A Level English Language



Bridging Course Week 3



Week 3

This week in the bridging course we will look at how you can make good use of news reporting of language in order to enrich your thinking about this A Level subject. We will then look in more detail at what I believe to be one of the most interesting parts of the course, accent and dialect. We will look at how ideas about accent and dialect often intersect with ideas about gender and at the end of this week you will have an opportunity to do some of your own research into a topic which combines both dialect and gender. Again, 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.

# A Level Language – Reading Around the Subject

**Read the article below by A Level English Language Examiner Dan Clayton.**

One of the most exciting things about the English Language A Level course is that language is always in the news, in one form or another. While this can provide you with some really interesting material to refer to in essays, language investigations and your own directed writing, it can also be a bit daunting to keep up with. And even if you know where to look, it’s sometimes difficult to work out how what you’re reading might fit in to what you’re doing on the course.

What I’ll attempt to do in this article is take a range of fairly recent stories about language in the news and contextualise them within the A Level course. In doing this, I’ll show you some good places to find stories, give some ideas about what you might learn from them and offer some suggestions about how to use them. Let’s start with a story that directly involves A Level students themselves…

## Below the Line and Below the Belt

A Level students at Havant and South Downs Sixth Form College were involved earlier this year in a project (supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund’s Young Roots programme) which investigated the history and use of the Portsmouth (‘Pompey’) accent. As part of their project, students and teachers looked at the history of the accent and dialect in their local area, collected examples of the variety and contributed to an exhibition for the general public. This all sounds exactly like the kind of work that takes the subject beyond the confines of the classroom and opens up links between theory in class and the real world ‘out there’. However, The Daily Telegraph had other ideas. In a piece in October 2018, titled

***College fails to ‘unearth anything’ after spending £34,000 investigating Portsmouth accent***

Unnamed Telegraph reporters rubbished the project, claiming that the ‘researchers’ (aka A Level students) had spent 10 months finding nothing of interest about the ‘so-called Portsmouth accent’. The College provided their own response to the story but another aspect of this whole rather unfair coverage of the college’s work is what happens when a story like this is opened up to comment on the newspaper’s website.

On the scale of things, 21 responses (at the time of writing this article) isn’t a huge outpouring of opinion – and some of them are supportive of the college’s work – but a quick glance at many of the comments shows the kind of attitudes that are often bubbling under the surface of news articles about language: namely, prescriptive and often xenophobic and/or declinist attitudes. So, while one commenter says ‘the involved students and the National Lottery are all idiots who have no idea of either ‘Research’ or the value of money’ another invokes a ‘Political Correctness Gone Mad’ agenda by saying

***All this proves is that the Lottery money is being wasted at an incredible speed on nonsensical projects.***

The corollary is that worthwhile enterprises are starved of money if they are not PC or sufficiently (sic) ‘edgy’before another chimes in with the most nakedly prejudiced comment of the lot:

***A more interesting area of research could be into why very many youngsters throughout the country of varying ethnic backgrounds seem to have adopted the intonations of Jamaican drug dealers.***

What can we learn from such an article and the comments that follow it? As many people from Deborah Cameron and Henry Hitchings to John and Lesley Milroy have previously argued, when people debate language they often use it as a proxy for other concerns, often those to do with what they perceive to be wider social ills. So, a good way to see those wider arguments exposed and to have recent stories to refer to is to check the ways in which the main newspapers report on language stories and then go ‘below the line’ to see how those arguments play out among the readers and their wider social and political agendas.

## Power to the Peevers

Language peeving is nothing new. People have complained about language ever since humans have been able to speak: the history of pedants and prescriptivists is a long one and they love to write about their pet-hates at length. What can be very instructive is to track the current gripes that people are expressing, and social media can be a great way of doing this. As the linguist Rob Drummond pointed out in a tweet in October 2018,

***If you ever want a point-in-time snapshot of current language peeves, just find a celebrity who has decided to share theirs and then sit back and read the replies!***

Drummond was referring to a tweet by the comedian Jason Manford that had picked up over 4500likes in the space of a few days. Manford’s own gripes were abbreviations like ‘hubs’ (husband), ‘totes’ (totally) and ‘bants’ (banter –which he also wanted banning as a word in its own right) but also the non-literal use of ‘literally’ and the phrase ‘Can I get…’ taking the place of ‘May I have…’. His fans chipped in with plenty of others: ‘LOL’ said ‘in person, face to face’; adding ‘super’ to the front of words; ‘cray-cray’… And while a lot of the responses were very funny, many seemed to be genuine gripes.

