A Level English Language



Bridging Course Week 4



Week 4

Last week you carried out a short investigation on the language of a figure in the public eye. This week we will look at how language is affected by technology, and language attitudes, and you will be asked to complete your own language investigation. You should write up your findings and bring them into school in September when your teachers will be able to give you some feedback on this research project. As always, you should try your best with this work, but again, don’t worry if you find it difficult. Some of the ideas here are challenging and your English Language teacher will be able to explain them when you return to school.

# Christian Ilbury on Language and Technology

Read the article below by Christian Ilbury and answer the questions which follow:

## ‘C ya l8tr bbz’ Language,Communication

## and Technology

#### PhD student Christian Ilbury explores the relationship between evolving technology and the linguistic choices we make on social media, offering insights from his current research that explode myths about spelling, abbreviations and other aspects of ‘txtspeak’.

There’s a strong chance that before reading this article today, you’ve already replied to a few stories on Snapchat, sent a few WhatsApp messages and DM’d someone through Instagram. Increasingly, our interactions are migrating online in the form of texts, but how is this shift towards digital communication changing the ways in which we communicate?

## Way Back Then

Back in the early days of the mobile phone when Nokia was the phone brand of choice, people primarily used to text each other via SMS. Unlike today, mobile data plans were expensive, apps weren’t a ‘thing’ and most people still had pay-as-you-go contracts. With SMS (i.e. text) messages charged per 160 characters, that extra kiss or final ‘see you later’ could set you back the cost of an additional message. And whilst a message could be spoken in a couple of seconds, using a keypad to text the same message took somewhat longer – even for the more competent texters.

To get around these issues, people developed innovative ways to communicate the same message, using fewer characters and in less time, saving both on the cost of a text and the time taken to write the message. In fact, many of these abbreviations still persist and are regularly used today: <lol> for ‘laugh out loud’, <omg!> for ‘oh my God!’, and <hbu?> for ‘how about you?’. When these forms were first documented, academics and newspapers were quick to suggest that the internet and texting were responsible for the emergence of a new variety of English. Indeed, much of this research pointed to the fact that the language used on the internet looked like a combination of both speech and writing. For instance, think of the spelling <walkin> for ‘walking’ or <chu> for ‘you’.

These two spellings essentially ‘mimic’ the way that these words are sometimes pronounced in speech. This led some scholars and journalists to describe this ‘new variety’ as a form of netspeakor txtspeak.

## An Even Longer Communication History

However, whilst the technology that we now use to communicate may be new, in reality, much of the language used online and in text-messaging isn’t so innovative. Tracing communication as far back as the 1800s when people used telegrams, we see that many of the telegraph messages sent via these machines contained several spellings that look remarkably similar to those that were characterised as netspeak. And, at that time, like text-messages, telegraphs were charged by the character. So, as with the 160-character limit of a message, people developed shorthand phrases, spellings and other textual elements to communicate more efficiently and more cheaply. Smart, huh?

## The Truth of Txtspeak

Nevertheless, modern-day newspapers continue to bemoan the surge of txtspeak and warn of the destructive effects of the internet on communication. Yet, academic research on the language of text-messaging and online communication has shown spellings and textual features that are perceived to be ‘typical’ of the variety actually to be relatively infrequent in practice. This point is perhaps more relevant now given the widespread use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), such as speech recognition systems (e.g. Siri) and predictive text, which use conventional spellings derived from dictionaries. In fact, in my own research on the mobile application and messaging service WhatsApp, I found a lot

of evidence to suggest that users make good use of predictive text technologies and are generally very conscious of their spelling and grammar. Like other researchers, I noted that the messages were largely written in standard English. But I also found that there were least two different types of variant spelling: spelling errors and the use of netspeak in the data.

