

## AN IMAGE OF AUSTRALIA IN SERBIAN TRANSLATION: THE CASE OF HENRY LAWSON

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**Abstract.** *The paper offers a critical analysis of Lawson's short stories which have been translated into Serbian. His stories are not analysed one by one but several levels of analysis have been proposed (lexical, grammatical and phonological) within which possible problems have been defined and their solutions discussed and commented on. The greatest attention is given to the lexical level of analysis where Peter Newmark's categorisation has been applied and cultural words grouped into five categories as follows: 1) ecology, 2) material culture, 3) social culture, 4) organisations, customs, activities, procedures, ideas, and 5) gestures and habits. Furthermore, the conducted analysis opens the ground for reflections on the impact of translations on the image of Australia and its culture they create for Serbian readership.*

**Key words:** *Australian English, cultural words, Lawson, translation*

The first recorded translation of the Australian classic author Henry Lawson (1867-1922) into Serbian dates from January 24<sup>th</sup> 1954 and it was published in a daily newspaper.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, this issue could not be found in the libraries. Back translation of the title from Serbian into English gives "The Stubborn Dog", so that it could arguably be the translation of "The Loaded Dog".

A collection entitled *Kako se zaljubio Džo Vilson* (Joe Wilson's Courtship) was published in 1956 and it is a selection of nine stories taken from *Joe Wilson and His Mates, On the Track, While the Billy Boils and Over the Sliprails*.<sup>2</sup> Although the collection was

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that the first translation ever of Australian literature into Serbian dates from the same year, 1954. It is a collection titled *Iz australijske proze* (From Australian Fiction) and it includes short stories from seventeen Australian authors.

<sup>2</sup> The collection includes the translations of "Joe Wilson's Courtship", "The Mystery of Dave Regan", "Gettin' Back on Dave Regan (as told by James Nowlett, bullock-driver)", "Bill, the Ventriloquial Rooster", "His Father's Mate", "Arvie Aspinall's Alarm Clock", "A Visit of Condolence", "That There Dog of Mine", and "The Story of Malachi".

published in Bucharest and intended for the Serbian minority in Romania, it is used in this analysis because the language of translation is Serbian and the book is available in libraries in Serbia.

In 1960, a translation of "The Loaded Dog" accompanied by a drawing was published in a children's magazine. Entitled "Ajaks i patrona" (Ajax and the Cartridge), it is a shortened, simplified and adapted version of Lawson's original. Stripped off of the local colour, descriptions and the particulars of prospectors' everyday lives, the short story is reduced to a comic anecdote suited for little children.

"She Wouldn't Speak", a first-person anecdote from shearers' lives, was published in a daily newspaper in 1963 as "Čaj" (Tea).

In its no. 3 issue from 1977, partly devoted to Australian literature, the literary magazine *Mostovi* chose Lawson's "The Lost Souls' Hotel" alongside poems and short-stories of other Australian authors to bring Australian writing closer to Serbian readership.

Owing to his thematic orientation and the insistence in his work on rendering a truthful and realistic image of rural Australia as well as the character and way of life of its inhabitants, Lawson's short-stories are pregnant with culture-specific vocabulary. Peter Newmark refers to such items as *cultural words* (Newmark 1988: 94) and Sider Florin defines them as "words and combinations of words denoting objects and concepts characteristic of the way of life, the culture, the social and historical development of one nation and alien to another" (Florin 1993: 123). Dealing with Australian English, as the analysis of Serbian translations in this paper sets out to show, presents the most challenging task for translators since the unique image of the country is to a great extent encoded precisely in a unique, culture-bound lexicon. Consequently, the degree to which Serbian readers would be able to appreciate Lawson's accomplishment as 'the national voice' or 'the prophet of the bush' depends on strategies deployed by translators. In order to make the analysis more systematic, the paper relies on Peter Newmark's categorisation (Newmark 1988: 94–103) which groups cultural words into five categories (with sub-categories in each):

1. *Ecology* (flora, fauna, winds etc.)
2. *Material culture* (artefacts, food, clothes, houses and towns, transport)
3. *Social culture* (work and leisure)
4. *Organisations, customs, activities, procedures, ideas* (political, social, legal, religious or artistic)
5. *Gestures and habits*