A celebrity from a very different generation, the columnist and former MP, Gyles Brandreth sparked a similar peevefest among viewers of BBC Breakfast in the same month when he complained about ‘totes’ (again), ‘I myself’, ‘bored of’ and ‘off of’, arguing that all the research shows that people who speak correctly, spell correctly, they will be more successful in this world.

Brandreth also claims that accents are neither here nor there, slang is fine but getting correct usage is important. Again, while dressing up his complaints in a fun, ‘I know I’m a pedant’ kind of self-aware schtick, Brandreth is still peddling some rather dubious ideas. What’s wrong with using an extra first-person pronoun to add emphasis? The French do it with ‘Moi, je…’ and English speakers often say ‘I personally’ to do a similar job. And what is this research he speaks of about users of ‘correct English’ (however that is defined) being more successful (however that too is defined)?

I myself (sorry Gyles) am not convinced by these arguments, but both stories provide can be seen to reflect battles over who is using ‘correct’ English and who has the power to say what’s right or wrong. They also provide you with some excellent examples of contemporary debates about English that can be linked to very similar discussions that have raged throughout the history of the language, from complaints about double negatives and split infinitives to the literally never-ending arguments about ‘literally’ (recorded as being used non-literally as far back as the 1760s). What’s also interesting is that social media seems to have allowed linguists and experts to respond directly to such populist language stories, offering genuine insight and empirical evidence. For every Gyles Brandreth or John Humphrys, there’s an Oliver Kamm or Jonathan Kasstan putting forward reasoned arguments. But as we’ve unfortunately seen in recent years, populism is not easily countered with hard facts: people can often be swayed by gut feeling and prejudice.

## Dropping Your Rosie Lees

Accents are rarely out of the news and stories about them can provide a wealth of different examples to refer to in many parts of the course. Language variation – in this case, regional and social variation and attitudes to it – is popular topic. One recent story helps to illustrate the overlapping nature of social and regional variation and how accents are viewed as markers of identity. The Labour candidate for Chingford and Woodford Green in East London, Faiza Shaheen was criticised for the way she spoke by Sky presenter Adam Boulton.

Accusing Shaheen of t-dropping (or more accurately from a linguistic standpoint t-glottalisation), Boulton asserted that Shaheen was ‘embarrassed about being posh’. As Language students, you will no doubt be aware that certain regional and social accents and their features can be stigmatised and frowned upon because they are perceived as being lower class, or carrying connotations of ignorance and a lack of formal education. But on the flipside, certain accents are also seen as being rather aloof and unlikeable: Received Pronunciation (RP) regularly polls high for intelligence but low for warmth, for example. In politics, where conveying a likeable and empathetic persona seems to be part of the job description, there has been a tendency since the 90s for certain upper- and middle-class politicians to chisel away the posher-sounding features of their natural accents to relate better to their wider electorate (although interestingly, Jacob Rees-Mogg bucks this trend). Former Prime Ministers Tony Blair and David Cameron (both privately educated) did it, ex- Chancellor George Osborne famously did it while addressing Morrisons warehouse workers in 2013 and was roundly mocked in the media for his Mockney affectations.

So is Shaheen just another example of a posh politician talking down? Not on your nelly. As Shaheen points out, she is the daughter of an East End car mechanic and attended the same state school as David Beckham and Harry Kane. She sounds like the area she is from. Boulton (privately educated) picked the wrong gal to tell porkies abaht, especially as Shaheen also heads a think tank on class and social discrimination and has written about the stigma associated with accents. It’s another excellent example of a story that shows how attitudes to language are often deeply ingrained in wider social contexts, but also an example that works well alongside some of the classic studies on accent and class – Ellen Ryan, Howard Giles, Peter Trudgill and Jenny Cheshire among them – offering a modern day application of older work.

