide*. (9) Speakers whose first language is not English or who have a bilingual background (Aboriginal, immigrant) often use sounds and a delivery influenced by

the patterns of the first or other language. (10) The name of the letter *h* is often pronounced 'haitch' by speakers wholly or partly of Irish-Catholic background [1, p. 117].

There are no syntactic features that distinguish standard AusE from standard BrE, or indeed any major non-standard features not also found in Britain, but there are many distinctive words and phrases. However, although AusE has added some 10,000 items to the language, few have become internationally active. The largest demand for new words has concerned flora and fauna, and predominant occupations like stock-raising have also required new terms. Because of this, Australianisms are predominantly naming words: single nouns (*mulga* an acacia, *mullock* mining refuse, *muster* a round-up of livestock), compounds (*black camp* an Aboriginal settlement, *black tracker* an Aboriginal employed by the police to track down missing persons, *black velvet* Aboriginal women as sexual objects, *red-back* a spider, *redfin* a fish, *red gum* a eucalypt), nouns used attributively (*convict colony* a penal colony, *convict servant* or *convict slave* a convict assigned as a servant).

A growing sense of national identity was fostered by involvement in the First World War. The line between formal and informal usage is perhaps less rigidly drawn in Australia than elsewhere, colloquialisms being more generally admissible than in Britain. Australian English makes far more frequent use of diminutives than do other varieties of English. They can be formed in a number of ways, such as by adding *-o* or *-ie* to the ends of abbreviated words. They can be used to indicate familiarity, although in many speech communities the diminutive form is more common than the original word or phrase. Examples of *-o* endings include *arvo* (afternoon), *demo* (demonstration), *devo* (deviant), *docco* (documentary), *muso* (musician), *servo* (service station, known in other countries as a "petrol station" or "gas station"), *bottle-o* (bottle-shop or liquor store), *derro* (derelict), *dunno* (don't know), *fazzo* (fabulous), *gyppo* (an Egyptian), *limmo* (limosine), *promo* (promotion), *rego* (still pronounced with a /dʒ/) (annual motor vehicle registration), *traino* (train station), *compo* (compensation). Examples of *-ie* or *-y* endings include *Aussie* (Australian), *barbie* (barbecue), *biggie* (a big issue), *bikkie* (biscuit; or money if plural (lipstick), *maggie* (magpie), *mozzie* (mosquito), *pollie* (politician), *possie* (position), *sweetie* (sweetheart) [2, p.61].

In terms of origin and structure, Australianisms fall into six categories: (1) Words from Aboriginal languages: *boomerang* a throwing weapon, *corroboree* a ceremonial dance, *jackeroo* a trainee farm manager, *kangaroo* a large hopping marsupial, *kookaburra* a kind of bird, *wombat* a burrowing marsupial. (2) Extensions of pre-existing senses: *bush* natural vegetation, or rural as opposed to urban life, *station* a garrison, colonial outpost, tract of grazing land, ranch. (3) Novel compounds: *bushman* someone skilled in traversing the bush, *bushranger* an armed bandit; *convict overseer* a convict appointed to supervise other convicts, *convict police* convicts appointed as police; *cattle/sheep station* – station for raising cattle or sheep, *station black* an Aboriginal employed on a station; *stock agent* someone buying and selling livestock, *stockman* someone employed to tend livestock. (4) Novel fixed phrases: *black bream*, *black swan*; *colonial ale*, *colonial tobacco*; *native plum*, *native potato*; *red ash*, *red cedar*; *white box*, *white cockatoo*; *wild banana*, *wild spinach*. (5) Coinage: *emancipist* a freed convict, *go slow* a form of industrial protest in which employees work to rule (now international), *woop-woops* remote country. (6) Words with greater currency in Australia than elsewhere include new applications of words from British regional dialects: *dinkum* reliable, genuine, *dunny* a privy, *larrikin* a hooligan, *wowser* a killjoy.

By and large, printed English is much the same as elsewhere. The authoritative style

guide is the Australian Government Printing Service's Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers, first published in 1966 and in its 4th edition. The manual was intended to set standards for government publications, but is widely used and has received input from the community at large through the *Macquarie Style Councils*. An informal guide is Stephen Murray-Smith's *Right Words: A Guide to Usage in Australia*. Where BrE and AmE spelling norms differ, BrE is preferred: *honour*, but *Labor* the name of the political party, *centre*, *licence*. The *-ise* spelling, as in *realise*, is generally preferred to *-ize* [3, p.45]. Australian usage has attracted comic stereotyping. The term *strine* refers to a kind of stage Australian in which vowels are distorted and syllables reduced, as in *strine* itself, collapsing the four syllables of *Australian* to one. Until recently, Australia was determinedly assimilationist. Although immigrant languages such as Greek and Italian are now accorded the status of *community languages*, and bilingualism is actively encouraged by the government, the impact of these languages on AusE has been negligible. Two issues currently dominate the linguistic scene: 1. *Multiculturalism*. 2. *American, British, and New Zealand influence*.

The arrival of immigrants is slowly converting a homogeneous Anglo-Celtic society into a multilingual, multicultural society that is more or less tolerant of difference. A recent development has been the publication of a National Policy on Languages, a report commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Education in 1986, a key document for federal and state initiatives to improve the teaching of English as a first and a second language, promote bilingualism, especially in those whose only language is English, and preserve and foster the teaching of community languages, including Aboriginal languages. Despite a new-found sense of independence (including the export of Australian films and television series), AusE is subject to the media-borne influences of BrE and AmE. By and large, because of traditional ties, there is less resistance to BrE than to AmE, particularly in pronunciation and spelling. Although it is 1,200 miles away, New Zealand is considered to be a close geographical, cultural, and linguistic neighbour. The constant movement of labour between the two countries ensures continuing exchange and sharing of features with New Zealand English.

### References

1. Harrington, J., F. Cox, and Z. Evans. "An acoustic phonetic study of broad, general, and cultivated Australian English vowels". *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 17, 1997, pp. 155–84.
2. Mitchell, Alexander G. *The Story of Australian English*, Sydney: Dictionary Research Centre, 1995.
3. Peters, Pam, ed., *Style in Australia: Current Practices in Spelling, Punctuation, Hyphenation, Capitalization, etc.*, 1986.