

Can *Sesame Street* bridge the Pacific Ocean?  
Effects of American television on the Australian language

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## 1.0 Introduction

This thesis<sup>1</sup> will investigate if (and to what extent) a linguistic change has taken place in the Australian lexicon in the last several decades as a result of the American media.

This thesis was inspired by a conversation I had with Brodie Herbert, an 18 year old student at the University of Melbourne from Perth. We were talking about how much the American media is broadcast into the average Australian home. American movies, music and television are constantly pumped into Australia's popular culture. Welcomed by some Australians, despised by others, the American influence is unmistakable down under.

Brodie was telling me about his younger sister who is 6 years old. Like most kids her age, she watches daytime children's television on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). The ABC lineup includes the American import *Sesame Street*.

One day Brodie's sister was reciting the alphabet for her mother. Instead of using the Australian pronunciation of the letter Z as "zed," she pronounced the American "zee" to her mother, who immediately corrected her daughter. Mrs. Herbert recognized that her daughter had picked up the "wrong" name for the last letter of the alphabet and was quick to amend the "mistake."

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Brodie explained to me his parents' frustration from constantly having to re-teach their daughter how to speak correctly—i.e. the Australian way. He claimed that this phenomenon is not uncommon in Australian households and classrooms and that most Australian parents and teachers are not pleased.

David Crystal points out that there is already a noticeable degree of borrowing from the American English model showing up in respected Australian newspapers.

American English (AmE) is making inroads into the British English (BrE) model in varying degrees across the country. It is evident in such words as *caucus* (in politics), *sedan* (BrE *saloon*), *station wagon* (BrE *estate car*), *truck driver* (BrE *lorry*), and *high school* (BrE *secondary school*). On the other hand, BrE influence is evident in *class* (AmE *grade*), *cinema* (AmE *movies*), *petrol* (AmE *gas*), *boot* (AmE *trunk*), and *tap* (AmE also *faucet*). Spelling is mixed (*defence* alongside *program*), though there is a traditional preference for British English forms. However, the *Australian Labor Party* uses the AmE spelling, and studies show considerable variation across states and between age groups in such cases as *centre/center* and *colour/color* (1996: 352).

Crystal's evidence is clear evidence that American English is making its way into the Australian English model. However, his examples include spelling differences and are from formal publications and organizations (which potentially have Americans working on them), whereas this thesis will look for similar indications of American influence, but within the lexicon and will use average Australian speakers for support.

This thesis will examine the history of television in Australia, the invasion of American media, Australian views towards this trend, and the situation of American media in

Australia today. There will be a short explanation of the diverging histories leading to the distinguishable lexicons of the American and the Australian Englishes. Finally, this thesis will conclude with a survey conducted to explore if any linguistic change has taken place, in fact, in the Australian lexicon as a result of Australians' exposure to American television as well as speculation as to why certain results were found.

## 2.0 American TV in Australia

### 2.1 History

#### 2.1.1 Television's beginnings and introduction in Australia

The first experimental television transmission occurred in Britain. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) got the ball rolling as early as 1930, and a regular service was implemented there by 1936. However, the plug was pulled shortly thereafter (reportedly in the middle of a Mickey Mouse cartoon) in the 1940s because of England's involvement in and concentration on World War II. The television in England remained unplugged until the end of the war. It was during this broadcasting blackout that American television stepped in and jumped ahead. America defined the new medium and created the cultural and commercial standards that are known today (Goodall 1995).

Television as a medium was finally introduced in Australia by the commercial network TCN-9 in 1956, but it was not welcomed with open arms. In the beginning, the new medium had very little respectability as a form of cultural expression. National leaders frowned on the idea of television from its establishment. They saw it as a vehicle for low-brow popular culture and preferred the prestige of alternate forms of expression,

such as theater. In Australia, “the Liberal prime minister who... was in office at the time of the introduction of television, Robert Menzies, despised the medium, as Winston Churchill had done in Britain, and did little to hasten its coming” (Goodall 1995:126). Because of the skeptical majority, the ABC had to promise something different, something respectable. “The dominant narrative has been that the ABC is engaged in a struggle to save art and ‘culture’ from the indifference or hostility of commercial broadcasting.” (Goodall 1995:120) Eventually, strict broadcasting standards were implemented, using the BBC as a model.

From the beginnings, the Australian government sanctioned a two-tiered system, comprised of public (ABC) and commercial television. Slightly more than a month after the first Australian broadcast on TCN-9, the ABC opened its airwaves. The newest addition to Australian television has been the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), which specializes in multi-cultural programming. It was the commercial networks that welcomed the international television imports into the country (Barker 1997).

Finally videotaping technology was developed in 1960, and programs other than live continuous video were able to be produced. By 1962, videotape recording equipment had been installed in all of the Australian state capitals. In the next year, Australians developed simultaneous television broadcasts of Adelaide programs in Adelaide, Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne. The popular Australian children’s show *Play School* began in 1966. In 1975, Australians could watch television in color. This technology opened the

doors for different varieties of shows along the way. (N.A. 2002:

<http://www.abc.net.au/corp/hist4.htm>)

### 2.1.2 In comes American TV

Since American television had had a head start over the rest of the world, the United States was allowed the chance to become far more advanced in mass media. Americans were already developing all aspects of television by the time Australian television appeared on the market. The American television industry was in complete control of its own market and was leagues ahead of any other nations in the new medium. This is largely because television in the United States was a decidedly capitalist endeavor. The ABC relied on government funding for much of their production costs, and therefore, had limited resources. Because of the head start and the available capital, American television surged towards the dominant status it holds today. Some point to World War II as opening the door to American media in Australia. “The Second World War brought close military association with the USA and this, along with American films and, more recently, television programmes, has raised the bogey of ‘American corruption of our speech’” (Turner 1966: 22).

