A Level English Language

Bridging Course: Week 1

Entry Requirements for Studying A-level English Language?

- Students who are expected to achieve at least a grade 6 in GCSE English Language.
- Students who have enjoyed their GCSE English Language course, and who are keen readers.
- Students who love a lively debate and discussion in lessons, and who are willing, and able, to share their ideas.
- Students who enjoy planning and writing essays.

What to expect from A-level English Language.

A-level English Language is demanding and rewarding in equal measure. Ideas that are studied are challenging ones which pose many questions. These questions are often philosophical or contentious, leading lessons to be filled with discussion and debate. Students are expected to complete substantial amounts of reading and preparation for lessons, in order to engage fully with class discussion. Students should expect to prepare and complete essays regularly, and these essays will often present some form of debate, asking students 'to what extent do you agree?' Therefore, engagement with class debate is essential in order to be fully prepared for the demands of writing academic and advanced level essays. English Language will make you ask important questions about society, power and communication.

This bridging course will provide you with a mixture of information about A-level English Language, and what to expect from the course, as well as key work to complete. Students who are expecting to study English Language at A-level, and are likely to meet the entry requirements, must complete the bridging course fully and thoroughly, to the best of their ability. You should complete all work on paper and keep it in a file, in an ordered way. You will submit it to your teacher in September. All of the work will be reviewed and selected work will be assessed, and you will be given feedback on it. This work will be signalled to you. If you do not have access to the internet, please contact the school and appropriate resources will be sent to you. If you are thinking about studying English Language at A-level you should attempt this work to see whether or not you think studying a subject like this is right for you. If you later decide to study English Language , you must ensure you complete this work in full. This work should be completed after you have read and completed the Study Skills work that all of Year 12 should complete.

Course outline

Paper 1 – Language the Individual and Society (40%)	Paper 2 – Language Diversity and Change (40%)
▪ An exam lasting 2hours 30 minutes.	▪ An exam lasting 2 hours and 30 minutes .
Section A - Textual Variations and Representations	**Section A - Diversity and Change**
Analysis of two texts (one contemporary and one older text) linked by topic or theme.	One question from a choice of two: Either: an evaluative essay on language diversity
Section B - Children's Language Development	Or: an evaluative essay on language change
A discursive essay on children's language development, with a choice of two questions where the data provided will focus on spoken, written or multimodal language	**Section B - Language Discourses** Two texts about a topic linked to the study of diversity and change. A question requiring analysis of how the texts use language to present ideas, attitudes and opinions A directed writing task linked to the same topic and the ideas in the texts
NEA – a coursework folder of 2 pieces worth 20% • You will write your own piece of original writing and accompanying commentary in which you analyse your won linguistic choices. • You will carry out a language investigation into a language topic of your choice.	

The following work requires a lot of reading, and some of the ideas might be challenging to understand on first reading. Remember to take regular breaks, go back to any of the tasks after some time away, and try your best. Your English Language teacher will go over the following work with you in lessons, early in Year 12.

Page Break

So, you want to study English Language?

Below is some advice and guidance from some key thinkers in English Language for those considering studying it at A Level:

Becoming an A Level Language Student – a Quick Guide

Examiner and university lecturer Dr Marcello Giovanelli tells students embarking on an A Level language course what to expect and how to make the most of the course.

If you're reading this then you may well have just started your A Level studies in English Language. Congratulations on choosing an exciting, modern and engaging A Level course!

However, the transition from GCSE to A Level can be a demanding one, and so in this article, I'll share some key principles of A Level language study with you that will help you to bridge the gap and get the most from your studies. Together, these form a 'quick guide' to becoming an A Level English Language student.

1. Learning a Metalanguage and Avoiding Impressionism

Given that you may not have had to do much explicit language work at KS4, you will find that you need to acquire a new terminology to deal with the kinds of analyses that you will undertake at A Level. We call this type of language about language a metalanguage. For English Language, most of this revolves around what we term levels of language (discourse, grammar, semantics, lexis,phonology), or what are currently known as linguistic methods or frameworks in examination board specifications. As a beginning linguist, it's important to start using these terms confidently and accurately to ensure that all descriptive linguistic work (any analysis that identifies and explores language features) that you do is as precise and clear as is possible, and avoids merely making impressionistic and speculative claims that are not rooted in language analysis.

2. The Importance of Context

At A Level, engaging with context means moving beyond simple GCSE notions of audience and purpose. Now what's really important to remember is that by context we are referring to a range of factors both within and outside of the text, paying close attention to situations where a text is both written or spoken (the context of production), and where it is read or listened to (the context of reception).

3. Ideas about Language

Another key skill that you will develop as you progress through your studies will be your ability to read and engage with ideas about language study. This will move you beyond seeing yourself as someone who analyses language to someone who actively explores ideas and concepts that researchers and academics have grappled with. Whichever specification you are following for your own studies, being able to understand the various debates surrounding language topics, and integrating these into your own analyses of data is an important skill that you will need to master.

4. Read Around the Subject

Of course, one of the best ways to explore issues and ideas in language is to read as widely as you can around the subject. As a start, you might try David Crystal's The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of the English Language (Cambridge University Press) for a good reference book and overall guide to language topics, Louise Mullany and Peter Stockwell's Introducing English Language (Routledge) for an excellent, albeit quite advanced, guide to the study of language and linguistics. Language: A Student Handbook on Key Topics and Theories (ed. Dan Clayton, English and Media Centre) offers an excellent collection of essays by leading academics on A Level language topics. It's also a good idea to use the internet to keep up to date with news stories and the latest debates involving language. Whether it's schools banning students from using non-standard English, how the latest innovations in technology are affecting the ways that we use language, or what the latest research in child language learning is, there's always something to interest the language student. Regularly visiting the online pages of tabloid newspapers will lead to no end of stories to read and discuss in class.

To make things easier for yourself, you could subscribe to a blog which collects the latest news for you such as Dan Clayton's peerless EngLangBlog http://englishlangsfx.blogspot.co.uk

5. Become a Data Collector

Another important part of becoming a student of language is learning how to become a researcher of language. In fact your career as a collector of language data begins the moment you start your course. The wonderful thing about language data, of course, is that it's everywhere: in the conversations we have with friends, the TV we watch, the books, magazines, social media pages, and tweets we read, the websites we browse, the computer games we play and so on. Make a point of collecting interesting examples of language you see, either in hard copy form or using the camera facility or a scanning app on your smartphone. Record conversations of both real (do ask for permission!) and represented (on the TV and radio) speech, practise transcriptions, start a scrapbook,
and share ideas with your fellow students via a blog. Get used to working with data and start applying learning in class to your own examples that you collect. You've got an exciting two years of study ahead of you!

Dr Marcello Giovanelli is a Lecturer in English in Education at the University of Nottingham.

Page Break

Attitudes to Language

A key idea which underpins our study of language is the idea of attitudes to language. People's attitudes to language can be categorised in different ways, but arguably the most important distinctions in language attitudes is between a **descriptive** attitude to language a **prescriptive** attitude, This is a crucial distinction which underpins our study of language and it is crucial to understand this distinction at the start of this course. The table below explains the difference between a **prescriptive** attitude and a **descriptive** attitude.

Prescriptivism	Descriptivism
This the practice of elevating one variety or manner of language use over another. It may imply some forms are incorrect, improper, and illogical, lack communicative effect, or are of low aesthetic value. Prescriptivism may address such linguistic aspects as spelling, grammar, semantics, pronunciation, and syntax. It may also include judgments on socially proper and politically correct language use. Linguistic prescriptivism may aim to establish a standard language, teach what a particular society perceives as a correct form, or advise on effective communication. Prescription might appear resistant to language change.	In the study of language, description or descriptive linguistics is the work of objectively analysing and describing how language is actually used (or how it was used in the past) by a group of people in a speech community. All scholarly research in linguistics is descriptive; like all other sciences, its aim is to observe the linguistic world as it is, without the bias of preconceived ideas about how it ought to be. Linguistic description is often contrasted with linguistic prescriptivism.

As people studying language, we ought therefore to be descriptive in our attitude. That means we should not judge different forms of language, but we should examine them objectively. A statement such as "It is much better to use standard English than Geordie dialect" is problematic to a descriptivist, who might argue, why? In what context? Might there be some contests where Geordie dialect is "better"? And what do we mean by "better" in the first place?

However, it is sometimes difficult be a descriptivist, or to maintain a truly descriptivist outlook. This is because, as you will see, many common attitudes to language are very prescriptive. The Media typically adopt a very negative attitude to any form of language change, and imply that standards of language use are slipping. This can be seen very frequently in newspaper headlines about language change, as we will see.
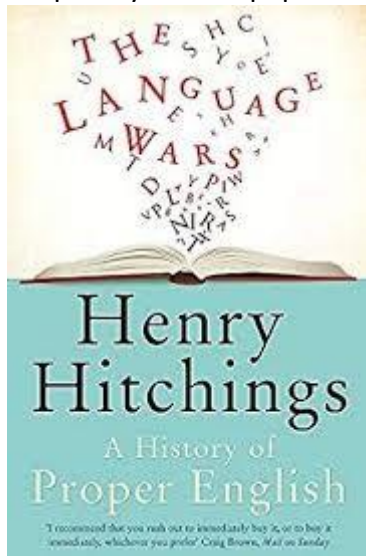
Prescriptivism is nothing new. In fact you could argue that people have been complaining about language change for a long time. Many writers and commentators hark back to a "Golden Age" when Language was perfect, but when we look back in history we can see that people have always complained about change and a perceived slipping of standards. A good book to read about this issue is **The Language Wars by Henry Hitchings**. If you can get a copy of this it would be some excellent wider reading, but below is a review of the book which summarises the main points it makes. Read the article and answer the questions below:

Review of The Language Wars by Henry Hitchings

Here linguist Dan Clayton reviews The Language Wars.

'Dig beneath the present,' says Henry Hitchings in his new book The Language Wars, 'and instead of hitting something solid you open what appears to be a bottomless shaft into the past'. While most of

us are used to the modern debates about supposedly declining standards of literacy, texting ruining our language and slang making us all speak like wannabe-gangstas with speech impediments, what Henry Hitchings reveals in his excellent survey of arguments about 'proper' English is that these debates , gripes and groans have been around for a very long time. In fact, he suggests that they've been around ever since we've had a language.

