

# Year 11 - 12 Bridging the Gap

## GCSE → A Level

### A Level English Language



# Course Breakdown

## AQA English Language A Level – 7702

For the A Level English Language course, there are 2 examinations and a folder of coursework. Throughout both Year 12 and 13, you will be simultaneously studying aspects of Paper 1 and Paper 2.

### Paper 1

<b>Language and the Individual</b> 2 hour 30 mins – 40% 100 marks	
<b>Section A</b> Textual Variations and Representations	<b>Section B</b> Children's Language Development
Two texts, linked by topic or theme 1. Analysis of meanings and representations in a text (25 marks) 2. Analysis of meanings and representations in a second text (25 marks) 3. Comparison of the two texts (20 marks)	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 (30 marks)

### Paper 2

<b>Language Diversity and Change</b> 2 hour 30 mins – 40% 100 marks	
<b>Section A</b> Diversity and Change	<b>Section B</b> Language Discourses
One question from a choice of two: <i>Either</i> an evaluative essay on language diversity (30 marks) <i>Or</i> an evaluative essay on language change (30 marks)	Two texts about a topic linked to the study of diversity and change. 1. Analysis of how the texts use language to present ideas, attitudes and opinions (40 marks) 2. Directed writing task linked to the same topic and the ideas in the texts (30 marks)

### NEA

<b>Language in Action</b> 100 marks – 20% 3,500 word count	
<b>Original Writing</b> 1,500 words	<b>Language Investigation</b> 2,000 words
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Annotated style guide</li> <li>➤ Original writing</li> <li>➤ Commentary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Research project (including data collection, methodology and analysis)</li> </ul>

## YEAR 1

### Course Intro: GCSE Skills Check & Idiolect/Sociolect/Ethnolect

#### Paper One, Section A: Meanings and Representations

##### Language Levels:

- Lexis
- Semantics
- Pragmatics
- Phonology, Prosody &
- Grammar & Morphology
- Graphology
- Discourse

**Mode:** Spoken/Written/CMC

#### Paper One, Section B: Child Language Acquisition

- spoken mode

#### Paper Two, Section A: Diversity

- Gender & Sexuality
- Regional Variation: Accent & Dialect
- Race & Ethnicity
- Occupation
- Social Groups/Age

#### Paper Two, Section B

- Discourse Analysis (Q3)
- Directed Writing (Q4)

#### NEA – Original Writing

## YEAR 2

#### NEA – Language Investigation

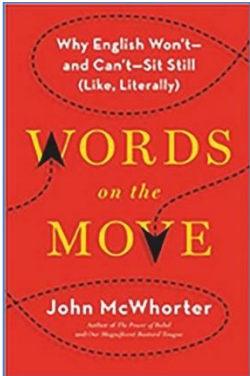
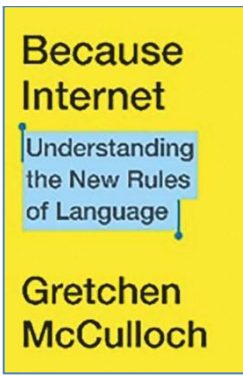
#### Paper Two, Section A: Diversity & Change

- the history of English
- processes of change
- standards and attitudes
- language & technology
- World Englishes
- language & power

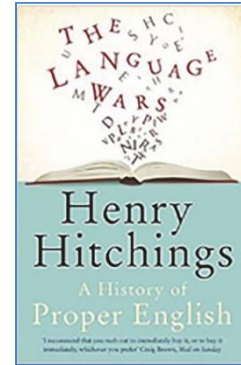
#### Paper One, Section B: Child Language Acquisition

- written mode

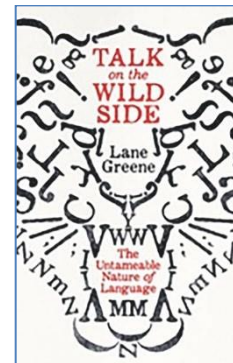
## Recommended Reading

<p><u><a href="https://preview.tinyurl.com/wordsmove">John McWhorter: <i>Words on the Move</i></a></u>  <a href="https://preview.tinyurl.com/wordsmove">https://preview.tinyurl.com/wordsmove</a></p>	
<p>Julie Coleman: <i>The Life of Slang</i>          (Short interviews about the book)  <a href="https://youtu.be/DIqk6MdLWRw">https://youtu.be/DIqk6MdLWRw</a>  <a href="https://youtu.be/HkAwIVoNUx0">https://youtu.be/HkAwIVoNUx0</a></p>	
<p>Gretchen McCulloch: <i>Because Internet</i>  <a href="https://tinyurl.com/cosinternet">https://tinyurl.com/cosinternet</a></p>	
<p>David Shariatmadari: <i>Don't Believe a Word</i>  <a href="https://tinyurl.com/notbelieve">https://tinyurl.com/notbelieve</a></p>	

