

## From Anzac to zack: a lexicographer looks at Australian English

Moore, Bruce. 2008. *Speaking Our Language: The Story of Australian English*. Oxford University Press. 255 pages. Paperback 978 0 19 556578 2, AUD \$32.95.

Review by James Lambert, City University of Hong Kong



As Director of the Australian National Dictionary Centre at the Australian National University Bruce Moore is one of Australia's foremost lexicographers and has written and edited widely in the sphere of Australian English. His latest offering *Speaking Our Language: The Story of*

*Australian English* is 'aimed at the general reader' and is geared to people with 'a keen interest in the Australian language, to people who would like to know what the distinguishing features of Australian English are; most importantly it is geared to the people who want to know where Australian English came from, what the forces were that moulded it, why it takes its present form, and where it is going', (Moore, xv.).

As underscored by the word *story* in the subtitle, the book is largely structured in a chronological order, beginning with the exciting discovery of kangaroo dung in Botany Bay, to the borrowing two-and-a-half months later of the word *kangaroo* from the Guugu Yimidhirr language by Joseph Banks and Captain James Cook in mid-July 1770. As the chapters progress there is a movement from the penal and colonial era, through the gold rush times, both World Wars, and so on to the present day with a postscript about future prospects, and excursions that delve into the Australian English accent, regionalisms and other Englishes, namely Aboriginal and Migrant.

The front matter contains a short Introduction, after which follows a brief description of some of the more salient points in which Australian English pronunciation differs from Received Pronunciation

(RP), including the perennial perception of outsiders that 'Australians say RICE rather than RACE' (xvii). As this book is directed at a popular audience it does not use IPA or 'specialised linguistic terminology' (xv). The end matter contains extensive Endnotes wherein the work's bibliographical information is presented with occasional further information, albeit set in exceedingly small type, and an index of the 'words that receive major discussion' in the text 'or are important to the argument' (221) but sadly no subject index, presumably as the chapter titles carry the burden of this job.

Indeed, chapters are short, the longest being 22 pages, and cover well-defined subject areas. Chapter 1 deals with borrowings from indigenous languages, chapter 2 with names for new flora, fauna and geographical features encountered by the colonists, while chapters 3 and 4 deal with the language of the convicts and the unique social structure that emerged as Australia transitioned from penal settlement, with convicts and administrators, ex-convicts and free settlers, to a country in which Australian nationalism and identity vied with notions of Empire and 'Home'.

Chapter 5 – Establishing the Accent – draws on the work of Edgar E. Schneider on colonial Englishes, and that of recent New Zealand research, especially that of Peter Trudgill, and describes the formation of the Australian accent as a three-tiered process of dialect levelling amongst the first settlers, who speak different dialects but may modify these slightly to improve comprehension, thence the children of the first settlers, who take up the various elements of the accents of their parents generation but with greater levelling, to finally the children of those children, who select one variant from each set of sounds used amongst their peers. Moore notes that it is 'well established that young children learn to speak like their peers, and not like their parents' (71). The chapter also dismisses the 'persistent story' (69) of the close connection between Australian English and Cockney, so strongly promoted by Eric Partridge, and explains the homogeneity of Australian pronunciation as a consequence of the 'spreading out of the foundation accent' due to the 'centralised government bureaucracy' and great 'geographical mobility' (72) that existed in early colonial times.

Chapters 6 and 7 cover the period of the Australian gold rushes and the influx of dialect terms, including iconic items such as *chook* (chicken) and *fair dinkum* (true, genuine), while 8 treats the language of the 'jolly swagman', farmers and cattlemen, shearers and Australian drinkers, and contains a summary of important Australian dictionaries that unfortunately omits to mention *The*

*Macquarie Dictionary* and the vast impact it has had on Australian English. Chapters 9 and 10 return to pronunciation and the cultural cringe that became associated with the rise in Britain of the perceived superiority of RP, leading to the emergence of Cultivated Australian, which tried to mimic RP, and Broad Australian, the reaction against it. Moore argues this dual personality arose because the social myths of Empire and Nationalism were actually not 'in conflict, but rather marched side by side' (xii). In chapter 11 the argument continues that Britain's movement to the Common Market in the 1960s signalled a break of Australia's long-lasting bond with the 'Home Country' and led to a resurgence of nationalism and consequent pride in Australian English. Chapter 12 covers Australian regionalism in terms of grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary, concentrating largely on the latter where the greatest

differences can be found. The coverage of Aboriginal Englishes and Migrant Englishes, or Ethnolects, in chapter 13 are concise overviews and the final chapter, looking towards the future, reports that Australian English is not being 'weakened by either Global English or the Internet' and by way of proof is resplendent in local coinages of the last two decades.

Moore is to be congratulated on this book, which is eminently readable and informative, making it a good read for scholar and general public alike. The only comparable narrative text on Australian English is Sidney J. Baker's *The Australian Language* published in 1945 with a second edition in 1966, almost half a century ago, and hence a book such as Moore's, which examines more closely the links between language, history, society and culture, is a welcome and long-overdue addition to the literature on Australian English. ■

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