

News from under the Southern Cross (Edition 39): Australian English

12 October

It's now October. 9 months have passed since I took up my position in Australia, and I've now come to realise just how remiss some of the images I had of Australia were while I was in Japan. One of these is Australian English.

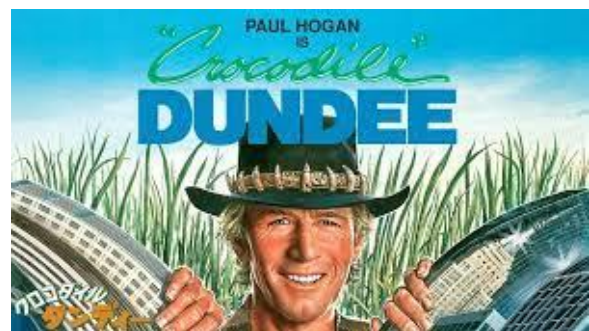
1. No accent!

In Japan, if you mention that you are going to Australia, there is no end to the number of people who tell you, with a smug look on their face, that “their English must have an accent”. Even staff at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for whom language should be a weapon, say that. Based on my experience so far, I think this is a prejudicial view that should be dispelled.

It is possible I feel this way because of the limits of my listening abilities. However, after working in Canberra and going around the various states, I have rarely felt “Oh, they do speak with an accent”. Rather, when I recall my time long ago studying in New York and being subject to rapid, machine-gun like speech replete with F-bombs, or being on the receiving end of a harsh lesson in cockney and the Scottish accent while in London where the only word I could catch was “bloody”, as a Japanese person I have found that Aussies speak a much more comprehensible English.

2. The source of prejudice against Australian English

I am assuming the impact of the film “Crocodile Dundee” has likely played a major role in this idea of Australian English having an “accent”. The descriptions in guidebooks widely read by the masses, which teach that in Australia people say “g'day” instead of saying “hello” or “hi” when greeting each other, appear to have partially originated from this film.



“Crocodile Dundee” (Rimfire Films)
(Source: dTV home page)

However, when passing people while out walking or cycling, they have sometimes said “g'day” but they've never said “g'die” (*Translator's note: In Japanese, foreign words are written using the katakana alphabet. “Day” is sometimes rendered in katakana as “die”.*)



Olivia Newton-John sings beautifully in Grease (1978)
(Paramount Movies)

(Source: Fandom)

That reminds me, the impetus for my interest in studying English when I was in my teens was thanks to the bright, clear singing voice of Olivia Newton-John. I remember that her version of “Country Road” was much easier to follow than John Denver’s.

3. Fascinating expressions

While living here, I have had a chance to learn some interesting Australian expressions.

One that I particularly like is “teaching Grandma to suck eggs” (*in Japanese, ‘preaching to the Buddha’*). Another great expression that I heard in Queensland was “Let’s sink a tinny of Gold” (i.e., let’s drink a can of XXXX Gold (a local beer name) lager).

4. Welcome to Australia’s universities

So there’s no need to worry. The youth of Japan can learn to speak orthodox, beautiful English in Australia. As a study destination, the collection of famous schools such as the Australian National University (ANU), the University of Sydney, and the University of Melbourne is also quite attractive.



One of Australia’s famous centres of learning - The University of Sydney

On that point, I would like to bring your attention to the university rankings released by UK and US rating agencies. Based on their criteria, universities such as Oxbridge and those in the Ivy League are usually evaluated highly, while those in Japan and Australia unexpectedly receive lower ratings.

World University Rankings according to The Times Higher Education Magazine

Rank	University Name	Rank	University Name
1	Oxford University	33	University of Melbourne
2	California Institute of Technology	35	University of Tokyo
2	Harvard University	54	Australian National University
4	Stanford University	57	Monash University
5	Cambridge University	58	University of Sydney
5	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	61	Kyoto University

(Source: Compiled by the Embassy from The Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2022)

From my experience having studied at the University of Tokyo (Todai), Columbia, Stanford and the University of Washington in Seattle, and teaching at places such as the Graduate School of Public Policy at Todai and the Faculty of Law at Chuo University, I can with all confidence recommend several universities in Australia.

5. I want to develop an “Australian School”

In Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, those who have undertaken their English language studies in America are referred to as the “American School”, while those who have studied English in the UK are called the “British School”. In order to study English, in most cases staff have traditionally been sent to universities or graduate schools in the US or UK. There have been very few examples of staff studying in either Australia, Canada, or New Zealand.

However, given that Japan-Australia relations are developing in leaps and bounds and that a great many students come from across Asia to study at universities in Australia, which is itself a leading nation in the Indo-Pacific region, I think it is both necessary and appropriate that Japan increase the number of people studying at Australia’s reputable universities. I would say it’s high time to do so.

This is because studying English in Australia isn’t limited to language learning, but is also linked to learning about Australia’s people, its society, history, culture, and its relationship with Japan.



Here's hoping for the birth of a much larger "Australian School"

I have high hopes for the creation of an "Australian School" who will proudly say "My English is 100% fair dinkum".

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