Eventually, Americans developed scheduled series for production. The success of these within the United States led to their exportation. And, since the other nations developing television in the world were not that far along in their television production, they welcomed the American imports to help fill their programming slots. In Australia, not only were the imported programs frequently of higher quality than the Australian

equivalents, but importation fees for the American shows cost the Australian industry much less than the hefty price tag of producing and distributing their own shows. Even shows that were extremely costly for Americans to produce could be exported to other nations. This happened because “the bulk of a program’s production costs will generally be recouped in the home market, allowing it to be sold into foreign territories at bargain basement prices” (Britton 1999:17). Australian television very quickly began to rely heavily on imported programs (Bell and Bell 1993). This practice continues today.

The American children’s television show *Sesame Street* first aired in America in 1971. It is unclear when exactly *Sesame Street* was first imported to Australia, however it is likely to be shortly thereafter, as Australians in their late 30s report watching the popular show.

*Sesame Street* is currently exported to over 20 different countries (N.A. 2002:

<http://www.ctw.org/corporate/>).

### 2.1.3 Increase over the years and response

The capitalist foundation of the American television empire, allowing for the mass production and distribution of American media, coupled with the affordability of all their cultural exports to other, less prosperous nations, have led to a cycle that may prove difficult for those less prosperous nations to emerge from. Both American television and American film have followed this model in Australia.

As production in general has become more and more expensive over the last few decades, American media have become more and more pervasive. “Production and promotion

budgets escalated through the eighties, [and] the chances of a return to investors from an Australian film's local box office alone—always a pretty remote possibility—became even more negligible” (Turner 1994:106). In the film industry, a reported 96 cents of every box-office dollar spent in Australia goes back to Hollywood (Britton 1999).

Because of this inequity in media production, something had to be done. In response to this threat of American television domination, since Australians realized that “the American industry could obliterate our own if we left it to the market” (Turner 1994:107), Australia placed sanctions on their imports. To promote a more level playing field, Australians implemented a policy of protectionism—the dream of a “fortress Australia”—one that is impenetrable to foreigners (Salusinszky 1999:19). These sanctions were created in the early stages of television development, still in the Menzies era. “Against the predictable fear of American domination of, and even via, television, the Menzies government established a Royal Commission into the medium in 1953 (Bell and Bell 1993:171).

Today, the imposed policies encourage the use of Australian actors and crew and set quotas for hours of Australian-made programming on the different stations (Salusinszky 1999). For example, one stipulation states that commercial broadcasters must devote no less than 55 percent of their air time to Australian programs (Britton 1999). Another goes specifically into the hours and types of shows that are required, calling for 175 hours of drama, 32 hours of children's drama, and 15 hours of documentaries by each station (Britton 1999).

Despite the network regulations, it is still standard practice for Australian broadcasters to import the inexpensive American programs. Today, a single episode of an American high-budget program such as *Chicago Hope*—costing more than \$US1.5 million to produce—is offered to Australian networks for a deal that is less than a tenth of the price of its Australian competitors (Britton 1999).

#### 2.1.4 What kinds of shows Australians get

There seems to be no limit to the type of American import that Australian networks pick up. The Australian television viewing audience watches all kinds of American media—children’s programs, talk shows, situation comedies, science-fiction, reality television, dramas, and game shows. To name a few, Australians get *ER*, *Friends*, *Temptation Island*, *The Price is Right*, *Late Night with David Letterman*, *Star Trek*, *Everybody Loves Raymond*, *Sex and the City*, *The West Wing*, *Jerry Springer*, and *Sesame Street* (Thomas 2002).

## 2.2 Cultural views towards the invasion

As Australians watch American television programs, they are exposed to the American culture and language. The effect of this exposure is debated. Some have no problem with it. Some do not enjoy it. Some see it as an active invasion of the Australian nation that has effects reaching farther than just the language.

### 2.2.1. Globalization versus Americanization

“They came, we watched, they conquered” (Doyle 1999:100). This seems to be a popular opinion among Australians. Where the difference lies is how people feel after the invasion.

Some are proponents of globalization, claiming, “What is often simplistically thought of as ‘Americanisation’ is more accurately explained as ‘modernisation’” (Turner 1994:96). They suggest that America is just the farthest ahead in the modernization process. To them, it is not the case that America is actively taking over the world culture; it is everybody else that is playing catch-up (Turner 1994).

Some see globalization as a rewarding effect of this modernization. They welcome the sharing of cultures. “Why is the presence of *Sesame Street* on Australian screens any more sinister than the presence of *Bananas in Pyjamas* on American ones? I would have thought it was splendid that children in the two countries can enjoy each other’s programs” (Salusinszky 1999:19). These people see the media of other nations as resources that should not be overlooked just because they were not manufactured in their own home markets.

Others do not see the globalization as a good thing—far from it. They see it more as cultural imperialism:

Cultural imperialism has also been analysed as “the sum of processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to,

or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating center of the system' (Phillipson 1992:58).

They see McDonald's and 7-11's on every street corner, hear Blink182 on the radio, drink a Coke, read the latest *Cosmo*, and watch the new *Malcolm in the Middle*. John Doyle jokes, "There will inevitably be a time down the track when excavators will be unearthing golden arches and anthropologists will be standing around scratching their heads at their significance" (1999:100). Others speculate that "Some surprisingly high results might also be yielded by an Australia-wide quiz on the physical attributes and the private lives of American movie stars" (Alexander 1941:12). Australians are constantly bombarded with the American culture, and for those who do not embrace it, it is becoming exceedingly difficult to avoid.

