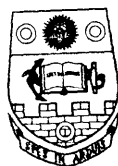


MISCELLANEA 36  
UNISA 1982



## ERRATA

The authors' names and full titles of the articles appearing in ENGLISH USAGE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA, Vol. 13 of 1982, were omitted and are as follows:

1. REMINISCENCES AND THOUGHTS OF AN EDITOR -  
An interview with Mey Hurter
2. LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND DEVELOPMENTAL  
READING - *P. Pienaar*
3. AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH - *W.D. Maxwell-Mahon*,  
University of Pretoria
4. TWO PLEASE? SPEECH DIFFERENCES BETWEEN  
MEN AND WOMEN IN A SIMPLE SERVICE EN-  
COUNTER - *Gary Barkhuizen*, Rhodes  
University
5. WORDS AS SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS BOUNDARIES -  
*T.D. Verryn*, University of South Africa

## AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH

By the end of the 19th century, English spoken and written in Australia had acquired a pronunciation and vocabulary of its own. Writing in 1829, Gibbon Wakefield said in his *Letter from Sydney* (which was composed in a jail in England) that 'terms of slang and flash' were in use throughout every stratum of society in the new colony:

Bearing in mind that our lowest class brought with it a peculiar language and is constantly supplied with fresh corruption, you will understand why pure English is not, and is not likely to become, the language of the colony.

The 'flash' dialect that Gibbon referred to was the argot originally imported with the First Fleet of 1788 – that collection of six transports, three store ships, and two naval vessels that brought Captain Phillip with 729 men and women convicts to Botany Bay to establish a prison farm.

Several Australian slang dictionaries were published in the Antipodes during the last decades of the 19th century. The most important from a linguistic and lexicographical point of view was *A New and Comprehensive Vocabulary of the Flash Language* edited by J.H. Vaux in New South Wales in 1812 and published with his *Memoirs* in 1819. Vaux was particularly suited to undertake such a work, having been transported to New South Wales three times for pickpocketing. What sort of expressions appear in his pioneering work? Well, among his lists were the following:

*trap*: a policeman  
*dab it up*: sleep (from *dab*: a bed)  
*flat*: an honest man  
*swag*: stolen wearing apparel

*brads*: money  
*gray*: double-tailed penny  
*hog*: a shilling  
*leary*: cunning

The first dictionary of Australian English compiled, like the O.E.D., on historical principles was that of Professor E.E. Morris of Melbourne, Victoria. This scholarly gentleman classified the words appearing in his *Austral English Dictionary* (1898) under the headings: new words coined by the colonists; adapted words for domestic usage; scientific names in general currency; English words with a different sense from that which they have in England; native (i.e. aboriginal) borrowings.

Present-day authorities on Australian English, blessed with the gift of hindsight, find much to complain about in Morris's work. He placed too much emphasis on the scientific names for flora and fauna, many of which names were not specifically Australian; he omitted many widely used slang words; he used quotations rather than actual early occurrences to locate the origin and meaning of Australian expressions; he often omitted the source and date of a quotation; he was not sufficiently familiar with everyday Australian usage of words. When all is said, however, Morris produced a valuable source of reference to which all subsequent students of Australian English have been indebted. He recorded numerous words current at the time which, through corruption and a process of linguistic osmosis, have left traces on 20th-century Australian expressions. For instance, a *dead bird* or certainty, nowadays used by those betting on horse-racing. In his *Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms* (1978), also compiled on historical principles, G.A. Wilkes quotes the instance of a schoolmaster in 1889 asking his class: 'What is a moral?' With one accord the answer came: 'A dead bird, sir!' The term itself originated with pigeon-shooting and refers to the first bird released in front of the guns. It was as good as dead.