## The Language ‘Problem’

What’s revealing about many of these stories is how the original stories are framed and how often language change or variation is presented as a problem. In the December 2018 edition of emagazine, Lynne Murphy offered a toolkit for evaluating language stories in the news and that is an extremely useful place tostart when exploring some of the stories featured here and in the wider reading that can inform your understanding of the course.

# Some Other Stories About Language from 2018

‘Gammon’ and the language of political abuse:<http://englishlangsfx.blogspot.com/2018/06/telling-porkies-about-gammon.html>

<https://language-and-innovation.com/2018/05/15/gammon-up-against-the-wall/>

Gary Younge on the dangers of political rhetoric and political violence:

<https://www.theGuardian.com/commentisfree/2018/oct/25/donald-trump-words-consequencesviolent-rhetoric>

Ben Zimmer on the use of the word ‘globalist’ and its sinister connotations:<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/03/the-origins-of-the-globalist-slur/555479/>

Daily Telegraph story on Portsmouth accent research<https://web.archive.org/web/20181009054509/https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/10/09/collegefails-unearth-anything-spending-34000-investigating/>

<https://www.millstreamproductions.com/work/pompey-dialect>

Jason Manford’s language peeves: <https://twitter.com/JasonManford/status/1055724735886168069>

Gyles Brandreth on his pet-hates: <https://twitter.com/BBCBreakfast/status/1050748647837716482>

# Questions:

1. Why is Clayton critical of the Telegraph’s coverage of research into the Portsmouth accent?
2. What does Clayton mean when he says language is often “a proxy for other concerns?”
3. Give some examples of language “peeves” identified by Clayton.
4. Summarise the events of the Faiza Shaheen affair.
5. Choose a link from the list at the bottom of the article and summarise the language controversy it covers.

# Accent and dialect

To learn more about accent and dialect read the article below by Nikolai Luck in which he gives a survey or recent linguistic research and ideas about accent, dialect and attitudes to these.

## Language Variation, Accents, Attitudes and The Words We Use

Picture the scene: a train full of England fans on the way to a World Cup match. Good-natured singing, lively banter, no hint of malice or threat; after all, everyone is on the same side. And then… well, and then an RP voice (yes, one of the fabled 5%) is heard to exclaim ‘Let’s watch some footie!’ A hush descends, the spirit of unity is shattered, snorts of derision are heard and the carriage suddenly seethes with palpable tension and potential violence. The non-RP contingent (yes, the fabled 95%) take exception – perhaps he could have been forgiven ‘soccer’. But ‘footie’? Never. As Clive Upton remarks in ‘Our Words, Our Lives, Our Streets – Dialect Slang and the BBC Voices Project’ (emagazine 31):

The names we choose to give things often identify us as coming from a particular region or as belonging to a certain…social group. Choose a word, and people will place you geographically or socially. (The suspicion is that someone saying ‘footie’ would rather be watching rugger.)

Upton reports on the joint endeavour between the Universities of Leeds and Sheffield to record the prevalence of dialect words for their Survey of Regional English (SuRE), a systematic attempt to record informants’ use of non-standard equivalents of Standard English words. Allied with the BBC Voices website, the survey documents ‘where particular words are to be found and where they have their strongest support’ – for example, ‘alleyway’ nationwide, ‘ginnel’ and ‘twitten’ in Yorkshire and Sussex respectively. Michael Rosen, in emagazine 27 (February 2005), homes in on a particular set of words relating to food in ‘Mealtimes – Language on a Plate’, charting his surprise at realising that he and his family may well have been eating ‘breakfast – dinner – tea’ but not everybody was. Rosen points out that historically English society marked out social distinctions by what you called the meals and by when you ate them. Serving ‘high tea’ half an hour early could see you lose your footing on social etiquette’s perilous high wire, and serving any kind of ‘sweet’ would ensure you slipping off into the lower middle class aspirational abyss forever. Anyone for footie after supper?