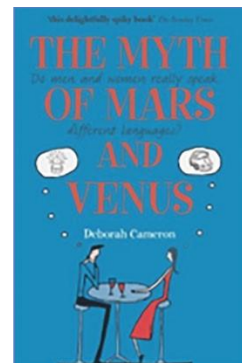
Henry Hitchings: *The Language Wars*  
(A review)



Lane Greene: *Talk on the Wild Side*  
<https://tinyurl.com/talkwildside>



Deborah Cameron: *The Myth of Mars and Venus*  
<https://tinyurl.com/mythmarsvenus>



Abby Kaplan: *Women Talk More Than Men... and Other Myths About Language Explained*  
<https://tinyurl.com/womenmentalk>



## Online Resources

### British Library

- British Accents and Dialects: <https://www.bl.uk/british-accents-and-dialects>
- English Language and Literature Timeline: <http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/evolvingenglish/accessvers/index.html>
- Texts in Context: <http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/texts/context.html>

**The Open University** has always been good for this, and recently one of their linguistics lecturers, Philip Seargeant, posted a link to a range of their online resources

- What is Language? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LwG9SNeCof8>
- The History of English in 10 Minutes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3r9bOkYW9s>
- A Brief History of Emoji: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTXLuZHYf4>
- Narrative in Journalism and Politics: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCP\\_ifjRZgA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCP_ifjRZgA)
- Filter Bubbles and Fake News: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaolE1blpWk>
- Why Do We Swear? [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TsFm-pN\\_XJO](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TsFm-pN_XJO)

The dictionary makers (lexicographers) are also very good at making their work with the English language really accessible.

- **The Oxford Dictionary** blog: <https://public.oed.com/blog/>
- **Macmillan Dictionary** blog: <http://www.macmillandictionaryblog.com/>
- Australia's **Macquarie Dictionary** blog: <https://www.macquariedictionary.com.au/blog/>
- The US's **Merriam-Webster Dictionary**: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>

### University College London (UCL)

Helping you understand what grammar is and how it works.

- Englicious Grammar Resources: <http://englicious.org/>

### Tony Thorne's *Language and Innovation* pages

- Tony Thorne is a linguist at King's College London who collects and tracks slang usage, among other things: <https://language-and-innovation.com/>

### Deborah Cameron's *A feminist guide to language blog*

- Deborah Cameron is one of the country's leading experts on language and gender and her blog is funny, thought-provoking and insightful: <https://debuk.wordpress.com/>

## Podcasts

The BBC's **Word of Mouth** programme, presented by Michael Rosen, has a huge archive of previous programmes all available for download. Some recent highlights have been selected for you here:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qtnz/episodes/player>

- [A Debate About American English](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08g5533) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08g5533>
- [Will Emoji Be the Future of English?](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08ffvp6) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08ffvp6>
- [The Language of Lying](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000dfpy) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000dfpy>
- [Romani Language](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m00050qw) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m00050qw>
- [Black British Identity and Black-related Words](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0004l93) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0004l93>
- [Solving Crime with Language](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m00027n6) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m00027n6>
- [Language, Gender and Trans Identities](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09r4k4l) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09r4k4l>

**Lexicon Valley**, presented by John McWhorter can be found here and a few particularly relevant ones have been highlighted below: <https://slate.com/podcasts/lexicon-valley>

- [Women's Language](https://slate.com/podcasts/lexicon-valley/2020/03/vocal-frywomen-language) <https://slate.com/podcasts/lexicon-valley/2020/03/vocal-frywomen-language>
- [Like, Sort Of...](https://slate.com/podcasts/lexicon-valley/2019/11/politeness-in-the-english-language) <https://slate.com/podcasts/lexicon-valley/2019/11/politeness-in-the-english-language>
- [Language on the Internet](https://slate.com/human-interest/2019/07/john-mcwhorter-and-gretchen-mcculloch-onbecause-internet.html) <https://slate.com/human-interest/2019/07/john-mcwhorter-and-gretchen-mcculloch-onbecause-internet.html>