In the area of ecology the most significant term is the **bush**, which Lawson wrote capitalised after 1900 because the part the arid interior plays in his work is not limited to that of a mere environment or backdrop. The bush is the major character in Lawson's work and is accordingly endowed with distinctive traits, exerts influence on the lives of other characters and has a prominent role in the action. It is a pervasive and compelling presence which appears in several aspects: as a mythical place, the bush emerges as the cradle of Australianism, the symbol and source of all Australian virtues; as a spiritual reality, the bush is a sacred place, the source of redemption, the aspect which was later to be developed in the work of Patrick White; and as a real, concrete bush as Lawson experienced it in his childhood and later. Furthermore, in all its aspects, the bush is both overtly and covertly contrasted with the city, that is, with the urban life and values. With regard to the highly expressive value of this term which is the epitome of local colour and the most remarkable distinctive feature of Australia, the most feasible translation strat-

egy, in our opinion, would be that of transference accompanied by an explanatory footnote at the first appearance of the word. According to Newmark, transference is a strategy when a SL (source language) word is transferred into a TL (target language) text in its original form (Newmark 1988, 81). The inclusion of the SL word in the TL text in this case would include a 'familiarising' of the spelling (transliteration), which gives *buš* in Serbian. None of the translators, however, chose this strategy but depending on the context they used the already existing words such as: *divljina* (wilderness), *šuma* (forest), *džungla* (jungle), when the opposition with the urban setting is implied, and *šumarak* (bosk, grove), *šipražje* (scrub, brush), *okolno žbunje* (surrounding shrubs), in a more specific meaning when the context implies the appearance, shape and size of the vegetation of the relevant area.

Australian vegetation posed a linguistic problem from the earliest days of settlement when English-speaking settlers found themselves surrounded by a reality for which the English language simply lacked terms to refer to. The plants they saw were unnameable in English they spoke. Names of trees and plants native to Australia present another translation difficulty and directly affect the image of the country the reader is building up in the course of the reading process. Serbian translators availed themselves of various methods applicable in such cases. In "The Lost Souls' Hotel", a generic term *eukaliptus* (eucalyptus) is used as the translation of **gum** whereas a kind of Australian acacia called the **mulga** is transferred (transliterated) as *mulga* with no explanation or culturally neutral TL term added to define the source culture specific term, so that the reader is left in the dark as to what kind of shrub grows along Hungerford road. In "His Father's Mate" the translator creates a confusion concerning Australian vegetation so that **wattle-trees** appear in Serbian translation as *bagremovi* (locust-trees/false-acacia), which results in the loss of local colouring (locust-trees are fairly common in Serbia) and the undermining of the writer's ironic allusion to the golden-yellow colour of the wattle-tree flowers growing in the Golden Valley. The Valley got its name from the once popular gold-mine, but by the time of the story the only gold to be found in the Valley were golden-yellow flowers of wattle-trees. When wattle-trees are mentioned for the second time in the story they are translated as *eukaliptus*.

Australian continent is also known for its distinctive wildlife, with the most famous representatives being the **kangaroo** and **koala**. Since there are accepted standard (or recognised) translations of these two terms which have become part of standard Serbian vocabulary (as *kengur* and *koala* respectively), they do not present any difficulty for translators. However, in "The Loaded Dog" the koala is referred to as **the native bear**. The translator decided to use the combination of a specific and generic term resulting in *koala-medved* (koala-bear) in Serbian. This method is identified as the strategy of classifier by Newmark, who defines it as "a generic or general or superordinate term sometimes supplied by the translator to qualify a specific term" (Newmark 1988: 282). This strategy is applied appropriately to this adapted version of Lawson's story intended for little children who might not be familiar with the kind of bear living in Australia (if the translator had literally translated "the native bear") or might not know what kind of animal the koala is (if the translator had used the name of the animal only).