Did you think that writing should of instead of should have (as in 'You should of phoned me!') was a recent problem? They argued about it in the Seventeenth Century.

Is it it's or its? They were confused about it over a hundred years ago.

You was or you were? This was problematic even for the writers of grammar books in the Eighteenth
Century, who would tell their readers to do one thing and then do the precise opposite in their own private letters.

Should we be worried about young people in Twenty First Century Britain not being literate by the time they leave school? In Victorian times they were more worried about too many young people learning how to read.

And so it goes on. Hitchings looks at arguments about what our language is, what different groups of
people think it should be and how we've arrived at a point now when English is pretty much a global phenomenon, admittedly a global phenomenon (Greek) that has taken much of its vocabulary (Latin)
from other languages (French).

The Language Wars is a great read, not just for its balanced approach to the debate about what we might see as 'proper' English, but also for its neat overviews of language topics covered at A level, such as gender and talk, political correctness, attitudes to accents and the growth of global Englishes.

Article Written By: Dan Clayton is a Senior Examiner for AQA A English Language and a research fellow at The Survey of English Usage at UCL.

Questions:

1. What does Hitchings suggest about modern debates about declining standards of language?
    Hitchings suggests that texting and slang is ruining our vocabulary even though this has been around for a long time, ever since we had a language.
2. Give some examples of language use which have been subject to controversy in the past?
    You was or you were caused a lot of difficulty as writers would tell people to do one thing and then in private letters go against what had been said.
3. What point is Hitchings making generally about attitudes to language?

David Crystal

A key figure in English Language and Linguistics who you will come to be very familiar with is the writer and academic David Crystal.
David Crystal has written over 100 books about language. In the article below, he is interviewed on his attitude towards the future of English including the role of full stops. What has says might surprise you. Read the article and then answer the questions below.

Period. Full Stop. Point. Whatever It's Called, It's Going Out of Style

By DAN BILEFSKYJUNE 9, 2016

"We are at a momentous moment in the history of the full stop," said David Crystal, who has written more than 100 books on language
One of the oldest forms of punctuation may be dying

The period — the full-stop signal we all learn as children, whose use stretches back at least to the Middle Ages — is gradually being felled in the barrage of instant messaging that has become synonymous with the digital age
So says David Crystal, who has written more than 100 books on language and is a former master of original pronunciation at Shakespeare's Globe theater in London — a man who understands the power of tradition in language
The conspicuous omission of the period in text messages and in instant messaging on social media, he says, is a product of the punctuation-free staccato sentences favoured by millennials — and increasingly their elders — a trend fuelled by the freewheeling style of Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter
"We are at a momentous moment in the history of the full stop," Professor Crystal, an honorary professor of linguistics at the University of Wales, Bangor, said in an interview after he expounded on his view recently at the Hay Festival in Wales
"In an instant message, it is pretty obvious a sentence has come to an end, and none will have a full stop," he added "So why use it?"
In fact, the understated period — the punctuation equivalent of stagehands who dress in black to be less conspicuous — may have suddenly taken on meanings all its own
Increasingly, says Professor Crystal, whose books include "Making a Point: The Persnickety Story of English Punctuation," the period is being deployed as a weapon to show irony, syntactic snark, insincerity, even aggression
If the love of your life just cancelled the candlelit, six-course, home-cooked dinner you have prepared, you are best advised to include a period when you respond "Fine." to show annoyance
"Fine" or "Fine!," in contrast, could denote acquiescence or blithe acceptance
"The period now has an emotional charge and has become an emoticon of sorts," Professor Crystal said "In the 1990s the internet created an ethos of linguistic free love where breaking the rules was encouraged and punctuation was one of the ways this could be done"
Social media sites have only intensified that sense of liberation
Professor Crystal's observations on the fate of the period are driven in part by frequent visits to high schools across Britain, where he analyzes students' text messages
Researchers at Binghamton University in New York and Rutgers University in New Jersey have also recently noted the period's new semantic force
They asked 126 undergraduate students to review 16 exchanges, some in text messages, some in handwritten notes, that had one-word affirmative responses (Okay, Sure, Yeah, Yup) Some had periods, while others did not
Those text message with periods were rated as less sincere, the study found, whereas it made no difference in the notes penned by hand
Geoffrey Nunberg, a linguist who teaches at the University of California, Berkeley, noted that the 140-character limit imposed by Twitter and the reading of messages on a cellphone or hand-held device has repurposed the punctuation mark
"It is not necessary to use a period in a text message, so to make something explicit that is already implicit makes a point of it," he said "It's like when you say, 'I am not going – period' It's a mark It can be aggressive It can be emphatic It can mean, 'I have no more to say'"
Can ardent fans of punctuation take heart in any part of the period's decline? Perhaps.

The shunning of the period, Professor Crystal said, has paradoxically been accompanied by spasms of overpunctuation

"If someone texts, 'Are you coming to the party?' the response," he noted, was increasingly, "Yes, fantastic!!!!!!!!!!!"

But, of course, that exuberance would never be tolerated in a classroom

At the same time, he said he found that British teenagers were increasingly eschewing emoticons and abbreviations such as "LOL" (laughing out loud) or "ROTF" (rolling on the floor) in text messages because they had been adopted by their parents and were therefore considered "uncool"

Now all we need to know is, what's next to go? The question mark

Questions:

1. What does Crystal say is happening to the full stop?
2. Why is this happening?
3. In what way has the meaning of the full stop changed in recent years, according to Crystal?
4. What other changes in language has Crystal observed recently according to the article?

Making a Point by David Crystal
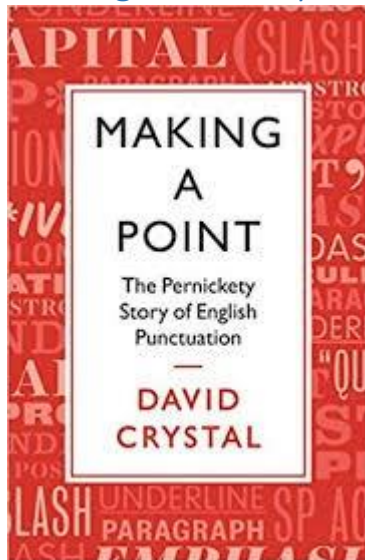
Another of David Crystal's more recent books is Making a Point: The Pernickety Story of English Punctuation. Read the article below in which Crystal talks about his book.

Making a Point – The Story of English Punctuation

Professor David Crystal's new book on punctuation takes a historical approach to a subject that is often hotly debated without drawing on this kind of knowledge. In this article, he gives a flavour of both the 'stories' and the arguments presented in the book.

Imagine this. You are a famous poet unsure of your punctuation, so you decide to write to the greatest scientist you know to ask him to correct the punctuation of a poetry book you're preparing for press.

You've never met him. Moreover, you ask him to send on the corrected manuscript to the printer, without bothering to refer back to you. And he does it.

An unlikely scenario? Not so. This was William Wordsworth, preparing the second edition of the Lyrical Ballads. On 28 July 1800, at the suggestion of Coleridge, he wrote to the chemist Humphry Davy:

You would greatly oblige me by looking over the enclosed poems, and correcting anything you find amiss in the punctuation, a business at which I am ashamed to say I am no adept.

Wordsworth wasn't alone. Thomas Gray in a 1768 letter gives over eight pages of instructions to Foulis Press about how to print his poems, but adds:

please to observe, that I am entirely unversed in the doctrine of stops, whoever therefore shall deign to correct them, will do me a friendly office.

And Byron writes to John Murray in 1813 to ask:

Do you know any body who can stop—I mean point—commas, and so forth? for I am, I fear, a sad hand at your punctuation.

On the other hand, Ben Jonson was scrupulous about punctuation, and insisted on checking every mark for printing accuracy, getting very annoyed if a printer dared to change anything. Keats also took a keen interest in the way his publisher dealt with his punctuation. In an 1818 letter to John Taylor, he expresses his indebtedness for his suggestions:

the comma should be at soberly, and in the other passage the comma should follow quiet...

My favourite Jonsonian is Mark Twain. Here he is in 1889:

Yesterday Mr Hall wrote that the printer's proof-reader was improving my punctuation for me, & I telegraphed orders to have him shot without giving him time to pray.

And in 1897:

I give it up. These printers pay no attention to my punctuation, Nine-tenths of the labor &vexation put upon me by Messrs Spottiswoode & Co consists in annihilating their ignorant & purposeless punctuation & restoring my own. This latest batch, beginning with page 145 & running to page 192 starts out like all that went before it – with my punctuation ignored & their insanities substituted for it. I have read two pages of it – I can't stand any more. If they will restore my punctuation themselves & then send the purified pages to me I will read it for errors of grammar & construction – that is enough to require of an author who writes as legible a hand as I do, & who knows more about punctuation in two minutes than any damned bastard of a proof-reader can learn in two centuries.

Never a calm subject, punctuation.

The more idiosyncratic the writer's punctuational style, the more editors and printers have taken it upon themselves to consistentise it. The way we read Jane Austen now is very little like the way she wrote. Likewise, Emily Dickinson. A 1970 edition prints this stanza following her original:

Our share of night to bear –
Our share of morning –
Our blank in bliss to fill
Our blank in scorning –

A 2000 edition edits it thus:

Our share of night to bear,
Our share of morning,
Our blank in bliss to fill,
Our blank in scorning.

They are worlds apart.

Answering the Question Why?

These are just some of the fascinating stories that I discovered when writing Making a Point. The story of English punctuation goes back over a thousand years – from a time when texts showed no punctuation at all, to the present-day attention to detail – and I was surprised to find that it had never been told in its entirety. A historical approach is essential, because it enables us to do something traditional accounts of punctuation of the Eats, Shoots and Leaves type never did: answer the question 'why'. Why did Wordsworth have such a problem? Why do people get so incensed over apostrophes? One answer lies in early differences of opinion among writers, grammarians, elocutionists, publishers, and printers about the nature of punctuation, and who was responsible for it.