An immediate result of Morris's *Austral English Dictionary* was that *Webster's International Dictionary* of 1898 managed to include a hastily compiled supplement dealing with Australian words and expressions. One of Australia's pioneering magazines was the *Sydney Bulletin*, founded in 1880 and still going strong. W.S. Ramson, in his *Australian English: An Historical Study of the Vocabulary 1788-1898* (1966), refers to the numerous letters and articles that filled the pages of the magazine concerning trends or characteristic features of Australian English around the turn of the last century. Novelists during the first quarter of this century sometimes added glossaries of Australian terms for those readers unfamiliar with the idiom. Professor W.K. Hancock, in his *Australia* (1930), expressed the views of many purists for whom the

King's English was the only acceptable mode of communication in the Empire's far-flung outposts. Australians, he complained, have rejected

almost at a blow the beautiful names of an intimate countryside - fields and meadows, woods, copse, spinney and thicket, dale, glen, vale and coomb, brook, stream and rivulet, inn and village. But in their place is a new vocabulary of the Bush - *billabong, dingo, damper, bushwacker, billy, cooee, swag, swaggie, humpy, stockman, jackeroo, squatter, bushranger, sundowner, brumby, drover, never-never, outback, backblocks*. One is *on the track, on the wallaby*. Many words have come from the aborigines, some have worked upwards from "St. Giles' Greek", others (*digger, fossick, pan-out*) derive from the gold rushes, and others still are originals coined offhand out of experience and a matter-of-fact humour.

(Quoted in S.J. Baker's *The Australian Language*)

The original settlers in Australia, as we know, were not convicts or naval officers but aborigines. They originally migrated from south-east Asia about 40,000 years ago; skeletons in tribal graveyards in Victoria, one of Australia's southern States, have radiocarbon dates of up to 9,000 years. The early European colonists soon borrowed words from some of the 260 aboriginal languages current in the 19th century; such borrowing was expedited by the collection of words already made by members of Captain Cook's crew on the *Endeavour* during his exploration of the South Seas in 1768-1770. The first aboriginal word incorporated into English, according to W.S. Ramson in his informative study of such borrowings, was *kangaroo*.

When Captain Phillip arrived with his First Fleet at Botany Bay in 1788, he was met by a band of aborigines who offered his company no violence. Instead, they ran to and fro on the beach calling out in their language: 'Go away! Go away!' The First Fleet went on to Port Jackson, since the site originally chosen proved unsuitable for establishing a settlement. Between 1788 and 1798, four collections of vocabularies used by the Port Jackson aborigines were made. Words from these vocabularies have since passed into Australian English. Some of these words are *budgeriee* (good), *bogie* (bathe), *corroboree* (gathering, usually with dances), *gibber* (a large stone or boulder), *jumbuck* (sheep), *murry* (very).

As might be expected, the aborigines soon devised a form of pidgin English with which to converse when dealing with the European colonists. An early comment on this pidgin dialect occurred in D. Collins's *Account of New South Wales* (1796), where the author speaks of the 'barbarous mixture of English with the Port Jackson dialect'. L.E. Furekeld, in his *An Australian Grammar* (1834),

lists some of the pidgin expressions:

*wommerrerr* - a weapon (hence the modern rocket base Womera in Central Australia)  
*pickaninney* - child  
*gammon* - falsehood  
*waddy* - a cudgel  
*strike-a-light* - to make known.

Strictly speaking, pidgin English is the language used in New Guinea and the Pacific Islands. But, as the largest of all these islands, Australia came in for its share of this form of the English language. The 'blackbirders' or Pacific slave-traders of the late 19th century supplied forced labour for the Queensland sugar plantations, and these islanders introduced their own type of pidgin to northern Australia. Pearl-luggers were also crewed by many Pacific islanders with an additional variety of pidgin. In 1921, Australia was given a mandate to govern New Guinea (or Papua New Guinea, as it is now called), and exercised this sovereignty until independence in 1975. Administrators and their staff brought back words and idioms from the New Guinea pidgin to the Australian mainland to enrich the language further. E.S. Sayer, in his *Pidgin English* (1939), gives an amusing example of Psalm 22 in pidgin:

Big Name watchem sheeppysheep: Watchem blackfella. No more belly cry fella hab. Big Name makum camp alonga grass, takum blackfella walkabout longa, no frightem no more hurry watta. Big Boss longa sky makum inside glad: takem walkabout longa too much good fella ....	The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake ....
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(Quoted in S.J. Baker's *The Australian Language*)

Australian English has not only a great variety of words and expressions that are foreign to or differ from standard English (if there is still such a thing), it also sounds different. So 'let stalk Strine'. During 1964, Professor A. Morrison of the University of Sydney began writing a series of articles in the *Sydney Morning Herald* about Australian pronunciation. He used the pseudonym of 'Afferbeck Lauder' (i.e. alphabetical order). Ultimately, he had four books published about Strine. There is a certain element of exaggeration and inventiveness in many examples he used, and most of the Old Australians (as distinct from the New Australians who arrived in the country shortly after World War II and continue to multiply) regarded the whole thing as a huge joke. Nevertheless, there is a distinctive Australian accent which may

conveniently be labelled 'Strine'.