Unlike the koala, the **bandicoot** represents a greater obstacle for translators since there is no accepted standard term for this animal in Serbian. There are several techniques translators can resort to when they know the meaning of the SL word but cannot find a TL equivalent for it. In addition to transference, commonly used strategies are those of

making neologisms, when translators create a new word or expression rather than just transfer one, and explaining the word, when a description of the meaning of the SL word is supplied in as few words as possible, aiming for economy. The actual choice of a particular translation strategy depends on a variety of factors such as the nature and purpose of the target text, the intended readership, and the importance of the cultural term itself both general and its particular role and relevance within the text. For instance, if it were a text about Australian animals, the name of this animal would most likely be transferred with some spelling adaptations and accompanied by the description. In "Joe Wilson's Courtship", however, this word is used in a simile which describes a lonely evening wandering of Joe Wilson, who feels abandoned and lost: "I mooched round all the evening like an orphan bandicoot on a burnt ridge." The Serbian translator chose to leave out the name of the animal from the simile, so that the meaning of the Serbian sentence is not quite clear: *Čitavo veče bio sam uznemiren, kao da sam lutao po planinskim visovima, golim i suncem opaljenim* (I was restless all evening, as if I mooched round mountain ridges, barren and burnt). It would have been better if the translator had found an equivalent Serbian simile to express the state of the main character who feels forlorn and helpless at this point in the story. Although this solution sacrifices the local colouring, it can be justified in so far as it is closer to the intentions of the source text whose major emphasis at this point is on the emotional condition of the protagonist rather than on cultural elements or the environment. However, the bandicoot seems to be very popular with Australians and is found as the keyword of several similes. In addition to **miserable as a(n) (orphan) bandicoot (on a burnt ridge)**, there are **as bald as a bandicoot**, **poor as a bandicoot** and for a worthless piece of land it is said that **a bandicoot would starve on it**. In this light it becomes clear that Serbian translation not only fails to convey the meaning of the text but also ignores valuable cultural content. Furthermore, preserving the original fauna of Australian texts is not merely a matter of translation's fidelity at the lexical level but its capability to uphold national writers' mission of asserting Australian cultural distinctiveness. As Jonathan Highfield (2006: 129) observes: "Australians turned to some of the surviving animal species as analogues for the uniqueness of the national culture of Australia. In early Australian narratives, animals serve as indicators of either the savagery of the continent or as portents of its uniqueness".

In "The Lost Souls' Hotel" being chased by flaming-nosed **bunyips** is used as the utter expression of horror. In this case the translator opted for a cultural equivalent of fear-inducing and fire-breathing monster from Serbian myths, legends and fairy-tales – *aždaja* (dragon, hydra). It is our contention that the word should have been transferred (with spelling adjustments) since the two creatures share very few distinctive features, have different mythical and historical backgrounds and are likely to trigger a dissimilar pool of associative ideas in the reader.<sup>3</sup> This short story could have been used as a convenient introduction to distinctively Australian legendary lore.

<sup>3</sup> The **bunyip** (usually translated as "devil" or "spirit") is a mythical creature from Australian folklore. Although the descriptions of bunyips vary wildly, it is usually given as a sort of lake monster. Common features include a horse-like tail, flippers, and walrus-like tusks or horns. According to legend they are said to lurk in swamps, billabongs, creeks, riverbeds and waterholes. According to *Srpski mitološki rečnik (Serbian Mythological Dictionary)* **aždaja** is a mythical creature associated with the traditional stories and beliefs about huge reptiles. It is a giant winged snake resembling a lizard or crocodile which has an odd number of heads (three, seven or nine, exceptionally two), four short legs, a snake-like tail, bat-like wings, and an open jaw issuing forth bluish flames. It originates from a snake which lives for thirty or a hundred years and grows legs and wings. It inhabits mountain and cave lakes. It can also be found in

Cultural words in the category of material culture include pieces of equipment of workers in the bush (shearers, drovers, unskilled workers, station-hands, railway workers, timber-getters etc), various objects and materials used to build them. Translators into Serbian came up with two solutions for the **swag** – *zavežljaj*, denoting any collection of things wrapped up together (pack), and *ranac* (knapsack). None of them, however, have the same expressive meaning as the swag because they do not imply the content of the pack or knapsack. The translator of "Joe Wilson's Courtship" explained and transliterated the word in the preface (*sveg*) so that when *zavežljaj* appears in the text the reader knows that it contains personal belongings and daily necessities of itinerant workers.