The BBC's **Seriously** podcast isn't just about language but you'll find a few interesting language programmes on there, including this one featuring Susie Dent on American English:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08qxd02>

Another BBC programme, **The Verb** often has language issues up for discussion. A few selected episodes are:

- [Puns and Wordplay](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000dj45) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000dj45>
- [Sports Writing](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000c2ls) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000c2ls>
- [How to Write Out Sexism](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0002zyh) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0002zyh>

## TED Talks

- Lera Boroditsky on the links between language and thought  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/lera\\_boroditsky\\_how\\_language\\_shapes\\_the\\_way\\_we\\_think](https://www.ted.com/talks/lera_boroditsky_how_language_shapes_the_way_we_think)
- John McWhorter on digital language and texting  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/john\\_mcwhorter\\_txtng\\_is\\_killing\\_language\\_jk](https://www.ted.com/talks/john_mcwhorter_txtng_is_killing_language_jk)
- Deb Roy on children's language development  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/deb\\_roy\\_the\\_birth\\_of\\_a\\_word](https://www.ted.com/talks/deb_roy_the_birth_of_a_word)
- Anne Curzan on what makes a word 'real'  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/anne\\_curzan\\_what\\_makes\\_a\\_word\\_real](https://www.ted.com/talks/anne_curzan_what_makes_a_word_real)
- Erin McKean on making up new words  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/erin\\_mckean\\_go\\_ahead\\_make\\_up\\_new\\_words](https://www.ted.com/talks/erin_mckean_go_ahead_make_up_new_words)
- Claire Bower on where English comes from  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/claire\\_bower\\_where\\_did\\_english\\_come\\_from](https://www.ted.com/talks/claire_bower_where_did_english_come_from)
- John McWhorter on made-up languages in sci-fi and fantasy  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/john\\_mcwhorter\\_are\\_elvish\\_klingon\\_dothraki\\_and\\_na\\_vi\\_real\\_languages](https://www.ted.com/talks/john_mcwhorter_are_elvish_klingon_dothraki_and_na_vi_real_languages)

## And others

David Crystal interviewed by Cambridge University Press

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59GMlpAdVok>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8jofTbIxM>

## Online Courses

If you are feeling like you really want to immerse yourself in some language study over the next few months (And why not?) **Future Learn** have a selection of online courses you can sign up for, including some excellent ones on Language and Linguistics. Here are a few we would recommend:

- Understanding English Dictionaries <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/understanding-dictionaries>
- An Introduction to Sociolinguistics: Accents, Attitudes and Identity  
<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/accents-attitudes-and-identity-an-introduction-to-sociolinguistics>
- Introduction to Intercultural Studies: Language and Culture  
<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/intercultural-studies-language-culture>



### **TASK 1 - Language Profile**

One of the most interesting aspects of studying language is that you learn more about your own language use, so this first task is all about you...

- Create a 'language profile' of yourself by answering the following questions and then writing them up as a set of bullet points that highlight what you think are the most interesting and important aspects of the language you use:
  - What's your earliest language memory? Can you remember a nursery rhyme, song or picture book from when you were very little?
  - Have your family or extended family kept any records – video, audio, family memories – of any of your earliest words?
  - Have you kept any old school books from when you were learning to read and write?
  - Where were you born and where in the UK, or the wider world, are your family from? Go back a few generations if you like and think about any other languages that your family members might speak, or other places your family members might have lived.
  - Are there any words or expressions only you or your family use, which others don't really understand? This is called your famillect.
  - Do you or your friends at school use language in any ways that you notice as being different from other people around you? These could be other people in your year, your teachers, your family, whoever.
  - Do you listen to or watch anyone on TV, online or in films or music videos who uses language in a way that interests or annoys you?
  - Do you ever look at or hear someone else using language in a way that you find is totally new or strange to you?
  - Have your teachers or family ever talked to you about the way you speak?

One of the most useful resources for language on this course is **you**. Language is made up of so much more than the words we see printed on a page, so when you are thinking about language, come back to these ideas here to keep the range wide. We are often told there is a right way and a wrong way to use language, but the more you study about language, the more you'll realise that it's more complicated and interesting than that.

And you'll also start to build up a bigger picture of the different influences on your own language identity as this course goes on – all the factors that influence who you are linguistically and how you can choose to behave with language in different situations.

## TASK 2 – Which Accents?

Everyone has an accent. You might not think you do, but it's a linguistic fact. Accents are normally associated with particular regions and places but can also be linked to a person's social class – how 'posh' they sound, for example.