## My Research Data and What it Shows

My data set comprises a corpus of 100,000 messages across two group conversations sent by sixteen individuals in their early twenties who were based in the South East of England and accessed WhatsApp via a smartphone. Exploring these variant spellings in this corpus, I found that users responded to spelling-errors and so-called netspeak features in very different ways. When I looked at the examples of the genuine spelling errors, I observed that the users actively would try to maintain ‘standard’ language policies, such that other users would often participate in a type of language policing. An example of this policing is found in (1), where Lisa and her friends are discussing their New Year’s Eve plans:

### Example 1

*Lisa: lol guys I’ve just been asked if I want to go to Barbadosfor 5 nights over*

*New Years FOR FREE*

*Abi: omg!*

*Ellie: Why don’t you go*

*Lisa: Nooo I already made plans with y’all! Can I split myself in half*

*Abi: Lol are you STUPID Lisa*

*Ellie: hahahaha*

*Abi: It’s Barbadous*

*Ellie: Wow*

*Ellie: Spelling*

*Lisa: Hahahaha spelling*

*Stef: We are going to London Bridge*

When the location is revealed by Lisa in line 1, it is correctly spelt as <Barbados>, but as the conversation develops and Abi refers to the location, she makes a spelling error <Barbadous>. Instead, of continuing the conversation, Ellie explicitly references the spelling in lines 9-10, before Lisa follows up her comments using ‘hahaha’ to ridicule the error. In this way, the users participate in a type of linguistic policing – by emphasising the incorrect spelling and evaluating the mistake as humorous – suggesting that spelling errors should be avoided at all costs. When I looked at these spelling errors in more detail, I found that another way that users seem to uphold these language standards is through the innovative use of the asterisk, <\*>, which is often used to repair spelling errors. In fact, of the 865 examples of <\*> in my data, 83.9% are used to fulfil this function.

But whilst genuine spelling errors are subject to ridicule and scrutiny from others in the conversation, when netspeak features are used, we do not see the same type of response from the group. This suggests that the group do not see these features as spelling errors but rather recognise them as an accepted form of online communication.

However, unlike spelling errors which are relatively frequent, these forms are incredibly rare. For instance, in (2) we observe the extensive use of netspeak features: <yaaa>, <bbz>, <c>, <u> and so on, but they occur only infrequently in other messages. For instance, whilst there are 1293 instances of ‘see’ in the entire corpus of nearly 100,000 messages, only seven of these are spelt as <c>. Given that they are so rare, why then would these features be used in this conversation?

### Example 2

*Mark: Ok! I’ll meet yaaa*

*Abi: Yeah George*

*Abi: I’m walking up the road*

*Stef: We’re in the garden bbz*

*Abi: Cooooool*

*Abi: C u in a min*

*Mark: You guys still there?*

*Abi: Yeeeeee*

To answer this question, let’s return to the purpose of the conversation in (2). As a friendly interaction between group members Mark, Abi, and Stef, the sole purpose of this exchange is to establish where the group will meet for a drink. Here, it seems that the use of non-standard spellings, such as <bbz> and <c>, function solely to establish the tone of the conversation. By using these netspeak features, the three users essentially mark this discussion as an informal conversation to establish where to get a

casual drink with friends. Take these forms away and replace them with the standard spellings of these forms and the conversation looks somewhat more like a formal

arrangement between colleagues!

## Medium, Message, Intentions and Choices

So, it seems that a lot of the work that is going here has to do with the ‘medium’ through which we are communicating. Given that communication on WhatsApp happens via text, we’re faced with a dilemma: text doesn’t allow us to use things like body language, intonation and other paralinguistic features to signal meaning that we use in speech. To account for this, we’ve developed unique ways to signal our true intentions. Emoji is a prime example of this. The infamous ‘tears of joy’ emoji, for instance, resembles the paralinguistic feature of laughter. What I would suggest here then, is that netspeak is doing a similar thing to emojis in that it is used to signal to the reader how the message should be interpreted.

