

Overcoming awkwardness: some Chinese interpretations of Australian humour

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Abstract

As Chinese people engaged with the Australian cultural scene in recent years, two posts about its humour attracted considerable attention from netizens in the People's Republic of China. The post authors believed that their firsthand accounts of events demonstrated how Australians used humour to overcome awkward situations and regarded this as an essential national characteristic. In each case, other interpretations were possible if cultural factors had been taken into account, including the contemporary culture of China, Putonghua language usage and the Anglo-centrism that is common to cross-cultural studies. This exploratory generalist textual study concludes that the authors' interpretations were largely determined by their cultural bias and by traditional regard for 'face' and politeness, and reflect the fact that, ultimately, the extent of cross-cultural communication is governed by international politics.

Keywords: Australia, humour, China, face, politeness.

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, Australian studies are flourishing in tertiary institutions in the People's Republic of China (PRC). Over forty centres of Australian studies are active at the time of writing, with regular conferences and publications covering society, politics, culture, international relations and many other subjects.¹ Perhaps because interdisciplinary humour studies themselves have only a relatively short history, Chinese scholars in these centres up to now have published very little on Australian humour², but there is a growing interest in the topic in the public arena in China and this may well prompt more research in coming years.

¹ For a full list, see Australian International Studies Association (InASA): China (including Taiwan) <https://inasa.org/china/> and Foundation for Australian Studies in China (FASIC) <http://www.fasic.org.au/index.php/pages/australian-studies-centres-in-china>

² Publications up to this point have been mainly confined to media and literary studies, including translations of Australian humorous novels and short stories. See for instance the profile of Daozhi Xu in the Australasian Humour Studies Digest April 2020 https://www.sydney.edu.au/content/dam/corporate/documents/faculty-of-arts-and-social-sciences/research/research-centres-institutes-groups/ahsn/the_humour_studies_digest_april_2020.pdf (retrieved February, 25 2021).

Two articles posted recently online in the PRC (Reyu, 2010; Zhang, 2014) commented on Australian humour, noting that, in the authors' view, it was frequently used to defuse awkward situations. This article contends that the authors' analyses were largely determined by their cultural background, leading to presumptions of motivation based on Chinese cultural practice, in which the social construct of "face" makes it hard or even impossible to resolve awkward situations. One of the authors commented further on the common use of swear words in Australian humour. He assumed that the government-sponsored tourism advertisement was humorous exaggeration, but this conclusion was framed by Chinese traditional standards of decorum and the general expectation in the PRC that public discourse would be subject to political censorship.

The analysis of the blog posts by authors *Reyu* and Zhang Yongxian shows that the humour they described is actually open to various interpretations. In three cases that they cited, laughter was interpreted as intended to resolve interpersonal difficulties and alternative explanations were overlooked. The fourth and fifth cases were a second-hand account of casual banter and a reflection on a well-known government-sponsored advertisement. All were interpreted as distinctively Australian humour. This paper argues that this was an essentialist conclusion and open to argument on various levels, as will be demonstrated below.

Since all humour depends on the audience as much on the producer, the intentions of the originators of humorous incidents do not determine their success as humour. The reception of the "jokes" must be considered, as well as whether and how they are understood and interpreted. The two blog authors consider the referenced jokes from Chinese cultural perspectives and conclude that Australian "jokers" use humour to smooth over awkward situations and to resolve matters without causing offence. They set out their reasons for this conclusion in some detail.

The next section of this paper comprises general reflections on aspects of culture that affect Chinese people's appreciation of Australian humour, and on cross-cultural communication with reference to humour. The third section introduces the blog authors and their texts. The fourth considers the blog authors' interpretation of the role of Australian humour by providing background notes on the stories. The fifth section analyses the blog stories in detail and discusses the authors' conclusions and cultural assumptions. The final section gives this author's own summary interpretation, including some comments on ongoing developments in Australia-China bilateral relations.

2. Humour and misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication

Before discussing their culturally based interpretations of Australian humour, it is necessary to consider some possible complications for the two blog authors, *Reyu* and Zhang Yongxian, that might be due to difficulties of language and cross-cultural communication. These pitfalls should be taken into account when evaluating how well-grounded their conclusions are. Indeed, intercultural communication is not simply a matter of language proficiency. Even simple day-to-day contacts can result in confusion, misunderstanding or worse (Thomas 1983). It is in this gap that humour struggles to bridge cultures.

One major issue is the comparatively high value accorded to social status in Chinese society described above. The PRC is not the only country for which such a difference can affect the expression and reception of humour (Jiang, Li & Hou 2019). A study by Kim and Mattila of the experiences of Korean visitors to restaurants in the United States showed that basic problems with English language communication were compounded by cultural expectations on both sides (Kim & Mattila 2011). The importance of face in Chinese and other East Asian

cultures has been widely discussed.³ It is understood applied in various ways across cultures. The author does not propose in this paper to canvas the extent or range of face interactions in Chinese society or across inter-cultural engagement with China, but notes that the cases cited here reflect particular interpretations at particular points of time and place.

Culture may be defined as the repository of conventional practices that members of a community have in common. Patterns of language use exist to promote effective communication based on linguistic conventions and established usage among members of a group. Those who share common understanding of the meaning of the conventions can minimize effort required for successful communication. Those who have different assumptions may find communication difficult. Group-wide linguistic conventions can be established if there is a common purpose or identity, as David Lewis observed (Lewis 1969), but that depends on mutual knowledge (Barr & Keysar, 2006).

In this context, communication comprises both verbal and non-verbal signals (Kelly 2001; Bach 1994). What people say is often different from what they mean. A speaker's tone of voice and the context of the conversation determine the meaning of statements. Those with imperfect language skills or lack of exposure to local customs and culture may not grasp the meaning or think they are 'straight' when they are meant to be humorous or sarcastic. Kent Bach comments, "If using language amounted to nothing more than putting one's thoughts into words, then understanding an utterance would be merely a matter of decoding the words uttered. No one seriously believes that" (Bach 1994: 124).

If we view communication, whether oral or written, as consisting of the preparation of a statement, its enunciation, its reception by the intended audience, and its possible reception by unintended audiences, as well as the appropriate environment, humour must also travel the same route across cultures. An intentional joke may reach its target if it is properly prepared, clearly communicated, received and understood. Lack of shared cultural information and cultural context and other reference points can stymie any humour. There are obviously many more hazards in cross-cultural humour.

The interactions between Chinese and Australians that form the subject of the two blog posts, and their interpretation by the authors of those posts also highlight the pervasive Anglo-centrism that characterises cross-cultural studies.⁴ The author of this paper has been conscious of this bias in her translations of the original texts and of the danger of assuming that English terms such as "awkwardness", "face" or "insult" have absolute meaning across cultural and linguistic divides. It is for this reason that the Chinese texts are appended and the translation has been made as far as possible in Minimal English (as defined by Chris Goddard).

3. Chinese views of "Australian humour"

Applying a pragmatics approach to understand how and why these two writers, Reyu and Zhang Yongxian, reach their conclusions regarding Australian humour, this section explains that to some extent they misunderstand the conversations and associated signals that they report. Some general observations may be useful.

