

New Directions

Language Diversity research and resource pack

Amanda Cole and Dan Clayton



acknowledgements

Written by Dan Clayton and Amanda Cole

Cover: Rebecca Scambler using photo by Nate Bell on Unsplash

The project

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Please note

Any errors in the research summaries are entirely our own and not those of the linguists who carried out the research. If you do happen to notice something that you would like to query, please contact dan@englishandmedia.co.uk

Some of the themes in a few of the research summaries might require a degree of teacher discretion as they touch on issues of misogyny and prejudice.

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Contents

introduction	5
regional variation	11
• Apps for Maps	12
• Whatever Happened to the Hodmedods?	14
• Strutting up North	17
• Sofa, Couch or Settee?	21
• Manchester Voices	24
• Levelling up?	28
• Corn(ish)?	31
• Cockneys in Essex	35
• From Cockney to the King	40
social groups	43
• A Dutch Chav from The Hague?	44
• ‘Give us my shoe back!’	47
• Populars, Townies, Geeks and Eden Valley Girls	51
• Foot in Mouth and Traps for Baths	54
• Upwardly Mobile in Edinburgh	56
race & ethnicity	61
• Stereotypes and Street Talk	62
• The Media and MLE	66
• Speaking Roadman	69
• Maybe it’s a Grime Ting	72
• Why the Long Face?	75
• The (White) Ears of Ofsted	77
gender & sexuality	81
• ‘STFU and start listening to how scared we are’	82
• Sassy Queens	85
• The Only Way is E-ssss-ex	88
• Can You Sound Gay and Working Class?	92
• ‘I’m a boy, can’t you see that?’	96
• ‘I’m not proud, I’m just gay’	99

contents

world englishes	103
• Now You're Talking My Language	104
• English as a Global Language	107
• Who Sounds Competent and Who Sounds Trustworthy?	109
• Who is a Native Speaker of English?	113
attitudes & representation	115
• Class Judgements	116
• 50 Years of Accent Bias in Britain	119
• Legal Judgements	122
• Implicitly Prejudiced?	125
• 'A lot of them write how they speak'	129
• Taps, Stops and Chavs	132
language & technology	137
• Mobile Messaging	138
• Are Emojis a Language?	143
• Watching and Speaking <i>EastEnders</i>	145
• Life Changes and Accent Changes	147
• Writing How You Speak	151
activities for research summaries	155
media texts & activities	167
glossary	213
permissions	243

introduction

introduction

The authors

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Amanda Cole is a lecturer in linguistics in the Department of Language and Linguistics at the University of Essex. She teaches, researches, supervises student projects and has published widely in the field of sociolinguistics. She is interested in how people speak and how they or others feel about it. In particular, being born into a family of East Londoners in Essex, she has always been fascinated by Essex and London dialects and the way people speak across South East England. Amanda appears regularly in the media discussing issues and topics related to linguistics, and she hopes to share linguistic knowledge and research as widely as possible. Along with Rob Drummond of Manchester Metropolitan University she runs the Accentism Project, a project which explores and shares stories of language-based discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping.

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introduction

New Directions: Language Diversity research and resource pack started life as an idea for a fairly small-scale free download that would pick up some examples of recent research into linguistic variation and present them clearly and in context for an AQA A Level English Language audience. Linguists are always very busy exploring the ways in which language is changing and studying the linguistic diversity that is all around us, and over the ten years or so since the new specifications were introduced, a lot has happened. We thought that we could give students and teachers a taste of that.

The more we worked on the initial idea, the more we realised that there was quite a lot that we wanted to cover! So, what you have here is a much bigger set of resources than we originally planned and one that we hope will help you develop a more up-to-date and interconnected understanding of the kind of work that is relevant to the A Level. While it has been designed with the AQA specification in mind, it should also be more widely useful for other A Level specifications and potentially beyond.

What we have included here is not designed to take the place of what is in the textbooks or other specification resources but as a complement to that material. The material here often builds on existing waves of sociolinguistic research or offers a new way of thinking about it, so should be viewed in that context.