For this activity, you will access to the 10 audio clips here:

<https://d.docs.live.net/40609ffd03e838cb/ALISONNEW/Documents/2020-2021/COURSEADMIN/BTG/EMC%20BTG/AUDIOS>

Here you will find 10 examples of different people from around the British Isles reading the same bit of text.

- Listen to all 10 of them and use the map on the next page to mark where you think each speaker might be from.
- Write a quick comment (maybe just a few words) about each accent and how it sounds to you.
- Now use the text of the extract (on page 9) and listen to three of the recordings (of your choice) again. Write down the numbers of the accent clips you have chosen in the relevant spaces. As you listen, use a highlighter to note the sounds that you notice as being different to how you might pronounce them.
- Think about the sounds that you have highlighted for each recording and see if you can notice any patterns in them.

**Accent Response Sheet**

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	

**Accent number:**

When he woke the next morning, the streets were empty and there was no one to be seen. He left the house and looked up and down the hill but not a soul was to be found. Somewhere in the distance a single church bell tolled slowly but there was no other sound: no bird song, no hum of traffic, nothing. Starting to feel anxious now, he walked up past the farm, towards the church, along the path by the school and into the main square. The bell had stopped ringing now, but a fragile tune – perhaps played on a fiddle – had taken its place. And that’s where he saw them for the first time: a circle of children, dancing mutely, each of their faces a mask of concentration, yet somehow alive and happy.

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### TASK 3 – Do We Need New Words?

The English language is always generating new words. New words can be created out of nothing (**neologisms**) or be formed by using other words – or parts of words – together in new combinations (what are called **compounds** and **blends**). Sometimes initials of words in a phrase might be used (**acronyms** and **initialisms**) and you might also see parts of words being added to the front or end of another word to give it a new form (**prefixes** and **suffixes**). Most A Level English Language courses look at how and why new words are formed, but there is also debate about whether we need new words and when (or whether) they should appear in dictionaries.

- Look at the list of some of the new words that have appeared (or suddenly become much more popular) in English over the last few years.
- Have you heard of these words before? Have you used any of them? Tick the relevant columns for each word.
- Choose two words from the list that you think are an important addition to the language. Try to come up with a sentence or two explaining why they are so important.
- Then choose two words from the list that you think are pointless and insignificant. What’s the problem with these words and why do you think they shouldn’t be included? Again, write a sentence or two explaining your thinking.
- Are there any other new words – or new meanings for older words – that you have heard about? Perhaps you could make a note of new and interesting uses of words over the next few months.
- What are your predictions for the most popular and widely-used words for the next 12 months?
- If you are interested in looking at the history of new words and slang terms that have appeared in the language, follow some of the links on pages 6 – 8 but in the meantime, [this article by one of the world’s most respected slang lexicographers](#) (i.e. people who compile dictionaries of slang), Jonathon Green, is a very good read: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-27405988>

#### Recent New Words

Word	Definition	Have heard/seen this word being used	Have used this word myself
Floss	A dance in which people twist their hips in one direction while swinging their arms in the opposite direction with the fists closed. Popularised by the game <i>Fortnite</i> .		

VAR	Video Assistant Referee. A system used in football to assist refereeing decisions.		
Gaslight	To manipulate or trick someone by pretending that they cannot trust what they see or hear until they doubt their own sanity.		
Twerving	A way of dancing that involves bending forward and shaking or thrusting your buttocks in a rhythmic motion.		
Dadbod	A term used to describe the typically flabby and unsculpted male physique that most dads have.		
Cancel culture	A way of describing the movement to 'cancel' - to publicly disapprove of and then attempt to ignore - celebrities or organisations because of their perceived immoral or unpopular actions.		
Nonbinary	A word describing a sexual identity that does not conform to binary categories of male and female.		
Hamsterkaufing	Stockpiling food like a hamster storing food in its cheeks (from German)		
WFH	Working From Home		
Mansplaining	A patronising way of explaining something (by a man to a woman).		

## TASK 4 – Key Events in Language History

One of the most interesting parts of any A Level English Language course is exploring how the language we use today came to be. Even now, the language is changing all the time and is used by people in the UK (and beyond) in many varied ways. From its earliest origins in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century CE, English has gone through many changes and reached many historic milestones.

