

Simile, Sarcasm, and Slang: Contemporary Australian English in the films *Noise* and *Animal Kingdom*

Stephen Richmond

1. Introduction

Many studies of Australian English focus on distinguishing it from British or American varieties either through phonetic features (the most famous being the broadened vowels of *mate* and *today*) or stereotypical 'Aussie' vocabulary like *bonza* (meaning 'good') or *strewth* (an exclamation of surprise, shortened from 'God's truth'). Australian English is certainly rich in expressive, humourous, even offensive vocabulary and phrases, and yet this is not a complete picture of what distinguishes the dialect. Australian English can also be identified through a number of pragmatic features, such as discourse markers. Though the mass media and internet have hastened the rate of borrowing from other forms and dialects of English, and some commentators have bemoaned the gradual decline of the Australian accent in the face of a culturally-dominant American one. However there are hints that a unique Australian dialect is alive and well, and that some of its linguistic features are becoming more, rather than less, prevalent in a globalised community.

From its outset as an English-speaking society, Australia has shared cultural products with its founding mother country Britain, and its

energetic cousin the United States. Thanks to their shared language and outwardly-similar culture and customs, cultural products such as film, literature and art have always flowed freely between the three nations, and they have influenced each other to various degrees. However, for many years during the latter half of the twentieth century, Australian writers, film producers, artists, and musicians suffered from a inferiority complex known as 'cultural cringe'.

Compared with Britain as the home/centre/standard of English language and the United States as a cultural power, Australian English was considered rustic, unsophisticated and even inferior. One of the results of this prevailing mood was that anything identifiable as distinctly Australian was, even if not completely expunged from the exported language, then certainly kept in the background of any cultural production. American audiences were once so unfamiliar with the Australian accent that the one of the first Australian films to gain a considerable audience in the United States, *Mad Max* (1977), was screened with subtitles. There was an era when Australian singers would disguise their antipodean twang in order to sound more 'authentic', i.e., closer to the dominant standard of the two English-speaking cultural giants. After that, exaggerated Australian English which characterized films such as *Crocodile Dundee* (1987) was mostly clichéd bush slang and not typical of the English spoken by most sections of Australian society.

Recently, however, expressions unique to Australia have begun to be celebrated in popular culture, and the hang-ups Australians might have had about any cultural inferiority have gradually relaxed. Recent Australian films have been characterized by their unsentimental use of the Australian idiom, not only to express humour (as was the case in the

past), but also other more complex emotions and values.

This essay is not intended to present an exhaustive taxonomy of Australian expressions. Rather, it should be read as a snapshot of several features of contemporary Australian English, as sampled from the scripts of two recent films, and a brief commentary on the sociolinguistic significance of these examples. Addressing in turn the devices of sarcasm, simile and slang, I will address the broader question: In what contexts are these forms employed in conversation in contemporary Australian English, and to what communicative ends? How are they used in a construction of 'Australianness'? Is it possible to find a genuine Australian identity simply through linguistic forms of expression?

The first of the two films sampled for this paper is *Noise*, a dramatic film which was commended for its sober and powerful depiction of a police officer in contemporary suburban Melbourne. It was awarded Australian Film of the Year in 2007 by the Film Critics Council of Australia. Brendan Cowell plays Graham McGahan, a disaffected cop afflicted with tinnitus and beset with doubt about his worth as a law enforcer. As his tinnitus grows worse, so does his feelings of cynicism of society and his place in it. He eventually finds meaning in his work as he helps console members of a community grieving after a tragedy. The dialogue between McGahan and the people around him — his fellow police officers, his girlfriend, the local citizens with whom he comes into contact — crackles with sardonic humour and slang. In an interview, the film's scriptwriter and director Matthew Saville described his reason for pursuing authentic Australian language:

Q: There is a great use of dry wit and a superbly sarcastic use of the Australian vernacular. Where was this drawn from and what to you

think it adds to the film?