The **billy** is translated as *manjerka* and *bakrač* (copper pot/pan/cauldron). *Manjerka* is a large square container with a lid which is used to transport large amounts of food, usually in the army or soup kitchen. Since it differs from the billy in its size, shape and purpose, *manjerka* cannot be considered as an adequate translation of the word billy. The closest Serbian equivalent of billy is probably *kotao* – a round, metal pot used to keep or boil water over an open fire. *Bakrač* has the same meaning as *kotao* but it is made of copper (*bakar* in Serbian), which, however, is not the case with the billy (made of tin or enamel), so that this solution is a bit imprecise.

The translator of "The Lost Souls' Hotel" sought the closest cultural equivalent of the **dampner** and found it in *pogača*, which traditionally denotes a type of flat, round unleavened wheat bread baked in the ashes of an open fire. In former times Serbian itinerant workers (usually harvestmen, reapers, haymakers) or those who were away from home for the whole day working in the field or grazing sheep or cattle used to carry such bread together with cheese as a meal.

Part of the traditional Australian bush costume are **'lasticside boots** (or 'lastic-sides or elastic-sides) and Lawson's Joe Wilson is wearing ones but the Serbian translator makes a mistake translating them as *papuče s gumenim đonom* (rubber-sole slippers).

Joe Wilson meets his future wife Mary at a **station** ("an extensive sheep or cattle raising establishment"). The translator decided to use an English borrowing – *farma* (farm) although Serbian already has more than one word referring to a farm (e.g. *gazdinstvo* or *imanje*), so that the deployment of the word invokes English or American setting from which the word was originally borrowed rather than the Australian one.

The category of social culture comprises words resulting from historical processes and conditions that governed the settling of the continent, development of social structures and labour division. The most general dividing line running through Australian society as delineated in Lawson's work is the one between city-dwellers and bushmen (bushwomen, bushpeople). Translators provided varied solutions for **bushmen**, depending on the term they used to refer to the bush. In "The Loaded Dog" they are referred to as *australijski doseljenici* (Australian settlers) and *kolonisti* (colonists), which is rather imprecise but sufficiently informative for the intended readership of small children and the fact that bushmen are not in the focus of the story. In "The Lost Souls' Hotel" bushmen are found as *ljudi što rade u ovoj divljini* (people who work in this wilderness) and *džambasi* – a word denoting persons who love horses and know much about them. But not all bushmen were fortunate enough to have horses. The translator of the collection *Joe Wilson's Courtship* calls them *stanovnici džungle* (inhabitants of the jungle), *mladić*

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hell where it devours sinners. The word is of Persian origin (**aždaha** – a dangerous snake) and it came into Serbian through Turkish.

*koji živi u džungli* (the young man who lives in the jungle), *čovjek iz džungle* (the man from the jungle), *poznanici koji su živeli tamo u šipražju* (friends who lived out there in the brush). The translations relying upon the term *džungla* (jungle) are the most inappropriate ones since Serbian readers are likely to associate the word with the appearance, climate, flora and fauna of the African and South American wilderness, and "the man from the jungle" is likely to produce the image of Tarzan.

Different ways in which Australian settlers could acquire land resulted in culture-bound vocabulary which both reflects various land schemes and implies socio-economic status of people. The items in question are (**free-**) **selector**, **selection** and **squatter**. Faced with a **drought-ruined selector** the translator of "The Lost Souls' Hotel" decided to make up for the lack of the specific term by using a general term in combination with additional information concerning the location of the land and social status of the man, thus hoping to achieve approximately the same associative meaning as the ST has for Australian readers: *jadnik čije je imanje, tamo negde bogu za leđima, suša sasvim spržila* (a poor man whose tract of land, in the middle of nowhere, was totally ruined by drought). The relative clause from "Joe Wilson's Courtship", **who selected up in the old days**, is translated as *koji se tamo već odavno nastanio* (who settled there long time ago) so that the information about how the man acquired the land is lost. The term **selection** is simply translated as *farma* (farm) or *mala farma* (little farm), which leads to the conclusion that this translation neglects the difference between **station** and **selection** and uses one and the same word for both – *farma*.