I explore that history in Making a Point. Another lies in the nature of the punctuation system itself. I think people feel they can get to grips with punctuation more readily than with other features of standard English, and so are more prepared to speak out about it. The standard is defined by four main criteria: grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation. In each case, writers of English have to conform to the rules that educated members of society have come to recognise over the past two hundred years or so. Failure to follow these rules is considered an error that needs to be corrected if the usage is to be deemed acceptable.

Of the four, spelling is the most demanding, because every word on a page has to be spelled correctly if our text is to avoid criticism, and there are tens of thousands of words that have to be spelled. We can never get away from spelling. By contrast, it's easy to get away from usage issues to do with grammar and vocabulary. In grammar, there are dozens of points of usage that define the difference between standard and nonstandard – Fowler's Dictionary of Modern English Usage lists most of the - but none of them turn up very often. We might read an entire chapter and never encounter a split infinitive or an instance of none is/are. Points of disputed usage in vocabulary, likewise, are sporadic: if you're concerned about the difference between, say, disinterested and uninterested or decimate meaning other than a tenth, you might read a whole book and never encounter an instance.

Punctuation sits prominently between these two extremes. Like spelling, it is there on every page; yet like grammar and vocabulary, it is sporadic. Many lines of a text will have no punctuation marks at all, and some of the marks may never appear in what you've written. There's not a single exclamation mark in this article, for instance.

Is it So Simple?

Correcting a perceived punctuation error seems like a simple task, therefore – and if everything was like potato's it would be. But there are hidden depths to punctuation, thanks to those differences of opinion, and dangers lurking around corners – which of course is what makes the subject so intriguing. A few years ago, two Americans travelled all over the USA with marker pens correcting every typo they encountered. They added an apostrophe to a notice at the Grand Canyon Heritage Site, and later learned they had committed a federal offence of defacing a national monument. They were fined, received a year of probation, forbidden to enter all National Parks, and were banned from typo correcting. They were lucky. Another outcome would have been six months in jail.

Article Written By: David Crystal is Honorary Professor of Linguistics at the University of Bangor. TheDisappearing Dictionary and Making a Point: the Pernickety Story of English Punctuation were published in 2015.

Questions:

1. Give an example of a writer Crystal mentions with a prescriptive view on punctuation.
2. Why might readers be surprised at what Wordsworth, Thomas Gray and Byron said about punctuating their own work?
3. What does Crystal mean when he refers to attempts to "consistentise" punctuation?
4. Why does Crystal think that punctuation errors sometimes elicit dramatic and extreme responses?

Extended answer

You have read a little about the work of Henry Hitchings and David Crystal. Both Crystal and Hitchings have descriptivist attitudes towards language. What evidence is there for their descriptivist views?

Explain your response in two to three paragraphs.

Extension – Political Correctness as a form of Prescriptivism

Political correctness (PC) is a term used to describe language, ideas, policies, or behaviour seen as seeking to minimize offence to gender, racial, cultural, disabled, aged or other identity groups. Conversely, the term "politically incorrect" is used to refer to language or ideas that may cause offence. Typically political correctness is a movement associated with the political left, as it is seen to advocate social justice for typically marginalised groups. Other people however, have criticised as a movement, arguing that it is draconian and censorious. Research some examples of controversies to do with language and political correctness and collate your ideas in the form of a detailed mind map.

A LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE

BRIDGING COURSE WEEK 2

Page Break

This week in the bridging course we will look at how context affects language. We will look at language change in the news, and the roles of dictionaries and lexicographers and why this is often misunderstood by the mainstream press. We will also look at how historical events effect language – we will exemplify this by looking at very recent work on the impact of the Covid 19 Pandemic on how we use language, including some debates and controversies about this. At the end of this week you will be asked to write an essay. You should bring this into school in September and you teacher will give you feedback on it. 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 NOTE ON NEWSPAPERS AND NEWS MEDIA

A lot of the work we are doing this week is based on news. It is important that you have an awareness of the biases and political standpoints of popular British, American and global news papers and news outlets. Research the following news outlets – where in the world do that come from? Are the tabloids or Broadsheets? Can you explain the difference between the two? Are they left wing or right wing, or neutral? Think about how you consume your news? Do you hear about the news directly, or through social media? Which of the following do you trust the most and the least?

The Times	The Guardian	The Independent	The BBC	The Daily Mail
The Daily Express	The Mirror	The Sun	The Telegraph	CNN
Fox News	The New York Times	Buzzfeed	Breitbart news	Al Jazeera

Now try to fill in the table below for British newspapers only:

	Broadsheet	Tabloid	
		Red Tops	Middle Market Dailies
Left Wing			
Right Wing			
Neutral			

Below is an article from the linguist Lynne Murphy about how to read about Language in the news:

HOW TO READ THE LANGUAGE NEWS – SCEPTICALLY

Professor Lynne Murphy offers six easy steps to help you distinguish between good journalism based on sound linguistic research and fake news when you read media stories about language.

When the editors of Collins Dictionary named fake news their 2017 Word of the Year, they probably weren't thinking about the linguistic news – though they could have been. There's plenty of bad journalism about language out there – and it's been going on for years. My own speciality is looking at how American English is represented in the British press, a particularly fertile area for stereotyping, misunderstanding and misinformation. But it's certainly not the only area.

Language is something the public want to know about. We all use language every day, and we tend to have ideas about English – what we like and don't like about it. The media are very happy to give us stories about English that support or challenge our ideas about how English works. They know it's great clickbait.

Too often, though, the news media present stories about English that misrepresent linguistic research, that interpret it in a way that suits certain prejudices, or that is not research-based at all. I have two bits of good news, though:

There is a lot of good language journalism out there too.

You have the power to cut through the hype and get a clearer idea of what's going on in the English language today. In this article, I give a tool kit for evaluating language stories in the news, so that you can identify quality pieces, find the places to be suspicious, and do something about it when language articles are used to spread misinformation or prejudice.

STEP 1: DON'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER, OR A LANGUAGE STORY BY THE MASTHEAD

Teachers like to tell us to 'consider the source' when evaluating information – and that is good advice. It's probably better to trust a textbook about English written by a linguistics professor than to trust your great aunt (unless she is also a linguistics professor). But when looking at media stories, it's easy to come to the conclusions 'broadsheets good, tabloids bad' and 'conservative press is conservative, liberal press is liberal'. But very often linguistic ideas don't go along with political ideas. I know very liberal people who are still linguistic snobs, for instance. And in my experience, there's plenty of bad linguistic journalism in broadsheets and sometimes good analyses in tabloids.

Take this example: in 2011 the British Library publicised their research on changing pronunciations in the UK – for example which syllable is stressed in controversy (CONtroversy or conTROVersy) and whether garage is garRAZH or GARridge. They concluded that British pronunciation changes have little or nothing to do with American English influence. Americans don't say the newer controversy pronunciation, for example. The Daily Mail's headline for this story was:

How is your English?
Research shows Americanisms AREN'T taking over the British language

But broadsheet the Telegraph ran the story with this on top:

The 'conTROversy' over changing pronunciations
To language purists they might grate, but new ways of pronouncing words are spreading in Britain thanks to the influence of US culture.

It was an irresponsible way to present the story, and it was in the 'quality' newspaper.

STEP 2: READ BEYOND THE HEADLINE

Headlines are usually not written by the author of the article, but by the production editor who's thinking 'how can we get people to click on or share this article?' Their advertising revenue depends on those *clicks* and shares. In cases like the Telegraph headline, it can look like the headline writer didn't read the article. Headlines often exaggerate or use emotive language to garner interest. By the end of a bad headline, damage has already been done. The Telegraph article goes on to quote the researcher saying that the change in the pronunciation of controversy has nothing to do with Americans. But 38% of those who click on links don't read the article. Of those who do read, only half will make it to the end of the article. Plenty of people will share the article on social media using only the headline to support a point they want to make. So, keep reading.

Step 3: Look at the Language

Take a minute and think about this BBC headline from 2017. What assumptions is it starting from? Is it trying to get a specific reaction from the reader?

How Americanisms are Killing the English Language

Look for presuppositions and metaphors. A presupposition is a claim that needs to be assumed to be true in order to interpret another claim. This headline expects you to accept two presuppositions: first, that the English language is being killed – they're not asking whether they're asking how. Another presupposition comes from the 'the' before 'English language': it presumes that there is one and only one thing called 'English language'. Is that true? When they say 'the English language', what assumptions do they expect you to make about that English and who speaks it?

Metaphors are used to frame what's happening in a particular way. But how does that metaphor work? Is the language alive? What would it mean for Americanisms to kill English? If Americanisms can kill, what are they? Disease? Poison? Weapons? Assassins? What other possible metaphors are there for words travelling around the world? British writers sometimes represent the English language as Britain's 'gift' to the world (even though the dominance of English has contributed to the decline or death of many indigenous languages). Another possible metaphor might have Americanisms enriching or revitalising English, rather than killing it. Why was this metaphor chosen?

Step 4: Evaluate the Research

Many media pieces about language are mere opinion, based on a single person's experience of English. The thing to remember about language opinions is that they're generally based on very limited experience of English – from their own lifetime, social class, age group, educational background, etc. Everyone has a right to an opinion, but we (and they) shouldn't mistake opinions for reality. Such articles often cherry-pick their evidence – that is, they use examples that support their point, but don't acknowledge the many examples that don't support it. Beyond the opinion pieces, much language news these days relates to linguistic research, in part because researchers feel pressure to show that their research is relevant by getting it into the news. But research deserves critical caution as well. There's stronger research and weaker research, and news organisations don't always bother to differentiate between them. Consider this from another Telegraph article:

The English language is evolving faster than ever – leaving older Brits literally lost for words, research has revealed. A detailed study has identified the social media language and mobile messaging terms that perplex millions of parents and which point to a future where emoticons may replace the written word. [...] The study was led by the English language expert Professor John Sutherland [and] was commissioned to mark the launch of the Samsung Galaxy S6 phone. The results point to a seismic generational gap in how we use and understand modern informal text speak while also suggesting older style abbreviations and acronyms such as TXT are now so old they are considered antiquated by the younger generation.

