

Podcast 41 - Australian Slang

by Rob McCormack - Friday, May 23, 2014

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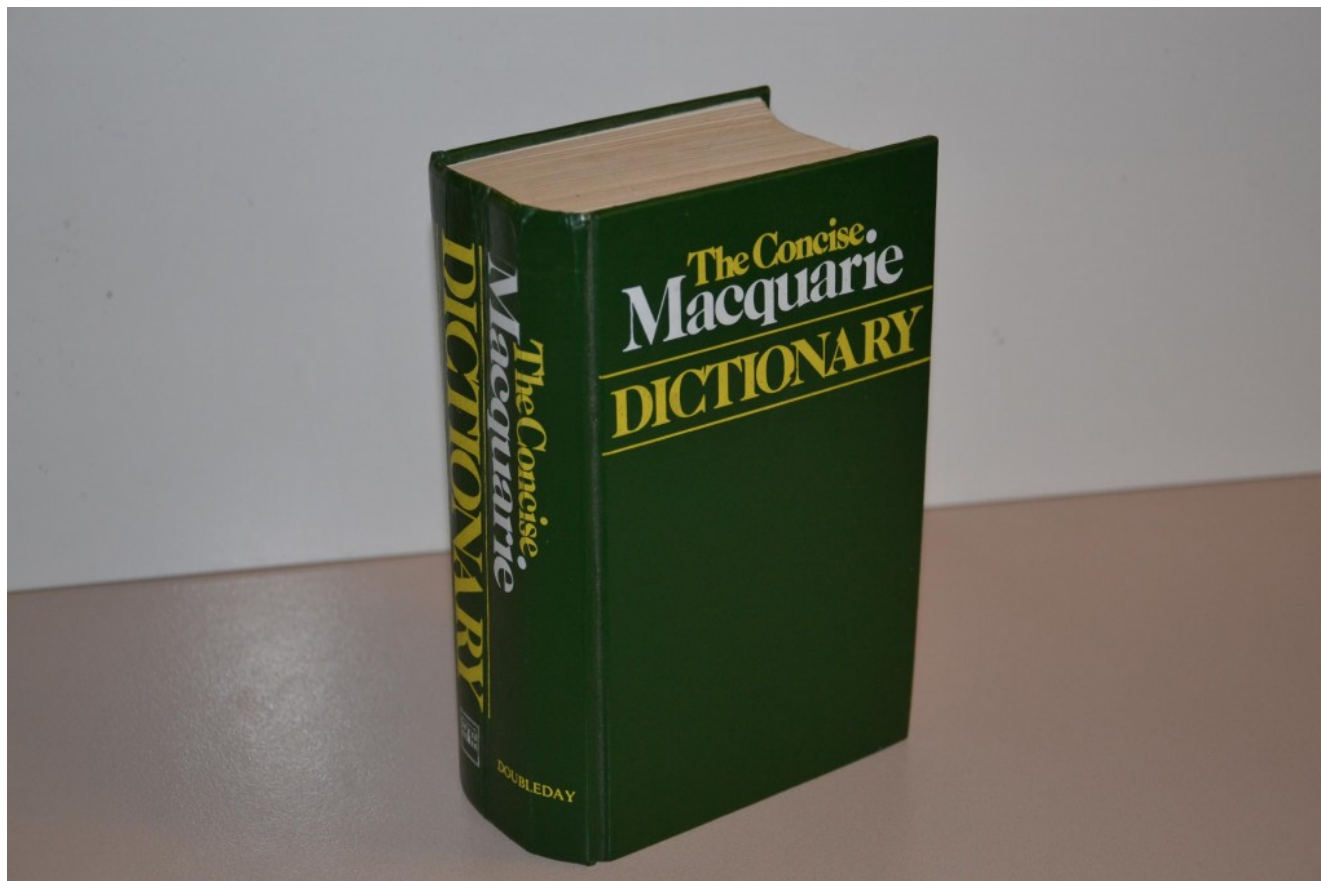
Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia, with Rob McCormack
Podcast Number 41 – Australian Slang

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Hi,

A while ago I went on a weekend trip with my two brothers and another friend. We went to Perth in Western Australia to watch the historic motorcycle races. We had a great time. I always enjoy spending time with my brothers. In the evening we sat around, had a few drinks and just talked. As I was listening to the conversation, it occurred to me that we use a lot of Australian slang when we talk amongst ourselves. I was thinking that if one of my Slowenglish listeners had been there, they may not have understood much of what was said. That's because we use a lot of slang words and phrases. It's almost like the situation in other countries where there are different local dialects in a language. The difference is that, all throughout Australia, you will generally find the same slang words and phrases used, or at least understood. That's a good thing. It helps to keep us together as Australians.

In this podcast, I will introduce you to just a few of the common slang terms which Australians use. If you want a more comprehensive list, you should visit a site like <http://www.koalanet.com.au/australian-slang.html>. Or, you can look it up in the Macquarie Dictionary. This is an Australian dictionary which has just about every word ever spoken by an Australian. It's an amazing book and everyone living in Australia should have one.



Probably the most recognizable Australian word is G'day. This is short for Good Day and means hello. It's often used by Australian men in the phrase 'G'day mate' when they greet their friends. It's very common.

The word 'Aussie' is used to describe Australians. It's important that you pronounce this word with a 'z' sound, not an 's' sound. It is often heard in the chant used by Australians at sporting events, which starts Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, Oi, Oi, Oi.

