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Research finds gender stereotypes and informal language influence Aussie kids' writing

'Soccer, footy and *ninja'* versus '*cousins, party and cake'.* New Oxford Wordlist research finds children's language continues to be impacted by gender stereotypes.

New research launched today reveals Aussie children have learnt to love their informal lingo, with words like *super, awesome, crazy, stuff* and *amazing*, all making the Oxford University Press (OUP) Wordlist.

The Oxford Wordlist draws on research from more than three thousand writing samples and details the top 500 words in reading and writing for Australian children from Foundation to Year 2, giving parents, carers and educators a better understanding of the language of primary school children and how it has changed over the past decade.

By comparing data from the same research conducted ten years ago, findings show some significant changes in language. Notable words including *computer* no longer made the cut – potentially due to the more frequent use of mobile technology (ie smartphones, tablets) by Australian children.

Another trend this year reveals the gender divide continues to manifest in children's language. *Soccer, footy* and *ninja* all featured highly for boys, while *cousins, party and cake* were popular for girls. In addition, boys were found to write more about competitive sport while girls write about home, family and friends.

The research dispels other societal preconceptions, as findings show there's little difference in the language used by children in regional and metro areas. Previous research also found that the socio-economic status of a school made a difference to the language most commonly used by students; however, this difference has narrowed over the past ten years.

School Publishing Director at OUP and President of the Australian Publishers Association, Lee Walker, said the Oxford Wordlist offers an insight into children's language, and the changes that have occurred over the past decade.

"The number of words that students know is a predictor of their academic success, and the Oxford Wordlist gives teachers, carers and parents a better understanding of their children's use of language, ultimately helping inform how they can improve learning outcomes," Ms Walker said.

"There's plenty for us to learn about what our children read and write. Clearly, there remains a difference in the language used by boys and girls, and technology is also making an impact on their word choices.

"Children also referenced AFL teams, fast food outlets, shops, movie and television characters, demonstrating societal and cultural influences on language."

Professor James Arvanitakis, Lecturer and Dean of the Graduate Research School at Western Sydney University, reflects on word choice in gender identities.

"This research shows that gender differences are strong – and despite a concerted effort to be less gender specific in many cases – these unconscious biases appear to remain significant amongst those that shape the children, such as parents and teachers," he said.

"It is also of note that fairy tales still shape the view of the world that children have, which brings us to the question: what are the new fairy tales we should be promoting?"

For more information or interview opportunities, please contact Porter Novelli on behalf of Oxford University Press:

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Further findings of interest:

- *Cake* was the most popular food mentioned by children, followed by *ice cream, pizza, chocolate* and *chips*. However, there were also some (although fewer) mentions of healthier options, including *cheese, chicken* and *egg.*
- *Soccer* was the most regularly mentioned sport, although when combined, *football* and *footy* were more popular.
- Optimistic words were more popular than negative words. *Happy* appeared more than twice as many times as *sad. Fun* appeared in the top 50 words, while *bored* or *boring* did not appear in the latest list.
- Family words appeared prominently in the research. *Grandma* appeared in the list for the first time. Other family words included *mum, dad, sister, brother, aunty* and *cousin.*
- *Mum* appeared at number 36 on the list, while *dad* sat at number 50. *Sister* was 84th on the list, while *brother* was 106th.
- *Princess* appeared at 134 on the list, *prince* did not appear.

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Oxford University Press (OUP) is the world's largest university press with the widest global presence. OUP Australia & New Zealand is the oldest continuous educational publisher in Australia, supporting Oxford University's objective of furthering excellence in research, scholarship, and education in the region since 1908. We believe that education changes lives, and the right learning resources can make a positive difference for learners of all ages.

About Oxford University Press Oxford Wordlist
The Oxford Wordlist research study was conducted by Oxford University Press in partnership with Anne Bayetto from Flinders University. The Oxford Wordlist lists the 500 most frequently used words, and is freely available to Australian educators. To access the Oxford Wordlist, or produce your own customised version, go to www.oxfordwordlist.com