The relationship between America and Australia is not a simple one. "America stands for both the best and the worst capitalism can offer: the ultimate fantasy of capitalism's power to deliver on your desires (Disneyland, I guess), and the nightmare of competitive individualism out of control" (Turner 1994:98). Turner writes,

America is also a model of those aspects of modernity we would most like to avoid: not only such effects of mass urban existence as high levels of crime but also the discursive regimes of highly 'media-ated' society—those of celebrity, sensationalism, and so on which are seen to mark the American media and surrounding industries (1994:100).

Some Australians resent the American idea. They do not accept the American ideology, military, popular culture, and President, to name only a few.

We abandon our language and our icons in favor of hers. We recognize her brand names instinctively like we used to recognise the religion of our next door neighbour. We know her history like our own and we broadcast her national anthem in full while her athletes stand on the podium. Their satellite dishes and military bases cover the planet like some great new franchise. We support her wars using her justifications (Atkins 2000:13).

The fact that it is the American culture that is so heavily imported into Australian movie theaters, radios and television line-ups only adds insult to injury. It is in a sense as if this is a second wave of colonization (Romaine 1997). And an *American* one at that.

A great deal of concern is for the Australian children. G. W. Turner explains, “The other day a seven-year-old-child asked me, ‘Why do birds fly south for the winter?’” (1966:71). This riddle (*answer*: “because it is too far to walk”) obviously has origins anywhere other than in the southern hemisphere, where birds fly *north* for the winter.

Many Australians fear that their children will grow up with American role models, ideologies, even expressions. One teacher complains that his “students’ imaginative life is fed from a river whose source is Hollywood” (Wheat 1998:18). Parents like Mrs. Herbert are tired of re-teaching their children how to speak. “*Sesame Street* still exhorts our children to say *zee*, and to spell the name of someone close to them *m-o-m*” (Atkins 2000:13). Some critics claim that this American domination is an active conspiracy (Alatis and Strachle 1997). These are the people who most ardently champion the protectionist stance.

If we return to the days when our screens were saturated with imported programs, we run the risk that over time our national confidence will take a beating. Our children will grow up thinking that things newsworthy and exciting only happen

to other people in other places; that all the heroes, all the funny people, all the interesting stories, come from somewhere else (Britton 1999:17).

Some advocate protectionism as the only solution to what they see as a constantly growing problem of America dominating their culture, their children and maybe most importantly, their language.

### 2.2.2. Language and the nation

The state of a nation's language is metaphorically seen as an indicator of the state of the nation. A nation with control of its language is a nation with control of itself (Romaine 1997). However, it seems that America and Australia, two countries that, in theory, speak the same language, are split by it. Even though English is the official or joint language in over 60 countries and plays a prominent role in an additional 20 countries worldwide, each variation is hardly the same English (Alatis and Strachle 1997). There are differences in accents, intonations, word meanings (especially in slang), idioms, and lexicons, to name a few. With the trend of globalization, particularly through the widespread broadcast of foreign media, different English speaking nations have easy access to the different varieties of English. Some do not see this as a good thing, particularly Australians who catch their children speaking American English.

Florian Coulmas offers a good characterization of the correlation of language and nationality:

The representatives of states or nations feel an obligation to imbue their citizenry with a respect for their culture, of which language is seen to be a part. Among the

most common ideologies exerted in this connection is the authenticity maxim: our heritage is authentic and therefore good. Its correlate, of course, is xenophobia; the alien is bad. When applied to language, linguistic purification results. Loan-words are perceived as contaminating the purity of the language, which in turn is regarded as a threat to cultural identity. Once such an ideal gains public recognition, a purification movement is born, and this is the other side of the coin of language cultivation (1989:186).

Coulmas' argument can be applied to the situation of American media in Australia. It could be extended to explain how the "alien" American culture is finding its way into the "authentic" Australian culture and how Australians have come to resent this infiltration—especially as it is reflected through their language.

Therefore, to some Australians, the overabundance of American media predictably can be seen as a threat to their national identity, especially if it is affecting their language. Some argue that once it has a grasp on the language, then, America is imposing on their entire nation.

It is important for any nation to maintain a sense of identity. In Australia's case, some say it is easy to confuse the issue, since several national identities are thrown into its popular culture. One author teases, "So, the millennium. What are we left with? We know about George Washington, Halloween, cookies, Werther's, *Friends*... and the good old days of *Sea Hunt* and *Father Knows Best*. At mid-life, it's great to have a sense of history" (Doyle 1999:100).

### 3.0 Differences between American and Australian English

So why are Australians alarmed to hear their children speaking merely a different version of English? American English and Australian English are actually very separate languages.

### 3.1 Historical accounts

Both American and Australian English are originally derivative of British English. However, American and Australian English have taken very different paths away from their common beginnings. The sounds and expressions of Australian (also New Zealand and South African) English show much more resemblance to the British standard than to the American (Pei 1965). Distinct differences were soon to form between the two, as Americans were historically quick to cut ties (linguistic and otherwise) with their mother country, whereas Australians borrowed heavily from their old homelands. Today, Australian English contains a conglomeration of “eighteenth- and nineteenth-century regional words from Cornwall, Wessex, the Midlands, East Anglia, Northumbria, Scotland and Ireland” (McCrum, Cran, and MacNeil 1986: 289). Often, uncommon English words were given a new life in the new land. Words like *creek* and *paddock*, which had enjoyed very specific and descriptive meanings in England, were soon applied to refer to much broader categories in Australia. “Words, like things, had to serve many functions” in the new land (McCrum, Cran, and MacNeil 1986: 287).