Pragmatics studies generally recognise that the contexts in which language is used directly impact on choices of interpretation, and these in turn can result in misunderstandings (Levinso, 1983; Gumperz 1982). Speech never takes place in a linguistic vacuum. John Gumperz indicates that difference mismatches may be due to how different communities assign meaning to linguistic forms. He describes how a West Indian bus driver's statement, "Exact change,

³ See for instance Brown and Levinson (1987), Goffman (1967), Matsumoto (1988), O'Driscoll (2007) and Yu (2003).

⁴ See Goddard (2020), Levisen (2019) and Wierzbicka (2014).

please,” is interpreted as rude by some passengers because he applies West Indian stress to the last syllable and the passenger interprets this according to his previous experience of similar sentence patterns. Pragmatics invokes the notion of socio-cultural knowledge in analysing misunderstandings. Anna Trosborg studies native and non-native speakers’ use of apology formulas and finds that different degrees of knowledge of culturally appropriate ways of responding can lead to loss of face and “a failure to express themselves in a subtle and polite manner” (Trosborg 1987: 165). Socio-cultural conventions affect all levels of speech production and interpretation and misunderstanding is not caused solely by verbal language. Communicative environments and extra-linguistic and socio-cultural knowledge can all result in misunderstandings (Thomas 1983).

These general observations demonstrate that Reyu and Zhang concluded that the role of humour in Australian society was “overcoming awkwardness”, from the starting point of their understanding of the role of humour in their own culture, even if this was not explicitly set out in their on-line posts. Such views may be loosely described as “Confucian”. The formative years of both authors were in the “Mao Era” (1949-1979), but although Confucian ethics and Confucian philosophy were formally rejected during this Socialist period, many aspects of traditional culture persisted. Traditional mores are still shaped by centuries of Confucian ethical teaching and since the 1980s there has been a revival of Confucian teaching. The values of that thought system are widely upheld in daily life. Specialist Confucian schools offer alternatives to regular educational institutions, which also incorporate an introduction to Confucian ethics in their curricula. (Starr 2012) In 2006, celebrity media studies professor Yu Dan’s abridged version of Confucius’ teaching, *Yu Dan ‘Lun Yu’ xinde* 于丹‘论语’心得 (Yu Dan’s insights into the Analects) sold 1.5 million copies in 40 days after its first release. (People’s Daily Online 2006)

Confucianism, as it evolved over centuries to become the ethical foundation of society, was primarily concerned with the preservation of hierarchical social structures. It taught that the young and those of inferior status should respect their elders and betters. Lin Yutang (1895-1976) linked Confucianism with excessive earnestness and regard for social status and convention. He believed that it was incompatible with humour and advocated that people should learn from Taoism:

The Confucians, who paid close attention to such conventions as the thickness of the wood on the inside and the outside of coffins and who insisted on mourning for a prescribed period of time after a family member’s death, could not keep out Zhuangzi’s boisterous laughter.

(Lin 2013: 176).

Lin’s view is however contested by Xu Weihe, who described the limits of humour usage in a society ruled by the Confucian worldview:

Proper humour, seen from the Confucian perspective, means a form of private, moderate, good-natured, tasteful and didactically useful mirth. This humour ethic stems from the belief that emotion is indispensable, and that unbridled passions are dangerous and must be expressed in a balanced way. It also stems from a profound concern for social morality, order and harmony.

(Xu 2013:49)

The concept of Confucian social order is closely connected with the general emphasis on *lian* 脸 and *mianzi* 面子, both rendered into English by the literal translation “face”. ‘Face’ does not refer to the relevant part of the human anatomy but to the position, prestige and image of an individual in society and this in turn is hierarchical, so that social roles are fundamental and great emphasis is placed on the desire for prestige. *Lian* (face) can be lost or damaged. A person without *lian* is lacking moral status and does not understand social conventions. *Mianzi* (face)

depends on the social context in which an individual is active and is a measure of his or her position on the social scale (Teon 2017).

The PRC is nominally proletarian but in fact strongly characterised by social divisions, in which the Party elite function virtually as a ruling class with an array of privileges not available to the rest of society. Their ubiquitous rampant corruption is perhaps described most vividly and in detail by Law Professor Xu Zhangrun, whose critical writing has been translated and made available internationally by Geremie Barme (2018). Under this elite is a burgeoning middle class and a numerically larger cohort of rural and urban farmers and workers. Even after the economic reforms of the 1980s, civil and military service has high status and is much desired by the general population as a route to promotion and prestige. PRC civil and military officials are always conscious of their *lian* and *mianzi* social standing. For this reason, they seldom relax, particularly when they are interacting with foreigners. Social occasions are formal, and humour is avoided.

Natural hesitancy, resulting from official censorship and adherence to policy instructions, generally makes for dull and humourless presentations by PRC officials. Speeches are set pieces to avoid possible liabilities or penalties. At the time of writing (2021), censorship and social controls are increasingly tight. Academics are careful of what they write and say in public. Aware of this trend, retired senior diplomat Duan Jin compiled a handbook for trainee diplomats and young officers and urged speakers to learn to be lighthearted for better effect. He commented:

People from Western English-speaking countries value humour and frequently make a few jokes before turning to the main topic or interject a few witticisms from time to time so that the audience don't go to sleep. My own practice was not deliberately to strive for humour but to let things flow naturally, to avoid "botching a painting of a tiger and ending up with something looking like a dog" (a Chinese proverb meaning to make a poor imitation of something) or descending to vulgarisms. When people tell you, "I like your sense of humour," they are not referring to a couple of jokes but to a person's temperament and refinement.

(Duan 2000: 9)⁵

Confucian ethics and the hierarchical nature of Chinese society exaggerate the impact of transgressions by government officials such as defence attaché *Reyu*. In his stories, he confessed to ignorance of diplomatic etiquette ("The flowers are thirsty") and use of the wrong public toilet ("Who changed the toilet sign?"). These incidents, if they had become known to his superiors, might well have been entered on his personal file and affected his chance of promotion. It is not surprising therefore that he chose to write under a pseudonym.

4. Two blog posts

The first blog post, *Aodaliyashi youmo: hua gangga wei qutan* 澳大利亚式幽默：化尴尬为趣谈 [Australian humour: Turning awkwardness into something interesting], is in the name of *Reyu* 热雨 (lit. hot rain). This pen-name hints at the author being a military officer, since 'hot rain' has military connotations. It is also assumed that he is male. *Reyu*'s article was first published in *Beijing Qingnianbao* 北京青年报 [Beijing Youth News] online edition on 5 January 2010 and reposted many times (*Reyu* 2010). *Beijing Qingnianbao* is the official publication of the Beijing Communist Youth League. It was first published in 1949 and is the most widely read newspaper in the city, generally on-line. Readership is not restricted to members of the Youth League. It

⁵ Author's translation.

has a wide appeal because its content and style are more relaxed than other Party newspapers and has a varied content of general interest and lifestyle topics.

In 2010 the Party and government of the PRC were led by President Hu Jintao. It was a period of strong economic growth and growing nationalism, promoted through official organs including newspapers and television. That *Beijing Qingnianbao* chose to feature a generally positive article about Australia is quite significant, reflecting good official relations between the two countries at that time.