'Outback' is a term used to describe those parts of Australia a long way from the cities. It usually means that there are not many people living there. A related slang term is 'Woop Woop'. This is a make believe place used by Australians when they are trying to say that a place is small and a long way from everywhere else. For example, you might say - 'It's somewhere out the back of Woop Woop.'

A 'battler' is a person who doesn't have much wealth or money but who works hard every day to make a living. It's a term to describe the average hard working Australian. By contrast, a 'bludger' is a person who doesn't work hard, but tries to get others to do their work, or who is happy living only on welfare. Hopefully there aren't too many bludgers in Australia.

The word 'dinkum' or 'fair dinkum' came into use during the First World War. It means something that is true or real. For example, you might say - 'He says he will do it, but I don't think he is fair dinkum.' This means you doubt that he will do it. Our current Prime Minister likes to use this word. A related word is 'dinky di'. This also means real or authentic. For example, you might say - 'He's a dinky di Australian', meaning he is a real Australian.

The word 'digger' is used to describe Australian soldiers. It comes originally from the gold rushes in Australia in the 1850s and was used during the First World War when many Australians fought in the trenches in Europe. Both the gold miners and the soldiers in the First World War had to dig holes, so the term 'digger' came about. It's also a word which shows that we respect our soldiers, both past and present.

Another common term is 'fair go'. This means that everyone has an equal chance, an equal opportunity. For example, if someone pushed in ahead of you in a queue, you might say – 'Fair go mate. Go to the back of the line.'

If you are talking about useful information, you might call it 'the good oil'. This means that this information can be trusted. For example, you might say – 'I'll give you the good oil on where to buy your tyres.'

The term 'public servant' is used to describe someone who works for the government. It comes originally from the convicts who were transported to Australia from Britain from 1788. They were known, not as convicts, but as servants of the crown, or government men, or public servants. Transportation of convicts to Australia finished in the late 1800s, but the term 'public servant' has been kept to describe government workers. I was a public servant for most of my working life.

If someone is going to try something for the first time, they may say – 'I'll give it a burl.' Or they may say, 'I'll give it a bash.' It generally means that you are not very experienced, but you will try your best.

Australian men also like to give friendly insults, often to their best friends and mates. For example, they will call their best friend a 'drongo', a 'galah' or a 'boofhead' when he makes a silly mistake or says something stupid. These are all words which mean that you are a bit silly, not very bright or not very skillful at something. For example, you may say – 'You can't do it that way, you drongo.' When these words are used with a broad grin, then you know they are from a friend. Without a grin, they can also be used as a real insult but are generally not considered as bad as some other insults you could make. Another insult is to say someone is a 'chop short of a barbie'. This means they are not very smart. This is not the sort of insult you would say to someone's face. Another one my father used to use a lot is 'he's as thick as two short planks.' This also means that someone is not very smart. If someone is a bad organizer, or makes a mess of organizing something, it's common to say, 'he couldn't organise a booze-up in a brewery.' A brewery is a place where beer is made. A booze-up is when everyone gets drunk.

Another very common aspect of Australian slang is the shortening of words. For example, 'arvo' means afternoon, 'barbie' means barbeque, 'cossie' means swimming costume, 'postie' means postman, 'brekkie' means breakfast and 'sanger' means sandwich. For example, you might say – Hey Mum, after brekkie, let's pack some sangers and our cossies and head for the beach. This arvo it's going to be hot.

I've only been able to give you a small sample of Australian slang, but I hope you found it interesting. The only real way to learn Aussie slang is to mix with Australians and soon you'll be saying G'day like the rest of us.

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me

where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back to you, in English of course. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

[WpProQuiz 24]

Vocabulary

amazing = very, very good

amongst = with others

authentic = real

average = typical

barbie = short for barbeque

bash = to hit

broad grin = when you do a big smile

chant = to sing, usually in a crowd

chop = a cut of meat

comprehensive = complete or full

considered = thought to be

conversation = to talk to someone

costume = something you wear

current = now

dialects = how a language is spoken in a place or region

doubt = you think that it may not happen

drunk = to have too much alcohol to drink

equal = when things are the same

events = things that happen

gold rushes = when gold was found in Australia and people rushed to find it

government = the people who make decisions for everyone, who run the country

greet = to say hello

historic = old

insults = something bad said about someone else

introduce = to show you something new

living = to earn enough money to live

Macquarie Dictionary = the dictionary of Australian English

mess = when things are badly done or disorganized

mix = to be with others and to talk with them

occurred to me = to realize something, to think of something

opportunity = when you can choose to do something

organizer = someone who makes things happen well

originally = some time ago, in the past

phrases = a few words together

planks = a long piece of wood

pronounce = to say out loud

queue = a long line of people who are waiting

recognizable = when you can easily see something

related = it belongs with something else

respect = to believe that someone has done, or is doing, something good

sandwich = something you eat, made with two pieces of bread and a filling

servants = people who work for someone else

shortening = to make something shorter

silly mistake = when you do something wrong, without thinking

situation = how things are

skillful = to be able to do something well

smart = clever

soldiers = men who fight for a country in an army

stupid = not clever, not smart

transported = sent to another place

trenches = a long hole in the ground, used by soldiers in the First World War

trip = a visit to another place

trusted = when you believe that something is good or true

tyres = these are on the wheels of a car, to grip the road

wealth = how rich you are

welfare = when you receive money from the government to live