Australian English borrowed heavily from British English, however a distinct difference between the two was soon to develop. The slight shift away from British English can be

accounted for when one considers who was doing most of the speaking in Australia—exported English and Irish convicts. Around 130,000 prisoners were sent from Europe to Australia in the 50 years after the first shipment in 1788 (Crystal 1996). Between 1793 and 1802, 41 percent of convict arrivals were Irish, and men outnumbered women two to one (Turner 1966). These convicts were likely to have already begun losing their regional accents by the time they were shipped off. Next, they were thrown together with hundreds of other convicts, leading to conformity among convicts and eventually convict slang, known as “flash” language (McCrum, Cran, and MacNeil 1986). The flash language was used as an indicator of in-group/out-group distinction (Turner 1966). It is also noted that Australian convicts rarely censored themselves. Early visitors to the new settlements observed the tendency of the convicts to swear openly. For example, “the reduced force of *bloody* in Australian English is doubtless a long-term effect of its high frequency of use within the original population” (Crystal 1996:98). Still others attribute linguistic differences to the attitudes of the regional speakers. “It was a frontier society, and its spirit was expressed in its language” (McCrum, Cran, and MacNeil 1986: 287).

Newly settled Australians also sometimes used words from their aboriginal neighbors. The first Australian word adopted by Captain James Cook was reportedly the aboriginal *kangaroo* (McCrum, Cran, and MacNeil 1986). About a third of all Australian cities and towns have names of aboriginal origin (Crystal 1996).

The first invasion of American English occurred during the gold rush in Australia in the 1850s. A wave of Californians came to Australia, bringing with them their mining tools as well as their American language—some of which was accepted and some ignored. “Standard American terms were adopted for gold-mining equipment but colloquial expressions with Australian equivalents were not adopted” (Turner 1966: 22). This point marked “the beginning of a tension in Australia between the use of British English and American English” (McCrum, Cran, and MacNeil 1986: 289). This tension foreshadowed feelings that persist over 150 years later.

Another historical event that brought American English and Australian English together was World War II. Between 1943 and 1945, American soldiers, sailors and airmen infiltrated their language into Australia. “That friendly invasion has left a residue of Americanisms, which have joined the already existing stock” (Partridge and Clark 1951: 88).

### 3.2 Current situation

There seems to be consensus in the literature that there continues to be an American influence in some aspects of the Australian language. “In recent years the influence of American English has been noticeable, so that the country now has a very mixed lexical character” (Crystal 1996: 98). The formerly preferred British English model now shares the stage with America in Australian tongues. Below are examples of this kind of code switching:

Should an Australian say *biscuit* or *cookie*, *nappy* or *diaper*, *lorry* or *truck*? The answer seems to be that Australian English, like its British ancestor (and like Canadian English), borrows freely according to preference. So Australians get water from a *tap* not a *faucet*, but tend to ride in *elevators* as well as *lifts*. Their cars run on *petrol* not *gas*, but they drive on *freeways* not *motorways* (McCrum, Cran, and MacNeil 1986: 289).

Code switching is not a universal or prescriptive phenomenon. “The norms vary from group to group” and can be influenced by factors like context, situation, and in-group and out-group status (Wardhaugh, 1998:105). Linguists see this trend of borrowing in Australia as a broad and varying phenomenon. “The situation is fluid, and looks likely to remain so” (Crystal 1996: 352).

David Crystal cites numerous Australian newspapers for not only borrowing American English in the text, but also juxtaposing the American English alongside British English. He found evidence of American spellings (such as *favorable*, *honor*, *program* and *labor*) as well as American terms (such as *Medicare*, *dollars*, *interstate*, and *federal*) appearing in Australian articles from prestigious papers, *The Age* and *The Australian*. Crystal notes one article that combines “*truck drivers* (not *lorry drivers*) visit[ing] *petrol stations* (not *gas stations*)” (Crystal 1996: 303). It is difficult to tell if these instances are the result of Australians adopting parts of American English or possibly the result of Americans working on the newspaper staffs.

Distinctions between American English and Australian English lexicons are not uncommon or difficult to find. Below is a short list of Australian English expressions along with their American English equivalents:

<i>Tea</i>	<i>Dinner</i>
<i>Swag</i>	<i>Roll of blankets</i>
<i>Bush</i>	<i>Woods/Forrest</i>
<i>Casualty</i>	<i>the Emergency Room</i>
<i>Mum</i>	<i>Mom</i>
<i>Piker</i>	<i>Quitter</i>
<i>To shout</i>	<i>To pay for (for someone else)</i>
<i>University</i>	<i>College</i>
<i>Woop woop</i>	<i>Middle of nowhere</i>
<i>Ta</i>	<i>Thank you</i>
<i>Bum</i>	<i>Butt</i>
<i>Runners</i>	<i>Sneakers</i>
<i>Suncream</i>	<i>Sunscreen</i>
<i>Pitch</i>	<i>Field (athletic)</i>
<i>Knackered</i>	<i>Tired</i>
<i>Buggered</i>	<i>Tired</i>
<i>To bugger off</i>	<i>To exit</i>
<i>Boot</i>	<i>Trunk</i>
<i>Capsicum</i>	<i>Red or green pepper</i>
<i>Billy</i>	<i>Kettle</i>
<i>Training</i>	<i>Practice</i>
<i>Doona</i>	<i>Comforter</i>
<i>Dunny</i>	<i>Outhouse</i>
<i>Tomato sauce</i>	<i>Ketchup</i>
<i>Queue</i>	<i>Line</i>
<i>Mate</i>	<i>Friend/buddy</i>
<i>Holiday</i>	<i>Vacation</i>

It is important to remember that the list above is just a small compilation of specific lexical differences between Australian English and American English (Morris 1968, Thomas 2002, Turner 1966 and Ward 1967). Many more differences exist.

