

JOHN DOE MEETS JOE BLOGGS FRA LESSON IN STRINE

By STEVE BUNK



IT WAS IN America, before immigrating here in 1982, that I first came to know and welcome the communications gap which soon would envelop me — as indeed, it must envelop any American who dares to hope that the cousin countries use the same language. My awakening was due to that seminal work of Afferbeck Lauder, *Let Stalk Strine* (Ure Smith, 1965) but not until after arriving here did I detect the euphonious linguist bo-peeping from

behind a pen name which is strine for "alphabetical order."

I had absorbed the shock of the new lingo and was busy mastering it by then, translating it into Yankee slang. I began to match strine with American jargon from sport, the peace movement, the heartlands, jive, rock music, ethnic pockets... wherever I could find phrases that seemed most able to explain this strange tongue to me.

For example, the greeting — that first tenta- ➤

STRINE

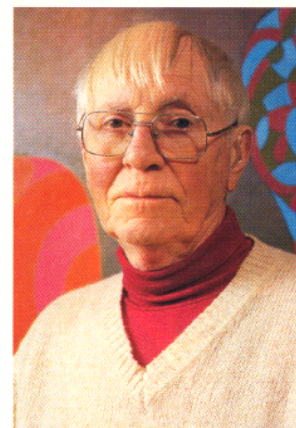
tive try in any language — is familiar to every Australian as, "G'die, mite."

One yankee equivalent, I reasoned, was the jive "Wuz-zappnin', blud?" I also wrote down the equally colourful, though somewhat less effusive redneck salutation, "Wut in hail yew thank yer doon, bowwah?" but settled on a third phrase as perhaps closest to the Australianism: that familiar Wild West greeting, still popular in Dallas and parts of Los Angeles, "Howdy" or "How do" (usually accompanied by the chummy sobriquet, "Pawed-naw").

Having captured the spirit of "G'die, mite," I moved on to thanks in strine. These are rendered either with the very simple "Ta" or by putting the conventional "thanks" where Americans would say "please," as in: "Gimme semmitch, ta" — roughly translated, "Howabouda ham san on rye, pleez."

I saw that the safest nicety in strine is, "Ow ya gairn?" which can be transliterated almost directly into "Howzit goin'?" The usual replies are similar as well. To wit: "Bewt" (short for "beautifully") and "Fan-tas-tic" (short for, "He wants to know how it's going, I'll tell him how it's going, it's going like a hole in the head, that's how it's going,"), respectively.

After the pleasantries, I identified



SIMON COWLING

Alistair Morrison (alias Afferbeck Lauder), master of strine

some of the most frequently used Oz terms to describe human types, entering after them the closest translations I could manage in Americanese. Australians know most of the latter already, through the media.

Even so, it might amuse you to flick through a few more scratchings in my notebook:

Australian	American
People	
bloke	guy
sheila	dame
Joe Bloggs	John Doe
mate	pal, buddy
offsider	sidekick
tall poppy	big gun
crim	hood
Insults	
bastard	sonofabitch
bludger	deadbeat, sponger
dag	nerd
dill, nong	peabrain,
	schlemiel
drongo	space case
ratbag	screwball, whacko
wanker	jerk-off
yobbo	geek
Nasty confusions	
rubber	eraser
barracking for your team	rooting for them
Other useful expressions	
no worries	no sweat
shoot through	split
shirty	cheesed off
give it a miss	take a raincheck
do your block	blow your stack
take a punt	take a stab
suss it out	scope a situation
spot on	dead right
I'm dead set	I'm 110 per cent ➤



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STRINE

This sort of thing could go on ad nauseam (if it hasn't already) but learning the niceties of such indelicacies is not the half of it. You must employ them properly, which I feel certain has not always been the case with the foregoing. And the hardest part is figuring out how to pronounce 'em. For this, I turned to expertise.

The title page to one of Afferbeck Lauder's volumes describes him as "Professor of Strine Studies, University of Sinny." By examining the copyright, I cleverly deduced that the real name behind it all was Alistair Morrison. Little did I know then that he also was listed under "strine" in no less a source than my 1982 edition of *The Macquarie Dictionary*.

Further investigation led to the news that, by 1981, Mr Morrison's *Let Stalk Strine* had gone through 17 printings and sold more than 140,000 copies. It then joined a companion volume, *Nose Tone Unturned*, under the joint title *Strine*.

I learned that Mr Morrison now calls Fremantle, Western Australia, home. It would be a long, exhausting journey for the privilege of visiting with him. I wrote him a letter instead. It included some of the most pressing linguistic queries of our time that I could think up offhand. His replies were in kind. Out of kindness, I offer only some of that exchange here:

SB: In the title piece of your book *Nose Tone Unturned*, you wrote that "although English is the official, written language of this country, the unofficial, spoken language is strine." Are your books proof in themselves that strine never can succeed as a written language?

AM: Hacker dyno?

SB: Do you ever suspect that the scholarship of strine may have been too erudite and therefore too esoteric to be fully appreciated by the school-fed masses?

AM: Strine first appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald* and so was addressed to a relatively well-educated public but that didn't stop it from becoming popular with all sections and levels of the English-speaking world. I think this may be because a lot of the enjoyment of strine seems to be in the puzzle-solving aspect of it. You read something out and then you have to try and understand what you've said. I have seen people with the strongest Aussie accent laughing at, say, "Phoney wicked beer loan" ("If only we could be alone") or "An airman pickle semmitch" ("A ham and pickle sandwich").

SB: How do you think the various American dialects compare with strine in terms of richness?

AM: Hard to answer this without a lot of research. I've always found American slang most satisfying; it's so picturesque, evocative and apt. Australian slang is satisfying in a different way — more earthy, perhaps? Less cynical? But I'm not detached enough to say which is the richer.

SB: Are you planning future works on strine?

AM: I am primarily an artist (painter) and graphic designer. Strine was an aberration and writing, although I greatly enjoy it, has not been my life's work. For some time, I've wanted to bring strine up to date; a lot of it is now obsolete and in 20 years many new words and phrases have been introduced into the language. However, I don't seem to have time to write these days; painting is a full-time job.

SB: What advice would you offer the bewildered but hopeful newcomer to 'Stralia?

AM: Buy a few copies of *Strine* and keep your ears open.

On that most practical note, sadly, the last observation left to make is that some Australians seem to be a bit embarrassed about their distinctive and quite inimitable accent — especially the country-bred folks. But — at least to this outsider's ear — Australian speech is worldly-wise, inventive and a genuine delight. As long as talk is the expression of thought and thought the vehicle of convention, it's not likely that the Aussies ever will sound like any other English-speaking people. And that's dead set, mate, no worries, although I could be wrong . . .

Hacker dyno?



GOOD WEEKEND