The resource pack is divided into three main sections with a detailed glossary at the end.

research summaries and Q&As

Section 1 is made up of research summaries and Q&As. These are divided into different colour-coded areas. You will see that there is a degree of overlap between these areas and we have flagged up many of the connections with references throughout to relevant summaries. Each summary takes a piece of research from a published paper or chapter and offers an accessible overview of what it was about, how it was done and what was discovered. Most of these are then followed by Q&As with the linguists involved. The Q&As are designed to give you a sense of the people behind the work, what motivated them and how it relates to other work they have done. These areas are broken down into the following sub-sections.

regional variation

Regional variation is a type of linguistic variation which refers to differences in the linguistic features used - or how frequently they are used - between people from different geographic places. The UK is a rich tapestry of different dialects, but the way people speak never stands still. In this section we summarise research on the dialects spoken across the UK, seeing the differences between them and how they have changed (or not), shifted boundaries and influenced each other. We see that language change isn't happening evenly or in the same way or at the same rate across the country. In this section we present a range of different findings from across the UK: new dialects are forming, some regional dialect features are flourishing while others are waning, linguistic features or whole dialects have spread or moved from one place to another, dialect levelling is happening with people adopting standard or geographically widespread linguistic features, and the way people speak reflects not just where they are from but also who they are and their sense of identity.

social groups

A very longstanding finding is that, in the UK, the lower a person's class position, the fewer standard linguistic features and the more regional dialect features they tend to use. In this section we summarise research on linguistic variation between people of different classes from the same place as well as between people of the same class from different places. We see that there is still a very close relationship between a person's class and how they speak in the UK. However, the research we summarise shows that there is much more to class than a person's job or economic position. A person's class – and the way they speak - can change throughout their lifetime and is closely linked to their lifestyle and hobbies, who they mix with, their sense of identity and even the type of school they attended. We also see that the way working-class people speak is often devalued and seen as incorrect, inferior and ungrammatical, but despite this, regional dialect features are valuable in other ways as they can reflect a person's identity and their roots and sense of belonging in their local community. We also see evidence that despite

introduction

being devalued in some ways, these regional dialect features can be viewed quite positively for other qualities.

■ race & ethnicity

Multicultural London English (MLE) is a relatively recent linguistic variety that was first spoken in East London, and Multicultural British English (MBE) is a related linguistic variety spoken in different parts of Britain. In this section we present alternative viewpoints on whether MLE is a multiethnolect meaning that it is not spoken exclusively by any ethnic group. We observe linguistic variation in a group of young Londoners with different ethnic identities, but we also see that people from many different ethnic backgrounds speak MBE in Manchester or consider themselves to speak MLE in London. The research we summarise also explores the associations of MLE, showing that it is thought by many to be a dialect spoken by Black people and that it is associated with grime music, a genre which emerged out of Black cultures in East London. We see evidence of prejudice, biases and anti-Black and anti-working-class stereotypes about MLE and its speakers reflected in the opinions of Londoners, the media and on social media. Beyond MLE, we also observe how, across the country, the speech of people who are not white is problematised and stigmatised in schools and in popular discourse which incorrectly considers their way of speaking as 'broken English'.

■ gender & sexuality

It has long been known that men and women from the same place and background often speak in subtly different ways. Women tend to use more standard linguistic features and less regional dialect features than men. In this section we see that linguistic variation between men and women often exists because of gender stereotypes and expectations in society. We also see that linguistic research has greatly evolved in its treatment of gender over recent decades, with increased focus on diverse gender identities. As well as gender, this section explores the links between how a person speaks – or even writes – and their sexuality, and how this interacts with gender as well as other elements of a person's background and identity such

as their class, ethnicity and where they are from. Linguists are not only interested in the linguistic features that a person uses, but also the content and the meaning of what people say. The research we summarise shows that gender and sexuality are closely related to how people speak as well as how they are spoken about and the assumptions made about them. We also see how language is used to construct and reflect identity and to resist misogyny, homophobia and transphobia.

