

## Fair Dinkum

I've lived in Japan for a while, but people are often surprised to hear that I come from Australia, because my accent is now quite neutral. Australians are well known for their accents, which can be difficult to understand for people who have learned mostly American English.

Many Japanese have joked to me that the phrase 'have a good day' sounds like 'die well,' in Australian English. That's because of the way many of us pronounce 'day,' – it can sound like 'have a good *die* (/dæɪ/).' But it's not just pronunciation that makes Australian English unique, and sometimes difficult.

Australians love playing with words. Our general rule seems to be, if you can make it shorter, do! For instance, in Aussie English – oh, by the way, 'Aussie' means 'Australian' – 'afternoon' is often shortened to 'arvo,' 'journalist' to 'journos,' and 'mosquito' to 'mozzie,' for instance. This might have helped me understand some Japanese terms, like '*eakon*' for 'air conditioner,' or '*akeome*' for '*akemashite omedetō*.' Despite being completely different languages, it seems Aussies and Japanese people play with their languages in similar ways.

Aussie English also has some rules to the way we shorten words. We often add '-ie' to the end of words when we shorten them, just like in 'Aussie.' I can give other examples; 'breakfast' becomes 'breckie,' 'football' becomes 'footie' – we Aussies love our sports – and barbeque becomes 'barbie.' We like a good barbie, too.

But Aussie English also has some truly unique expressions. Sometimes, we make expressions longer – another way of playing with words. One example is 'flat out like a lizard drinking.' I often use this when I have a lot of work to do. This comes from the phrase 'flat out,' which means 'giving maximum effort and speed,' kind of like *zenryoku* (全力) or *seiippai* (精一杯) in Japanese. No one knows where 'flat out' came from, but adding 'like a lizard drinking,' adds some of our nature – it makes it sound more 'Aussie.'

A lot of our unique expressions come from our history – many of the early settlers in Australia came from the poorer classes in England. These people would also play with language, often using rhyming words to express something very different. For instance, 'pork pie,' means 'lie,' not telling the truth. This simply comes from the rhyme between 'pie' and 'lie.' This can be really difficult for people to understand – in fact, even *Natsume Sōseki*, who was a master of the English language, struggled with similar slang when he arrived in England.

Strangely, not all of our slang comes from English. One very famous Aussie expression is 'Fair Dinkum.' The phrase 'fair dinkum' is used to say something is genuine, true, or good. Apparently, this comes from Chinese language. During the gold rush in Australia, many Chinese workers came to dig for gold. The way they would say 'true' and 'gold' sounded like 'din' and 'kum' to English speakers. So, the Chinese for 'true gold' came to mean something good or true, in Aussie English: Fair Dinkum.

While Aussie English can be hard for others to understand, I still sometimes use it in Japan. Using Aussie slang feels like home. For instance, sometimes I'll ask my kids, "Do you want a raw googie with your sukiyaki?"

### Questions, Answers and Hints:

#### 1. Does the speaker sound like a typical native English-speaker of his country?

**Answer:** Probably not.

**Hints/Clues:** In the opening passage, the narrator explicitly states, 'people are often surprised to hear that I come from Australia, because my accent is now quite neutral.' Given the immediately following example of Australian English pronunciation, he likely does not sound like a 'typical Aussie.' (This can also be used as a discussion question to address why accents shift and change).

2. Although many Japanese people joke to the narrator, ‘have a good day’ sounds like ‘die well,’ why does this not make sense? (Hint: It is often heard as ‘have a good die’).

**Answer:** Because it would be grammatically incorrect.

**Hints/Clues:** No specific clues in the text, but a grammatically correct rendition of the misinterpreted pronunciation would be ‘have a good *death*.’ A verb, ‘die,’ cannot be used as an object.

3. Motorcycle gangs, members of whom are sometimes called ‘Bikers’ are a problem in many countries. Applying the rules of ‘Aussie English’ explained by the narrator, what do you think Aussies would call ‘Bikers?’

**Answer:** Bikies.

**Hints/Clues:** The narrator explicitly explains that Australians ‘often add ‘-ie’ to the end of words when we shorten them, just like in ‘Aussie.’ Given the examples he offered, it can be inferred that ‘-ie’ is added to a prominent consonant in the original word. In the case of ‘Biker(s),’ this would become ‘Bikie(s).’

4. Is the narrator proficient in Japanese?

**Answer:** Likely yes.

**Hints/Clues:** In addition to making reference to having lived in Japan ‘for a while,’ in the opening paragraph, the narrator also adopts Japanese expressions (such as ‘zenryoku (全力)’ and ‘seiippai (精一杯),’ to explain Aussie English expressions. Further, he makes reference to Natsume Sōseki’s struggles with spoken English, suggesting a familiarity with Japanese literature.

5. What do you think a ‘googie’ is?

**Answer:** An egg.

**Hints/Clues:** Students should draw on their knowledge of *sukiyaki* – often eaten with a raw egg (although often children will avoid the egg).

6. The narrator says ‘dinkum’ in ‘fair dinkum’ comes from Chinese, meaning ‘true’ and ‘gold.’ Given your knowledge of Chinese characters (漢字), what do you think ‘din’ and ‘kum’ are in Japanese?

**Answer:** *shin* (真: true) and *kin* (金: gold).

**Hints/Clues:** Given the meanings as relayed in the passages, students should be able to apply their knowledge to arrive at a fairly close answer. (This can also be used as a discussion point to demonstrate how prior language knowledge can help to understand related languages).

**Bonus Question:** The English expression ‘Long time no see,’ is ungrammatical. Some explanations suggest it comes from Chinese railroad workers in America, translating their four-character expressions (四字熟語: *yojijukugo*) into English. How would you render ‘long term no see’ into a Japanese *yojijukugo*?

**Bonus Question Hint:** Some explanations for ‘long term no see,’ suggest it comes from the Cantonese ‘好耐冇見,’ or the standard Mandarin ‘好久不見.’ One possible simple rendition (which does not, of course, exist in Japanese) is a reverse transliteration: 長時不見.