## The How and Why of Language Variation

An excellent departure point for a tour of the emagazine variation archive is Ian Cushing’s article ‘A World of Differences – Exploring Language Variation’ from April 2015. Celebrating the extraordinary diversity of different forms of English, Cushing seeks to describe how and why language begins to vary. How it happens is outlined through the concept of sociolect:

*... essentially any different group of people is likely to use language in a slightly different way and almost any activity you partake in identifies you as belonging to a distinct social group. As to why language is so diverse, Cushing establishes the centrality of language to our sense of self. The language we use… is a fundamental part of forming our identity and how other people perceive us… geography… creates accents and dialects… people working to identify themselves as being from Liverpool are… likely to adhere to (certain) linguistic forms. Mobility and migration play their part too. Bradford Asian English and Multi-Cultural London English are just two examples of… hundreds of emerging… forms across the UK.*

He draws a useful and striking analogy between the language you use and the clothes you wear to explain the phenomenon of code-switching. You don’t wear a prom dress to fix a bike but choose an outfit to suit the occasion, just as you select the variety of English you use depending on what you are doing and who you are talking to. Sweary slang at a job interview is the equivalent of wearing ripped jeans to a prom; chances are you’ll be thrown out. Code-switching is testament to our complexity as social beings and many factors are at play in contributing to our unique idiolect, age, gender, ethnicity, occupation, sexuality and so on.

## Attitudes

But what if you’re wearing your finest prom dress and it doesn’t even get you in to the prom? What if your way of speaking is deemed to be not ‘good’ enough? Whilst the academic consensus amongst linguists is to embrace diversity and to recognise the linguistic equality of varieties of English, a descriptive approach, beyond university linguistic departments a prescriptive (judgemental) discourse holds sway which prompts Dr William Barras to ask ‘Why does accent variation attract such vitriol?’ In ‘Accentuate the Positive? Media Attitudes to Accent Variation’ (emagazine 65, September 2014) Dr Barras charts woeful examples of blatant accent prejudice, including the BBC Breakfast presenter Stephanie McGovern confounding some viewers with her ability to gain a degree in Economics whilst retaining her Teeside accent. Dr Barras examines where accent prejudice comes from and outlines how, commonly, two distinct elements of language, an accent (RP or Received Pronunciation) is mistakenly conflated with a dialect (Standard English). Despite popular perceptions to the contrary it is perfectly possible to speak standard English with a non-RP accent (and non-standard English with an RP accent). Dr Barras concludes that the polarising effect of accents… still holds true… what linguists can add to the debate is evidence that there is no linguistic justification for thinking that one accent is more correct or more pleasing to the ear than any other.

An excellent companion piece to this article is ‘She’s Proper Good, Innit – Why Dialect discrimination is unwise’ from September 2013. Shaun Austin and Professor Paul Kerswill present The Lancashire Study with the kind of data table beloved of A Level English Language examiners. It makes for compelling scrutiny. The social backgrounds of seventy six pupils at three Lancashire schools were documented, categorising them according to how ‘academically aspirational’ they were and the extent to which their home background could be described as ‘pro-educational’. The prevalence of three linguistic variables, chosen because of the stigma localised versions of these features were found to invite, were then measured as the students gave presentations:

1. h: for example, hat versus ‘at

2. th: for example thing versus fing, with versus wiv

3. t: for example better versus be’er

The finding that in general, pupils with high educational aspiration use more prestige speech features than pupils with low aspiration seems to account for perceptions that localised speech forms are indicative of low levels of aspiration.

Yet this is overly, and perhaps damagingly, simplistic. Two of the most academically ambitious and successful students’ accent and dialect features match their (working-class) backgrounds and help to maintain their status as accepted members of their community. And yet, the maintenance of these features carries with it a risk of being unfairly tarred with negative stereotypes. She’s proper good, but will she be given a proper chance?

## Phonological Change

In the Peter Morgan play The Audience, about the weekly meetings between the Queen and the Prime Minister of the day at Buckingham Palace, the actors Helen Mirren and Kristen Scott Thomas, who both play the Queen, have to perform a series of accent shifts alongside the numerous costume changes required of the role in order to reflect the downward convergence of the monarch from pure to modified RP over the course of her reign (even so, it remains the only production Kristen Scott Thomas has ever appeared in where she’s been asked to make her voice sound posher than it already is). In ‘Accent and Phonological Change’ (emagazine 58, December 2012) Suzanne Williams details her own personal experience of accent modification and places it in the wider context of a perceived decline of regional accents, suggesting that rather than lamenting the disappearance of traditional regional accents we should view it in evolutionary terms and celebrate the emergence of new accents and new identities that reflect a changing world as hybrid accents form due to the constantly changing demographics of the nation.