■ world englishes

English is a global language - it is extremely widely spoken, written and understood around the world for many different purposes and by many different groups of people. In this section we look at how English is spoken, learnt, taught and felt about in different parts of the world. Some of the research we summarise looks at the role of English in countries where it is a colonial language that was previously imposed or introduced by the British Empire. We see the continuation of policies and ideologies from the colonial period which promote English as the medium of education and unduly value it as a prestigious language, often above and beyond local languages. We also see that not all dialects of English are seen as equal, with so-called Inner Circle varieties such as British English, US English and Australian English often afforded the most status, respect and prestige around the world. The research in this section promotes an equal stance for all languages and varieties of English. We learn that multilingualism and translanguaging are the norm in much of the world, meaning that many people use English as part of a wider repertoire of languages and cannot always easily or accurately be defined as either native or non-native speakers of English.

■ attitudes and representation

People often form judgements, ideas or opinions about others based on the way they speak. In this section we summarise research which shows that some linguistic features or linguistic varieties are devalued in society, potentially leading to unfair treatment and discrimination against the people who speak them. We see that the hierarchy of how different linguistic varieties in the UK are evaluated has changed little over several decades

introduction

and disproportionately disadvantages those from less privileged backgrounds with some very real-life consequences in the workplace, at school and in the assumptions made about a person and their abilities. The research also shows that, based on how they speak, a person might be judged to have some positive traits but not others, for example, some linguistic varieties have high social status while others have high social attractiveness. We also see differences in how a single linguistic variety or linguistic feature is judged. We see that, firstly, different groups of people may be evaluated in different ways when using the same linguistic feature, reflecting societal stereotypes and expectations. Secondly, people from different demographic groups or backgrounds or with different experiences and values may differ in their attitudes towards a linguistic variety.

language & technology

For many of us, technology is integral to our lives, shaping how we spend our time, learn and study, build and maintain relationships, and share our ideas and feelings with others. As a result, there is an ever-growing and important body of research into the links between technology and language, exploring how people use technology to communicate and interact with others. In this section we see the ways that people use mobile messaging to carry out business transactions, maintain relationships and express themselves in their working, social and home lives, and use emojis to express emotion and to support and supplement the language used in written communication. We also see research which challenges previous assumptions and theory by showing that both language change and accent acquisition are possible when people encounter different ways of speaking through technology such as via television or video calls. This section also demonstrates the role of technology in carrying

out linguistic research, enabling linguists to easily collect large amounts of data from a wide range of participants to address important questions in linguistics.

activities

Section 2 provides a series of activities for students based on the research summaries and Q&As. Some of these involve a generic approach, where any research summary could be used for the task, while others ask for a more specific focus. Teacher notes provide some guidance about how these can be used and where they might be integrated into an existing scheme of work. Some of the tasks here are directly linked to AQA exam components such as previous Language Diversity essay questions; others are more suited to section B of Paper 2.

media texts

Section 3 consists of a set of activities based on media representations of the language issues that have been introduced through the research summaries. When linguistic research comes into contact with the media, the results can be interesting! Some coverage is informed – or in some cases, even written - by the linguists who did the research and some of it is written by journalists who have a genuine insight and understanding. In many other instances, that is not the case. The activities in this section, offer a range of different tasks based on different kinds of media text. Some are about analysing and evaluating how different publications have presented research and language ideas, while others are about transforming the material or responding to it in different ways.

We hope that you find this pack useful and interesting.

regional variation

Apps for Maps

Creating a crowdsourced dialect app

Researchers: Adrian Leemann, University of Bern | Marie-José Kolly, Journalist at *Republik Magazin* | David Britain, University of Bern

Background

A major [dialect corpus](#) which documented the different ways of speaking in England was the [Survey of English Dialects \(SED\)](#). The SED collected data on the different dialects in England from NORMs (Non-mobile, Older, Rural, Male speakers) between 1950 and 1961. As the SED is now well over 50 years old, Adrian Leemann, Marie-José Kolly and David Britain created an updated dialect corpus of England.