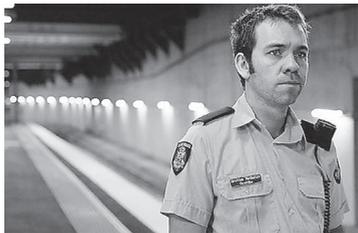
A: I think it's just drawn from my love of it . . . it's a fragile dialect. I love the Australian vernacular and it's fragile because it's unique — it's an amalgam of the great mongrel that we are. Hopefully it will continue to grow, but it will only do so if we celebrate it.

2. Sarcasm, mockery and irony

We can find an example of this dryness and sarcasm in the very first scene of *Constable McGahan*. Arriving on a deserted station platform in the middle of the night, his police radio crackles to life:

Sample 1

- Police radio: Report of a disturbance on the Lilydale train express
21. Please repeat 21, Thank you. Melbourne East 818?
- McGahan: Melbourne East 818, back.
- Police radio: Say again please, 818. The signal's very weak.
- McGahan: Sorry, I'm in a tunnel and my battery is **cactus**.
- Police radio: And difficult for me with a weak signal 818.
- McGahan: Well **fuck you then**.



Brendan Cowell as Constable Graham McGahan
in *Noise* (2007) Photo: *Sydney Morning Herald*

McGahan's refusal to use standard police terminology and manner when reporting his situation immediately marks him as a non-conformist. Though his motivations for this are at this point of the film unclear, they are not the focus of this study. *Cactus*, while not exclusively Australian, is a common slang term used predominantly by working-class (hyphen) men to mean *finished, not working, out of order*. By choosing to use this over the standard response discourse, McGahan identifies himself as a working-class, no-frills Australian male. Furthermore, his response to the dispatcher's request for reiteration is an outright profanity, something which would be cause for reprimand in a regular police force. McGahan further demonstrates his contempt for 'officialese' when, later in the film, he sees a colleague from the police force interviewed on the TV news, and points him out to his girlfriend Caitlin, who is leaving for work.

Sample 2

- McGahan: (pointing to TV) I know this guy. He speaks exactly like that in real life.
- Officer on TV: "... information they may have in their knowledge ..."
- Caitlin: I'm off. I'll see you tonight.
- Officer on TV: "... to recent events in the vicinity, or events leading to ..."
- McGahan: (mimicking police officer's voice) Information pertaining to their recent knowledge of events in the vicinity.
- Caitlin: Gotta go. Seriously.
- McGahan: (still mimicking police officer's voice) Male constable indicates that he would like to wish

female occupant of the residence good luck
pertaining particularly to her endeavors of the day.

Caitlin: I love you, but shut up!

McGahan: Female occupant responds by departing the vicinity
without further ado.

With its convict and working-class origins, Australian society has traditionally defended the underdog, and by extension, placed great importance on egalitarianism and a fair go for all. When those in authority abuse their power, or do not meet their assumed standards, they are fair game for invective. Linguistically this is expressed lexically through insulting, ironic, or creative idioms, and formally by use of mimicry, satire, absurdity and sarcasm, to deflate some of the power and pomposity of dominant social structure and bring them back to a more equal social standard.

In the above conversation, McGahan is again expressing his disdain for structures of power and disillusionment with his situation, though this time through deliberate humour. While he normally eschews prescribed police vernacular, his inappropriate use of it here in a non-formal context to a humorous end (to make his girlfriend laugh) but also as a way of mocking the body of authority he is himself a member of. Distrust or even outright mockery of authority is often quoted as feature of Australian humour, and indeed many of the enormous number of inventive Australian phrases and expressions (many listed in Lunn 2006, and Battersby, 2007) are insults or put-downs.

According to Norrick and Chiaro (2009),

As a solidarity strategy, humour typically contributes to the

smoother achievement of work objectives. But humour also enables individuals to construct complex social identities, and by licensing relatively unconventional behavior, it allows people to challenge and shift the boundaries of normative and expected behaviors.

McGahan's humour and sarcasm seem to rest nicely within this characterization. The droll language he employs is not intended for amusement, but more to assert an identity, however irregular it might be. The examples introduced in the next section seem to play the same role.