It raises a few alarm bells. How is this person an 'English language expert'? In fact, the researcher is a professor of literature, not language or linguistics. The training in doing sociolinguistic research is quite different from that required for literary research. The research has been commissioned by a business that is promoting a new product. Such research does not have the quality-control requirements that go along with publication in an academic journal or research funded by an academic organisation. The company wanted something they could make a headline out of, so its press releases would be picked up as news items. That's a lot cheaper and gets more 'shares' then an advertisement would get. There is no link to the original research report, so you can't check the methodology, the actual findings, or the researcher's interpretations of it.

The evidence doesn't merit the conclusions. They've shifted the discourse in two ways here: from evidence about one very specific kind of language [texting] to a claim about English in general from evidence from now to a historical claim. We can't actually know whether English is changing 'faster than ever' from a study of two generations at one time, and there's no reason to believe that the language of texting is the same as that of conversation or essay writing, for example. The shiftiness in the last point is something to stay very aware of. Articles about dialect-word research often shift into claims about accents. Evidence about spelling might morph into a claim about pronunciation or education. Consider whether there are other possible explanations for the phenomena discussed. For instance, where dialects are becoming less distinct, sometimes television is blamed. But are there other factors at work, such as more people travelling further for work, more people going to university, more people moving away from their place of birth in modern times? If children's spelling is poor, it's a big leap to decide that's because of social media – you also need to check whether children's spelling is always poor at that age (is it a developmental issue) or whether spelling education is done differently now than it used to be.

Step 5: Check Their Facts; Do Your Own Research

If the article links to the original research, have a look at that. It's likely to have more careful conclusions and less misleading language than the media coverage. For instance, one study about changing accents in Britain (mostly due to the influence of major British cities) had one line about communication becoming more casual, possibly because of the influence of social media platforms from the US. A Guardian article on the study led with the claim that

By 2066, dialect words and regional pronunciations will be no more – consumed by a tsunami of Americanisms. There was no way to get from the report to that conclusion – and in fact, the article was arguing that the report didn't know what it was talking about. But to get to the point they wanted to make, the writer was gravely misrepresenting the research.

But sometimes it's the researcher who gets it wrong – and the media reports it anyway. A 2017 news item claimed British words were losing ground to American words. But looking at the original research, I found that one of the 'British' words that British people aren't saying nowadays was 'capsicum'. It's no wonder they didn't find it in Britain, since it's the Australian word for a sweet pepper.

You have the power to check claims made in the media about language, and all you need is access to the internet and a sense of which sources of information are reliable. Check a few dictionaries (just one and you haven't really done your research since different dictionaries might offer different information). The Online Etymology Dictionary is free and has lots of good information about word histories.

Step 6: Do Something About Fake Linguistic News

Language changes; it's inescapable. But a lot of media articles seem intent on creating villains in the story of language change. It's the millennials! The immigrants! The Americans! The teachers! They're who we can blame! These kinds of stories serve political purposes. They are propaganda. The aforementioned study about accents changing in Britain gave rise to a Sun headline

The 'th' sound vanishing from the English language with Cockney and other dialects set to die out by 2066 due to immigration.

That is a seriously problematic interpretation of the research, and it serves the Sun's general antiimmigration stance. It was an unethical headline. And the newspaper deserved to be called out on it. In those kinds of situations, it's not enough for us to know ourselves that it's bad linguistic journalism. When the press demonises groups of people (or their languages) using bad thinking and poor research, we need to stand up. The good news is that in the era of social media, this is easier to do than ever. Contact the media source and point out the errors. Find better articles on the issues to share when you see people sharing the biased articles. Be a good citizen and start conversations about the problems and consequences of bad linguistic research.

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QUESTIONS

1. How do the news media often present stories about English?
2. What does Murphy feel is ironic about the coverage of the American pronunciation in the Daily Mail and The Telegraph?
3. Why does Murphy argue it is important to "read beyond the headline"?
4. Why is the metaphor "American is killing the English language" problematic to Murphy?

5. Why does Murphy argue that the Sun headline in Section 6 is unethical?

Every year, news stories appear in the media about new words being admitted into the dictionaries, or about Word the of the Year. In 2019, for example, the Word of the Year according to Oxford Dictionaries was **climate emergency**.

Look up the WOTY for the last 10 years. Different dictionaries sometimes come to different conclusions. See if you can complete the following table:

	OXFORD DICTIONARIES	COLLINS DICTIONARIES	MERRAIM WEBSTER
2019			
2018			
2017			
2016			
2015			
2014			
2013			
2012			
2011			
2010			

EXTENDED RESPONSE:

Now that you have collected the data above, what do you think it reveals about the relationship between language and society?

DICTIONARIES IN THE NEWS

In 2015 dictionaries made the news again as a group of famous writers wrote in protest against the exclusion of so called "nature words" from the dictionary. Read about this in the Guardan article below:

Oxford Junior Dictionary's replacement of 'natural' words with 21st-century terms sparks outcry

Margaret Atwood and Andrew Motion among authors protesting at dropping definitions of words like 'acorn' and 'buttercup' in favour of 'broadband' and 'cut and paste'

Alison Flood

"A" should be for acorn, "B" for buttercup and "C" for conker, not attachment, blog and chatroom, according to a group of authors including Margaret Atwood and Andrew Motion who are "profoundly alarmed" about the loss of a slew of words associated with the natural world from the Oxford Junior Dictionary, and their replacement with words "associated with the increasingly interior, solitary childhoods of today".

The 28 authors, including Atwood, Motion, Michael Morpurgo and Robert Macfarlane, warn that the decision to cut around 50 words connected with nature and the countryside from the 10,000-entry children's dictionary, is "shocking and poorly considered" in the light of the decline in outdoor play for today's children. They are calling on publisher Oxford University Press to reverse its decision and, if necessary, to bring forward publication of a new edition of the dictionary to do so. The likes of almond, blackberry and crocus first made way for analogue, block graph and celebrity in the Oxford Junior Dictionary in 2007, with protests at the time around the loss of a host of religious words such as bishop, saint and sin. The current 2012 edition maintained the changes, and instead of catkin, cauliflower, chestnut

and clover, today's edition of the dictionary, which is aimed at seven-year-olds starting Key Stage Two, features cut and paste, broadband and analogue.

 "We recognise the need to introduce new words and to make room for them and do not intend to comment in detail on the choice of words added. However it is worrying that in contrast to those taken out, many are associated with the interior, solitary childhoods of today. In light of what is known about the benefits of natural play and connection to nature; and the dangers of their lack, we think the choice of words to be omitted shocking and poorly considered," the authors have written to OUP. "When, in 2007, the OJD made the changes, this connection was understood, but less well publicised than now. The research evidence showing the links between natural play and wellbeing; and between disconnection from nature and social ills, is mounting."

The 28 signatories to the letter, who also include Sara Maitland, Helen Macdonald and Ruth Padel, say their concern is "not just a romantic desire to reflect the rosy memories of our own childhoods onto today's youngsters".

"There is a shocking, proven connection between the decline in natural play and the decline in children's wellbeing," they write, pointing to research which found that a generation ago, 40% of children regularly played in natural areas, compared to 10% today, with a further 40% never playing outdoors. "Obesity, anti-social behaviour, friendlessness and fear are the known consequences," they say.

The campaign has been pulled together by Laurence Rose, who works for the RSPB and who provided a list of words taken out, including hamster, heron, herring, kingfisher, lark, leopard, lobster, magpie, minnow, mussel, newt, otter, ox, oyster and panther.

"Will the removal of these words from the OJD ruin lives? Probably not," say the authors. "But as a symptom of a widely acknowledged problem that is ruining lives, this omission becomes a major issue. The Oxford Dictionaries have a rightful authority and a leading place in cultural life. We believe the OJD should address these issues and that it should seek to help shape children's understanding of the world, not just to mirror its trends."

They tell the publisher "that a deliberate and publicised decision to restore some of the most important nature words would be a tremendous cultural signal and message of support for natural childhood", and ask it to "take that opportunity, and if necessary, bring forward the next edition of the OJD in order to do so".

Macfarlane, whose forthcoming book Landmarks, which looks at the relationship between nature and language, was originally inspired by the OJD's changes, pointed to the response in 2008 from the head of children's dictionaries at OUP, who said the changes had been made because: "When you look back at older versions of dictionaries, there were lots of examples of flowers for instance. That was because many children lived in semi-rural environments and saw the seasons. Nowadays, the environment has changed."

"There's a realism to her response – but also an alarming acceptance of the ideas that children might no longer see the seasons, that all childhoods are urban, that all cities are denatured, and that what exists beyond the city fringe or the edge of the computer screen need not be named," said Macfarlane. "We do not care for what we do not know, and on the whole we do not know what we cannot name. Do we want an alphabet for children that begins 'A is for Acorn, B is for Buttercup, C is for Conker'; or one that begins 'A is for Attachment, B is for Block-Graph, C is for Chatroom'?"

Motion, the former poet laureate, said that "by discarding so many country and landscape-words from their Junior Dictionary, OUP deny children a store of words

that is marvellous for its own sake, but also a vital means of connection and understanding.

"Their defence – that lots of children have no experience of the countryside – is ridiculous. Dictionaries exist to extend our knowledge, as much (or more) as they do to confirm what we already know or half-know," said Motion.

A spokesperson for Oxford University Press said: "All our dictionaries are designed to reflect language as it is used, rather than seeking to prescribe certain words or word usages. We employ extremely rigorous editorial guidelines in determining which words [can] be included in each dictionary, based on several criteria: acknowledging the current frequency of words in daily language of children of that age; corpus analysis; acknowledging commonly misspelled or misused words; and taking curriculum requirements into account.

"The Oxford Junior Dictionary is very much an introduction to language. It includes around 400 words related to nature including badger, bird, caterpillar, daffodil, feather, hedgehog, invertebrate, ladybird, ocean, python, sunflower, tadpole, vegetation, and zebra. Many words that do not appear in the Oxford Junior Dictionary are included in the Oxford Primary Dictionary; a more comprehensive dictionary designed to see students through to age 11. Words included in this title include mistletoe, gerbil, acorn, goldfish, guinea pig, dandelion, starling, fern, willow, conifer, heather, buttercup, sycamore, holly, ivy, and conker.

"We have no firm plans to publish a new edition of the Oxford Junior Dictionary at this stage. However, we welcome feedback on all our dictionaries and feed this into the editorial process."