Reyu's post described his time in Australia, presumably on an official posting, and his personal contacts with Australians there and elsewhere. He cited three occasions when he witnessed what he regarded as typical Australian humour. His account purported to be firsthand and, although impossible to verify, this seems plausible. From 2004, Hu Jintao had stressed the importance of the People's Liberation Army supporting China's wider international interests and diplomacy (People's Daily Online), thus highlighting the role of defence attachés. *Reyu's* stories set in the recent past coincided with Hu's policy statement.

The full text of the blog post may be found in the Appendix, with this author's translation in a raw, semi-literal form, not polished for ease of reading so as not to gloss over possibly significant linguistic constructs. Sometimes it has been necessary to insert words to conform with standard English grammatical structure - this text is bracketed. This author's comments on the text or translation are in square brackets. Where the preferred translation differs significantly from the original, the literal translation is included for comparison. The translation has been checked and verified by a professional translator.⁶

The second on-line post concerning the interpretation of Australian humour was by linguistics professor Zhang Yongxian 张勇先, a PRC leading scholar of world English. This was an on-line 2018 excerpt with some additional text from his 2014 award-winning book *Yingyu Fazhanshi 英语发展史 From English to Globlish* entitled *Mudeng koudai de Aodaliyashi Yingwen 目瞪口呆的澳大利亚式英文 [Australian English that will leave you dumbstruck]* (Zhang 2014; Zhang 2018). Zhang studied at the University of Melbourne in the early 1980s and is Director of the Australian Studies Centre at Renmin University, Beijing. *From English to Globlish* is a set text in a number of PRC universities.

In this post, Zhang mentioned the piece by *Reyu* and expanded on it. He provided examples of humour used for various purposes, including tourism promotion of Australia. The full post text and translation are provided in the Appendix. Text in italics is in English in the original. The tourism advertising video *Where the bloody hell are you?* referenced here can be found on YouTube (Tourism Australia 2014).

In the following sub-sections, background information and explanation of the two blog posts is provided to help the reader understand the blog authors' interpretations of humour, which is discussed in the fifth section.

4.1. "The flowers are thirsty" (Reyu story 1)

In recent decades, Mozambique has accepted much aid from the PRC and some significant infrastructure projects have been completed with Chinese funding and technical assistance. The local population is generally supportive of the close relationship between the two countries (Baker, 2019). Mozambique was the first African country to sign a Global Strategic Partnership Cooperation and Agreement with the PRC and is a member of China's "Belt and Road" Initiative. The PRC embassy is well-staffed and has a visible presence. Australian representation is at a considerably lower level, with an honorary consul only. Both the PRC and Australia were represented in the ONUMOZ United Nations peacekeeping operation in

⁶ See acknowledgment below.

Mozambique over more than 20 years. It may well have been this cooperative relationship that furnished opportunities for social interaction such as the dinner party described in this story.

Reyu's first story concerns a party at his residence in Mozambique. The guests include an Australian couple, Mr and Mrs Paul. To understand the sequence of events, it helps to know that Chinese official residences are generally provided with a formal sitting room as well as a dining room. On arrival, guests are invited into the sitting room, where tea is served. Only after a significant period of conversation does the host invite the guests to move to the second room for dinner. It is not usual to serve alcoholic drinks in the sitting room but only with the meal; tea is generally provided – tea has the status of China's national drink. Tea is poured for the guests by the household staff.

Mr and Mrs Paul arrive with a bunch of flowers. *Reyu* sets it on one side and the party sit and drink tea. In Chinese culture, however, flowers are not commonly given as gifts. Cut flowers are associated with funerals, especially if white or gold in colour, so this gift is not auspicious. The Pauls may not have appreciated this, as flowers are a customary gift in Australia. A Chinese guest might bring a small, wrapped present, not flowers. The host would thank the guest for the gift and put it on one side to be unwrapped later after the visitors departed.

This is the background to the humorous remark noted by *Reyu* when the waiter comes to refill teacups, interpreted as the Pauls' kind attempt to *cover* *Reyu's* ignorance of diplomatic etiquette.

保罗夫人不经意似的看看我，又看看茶几上的花，轻声向我幽了一默：“花渴了。”保罗随后也对招待员来了一句“也给花喝点茶”。笑声中，我一看躺在茶几上那把鲜花，顿时恍然大悟，立即请招待员找个花瓶把花插上。事后我想，若不是保罗夫人的一句“花渴了”，及时把花插到花瓶里，对保罗夫妇来说，当场就是一个尴尬，而对于我，更是一个不可弥补的尴尬。Mrs Paul looked at me seriously and then looked at the flowers on the coffee table, and in a quiet voice muttered to me, “The flowers are thirsty”. Paul⁷ then spoke to the waiter, “Give the flowers some tea”. As (people) laughed I looked at the bunch of flowers lying on the coffee table, and suddenly realised, and immediately asked the waiter to find a vase and put the flowers in (it). After this I thought, if Mrs Paul had not said, “The flowers are thirsty”, and (if) the flowers had not been put in the vase in a timely way, for Mr and Mrs Paul, it would have been an awkward situation, while for me, it would have been irreparably awkward.

4.2. “Olympic champion” (*Reyu* story 2)

Australia's defence and security relationship with Malaysia are governed by the 1971 Five Power Defence Arrangements. These commit Australia to come to the defence of Malaysia and Singapore in the case of foreign attack. There are around one hundred Australian defence personnel in Malaysia at any one time and frequent joint exercises are held between the two countries. Malaysian officers regularly engage in training courses in Canberra. This is the background to the second story, which concerns a Malaysian officer, called Ismail, on an official trip to Melbourne, accompanied by *Reyu* and possibly other international defence officers.

In 2009 Australia's relations with the PRC were good. Embassies in Beijing and Canberra included senior defence attachés. President Hu Jintao made an official visit to Australia and was accorded the honour of addressing parliament, although it was noted that his visit was followed closely by that of US President Barack Obama, who also spoke in parliament so that commentators speculated whether Australia could maintain equally cordial relationships with China and America. Some tensions caused by this coincidence could perhaps have underlain the attachés' visit to Melbourne.

⁷ “Paul” probably refers to Mr Paul but the text is ambiguous here.

In this story, Ismail splits the seam of his uniform trousers when he is retrieving luggage from the hold of the air-force plane at Melbourne airport. *Reyu* says that Ismail is embarrassed. It is understandable that he would wish to appear dignified and to uphold the prestige of his country. “Wardrobe malfunctions” are embarrassing in any culture, particularly when they happen to officials and dignitaries. Here the audience comprises Ismail’s international colleagues and his Australian hosts, both male and female. The Australian defence officers comment aloud on his predicament, applauding and saying he is an Olympic hurdling champion.

女士们也不失时机地附和说：“军装没有运动服质量好，换上运动服就会创造更好的成绩。”快速反应的幽默，说得大家开心地大笑。The women (officers) did not lose the opportunity either to chime in: “Uniforms are not as good quality as track suits, if you had changed into a track suit you would have scored even higher”. This speedy responsive humour, when spoken made everyone laugh happily.