3. Figurative expressions

Later in the film, McGahan is posted to a police caravan stationed outside a suburban shop, with the job of interviewing the few local citizens who come to offer information in connection to a recent murder. The job is tedious, and McGahan is unenthusiastic about an assignment which further underlines his insignificance. The exchange between McGahan and the female officer explaining his duties and showing him around his new workplace contains several utterances which are interesting for their role in creating and confirming the participants' varied identities.

Sample 3

- Rhonda: Email hasn't been set up yet, but there's phones on both desks, fax and what have you, coffee and shit in the kitchenette. (Phone rings.)
- McGahan: You going to answer that, or . . . ?
- Rhonda: Nah, I know who that is.

McGahan: So this is where she was last seen?

Rhonda: Yeah. Bought a packet of Alpine lights and a Diet Coke. But don't talk to Lionel about that, he's a bit He's OK, he's fine, he's just a bit funny about all of this. Look, it isn't rocket surgery. Basically you've just gotta sit here and put down whatever the **mouthbreathers** say or do. Mostly it's the same old same old- "She was a lovely girl," "Kept mostly to herself," "Always happy," Always had time to say hello." Just **whack it down** on the shit sheet, put 'em in the out tray and Johnno'll fax em in the morning

McGahan: Sweet.

Rhonda: Yeah, **slack as**.

Even between two officers of similar rank, there is very little in the above exchange which might be described as official police vernacular. Instead, we find casual, even offensive language used here as a solidarity strategy. Although the two officers have little in common — gender, age, and interest in their work are all social gaps — Rhonda uses laid-back language such as *whack it down* (instead of the more standard police-talk *note it down*) to extend group membership to McGahan, and to show him that he is a valued member of a group. Referring to members of the general public disrespectfully as *mouthbreathers* immediately reinforces the common status of the officers. This deliberate informality and use of in-group epithets is clearly a form of positive politeness according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) categorization of linguistic politeness.

Australian English features a wealth of descriptive and often darkly

ironic similes, which are used to add emphasis to adjectives such as *hot*, *dry*, and *hungry*. Examples such as *face as long as a wet weekend* derive their humour from a play on words, an incongruent comparison; the fact that the physical length of a person's face is cannot be measured on the same scale as the length of time elapsed during a tedious weekend. The example at the close of Sample 5, *full as a state school*, is one such phrase. Sometimes, expressions such as *a face like a wedding cake left out the rain* rely purely on vivid imagery to give their rhetorical impact.

The final utterance by Rhonda, *slack as*, as odd as it looks on paper, is a distinctive example of modern Australian colloquial speech. It is common in casual conversation, especially in that of young people, but yet to be given much attention from linguists. It might be described as a 'dangling simile', in that it consists of an only half-finished figure of speech- the object of comparison is omitted completely. Intonation is certainly important in conveying the required emphasis, but it is perhaps an indicator of the frequency of figurative expressions and their importance in Australian English that such a reduced construction carries the required meaning.

There are several other examples of descriptive simile in the film, but given in their full form. When McGahan remarks that a local tradesman, wanted for assaulting a mentally-challenged young man, is *in more trouble than the first settlers*, he is emphasizing the seriousness of the situation in a mischievous way. *The first settlers* refers to the original immigrants to the Australian continent, who faced daily hardship and danger in their struggle to establish a European-style community in a harsh and unfamiliar environment. Though the exact type of trouble is different, the message is clear to anyone with knowledge of national history.

Peters (2007) notes the worth of evaluative idioms such as metaphor to an Australian style of discourse, saying ‘Australian similes . . . are reflexations of those used in Northern hemisphere varieties of English’ and ‘the liveliness of their use in the Australian context suggests their importance as “cultural scripts”’. Because a shared cultural background is necessary for the simile to be understood, these idioms are vital in reinforcing a common (Australian) identity. Lunn (2006) lists thousands of vivid, hilarious, obscene, absurd and poetic metaphors in his collection of Australian phrases of the 1940s and 50s *Lost for Words*. Lunn is a passionate believer in the erosion of unique Australian language, stating in his introduction that his book is an attempt to ask for Australia’s ‘lost language’ back in the face of cultural imperialism (mainly posed by the US). He asks:

How long is it since you saw someone in a TV sitcom on our screens reach out across the coffee table and say, ‘Excuse pigs without tails’? Or heard a TV character tell someone to drop by: Just toot and come in — you know, the Egyptian Pharaoh?’ Or a woman say ‘Now *she* was an education’? (Lunn, 2006)

Lunn’s appeals are influenced to some degree by sentimentality, but his point is well made — even accounting for natural language change, a loss of language, even the comic, is a damaging loss of identity.

