

# How Australian English Compares to British and American English

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## G'day Mate.

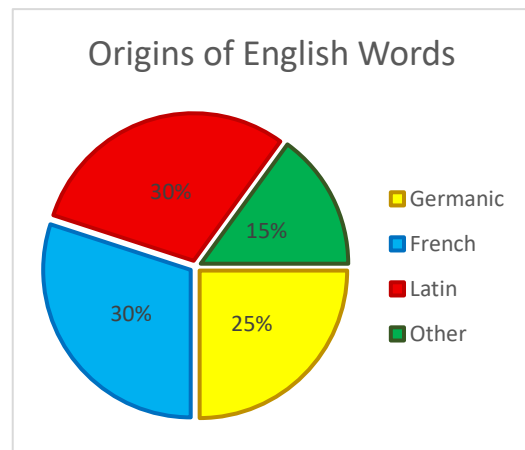
I've heard English described as three languages in a trench coat that beat up other languages in alleyways and rifle through their pockets for spare vocabulary. While that describes its origins, that doesn't account for its many dialects. Most commonly taught in TESOL are British English (specifically Received Pronunciation) and General American English. As an Australian, this puts me in an interesting situation: Australian English draws from both, but sometimes does its own thing.

## Once upon a time...

English originated from the languages of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, with influence from Britain's native Celtic languages. It was strongly affected by Old Norse, Norman French, and Latin, producing modern English (Stewart 2024, Foote 2024, Foote 2025). Consequently, English is a Germanic language where only 25% of its words are Germanic, but those include its most basic and commonly used words, accompanied by Germanic grammar (Foote 2025).

Over time, English diverged into many dialects.

From 1620, people and their dialects from across the Isles migrated to America. By 1724, America's transplanted dialects had significantly levelled out and, influenced by Native American languages and other immigrants, produced a handful of mutually intelligible koines emulating Received Pronunciation, which evolved further through the 1800s (Badawy 2024, English Grammar Zone 2025, Longmore 2007, pp. 514-526). From 1788, Australian English evolved the same way, with British and Irish dialects as the key ingredients<sup>1</sup>, and influence from native Aboriginal languages and immigrants (Badawy 2024, English Grammar Zone 2025, Oxford International 2025, Strong 1898).



## Could you say that again? I can't understand you.

Perhaps the most noticeable thing when meeting someone is their accent. American accents stand out for their harder /r/ sounds at the ends of words (e.g. /smɑrtər/ vs /smɑ:tə/) (Badawy 2024, E2Language Team 2018). Other speech differences include:

- "O"s sounding more like "A"s (e.g. "sorry": /'saɪ.i/ vs /'sɔɪ.i/) (Wiktionary 2025c<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>1</sup> The Australian accent most closely resembles London's Cockney accent (Strong 1898), which has caused people to conflate or confuse the two (ShibuyaGato 2021, 1:01:46-1:03:05, Yugipedia 2025).

<sup>2</sup> I would cite a published English dictionary here, except I cannot find one freely available online that lists all of the relevant British, American, and Australian pronunciations, only American and/or British, with any online

- /j/ sounds after /t/ sounds are dropped (e.g. “tube”: /tju:b/ vs /tu:b/ (Wiktionary 2025d)).
- “O”s at the ends of words are a harder “O” sound (/noʊ/), not a softer “EU” sound (/nəʊ/ or /nəu/) (Badawy 2024, Wiktionary 2025b).
- Pitch rises when asking Yes/No questions, rather than falling (E2Language Team 2018).

Something that Americans and Australians align on are double-T sounds (e.g. “better”), which shift towards a /d/ sound (e.g. “beddah”), especially for Americans (Badawy 2024, English Grammar Zone 2025).

