

Unit 12 - Australia



The objectives for this unit are:

- reading: read a text about the popularity of Australian slang in Britain.
- colloquial English: learn some Australian English expressions

Unit 12 - Australia - Reading: Key phrases

The following words and phrases appear in the text you are going to read in this section:

propensity a tendency to a particular kind of behaviour

She has a propensity to exaggerate.

build up a head of steam start to increase

This project began slowly but now we're really building up a head of steam.

hamper (often passive) prevent someone from easily doing or achieving something

We were hampered by the weather in our efforts to reach the airport on time.

nickname an informal, often humorous, name that is connected to appearance, personality, etc.

It was my nickname when I was at school.

buttoned-up reserved and not inclined to reveal information

The Colonel is a very buttoned-up individual but then he is from a different generation.

jargon words and expressions that are used by a particular profession or group and which are difficult to understand

The people in the IT Department are always using computer jargon. I don't understand a word they say.

lingo expressions used by a particular group of people

I don't understand him when he uses computer lingo.

on the slide changing to a lower or worse condition

The Western economies are on the slide.

powerhouse a group or an organization that has a lot of power

China is the new economic powerhouse.

buzzword a word or phrase that has become popular and fashionable and is used a lot in newspapers, etc.

Analogue is the buzzword in photography at the moment.

The rise and fall of Australian slang



Australians have always had a way with words and there are few languages, or dialects, with a stronger history of slang than Australian English. So much so that there is even a name for the way Australians speak: *Strine*, a shortened phonetic rendition of the word 'Australian' in a broad Australian accent. Strine exhibits Australians' love of an amusing phrase such as *go off like a bucket of prawns in the sun* (to cause a commotion), *flat out like a lizard drinking* (very busy), or *his blood's worth bottling* (he's an excellent person), as well as their propensity to shorten words: *arvo* for afternoon, *sunnies* for sunglasses, *swimmers* for swimming trunks, and *mozzies* for mosquitos. These two elements are often combined: *it cost big bikkies* meaning it was very expensive, where *bikkies* refers to biscuits.

But where did Strine come from and how did it become so popular and established in the UK?

'Australian slang really seems to have built up a head of steam in the late 19th Century,' says Tony Thorne, linguist at King's College London and author of the *Dictionary of Contemporary Slang*. This was partly down to the fact that the kind of people who went to Australia tended to come from places with rich local linguistic traditions like Scotland, Ireland, and the East End of London, he says. 'Those people weren't hampered by the upper-class cultures of the UK. They were much more free to play with language, creating nicknames for local things, in a way that the buttoned-up Brits in those days weren't able to.'

There is also, of course, the link with convicts and the British policy of setting up penal colonies in Australia. 'At least in the early decades there was a connection with the lower classes. Slang and jargon, that sort of playful language, was very common in those social strata,' says John Hajek, professor of language and linguistics at the University of Melbourne.

But it wasn't until the 1960s and 1970s that Strine started to be noticed in the wider world. 'That was the time when Australianisms stopped being something local and started to spread outside of Australia itself,' says Thorne. Television played a big part, and in particular one man: the Australian comedian Barry Humphries.

Humphries' characters became famous in the UK and they brought with them the rich and varied language that the Australians were using. This paved the way for more television to be imported from Australia with one of the biggest hits being the tea-time soap opera *Neighbours*. 'There was certainly a huge shift in the attitude towards Australian English in the UK as a result of *Neighbours*,' says Hajek. 'It exposed the British to a much wider variety of Australian accents and terminology.'

Those were the heady days of Australian lingo. Now, though, it seems Aussie slang is on the slide. In the latest edition of Tony Thorne's *Dictionary of Contemporary Slang*, for the first time, there are a just a handful of new Australianisms and some of those are just old words that have come back into common usage. Australian slang, says Thorne, is just not what it used to be.

'The very macho, very classless kind of Australian culture is out of date,' he says. And not so long ago macho Australians were big exporters of slang. *Tinnies* (beer cans), *stubbies* (short beer bottles), *necking* (drinking/swallowing) all came from the Australian drinking culture and were picked up by people in the UK, the United States, and South Africa,' Thorne says.

But as Australians have changed, so too have their linguistic habits. 'Australia has become a powerhouse in the financial and service sectors,' says Thorne. Now when Australians go abroad, they're not barmen and backpackers. They're working in the corporate sector. 'The language of the corporate sector is business-speak, jargon, and buzzwords. Australians have embraced that. *Utilize*, *corporateize*, *maximize*. The old language is past its sell-by date.'

From BBC News

The rise and fall of Australian slang: Read the text and answer the questions

Read the text and decide if the statements are true, false, or not mentioned.

1. Australians like to abbreviate words.
2. Australian slang is a recent invention.
3. The British upper classes first started creating Strine.
4. Australian slang became well-known in the UK because of television.
5. Strine is still very popular today.
6. Australian society has changed a lot recently.

The rise and fall of Australian slang: Read the text and answer the questions

Read the text again and choose the correct endings to complete the statements.

Immigrants mainly came from

- A. rich parts of the UK.
- B. poor parts of the UK.
- C. engineering families.
- D. the upper classes.

The Dictionary of Contemporary Slang contains

- A. only new slang.
- B. all kinds of slang.
- C. only old slang.
- D. only Australian slang.

Strine started to spread outside of Australia due to

- A. the lower classes.
- B. the penal colonies. an internationally famous comedian.
- C. a soap opera.

Australian culture used to be dominated by

- A. backpackers.
- B. comedians.
- C. men.
- D. businessmen.

Barry Humphries' popularity meant that

- A. people started emigrating to Australia.
- B. the Dictionary of Contemporary Slang was written.
- C. the British started watching television at teatime.
- D. Australian television programmes were shown in the UK.

Nowadays, Australians

- A. work as barmen when they go abroad.
- B. use much more business jargon.
- C. are taller and stronger than they used to be.
- D. don't speak Strine.

Unit 12 - Australia - Colloquial English

These New Zealand English words and phrases are taken from the text you read in the previous section:

go off like a bucket of prawns in the sun cause a commotion
I spilt my coffee on him and he went off like a bucket of prawns in the sun.

flat out like a lizard drinking very busy
I'm flat out like a lizard drinking doing eight in the morning till eight at night.

his / her blood's worth bottling he / she is an excellent person
Sheila gave me a lovely birthday prezzie - her blood's worth bottling, mate.

cost big bikkies expensive
I'm thinking of getting a new car but it'll cost big bikkies.

arvo afternoon
The game doesn't start until this arvo.

Sunnies sunglasses
Anyone seen my sunnies?

swimmers swimming trunks
Your sunnies are next to your swimmers, mate.

mozzies mosquitoes
These mozzies are driving me mad!

bikkies biscuits
Do you want some bikkies with your tea?

neck drink or swallow
Neck your tinnies and we'll go for something to eat.

Australian English: Practice

Complete the sentences with the correct words.

1. I would buy a new one but it'll cost big _____.
2. Do you like my new _____? I bought them at the beach.
3. We're meeting Dave this _____ if you want to come along.
4. _____ your drink - it's time we got back to work!
5. She went off like a bucket of _____ when I told her the news.
6. He's a lovely guy - his blood's worth _____.
7. Gaz has left his _____ on the beach again.
8. I'm flat out like a lizard _____ all this week, mate.
9. You need to cover up - there's a lot of _____ down by the river.
10. Don't give the boy so many _____. You know it makes him hyperactive.