## North and Scouse

Several articles in the archive provide a specific focus on a particular variety of English. Graeme Trousdale’s ‘Northern English – a State of Mind’ (emagazine 35) explains the link between identity and linguistic behaviour. The critical issue here is one of identity as action: your identity is not a reflection of what you are, but rather the outcome of what you do. Speakers draw on a multilingual repertoire by varying the language they use according to context. In Preston, for instance, English freely mixes with Urdu and Bengali whilst in Newcastle speakers routinely code-switch between localised Geordie and supralocal Northern forms. In ‘More or Less Scouse – Language Change on Merseyside’ (April 2010) Dr Kevin Watson considers how the localised Liverpool accent bucks the seemingly inexorable trend of other regional varieties towards dialect levelling (dialects converging and becoming increasingly homogenised) by actually becoming more Scouse as young speakers show a notable tendency to use more localised ‘Liverpool variants’ such as fricative /t/ and /k/ sounds in words like ‘matter’ and ‘back’ rather than standard variant plosive forms.

The research shows a marked increase in the use of regionally restrictive features – the opposite of levelling’s prediction… But why? Dr Watson suggests that this divergence of the younger generation away from older speakers’ use of standard variant forms could be to do with covert prestige. Paradoxically, precisely because Scouse is maligned by outsiders it is embraced by insiders.

Such a pronunciation is a marker of association, a badge of identity which distinguishes them from other people. Ben Farndon’s ‘Rural Voices: Attitudes to Language Variety’ (emagazine 52 April 2011) cites the opprobrium that can be provoked by rhotic rural accents. Rhotic accents are those that pronounce the consonant /r/ when it falls after a vowel in words such as ‘cart’ or ‘car’ a form found particularly in the South West counties of Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Dorset. In 2005, a quarter of respondents to the BBC Voices survey from this area reported that they didn’t like their own accent. The media have certainly contributed to this sense of shame, often equating the rhotic accent with stupidity and eccentricity in comedy shows and advertising. Perhaps rural accents will fade partly as a result of these pernicious associations although Farndon ends on an optimistic note; awareness of decline could lead to a conscious effort to preserve and revitalise rural accents, and a Scouse-style renaissance could be on the cards.

Nikolai Luck teaches at the Sixth Form College, Colchester.

# Questions

Having read the article above, can you provide definitions of the following terms:

1. RP
2. Rhotic accent
3. Dialect levelling

# Northern English

Next read the following article by Graeme Trousdale on Northern English:

## Accent and dialect - Northern English

Northerner and linguist Graeme Trousdale separates out the myths and prejudices from the realities of northern English, at the same time as recognising that categorising identities is part of the way we understand linguistic behaviour.

### A State of Mind?

It's a difficult thing, working on accents and dialects of English, if you come from northern England like I do. As an academic who works on varieties of English, I strive to show that all varieties are linguistically equal, with no accent or dialect being inherently better than any other; as a northerner, I know that northern English is the best accent of the lot, no matter what academics think. It all boils down to this. There are two groups of people in the world: those who have a northern English accent, and those who wish they did!

### Defining 'northern English'

But what is 'northern English', exactly? If we ignore any sociolinguistic variation within the north, and try to concentrate just on a traditional, regional definition of a 'dialect', we run into problems. What land mass corresponds to the area in which northern English is spoken? Historically, for instance, much of lowland Scotland could legitimately be considered part of the linguistic north, given what we know about the early history of English, and the similarities between the dialects of the far north of England, and those of southern Scotland. But because political boundaries and social groupings have formed and reformed since the Anglo-Saxon period, we have to recognise that geography alone cannot serve to delimit linguistic varieties. An alternative approach is to consider individuals, and the identities that they project, partly through their linguistic behaviour. The critical issue here is one of identity as action: your identity is not a reflection of what you are, but rather the outcome of what you do. It is agentive, and manifests itself in many ways, from the clothes that people buy, the music they choose to listen to, and the language that they speak.

