

Australian Cultural Values

A focal point of the English Language Study Design, specifically Unit 4 Area of Study 1, is the construction of the Australian identity through language. In order to understand how language is used to reflect the Australian identity, it is important to first understand what values or standards of behaviour an Australian identity is comprised of.

When it comes to constructing essays, it is important to find contemporary examples from Australian media and link them to Australian cultural values. These examples must be explained using subsystems to display their linguistic relevance.

Australian cultural values are influenced by Australia's history. Convict settlement, the influence of the British monarchy, an influx of new migrants and globalization of language have all influenced the cultural values Australian's hold today. These events in history have enabled Australians to develop values by which they hold themselves, including egalitarianism, mateship, antiauthoritarianism and larrikinism.

The most significant value is that of egalitarianism. This is the doctrine that all people are equal and deserving of equal rights and opportunities. Class distinctions are far less significant in Australian society compared to the United Kingdom where social circles have been constructed around rigid hierarchy's. In contrast, Australian's of lower socio-economic standing typically do not see themselves as being less equal than privileged Australian's.

This notion is reflected in the language used in Australian society. Addressing individuals as 'mate' and using colloquialisms such as 'pollies' to refer to politicians demonstrates that Australians value one another on an equal ground, irrespective of socio-economics or class.

This value extends into Australia's sense of multiculturalism. Australia houses citizens with diverse ethnic backgrounds and prides itself on this cultural diversity. Many ethnolects have established themselves within Australian culture overtime and spread across society. These ethnolects are also finding their way onto platforms such as television to reflect present Australian society. Comedians such as Nazeem Hussain or the Channel Nine show, 'Here come the Habibs' use phonological, lexical, syntactical and semantic features of their respective ethnolects in a comedic manner to portray cultural diversity in a public space and celebrate the Australian value of multiculturalism.

Ethnolect speakers express their multicultural identity by molding Australian English along with their ethnic language to create their unique ethnolect. This is particularly evident with Greek and Lebanon English speakers who adopt Australian colloquialisms but retain their ethnic accent. They also often insert an interjectory such as 'reh' into everyday discourse as a way of promoting solidarity with others within the ethnic society.

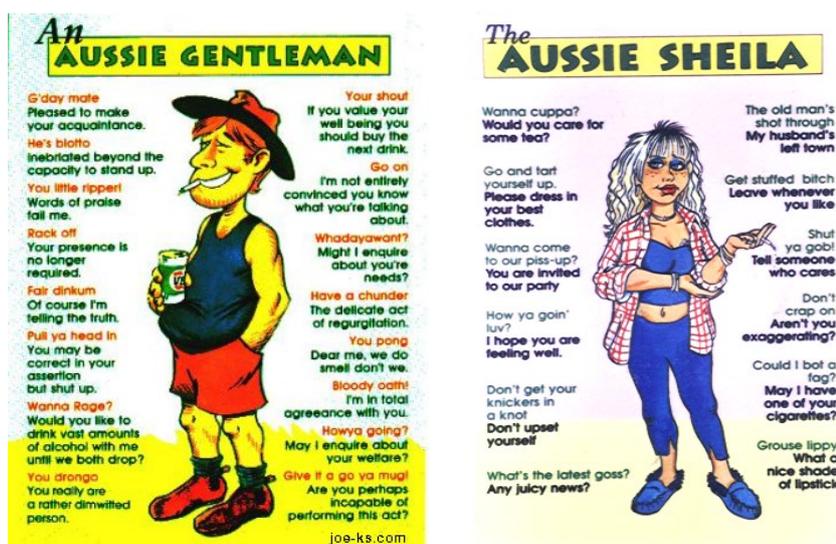


The Australian value of anti-authoritarianism is largely reflected through the lexical choices of individuals. This value is derived from the Australian notion of egalitarianism. Australians have a far greater tendency to use expletives than those from other English speaking countries. The relaxed manner in which the Australian society perceives language use is indicative of their disregard for social hierarchies and authority figures.

The ease with which comedic remarks can be made about influential figures and politicians in the Australian media, indicates this very idea. The SBS series, *The Feed* recently released a Facebook video "How Politicians Speak" mocking politicians by imitating political language in everyday conversations, using excessive hedging and obfuscation and a highly formal register. This Facebook video can be further explained using the subsystem of semantics. The meaning of the video is greater than the literal words being spoken by the actors. There is cultural context required to understand the humorous intent of the video. Through this cultural context, the video is able to reach out to its audience and express this anti-authoritarian way of thinking.

The tendency to ridicule politicians and authoritative figures can be explained by a phenomenon known as 'tall-poppy syndrome' which describes the tendency to degrade, attack or cut down individuals because they have risen in the social hierarchy. As a country which deeply values humility and embodies the 'battler' persona, Australians automatically become critical when those around them climb the social ladder. Snide comments and banter are tools used to remind those rising through the ranks that they are not better than anyone else. Furthermore, the tall-poppy syndrome is an explanation for why Australians consistently ridicule and mock their politicians. Comedian, Tim Minchin recently gave a speech to a graduating class at the University of Western Australia. In this speech he used crude language and blunt remarks to give advice to the students while simultaneously deflating their sense of self with phrases such as, 'opinions are like assholes, in that everyone has one'. Embossed within this simile is the concept of humility and egalitarianism that depict the tall-poppy syndrome.

Most examples of Australian language will ultimately tie back to these values. This includes the general Australian accent, Australian colloquialisms, phonological features of Australian English such as assimilation and the use of high rising terminal. The features of this language are linked to the values this language is used to express.



This link is particularly evident in political speeches, debates and comedic material. In relation to essay writing, there are a few steps to be conscious of when showing these links. Try to understand

your examples using subsystems and which subsystems are relevant for the given example. Is the language use significant on a phonological level, morphological level, lexical level, syntactic level or semantic level?

Throughout the year, you will be required to research and collect such contemporary examples which reflect Australian values. In your essay you are required to demonstrate the significance of your example, use metalanguage to explain the example and then link this example to the values it reflects in Australian society and finally explain what this means for the essay prompt. Following this sequence of steps will ensure that you are able to discuss Australian Identity and Language in a holistic manner.

Link to “How Politicians Speak” Facebook video:

<https://www.facebook.com/thefeedsbsviceland/videos/532043527129358/>

Link To clippings of Nazeem Hussain’s SBS show “Legally Brown” which turns Political Incorrectness on its head:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cUWT6c0lcc

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ntRq5XZt4bc>

Link to Kate Burridge interview on Studio 10 explaining the trend towards the General Australian Accent:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SsrfLwFQMHg>