In the next example, McGahan is interviewing a local resident named Craig, who has come into his police caravan with some information about *suss* (suspicious) goings-on in the neighborhood. However, over the course of the conversation, Craig’s tone begins ranting aggressively, and after making racially offensive and intimidating

remarks, McGahan's originally friendly manner changes to an openly hostile one.

Sample 4

- Craig: (threateningly) What was your name again?
MaGahan: McGahan. 'Mc' as in 'McDonalds', 'Gahan' as in, if you can read, it's written right here on my name tag. Do you want to borrow a pen to jot it down?
Craig: Nah, I'll commit that to memory.
McGahan: Yeah, give your memory a **red hot go**. I'll be interested to see how that goes for you, Craig.

The figurative expression *red hot go* is just one of thousands littered through Australian discourse. But why does McGahan use sarcasm and irony here, when he is justifiably nervous about the potentially unstable young man threatening him? He makes fun of Craig's supposedly poor memory and reading skills, and uses false politeness (*do you want to borrow a pen . . . ?*) to reinforce his point. In a taxonomy adapted from McGhee (1989), Kersten (2009) lists the following as the chief functions of humor in social interaction. Firstly, as a facilitator of social interaction, humor makes communication easier. Speakers use humor to receive acceptance and recognition from those around them, or as a socially acceptable means of expressing aggression. As a form of amusement, humor is used for its own sake- simply to make others laugh. Finally, it is employed as a way of saving face, a way of defusing tension in a situation.

It is possible that McGahan is trying to be funny here to defuse the tension of the scene, but it is perhaps also likely that he is using it to

assert his superiority over the threatening Craig, someone who is physically his equal. Since McGahan is deeply insecure of his social value as a police officer, he does not have recourse to the authority to verbally overpower Craig with a direct command (*I'll arrest you for threatening an officer*), and so resorts to taunting. Indeed, in the face of an offensive verbal attack from Craig, he is nonchalant rather than authoritative, saying, "You can call me what you want. It's your taxes." This could be described as perhaps the most quintessentially 'Australian' line of dialogue in the film, not because of any phonetic, lexical, or idiomatic features, but because it perfectly expresses the sardonic and anti-authoritarian attitudes which are traditionally recognized as Australian.

Sample 5

Rhonda: (hands McGahan a photo of a dog wearing a police hat)
What about the dog?

McGahan: What about it?

Rhonda: Well, it was impersonating a police officer.

McGahan: (mutters angrily) Yeah, what was it thinking?

Rhonda: It's a serious offence Graham.

McGahan: If that were true, **we'd get done.**

Rhonda: **Yeah, no.** Hang on

McGahan: No, look at us Rhon. No offence, but we are doing **five-eighths of fucking nothing.**

Rhonda: Bullshit. You've got that, whatsit, the ear **thingy**. Come on, I know what's **up your bum**. Don't let a grabstick like Stouratis get you down. Lionel told me. You could have booked the little shit for disturbance, or I dunno, damage to property, if you're so worried about your

time sheets.

McGahan: Yeah, look, he was pissed, but he had a point.

Rhonda: Crap, crap, crap. He was **full as a state school**.

Though it might appear casual and even abrasive, the above section contains a number of linguistic devices working in subtle ways to manage the social realities and needs of the participants. McGahan's feeling of complete helplessness as a police officer is manifest in his assertion that he and Rhonda would 'get done' for impersonating police. He feels so lost and inept that he is a regular person masquerading as someone in his profession. The use of the idiom **five-eighths of fucking nothing**, is, profanity aside, an example of how descriptive language can be used for conversational emphasis. Neither the simpler *we are doing nothing* nor even the emphasized *we are doing absolutely nothing* conveys the same degree of McGahan's frustration. Part of the humour in this expression comes from the originality and arbitrariness of the number used in the fraction. It is possible that in Australian expression, the amount 'five-eighths' has come to represent 'a lot' or 'a great deal'.