Having more than one meaning, the term **squatter** is a more complex one and demands of the translator to rely upon a wider context in determining which meaning is applicable.<sup>4</sup> For this word, as for most culture-specific Australian terms, there is a lexical gap in Serbian. The translators mostly turned to solutions which are descriptive in character. In "She Wouldn't Speak" a general, unmarked term *farmer* is used, which sacrifices the information about the size of the land and social status of the owner. "The Lost Souls' Hotel" offers a descriptive translation: *ljudi koji zaposednu zemlju da bi je tek kasnije dobili u zakonito vlasništvo* (people who occupy a tract of land illegally and only later are granted legal rights). When the word appears for the second time it is rendered as *zemljoposednici* (landowners). The translator of Joe Wilson stories adds an adjective indicating the social status of the owner: *bogati farmer* (a wealthy farmer).

Among other bushpeople who populate Lawson's stories are **swagmen**, **sundowners**, **bushrangers**, **jackaroos** (also spelled as jackeroo), and **fossickers**. The translator of "The Lost Souls' Hotel" offers a rather extensive explanation of the term **swagman** when it is mentioned for the first time: *nadničari-beskućnici koji sve svoje nose na ramenima, ranac i čebe kojim se pokrivaju* (homeless itinerant workers who carry all their belongings on their shoulders, a knapsack and a blanket which they use to cover themselves at night). The next time the word appears in the text and the reader is already familiar with it the translation is reduced to *nadničari-beskućnici* (homeless itinerant workers). In the preface of the *Joe Wilson's Courtship* collection, the word is explained and transliterated (*svegmen*), but it does not appear in the text of any story in the collection. Unfortunately,

<sup>4</sup> *The Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary* provides five definitions of **squatter**: "1. person who inhabits unoccupied premises without permission. 2. *hist.* person who occupies a tract of Crown land in order to graze livestock, having title by licence or lease. 3. *hist.* person, esp. an ex-convict, who occupies Crown land without legal title. 4. sheep-farmer, esp. on a large scale; such a person a being of an elevated socio-economic status; (also *attrib.*). 5. = SQUATTER PIGEON.

the highly expressive and imaginatively metaphoric meaning of the **sundowner**<sup>5</sup> is completely lost in Serbian translation since the translator of "The Lost Souls' Hotel" fails to make the difference between swagmen and sundowners so that the latter appear as *mučenicima što rade od izlaska do zalaska sunca* (workers who toil from sunrise to sunset), *lutajući nadničar* (wandering itinerant worker), and *nadničar* (itinerant worker). **Bushrangers** from the story about Dave Regan are transferred with spelling adaptations (*bušrendžer*) and followed by a footnote explaining the meaning of the word as *bandit iz austalijske džungle* (bandit from the Australian jungle). The term **jackaroo**<sup>6</sup> – arguably a coinage from **Jack**, a personal name used generically to denote any man, and **kangaroo**, one of the most typical Australian animals – includes a number of distinctive features and is consequently very associative and expressive. In "She Wouldn't Speak" *varoški kicoši* (city fops) indicates that unlike typical bushmen jackaroos are well-groomed, have more money and do not spend all their time in the bush. The word *kicoš* (fop) implies the sting of ridicule aimed at jackaroos but the purpose of their visit to outback stations remains hidden from Serbian readers. *Novajlija* (novice) in "The Lost Souls' Hotel" points at jackaroos' inexperience whereas in "Joe Wilson's Courtship" the term is transferred as *džeker* but the footnote says it is a sailor. A **fossicker** is the major character of "His Father's Mate". The Serbian translator adds an adjective to the general term thus providing information about the economic status of the man: *siromašni rudar* (hard-up miner). However, the knowledge that he is actually mining for gold in abandoned claims has to be gathered from elsewhere in the story.

As for the habits of bushmen, one of the most common ones is that they are frequently on the move owing to the nature of their work and there is a set of expressions based on the word **track** to describe this: **take the track, on the track, on the lonely track, to be on the wallaby track**. Serbian translators used two synonymous words (*put* and *drum* – both meaning "road" but the latter one is archaic) and in the case of **the wallaby track** it is specified that characters are in search of work.

Lawson uses the manner of speaking as a significant means of characterisation of typical bushpeople so that his stories abound in dialect, ungrammatical structures, slang, colloquialisms and non-standard pronunciation. The most frequently found ungrammatical items are S/V concord (**we was, I says**), double negation (**didn't say nothing**) and irregular verbs (**seed, knowed**). None of the translations into Serbian reflect this aspect of Lawson's stories.