- This activity asks you to create a timeline of key events in the history of English. You might not know some of the dates for these events – and that doesn't matter at this stage – but you will still be able to start sequencing some of the main developments in the language.
- You can do this activity either by writing out the events in the order you think they happened or by printing the sheet and cutting out the tiles to place in a sequence.
- If you're writing the dates, put them in a sequence on a sheet of paper, with the oldest ones on the left and the most recent on the right.
- If you're printing and cutting them out, shuffle them around and try to place them in the order that you think they occurred, with the oldest events on the left and the most recent on the right. Add tiles to your timeline one by one, thinking about where to place each one, before settling on your final timeline.
- Check your timelines through internet research. How accurate was your timeline? Do any of these dates surprise you?
- Why do you think some of these dates are so significant to the history of the language? Choose three key events from the timeline and try to write a sentence or two about their significance.
- If you want to find out more about some of the key events in the history of the English language, have a look at the link to the British Library timeline and the Open University *History of English in 10 Minutes*.

### British Library

#### [English Language and Literature Timeline](http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/evolvingenglish/accessvers/index.html)

(<http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/evolvingenglish/accessvers/index.html>)

### Open University

#### [The History of English in 10 Minutes](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3r9bOkYW9s)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3r9bOkYW9s>)

First TV broadcast in the world	First spelling guide in UK
First printing press in the UK	First English settlement in America
First telephone call	First wood-cased pencil invented
First Bible translation in English	First newspaper printed in UK
First dictionary published in UK	Passing of Education Act that led to compulsory schooling up to age of 15
First BBC radio broadcast	Norman invasion of Britain
First Hollywood film studio built	First email sent
First SMS (text) message sent	Establishment of first university in the UK



## TASK 5 – Texts

One of the things you will quickly notice about the study of language at A Level is that you don't just look at serious, weighty books. You might have studied quite a lot of literary fiction on your English courses so far and even when it hasn't been literature, it has probably been what is broadly termed 'literary non-fiction'. On an A Level English Language course, you will analyse all sorts of language. This activity will help you notice ALL language around you.

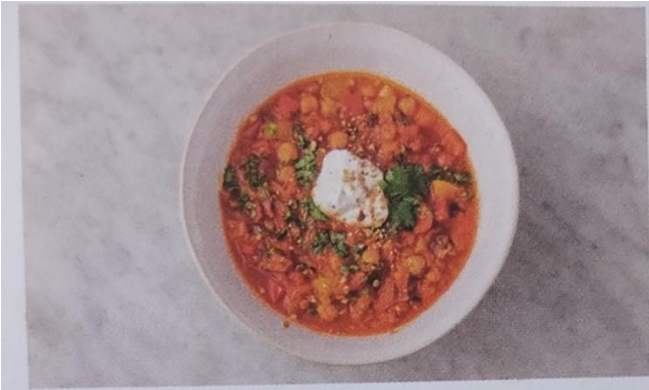
- On the following pages, you will find eight 'texts'. These might not be the kind of texts you've analysed before, but they are all worth analysing because they have been created to communicate in some way.
- Have a quick look at each text and think about the following:
  - What they are about
  - What they might mean – the ideas, messages, opinions, personalities being expressed
  - How they use different methods of communication: design, colour, vocabulary choices, structure, style, interaction.
- Choose three texts and use the questions below to make some quick notes about how they compare in their uses of language.
- Once you've done this, think about gathering your own set of texts from the world around you. Like these texts here, your texts could be written, spoken, online, serious, silly, informative, clever and/or important. Try to find at least five interesting texts and use the same questions to help you think about them.

### Questions to ask about your choice of texts

- What is the language in each text designed to achieve? Do you notice any differences between the three you have chosen?
- How have visual elements been used in the texts? Any differences?
- If any of the three were originally spoken, do you notice anything distinctive about them?
- How easy or difficult is it to analyse some of these texts? Does it feel like you can analyse them in the same way as a piece of literature, for example?

While analysing these types of text might be a new experience for you, the ways in which you explore and analyse them will build on things you've done before. Some of that will take you back to the work you might have done at Primary school with grammar (verbs, nouns and phrases, for example) and some will build on the work you've just been doing for GCSE.