This article raises interesting questions about the role of dictionaries and whether they should be descriptive or descriptive. Do you think that the authors were correct to contest which words were included in the children's dictionary? Fill in the table below with your ideas.

Yes, the authors were correct to protest about the exclusion of nature words from the children's dictionary	No, the authors were not correct to protest about the exclusion of nature words from the children's dictionary

Below are transcripts from TED talks by two American experts in lexicography, Erin McKean and Anne Curzan, when they talk about their work in producing dictionaries. I have included links to the TED Talks if you would prefer to listen rather than read. Once you have read or listened, answer the questions below.

ANNE CURZAN – WHAT MAKES A WORD REAL?

https://www.ted.com/talks/anne_curzan_what_makes_a_word_real?language=en

I need to start by telling you a little bit about my social life, which I know may not seem relevant, but it is.

When people meet me at parties and they find out that I'm an English professor who specializes in language, they generally have one of two reactions. One set of people look frightened. (Laughter) They often say something like, "Oh, I'd better be careful what I say. I'm sure you'll hear every mistake I make." And then they stop talking. (Laughter) And they wait for me to go away and talk to someone else. The other set of people, their eyes light up, and they say, "You are just the person I want to talk to." And then they tell me about whatever it is they think is going wrong with the English language. (Laughter)

A couple of weeks ago, I was at a dinner party and the man to my right started telling me about all the ways that the Internet is degrading the English language. He brought up Facebook, and he said, "To defriend? I mean, is that even a real word?"

I want to pause on that question: What makes a word real? My dinner companion and I both know what the verb "defriend" means, so when does a new word like "defriend" become real? Who has the authority to make those kinds of official decisions about words, anyway? Those are the questions I want to talk about today.

I think most people, when they say a word isn't real, what they mean is, it doesn't appear in a standard dictionary. That, of course, raises a host of other questions, including, who writes dictionaries?

Before I go any further, let me clarify my role in all of this. I do not write dictionaries. I do, however, collect new words much the way dictionary editors do, and the great thing about being a historian of the English language is that I get to call this "research." When I teach the history of the English language, I require that students teach me two new slang words before I will begin class. Over the years, I have learned some great new slang this way, including "hangry," which -- (Applause) — which is when you are cranky or angry because you are hungry, and "adorkable," which is when you are adorable in kind of a dorky way, clearly, terrific words that fill important gaps in the English language. (Laughter) But how real are they if we use them primarily as slang and they don't yet appear in a dictionary?

With that, let's turn to dictionaries. I'm going to do this as a show of hands: How many of you still regularly refer to a dictionary, either print or online? Okay, so that looks like most of you. Now, a second question. Again, a show of hands: How many of you have ever looked to see who edited the dictionary you are using? Okay, many fewer. At some level, we know that there are human hands behind dictionaries, but we're really not sure who those hands belong to. I'm actually fascinated by this. Even the most critical people out there tend not to be very critical about dictionaries, not distinguishing among them and not asking a whole lot of questions about who edited them. Just think about the phrase "Look it up in the dictionary," which suggests that all dictionaries are exactly the same. Consider the library here on campus, where you go into the reading room, and there is a large, unabridged dictionary up on a pedestal in this place of honor and respect lying open so we can go stand before it to get answers.

Now, don't get me wrong, dictionaries are fantastic resources, but they are human and they are not timeless. I'm struck as a teacher that we tell students to critically question every text they read, every website they visit, except dictionaries, which we tend to treat as un-authored, as if they came from nowhere to give us answers about what words really mean. Here's the thing: If you ask dictionary editors, what they'll tell you is they're just trying to keep up with us as we change the language. They're watching what we say and what we write and trying to figure out what's going to stick and what's not going to stick. They have to gamble, because they want to appear cutting edge and catch the words that are going to make it, such as LOL, but they don't want to appear faddish and include the words that aren't going to make it, and I think a word that they're watching right now is YOLO, you only live once.

Now I get to hang out with dictionary editors, and you might be surprised by one of the places where we hang out. Every January, we go to the American Dialect Society annual meeting, where among other things, we vote on the word of the year. There are about 200 or 300 people who come, some of the best known linguists in the United States. To give you a sense of the flavor of the meeting, it occurs right before happy hour. Anyone who comes can vote. The most important rule is that you can vote with only one hand. In the past, some of the winners have been "tweet" in 2009 and "hashtag" in 2012. "Chad" was the word of the year in the year 2000, because who knew what a chad was before 2000, and "WMD" in 2002.

Now, we have other categories in which we vote too, and my favourite category is most creative word of the year. Past winners in this category have included "recombobulation area," which is at the Milwaukee Airport after security, where you can recombobulate. (Laughter) You can put your belt back on, put your computer back in your bag. And then my all-time favourite word at this vote, which is "multi-slacking." (Laughter) And multi-slacking is the act of having multiple windows up on your screen so it looks like you're working when you're actually goofing around on the web. (Laughter) (Applause)

Will all of these words stick? Absolutely not. And we have made some questionable choices, for example in 2006 when the word of the year was "Plutoed," to mean demoted. (Laughter) But some of the past winners now seem completely unremarkable, such as "app" and "e" as a prefix, and "google" as a verb.

Now, a few weeks before our vote, Lake Superior State University issues its list of banished words for the year. What is striking about this is that there's actually often quite a lot of overlap between their list and the list that we are considering for words of the year, and this is because we're noticing the same thing. We're noticing words that are coming into prominence. It's really a question of attitude. Are you bothered by language fads and language change, or do you find it fun, interesting, something worthy of study as part of a living language?

The list by Lake Superior State University continues a fairly long tradition in English of complaints about new words. So here is Dean Henry Alford in 1875, who was very concerned that "desirability" is really a terrible word. In 1760, Benjamin Franklin wrote a letter to David Hume giving up the word "colonize" as bad.

Over the years, we've also seen worries about new pronunciations. Here is Samuel Rogers in 1855 who is concerned about some fashionable pronunciations that he finds offensive, and he says "as if contemplate were not bad enough, balcony makes me sick." (Laughter) The word is borrowed in from Italian and it was pronounced bal-COE-nee.

These complaints now strike us as quaint, if not downright adorkable -- (Laughter) -- but here's the thing: we still get quite worked up about language change. I have an entire file in my office of newspaper articles which express concern about illegitimate words that should not have been included in the dictionary, including "LOL" when it got into the Oxford English Dictionary and "defriend" when it got into the Oxford American Dictionary. I also have articles expressing concern about "invite" as a noun, "impact" as a verb, because only teeth can be impacted, and "incentivize" is described as "boorish, bureaucratic misspeak."

Now, it's not that dictionary editors ignore these kinds of attitudes about language. They try to provide us some guidance about words that are considered slang or informal or offensive, often through usage labels, but they're in something of a bind, because they're trying to describe what we do, and they know that we often go to dictionaries to get information about how we should use a word well or appropriately. In response, the American Heritage Dictionaries include usage notes. Usage notes tend to occur with words that are troublesome in one way, and one of the ways that they can be troublesome is that they're changing meaning. Now usage notes involve very human decisions, and I think, as dictionary users, we're often not as aware of those human decisions as we should be. To show you what I mean, we'll look at an example, but before we do, I want to explain what the dictionary editors are trying to deal with in this usage note.

Think about the word "peruse" and how you use that word. I would guess many of you are thinking of skim, scan, reading quickly. Some of you may even have some walking involved, because you're perusing grocery store shelves, or something like that. You might be surprised to learn that if you look in most standard dictionaries, the first definition will be to read carefully, or pore over. American Heritage has that as the first definition. They then have, as the second definition, skim, and next to that, they say "usage problem." (Laughter) And then they include a usage note, which is worth looking at.

So here's the usage note: "Peruse has long meant 'to read thoroughly'... But the word is often used more loosely, to mean simply 'to read.'... Further extension of the word to mean 'to glance over, skim,' has traditionally been considered an error, but our ballot results suggest that it is becoming somewhat more acceptable. When asked about the sentence, 'I only had a moment to peruse the manual quickly,' 66 percent of the [Usage] Panel found it unacceptable in 1988, 58 percent in 1999, and 48 percent in 2011."

Ah, the Usage Panel, that trusted body of language authorities who is getting more lenient about this. Now, what I hope you're thinking right now is, "Wait, who's on the Usage Panel? And what should I do with their pronouncements?" If you look in the front matter of American Heritage Dictionaries, you can actually find the names of the people on the Usage Panel. But who looks at the front matter of dictionaries? There are about 200 people on the Usage Panel. They include academicians, journalists, creative writers. There's a Supreme Court justice on it and a few linguists. As of 2005, the list includes me. (Applause)

Here's what we can do for you. We can give you a sense of the range of opinions about contested usage. That is and should be the extent of our authority. We are not a language academy. About once a year, I get a ballot that asks me about whether new uses, new pronunciations, new meanings, are acceptable.

Now here's what I do to fill out the ballot. I listen to what other people are saying and writing. I do not listen to my own likes and dislikes about the English language. I will be honest with you: I do not like the word "impactful," but that is neither here nor there in terms of whether "impactful" is becoming common usage and becoming more acceptable in written prose. So to be responsible, what I do is go look at usage, which often involves going to look at online databases such as Google Books. Well, if you look for "impactful" in Google Books, here is what you find. Well, it sure looks like "impactful" is proving useful for a certain number of writers, and has become more and more useful over the last 20 years.

Now, there are going to be changes that all of us don't like in the language. There are going to be changes where you think, "Really? Does the language have to change that way?" What I'm saying is, we should be less

quick to decide that that change is terrible, we should be less quick to impose our likes and dislikes about words on other people, and we should be entirely reluctant to think that the English language is in trouble. It's not. It is rich and vibrant and filled with the creativity of the speakers who speak it. In retrospect, we think it's fascinating that the word "nice" used to mean silly, and that the word "decimate" used to mean to kill one in every 10. (Laughter) We think that Ben Franklin was being silly to worry about "notice" as a verb. Well, you know what? We're going to look pretty silly in a hundred years for worrying about "impact" as a verb and "invite" as a noun. The language is not going to change so fast that we can't keep up. Language just doesn't work that way. I hope that what you can do is find language change not worrisome but fun and fascinating, just the way dictionary editors do. I hope you can enjoy being part of the creativity that is continually remaking our language and keeping it robust.