### Example 3

*Mark: Ok I’ve paid the council tax, so if everyone could please transfer £23.56 asap that would be gr8 thaaanks!*

A further example is found in (3). In this extract, Mark has just sent a message to a group chat that includes his housemates asking them to pay their share of the council tax which he’s paid in full. Note, in most of his message, he uses standard spellings and written conventions. However, we see he uses the ‘netspeak’ forms <gr8> for ‘great’ and <thaaanks> for ‘thanks’ at the end of his message. Why, given the relative infrequency of these forms, does he use these features in this text? Based on my arguments so far, it seems likely that that his use of <gr8> and <thaaanks> are doing something very similar to the variant spellings in (2). In other words, by using these two features at the end of his message he essentially turns something very serious and formal (a request for money) into something not so serious that says to the rest of the group: ‘this is still an informal conversation amongst friends’. So, whilst our predictive text and our unlimited data may not mean that we may not use ‘c u l8tr bbz’ for the same reasons as before, during the Nokia era, it seems that the use of non-standard spellings are still an incredibly useful resource when communicating via (digital) text!

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# Questions

1. What does Ilbury mean by netspeak?
2. How have changes in mobile phone technology affected the use of language in texting?
3. What does Ilbury mean by linguistic policing and what examples does he give of this?
4. What does Ilbury notice about the innovative use of asterisks in texting?
5. What is mean by paralinguistic features and how do we convey these in texts?

# Investigating Social Media

Read the article below about how to investigate language use in social media.

## So you’re thinking of investigating social media… PhD student Christian Ilbury knows just what you need to do. Here he offers advice about how

## to go about it.

With our interactions increasingly migrating online, it’s no surprise that more and more students arelooking to investigate patterns of digital language and communication. From emoji to Bitmoji, Snapchat to Instagram, digital data presents an appealing opportunity to investigate a range of diverse and innovative linguistic patterns. But, before you start screenshotting your friends’ Insta feed or analysing their recent upload to TikTok, there are a number of issues to think about. After that, you can get going on your research project. In this article, I outline a five-step guide to help you think about researching language and communication in digital contexts.

## Step 1: Developing a Research Question

As with any research, a good place to start is to specify a ‘research question’. Often, this question relates to your research interests, but it more often relates to why you’re doing the research. A good research question is one that is answerable. Don’t make it too obvious (e.g., are emojis used on Twitter?) or too vague (e.g., what language features are used on Facebook?). Remember, you actually have to conduct the research to answer your question. A good research question needs to be principled and interesting. For instance, ‘Do women use more emoticons than men when texting?’ or ‘Do older speakers use more variant spellings than younger speakers on Twitter?’ are both good

research questions as they are focussed enough to be answered. It’s also worth thinking about how these language features are being used, because you will also need to look at what language means. A good place to start is to read some existing studies that relate to your research interests. In order to develop your research question, when reading the existing literature, you should start to look for ‘gaps’ in the existing research: Are there questions you have that haven’t been answered? If so, you might want to develop a research question that fills these gaps! An alternative way of developing a research question is by duplicating a study and applying this to another context. For instance, say you’ve read a study which reported that younger American users use more emojis in texts than older users, you could change the context of this study and investigate this question in the context of the UK. In later stages of your analysis, you might want to compare and contrast your findings with the American study.

## Step 2: Choosing a Platform

With an abundance of social media sites, choosing the right platform to extract and analyse data from is often a difficult choice. A good way of working out which platform you want to investigate is by assessing what type of data can help you answer your research question(s). Are you interested in textual patterns (e.g., emoji, spellings, use of figurative language)? If so, you might want to choose a platform where interactions are primarily text-based (e.g., messages, tweets, comments). A good choice of platform here would be the mobile messaging service, WhatsApp, since the vast majority of

messages sent via this app are textual. On the other hand, if you’re interested in graphical patterns of digital language and communication, you might wish to choose a platform like Snapchat or Instagram. For instance, say you wanted to investigate how individuals use hashtags to summarise the content of an image/video, you could examine this in the context of Instagram posts, as users very often tag their photos with lots of terms that summarise their upload.

