

Schnookums,  
Pumpkin Pie, Papa Bear,  
Osher Piglet, Boo, Pooh Bear,  
Fuzzy Wuzzy, Babycakes, Bloop Bloop, Bleep Bleep, Schmoopie, Goo,  
Luff Monkey, Woo Woo, Pussykins, Bubba-mama, Boogaloo, Fluffy,  
Honeybaby, Baby Dolls, Honey Bunny, Snuggles, Goldenfox, Booky,  
The Squirrel, Ju Ju Girl, Love Freak, Pink Princess, Kitten, Naughty  
Girl, Schmookie, Hot Legs, The Scientist, Flower Pot, Sexy Boy,  
Tessie Bear, Xena, Snooks, Miss Pussycat, Floss, Gucci, Tik  
Tok, Pookster, Jubbly, Foghorn, Gherkins, Dimpleman,  
Turbogirl, Snake, Magic Hands, Firefox, Gumby,  
Cuddlechops, Sweet Pea, Macca Baby, Huggie  
Wuggie, Buffy, Cupcake, Sweetie Pie,  
Bad Puppy, Stud Muffin, Ookums,  
Boo-boo, Pookie, Love Slave,  
Sugarpants, Titwiggie,  
Fee-Fee, Wolfie,  
Fluff

# In the name of love

Sweetcheeks,  
Chockle-Pock, Cutiepie,  
Rellie Pellies, Bondi Burger,

*Sweet-talk, pillow-talk, love-talk - whatever you call it, there's no denying that the mushy, lovey-dovey speak that goes on between couples can be a little ... disconcerting. So what drives us to do it? David Astle investigates the language of love.*

**B**loop Bloop loves Bleep Bleep. Floss has a thing for Snooks. Cavalier carries a torch for Sexy Boy, while Dummbast can't get enough of Mrada Pussycat. All of the above, I swear, are genuine terms, lifted from this year's Valentine's Day classifieds. But state a pin in any personal column and you're guaranteed to hit a Sex Monkey, a Tessie Bear, a Xena. I'm warning you now: if you've just had your breakfast, maybe you should wait half an hour before reading any further. Snugglesome, are you reading this? Or how about your other half, Boogaloo? For all you know, Craig from IT could be Gumby after hours. Marianne, the art teacher, could lose her smooch to become Turbogirl or Firefox or Hubba-Bubba-Mamma. Only her man - SpongeBob or Snake or Magic Hands - would tell you but, thankfully, he's staying silent.

Because love-talk is spoken behind closed doors. Couples seem untied in keeping the squishy business under wraps. It's only a big splash as Valentine's Day - or an unguarded moment in the public domain - when such pillow-ese escapes their ruby lips.

So why do we do it? (And don't you look all innocent, Chicken Legs.) How to explain this universal lapses of two sane adults into gaga land? Why does a harmless name like Fiona McCaig, say, turn into Fluff, Fee-Fee or Macca Baby?

Alas, silly names are just a glimpse of the doe-eyed guff. Lovers don't just re-badge each other in the throes of affection but regress into isping, rhyme, meowing, invented words and shambolic imitations of Sam Spade or Ermer Fud.

Uttered by lovers, love is less "love" than lub or wuv or wub. Hugs are huggie-wuggies, while kisses can range from snackeronies to smoochie-coochie-coo. And don't get me started on wedding tackle or the humpy-rumpy thing they accomplish around the clock. Seems every piece of anatomy, from the lewd to the ludicrous, gets a nickname in this bedroom jargon.

OK, so Love Is The Drug. Roxy Music taught us that. Over the years, pop songs have schooled us in the whole love lexicon. If Kyle isn't lost in Some Kind Of Bliss, then Mark Seymour's kissing you in four places. Fine. Let heaven Cupid have his day. But why this call for cutsey-wuffey voices exchanging womanic dabble?

Meredit Fuller, a Melbourne psychologist, puts the lovey-dovey dialogue down to hard-wiring. "To encourage our spouses to continue, there are three universal terms we respond to. A bit of us - when we see a puppy or a baby or something like ET - go into that baby talk. We get this sort of smile and that 'awww' feeling."

Evelyn Field, a Melbourne counsellor who specialises in relationships, calls it "the cooing of doves". "It's the tone we get from our mums - all this cot talk - and it's what we give to our lovers, our babies, our cats and our dogs."