So how does a word get into a dictionary? It gets in because we use it and we keep using it, and dictionary editors are paying attention to us. If you're thinking, "But that lets all of us decide what words mean," I would say, "Yes it does, and it always has." Dictionaries are a wonderful guide and resource, but there is no objective dictionary authority out there that is the final arbiter about what words mean. If a community of speakers is using a word and knows what it means, it's real. That word might be slangy, that word might be informal, that word might be a word that you think is illogical or unnecessary, but that word that we're using, that word is real.

Thank you.

ERIN MCKEAN – THE JOY OF LEXICOGRAPHY

https://www.ted.com/talks/erin_mckean_the_joy_of_lexicography?language=en

Now, have any of y'all ever looked up this word? You know, in a dictionary? (Laughter) Yeah, that's what I thought. How about this word? Here, I'll show it to you. Lexicography: the practice of compiling dictionaries. Notice -- we're very specific -- that word "compile." The dictionary is not carved out of a piece of granite, out of a lump of rock. It's made up of lots of little bits. It's little discrete -- that's spelled D-I-S-C-R-E-T-E -- bits. And those bits are words.

Now one of the perks of being a lexicographer -- besides getting to come to TED -- is that you get to say really fun words, like lexicographical. Lexicographical has this great pattern: it's called a double dactyl. And just by saying double dactyl, I've sent the geek needle all the way into the red. (Laughter) (Applause) But "lexicographical" is the same pattern as "higgledy-piggledy." Right? It's a fun word to say, and I get to say it a lot. Now, one of the non-perks of being a lexicographer is that people don't usually have a kind of warm, fuzzy, snuggly image of the dictionary. Right? Nobody hugs their dictionaries. But what people really often think about the dictionary is, they think more like this. Just to let you know, I do not have a lexicographical whistle. But people think that my job is to let the good words make that difficult left-hand turn into the dictionary, and keep the bad words out.

But the thing is, I don't want to be a traffic cop. For one thing, I just do not do uniforms. And for another, deciding what words are good and what words are bad is actually not very easy. And it's not very fun. And when parts of your job are not easy or fun, you kind of look for an excuse not to do them. So if I had to think of some kind of occupation as a metaphor for my work, I would much rather be a fisherman. I want to throw my big net into the deep, blue ocean of English and see what marvellous creatures I can drag up from the bottom. But why do people want me to direct traffic, when I would much rather go fishing? Well, I blame the Queen. Why do I blame the Queen? Well, first of all, I blame the Queen because it's funny. But secondly, I blame the Queen because dictionaries have really not changed.

Our idea of what a dictionary is has not changed since her reign. The only thing that Queen Victoria would not be amused by in modern dictionaries is our inclusion of the F-word, which has happened in American dictionaries since 1965. So, there's this guy, right? Victorian era. James Murray, first editor of the Oxford English Dictionary. I do not have that hat. I wish I had that hat. So he's really responsible for a lot of what we consider modern in dictionaries today. When a guy who looks like that, in that hat, is the face of modernity, you have a problem. And so, James Murray could get a job on any dictionary today. There'd be virtually no learning curve.

And of course, a few of us are saying: okay, computers! Computers! What about computers? The thing about computers is, I love computers. I mean, I'm a huge geek, I love computers. I would go on a hunger strike before I let them take away Google Book Search from me. But computers don't do much else other than speed up the process of compiling dictionaries. They don't change the end result. Because what a dictionary is, is it's Victorian design merged with a little bit of modern propulsion. It's steampunk. What we have is an electric velocipede. You know, we have Victorian design with an engine on it. That's all! The design has not changed. And OK, what about online dictionaries, right? Online dictionaries must be different. This is the Oxford English Dictionary Online, one of the best online dictionaries. This is my favorite word, by the way. Erinaceous:

pertaining to the hedgehog family; of the nature of a hedgehog. Very useful word. So, look at that. Online dictionaries right now are paper thrown up on a screen. This is flat. Look how many links there are in the actual entry: two! Right? Those little buttons, I had them all expanded except for the date chart. So there's not very much going on here. There's not a lot of clickiness. And in fact, online dictionaries replicate almost all the problems of print, except for searchability. And when you improve searchability, you actually take away the one advantage of print, which is serendipity. Serendipity is when you find things you weren't looking for, because finding what you are looking for is so damned difficult.

So -- (Laughter) (Applause) -- now, when you think about this, what we have here is a ham butt problem. Does everyone know the ham butt problem? Woman's making a ham for a big, family dinner. She goes to cut the butt off the ham and throw it away, and she looks at this piece of ham and she's like, "This is a perfectly good piece of ham. Why am I throwing this away?" She thought, "Well, my mom always did this." So she calls up mom, and she says, "Mom, why'd you cut the butt off the ham, when you're making a ham?" She says, "I don't know, my mom always did it!" So they call grandma, and grandma says, "My pan was too small!" (Laughter) So, it's not that we have good words and bad words. We have a pan that's too small! You know, that ham butt is delicious! There's no reason to throw it away. The bad words -- see, when people think about a place and they don't find a place on the map, they think, "This map sucks!" When they find a nightspot or a bar, and it's not in the guidebook, they're like, "Ooh, this place must be cool! It's not in the guidebook." When they find a word that's not in the dictionary, they think, "This must be a bad word." Why? It's more likely to be a bad dictionary. Why are you blaming the ham for being too big for the pan? So, you can't get a smaller ham. The English language is as big as it is.

So, if you have a ham butt problem, and you're thinking about the ham butt problem, the conclusion that it leads you to is inexorable and counterintuitive: paper is the enemy of words. How can this be? I mean, I love books. I really love books. Some of my best friends are books. But the book is not the best shape for the dictionary. Now they're going to think "Oh, boy. People are going to take away my beautiful, paper dictionaries?" No. There will still be paper dictionaries. When we had cars -- when cars became the dominant mode of transportation, we didn't round up all the horses and shoot them. You know, there're still going to be paper dictionaries, but it's not going to be the dominant dictionary. The book-shaped dictionary is not going to be the only shape dictionaries come in. And it's not going to be the prototype for the shapes dictionaries come in.

So, think about it this way: if you've got an artificial constraint, artificial constraints lead to arbitrary distinctions and a skewed worldview. What if biologists could only study animals that made people go, "Aww." Right? What if we made aesthetic judgments about animals, and only the ones we thought were cute were the ones that we could study? We'd know a whole lot about charismatic megafauna, and not very much about much else. And I think this is a problem. I think we should study all the words, because when you think about words, you can make beautiful expressions from very humble parts. Lexicography is really more about material science. We are studying the tolerances of the materials that you use to build the structure of your expression: your speeches and your writing. And then, often people say to me, "Well, OK, how do I know that this word is real?" They think, "OK, if we think words are the tools that we use to build the expressions of our thoughts, how can you say that screwdrivers are better than hammers? How can you say that a sledgehammer is better than a ball-peen hammer?" They're just the right tools for the job.

And so people say to me, "How do I know if a word is real?" You know, anybody who's read a children's book knows that love makes things real. If you love a word, use it. That makes it real. Being in the dictionary is an artificial distinction. It doesn't make a word any more real than any other way. If you love a word, it becomes real. So if we're not worrying about directing traffic, if we've transcended paper, if we are worrying less about control and more about description, then we can think of the English language as being this beautiful mobile. And any time one of those little parts of the mobile changes, is touched, any time you touch a word, you use it in a new context, you give it a new connotation, you verb it, you make the mobile move. You didn't break it. It's just in a new position, and that new position can be just as beautiful.

Now, if you're no longer a traffic cop -- the problem with being a traffic cop is there can only be so many traffic cops in any one intersection, or the cars get confused. Right? But if your goal is no longer to direct the traffic, but maybe to count the cars that go by, then more eyeballs are better. You can ask for help! If you ask for help, you get more done. And we really need help. Library of Congress: 17 million books, of which half are in English. If only one out of every 10 of those books had a word that's not in the dictionary in it, that would be equivalent to more than two unabridged dictionaries.

And I find an un-dictionaried word -- a word like "un-dictionaried," for example -- in almost every book I read. What about newspapers? Newspaper archive goes back to 1759, 58.1 million newspaper pages. If only one in 100 of those pages had an un-dictionaried word on it, it would be an entire other OED. That's 500,000 more

words. So that's a lot. And I'm not even talking about magazines. I'm not talking about blogs -- and I find more new words on BoingBoing in a given week than I do Newsweek or Time. There's a lot going on there.

And I'm not even talking about polysemy, which is the greedy habit some words have of taking more than one meaning for themselves. So if you think of the word "set," a set can be a badger's burrow, a set can be one of the pleats in an Elizabethan ruff, and there's one numbered definition in the OED. The OED has 33 different numbered definitions for set. Tiny, little word, 33 numbered definitions. One of them is just labelled "miscellaneous technical senses." Do you know what that says to me? That says to me, it was Friday afternoon and somebody wanted to go down the pub. (Laughter) That's a lexicographical cop out, to say, "miscellaneous technical senses."

So, we have all these words, and we really need help! And the thing is, we could ask for help -- asking for help's not that hard. I mean, lexicography is not rocket science. See, I just gave you a lot of words and a lot of numbers, and this is more of a visual explanation. If we think of the dictionary as being the map of the English language, these bright spots are what we know about, and the dark spots are where we are in the dark. If that was the map of all the words in American English, we don't know very much. And we don't even know the shape of the language. If this was the dictionary -- if this was the map of American English -- look, we have a kind of lumpy idea of Florida, but there's no California! We're missing California from American English. We just don't know enough, and we don't even know that we're missing California. We don't even see that there's a gap on the map.

So again, lexicography is not rocket science. But even if it were, rocket science is being done by dedicated amateurs these days. You know? It can't be that hard to find some words! So, enough scientists in other disciplines are really asking people to help, and they're doing a good job of it. For instance, there's eBird, where amateur birdwatchers can upload information about their bird sightings. And then, ornithologists can go and help track populations, migrations, etc.