Advances in digital technology have made data collection on dialect variation more accessible and potentially more representative of the general population. Leemann, Kolly and Britain devised a free app called the [English Dialects App](#) which asked smartphone users a series of questions about words, phrases and pronunciations they use and, in some cases, to record an extract of speech. The researchers wanted to gather data that could be used by themselves and other researchers to explore changes in dialects in England over time, for example, by comparing the older SED corpus and the data collected by the app.

Methods

The English Dialects App was widely advertised and covered in the national media, attracting 99,000 downloads by May 2017, including quiz data from 50,700 participants and recordings of 4,300 participants. The app asked users 26 questions about the [phonology](#) (73% of the questions), [lexis](#) (12%) and [syntax](#) (15%) they used. For example, participants were asked, 'A small piece of wood stuck under the skin is a...' and then given potential answers including: 'spool', 'spile', 'speel', 'spell', 'spelk', 'shiver', 'spill', 'sliver', 'splinter' or 'splint'. They were also

asked if they pronounce or drop the 't' at the end of the word *bit*, and whether *scone* rhymes with 'gone' or 'cone'.

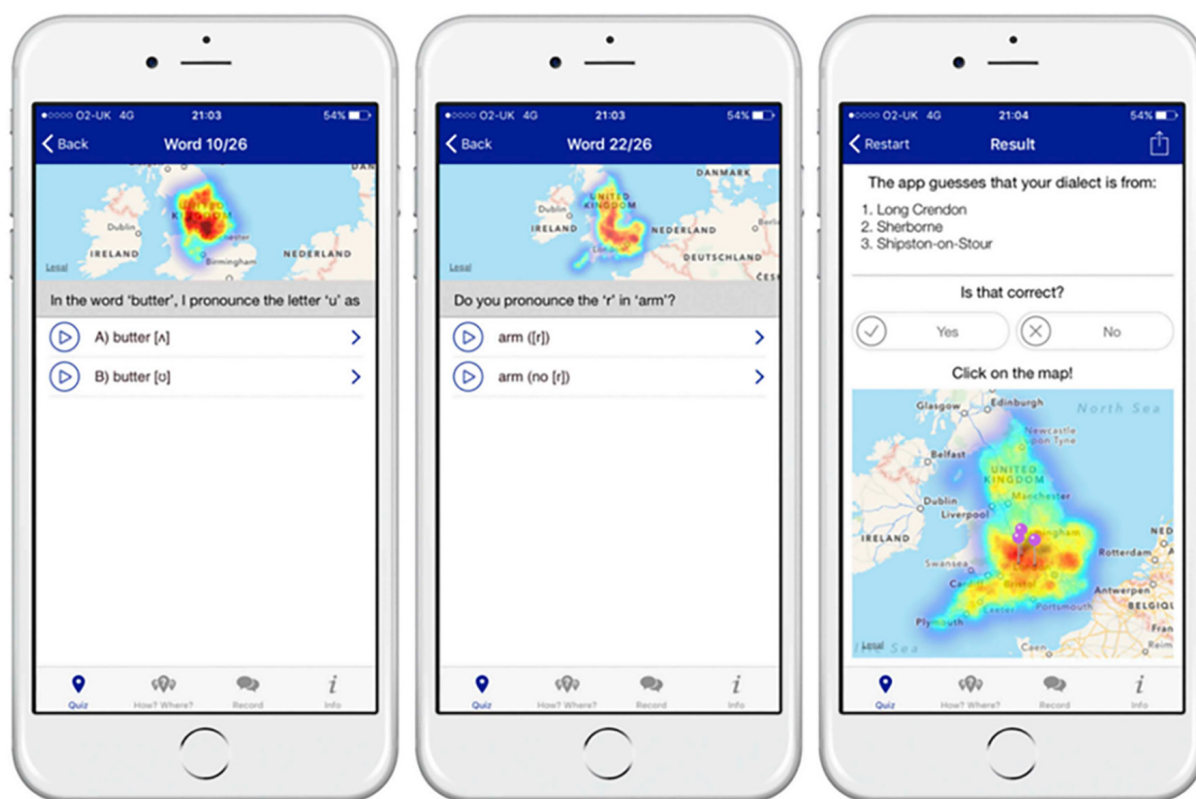
The app then matched each person's responses to three locations in England where they were most likely to be from by cross-referencing their responses to data from the SED. If the participant's dialect was correctly identified, they were then asked if they wanted to contribute to further research by providing additional data on themselves (such as age, gender and ethnicity). If the prediction about where they were from was wrong, they were asked to move a pin around on a map to identify where they were actually from.

