

## **Aussies Speak Strine: Australian English**

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### **Якою мовою говорять Австралійці: Австралійський варіант англійської мови**

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Today approximately 400 million people speak English as their first language. Although English is only the third largest language by number of native speakers, after Mandarin Chinese and Spanish, when combining native and non-native speakers it is probably the most commonly spoken language in the world. One person in seven of world's population uses English as either the native language, the second language in a society that is bilingual, or the foreign language for practical purpose-administrative, professional or educational. Linguistics professor David Crystal calculates that non-native speakers now outnumber native speakers by a ratio of 3 to 1.

Since English truly is a global language, English language learners and users need to be prepared for future communications with speakers of varieties of English. So-called the inner circle, the outer circle and the expended circle varieties of English may considerably be different from the one on which the chief emphases are made in English language classes. Knowing about those varieties deepens the awareness and confidence of speakers.

English has become a world language because of its establishment as a mother tongue outside the United Kingdom. When the United Kingdom became a colonial power, English served as the lingua franca of the colonies of the British Empire in North America, India, Africa, Australia and many other regions. Thus, numerous varieties of English have appeared.

Australian English began diverging from British English shortly after the foundation of the Australian penal colony of New South Wales in 1788. British convicts sent there came mostly from large English cities (including Cockneys from London). They were joined by free settlers, military personnel and administrators, often with their families. In 1827 Peter Cunningham, in his book *Two Years in New South Wales*, reported that native-born white Australians of the time spoke with a distinctive accent and vocabulary.

In Australia, there is no variation in accent according to region, race, or socio-economic class. Instead, the accent varies according to ideology.

Most linguists consider that there are three defined accents of Australian English: "Broad", "General" and "Cultivated". They often, but not always, reflect the social class and/or educational background of the speaker. Two Australians can grow up side by side and end up speaking different versions of Australian English, using different accents and using different words.

- Broad Australian English

About ten per cent of Australians speak like ex-prime minister *Bob Hawke* with what is known as a *broad accent*.

Broad Australian English is the archetypal and most recognisable variety and is familiar to English speakers around the world, because of its use in identifying Australian characters in non-Australian films and television programs. In reality it is somewhat less common than General Australian English. Broad Australian English is recognisable by a certain nasal drawl and the prevalence of long diphthongs. You are more likely to encounter Broad Australian English as you travel further away from the capital cities.

Although only a small minority of Australians actually uses broad accents, it has a great deal of cultural credibility. For example, it is used by a disproportionately large number of newsreaders. It is also used in a disproportionately large number of television commercials. Examples of identities are Steve Irwin; Bryan Brown; Pauline Hanson.

- General Australian English

Around 80 per cent of Australians speak like *Nicole Kidman* with what is known as a *British received accent or general Australian English*.

General Australian English is the stereotypical variety of Australian English. It is the variety of English used by the majority of Australians and it dominates the accents found in contemporary Australian-made films and television programs, such as *Neighbours*. This variety has noticeably shorter vowel sounds than Broad Australian English, among other differences. There is perhaps a trend towards General Australian away from the extremes. Examples of identities are Nicole Kidman; Hugh Jackman; Russell Crowe.

- Cultivated Australian English

A final ten per cent speak like ex-prime minister *Malcolm Fraser* with what is known as a *cultivated accent*.

The accent sounds like someone educated at Oxford University in England. Although it is not very popular today, in past eras, the cultivated accent had the kind of cultural credibility that the broad accent has today. For example, newsreaders on the government funded ABC had to speak with the cultivated accent. Since there was a shortage of Australian men able to speak in the accent, male newsreaders were

imported from England. Cultivated Australian English has many similarities to British Received Pronunciation, and is often mistaken for it. Examples of identities are Geoffrey Rush; Dame Joan Sutherland; Robert Hughes.

Quite a phenomenon in Australia is Strine. The term coined in 1964 and subsequently used to describe a joke or made-up "language" purportedly spoken by Australians whose accents frequently run words together in a type of liaison. The term is syncope, derived from a shortened phonetic rendition of the pronunciation of the word "Australian" in an exaggerated Broad Australian accent by saying the word "Australian" through both closed teeth and the nose. In the same way an Australian resident is known as Aussie.

The next cultural peculiarity of Australia is that there is a significant difference between how men speak and how women speak. It is quite rare to find a woman speaking with a broad Australian accent, and quite rare to find a man speaking with the cultivated accent. A woman speaking with a broad accent would be like a woman wearing a blue bonds singlet and talking about pig shooting. Likewise, a man with a cultivated accent would be like a man wearing a skirt and talking about make-up. No other English speaking country has the same gender difference in pronunciation.

Quite prolonged existence of the Australian dominion, being cutting off from the metropolis by a few thousand miles, and a weak cultural ties with the metropolis, on the one hand, and a growing sense of national identity and national independence, on the other hand, definitely reflect on vocabulary, pronunciation and English grammar in Australia. Differences with the vocabulary of Standard English now continue growing, because progressive Australian writers are widely adopting the so-called "australianisms" in literary language, and a deep study of Australian history in schools, as well as publication of popular scientific works about the history of Australia reviving old words from that period, when Australia was a place of exile and experienced the turbulent years of the gold rush. However, these differences are not so great to be able to talk about the Australian language.

Speakers of Strine can understand all of the world's English dialects. Through sports such as cricket, Australians are exposed to commentators from the West Indies, India, Pakistan, England, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, South Africa, New Zealand and England. Other sporting contests, such as international rugby, also provide the mass exposure to international English that further expands the Australian lexicon.

In terms of travel, Australians are keenly interested in the outside world. Almost 10 per cent of Australians go on a backpacking holiday. Almost one million Australians are currently expatriates. When these

travelers eventually return to Australia they bring with them the new words they have learnt.

Via movies and television, Australians keep up-to-date with the evolutions in both American and British English. Any new word that is broadcast in either the American or British media quickly finds its way to Australia.

Most importantly, due to strong cockneys' and children's influence on Strine give Australians a strong ability to invent and comprehend novel idioms. This is the most difficult skill of speaking English but also the most important. Idioms are like poetry. They add visual imagery to a sentence to enhance its power and emotive appeal. Without them, English speakers can communicate no better than a ten-year-old.

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Australian English similarly to the other ones is not simply a means of communication but the symbolic possession of a particular community, expressive in its identity, its traditions, and values. Many speakers of English use it in their own way as an expression of their identity and their cultural values. Appreciating this phenomenon will help learners to be prepared for their international interactions that are likely to occur in the existing "global village".

### **Literature**

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