Rhonda's initial response to this complaint, *Yeah no* is a peculiar discourse marker which has gathered attention (Burridge and Florey, 2002, Moore 2007) for its growing use in mostly Australian contexts, and its subtle functions. Burridge and Florey attribute three basic functions to *yeah no* - a propositional one where it is providing referential meaning through assent or dissent with a previous utterance, a textual function where it is used to pick up a previous topic, or an expressive function where it is used to deflect a compliment or criticism. The *yeah no* in the example above is basically propositional. Rhonda disagrees with McGahan's negative assessment of their work, but is hesitant to state

this outright. *Yeah no* is a skilful way of dealing with ‘uncomfortable’ topics in a culturally appropriate manner.

Rhonda’s casual referral to McGahan’s debilitating tinnitus condition as an ‘ear thingy’ is perhaps more sympathetic than it first appears. Giving the harmless word *thing* a new phonetic ending with -y is a distinct, some would say superlatively Australian, method of casualization. Later in the film, McGahan himself uses the same form when he talks about the police band *practicing for the carols thingy*. The -y/-ie and -o endings given to many nouns fall into the category of diminutives and short forms, which have been discussed as an almost classic feature of direct reference in Australian discourse, though their sociolinguistic role is yet to be deeply investigated. Casualizing nouns (such as *mosquito* to *mozzie*, *smoke break* to *smoko*) is a way of expressing social unity through a disposal of pretence. *Noise* features two such short forms: *ambo* (ambulance officer) and *suss* (suspicious). However, many of these forms have become lexicalized in their own right, and it is hard to surmise that they are always used with a positive intent in contemporary discourse.

4. Discourse markers — *mate* and *you know*

Director David Michod’s debut feature film *Animal Kingdom*, released in Australia in 2009, won international acclaim and the World Cinema Jury Prize at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival. A dark and quietly unsettling character piece, it tells the story of how a shy teenager Josh Cody is caught up in the war between his criminal family and the local police. His uncles, the bank robbers Pope, Craig and Darren, take him under their wing when his mother dies of a drug overdose, yet his

involvement with their crime binds him more and more tightly to their inevitable downfall.

The dialogues in *Animal Kingdom* are raw and descriptive, with copious use of profanity and threatening language. All of the main characters are portrayed as working class, although the money they obtain through their robberies and drug dealing allows them to live a more middle-class lifestyle, and their dialogues reflect this social status. While there are not as many overt hallmarks of Australian expression and slang in *Animal Kingdom* as can be found in the script of *Noise*, there are nevertheless several conversational features which are interesting when analyzed from a pragmatic perspective.

In the following dialogue, bank robber Barry is meeting Pope, his partner in crime at a local supermarket to hand him his share of their last take, an amount which is not as much as they had hoped. He confesses to Pope that he finally wants to leave his criminal career behind and tries to convince Pope to do the same.

Sample 6

Barry: (handing Pope a wad of cash) Here mate. It's bullshit. **Mate**, I don't know what you're thinking about your future, but I'm just about done with this shit. I need some sort of change. The stock market's working. **You know** that twenty grand I put in there is sixty now? See, you get a foot in that door, there's serious money to be made, **you know**?

Pope: I don't know anything about the stock market **mate**.

Barry: So what? Neither did I. Doesn't matter. You get the paper, you learn it. It doesn't matter. Our game- it's over mate. It's getting too hard. It's a fucking joke. **You know** Craig's

making a fucking fortune with the drug thing. You saw the house he's bought.

Pope: (nods)

Barry: I don't know I got that in me. It's grubby.

Pope: Mmm.

Barry: Grubby business. The stock market **mate**. There's a resources boom. I'll get you started. I'll set you up an account and you're away.

Pope: Yeah I **Mate**, I don't have a computer.

Barry: Don't need a computer.