## The Texts

<p>On tonight's show, we've got Fontaines DC live in the studio, old session tracks from The Chameleons, Ruthless Rap Assassins and Half Lazy plus all the usual mixture of weird, wonderful and just a bit wonky music from all around the world. Join me after nine tonight for the last of this week's Evening Shows.</p>	<p>A radio DJ presenting a trailer for a show.</p>
 <p><b>6. Serve</b></p> <p>Serve the <b>spiced Moroccan soup</b> in bowls with the remaining <b>coriander</b> sprinkled over. Dollop on some <b>Greek yoghurt</b> and finish with a sprinkling of <b>dukkah</b>. Add a sprinkle of the remaining <b>chilli</b>, if you want an extra kick.</p> <p><b>Enjoy!</b></p>	<p>Part of a recipe for a meal.</p>
<p>What refugees using our services say:</p> <p>“I want to say thank you and I really appreciate the effort you made towards making my life look beautiful, peaceful and secure.” – Resettled refugee</p> <p>“They help me a lot – Refugee Action is great. And I feel that they love me.” – Joseph</p> <p>“Refugee Action has been amazing with us. They helped us with everything – registering our children in schools, this was a priority for us.” – Dara</p> <p>“A lot of people in this country have helped me, including Refugee Action. Now I would like to change my career and help other people.” – Ade</p>	<p>A section of a charity leaflet from Refugee Action.</p>

Play as a band of rebel cats trying to stop fascists from seizing control of the galaxy in this cooperative game!

In the year three million, the animals of Earth's past inhabit the galaxy in advanced societies. Now, using fear and force, the regime known as the Rat Pack is sweeping into power across the planets. Together, a small group of cat rebels will try to stop these fascist forces from seizing power - while building a new galaxy where all species are free together.

A description of the boardgame, *Space Cats Fight Fascism* (TESA Collective games) on the back of the box.

From the first time he was stopped and searched as a child, to the day he realised his mum was white, to his first encounters with racist teachers; race and class have shaped Akala's life and outlook. In *Natives*, he takes his own experiences - with education, the police, identity and everything in between - and uses them to look at the social, historical and political factors that have left us where we are today.

**'Gripping . . . trenchant and highly persuasive'**

**METRO (BOOKS OF THE YEAR)**

**'One of the most thoughtful books of the past year'**

**EVENING STANDARD**

**'A potent combination of autobiography and political history'**

**INDEPENDENT**

The blurb from the back of a book (*Akala's Natives*, published by Two Roads).

**EASY OPEN: FLIP, SQUEEZE, RIP AND TIP**



*Grain-free, Natural, Complete, Delicious*

**(GB) INGREDIENTS/COMPOSITION:** FRESH TURKEY (45%), FRESH DUCK (20%), GREEN PEAS (3%), CARROTS (1%), SEAWEED EXTRACT, YUCCA EXTRACT, FRUCTOOLIGOSACCHARIDE PREBIOTICS (0.5G/KG).

**NUTRITIONAL ADDITIVES:** VITAMINS: VITAMIN A: 2500 MG/KG; VITAMIN D3: 200 IU/KG; VITAMIN E: 30 MG/KG. TRACE ELEMENTS: POTASSIUM IODIDE 0.8 MG/KG, COPPER SULPHATE PENTAHYDRATE 20 MG/KG, ZINC SULPHATE MONOHYDRATE 139 MG/KG, FERROUS CARBONATE 33 MG/KG.

**ANALYTICAL CONSTITUENTS:** CRUDE PROTEIN 10.25%, CRUDE FAT 10%, CRUDE FIBRE 0.2%, INORGANIC MATTER 4%, MOISTURE 69%.

BEST BEFORE/BATCH NUMBER: SEE BASE

**FRESH INGREDIENTS**  
**LOCALLY SOURCED**  
**FAMILY-FARMED TURKEY**  
**FAMILY-FARMED DUCK**  
**FRESH VEGETABLES**  
**SOURCE OF ANTIOXIDANTS**

A dog food carton.

And it's controlled beautifully by Jack Harrison who beats his man and whips a ball across the face of goal. It's an inviting ball aaaaand it's Ben White who gets on the end of it to put it past the keeper's outstretched hand. First goal of the season for the central defender and what a great team goal that was.

Part of a radio commentary on a football match.



A tweet from a local record shop on Record Store Day.

## TASK 6 – Running the Numbers

One of the most striking aspects of this course compared to GCSE English is that you might have to do some work with numbers, charts and graphs. That's because when you're analysing language, it's sometimes helpful to be able to back up a hunch about a pattern you might have spotted with some figures about how often something is actually happening. Also, you might want to observe a change in language over time, or a strength of feeling that people have to a particular language feature, so it makes sense to measure language and explore the data.

If you want to measure differences in language styles, one thing you might do is gather some data together from different sources and start to look for how many times a certain feature occurs. Let's try a simple introduction to this.