When wardrobe malfunctions happen at public or formal occasions, what to say to the person affected and how to say it are delicate matters. The general consensus, in diplomatic circles at least, is that a low-key approach and a quiet remark made in a positive and non-threatening way are best. Such an approach has been noted in on-line forums (Anon., 2017) but *Reyu* does not call the Australians out, but, instead, remarks that they made “友善的玩笑 friendly jokes”.

4.3. “Who changed the toilet sign?” (Reyu story 3)

Toilet jokes are common to most cultures, as is transgressive breaking of taboos regarding discussion of defecation (Praeger, 2007). This is certainly true of Chinese culture. Setting *Reyu*’s third story in a public toilet creates a framing that in itself is capable of a humorous response. This story also touches on sensitive gender relations in the context of male and female toilets. In Chinese society, gender-specific toilets are standard. In *Reyu*’s account, he and two defence colleagues from Papua New Guinea and Kuwait enter a public toilet in Fremantle and are disturbed while they are about their business by a woman who tells them they have mistakenly entered a female toilet. *Reyu* does not mention any taboos that might have affected the behaviour of his companions from PNG or Kuwait, even though they would have exhibited avoidance behaviour in the proximity of a female. Most PNG ethnic groups go to extreme lengths to entrench gender separation in daily life and in the built environment (Kaitilla, 1996). As for Kuwait, Islamic cultural practice requires that no part of the male torso should be exposed in public, and if any part of the body or clothing is splashed by urine it must be washed before praying, so men often avoid using urinals and prefer to urinate into a toilet bowl (Umar, 2020). The first encounter with the woman occurred inside the building, where private parts might have been exposed to her view. The thought that they might mistakenly have entered a female toilet would have been shocking to all three men.

The three men hastily leave the toilet and check the sign outside. They are reassured that they have not made a mistake and their first thought is to inform the woman, who is still inside, but she apparently remains fully in charge of the situation.

不大一会儿，那位女士从内门出来，三步并作两步走到厕所门外。她抬头细看，明晃晃的“男厕所”牌子，令她深信不疑。没想到的是，她不假思索，脱口说出一句话：“谁这么捣蛋？把厕所牌子换了！”不仅仅我们几个，就连其他在场的人也被她的机智和幽默逗得哈哈大笑。等我们回过神来，那位女士早已扬长而去。原本一个极其尴尬的场面，一句“谁换了厕所牌子？”把所有的尴尬和窘迫弄得无影无踪。Not long after, the lady came out from (behind) the door, and scuttled quickly out of the toilet. She lifted her head and looked carefully, the shiny bright “Men’s Toilet” sign convinced her. What I did not expect was

that without further thought, she shouted, “Who is the bastard⁸ who changed the toilet sign?” Not only we few, others who were also present were amused by her wit and humour and laughed out loud. When we recovered, the lady had already left the scene. What was originally an extremely awkward situation, with one sentence, “Who changed the toilet sign?” had made all the awkwardness and embarrassment vanish into thin air.

4.4. “DVD, DVD, DVD” (Zhang Yongxian story 1)

The first story provided by Zhang Yongxian to illustrate Australian humour concerns an encounter between Professor David Walker and a street vendor in Beijing. Their interaction contravenes Chinese conventional social practice, particularly the conversational bridging of the social gulf between a high-status academic and a hawker of low status engaged in risky illegal business. The story runs as follows:

2006年澳大利亚著名学者大卫·沃克 (David Walker) 在中国人民大学讲学。有一天, 博士研究生梁志峰陪教授游览北京。在街头, 他们遇到一个兜售盗版光盘 (DVD) 的年轻人。看着沃克教授等人迎面走来, 那年轻人便凑上前去, 带着询问的口气对沃克教授说: “DVD? DVD? DVD?”没想到这位大学者却一本正经地对追问他的小青年说: “No, David.” 甚至还客气地向对方点点头, 并作出意愿握手的动作。原来, 他是跟小青年开玩笑。他装作为小青年是在问他的名字, 所以才客气地纠正对方: 我不叫DVD, 我叫 David。In 2006 the renowned Australian scholar David Walker was lecturing at Renmin University. One day, doctoral student Liang Zhifeng accompanied the professor on a tour of Beijing. On the street, they came across a young man illegally selling pirate DVDs. Seeing Professor Walker and the other person coming, that young man came up (to them), and in a questioning tone said to Professor Walker, “DVD? DVD? DVD?” Who would have thought that this academic very primly said to the young man who was questioning him, “No, David”. Then he even nodded politely to him and made a gesture (as if) he wished to shake hands. Actually, he was joking with the young man. He was pretending that he had thought that the young man was asking his name, and therefore had politely corrected him: I am not called DVD, I am called David.

Australians generally respond to casual remarks from sales staff, bus conductors and others with “Thank you!” or “Excuse me”, but Chinese practice is to ignore casual remarks from such people, being reluctant to engage in conversation or even acknowledge their presence, feeling that reciprocal relationships with strangers are to be avoided. This conversation also breaks with standard Chinese practice regarding the use of personal names, since few people address others by first names – a level of intimacy enjoyed mainly by spouses or parents. It is more usual to address someone by a professional or status title such as “Doctor”, “Bureau Chief” or “Professor.” If the appropriate title is not known, an inferior person may use a generic mode of address, the equivalent of “Uncle” or “Grandpa” to an older person, or “Sir” to a foreigner (Blum, 1997). A street peddler will never address a potential customer by a personal name. Australians, on the other hand, commonly use first names, including in self-introduction and may even invent a first name for others such as “Bruce” or “Sheila”. They never use status titles such as “Director” or “Chairman” except in formal committee situations. On first meeting they commonly extend their hands expecting a reciprocal handshake (Evason, 2016).

Walker was true to Australian type when he extended the initial verbal approach by the street vendor with a proffered hand and a riff on his (actual) personal name. This type of banter is common between Australian males, who are oriented not to take themselves too seriously (Goddard, 2009; Goddard, 2012; Haugh and Chang, 2015). It would not be expected in China between strangers of different social status and cultural/linguistic backgrounds, where various taboos govern their social interaction.

⁸ *hundun* 混蛋, literally “rotten egg” is here translated by the common Australian expression “bastard”.

4.5. “Where the bloody hell are you?” (Zhang Yongxian story 2)

In the final part of his blog post, Zhang reproduced material that had already been published in his *From English to Globlish*. The connection with the David Walker story and the earlier post by *Reyu* seems rather tenuous but it does point readers to Zhang’s book on the internationalisation of English. The link with *Reyu*’s post is not explicit but is probably with the Australian habit of casual swearing mentioned in the third story about the Fremantle public toilet.

Zhang focused on the 2006 advertisement by *Tourism Australia* titled, “Where the bloody hell are you?” At that time, the Australian tourism authority believed that there was tremendous untapped visitor potential in the US, where a 1984 advertisement featuring Paul Hogan (“Put another shrimp on the barbie!”) and the 1986 Australian movie *Crocodile Dundee* had greatly increased inbound tourism. Based on this, the authority believed that the expenditure of \$1.8 million on a new advertisement for the US and the UK, the other major English-language market was justified. The video advertisement showcased the attractiveness of Australian wilderness and resort destinations and culminated in an appeal to the viewer by an attractive bikini-clad young woman who shouted, “Where the bloody hell are you?”