Other Australian pronunciation quirks include:

- Some “A” sounds get shifted (e.g. “day” (/deɪ/) becomes /dæɪ/) (Oxford International 2025, Wiktionary 2025a).
- Other “A” sounds are elongated (e.g. “car” being pronounced less like “cah” than “caah”) (Badawy 2024)).
- Short vowels are shorter and crisper (Oxford International 2025).
- Some vowels have a more nasal tone (e.g. “night”) (Oxford International 2025).

## Shakespeare would have been proud.

Another noticeable difference between British, American, and Australian English is the vocabulary. Each refers to many things by distinct words (English Grammar Zone 2025, E2Language Team 2018, Moore 2025, Oxford International 2025):

USA	UK	Australia
Candy	Sweets	Lollies
Bell Pepper	Pepper	Capsicum
(French) fries	(Hot) chips	Chips

Conversely, one word might be used differently in each dialect: where Americans refer to savoury bread as “biscuits”, Brits use “biscuit” for what Americans call “sweet cookies”, and Australians for any “cookie” (Oxford International 2025).

Sometimes, only one dialect uses a different word (English Grammar Zone 2025, Kong 2017, Moore 2025, Oxford International 2025):

USA	Australia	UK
Eggplant		Aubergine
Underwear		Pants
Flashlight	Torch	
Elevator	Lift	
Flip-flops	Thongs	Flip-flops

Britain, America, and Australia also all have unique slang. British slang draws from expat groups and pop culture references, Aussie slang features shortened words or pop culture references and American slang tends to be universally understood by English speakers thanks to American media (Badawy 2024, English Grammar Zone 2025, Oxford International 2025):

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Australian dictionaries I’ve found being behind paywalls, and printed Australian dictionaries only listing Australian pronunciation. Therefore, Wiktionary is the best option for listing all three that I have found.

Country	Slang	Meaning
UK	Quid, e.g. “___ costs 5 quid.”	British Pound, i.e. “___ costs £5.”
	Cuppa	Cup of tea
	Innit?	Isn't it?
USA	Bail	Leave suddenly
	Beat, e.g. “A will beat B”	To win against, e.g. “A will win against B”
	Dude	Man / male
Australia	G'day	Hello
	Footy	Australian Rules Football
	Maccas	McDonald's

## Bubble, bubble, toil and– wait, not that kind of spell?

Another key difference in dialects is spelling. In the past, many variant spellings of words circulated around. These were codified into standard spellings in British and American English significantly influenced by popular dictionaries by Samuel Johnson and Noah Webster respectively (Scragg 1974).

For word endings, Australia conforms to British spelling (E2Language Team 2018)...

American English	British and Australian English
-er (center)	-re (centre)
-or (color)	-our (colour)
-ize (organize)	-ise (organise)
-og (analog)	-ogue (analogue)
-led (traveled)	-lled (travelled)

...but may vary for individual words (Moore 2025):

US	AU	UK
Program (computer)	Program	Program
Program (TV show)	Program	Programme
Check (banking)	Cheque	Cheque

## Do we even use all of these?

Perhaps the least noticeable difference is grammar. Australian English borrows some American preferences, but sides with Brits on verb tenses (E2Language Team 2018, Oxford International 2025):

Grammatical Item	USA	Australia	UK
Collective Nouns	The class <b>is</b> happy.		The class <b>are</b> happy.
Past Tenses	I'd <b>forgotten</b> .	I'd <b>forgot</b> .	
	I <b>learned</b> it.	I <b>learnt</b> it.	
	I <b>got</b> a car.	I <b>have got</b> a car.	
Simple Past vs Perfect Present	I <b>ate</b> dinner already.		I <b>have eaten</b> dinner already.

## I tried so hard, and got so far...

Australian English inherits much from British English, but borrows extensively from American English as well. It is also influenced by native Aboriginal languages and the immigrants that come to its shores. But it isn't entirely derivative, and has made its own decisions on vocabulary and slang. Combined with its accent, these make Australian English a unique dialect that is just as valid as its more widely taught siblings.

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