### Multilingual northerners

Multilingualism is perhaps the most obvious way of illustrating this, and many northerners are multilinguals. Sometimes the context of the speech act, or the social and linguistic background of the participants in the discourse, will determine what language speakers use: a community language at home with grandparents, for instance, but English in the classroom. However, we also find speakers exploiting their linguistic repertoire by varying the language they use even when the context and participants remain constant: a group of teenagers from Preston might well create a variety which appears to be a jigsaw of English, Urdu, Bengali and other languages when engaged in informal talk. Such speakers don't need to be fluent in all of these languages; some may only know a handful of Bengali words and phrases, but drawing on even this limited knowledge can be enough to indicate group membership, to show that you belong. Patterns of crossing, to use Ben Rampton's term, are a regular feature of the linguistic behaviour of multilingual speakers in communities both within northern England and beyond. This crossing is a way of marking identity.

What holds for languages also holds for dialects. Speakers project aspects of their identity by drawing on the range of 'Englishes' that they know - Tyneside English, Northern English, British English and so on. For instance, in any particular speech event, a speaker from Newcastle might say house (with a diphthong) rather than hoose (with a monophthong), but, in words like bath and dance, still retain a low front vowel (as most speakers of English have in cat) rather than the low back vowel associated with southern speech. Thinking about this in terms of local and supralocal poles, we'd say that the speaker is locating himself or herself in the middle of this cline - he or she may be perceived as having a 'General Northern' accent, rather than a heavily localised variety. In another speech event, the same speaker may use many more 'Newcastle' variants, in which case the speaker is located closer toward the 'local' pole. Again, this linguistic behaviour is tied in with the projection of a particular kind of identity, from local Geordie to supralocal northerner. In my own research on Tyneside English, some of the older speakers I talked to were lamenting the fact that younger speakers from the north-east didn't talk 'proper Geordie' anymore. This view was not upheld by the younger speakers, who took great pride in speaking Geordie - they just considered themselves to speak modern Geordie. For many (including many people from the north-east) this modern Geordie is not as distinctive from other accents as it used to be, and this process of dialect levelling has been attested for other dialect areas in surveys carried out in the British Isles. But even if we accept the claim that local varieties are not as distinct as they were, the concepts of 'northerner' and 'northern English' remain.

### Categorising and stereotyping

How are such concepts formed in our minds? One of the ways in which our minds work is that we create stereotypes - it's an unfortunate but necessary by-product of our human ability to categorise. Our minds are constantly categorising, placing things into larger groups, based on what we perceive to be similarities among different entities. Stereotypes function as abstract members of the social categories we store in our minds; we identify attributes that we associate with the categories, and the more attributes a given instance of a particular category has, the more we consider that instance to come close to the stereotype. In terms of social categorisation, these attributes can be to do with the way in which people dress, the kind of music they like, and the kind of language they speak, which we've also seen to be influential in the projection of identity. So identity and stereotypes are closely linked in speakers' minds.

All of you reading this will have a social category of 'northern Englishman', for instance, a category which you've built up through experience, as a result of encounters with men from northern England. These encounters vary massively in kind, of course: part of your category of 'northern Englishman' might have been constructed on the basis of your dad being from York; another part constructed because you've seen Ant and Dec on the television; another part because you've heard Steven Gerrard be interviewed after he has played for England, and so on, over potentially tens of thousands of instances of northern Englishmen you've encountered, however briefly. Your category of 'northern Englishman' will be unique to you, because no-one else in the world has had exactly the same experiences as you have. This is why your concept of 'northern Englishman' can't correspond directly to a person in the 'real world': it is abstract, part of your mental make-up. And what's true of 'northern Englishman' as a social category is equally true of 'northern English' as a linguistic category. Just as you encounter and categorise speakers, you encounter and categorise speech. This is why northern English is a state of mind.

### Prejudice and comedy

Sometimes, however, this social and linguistic stereotyping is based on very little evidence indeed, and this can result in prejudice. Let's take a more specific category, 'Yorkshireman', and an aspect of the language associated with Yorkshiremen, the phrase 'Eeh bah gum'. I don't think I've ever heard a Yorkshireman say 'Eeh bah gum'. Yet this has become such a stock Yorkshire phrase that a story on The Sun's website, detailing the fondness of Brad Pitt and his wife for the soap opera Emmerdale, set in the Yorkshire Dales, had the headline 'Jolie bah gum, Angelina'. 'Eeh bah gum' has now passed into folklore, and has become entrenched as a marker of Yorkshire speech with the result that it works as a stereotyped linguistic form that invokes a stereotyped social category.