#### 4.0 Experimental set-up

The popular literature in Australia seems to suggest that the American media has had a profound impact on the Australian language, and this supposition is exactly what the survey tries to investigate. The survey for this thesis is an attempt to see if there is a correlation between an Australian's use of the American English terms over the Australian English terms (such as those listed above) and the amount of exposure to American television, specifically *Sesame Street*.

The survey method was chosen for the kinds of questions that are being investigated as well as the relative ease of communication with respondents. Face to face communication with dozens of Australians is difficult to do from America.

To find potential parallels between one's exposure to American media and the use of American expressions, the questionnaires included questions to assess each subject's age, feelings towards Australia, feelings towards America and the American media, exposure to the American media and possible influences the media may have had on the subject's internal lexicons. Each of these categories was assessed to see if there was any correlation between a given category and the subjects' tendency to give American English responses.

#### 4.1 Subjects

##### 4.1.1 Demographics

Subjects are all Australians currently living in the southeastern state of Victoria or the capital city Canberra (which lies within New South Wales borders), including cities like

Melbourne, Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong. Subjects who responded are between the ages of 18 and 54.

The subjects were divided into age groups of 18-24 years old (19 subjects), 25-35 years old (11 subjects) and 38-54 years old (9 subjects). The median age was 27.5 years old. Subjects included 29 females and 10 males. The youngest group was made up of almost entirely university students, the middle group included some university students and some working individuals, and the oldest group was comprised of entirely employed subjects.

#### 4.1.2. How/Why they were selected

Each survey was sent directly via e-mail to subjects and included a secondary request that the survey be forwarded by e-mail to other Australians, in an attempt to create a larger, more diverse sample. Subjects filled out a page long questionnaire as a reply to the initial e-mail. Some elaborated on their responses, some gave minimal answers.

## 4.2 Survey

Below is exactly what was sent to each individual via e-mail (numbers have been added here to each question in order to facilitate discussion). Each e-mail included a short introduction explaining the survey:

G'day!

I am hoping that you could spare 5 minutes to fill out my survey. I am doing a study on the Australian language. It would be a tremendous help to me if you hit reply and went through the questions. Thank you!

Fill in the blanks with the appropriate word or phrase as you might say it:

1. That was nice of Dave's \_\_\_\_\_! She baked cookies for her son.
2. While Kate was roller-skating, she slipped and fell right on her \_\_\_\_\_.
3. I have to go. I'm late for hockey \_\_\_\_\_!
4. Playing football, Pete broke his arm and was rushed to \_\_\_\_\_.
5. After Emma finishes high school, she plans to go on to \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Helen found the nice \_\_\_\_\_ that she lives in from her friend who lives in the one down the hall.
7. This week I've worked so much and not slept at all! It has just made me so \_\_\_\_\_!
8. Would you like mustard or \_\_\_\_\_ for your hamburger?
9. Cat and her sister had to wait in the long \_\_\_\_\_ to buy their tickets.
10. When his boss told him he had lost his job, Luke couldn't believe he'd been \_\_\_\_\_.

Pick one that you are most likely to say (delete the others):

11. I'm going on a (vacation/trip/holiday) to England next month.
12. My mother said I could go to James' house to play this afternoon, as long as I am home by the time she makes (dinner/tea/supper).
13. Alex's best (mate/buddy/friend) Bob took him out and bought him a beer on his birthday.
14. Make sure you keep the (docket/receipt/bill) when you use your credit card to buy something.
15. Sally asked Mary to elegantly (plait/French braid/braid) her hair for her, instead of just putting it in a ponytail.

Other questions:

16. How old are you?
17. Do you see yourself ever leaving Australia (to live somewhere else)? If yes, why? And where?
18. How would you rate your television watching habits in the last year? (watch a lot, a moderate amount, a little, none)
19. Do you like the U.S.? (yes, no, don't care)
20. Do you like American television and movies?
21. Did you watch "Sesame Street" when you were younger?
22. If yes, do you know Cookie Monster's song?
23. Which did you watch more, "Sesame Street" or "Play School?"
24. When you recite the alphabet, do you sing it?
25. Spell out as best you can how you would say these letters: H and Z

Sentences (1)-(10) are worded with the intention of allowing subjects to provide a typically American target phrase or a typically Australian target phrase as an answer. For example, sentences (2) and (3):

2. While Kate was roller-skating, she slipped and fell right on her \_\_\_\_\_.

The target American words are *butt* or *ass*. The target Australian words are *bum* or *arse*.

Other responses include *bottom*, *ankle* and *knee*, and these answers are tabulated separately.

3. I have to go. I'm late for hockey \_\_\_\_\_!

The target American word is *practice*. The target Australian word is *training*. Other responses include *-nothing-* and *rehearsal*, which are tabulated separately.

Sentence (4) is slightly different because answers are assessed not only on the word level, but on the phrase level.

4. Playing football, Pete broke his arm and was rushed to \_\_\_\_\_.

The target American phrases are *the hospital*, *the emergency room* or *the ER*. The target Australian phrases do not include the article *the*. They are simply *hospital* and *casualty*. Other responses here include *the doctor* and *the pub* (the latter is a good example of the Australian sense of humor).