Non-standard pronunciation appears in dialogues and stories told in the first person. The examples include the **-ing** ending (**laughin', jokin', chyackin', barrickin'**), pronouns **them ('em)** and **you (yer, ye)**, changing and dropping of vowels and whole syllables (**sich fine girls, git down, edication, eye-talian blood, insoid here, 'Twas a grand foit, I kin wind up a lot more 'n thet, d'reckly, 'ello, b'low, used ter, fellers, ye ough-ter be able, failyer, D'yer mean ter say, follered**). All Serbian translations, however, observe the rules of standard Serbian pronunciation.

<sup>5</sup> *The Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary* defines **sundowner** as "an itinerant, ostensibly seeking work, who times his arrival (at a station etc.) to coincide with the end of the day's work and the provision of food and bed; loafer, sponger."

<sup>6</sup> *The Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary* defines **jackaroo** as "1. *hist.* young man (usu. English and of independent means) gaining experience by working as a trainee on an Australian sheep or cattle station. 2. trainee in station management."

Australian slang and colloquialisms such as **ratty**, **chyack**, **barrack**, **blanky**, **crimson**, and **tucker** are all but one correctly rendered into Serbian using the appropriate register. With a **tucker bag**, however, the translator of "The Lost Souls' Hotel" made a mistake translating it as *čebad* (blankets). Nevertheless, whatever the fidelity, those who read Australian texts in translation are bound to have a second-hand experience when it comes to Australian slang and colloquialisms. Readers in other English speaking countries would instantly identify the character as Australian if he/she used such words while such information disappears from the translated text.

The translations analysed in this paper come from the period which precedes major developments in communication technology and information accessibility. They belong to a time when books and literary presentations were still the primary source of knowledge and images of foreign cultures. Moreover, they are texts of an author who stands at the beginning of authentic Australian writing, an author who was engaged in the battle for nationhood and whose literary career reached its peak simultaneously with the culmination of national feeling that materialised in the Federation of Australian States in 1901; an author whose commitment to Australia and Australianness is best seen at work in his writing devoted to the uniquely Australian scene and character. This is where the interest of this paper stems from. Will Serbian translations make it possible for their readers to appreciate the distinctiveness of Australian experience?

As the analysis of cultural words has shown, Serbian translators tended to fit specifically Australian items into Serbian linguistic and cultural horizon whereby they sacrificed the local colour, expressive meaning, associative power and cultural content of Australian vocabulary. Instead of using substitution, more or less extensive descriptions, generic terms or already existing English borrowings (which invoke neither Australian setting nor culture or history) the translators could have been more open to the possibility of enriching the Serbian language with new words. It did not hurt when it was expanded to include *kengur* or *koala* and it certainly would not have hurt had it embraced the bush, bunyip or squatter. In the case of cultural words, we support Walter Benjamin's argument that the difference between source and target language can be used as the source of an enrichment of the target language by bringing into it foreign, untranslatable concepts. In other words, rather than preserving at any cost the state in which his own language happens to be, the translator should allow his language to be affected by the foreign tongue. In Benjamin's turn of phrase, instead of trying to turn Australian into Serbian the translators of Lawson's stories would have created a more powerful, faithful and unique image of Australia had they tried to turn Serbian into Australian.

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## SLIKA AUSTRALIJE U SRPSKOM PREVODU: SLUČAJ HENRIJA LOSONA

**Nataša Karanfilović**

*Rad daje pregled objavljenih prevoda priča Henrija Losona na srpski jezik, a zatim kritički analizira prevode sa nekoliko aspekata (leksika, gramatičke strukture i fonetika). Najviše pažnje posvećeno je leksičkom nivou analize, kao najzahtevnijem na polju kulturoloških termina. Prema kategorizaciji Pitera Njumarka kulturološke reči su grupisane u pet kategorija: 1) ekologija, 2) materijalna kultura, 3) društvene tekovine, 4) organizacije, običaji, aktivnosti, protokoli, ideje i 5) gestovi i navike.*

Ključne reči: *australijski engleski, kulturološki termini, Loson, prevod.*