An additional point to consider when choosing your social media platform is that you should think about the constraints and functions of that app or site and whether those features affect the language or style of communication used on that platform. For instance, Twitter restricts tweets to 280 characters, such that messages are often spread across multiple tweets or are very brief. Often, because of this character limit, tweets are incredibly informal and users often substitute longer words for abbreviations and acronyms (e.g., IRL = ‘in real life’). It might be worth thinking about how these

functions or constraints of the platform might influence the patterns of communication and language use that you observe. Thinking about these issues may be helpful in developing a research question!

## Step 3: The Ethics of Online Data

If it’s online, you can use it, right?! Well, not exactly. Just because something is public doesn’t automatically mean you can use it without considering the consequences of using that message/image. For instance, tweets are generally set to public by default, on Twitter. But you might want to consider the content of the message before using that tweet as ‘data’. Remember, lots of people signed up to social media sites to connect with their friends and family, and few users would have anticipated that their messages or images may be, one day, analysed by a researcher. A good way of judging whether a picture or message is useable is asking yourself: ‘Would I be happy if my picture/message was analysed in this way?’ If not, don’t use it! Other types of social media are set to private by the user (e.g., Facebook profiles). If the data isn’t public, then you’ll need to think about what researchers refer to as the ‘ethical issues’ associated with using that data. Often, you will need to run this by your teacher or the person leading the research project to ensure that you are using the data appropriately. In many cases, where data is not publicly visible, such as WhatsApp where users communicate via closed conversations, you’ll need to get permission from everyone involved in that chat before extracting and analysing that data. Even then, when you’ve got the permission and extracted the data, you should think about whether the use of a particular message or image is appropriate. For instance, in the case of WhatsApp messages, the chat history may include details or comments that the user has unwillingly given you permission to analyse. In my own research, participants have provided chats that give their address, bank details and other personal information. If you encounter similar messages, you should delete this information and remove these chats from your database. In all research, to ensure that you are conscious of your participants’ right to privacy, you should anonymise all data.

## Step 4: Extracting Data

Unlike speech which can be easily recorded with a simple recording device, extracting digital and social media data often proves to be much more difficult. How you go about getting your data is dependent on the accessibility of the social media content as determined by the platform or site. Take Snapchat for instance. Most of the messages sent on Snapchat disappear after 10 seconds, whilst videos uploaded to the user’s Story are difficult to record without using screen capturing software.

Extracting and analysing this data can prove to be incredibly challenging!

WhatsApp data, on the other hand, is pretty easy to analyse because the app allows you to export entire chats as a text file. Similarly, on Facebook Messenger, it is possible to copy and paste large chunks of messages to a text file, allowing the researcher to extract lots of data relatively easy. For those of you who are more tech-savvy, you might want to look into whether the social media site has Application Programme Interface (API). This is essentially a way to ‘tap-in’ to the site’s servers and extract lots of data from the site with minimal input. Twitter allows researchers to access their API and

many programs have been developed to make this process much more user friendly. If you’re interested in finding out more, I’d recommend ‘Mozdeh’ and ‘FireAnt’, which provide a user-friendly interface to extract data from sites such as Twitter and YouTube.

## Step 5: Analysing and Interpreting the Data

Great, so you’ve got your data. Now, how do you go about analysing it? Your analyses are often informed by your research question. So, say you were interested in researching whether women use more emojis than men, you might want to address this question by using a sociolinguistic approach (think William Labov, Jenny Cheshire, Peter Trudgill). A good way to answer this question is to count how many emojis are used by men and how many are used by women. Then, you might want to break this down further, by looking at the types of emoji used by individuals of each gender. Once

you’ve found patterns in your data, you then might want to think about why these patterns exist and what they might mean? Think about the details of particular examples as well as the bigger picture and try to establish meaningful links between the two. For instance, say you find that older users use more emoticons – e.g., :] – than emojis – – why might this be and how are these differences apparent in certain contexts? What kinds of meanings are being created? In order to work this out, you should refer to existing studies as well as your own intuitions. Lastly, think about the story behind your findings: What does this tell us about language/social media use?