Pope: Well, I don't know what I'm going to do.

Barry: Either do I is what I'm saying. But every day's a new day is what I'm also saying.

What is immediately obvious is the frequency of the friendly address term *mate*. While this not a uniquely Australian word (it is also common in parts of England), *mate* is familiar to non-Australians as a ubiquitous term of endearment, introduced to the world through breakthrough Australian films of the 1980s such as *Crocodile Dundee*. The concept of 'mates' and 'mateship' is taken extremely seriously in parts of Australian society, and the importance of this lexical item to discourse should not be underestimated. In daily conversation, *mate* is usually used to address someone in a friendly and courteous manner, regardless of the personal relationship. Indeed, shop staff will address customers in this way. Though it is traditionally thought of as a male solidarity term with fundamental ties to notions of egalitarianism, Rendle-Short (2009) reports that is now more freely used by even younger women as a friendly, intimate term of address. *Mate* has a multitude of uses, and is almost an

almost irreplaceable part of casual conversation. It most commonly functions as a positive politeness strategy, lessening the distance between speaker and listener through invitation to a friendly group- that of one's 'mate'. Many basic descriptions of Australian English characterize *mate* in this way. However, in the exchanges in Samples 6 and 7 show *mate* being used in ways divergent from its traditional role.

In the exchange from *Animal Kingdom* quoted above, *mate* is playing a role distinct from direct address. It is used at the end of important phrases or sentences as emphasis, punctuating Barry's pleas, and giving his appeals more rhetorical weight. He is appealing to the solidarity in his mateship with Pope- mateship in its most traditional male, egalitarian sense. Similarly, the discourse marker *you know?* is used to punctuate the dialogue, and to bring the listener around to the speaker's point of view. *You know* is hardly an Australianism- it is common in dialogue all over the English-speaking world, but used here in tandem with *mate* to perform the same basic function is a particular characteristic of Australian discourse.

Sample 7

- McGahan: So, you going away for Christmas, John?
John Smith: (nods) Lakes Entrance.
McGahan: Right. So when you check into the motel, what name do you give 'em?
John: (confused) Mine.
McGahan: Right, yeah. No, 'course.
John: Why would I lie about my name? It's a perfectly normal name.
McGahan: No argument there, **mate**. (looks around caravan)

John: What are you doing?
McGahan: Looking for my cap. You haven't seen my cap, have
 you **mate**?

The first instance of *mate* is to underline the irony in the previous utterance. It is almost the lexical equivalent of rolling one's eyes. McGahan is perplexed by fellow officer John Smith's constant inability to see what is patently obvious to him, i.e., the name John Smith is almost too conventional to be his real name. The perfectly normal name is the source of the humour- the ordinariness of Smith's name is exactly what McGahan is emphasizing. Most of McGahan's dialogue with Smith throughout the film consists of gentle teasing, but since Smith is not aware of the humour it seems McGahan is doing it for his own entertainment, or ours, as his audience. The second *mate* is used in the more typical manner- to express solidarity with Smith, and to lend emotion to his appeal for help.

Rendle-Short (2010) argues that the interpretation of *mate* depends on its position in the utterance, and that it can also be interpreted as antagonistic or hostile. Indeed, there is a scene in *Animal Kingdom* in which an enraged driver intimidates J, who is sitting in the car alongside, with the threat *I'll deck ya mate*. *Deck* is a verb common in Australia used to mean *put someone on the ground*, i.e. to physically attack someone. The *mate* in this case is therefore decidedly antagonistic in intent.

5. Conclusion

Not all of the utterances chronicled here are exclusively Australian,

and not all of them are examples of humour used purely for the sake of amusement. However, their features align them with traditional models of Australian utterance, and are used in ways different from other varieties of English. The ironic, sarcastic, irreverent language used by Constable McGahan in *Noise* is a means, perhaps the only possible one, through which he expresses both his identity as a member of a police force and his resistance to structures of power. Vividly descriptive simile, sarcasm and other forms of figurative language are commonly used in the Australian context to as a form of social glue — the cultural commonality required for one to understand that the humour is the locus for a social bond between speaker and listener.