And there's this guy, Mike Oates. Mike Oates lives in the U.K. He's a director of an electroplating company. He's found more than 140 comets. He's found so many comets, they named a comet after him. It's kind of out past Mars. It's a hike. I don't think he's getting his picture taken there anytime soon. But he found 140 comets without a telescope. He downloaded data from the NASA SOHO satellite, and that's how he found them. If we can find comets without a telescope, shouldn't we be able to find words?

Now, y'all know where I'm going with this. Because I'm going to the Internet, which is where everybody goes. And the Internet is great for collecting words, because the Internet's full of collectors. And this is a little-known technological fact about the Internet, but the Internet is actually made up of words and enthusiasm. And words and enthusiasm actually happen to be the recipe for lexicography. Isn't that great? So there are a lot of really good word-collecting sites out there right now, but the problem with some of them is that they're not scientific enough. They show the word, but they don't show any context. Where did it come from? Who said it? What newspaper was it in? What book?

Because a word is like an archaeological artifact. If you don't know the provenance or the source of the artifact, it's not science, it's a pretty thing to look at. So a word without its source is like a cut flower. You know, it's pretty to look at for a while, but then it dies. It dies too fast. So, this whole time I've been saying, "The dictionary, the dictionary, the dictionary, the dictionary." Not "a dictionary," or "dictionaries." And that's because, well, people use the dictionary to stand for the whole language. They use it synecdochically. And one of the problems of knowing a word like "synecdochically" is that you really want an excuse to say "synecdochically." This whole talk has just been an excuse to get me to the point where I could say "synecdochically" to all of you. So I'm really sorry. But when you use a part of something -- like the dictionary is a part of the language, or a flag stands for the United States, it's a symbol of the country -- then you're using it synecdochically. But the thing is, we could make the dictionary the whole language. If we get a bigger pan, then we can put all the words in. We can put in all the meanings. Doesn't everyone want more meaning in their lives? And we can make the dictionary not just be a symbol of the language -- we can make it be the whole language.

You see, what I'm really hoping for is that my son, who turns seven this month -- I want him to barely remember that this is the form factor that dictionaries used to come in. This is what dictionaries used to look like. I want him to think of this kind of dictionary as an eight-track tape. It's a format that died because it wasn't useful enough. It wasn't really what people needed. And the thing is, if we can put in all the words, no longer have that artificial distinction between good and bad, we can really describe the language like scientists. We can leave the aesthetic judgments to the writers and the speakers. If we can do that, then I can spend all my time fishing, and I don't have to be a traffic cop anymore. Thank you very much for your kind attention.

1. What does Curzan feel is unusual or problematic about how we as readers view dictionaries?
2. In Curzan's opinion, what makes a word real?
3. McKean uses the metaphors of a traffic cop and a fisherman to describe her role – which metaphor does she prefer and why?
4. What does McKean mean by the ham butt problem?
5. In Mckean's opinion, what makes a word real?

LANGUAGE IN THE NEWS – THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS IN OUR LANGUAGE

Already, news articles have started to emerge about the impact of the pandemic on our language choices. Below is a blog from the Oxford English Dictionaries website about the impact of Covid 19 on our language.

SOCIAL CHANGE AND LINGUISTIC CHANGE: THE LANGUAGE OF COVID-19

It is a rare experience for lexicographers to observe an exponential rise in usage of a single word in a very short period of time, and for that word to come overwhelmingly to dominate global discourse, even to the exclusion of most other topics. Covid-19, a shortening of coronavirus disease 2019, and its various manifestations has done just that. As the spread of the disease has altered the lives of billions of people, it has correspondingly ushered in a new vocabulary to the general populace encompassing specialist terms from the fields of epidemiology and medicine, new acronyms, and words to express the societal imperatives of imposed isolation and distancing. It is a consistent theme of lexicography that great social change brings great linguistic change, and that has never been truer than in this current global crisis.

The OED is updating its coverage to take account of these developments, and as something of a departure, this update comes outside of our usual quarterly publication cycle. But these are extraordinary times, and OED lexicographers, who like many others are all working from home (WFH, first attested as a noun in 1995 and as

a verb in 2001), are tracking the development of the language of the pandemic and offering a linguistic and historical context to their usage.

Some of the terms with which we have become so familiar over the past few weeks through the news, social media, and government briefings and edicts have been around for years (many date from the nineteenth century), but they have achieved new and much wider usage to describe the situation in which we currently find ourselves. Self-isolation (recorded from 1834) and self-isolating (1841), now used to describe self-imposed isolation to prevent catching or transmitting an infectious disease, were in the 1800s more often applied to countries which chose to detach themselves politically and economically from the rest of the world.

As well as these nineteenth century terms put to modern use, more recent epidemics and especially the current crisis have seen the appearance of genuinely new words, phrases, combinations, and abbreviations which were not necessarily coined for the coronavirus epidemic, but have seen far wider usage since it began. Infodemic (a portmanteau word from information and epidemic) is the outpouring of often unsubstantiated media and online information relating to a crisis. The term was coined in 2003 for the SARS epidemic, but has also been used to describe the current proliferation of news around coronavirus. The phrase shelter-in-place, a protocol instructing people to find a place of safety in the location they are occupying until the all clear is sounded, was devised as an instruction for the public in 1976 in the event of a nuclear or terrorist attack, but has now been adapted as advice to people to stay indoors to protect themselves and others from coronavirus. Social distancing, first used in 1957, was originally an attitude rather than a physical term, referring to an aloofness or deliberate attempt to distance oneself from others socially—now we all understand it as keeping a physical distance between ourselves and others to avoid infection. And an elbow bump, along with a hand slap and high five, was in its earliest manifestation (1981) a way of conveying celebratory pleasure to a teammate, rather than a means of avoiding hand-touching when greeting a friend, colleague, or stranger.

New and previously unfamiliar abbreviations have also taken their place in our everyday vocabulary, and these too appear in the latest OED release. While WFH (working from home) dates from 1995 as mentioned previously, the abbreviation was known to very few before it became a way of life for so many of us. PPE is now almost universally recognized as personal protective (or protection) equipment—an abbreviation dating from 1977 but formerly probably restricted to healthcare and emergency professionals. The full phrase – personal protective equipment – dates from as far back as 1934.

As a historical dictionary, the OED is already full of words that show us how our forebears grappled linguistically with the epidemics they witnessed and experienced. The earliest of these appeared in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the great plague of 1347-50 and its follow-ups, which killed an estimated 40-60 per cent of the population of Europe, must surely have been an ever-present memory and fear. Pestilence, 'a fatal epidemic or disease', was borrowed from French and Latin, and first appears in Wycliffe's bible of a1382, not long after this first great devastation. The related term pest (from French peste) appeared shortly afterwards. Our weakened uses of pest—an insect that infects crops, an annoying person— stem from this original plague usage. Pox (from the plural of pock, denoting a pustule or the mark it leaves) appeared in 1476 as a term applied to a number of virulently contagious diseases, most especially the dreaded smallpox (first recorded in the 1560s).

It was the great plagues of the seventeenth century, however, that opened the floodgates for the entry into English of words to describe the experience of epidemic disease. Epidemic and pandemic both appeared in the seventeenth century; the Black Plague (so called from the black pustules that appeared on the skin of the victims) was first used in the early 1600s (although its more familiar synonym Black Death, surprisingly, did not appear until 1755). It was the seventeenth-century plague that saw a whole village in Derbyshire choose to self-isolate or self-quarantine; the adjective self-quarantined was first applied, in a historical description from 1878, to the story of the heroic population of Eyam, which isolated itself in 1665-6 to avoid infecting the surrounding villages, and lost around a third of its population as a consequence.

As the world expanded, so too did the spread of diseases and their vocabulary. Yellow fever appeared in 1738, and the so-called Spanish influenza in 1890 (reduced to Spanish flu during the great epidemic of 1918). Poliomyelitis appeared in 1878 (shortened to polio in 1911), although the epidemic that attacked children especially and struck fear into the heart of parents was at its worst just after WWII. Recent decades have also seen their share of linguistic coinages for epidemics and pandemics. AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) appeared in 1982, and SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) in 2003. The coronaviruses themselves (so-called because they resemble the solar corona) were first described as long ago as 1968 in a paper in Nature, but before 2020 few people had heard of the term beyond the scientists studying them.

As we continue to monitor our in-house corpora and other language data to spot new words and senses associated with the pandemic and assess the frequency of their usage, the OED will keep updating its coverage to help tell the story of these times that will inevitably become embedded in our language.

ESSAY TASK:

How has the coronavirus crisis impacted upon your own language use. Collect as many examples as you can about how this pandemic has onfluenced your language? Have you acquired new words or do you use words in a different way. For example ,I sent a message to my family last Thursday which read "Zoom after Clap" – I do not think anyone would have known what I was talking about a few weeks ago! Once you have a detailed mind map, write up the account of how Covid 19 has changed the language of you and those around you.

EXTENSION

The current crisis has also triggered some debates about language use. For example, when Foreign Secretary Dominc Raab described Boris Johnson, who was suffering from the virus, as "a fighter". This is covered in the BBC article below:

CORONAVIRUS: WHY DO WE TALK ABOUT 'FIGHTING' ILLNESS?

By Justin Parkinson

Political reporter, BBC News
9 April 2020

Being tough - or a fighter - is often said to be an asset when someone has a serious illness, such as coronavirus, but is this sort of language helpful or misleading? "I'm confident he'll pull through," said Dominic Raab, as he addressed the nation following Boris Johnson being taken into intensive care, "because if there's one thing I know about this prime minister, he's a fighter".

The foreign secretary, Mr Johnson's de facto deputy as prime minister, has come in for criticism for his choice of language. It's not possible for a patient to "fight" a virus, as if it is a visible, human adversary, it's argued - that's the job of technology and medics. And, if someone succumbs to it it, does this mean they have lost their "battle"?

There was further reaction when Health Secretary Matt Hancock echoed Mr Raab's words. Angharad Rudkin, a clinical psychologist at the University of Southampton, feels Mr Raab's critics have a point. 'Battle terminology' is most helpful when people are fully in control of outcomes when in a challenging or adverse situation," she says. "For example, 'battling' through work or 'battling' your way through the traffic. It becomes less helpful when a person has little control over the outcome." With coronavirus, unlike military conflict, the enemy is invisible and inside people. Instead of taking up arms, the public is being asked to undergo the tedium and privations of self-isolation and social distancing to prevent its spread.In his address to the nation on 23 March, setting out further restrictions, Mr Johnson himself used distinctly military language, saying that "in this fight we can be in no doubt that each and every one of us is directly enlisted. Each and every one of us is now obliged to join together".