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# Researching language attitudes

Another interesting area to investigate is attitudes to language. The easiest way to investigate this is by using a questionnaire. Platforms such as SurveyMonkey or Google Forms are good ways of doing this.

Read the article below which describes some of the stages of Rob Drummond’s research into attitudes to taboo language below:

# A survey into ‘offensive’ words

# Background

In March 2020, I launched an online survey looking at the offensiveness of certain words. The idea came from some research I had carried out into the language of young people in Manchester, with a focus on swearing. I wrote an academic article called Teenage Swearing in the UK (email me if you are interested but don’t have access to the journal), and made the point that what different people view as ‘swearing’ or offensive varies enormously. People take offence at different things, depending on a) what was said; b) who said it; c) how it was said; and d) what the context was.

## The survey

It’s actually quite difficult to explore people’s attitudes to offensive words in context. Once you start trying to account for all the different possible influencing factors, it is difficult to know where to stop. However, it is relatively straightforward to explore people’s attitudes to individual words, as long as you accept the obvious limitations (see below).

This survey was very simple. Participants were shown 11 isolated words, and asked to rate each of them on a scale of offensiveness with the prompt: ‘How offensive do you find each word?’. They used a slider, with a scale of 0-10 to give each word a rating. They were then asked to choose the most offensive words from the list (up to 3), by dragging the words into a box. Finally, they were asked to indicate their age, gender, and nationality. There was also a space for them to add any comments. I wanted relatively common words that I knew would be viewed as representing a range of offensiveness, but I consciously avoided some obvious words which were overtly sexist, racist or homophobic. A simple online survey is not the place to explore such complex language.

The survey ran for a week, and had 2788 complete responses. Far more women than men took part (1706 women, 983 men, 47 non-binary), and the largest age group was people in their 40s. The oldest participant was 85. Although 69 nationalities took part, in many ways this became a study into specifically ‘English’ views on swearing, as most respondents said they were from England. The top 6 nationalities were English, American, Scottish, Canadian, Australian, Welsh.

## Limitations

Before I start with the results, it is worth highlighting the obvious limitations of the survey. Otherwise, some of you will be reading this unable to concentrate due to the desperate need to point out why it is bad research. This isn’t bad research, but it is simple research. The design of all research involves compromise in one way or another, and I compromised on sophistication in favour of attractiveness and shareability. I could have created a more detailed survey and tried to recruit maybe 50 participants, but I chose to keep it simple get more responses. This isn’t a PhD.

The biggest limitation is that offence depends on context, and this survey takes the words out of context. Several people made this point, either as an observation or as a criticism. I completely agree with this; context can be vital for meaning, especially with regard to offensive language. But I would also argue that some words are still perceived as being ‘stronger’ than others, even out of context. The survey is trying to explore that underlying ranking of the words.

A few people made the comment ‘I don’t find any of the words offensive, so I can’t choose my top 1, 2 or 3’. This is a fair comment; I can see that the question ‘How offensive do you find [word]?’ is potentially problematic in this regard. But this is a compromise. If I had asked people to rate the words in relation to some societal norm then it would have made it less personal, and could have resulted in people thinking ‘Well I find the word [xxxx] very offensive but I know other people don’t seem to, so I’ll rate it 3 rather than 9’. The vast majority of people seemed to be able to rate the words in terms of some sense of offensiveness, so I think it worked overall. Again, compromise.

# Accentism

Another way in which attitudes to language manifest themselves is in attitudes towards accents. How could you go about measuring these attitudes. Read the article below for some ideas.