Pets, babies, fiances ... it seems anything in need of our protection and loyalty and we're there, taking the talk. In a gonzo bid at research, I skulked in the anteroom of a local baby clinic to overhear the following expressions: "Quick sticks, Locke, up you pop!"; "Awww, did you fall over, Sweetie?"; [singing] "Lucy, Lucy, Mummy's got your juice-y"; "After an hour, I was half-expecting someone to ask, 'Who did bunny-wunny man writing everything down over dirt?'"

This age-old baby connection to sweet-talk is emphasised by

the glut of food images that crop up in our love rants. Kate Burridge, a linguistics professor at Monash University, spent a day circling such names as Spacaki, Pumpkin and Stud Muffin. She even found a Rosemary delectable to smother her Tasty Lamb.

"Everyday language," says Burridge, "reminds us of the link between eating and sex. Look in a thesaurus under 'desire' and the overlap of vocabulary is striking: appetite, hunger, craving, greed." Evelyn Field turns to Freud: "If he was right, the first year of life is the oral phase, when we put everything in our mouths. That's how we explored the world, licking spoons, drinking and eating - and edible nicknames underline that period. In a sense, they relieve it."

"Baby-talk," adds Fuller, "replicates that very private world you had when you were in the womb, when you were a baby and were given precocious love, a sense of security, trust, a sense of being at the centre of the universe. When you relate that concept to having a relationship, it's a continuum."

So who's babyzing who here? If Floss declares his/her love for Snooks, which lover is acting in loco parentis? "It's a mutuality," says Fuller. "Like a flow between nurturing and being nurtured."

Fuller also links love-talk to a surge in oxytocin, a hormone that spurs primal bonding can release, which is the equivalent buzz a young mum gets when watching her newborn suckle.

But buds grow just as love grows. You don't hear parents calling their kids "Silly-Billy" or "Eggs McKuffin" on graduation day. At least I hope not - for your sake as much as theirs. So when does this dotting dialogue wear thin?

Poet Henry Lawson reckoned this sugary stuff had a shelf life. In his story *Mitchel On Matrimony*, the title character despaired. "A man can't go on talking lovey-dovey talk forever and listening to his young wife's prattle when he's got to think about making a living."

Janet Hall, a Melbourne-based sex therapist and hypnotherapist, sees a couple's cutsey phase ("where we declare our own vulnerability ... as well as affirming each other as beautiful beings") evolving into a more nonchalant mode. "After the romantic haze settles, we relax into love. We have tried and tested our trust and don't see things through that brand-new rainbow any more."

Not that affection (or a nauseous nickname) evaporates with time, insists Meredith Fuller. "As a relationship grows, it develops a breadth and a depth. An language reflects this, usually tonally, while many endearments still evoke that shared history."

Or shared tolerance, in the shape of the low-watt result. Observe the rollout of Hammer Hands, Turkey Bat, Half-Job Harry and Princess Perfect - each with a stigma implied yet unquestionably fond if cooed between respective partners.

"Terms of endearment based on someone's intimate behaviour is a way of tolerating that trait," explains Fuller. "So long as the other person accepts the name, the language is saying, 'We're different but we don't want to lose each other.'" In other words, our gentle snipes can be a means of short-circuiting conflict.

OK, now I can see why we sweet-talk but it still has its limits. Ninety-three years ago songwriter Irving Berlin penned a ditty called *Snooky Ookums*. Describing a love-struck couple in apartment 43, the song finishes with the rousing cry, "All right long he calls her Snooky Ookums, Snooky Ookums/All right long the neighbours shout, 'Cut it out, cut it out!'"

Love bites  
Sweet nothings  
from newspaper  
Valentine's Day  
messages, 2006

Chockle-Pock! With you and Surf-o-Matic, my world is almost complete. Looking forward to topping it all off over the years. Much love, your not quite Kosher Pumpkin Pie.

AF - Happy Valentine's Day! I wub u more dan mudbur can say (even when you're nappy). Lots of Lub always and fowels, your Cowatt (+ lewish).

Ratsoo, may your beauty little eyes pierce the cruel fog of life, and like your combover may we never be a part. Love, FF.

Dear Piglet, I love your honey pot and I'd chase you across 100 acres to give you my wood. Love from Pooh Bear.

Di, Didee, Dams, Da, Doves or whatever your name is. Happy Valentine's Day. Love, Hubby xxx.

Sauzy, delicious, tender and hot... Bonoburger, you've got the lot!

Davey C, never stop kissing me. Love, Fuzzy Wuzzy.

Snookapoops, I fell in love with you the first time you kissed me. My life is complete with you in it. Love, Rellie Pellies Mviah.