- Choose a social media or messaging app that you frequently use and look at the last ten messages you posted/sent. How many times have you:
  - a) abbreviated (or shortened) a word? For example, have you used *tomoz* for *tomorrow*, *uni* for *university*, *u* for *you*, or *bye* for *goodbye*?
  - b) used an emoji?
- Make a note of the totals for each.
- Now, have a look at ten messages you've been sent from someone else – perhaps an older family member like your dad, aunty or gran. Do the same for them and make a note of the totals.
- Do you notice any differences in the totals you have for the two sets of data?
- Are there any surprises in these totals? Did you see anything that you didn't expect to see?

Now, think about how you might explore this further.

- Can you think of a way to investigate if older people have a different messaging style to people of your age?
- What else could you look for beyond emojis and abbreviations?
- Make a note of the other language features that you might want to explore as part of this.
- What other factors might have an impact? Is there a different messaging style that women and men use? What about the topics being discussed? Could the subject matter have an effect on the style of the messages? How long are the messages?

These are all factors that you might start thinking about when you get further into the course and start collecting your own data for investigation. And while counting how many times a language feature appears is a really helpful way of exploring language, it's always going to be important to look at what language means, who's using it and the context it appears in to really make sense of what's going on. You'll also find that as you do this in more detail, you'll need to think about the practicalities and ethics of data collection.

- For a look at how this works in practice, read the following two articles by the linguist Christian Ilbury produced for *emagazine*. Here he talks us through his PhD on the language used by a group of friends on WhatsApp and how you can carry out your own smaller scale investigations into the language used on social media.



## '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 netspeak or 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 textmessaging and online communication has shown spellings and textual features that are

perceived to be 'typical' of the variety actually to be relatively infrequent in practice. This point is perhaps more relevant now given the widespread use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), such as speech recognition systems (e.g. Siri) and predictive text, which use conventional spellings derived from dictionaries.

In fact, in my own research on the mobile application and messaging service WhatsApp, I found a lot of evidence to suggest that users make good use of predictive text technologies and are generally very conscious of their spelling and grammar. Like other researchers, I noted that the messages were largely written in standard English. But I also found that there were least two different types of variant spelling: spelling errors and the use of netspeak in the data.

### My Research Data and What it Shows

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

#### Example 1

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

*New Years FOR FREE*

*Abi: omg!*

*Ellie: Why don't you go*

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

*Abi: Lol are you STUPID Lisa*

*Ellie: hahahaha*

*Abi: It's Barbados*

*Ellie: Wow*

*Ellie: Spellina*

*Lisa: Hahahaha spellina*

*Stef: We are aoina to London Bridae*

When the location is revealed by Lisa in line 1, it is correctly spelt as <Barbados>, but as the conversation develops and Abi refers to the location, she makes a spelling error <Barbadous>. Instead, of continuing the conversation, Ellie explicitly references the spelling in lines 9-10, before Lisa follows up her comments using 'hahaha' to ridicule the error. In this way, the users participate in a type of linguistic policing – by emphasising the incorrect spelling and evaluating the mistake as humorous – suggesting that spelling errors should be avoided at all costs.

When I looked at these spelling errors in more detail, I found that another way that users seem to uphold these language standards is through the innovative use of the asterisk, <\*>, which is often used to repair spelling errors. In fact, of the 865 examples of <\*> in my data, 83.9% are used to fulfil this function.

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

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

#### *Example 2*

*Mark: Ok! I'll meet yaaa*

*Abi: Yeah George*

*Abi: I'm walking up the road*

*Stef: We're in the garden bbz*

*Abi: Cooooool*

*Abi: C u in a min*

*Mark: You guys still there?*

*Abi: Yeeeeee*



To answer this question, let's return to the purpose of the conversation in (2). As a friendly interaction between group members Mark, Abi, and Stef, the sole purpose of this exchange is to establish where the group will meet for a drink. Here, it seems that the use of non-standard spellings, such as <bbz> and <c>, function solely to establish the tone of the conversation. By using these netspeak features, the three users essentially mark this discussion as an informal conversation to establish where to get a casual drink with friends. Take these forms away and replace them with the standard spellings of these forms and the conversation looks somewhat more like a formal arrangement between colleagues!

### Medium, Message, Intentions and Choices

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

### Example 3

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

A further example is found in (3). In this extract, Mark has just sent a message to a group chat that includes his housemates asking them to pay their share of the council tax which he's paid in full. Note, in most of his message, he uses standard spellings and written conventions. However, we see he uses the 'netspeak' forms <gr8> for 'great' and <thaaanks> for 'thanks' at the end of his message.

