

lingua weekly

4th January 2007

Strine

Paola Lizares



Though I moved to Australia exactly a month ago, I am still in a constant state of awe while getting to know this country. Here, everything is strange. The warm Christmases and cool Augusts, the flightless birds, the pouched mammals, the champion swimmers amongst obese citizens, the far-too-salty Vegemite bread spread ...and the language, Australian English, also known as 'Strine'.

Ever thought of coming 'down under' to improve your English? Then, aside from being able to spend your afternoons improving your surf style in shark-infested waters, you will be able to almost understand a kind of English that most Europeans aren't acquainted with.

The first lesson is to understand the diphthongs, particularly the diphthongs used in Broad Australian English, basically spoken in Queensland. You call your friend your 'mate', but you actually pronounce it 'mait'. If you want to say 'my mate', you should actually say 'moi mait'. So if you want to say 'My mate has a date with Kate', you have to say 'Moi mait ez uh dait with Kait'. Or if you want to say 'I want to buy some wine today', it's 'Oi wanna boi sim woin today' -- a bit exaggerated, but...

On the morphological level, you'll find that the Australians are fond of shortening words and adding -ie to them. Hence, an Australian is an Aussie. A mosquito is a mossie. A barbecue is a barbie. So a coupla mossies can ruin an Aussie barbie.

On the lexical level, you'll encounter words unheard of in other places. I once passed by a seafood restaurant. A sign said that you could eat bugs. I had always thought that a bug was an insect. But then I found out that, in Australia, a bug is a kind of shellfish, similar to the lobster. Another sign at the restaurant said, "No thongs allowed". Now to me, a thong is a type of underwear whose back part is so narrow, it displays the cheeks of your bottom. It took me some time to realize that an Australian thong is what I have always called a flip-flop (the kind of cheap, rubber sandal where your big toe and second toe are separated by a V).

When greeting an Aussie, you say 'G'day'. At a shop, they'll always ask you, "How are ya?" or "How are ya doin'?", to which I haven't quite found the appropriate answer yet. If someone helps you, you show your gratitude with a British 'ta'. When saying goodbye, you say 'Seeya' or 'Seeya then'.

I could go on forever. If you're interested in hearing more Australian English, you should travel to Australia. Its strangeness is certainly a part of its singular beauty. And if you can't make it all the way here, why not watch some Australian movies in their original version? I recommend "Muriel's Wedding", "Crocodile Dundee" and any of the documentaries of the late Steve Irwin.

Seeya!

© Copyright Planet Lingua 2006