## Love Island: audience reaction shows deep snobbery about accents

June 19, 2018 2.39pm The Conversation

**Author**

1. [**[](https://theconversation.com/profiles/gerry-howley-369128)Gerry Howley**](https://theconversation.com/profiles/gerry-howley-369128)

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Now that the current crop of inmates disporting themselves around [Love Island](https://theconversation.com/why-love-island-is-the-best-kept-guilty-secret-on-british-television-97409) have settled in, members of the mainstream and social media have been passing judgement on the “islanders”. While I’m by no means a regular viewer of the show, as a sociolinguist, it is the comments that are being made about the way some of the contestants sound that have really caught my attention.

Linguistic discrimination, also called [linguicism](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13613324.2016.1150827?journalCode=cree20), is discrimination against somebody based on their use of language. This can include their vocabulary, the sound of their accent, or their grammar.

When the show started at the beginning of June, 11 young people moved into their luxury accommodation on the island and immediately social media lit up with people passing judgement on their demeanour, their looks, body language and what they had to say. From a sociolinguistic point of view, it’s been easy to predict who of the 11 would receive the most criticism – there’s a [body of research](http://www.cambridge.org/gb/academic/subjects/languages-linguistics/sociolinguistics/attitudes-language?format=HB&isbn=9780521766043#2jV0PjqZX16Hlue6.97) to back this up and, for anybody who has studied this, there were few surprises.

In general, speakers with more standard southern accents are less criticised, and those with accents that we are socially conditioned [to think of](https://theconversation.com/why-do-some-accents-sound-better-than-others-77732) as funny, friendly, and socially attractive, such as Welsh, Scottish and Newcastle accents, also get off lightly.

However, the Liverpool accent is frequently found near the bottom of the list when people are asked to rate how much they like the sound of different accents. One young islander, Hayley – from Liverpool – has been widely criticised on Twitter. Viewers have variously stated that her voice is “annoying”, “cringeworthy”, “makes [your] skin crawl”.

Hayley’s speech prompted one viewer to ask the twitterverse: “What level of education does this girl have” because “it’s so difficult listening to [her] speak.” Another tweeter left this tweet:

**[Bev Dickinson](https://twitter.com/BevDickinson)**[@BevDickinson](https://twitter.com/BevDickinson)

[#loveisland](https://twitter.com/hashtag/loveisland?src=hash) Hayley is an absolute snake. She's so fake and completely vile and has now been found out haha. Girl is thick as pig shit and can't even speak actual sentences properly. Go get yourself an education your embarrassing.

Now, if I were someone who discriminated against someone because of their language, I’d be pointing out that the last sentence in that tweet needs some punctuation – and by the way it’s “you’re embarrassing”. There’s more than a sprinkling of irony in someone being a language pedant and then getting it “wrong” while doing so. And while Hayley might [say some surprising things](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/love-island-2018-brexit-hayley-trees_uk_5b1b87f8e4b0adfb82695492), it tends to be her accent that people queue up to criticise.

**Common complaint**

Links between a lack of education and use of language have long been used as justification for oppression and control of people by the dominant ruling classes throughout history. Whether it be putting down the Welsh [Treachery of the Blue Books](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/wales/entries/72d77f69-72a7-3626-9c19-469c91f45753) (where it was falsely concluded in 1847 that the Welsh were ignorant, lazy and immoral, and that their use of the Welsh language was partly responsible) or whether it is used as a tool of the class system, language snobbery is and has been used to oppress people.

Unfortunately, accent prejudice is now so deeply ingrained within us that it’s incredibly frequent to hear speakers describing themselves as sounding “common”. I spend much of my teaching time at university trying to get my first year students to understand that there is no such thing as a “common”-sounding or “bad” or “correct” accent – but in fact these are societal norms that have been imposed on us.