Zhang was intrigued by the use of crude words. In *From English to Globlish*, he had noted common Australian swear words, particularly “bloody” and “bastard”. This use of profanities for humorous effect has been thoroughly documented. Zhang had referred in his book to Phillip Adams (Adams, 1994). Goddard has studied the comparative use of swearing in Australian and American English (Goddard, 2015), and Pinker has observed that worldwide popularity of obscene language in conversation, writing and the media parallels a global trend towards informality in social interaction and public discourse (Pinker, 2007) while Jing-Schmidt has confirmed that this trend extends to the PRC, but it is strongly moderated by official pronouncements on “spiritual civilisation” and “harmonious society” (Jing-Schmidt, 2017).

Swearing is highly culture-specific in terms of the relationship of speaker and audience, particular words used and social context. Generally, swear words are used in conversation and not in public discourse or literature. Politeness research confirms that the offensiveness of rudeness and swearing is dependent on the social situation as much as on the intention of the speaker (Jay and Janschewitz, 2008). Although Chinese people are sometimes described as excessively polite and sometimes as universally rude, the actual degree of politeness and impoliteness in their conversation and social interaction is dependent on interpersonal relations, particular circumstances, language competence and many other factors, so that it is impossible to generalise about what might be regarded as typical Chinese behaviour (Kadar, 2019).

5. Alternative explanations of humour stories

This section considers whether the five cases of ‘Australian humour’ are evidence of Australian propensity to use humour to deflect or resolve awkwardness and embarrassment. Alternative explanations are possible, including those set out below.

5.1. *Reyu* story 1

Reyu states, “澳洲人就凭一句话，可以做到一笑了之 Australians with just one sentence can resolve (difficulties) with laughter”. In this story, *Reyu* explains the laughter as saving him from embarrassment. He thinks that Mrs Paul tried to cover up his gaffe with a joke to “save his face” but this is not the only possible interpretation.

It is not clear from the text whether Mrs Paul intended her remark as a jest to overcome awkwardness. Other explanations include:

- Mrs Paul is making fun of the host for not knowing or forgetting that the flowers should have been put in water. Her remark implies that he should have done this himself or asked the staff.
- Mrs Paul thinks that the flowers, left on the table, are in the way or perhaps obscuring her vision, so she uses banter as a hint that they should be removed.
- She is concerned that *Reyu* undervalues her gift and has abandoned the bouquet because he thinks it is worthless, so she draws attention to it to highlight that she has brought something special. If this explanation is correct, then she is not being polite. Possibly other guests laugh because they find her remark embarrassing, or because they think that she is mocking *Reyu* and making him the butt of the joke.

All these explanations are legitimate. *Reyu* however interprets the laughter as humour to smooth over a diplomatic gaffe that affected his professional standing in an official gathering.

5.2. *Reyu* story 2

Reyu concludes that the Australian defence personnel cracked jokes about Ismail's split trousers to help him deal with an embarrassing situation. This is only one possible explanation. Their remarks were certainly not helpful as they did not offer a solution to Ismail's problem but there are several alternative explanations of their banter:

- The reference to Olympic athletes is an attempt to share a joke with the international guests. This seems unlikely, since there is no response from Ismail or *Reyu*.
- An "in joke" is shared between the Australians, perhaps building on some earlier dialogue to which *Reyu* has not been privy.
- The Australians are mocking the Malaysian officer, ridiculing his clothing, physique or physical ability.
- The Australians intend to share a joke with *Reyu* and any others present at the expense of Ismail.

This last alternative explanation is in line with observations by Beal and Mullan, who have noted that Australians preferred recipient-oriented humour that created some complicity while threatening the composure of an "outsider" (Beal & Mullen 2017).

Reyu interprets the Australians' remarks as a "typical" attempt to resolve an awkward situation and states that the humour helps Ismail recover his composure. The text does not describe how Ismail responds. If he laughs, it is possible that he "gets" the joke. It is also possible that his response is a quiet smile, more typical of Malaysian culture, where potential loss of face is warded off discreetly to protect self-worth and maintain status. Such a smile does not overcome embarrassment but rather reinforces it.

5.3. *Reyu* story 3

This story centres on the embarrassment of the three men, which *Reyu* says is dissipated by a humorous remark from the woman after entering the men's toilet. There are other explanations of the humour that made them and "others who were also present" laugh out loud:

- When the woman says, "Who changed the sign on the toilet?" this implies that she thinks that, in the short period when she was inside, someone has removed a sign for "Women" and replaced it with "Men". The implication is that she knows she has made a mistake but is not going to admit it. Her joke might be intended to cover her own embarrassment, not to relieve the awkwardness of the men.
- The woman might be embarrassed because she has mistakenly entered the men's toilet. Her quip about the sign being changed would then be an attempt to deflect criticism.

Reyu concludes that the woman's remark "caused all the awkwardness and embarrassment to vanish into thin air". This implies that the men were embarrassed, but he does not pinpoint the reason. It might be because the woman has seen them in a state of undress, although his account rules this out – he says that they continue to feel awkward until she declares that someone has changed the toilet sign.

5.4. Zhang Yongxian story 1

Zhang Yongxian's explanation is that David Walker "was joking with the young man. He was pretending that he had thought that the young man was asking his name, and therefore had politely corrected him.". In other words, Zhang believes that the humour is a role play, perhaps for the benefit of the accompanying student rather than the street vendor who we assume does not understand English. There are other possible explanations:

- The story might illustrate humour overcoming awkwardness if the student is embarrassed because his assigned role, to showcase the national capital to a distinguished visitor, has been thwarted by the undesirable existence of an underground market for pirated DVDs.
- The joke could be an in joke between Walker and the student, mocking the poor English language ability of the vendor. Many Chinese cannot pronounce "V" and replace it with "wee" or "weigh" in both "DVD" and "David".
- The joke could be an attempt by Walker to demonstrate that he is not concerned about the difference in social status between a professor and a street trader.
- The joke could be a pretence by Walker that he is an "innocent abroad" and has no idea that the peddler is attempting an illegal transaction.
- Walker might be using humour to deflect the proposal that he purchase DVDs.

5.5. Zhang Yongxian story 2

Zhang Yongxian noted that Australian inbound tourist numbers fell in 2007/8 and ascribed the decline to the advertisement's use of the words "bloody hell". He seemed to believe that Tourism Australia was exerting a typically Australian humorous use of casual crude language to resolve the "awkwardness" of previous publicity campaigns that had not attracted visitors from overseas. The attractions were listed one by one – identified as outback barbecues, attractive beaches and so on – and the blame for their lack of success was attributed not to the organisers but to the international tourists who did not appreciate the efforts made on their behalf. This disguised aggressiveness was then masked with casual swearing for humorous effect.⁹

Zhang said that Tourism Australia did not understand the absolute taboo on the public use of such words in Britain and the US. He added that not all was lost since through this advertisement Australian language and culture became better known internationally. Quoting a proverb, he mused, "可谓失之东隅，收之桑榆。What you lose on the swings, you gain on the roundabouts".