As we have seen, Australian English also features a number of discourse markers such as *yeah no* and *mate*, which function in various ways; as cohesive particles, hedges and face-savers, or as expressions of assent, dissent, or even threat. This range is evident in *Animal Kingdom*; depending on intonation, and linguistic context, the address term *mate* can go from functioning as an appeal for understanding or solidarity to a powerful invective on the end of a threat.

How does such language work in a construction of Australianness? Traditional values, such as mateship, and egalitarianism and cultural tendencies, like black, ironic humour and disrespect of authority, manifest themselves in the examples of dialogue taken from these films.

Noise director Matthew Saville (2007) remarks that ‘. . . part of the Australian vernacular and the Australian character is that unlike the Americans or Europeans we don’t do our dirty laundry in public.’ The language that he and *Animal Kingdom* director David Michod employ in their films is part of the way in which Australians use slang, humour and irony to express attitudes about serious and personal issues which are

not easily discussed in open conversation. The casualness and humour also acts as a buffer between personal or taboo topics — the ‘dirty laundry’ Saville is talking about — and the participants in the discourse, a form of positive politeness used to negate face threatening acts that arise in conversation.

It is perhaps no coincidence that both of these films, which endeavor to authentically portray Australian modes of communication, are set unequivocally in the suburbs- home to the great majority of Australia’s population and therefore the abode of the ‘average Aussie’. Interestingly, in a discussion of cultural studies of Australian suburbia, Lucas (1994) posits that the suburbs may be to the city what Australia is to its dominant cultural parents England and the US, that is, an outlying reproduction, forever marginal, forever searching for its cultural beginnings. Both the films surveyed here locate themselves firmly in the suburbs- aside from the language used by the characters, their body language and dress, and the films’ setting and style are designed to be as close as possible to that of everyday ‘middle’ Australia.

It might be said, then, that given that the cultural setting of both of these films is similar to that of other English-speaking societies, and that their narratives, themes, character motivation and action are quite universal, the films locate their essential Australian identity primarily through linguistic means.

Note

- (1) For an comprehensive description of contemporary Australian English, see Peters (2007)

References

- Battersby, V. (2007) *Australian Language and Culture*. Footscray: Lonely Planet Publications
- Burrige, K & Florey, M (2002) "Yeah no he's good kid": A Discourse Analysis of Yeah-no in Australian English, *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, Vol. 22, No. 2 pp149-171
- Dropulich, Silvia (2007) *Matthew Saville on Making Noise*, The University of Melbourne Voice, Vol. 1 No. 16
- Holmes, Janet, (1992) *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. London: Longman Publishing
- Joyce, Patrick (1991) "The people's English." In: Burke, P and Porter, R (eds.) *Language, Self and Society- A Social History of Language*, pp Oxford: Polity Press
- Lucas, Rose (1994) "Round the block: back to the suburb in *Return Home*." In: Ferber, Sarah, et al (Eds.) *Beasts of Surburbia- Reinterpreting Cultures in Australian Suburbs*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press
- Lunn, Hugh (2006) *Lost for Words- Australia's lost language in words and stories* Sydney: ABC Books
- Norrick, Neal R. & Chiaro Delia (eds.) 2009 *Humor in Interaction*, Amsterdam: John Benjamin Publishing Company
- Peters, Pam (2007) *The Cambridge Guide to Australian English* Melbourne: Cambridge University Press
- Peters, Pam (2007) "Similes and other evaluative idioms in Australian English". In: Skandora, Paul (ed.) *Phraseology and Culture in English* Berlin: Morton de Gruyter
- Rendle-Short, Johanna (2010) "'Mate' as a term of address in ordinary interaction." *Journal of Pragmatics* 42 pp1201-1218
- Tannen, Deborah (2007) *Talking Voices: Repetition, Dialogue and Imagery in Conversational Discourse (Second Edition)* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Thomas, Jenny (1995) *Meaning in Interaction- an introduction to pragmatics* London: Longman Publishing
- Thornburrow, J (1999) *Language and Identity in Language, Society and Power: An Introduction (Second Edition)* London: Routledge