Sentences (11)-(15) are forced choice items. Each includes three choices to fill the blank in the sentence—one American English, one Australian English and one neutral lexical item. The order of presentation of the possible entries varied among the 5 forced choice sentences. For example, sentence (11):

11. I'm going on a (vacation/trip/holiday) to England next month.

The American English response is *vacation*, the Australian English response is *holiday* and both lexicons allow for the response *trip*. Other sentences present the lexical items in a different order to encourage the subjects to actively interpret each sentence.

#### 4.3 Data

I received 42 replies to the survey. Three were discarded—one was a duplication of another subject's responses, and two others had obviously not offered serious answers to the questions and would not have been productive entries to the survey sample. There were 39 valid subject responses. Each is listed below and grouped by age.

M/F	Age	AUS	AM	Other	Stay?	TV Habits	Like US	US TV	SS	Cookie	PS/SS	ABC	H	Z
F	19	11	1	3	N	3	yes	yes	no	yes	PS	yes	no H	zed
F	22	11	1	3	Y	1	fine	no	yes	no	PS	no	H	zed
M	18	10	1	4	N	3	no	yes	yes	yes	equal	yes	H	zed
M	24	10	1	4	Y	2	fine	fine	yes	no	SS	yes	no H	zed
F	19	10	2	3	N	3	fine	yes	yes	yes	PS	no	H	zed
F	20	10	2	3	N	2	yes	yes	yes	no	equal	no	no H	zed
F	20	7	2	6	Y	3	no	yes	yes	no	PS	yes	no H	zed
F	19	11	3	1	Y	3	yes	yes	yes	yes	equal	yes	H	zed
F	19	11	3	1	Y	2	fine	yes	no	no	PS	yes	no H	zed
F	19	9	3	3	N	2	yes	yes	yes	no	PS	yes	H	zed
F	20	9	3	3	N	2	fine	yes	yes	yes	equal	yes	H	zed
F	21	9	3	3	N	2	fine	yes	yes	no	PS	no	H	zed
F	20	8	3	4	N	2	yes	fine	no	no	PS	yes	no H	zed
M	20	10	4	1	Y	2	fine	fine	yes	no	PS	no	no H	zed
F	19	9	4	2	Y	2	yes	yes	yes	no	PS	yes	H	zee
F	20	8	4	3	Y	4	yes	yes	yes	yes	PS	yes	H	zed
F	20	7	4	4	N	4	yes	yes	yes	yes	equal	yes	no H	zed
F	19	6	4	5	Y	4	fine	yes	yes	yes	equal	no	no H	zee
F	20	7	5	3	N	3	yes	yes	yes	yes	SS	yes	no H	zee

F	25	11	1	3	N	2	fine	fine	yes	no	SS	yes	no H	zed
F	25	9	3	3	Y	4	no	yes	yes	yes	PS	yes	no H	zed
F	25	8	3	4	Y	2	no	fine	yes	no	PS	yes	no H	zed
M	26	11	2	2	n	2	fine	no	no	no	PS	no	H	zed
F	26	10	2	3	Y	3	fine	fine	yes	yes	SS	yes	no H	zed
M	26	7	4	4	Y	3	yes	yes	yes	no	SS	yes	H	zed
F	27	10	2	3	N	3	yes	yes	no	no	PS	yes	H	zed
M	27	9	2	4	N	2	fine	no	yes	yes	equal	no	no H	zed
M	28	10	2	3	N	2	yes	fine	yes	yes	SS	yes	no H	zed
F	28	9	3	3	Y	2	no	no	yes	yes	PS	no	H	zed
F	35	9	2	4	Y	2	yes	yes	yes	yes	SS	yes	H	zed

F	38	8	5	2	Y	2	yes	fine	yes	yes	PS	yes	no H	zed
F	40	9	1	4	Y	3	fine	fine	no	no	PS	yes	H	zed
F	40	6	4	5	Y	3	yes	yes	no	no	PS	yes	H	zed
F	41	5	5	5	Y	3	fine	no	no	no	PS	yes	H	zed
M	45	7	3	5	N	2	no	fine	no	no		no	no H	zed
M	45	8	3	4	Y	3	yes	yes	yes	yes	SS	yes	no H	zed
M	46	9	2	4	Y	2	yes	yes	no	no	equal	no	no H	zed
F	50	8	3	4	Y	2	fine	fine	no	no		no	no H	zed
F	54	14	1	0	N	2	yes	no	no	no	PS	no	H	zed

The table above includes subjects' sex, age, totaled categorized responses (Australian, American, other), future living plans (staying in Australia?), television watching habits (scale of 1-4, 1 being a rating of "none" and 4 being a rating of "a lot." The median is 2.5), attitudes towards the United States, exposure to *Sesame Street* (including memory of a Cookie Monster song as well as preference for over the Australian equivalent *Play School*), style of alphabet recitation (singing the alphabet is an American adaptation taught by *Sesame Street*), and pronunciation of the letters *H* (aspirated or not) and *Z* (*zee* versus *zed*).

#### 4.3.1 Frequency data

The frequency of American English responses out of the total possible responses is broken down below in terms of age groups, along with the mean rating for subjects' television watching habits (same scale as above), percentage of subjects who reported watching *Sesame Street* and percentage of subjects who reported that they sing the alphabet.

	Frequency of Am. terms	Mean TV Rating	Watch <i>Sesame St</i> ?	Sing the alphabet?
18-24	18.1	2.58	yes 84% no 16%	yes 68% no 32%
25-35	15.6	2.45	yes 82% no 18%	yes 73% no 27%
38-54	20	2.44	yes 22% no 78%	yes 56% no 44%
totals	17.9	2.49	yes 63% no 37%	yes 66% no 34%

The frequency of American terms used does not seem to be related to age groups of those surveyed, as the only age group giving fewer American English responses than the total survey mean is the middle 25-35 age group.