There are however other possible explanations for the failure of this joke that do not relate to overcoming awkwardness:

- Since the advertising video is government-sponsored propaganda, there is a taboo-breaking mismatch between the content and the authority. Officially sanctioned crude humour would be improper in the PRC and the profanity of this advertisement would be unthinkable.

⁹ Aggressive humour is defined in Martin (2003) Humor Styles Questionnaire.

- The non-verbal signals in the video do not tally with the script, requiring a high degree of cultural mutual knowledge (Barr & Keysar 2006).

6. Conclusion

Since writing the first draft of this article, relations between Australia and China have gone into freefall. A prolonged spate of tit-for-tat accusations have brought things to such a state that no comments about Australia that are even remotely positive can be found on PRC websites. In 2021 neither of the two blog posts on which this article is based would pass official censors. It may be that there is still space for subversive humour, but it is evanescent and constantly suppressed by national or local authorities who either follow official guidelines or tend to err on the side of caution. This article therefore represents a particular point in time, possibly the “golden era” of relations, which lasted for about ten years commencing from the Beijing Olympics in 2008.

Australia-China cross-cultural communication was then still in an initial phase. Prior to the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1972, Australia was little known or understood by Chinese. After that, the blank canvas was gradually filled, starting with factual information on geography, history, politics and later adding understanding of intangible cultural assets such as values and lifestyle. Cross-cultural communication became more important and graduated from accidental to purposed cross-cultural humour. Now it has retreated to private and personal communication in channels not subject to monitoring.

During the “golden era” there was an extraordinary increase in personal contacts. Overall inbound tourist numbers rose from 360,000 in 2008 to 1,450,000 in 2018, with the bulk of this coming from the PRC, and there was a shift from package tour groups to independent and family travellers (Tang 2019). In 2008 there were 127,276 PRC students in Australia, and in 2018, 255,896 (Australian Department of Education, Skills and Training 2019). PRC investment grew, albeit slowly, from approximately \$5 billion in 2009 to \$63.6 billion in 2018, reflecting a commensurate increase in personal contacts and collaboration between individuals and companies (Sanyal, 2011; Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2019). The 2017 census revealed that five percent of the Australian population was ethnic Chinese or of Chinese background. Naturally, this multiplication of person-to-person contacts provided increased potential for cultural bridges and the significance of humour in cross-cultural communication was greatly increased, both for risk and potentially for reward. As more Chinese travelled to and settled in Australia, there was a growing need on both sides to understand the cultural contexts and nuances of language and non-verbal expression. Chinese scholars attempted to come to grips with Australian humour and their explanations illustrate the importance of shared cultural information.

The analysis of the stories recounted here demonstrates that humour effect depends on reception and interpretation. It is inherent neither in the texts themselves nor in the intentions of the originators of the jokes. *Reyu* and *Zhang*, the authors of the on-line posts, had particular interpretations of the meaning and humorous significance of events that were almost certainly not shared by the Australians involved. Their reaction to the “humour” reveals the importance they attached to the resolution of awkward situations and preservation of “face” and to the appropriate etiquette for persons of high social standing and government institutions. Because of their social conventions, the authors were especially struck by how the Australians resolved matters with humour without causing offence, and they therefore selected this explanation for their posts. From the Chinese cultural perspective, the Australian joke originators broke social conventions in a way that in another (i.e. Chinese) context would have seemed rude or insensitive. Chinese traditional concern with social status and “proper humour” (to use the term

employed by Weihe Xu) persists even to this today. Chinese cultural practice and the social construct of “face” still make it very hard or even impossible to resolve awkward situations.

The global pandemic of 2020 brought down the shutters on international travel, exchange and communication, and at the same time contributed to suspicion, racism and hostility. Australia now faces a dilemma of how to manage relations with the PRC, which is a major trading partner, investor and source of tourists and students while defending its strategic and security interests from an increasingly authoritarian and aggressive government. Now more than ever, it needs experts and advisers to help with cross-cultural communication. Appreciation of the rules and styles of humour in both cultures is surely essential. Then and only then can both sides start to communicate without losing face, and, hopefully, manage to overcome awkwardness.

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Appendix

Reyu 热雨. *Aodaliyashi youmo: hua gangga wei qutan* 澳大利亚式幽默：化尴尬为趣谈 [Australian humour: Turning awkwardness into something interesting] (05.01.2010). 北京青年报 *Beijing Youth News*. Retrieved December, 8 2021 from <http://www.chinanews.com/hr/hr-hwsh/news/2010/01-05/2055441.shtml>.

我最早接触澳大利亚人，不是在澳大利亚，而是在莫桑比克。接触澳洲人不久，他们言行中的独特幽默就给我留下很深的印象，也在莫中程度上影响了我的言行举止。最为难忘的是，他们在尴尬方面，具备天才的幽默细胞，不管面对令人难为情的事情，澳洲人就凭一句话，可以做到一笑了之。真可谓：谈笑间，尴尬飞烟灰。

The first time that I encountered Australians was not in Australia but in Mozambique. Not long after encountering Australians, their special humour in words and actions left me with a deep impression, and to a certain extent influenced my words, actions and behaviour. Most unforgettably, in the face of awkwardness, they evinced humour genes, no matter how unpleasant the matters they faced, Australians with just one sentence can resolve them with laughter. It is really a case of: speaking of laughter, awkwardness flies away like smoke.

第一个故事：“花渴了。”许多年前，我在莫桑比克任职。作为社交活动，一天晚上我宴请来自澳洲的朋友保罗夫妇吃饭。出于礼节，保罗夫妇抵达我住处时携带了一把鲜花。那时候，在外交舞台上，我初出茅庐，还不十分熟悉外交场面，应对一些礼仪也没有经验。接过保罗夫妇送的鲜花，我没顾上及时找个花瓶插上，随手放在茶几上之后就只管寒暄、聊天了。

就在大家聊得热火朝天的时候，招待员来给我们续茶，保罗夫人不经意似的看看我，又看看茶几上的花，轻声向我幽了一默：“花渴了。”保罗随后也对招待员来了一句“也给花喝点茶”。笑声中，我一看躺在茶几上那把鲜花，顿时恍然大悟，立即请招待员找个花瓶把花插上。事后我想，若不是保罗夫人的一句“花渴了”，及时把花插到花瓶里，对保罗夫妇来说，当场就是一个尴尬，而对于我，更是一个不可弥补的尴尬。

The first story: “The flowers are thirsty”. Some years ago, I was posted to Mozambique. As a social activity, one evening I invited Mr and Mrs Paul, friends who came from Australia, to dinner. As a matter of politeness, when Mr and Mrs Paul arrived at my residence they brought a bunch of flowers. At that time, on the diplomatic stage I was a greenhorn, and not yet completely familiar with diplomatic affairs, and had no experience in handling some etiquette procedures. Having received the flowers presented by Mr and Mrs Paul, I unthinkingly forthwith put them on the coffee table [lit. “tea table”] and just went on with greetings and chitchat.