Why, given the relative infrequency of these forms, does he use these features in this text? Based on my arguments so far, it seems likely that that his use of <gr8> and <thaaanks> are doing something very similar to the variant spellings in (2). In other words, by using these two features at the end of his message he essentially turns something very serious and formal (a request for money) into something not so serious that says to the rest of the group: 'this is still an informal conversation amongst friends'.

So, whilst our predictive text and our unlimited data may not mean that we may not use 'c u l8tr bbz' for the same reasons as before, during the Nokia era, it seems that the use of non-standard spellings are still an incredibly useful resource when communicating via (digital) text!

# Investigating Social Media

**So you're thinking of investigating social media... PhD student Christian Ilbury knows just what you need to do. Here he offers advice about how to go about it.**

With our interactions increasingly migrating online, it's no surprise that more and more students are looking 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 easily.

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?

## TASK 7 – Opinions in the Media

As well as debating big ideas about the English language, you'll be studying what others say about it. Language is constantly being discussed online and in the press, with opinion pieces being produced all the time. This is great news for language students, because there's a never-ending supply of material to explore. But it can also be a little tricky to keep track of.

Here are 5 articles for you to have a look at, to give you a taste of the kinds of arguments people have about language. Some of these are by linguists (people who study language) and others are by journalists or commentators. We won't necessarily agree with the views being offered, but they will give you a sense of some of the different arguments out there.

Whenever you read an article about language, you have to have your wits about you, so before you look at the links, read the article by the linguist Lynne Murphy on the next page. It shows you how to read an article about language, so use the approach she suggests to assess the ideas presented, the credentials of the writers and the validity of their opinions.

Five suggested opinion pieces:

1. [If You Can't Embrace Regional Dialect, You Can Kiss My Chuddies:](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/31/embrace-regional-dialect-kisschuddies-dictionary/)  
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/31/embrace-regional-dialect-kisschuddies-dictionary/>
2. [The Ugly Rise of Accent Softening:](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/mar/20/ugly-rise-accent-softening-peoplechanging-their-voices)  
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/mar/20/ugly-rise-accent-softening-peoplechanging-their-voices>
3. [Calling Someone a 'Gammon' Is Hate Speech:](https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/what-does-gammon-mean) <https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/what-does-gammon-mean>
4. [Saying No To Gizit Is Plain Prejudice:](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/saying-no-to-gizit-is-plain-prejudice8488358.html)  
<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/saying-no-to-gizit-is-plain-prejudice8488358.html>
5. [Text Speak: Language Evolution or Just Laziness?](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationopinion/9966117/Text-speak-languageevolution-or-just-laziness.html)  
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationopinion/9966117/Text-speak-languageevolution-or-just-laziness.html>

You can keep track of articles about language by following @EngLangBlog (<https://twitter.com/EngLangBlog>) on Twitter and by bookmarking your favourite articles using your preferred social media apps.

Why not keep a reading record of the articles you come across over the next few months? You could even do a top five and a bottom five of the best and worst articles about language that you've read!

# 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 (CONtrovery or conTROVerry) 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 conTROVerry 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 (1)*

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. (2)

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.<sup>3</sup> 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 (4)*

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. (5) 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' than 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:

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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 bullet 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. (6)

But sometimes it's the researcher who gets it wrong – and the media reports it anyway. A 2017 news item (7) 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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## TASK 8 – The Future of English

English is ever-changing; it doesn't stay the same for very long, but somehow we still share it as a common language that can unite us (and occasionally divide us). What do you think might happen to English in the future? Below you'll see three predictions for the future of English. Have a think about each one: how likely are they to happen, do you think? Write a sentence or two in response to each and then come back to your predictions once you are well into your course next year, or even at the very end, before your final exams. How have your predictions held up? Remember too that **you** are part of the future of English: it's the speakers and writers of English who shape its use so you will have a part to play in how it develops, and this course might just have a lasting impact on you as well.

Prediction	Your Ideas
Technology will advance so quickly in the next five to ten years that it won't matter which languages we speak because translation apps will allow us to talk to everybody in any language.	
The English language will continue to take over the world, spreading everywhere and leading to it becoming the shared language of nearly everyone. But we will all speak English with American accents.	
The English language will change so quickly and in such different ways that it will break into new separate languages, just like Latin turned into Italian, Spanish and French in centuries gone by.	