The 18-24 age group reported watching the most television on a scale of 1-4 (2.58), and the 25-35 age group reported watching television slightly more (2.45) than the 38-54 group (2.44).

Also, as expected, the younger groups reported watching more *Sesame Street* than the oldest group. Instead, significantly more subjects in the oldest group (78%) did not watch *Sesame Street* at all. This is not surprising since the children's show was likely to not have been available to some members of the oldest group when they were young enough to watch it.

Finally, the data suggest that most Australians (66%) sing the alphabet when they recite it. Percentage-wise, more subjects from both younger groups sing their ABCs than the oldest group. This may be related to exposure to *Sesame Street*, where children are taught to sing.

#### 4.3.2 Correlational linear regression

A linear regression analysis of the data indicated that the percentage of American English responses was higher for those who watch more television ( $F=3.70$ ,  $p<.06$ ). No other significant correlations were found between American responses and other variables.

#### 4.3.3 Item analysis

Responses to each survey question are tabulated below in an item analysis, showing the percentage of each age group who responded with the target American English responses and the percentage who responded with the target Australian English responses. “Other” responses are not included in this analysis. Below the table is the list of survey questions.

Q#	18-24 (19) %Am.	%Aus.	25-35 (11) %Am.	%Aus.	38-54 (9) %Am.	%Aus.
1	0	84	0	91	0	67
2	11	68	0	82	0	44
3	11	79	18	81	78	22
4	16	79	0	100	0	100
5	0	89	0	100	11	77
6	21	5	36	27	22	33
7	58	31	64	0	67	11
8	0	100	0	91	11	89
9	26	64	0	100	11	78
10	37	63	27	72	11	89
11	0	58	0	73	0	78
12	0	32	0	9	0	44
13	5	63	0	54	0	55
14	89	11	91	9	89	11
15	5	57	0	45	0	44

1. That was nice of Dave's \_\_\_\_! She baked cookies for her son.
2. While Kate was roller-skating, she slipped and fell right on her \_\_\_\_.
3. I have to go. I'm late for hockey \_\_\_\_!
4. Playing football, Pete broke his arm and was rushed to \_\_\_\_.
5. After Emma finishes high school, she plans to go on to \_\_\_\_.
6. Helen found the nice \_\_\_\_ that she lives in from her friend who lives in the one down the hall.
7. This week I've worked so much and not slept at all! It has just made me so \_\_\_\_!
8. Would you like mustard or \_\_\_\_ for your hamburger?
9. Cat and her sister had to wait in the long \_\_\_\_ to buy their tickets.
10. When his boss told him he had lost his job, Luke couldn't believe he'd been \_\_\_\_.
11. I'm going on a (vacation/trip/holiday) to England next month.

12. My mother said I could go to James' house to play this afternoon, as long as I am home by the time she makes (dinner/tea/supper).
13. Alex's best (mate/buddy/friend) Bob took him out and bought him a beer on his birthday.
14. Make sure you keep the (docket/receipt/bill) when you use your credit card to buy something.
15. Sally asked Mary to elegantly (plait/French braid/braid) her hair for her, instead of just putting it in a ponytail.

The item analysis suggests that some questions in this survey are more likely than others to produce American English responses over Australian English responses. Questions (3), (6), (7), (9), (10) and (14) each produced a significant proportion of American English target words among test subjects. Questions (1), (5), (8), (11), (12) and (15) produced no American English answers for at least one of the age groups. Sentences (1), (11) and (12) did not have *any* American English responses from subjects. There are many possible explanations for these results.

The easiest explanation is that certain questions on the survey were not worded very well. For example, sentence (6):

6. Helen found the nice \_\_\_\_\_ that she lives in from her friend who lives in the one down the hall.

This sentence provided more "Other" words overall than target American *or* Australian English words. The desired lexical distinction that this sentence was aiming to make was the choice between the Australian *flat* and the American *apartment*, however, most subjects produced the word *room* which does not specifically belong to one lexicon over the other.

Another explanation is that certain words that were labeled as American English target words, in actuality, may be present in both lexicons. For example, sentence (14):

14. Make sure you keep the (docket/receipt/bill) when you use your credit card to buy something.

The subjects were asked to select the word they would be more likely to use. The target American English word for this question is *receipt*, however, most Australians in the survey had a definite preference for using this word over both *docket* (the target Australian English word) and *bill* (the word supposedly in both lexicons).

Assuming that the survey is a good test of lexical preferences, on the other hand, there are still more possible explanations for these trends in responses. It is possible that some words are more frequently borrowed across lexicons than others. For example, sentences (1) and (7):

1. That was nice of Dave's \_\_\_\_\_! She baked cookies for her son.
7. This week I've worked so much and not slept at all! It has just made me so \_\_\_\_\_!

Of all 39 subjects, sentence (1) did not produce a single American English response of *mom*. This could be because the word for mother is taught at such an early age. It seems that this word *mum*, as it is one of the very first words that infants are taught to speak, would be less likely to be affected by exposure to alternative words like *mom* than other words like *boot* (versus the American English *trunk*) that were not taught so early or were not such integral parts of one's childhood. Also, it is worth mentioning that *Mum* can

often refer to a particular person—therefore it would be less likely to be influenced by the American name *Mom*. Sentence (7) is another example of a target word that is not likely to have been taught or emphasized at an early childhood age. The target American word *tired* was used with more frequency than the target Australian words *buggered* or *knackered*. Lexical items like this would be more likely to be open to variation since they are not as deeply rooted in speakers' vocabularies as words like *mum*.