Just when we were deep in conversation [lit. “talking until the heat rose to heaven”], the waiter came to replenish our tea, and Mrs Paul looked at me seriously and then looked at the flowers on the coffee table, and in a quiet voice muttered to me, “The flowers are thirsty”. Paul then spoke to the waiter, “Give the flowers some tea”. As (people) laughed I looked at the bunch of flowers lying on the coffee table, and suddenly realised, and immediately asked the waiter to find a vase and put the flowers in (it). After this I thought, if Mrs Paul had not said, “The flowers are thirsty”, and the flowers had not been put in the vase in a timely way, for Mr and Mrs Paul, it would have been an awkward situation, while for me, it would have been irreparably awkward.

第二个故事：“奥运冠军。”我后来到澳大利亚工作，有机会比较广泛地接触澳洲人。一次在澳大利亚国内旅行，我们乘坐军用运输机。到了墨尔本机场，我们下了飞机，照例在机尾排成一字形，把我们的行李从机舱传递到地面。就在传递过程中，来自马来西亚的伊斯迈尔因跨越行李的动作幅度太大，裤子中间当场开线。事故发生时，他自己不由自主地“啊！”了一声。

我迅速向伊斯迈尔看去，心想这可出大洋相了。可是，在场的澳大利亚军官在第一时间带头鼓掌，并且宣布伊斯迈尔为跨栏“奥运冠军”。女士们也不失时机地附和说：“军装没有运动服质量好，换上运动服就会创造更好的成绩。”快速反应的幽默，说得大家开心地大笑。开始显得有点狼狈的伊斯迈尔，也被大家友善的玩笑感染，双手高举，做出“奥运冠军”得胜的样子。

The second story: “Olympic champion”. Later, I went to Australia for work, and had opportunities more broadly to meet Australians. Once I was travelling inside Australia and we were taking an Australian military plane. When we reached Melbourne airport, we disembarked, and as usual queued at the tail of the plane, and took our luggage, passing it (one to another) from the hold down to the ground. Just when we were passing it, Ismail who came from Malaysia, because of his over-exerted action in stepping across the luggage, split the seam in the crotch of his trousers. When this incident happened, he could not help exclaiming, “Oh!”

I quickly looked towards Ismail, and I was thinking that this was an embarrassing thing. The Australian air force officers who were there first burst into applause, then proclaimed that Ismail was the hurdling “Olympic champion”. The women (officers) did not lose the opportunity either to chime in: “Uniforms are not as good quality as track suits, if you had changed into a track suit you would have scored even higher”. This speedy responsive humour, when spoken made everyone laugh happily. Ismail who initially had been rather shamefaced, was infected by the friendly jokes from everyone, and raised both hands, as an “Olympic champion” does when winning.

第三个故事：“谁换了厕所牌子？”这件事发生在澳洲西部的帕斯。那次，我们应邀赴帕斯参观澳空军部队。公务活动中遇到周末，我们就可以自由活动。我与来自巴布亚新几内亚和科威特的朋友当时属于临时光棍，自动结合成一个业余活动小分队。那天，我们一行三人去帕斯附近的弗里曼特尔海港城市游览。其间，我们三人一起去厕所方便。

进了厕所，我和科威特朋友都解小手，不需要进入内门“办公”。巴新朋友需要解大手，就去推开一个内门。就在我们准备解手的时候，突然听见身后传来一个女子的厉声：“错了！这里是女厕所！”我们回头

一看，巴新朋友愣在那里，我们两个立即停止“行动”，招呼巴新朋友赶紧退出厕所。退到门外，我们仔细一看，没错啊！这里就是男厕所。

于是，我们又返回厕所。巴新朋友走近那个内门，也大声喊了一句：“女士，你错了！这里是男厕所！”此时，估计那位女士自己也不自信了。不大一会儿，那位女士从内门出来，三步并作两步走到厕所门外。她抬头细看，明晃晃的“男厕所”牌子，令她深信不疑。没想到的是，她不假思索，脱口说出一句话：“谁这么捣蛋？把厕所牌子换了！”

不仅仅我们几个，就连其他在场的人也被她的机智和幽默逗得哈哈大笑。等我们回过神来，那位女士早已扬长而去。原本一个极其尴尬的场面，一句“谁换了厕所牌子？”把所有的尴尬和窘迫弄得无影无踪。

The third story: “Who changed the toilet sign?” This happened in Perth in Western Australia. On that occasion, we had been invited to inspect the Perth air force base. While on duty we had one weekend, and we therefore could have some free activities. I and friends from Papua New Guinea and Kuwait were there on our own [lit. “temporary bachelors”], and naturally joined together as a leisure activities unit. That day, the three of us were sightseeing in the port city of Fremantle near Perth. While there, the three of us all together went into a toilet to relieve ourselves.

Having entered the toilet, I and the Kuwaiti friend had a pee and did not need to go into a cubicle to do any “business”. The PNG friend needed to do number one, so went to push open one of the interior doors. Just when we were about to pee, suddenly we heard a shout from behind us, “You are wrong! This is a women’s toilet!” We turned around and looked, the PNG friend froze to the spot, we two at once stopped “doing it”, and called to the PNG friend to leave the toilet quickly. We retreated outside, and looked carefully, we had not been wrong! It was a men’s toilet.

So, we went back to the toilet. The PNG friend went close to the (cubicle) door and called out, “Madame, you are wrong! This is a men’s toilet!” Then, I think that lady began to have some doubts. Not long afterwards, the lady came out from (behind) the door, and scuttled quickly out of the toilet. She lifted her head and looked carefully, the shiny bright “Men’s Toilet” sign convinced her. What I did not expect was that without further thought, she shouted, “Who is the bastard who changed the toilet sign?”

Not only we few, others who were also present were amused by her wit and humour and laughed out loud. When we recovered, the lady had already left the scene. What was originally an extremely awkward situation, with one sentence, “Who changed the toilet sign?” had made all the awkwardness and embarrassment vanish into thin air.

Zhang Yongxian 张勇先. *Mudeng koudai de Aodaliyashi Yingwen*目瞪口呆的澳大利亚式英文 [Australian English that will leave you dumbstruck] Extract. Retrieved December, 8 2021 from <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/okaNOr6-QqRAcr7dLRYOEA>

哪里有澳大利亚人，哪里有欢声笑语。澳大利亚英语中的某些任性表达跟澳大利亚人的幽默有关。澳大利亚人说的 **bloody**和 **bastard**可能会使人目瞪口呆。不了解澳大利亚文化的人会觉得这类特殊表达粗疏不堪，但是，真正了解澳大利亚文化的人是不会这样看的。

Wherever there are Australians, there will be the sounds of laughter. Some Australian optional expressions relate to Australian humour. Bloody and bastard that are often said by Australians may alarm some people. Those who do not understand Australian culture will feel

that such (expressions) are intolerably crude, but those who truly understand Australian language and culture will not regard them in this way.

幽默是澳大利亚人的传统，也是澳大利亚英语的特征，澳大利亚人对此十分自豪。虽然有些英国人表面上觉得澳式幽默粗疏下流，放荡不羁，但他们内心却和美国人一样，对澳大利亚人的幽默既欣赏佩服，有时还会叹不如。

Humour is an Australian tradition, and is also a special characteristic of Australian English, and Australians are very proud of this. Although some English people on the surface feel that Australian humour is crude, low class, and excessive, but in their hearts, like Americans, they enjoy and admire Australians' humour and sometimes regret that their own is inferior.

