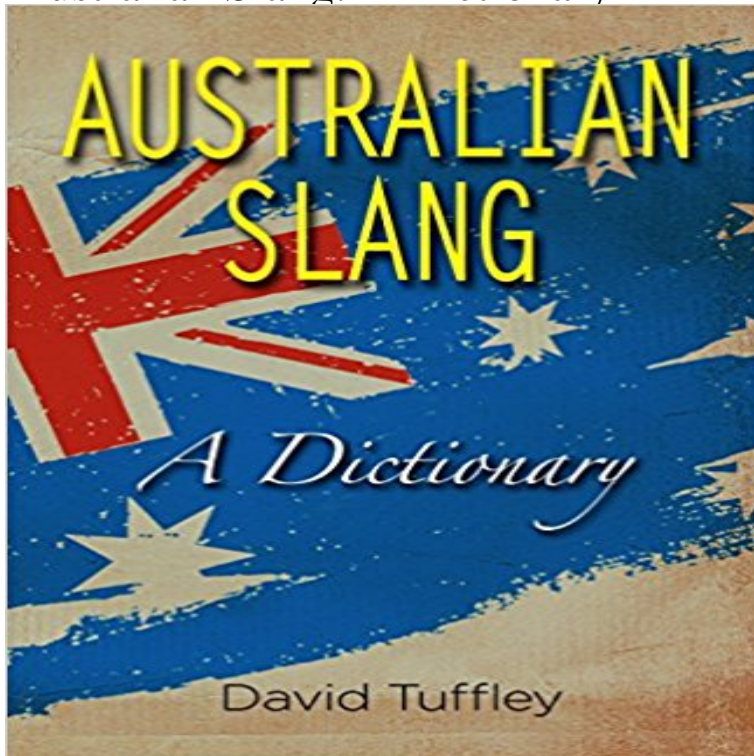


Australian Slang: A Dictionary



Aussie Slang is a richly-textured, often ribald world of understatement and laconic humour. This guide aims to do three things; (a) to help the traveller decipher what they hear around them in everyday Australian life, (b) give the casual reader some insight into informal Australian culture, and (c) make a record of some old Australian expressions that are slipping into disuse now that English has become a global language. Readers will recognize both British and American terms in this list. Australian English has absorbed much from these two great languages. For depth of knowledge of their own language, no-body beats the British. Its their language after all. A thousand years in the making, the English language is embedded deep in the DNA of the British. No-one uses their language more skilfully than they do. On the other hand, American English has a creative power that recognizes no boundaries. Americans have taken a very good all-purpose language and extended it in all kinds of directions with new words describing the world as it is today. They do not generally cling to old forms out of respect for tradition. As Winston Churchill observed, Britain and America two great nations divided by the same language. Australian English sits comfortably in the space between the two. Australian English began in the early days of settlement as English English with a healthy dash of Celtic influence from the many Scots, Irish and Welsh settlers who came to Australia. Large numbers of German settlers also came in the 1800s, and their influence on the language is also clearly evident. For over a hundred years, Australia developed in splendid isolation its unique blend of English, tempered by the hardships of heat and cold, deluge and drought, bushfires and cyclones. The harsh environment united people in a common struggle to survive. People helped each other. Strong communitarian loyalties were engendered.

It is from this that the egalitarian character of Australia evolved. There is a strong emphasis on building a feeling of solidarity with others. Strangers will call each other mate or luv in a tone of voice ordinarily reserved for close friends and family in other parts of the world. Everyone was from somewhere else, and no-one was better than anyone else. A strong anti-authoritarian attitude became deeply embedded in Australian English. This was mainly directed towards their British overlords who still ran the country as a profitable colony. The Australian sense of humour is generally understated, delivered with a straight-face, and is often self-deprecating in nature. No-one wants to appear to be up themselves. Harsh or otherwise adverse conditions had to be met without complaint, so when discussing such conditions, it was necessary to do so with laconic, understated humour. Anyone not doing so was deemed a whinger (win-ger). Following World War II the American influence came increasingly to influence Australian culture and therefore the language. No-one is better at selling their popular culture to the world than the United States of America. Their pop culture is a beguiling instrument of foreign policy, so pervasive and persuasive it is. Young Australians enthusiastically embraced American culture, and since the 1940s the old established British language and customs have become blended with the American. If Australian English has a remarkable quality, it is the absence of regional dialects. It is spoken with relative uniformity across the entire nation. Brisbane on the East coast is a 4,300 kilometre (2,700 mile) drive from Perth on the West coast, yet there is little discernible linguistic difference between the two places compared with the difference, for example between Boston and San Francisco in the US. Nowhere else in the world do we see such linguistic uniformity across large distances.

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