Such stereotypes regularly feature in comedy portrayals of the north. Here is a transcript of part of a famous Monty Python sketch, where Michael Palin, Eric Idle, Graham Chapman and Terry Jones are dressed in white tuxedos, drinking white wine, against a background of a beautiful coastline:

*FIRST YORKSHIREMAN: Aye, very passable, that, very passable bit of risotto.*

*SECOND YORKSHIREMAN: Nothing like a good glass of Château de Chasselas, eh, Josiah?*

*THIRD YORKSHIREMAN: You're right there, Obadiah.*

*FOURTH YORKSHIREMAN: Who'd have thought thirty year ago we'd all be sittin' here drinking*

*Château de Chasselas, eh?*

*FIRST YORKSHIREMAN: In them days we was glad to have the price of a cup o' tea.*

*SECOND YORKSHIREMAN: A cup o' cold tea.*

*FOURTH YORKSHIREMAN: Without milk or sugar.*

*THIRD YORKSHIREMAN: Or tea.*

The sketch then descends into madness as each of the Yorkshiremen tries to outdo the others by recounting how difficult his life was while growing up. Much of the humour derives simply from the exaggerated accounts of hardship, but there is also humour in the incongruity of discourse topic and linguistic forms - the affluence associated with the discourse on risotto and fine French wine, combined with the non-standard grammar (thirty year, them days, we was glad) and Victorian names. This incongruity is marked too by what appears to be a mismatch between the way the characters are dressed (white tuxedos) and the way they speak (with Yorkshire accents). But why a Yorkshire accent? Why not one associated with London, Bristol, Plymouth, or Norwich? Again, the humour derives in part from wider cultural knowledge (or rather, assumptions) about a typical Yorkshireman, playing on the stereotype that it's grim up north. (After all, why should white tuxedos and a Yorkshire accent seem like a mismatch?)

This links to a wider, institutional stereotype: the portrayal of the north as 'other'. This is part of the cultural norms of much of the British media, which is both metrocentric (focused on cities) and austrocentric (focused on the south). These terms are used by Katie Wales to describe the way in which the history of English has often been analysed by linguists, but they are true too of much of the British establishment. For instance, the BBC News website in 1999 reported the decision of the Oxford English Dictionary to include the exclamation 'Ee', considered to be a northern form, in revisions to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, as follows:

*Ee bah gum, it's in t'dictionary*

*By 'eck! Them daft 'apeths at t'Oxford Dictionary have gone all northern.*

If that were true, what a wonderful world it would be.

# Questions

1. What problems does Trousdale identify with defining Northern English?
2. What does Trousdale find interesting about Geordie’s perceptions of their own language use?
3. Summarise Trousdale’s account of the stereotype of the northerner.

# Gender and accent

Some linguistics have argues that women who speak with regional accents are victims of more linguistic prejudice than men. Do you agree, and if so, why is this? For the next section, you should research criticism received by two female public figures, the Labour MP Angela Rayner, and the TV Presenter Steph McGovern.

Make detailed mind maps on what you find. What do you conclude from your findings?

# Researching accent, dialect and gender:

A female speaker who has been in the news recently and who has faced criticism of her accent is the Home Secretary Priti Patel. She has been particularly criticised for her pronunciation of words ending in ING such as “working”, “trying”, “thinking” – she tends to pronounce these work “workin’” etc and this is often stigmatised as a non-standard pronunciation.

The linguist Rob Drummond has suggested the following research methods to investigate Patel’s language. Follow these steps and you will have carried out a scientific piece of linguistic research.

1. Find two or three videos of Priti Patel speaking, ideally in different contexts.
2. Look at one of the following three language features in particular
3. ING or g-dropping
4. T- glottaling – this is using a “glottal stop” instead of T in words such as butter, twenty or got
5. L- vocalisation – this is pronouncing a workd which ends with “l” with a “w” sound eg well, fall
6. For each video, count the numer of times she uses each feature, but you could also count the number of times she “could” have used it but doesn’t.
7. Chart your findings in a graph
8. What do you conclude from your research project?