在与人交流时，澳大利亚人总要想方设法表达幽默感。他跟你开玩笑，同时还期望你也能幽默一把，把玩笑接着开下去 (**kick back**)。也就是说，如果他能拿你开玩笑，还会期望你接过话题，反过来拿他开玩笑。如果你对他的幽默没反应，或不能 **kick back**，那他肯定会有不爽的感觉。

When interacting with others, Australians always want to find a way to express their sense of humour. If he makes a joke at your expense (lit. with you), at the same time he hopes that you will also be a bit humorous and continue the joke (kick back). That is to say, if he makes a joke at your expense, he still hopes that you will continue the topic, and in turn make a joke at his expense. If you do not react to his humour, or cannot kick back, then he will certainly feel unhappy.

澳大利亚人说话很机智，处处有笑料。2010年1月《北京青年报》刊登的一篇短文被疯狂转载。这篇题为“澳大利亚式幽默：化尴尬为趣谈”的短文（作者化名：热语）包含三个幽默故事，既使是不苟言笑的人也会被文中描述的“澳式幽默”逗得合不上嘴。

Australian conversation is very witty and has joke content everywhere. In January 2010 the Beijing Youth News published a short piece that went viral. This short essay titled “Australian humour: Turning awkwardness into something interesting” (author penname: Reyu) contained three humorous stories, and even straightlaced people would be amused and provoked to laughter by the “Australian humour” described in the text.

《英语发展史》的作者也喜欢反复讲一个真实的故事：2006年澳大利亚著名学者大卫·沃克 (David Walker) 在中国人民大学讲学。有一天，博士研究生梁志峰陪教授游览北京。在街头，他们遇到一个兜售盗版光盘 (DVD) 的年轻人。看着沃克教授等人迎面走来，那年轻人便凑上前去，带着询问的口气对沃克教授说：“DVD? DVD? DVD?” 没想到这位大学者却一本正经地对追问他的小青年说：“No, David.” 然后还客气地向对方点点头，并作出意愿握手的动作。原来，他是跟小青年开玩笑。他装作以为小青年是在问他的名字，所以才客气地纠正对方：我不叫DVD，我叫 David。

The author of “From English to Globlish” also likes to repeat a true story: In 2006 the renowned Australian scholar David Walker was lecturing at Renmin University. One day, doctoral student Liang Zhifeng accompanied the professor on a tour of Beijing. On the street, they came across a young man illegally selling pirate DVDs. Seeing Professor Walker and the other person coming, that young man came up (to them), and in a questioning tone said to Professor Walker, “DVD? DVD? DVD?” Who would have thought that this academic very primly said to the young man who was questioning him, “No, David.” Then he even nodded politely to him and made a gesture (as if) he wished to shake hands. Actually, he was joking with the young man. He was pretending that he had thought that the young man was asking his

name, and therefore had politely corrected him: I am not called DVD, I am called David. [Some text is omitted at this point.]

除bastard之外，单词bloody也是个National Adjective（国家特色形容词）。跟bastard一样，单词bloody也极为常见。2006年，为吸引外国游客，澳大利亚政府斥资1.8亿澳元，在国际上开展了一系列宣传活动。这次活动宣传片的标题和口号是“**So where the bloody hell are you?**”在澳大利亚，这是一句既普通又常见的口语表达，意思是：你在哪里？你咋还不来？你到哪儿去了？这句话隐含的意思是：我很想见到你，盼望快点来，我们在等你，你怎么还不来？还在等什么？

Apart from bastard, the adjective bloody is also a National Adjective (adjective of national significance). Like bastard, the word bloody is extremely common. In 2006, in order to attract international tourists, the Australian Government invested 1.8 million Australian dollars in a series of international promotional activities. The title and slogan of the promotional video in these activities was “**So where the bloody hell are you?**” [Coloured font in the original text.] In Australia, this is a very ordinary and common verbal expression, the meaning being: Where are you? Why haven't you come yet? Where have you gone? The hidden meaning is: I very much want to see you, and hope you will come quickly, I am waiting for you, why are you still not coming? What are you waiting for?

英文的 **Where are you**（你在哪里）是个很简单的问句，句中添加了短语以后，就能表达急迫，渴望的心情了。在这种语境下，这句话没有贬低或侮辱他人的含义，更没有粗口骂人的意思，他只是一句常见的澳式英语表达而已，但许多英语国家的人被其中的“**bloody hell**”吓到了。

The English **Where are you** is a very simple question, and after adding a short phrase to the sentence, it can express a sense of urgency, and longing. With such language usage, this sentence does not have any implication of devaluing or blaming others, let alone coarse swearing at others, it is just a common Australian English expression, but people in quite a few English-speaking countries were shocked by its “**bloody hell.**” [Some text is omitted at this point.]

澳大利亚人的伟大之处在于他们敢于在语言文化方面做英国人和美国人的老师，明知这些国家忌讳bloody这个词，还偏要大张旗鼓地主动上门说给英美国家的人听：你们还不知道这句话的意思吧？我来告诉你们…结果就因为bloody+hell，英国当局禁止该片在英国播出。为此，澳大利亚旅游部长还专门去向英国人解释bloody hell在澳大利亚英语中的含义，说这不是下流语言，一点不粗俗，没有冒犯人的意思

A great thing about Australians is that they dare to be teachers of British and Americans in the language and culture field, knowing that these countries avoid the word *bloody*, and still wanting brazenly to approach them and speak so that British and Americans could hear: Do you still not know the meaning of this sentence? Let me tell you... The result being that because of *bloody+hell*, the British authorities banned the advertisement from being shown in Britain. For this reason, the Australian Minister for Tourism went specially to Britain to explain the implied meaning of *bloody hell*, saying that it was not coarse language, not at all crude, and not meaning to insult people. [Some text is omitted at this point.]

片子的看点很多，有些只能意会，不好言传。如果细心看的话，你会发现更多的澳式夸张和幽默。据2007-2008年的统计，前往澳大利亚旅游的海外游客比预期有所减少，人们都说是bloody hell惹的祸。然而，通过英国国家之间对bloody hell含义和用法的争论，澳大利亚不但向世界展示了独特的语言文化，同时也提高了澳大利亚语言文化的知名度，扩大了澳大利亚的国际印象。可谓失之东隅，收之桑榆。

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There are many points of view in this video, some can only be intuited, and are not easily conveyed. If you watch it with attention, you will find more Australian-style exaggeration and humour. According to statistics for 2007-2008, international travellers going to Australia for tourism were less than predicted, everyone said that this was the fault of *bloody hell*. However, after the debate about the meaning and usage of *bloody hell* in English language countries, Australia not only displayed its unique language and culture to the world, at the same time it raised the profile of Australian language and culture, and increased Australia's international influence. This is truly a case of "What you lose on the swings, you gain on the roundabouts." [Original proverb comes from the classical history of the Han Dynasty *Hou Han Shu*, lit. Lose from the sunrise but gain from the mulberry.)

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