Other reasons one lexical item might be more influenced than another in Australian English is the amount of exposure Australians have with the term. For example, sentence (4):

4. Playing football, Pete broke his arm and was rushed to \_\_\_\_\_.

If the subject answering this question frequently watches the American television dramas *ER* or *Chicago Hope*, then an American English response might be more likely from that subject than from someone who is unfamiliar with alternative terms for *casualty*.

#### 4.3.4 Discussion of findings

Nearly none of the findings from the survey was significant. However, the main finding of interest with marginal significance from these data is that the more television that these Australians reported watching, the more likely they were to give American English responses. Other findings favor that younger subjects watch more television. Since those who watch more television tend to give more American English responses, then younger

subjects may also be more likely to give American English responses; however, age itself is not a significant predictor based on these results.

Other survey results were expected. Younger subjects are more likely to have watched *Sesame Street*. This makes sense as more Australian parents join the workforce, potentially leaving their children at home alone combined with the trend of televisions appearing in more homes as time goes on, that younger people would have more of a chance of watching the children's show than the older generations. There were two subjects in the oldest age group who reported not owning a television until they were in their teenaged years since the technology was so recent at the time. Also, since *Sesame Street* is only in its 31<sup>st</sup> season in the United States, Australians in this survey who are between 45-54 years old may not have watched *Sesame Street* at all until they had children of their own.

Also, younger subjects and those who watch more television are more likely to know Cookie Monster's "C is for Cookie" song. This is expected for two main reasons. Firstly, the evidence already suggests that younger groups are more likely to watch more television, allowing for more exposure to the song itself. Secondly, if subjects in the younger group were actually exposed to the song, they have had less time since this exposure to forget it than the other groups have had.

Finally, subjects are more likely to sing the alphabet if they are younger or if they watch more television. This also makes sense logically, since subjects who are younger and

who watch more television are more likely to watch *Sesame Street* (which actively teaches children to sing the alphabet), then these subjects should be more likely to pick up on the lessons that the children's show teaches them.

#### 4.4 Problems with the study

There are several problems with this study. First, the data was collected in survey form. This method means subjects may not have provided their natural speech. Subjects had the opportunity to think about what they wrote before submitting their surveys and the potential to change their responses to fit how they wanted to be perceived.

Also, all subjects were aware that they were being surveyed by an American. This knowledge may have influenced their answers, especially on questions regarding their like or dislike for the United States.

Since the survey was developed by an American, there may be unintentional markers for American English in the question set-ups. For example, one subject pointed out that question (1) should have been worded differently as Australians bake *biscuits*, not *cookies*. Other errors were not pointed out but are potentially there.

Several of the survey questions were open ended. Also, even when some answers were provided to choose from, subjects elaborated anyway. For tabulating purposes, it was necessary to assess the overall meaning behind some responses. This practice leaves room for error.

## 5 Conclusions

The majority of Australians see the Americanization of their available media as an important issue.

Simple accusations of American cultural imperialism cannot adequately explain the cultural politics here; it is undeniable that in film and television production in Australia today, the dominance of the American industry is still perceived as a genuine practical problem (Turner 1994:106).

This “practical problem” of American dominance in the popular media, then, is extended by some to represent a threat to the Australian language, which is then itself extended as a threat to the Australian culture. “Because the state of the language is metaphorically taken to be an indicator of the state of the nation, a society or nation in control of itself is in control of its language—like a good patriarch in control of his women and children” (Romaine 1997:ix). The thought of losing a sense of national identity has stirred uneasiness among some Australians. As a response, television stations have implemented measures of control, such as setting quotas of required Australian programming or regulations regarding employment of Australian actors.

While much has been printed of the American influence on the Australian language, the results from this survey do not provide much indication of such an obvious change. This lack of strong evidence may be a result of insufficient sampling (in which case, further research would be beneficial) or an indication that there has not been an actual overall change in the language.

Research on this topic could be extended to include a younger range of subjects. Since formal education may have an effect as teachers correct their students, it might be interesting to examine subjects before they enter school, subjects in their first year of school and subjects after a couple years of schooling.

Another factor that could be taken into consideration for further research would be the sample composition. A larger, more balanced sample might give more reliable results. Also, it might be interesting to extend this research to a socio-economic angle. All of the subjects surveyed here are university students or working adults. Differences could be examined by collecting data from a variety of socio-economic levels to see if one group is more likely to borrow American words than another group.

If it is true that there has been no significant change in the language, this could be for a couple reasons. One major reason could be because of Australian adults like Mrs. Herbert, who work to correct their children's speech, or first grade teachers like Mrs. Thomas, who re-teach their students every year how to speak *Australian* English as they begin schooling (Thomas 2002).

Another potential reason there may not be a major change in the lexicons of Australian speakers could be a rejection of foreign influences and a strengthening of national pride. This is partly the motivation behind teaching children how to speak proper Australian English; however, it is a bigger issue than that. "Young Australians no longer want a handed-down culture" (Knightley 2000:20). They are proud of anything made in

Australia and may waiver to accept foreign influences or control, since “colonized people are portrayed as weak, effeminate, and child-like at the same time as they are regarded as uncivilized, unclean, [and] morally impure” (Romaine 1997).

Australians, in control of their own culture, see language as a part of this control, and they value their particular Australian lexicons as they value their own identity. They watch American television and movies and read American words in their own newspapers, but despite the unavoidable American presence, many Australians seem to refuse to incorporate un-Australian terms into their own lexicons.

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