



HOW TO TALK LIKE A LOCAL

by Susie Dent

Arrow Books, 244 pages, RRP
£7.99

Ella Jeffries on a lively account of contemporary variation in British English.

Effective as a reference book or simply to flick through, *How to Talk Like a Local* is a collection and description of regional words and phrases that have been or still are in use around the UK today. These include words we may consider to be old-fashioned, such as the endearment ‘chuck’, and also words that bear the markings of a 21st century fad for cultural phenomena such as ‘chav’ (“a young person in trendy clothes and flashy jewellery”) and ‘minging’ (“ugly”). However the addition of some description of the history and etymology of the words shows that even the apparently modern dialect words have been around longer than

we think (‘chav’, derived from a Romany word, has been around for over 150 years). I was struck by how many words I had not heard of throughout the book, a testimony to both the regional diversity evidently still existent and the depth of the research that has gone into the finding and choosing of these words. A useful feature of this book is found in the links between the words which mean roughly the same thing in different dialects; underneath each word is a list of other similar regional words which can in turn be looked up in the book. Also, scattered throughout are lengthier descriptions of some common slang names for processes, such as the many different ways tea making, brewing and pouring are described throughout Britain (‘brew’, ‘wet’, ‘steep’, ‘mash’, ‘teem’, ‘bide and draw’). There are also longer descriptions of some of the specific phonetic features of certain accents, with two-page sections on ‘How to talk like a ...’ which ranges from Cockney to Geordie to Scot (being from Yorkshire I felt a section on this region was lacking!). These sections are user-friendly for non-specialists, providing sounded out letter examples of the way in which we distinguish these accents and they include some words and phrases specific to the region.

This book explores and uncovers the dialect variation that some people believe is dying out but is evidently still in use throughout the UK. Personally I

was particularly drawn to words from my native Yorkshire and found some that I have never heard before (e.g. ‘gobslotch’; an idle fellow), words that I hadn’t previously known were dialect specific (e.g. ‘ginnel’; alleyway) and words that I recognise but whose meanings I wouldn’t have been able to pin down (e.g. ‘blethered’; tired out). In the introduction to the book the point is nicely made that although many words have died out, the constantly changing language reflects the constant development of lifestyle and society over the years. With this sentiment in mind, I expected more terms reflecting young people’s interests and concerns. In order to reflect the diversity and constant development of language, it would have been useful to document some of those words currently in vogue today which may well become established dialect words in future. In a similar vein (this may be the sociolinguist in me), some reference to which particular ages/sexes/social groups use these words would have made an interesting addition. ¶

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