With acknowledgements to Professor Morrison, I shall quote from the account he gives of a cocktail party arranged in London to celebrate the publication of one of his Strine books. Again he has given imagination a loose rein — but again, there is a firm foundation of truth in his story. Sir Hoddler Weck, eminent British man of letters, was apparently guest of honour:

I heard the crash of breaking glass in the Australian sector — it was time to start the recital. I suggested to our Secretary, Miss Nibbly, that, as our guest of honour had arrived, we should ask everybody to be seated. 'Er nir,' she replied, 'He hessna rave jet.' 'But there is Sir Hoddler,' I said, 'talking to that woman with onions all over her hat.' 'Sir Hoddler?' She looked surprised. 'Er nir. Mospey sommer steck. Wean vetted Mr Fuller Boolsh. He skirtner reedy spoitreh ebba leave. He hessna rave jet. Ay durnt think they're onions. Ay think they're cherries.' 'But I invited Sir Hoddler,' I said. 'It was all settled at the last Council meeting. Well they look like onions.' I began to feel uneasy about the situation. 'Er nirpra fessor. Aim in chodge of the errenchments. The president a nader saded twosk Mr Fuller Boolsh. Tsol settle demmer Fred. End they're *dairf* nittleh cherries.' My uneasiness increased. I went over to discuss it with the President, and found him pouring gin into the empty space an inch away from his glass. 'Hair yeggowan mite?' he asked. 'Reg,' I said, 'just who *is* our guest of honour?' 'Hacker dyno?' he said, 'ammonia president. Ar, yousha rise. Irriers now.'

The rest of this account, together with two poems in Strine (one on Ned Kelly, naturally) can be found in the Introduction of *Fraffly Strine Everything* (1969), a compendium of *Let Stalk Strine*, *Nose Tone Unturned*, *Fraffly Well Spoken*, and *Fraffly Suite*.

In its colloquial expressions and idioms, Australian English is particularly rich. This is particularly so in the case of exclamations and expletives. 'Stone the crows' and 'starve the lizards' is an expression of astonishment. If someone is not feeling well, he or she is 'real crook'; to be in good spirits, however, is to be 'a box of birds'. Asked to define promiscuity, an Australian might say: 'it's like being caught in a circular saw'. And to quieten a persistent interjector during a discussion, he will say: 'Shut up. Who's robbing this coach, anyway?' Shades of Ned Kelly.

At present, books on Australian English usage are coming off the presses in a steady stream. Anyone interested in the way English has been transported to Botany Bay and gained freedom of expression could make a selection along these lines:

BAKER, S.J. *The Australian Language* Melbourne: Sun Books, 1977.

(Probably the best book on the subject available; over 500 pages of entertaining history and examples from 1788 to the present day.)

WILKES, G.A. *A Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms* Fontana paperback, 1980.

(The standard work. 370 pages of examples copiously illustrated according to historical principles by quotations from earliest sources of usage.)

SCOTT, B. *The Complete Book of Australian Folklore* Sydney: Summit Books, 1978.

(Profusely illustrated, with reproductions of paintings, sketches, and line drawings to accompany over 400 pages of idioms and colloquial expressions. A large paperback, 27 cms x 19 cms.)

WANNAN, B. LANSDOWNE. *Australian Folklore: a Dictionary of Lore, Legends and Popular Allusions* Dee Why West, New South Wales, 1979.

(Comparable to Scott's book, but longer, with over 580 pages of examples. Equally authoritative and reliable, and profusely illustrated; also a large paperback 18 cms x 25 cms.)