A few weeks earlier, he said: "Crucially, we must not forget what we can all do to fight this virus, which is to wash our hands with soap and hot water for the length of time it takes to sing Happy Birthday twice." But the PM was calling for a "fight" against coronavirus as a whole, not asking patients - rather than doctors or nurses - to "take it on" after being infected. "Not everyone is up for the fight," says Dr Rudkin. "Not everyone can fight. We need to be understanding of this and not judge others. Some may fight or battle bravely and still not 'win', but we need to see this as being more about the power of the attacker - the virus - than the fragility of the defender."

In 2016, the charity Breast Cancer Now raised concerns over the use of the expression "battling with cancer", questioning its accuracy as a description of what a patient goes through. Instead, it suggested cutting out "emotive language" and using "simple, factual" alternatives. These included "living with cancer", "recovering from cancer treatment" and "having treatment for cancer". Mr Raab's detractors might suggest he does the same when referring to Mr Johnson's coronavirus.

But language cannot be seen entirely outside its historical context, as politicians are well aware. Coronavirus is often referred to as the biggest crisis facing the UK since World War Two. Famously, following the evacuation of Dunkirk in June 1940, Prime Minister Winston Churchill delivered a House of Commons speech warning against complacency and of a long struggle ahead. In its best-known passage, he promised: "We shall fight on the beaches. We shall fight on the landing grounds. We shall fight in the fields and in the streets. We shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender."

Boris Johnson is said to be responding to treatment. Could Mr Raab, a former boxer and a black belt in karate, be tapping into Churchillian rhetoric himself? The foreign secretary's comments, while arguably dubious in the strict medical sense, have the advantage of offering "plain English" that "people quickly understand" during a fast-moving crisis, says Pete Davies, managing director of Manchester-based Sugar PR, who advises corporate clients on crisis management and communications. "If public relations teams and political communicators took into account the views of the language police on Twitter, there'd be no time to get vital life-saving messages across," he adds.   "The fact is, this is a fight that collectively we simply must win. Politicians shouldn't shy away from that term."

On an individual basis, the Centre for Perioperative Care has recommended people get as physically fit as possible to reduce the possibility of becoming seriously ill with coronavirus - the same advice it gives for pre-operation patients. This could be interpreted as "battle-hardening" oneself for the tribulations ahead, but that is not the same as "fighting" the disease once it is contracted. As for Mr Raab's words, says Dr Rudkin, while they are "flawed" in a strict medical sense, the use of combat imagery can "provide more comfort than anxiety" because it gives a sense of empowerment. The idea of the prime minister catching and getting over coronavirus could extend the feeling of a collective struggle. "The important thing is that we as a whole planet are in this together," Dr Rudkin says, "and there is a huge amount of strength that comes from knowing that."

Below is a related article about the "battle" metaphor when used in relation to cancer patients:

METAPHORS FOR CANCER, AND WHY THEY MATTER
PROFESSOR ELENA SEMINO HAS BEEN RESEARCHING THE METAPHORS PEOPLE USE TO DESCRIBE THEIR OWN AND OTHERS' EXPERIENCE OF CANCER. HERE SHE SHARES SOME OF HER FINDINGS.

'She lost her brave fight.' If anyone mutters those words after my death, wherever I am, I will curse them.

This is how Kate Granger, a doctor in her early 30s with advanced cancer, rejects the 'fight' metaphor that is often used for people who have died of cancer. Later in the same 2014 article for the Guardian newspaper, she adds:

I do not want to feel a failure about something beyond my control. I refuse to believe my death will be because I didn't battle hard enough. […] After all, cancer has arisen from within my own body, from my own cells. To fight it would be 'waging a war' on myself.

At Lancaster University, we have studied the metaphors that cancer patients use to talk about their experiences, in interviews and contributions to online forums.

Why do Metaphors Matter?

Metaphor involves talking and, potentially, thinking about one thing in terms of another, on the basis of some perception of similarity. For example, being ill and fighting are different things, but we talk about the former in terms of the latter because both are

difficult and potentially life-threatening. Metaphors matter because different metaphors 'frame' the topic in different ways, and these framings can affect our perception of ourselves and of our experiences. In the 'fight' metaphor, for example, the illness itself is usually cast as the enemy; getting better corresponds to winning; and not getting better corresponds to defeat. This framing can be quite negative for patients, as Kate Granger points out: it can be distressing for cancer sufferers to think that they have an 'enemy' inside them; even worse, if lack of recovery is seen as losing a battle, patients may feel guilty about something that is not their
fault. The shortcomings of a particular metaphor can be overcome by using a different metaphor. While suffering from breast cancer in 2005, journalist Melanie McFadyean suggested an alternative, in a piece for the Observer magazine:

Why should people with cancer be expected to take up arms? It is better to see cancer as a journey. Everyone says that being positive helps you to come through, and being positive during a journey seems easier to me than being positive during a war in which the enemy is all around you.

The 'journey' metaphor for cancer frames the whole experience very differently: it casts the illness as a road to travel on, or as a travelling companion, rather than an opponent; and it does not involve the idea that not getting better is a failure on the part of the patient. It is therefore not surprising that the 2007 NHS Cancer Reform Strategy includes many references to the patient's cancer 'journey', but no instances of 'battle' or 'war'. But do cancer patients actually use 'fight' and/or 'journey' metaphors, and, if so, how?

Cancer Patients' Use of Metaphors

In our data, patients use both 'fight' and 'journey' metaphors fairly regularly: both types of metaphors occur, on average, between once and twice per 1,000 words. An example of each is given below:

I have kind of prepared myself for a battle with cancer.
We are on the bowel cancer journey.

In our study we have found plenty of evidence of the possible negative consequences of 'fight' metaphors. For example, a patient writes:

I feel such a failure that I am not winning this battle.

Here the metaphor clearly undermines the patient's self esteem, at a time when she has many other negative emotions to deal with. Another war-related metaphor that can contribute to emotional distress is used by some patients who expect their cancer to return:

I am a walking time bomb.

This metaphor frames the possible future recurrence of the illness as totally unpredictable, irreversible and immediately devastating for the patient. On the other hand, for some patients at least, 'fight' metaphors seem to function as a source of pride, motivation and a positive sense of self:

Cancer and the fighting of it is something to be very proud of.
My consultants recognised that I was a born fighter.

I don't intend to give up; I don't intend to give in. No I want to fight it. I don't want it to beat me,
I want to beat it.

When we considered 'journey' metaphors in our data, we found the same kind of variation. 'Journey' metaphors often express and reinforce feelings of purpose, control and companionship. Several patients use 'journey' metaphors to convey a sense of group solidarity with other cancer sufferers:

The rocks in our paths are easier to handle when we're all in it together.

One patient uses a 'journey' metaphor to suggest that the experience of illness can have some positive aspects:

My journey may not be smooth but it certainly makes me look up and take notice of the scenery!

On the other hand, some uses of 'journey' metaphors suggest lack of acceptance of the illness, or frustration at not being in control. One patient compares being ill with cancer to:

trying to drive a coach and horses uphill with no back wheels on the coach.

Another patient wonders:

How the hell am I supposed to know how to navigate this road I do not even want to be on when I've never done it before?

What Do Our Findings Mean?

Our findings support the avoidance of 'fight' metaphors in recent UK policy documents, and suggest that healthcare professionals should not introduce them first when speaking with patients. On the other hand, different metaphors seem to work differently for different people. 'Fight' metaphors can clearly be harmful for many patients, but they are also inspiring and motivating for some. 'Journey' metaphors are a better alternative for many patients, but they can also convey and reinforce negative feelings for some.

Ultimately, metaphors are resources for expressing ourselves and for making sense of our experiences. When we are ill, we should be encouraged and enabled to pick the ones that work best for us.

Beyond Fights and Journeys?

If metaphors are useful resources, we should have as many at our disposal as possible. We have collected many alternatives to 'fight' and 'journey' metaphors, from our data and other sources. For example, a cancer sufferer commenting on Kate Granger's article uses a musical metaphor:

To heal is to meet the rogue cells within and convince them to sing in tune with the rest of the body.
In an article for BBC news, Andrew Graystone uses a household metaphor:

For me, cancer arrived as an unwelcome lodger, parking itself in the back room and demanding attention. For three years I tried to be a courteous if unwilling host. Eventually the time came to invite my cancer to leave. She has left the place in a bit of a mess, and I'm conscious that she has kept the key. Still I'm hopeful that in due course all I will be left with is the rich memory of time spent with a stranger I never expected to meet.

We are hoping to collect many more such examples that we can share with patients and doctors. If you come across any, or can contribute your own, we would love to hear from you.

Professor Elena Semino is Head of the Linguistics and English Language Department at Lancaster University.

Write an opinion article for a newspaper in which you argue for or against the idea of using "battle" metaphors to describe those suffering from diseases.

Page Break

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 researchhttps://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.

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QUESTIONS

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

1. RP

2. Rhotic accent
3. Dialect levelling

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?

The accent of Angela Rayner

The accent of Steph McGovern

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
    a. ING or g-dropping
    b. T- glottaling – this is using a "glottal stop" instead of T in words such as butter, twenty or got
    c. L- vocalisation – this is pronouncing a workd which ends with "l" with a "w" sound eg well, fall
3. 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.
4. Chart your findings in a graph
5. What do you conclude from your research project?

Page Break

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:

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?

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?

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INVESTIGATING SOCIAL MEDIA

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

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.

Gerry Howley
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Now that the current crop of inmates disporting themselves around Love Island 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, 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 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 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@BevDickinson

#loveisland 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, 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 (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 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 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". In the book, Canadian linguist Alexandra D'Arcy 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 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 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". Experts in their field face prejudice because of their accents – including my colleague Katie Edwards, who has spoken out 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 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 that the former prime minister wanted Britain to be a classless society, more recent evidence 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? Page Break

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!