

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Language performs an array of functions; of particular interest is its ability to express identity. The way in which a person speaks is a conscious and deliberate decision, this language choice reflects not only who one is as an individual, but also the region in which they were raised and the person whom they wish to be perceived as.

'An Englishman's way of speaking absolutely classifies him' – Idiolects convey many details of one's identity including: age, nationality and religion. A man of Australian national identity, with Scottish parents and of a catholic religion conveys his identity in the following ways: The lexical choice of lexemes 'hooroo', 'sheila', 'lassie' and the use of the utterance 'God bless ya pet' as a closing in oral discourse. Both 'hooroo' and 'sheila' are characteristic of a Broad Australian English lexicon – hence reflecting his national identity. 'hooroo' is a distinctly Australian way of saying 'goodbye'. During early colonisation of Australia, the celebratory interjection 'hooray' experienced a semantic shift and was used as a colloquialistic closing amongst the nation's population. Over time as the language was becoming codified and a general accent was established the pronunciation of this lexeme modified to what is now pronounced as 'hooroo' – a lexeme now only used in the context of a closing. Alternatively, 'Sheila' – originally an Irish name, is an Australian colloquialism that dates back to European settlement of the nation and is used to denote any female in Australian spoken English. Synonymic of this is the lexeme 'lass' or 'lassie' – characteristic of spoken Scottish colloquial language and from a Scandinavian origin in the 14th century. The man's tendency to use this latter lexeme reflects his Scottish background; during the language acquisition phase of childhood, his parents most probably used the word regularly around him resulting in it becoming part of his everyday lexicon. In addition, his belief in Catholicism is reflected in the following utterances: 'God bless ya pet' and 'hooley dooley'. The former utterance used quite regularly by the male illustrates his belief in God and his catholic upbringing (in a catholic orphanage run by nuns during early adolescence). The nuns would have used this closing extensively, causing the man to do the same – even in later life. However, 'hooley dooley' is a variation of the Australian interjection 'holy dooley' which is used as an interjection of great surprise, synonymic to 'Oh my God' and 'Jesus Christ'. The speaker's decision not to use the standard colloquialism again reflects his religion, as a strict catholic who believes that blasphemy is a sin.

Australian English is a fairly homogenous language but lexical choice differs from region to region. 'Bogan', 'westie', and 'moccy' are all synonymic nouns that refer to an unsavoury and often uncivilised person of lower socio-economic status. 'Bogan' is the most widely used lexeme in Australia of this cluster. Its first use in a pejorative context is believed to have occurred in Victoria in the mid 1970s. It became standardised across this state during the latter half of the next decade as Victorian adolescents were exposed to the Melbourne production 'Comedy Company' and reoccurring character 'Kylie Mole' who relentlessly utilised the lexeme as part of her distinctive idiolect. Later, in 1990 the Victorian Football League officially became the AFL (Australian Football League) – during this transition a number of Victorian teams relocated interstate and many linguists believe that they took their colloquial lexicon with them resulting in the nation wide use of 'bogan'. In Ballarat, Victoria however, locals do not tend to use this lexical item in a pejorative sense. Instead, this lexeme has somewhat affectionate connotations, similar to that of the colloquialism 'dag'. Alternatively, to refer to a person of uncivilised nature interlocutors in this region utilise the lexeme 'westie', which also features in the Sydney regional dialect. Notably, the Ballarat-based occurrence of this colloquialism originates from the proper pronoun of the suburb Wendouree West – the location of the majority of the city's commission housing. By abbreviating the previously mentioned pronoun to 'the west' and then adding the diminutive suffix '-ie' the discriminatory lexeme was first coined. Originally, it was used as discriminatory language referring to any inhabitant of this area.

However, its semantics eventually generalised to refer to any individual – regardless of location – perceived to act ‘feral’ and uncivilised. It was often once typical for Melbournians to use the lexeme ‘moccy’ in describing this demographic – ‘Moccy’ is a colloquialism for the noun ‘moccasin’ – a type of footwear that bogans in the late 20th century were infamous for. Hence, through the process of synecdoche ‘moccy’ experienced semantic shift causing it to become another regional variant of ‘bogan’. In addition to regional variances of lexical choice, there are slight phonetic variations within the nation. Particularly concerning lexemes that feature ‘a’ as the central vowel sound, such as: ‘dance’, ‘France’ and ‘photograph’. South Australians pronounce this lexeme with a distinct / a / phoneme whilst Victorians and most other Australians use the / æ / phoneme. The reason for this distinction is that during the colonisation of Australia the South Australian population was of the English majority, hence the / a / pronunciation characteristic of this variety dominated.

Australians are proud egalitarians. It is no wonder that some adopt the Broad Australian English (BAE) approach to spoken language – it may be considered the least prestigious variety of the Australian language but interestingly is perceived as the most genuine. ‘Fair dinkum’ is a phrase that has long been a staple of the BAE lexicon. The utterance has many functions: it can be used as a statement of confirmation and as an interrogative exclamation similar to ‘really?’ It is also an Australian colloquialism for both of the adjectives: ‘genuine’ and ‘real’. The phrase is attested from 1888, first appearing in the utterance “It took us an hour’s hard dinkum to get near the peak” - from ‘Robbery Under Arms’ by Rolf Boldrewood. Here the semantics seem to imply work or exertion. Australians are infamous for having strong admiration for honest hard labour and the working class man. Thus, it is highly likely that this belief is responsible for the semantic shift ‘fair dinkum’ has encountered over the last century – and through utilising this idiom, speakers can convey this commonality. Colloquial language is known to reflect solidarity amongst interlocutors – Hence, why Kevin Rudd attempted to utilise a colloquial register to close the social distance between him and Australian voters. During an interview regarding the Labor Party’s efforts to promote women within the government, Rudd uttered ‘Fair shake of the sauce bottle, mate’. The colloquial lexeme ‘mate’ is a synonym of friend, very typical of the male lexicon, illustrating his attempt to project a more masculine identity to the Australian public. The entire clause functions as a synonym to ‘fair go’ a concept very strong to Australian culture, reflecting the nation’s egalitarian identity – and effectively the ‘typical Australian’ identity Rudd is endeavouring to convey. However, his attempt to show solidarity with every-day Australian voters baffled the public. The consensus was that the PM had mistakenly joined two colloquialisms, effectively confusing the separate semantics of the slang terms so much so that they become one concept. When this occurs it is called conflation. The two clauses are ‘fair shake of the dice’ and ‘fair suck of the sauce bottle’ (both synonyms for ‘fair go’). The latter is likely to have originated from homeless alcoholics wanting a share of cheap bottled wine, which was being passed around. The lexeme ‘sauce’ often functions as slang for alcohol, supporting the etymology of the idiom.

Indisputably, language is the best accessory for expressing one’s identity. No amount of clothing or variation of hairstyle could ever convey the history and culture that is expressed every time one opens their mouth.