English in Asia
Susan Butler
Macquarie Dictionary

Libby Gleeson, an Australian children’s writer, has spoken about the difficulties she faced writing for international publishers. She said

"Language is my tool of trade. I make things with words and phrases the way a carpenter builds things from wood or a potter works with clay.
And because I write fiction I am fascinated by the way that the way you talk is a statement of who you are."

"Lots of people fear new technology. Some fear the fact that they can’t control its use so you or I can access programs outside the control of the censor.
I fear a different thing.
I fear the danger of the bland, the boring sameness.
Our publishing industry is dominated by overseas interests and the temptation is always to publish for the international market – and that means cautious publishing with an international English tone – no colloquial Australian expression."

Her problem is one routinely faced by Australian publishers who seek to escape our pitifully small market into the larger markets, particularly for us the dream market of America, and who have therefore become experts at translating Australian English into American English or British English.

I remember being told the cautionary tale of the publisher who sent off a children’s book to an American editor without doing this kind of translation. The book was about a car and used the Australian word *duco* for the paint on the car. The American editor – with countless people beseeching her to publish their book – took one look at this incomprehensible word *duco* and dismissed the book to the reject pile. The moral of the story is that translation from one variety of English to another is a must for publishing survival. But what is lost in the translation?

One of the problems is that the translation can be of two different kinds. It can be from one variety to another in which the new translation attempts to achieve the same kind of stylistic effect as the original. So *vegemite* goes to *marmite* in British English and *pharmacy* goes to *drugstore* in American English.

Or the translation can move to something generalised and neutral, something that the publisher can get away with in anyone’s English even if the work is made more boring as a result. In this kind of translation *vegemite* goes to *paste* or *spread* and *pharmacy* goes to *shop*.
Libby Gleeson certainly maintains that she loses her edge when she has to suffer this kind of translation – and children’s writers must feel this even more keenly because children’s language is full of the sublimely local.

OHP 1

can
As in "Can I have a go?" – means "Can I have a turn?"

champion
This is the best person in a game.

coconut
Part of a song to tease someone with a new and short haircut - "[Name’s]...had a haircut, He looks like a coconut."

cool
Very good. There is also, double cool.

cops
Police who sometimes visit the school, perhaps to see the teachers.

counted in
Look up tip and dip dip to see how this is done.

Crecy
Crecy is [located] between "school care" and the "back demountables". Other places in the school grounds are "oval", "quad", and forest. [Crecy rhymes with "messy". It was the name of an early Hazelbrook property demolished for school space. It was named after a battle.] Look up forest.

dip dip
A way of counting someone in or out for a game. You can do all sorts of things. You can have "silly ones", "naughty ones", and some that are really bad. Here is the ordinary one: Little Miss Piggy fell down in the sink. How many gallons did she drink? The person on whose finger you finish the beat [here it is on the word "drink"] – the person touched or counted by the counter is out, or "is in" depending on the game. You can also have – Wibble wobble, wibble wobble, wibble wobble. Out! OR Wibble wobble. You’re in trouble!
So the person who is "in trouble", is in. Look up pick.

TEXT

This collection of words demonstrates that for this child there is no distinction to be made between words of general currency, words which are part of children’s language but which have flowed down to children everywhere from the media,
and words which are quite peculiar to his school community. There are no hesitations, no apologies made for these. They are recorded as items of equal worth with those which have much greater mainstream currency.

**OHP 2 (3 pages)**

**Sample from Macquarie Kids Internet Dictionary (K*I*D) - Australia, South Africa and Singapore.**

**PAGE 1  AUSTRALIA**

Word: to rock someone  
Meaning: to cause embarrassment  
Example: 'Mona really rocked me yesterday when she told everyone what that boy said about me at the station.'  
Contributor: Female, aged 15, NSW

Word: lightning  
Meaning: a type of marble that looks like it has a streak of lightning in it and is the second best marble you can get  
Contributor: Male, aged 8, NSW

Word: sick  
Meaning: cool  
Example: 'I like your new hair style, it looks sick'  
Contributor: Female, aged 16, NSW

Word: tooshie  
Meaning: angry  
Example: 'getting tooshie are we?'  
Contributor: Male, aged 8, NSW

Word: nomate  
Meaning: a person who doesn't have any friends  
Contributor: Male, aged 11, ACT

Word: tripper  
Meaning: a cool person (i.e. someone very popular)  
Contributor: Male, aged 14, VIC

**PAGE 2  SOUTH AFRICA**

Word: don't pass a stone  
Meaning: relax  
Example: 'look brave, don't pass a stone'
Contributor: Male, aged 15, South Africa

Word: schollie
Meaning: idiotic, stupid
Example: 'you are such a schollie'
Contributor: Female, aged 15, South Africa

Word: beenie
Meaning: a woollen hat
Example: 'why don’t you wear your beenie when you come out of the surf?'
Contributor: Male, aged 14, South Africa

Word: homeboy
Meaning: someone who is popular
Example: 'look at that homeboy with all the kids'
Contributor: Male, aged 16, South Africa

PAGE 3 SINGAPORE

Word: sian
Meaning: boring, tiring
Example: 'So sian, tomorrow got History test'
Contributor: Female, 13 years, Singapore

Word: Relack
Meaning: Relax, cool it
Example: 'Hey, relack, ah!’
Contributor: Female, 13 years, Singapore

Word: Beeep
Meaning: to censor
Example: 'beeeep it!’
Contributor: Female, 14 years, Singapore

Word: Ring Ring
Meaning: Indication that your brassiere strap is showing
Example: "The telephone is ringing "Ring, Ring""
Contributor: Female, 15 years, Singapore

Word: sabo
Meaning: sabotage
Example: 'Why you sabo me?’
Contributor: Female, 15 years, Singapore