**Like it or not**

Back on Love Island, another islander who received negative attention was Niall from Coventry. His voice was criticised for being annoying – but, according to Good Morning Britain’s Piers Morgan, Niall’s biggest crime was his use of the word “like”. The presenter demanded that a clip of Niall be played several times. He also mocked Niall’s West Midlands accent by [doing an impression](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kekLukjDLQ) that sounded more like a really bad stereotype of a West Country farmer (or Worzel Gummidge if you’re from my generation):

*But like I didn’t actually like say to her like before she went like anything like I didn’t say like …*

The use of the word “like” is currently one of the most stigmatised aspects of linguistic variation. Its use is generally attributed by non-linguists to adolescents and young people – when it is often perceived as a sign of lexical indecision, perhaps through having a small vocabulary or just not knowing what you want to say. However, [research shows](https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/11/the-evolution-of-like/507614/) that the use of like in utterances always performs a function. It frequently acts as a marker that may be used to sustain or repair a sentence, link information in the utterance together, or alternatively mark a boundary between the different points the speaker is making.

Like receives so much attention that there’s even a book on “[800 years of like](https://benjamins.com/catalog/slcs.187)”. In the book, Canadian linguist [Alexandra D’Arcy](http://web.uvic.ca/~adarcy/web%20documents/DArcy%202005.pdf) details the different uses of like, the fact that there is a long history of use of like by speakers of all ages, and dispels a number of the myths and stereotypes associated with it.

**Class act**

It would be easy to dismiss the comments about the Love Islanders as a bit of fun, but there is a much darker side to linguistic discrimination. In the US, a [study showed](https://source.wustl.edu/2006/02/linguistic-profiling-the-sound-of-your-voice-may-determine-if-you-get-that-apartment-or-not/) that some potential employers, real estate agents, loan officers and service providers linguistically profile callers responding to adverts, despite this being against federal and state law.

Although we now hear more regional dialects on the TV and radio, more than a quarter of Britons [feel discriminated against](http://www.itv.com/news/2013-09-25/28-of-britons-feel-discriminated-against-due-to-accent/) because of their accent. Teachers feel that they need to change their accent to be taken more seriously and teachers with northern accents have even been [told to “posh up”](https://schoolsimprovement.net/teachers-northern-accents-told-posh-heres/). Experts in their field face prejudice because of their accents – including my colleague Katie Edwards, who [has spoken out](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11270980/British-universities-Im-fed-up-of-being-ridiculed-for-my-regional-accent.html) over times she has felt that she can’t be taken seriously as an academic with her Doncaster accent.

Even masters of their craft have been typecast and discriminated against just because of the way that they speak, such as the acclaimed actor Maxine Peake – who was told to [lose her Bolton accent](https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/maxine-peake-accent-interview-guardian-12963558) because the character she was auditioning for had been to university. The list goes on.

So why can we not seem to shake our prejudices about dialects? Well, part of the issue is that by now, these attitudes are so deeply ingrained within us that we all tend to believe the hype. Our standard language ideology maintains that standard accents are associated with the upper classes, privilege, education and opportunity.

Despite John Major’s [1990 declaration](https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107871) that the former prime minister wanted Britain to be a classless society, [more recent evidence](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2017/05/03/the-long-read-the-working-class-hasnt-gone-away-by-ron-johnston/) indicates that class divides are just as bad as before. And unfortunately, it seems that linguistic discrimination really is one of the last acceptable forms of prejudice.

# Question

Having read the article about accent prejudice, how would you go about designing a survey to measure people’s attitudes to accents?

# Researching language

Now it is time to carry out your own language research project. Decide on a topic related to either social media use, attitudes to taboo language or attitudes to accents, and gather some data. You should follow the same steps and structure outlined by Ilbury and Drummond in the articles above.

Write up your findings using the following subheadings

#### Research question

What is it that you are trying to find out?

#### Data gathering

How did you gather your data? Did you collect examples of language form social media and if so how? Did you do a survey like Drummond?

#### Ethical considerations and limitations

What ethical considerations did you need to consider when gathering your example? Were there issues to do with privacy or anonymity? What are the limitations of your data collection?

#### Analysis

What have you found out? What does the data tell you?

# Please bring this research into school in September. You are sure to have lots of interesting information to share with your teacher and your classmates!

# well done on completing this bridging course!