The app users were then asked to record themselves reading aloud from 'The Boy Who Cried Wolf', a [passage](#) that contained many opportunities to elicit different regional pronunciations (such as the [trap-bath split](#)). Again, participants were asked to move a pin on a map to identify where they were from.

What were the results?

As mentioned earlier, the SED collected dialect data from NORMs, but the app reached a different demographic. The responses to the dialect quiz tended to be from young, white adults, and the sample tended to be more educated than the general population. As smartphone users tend to be younger, it was no surprise to find that the participants skewed to this demographic. Although the app was aimed at people in England, there were also responses from other parts of the UK and from Ireland. The geographic spread of participants tended to match the population density of England, with high concentrations of participants from the South East and the Northwestern Midlands.

regional variation



The English Dialects App. Image reproduced from the research paper referenced at the end of this summary.

Comparing the results from the app and the SED shows that [language change](#) has happened in many parts of England. For example, there has been a substantial decline in [rhoticity](#) (pronouncing the 'r' in words like *arm*) in England and that various dialect terms for a small piece of wood stuck under the skin are in decline with 'splinter' becoming increasingly dominant.

Comparing the results from the app and the SED shows that language change has happened in many parts of England

exactly that (See [Whatever Happened to the Hodmedods summary](#)). Another dimension to the research is that there are two datasets – actual recordings and quiz responses in which people identify what they say they say – allowing researchers to explore the accuracy of people's perceptions about their own language use. Lots of important and interesting research has used the English Dialects App data to analyse [linguistic variation](#) and language change in England.

Reference

Article title: The English Dialects App: The creation of a crowdsourced dialect corpus
Authors: Adrian Leemann, Marie-José Kolly, David Britain
Journal: Ampersand, Volume 5, pages 1-17
Year of publication: 2018
Link to article: [click here](#)

The researchers noted that their data could be used to explore these changes and many others, and subsequent research has done

Whatever Happened to the Hodmedods?

Dialect levelling in England

Researchers: David Britain, University of Bern | Tamsin Blaxter, University of Oxford | Adrian Leemann, University of Bern

Background

[Dialect levelling](#) is when [linguistic varieties](#) gradually become more similar, or levelled out, across a region or geographic area. Dialect levelling happens because of the movement of people and resultant [dialect contact](#), the growth of universal education and literacy, and people buying into the idea that there is a correct or [standard](#) way of speaking.

As far back as the nineteenth century, people have noted the disappearance of some [regional dialect features](#) in England, but there has not been much [empirical research](#) testing if dialect levelling is taking place. David Britain, Tamsin Blaxter and Adrian Leemann address this problem by comparing two different [dialect corpora](#) – the [English Dialects App \(EDA\)](#) data (from 2017) (see [Apps for Maps summary](#)) with that from the [Survey of English Dialects \(SED\)](#) (data from the 1950s) to pinpoint if, where and when dialect levelling has taken place in England.

Methods

The researchers compared eight regional dialect features (three lexical, two phonological and three syntactic) from the EDA data with the older SED data to see if [language change](#) had taken place and whether this constituted dialect levelling. They looked for two types of dialect levelling:

- Geographical shrinkage: the area where people previously used one or more linguistic features is now smaller.
- Quantitative shrinkage: the area where people previously used one or more linguistic features has remained the same but fewer people say these features.

Comparing SED and EDA data is a [real time](#) approach to analysing language change because the data was collected at different time points. As well as this, the researchers also used an [apparent time](#) approach to analysing if language change had occurred by comparing EDA data from younger and older participants. If they found differences in dialect use between the different age groups, this would suggest that language change might have taken place.

The researchers compared eight regional dialect features (three lexical, two phonological and three syntactic) from the EDA data with the older SED data to see if language change had taken place and whether this constituted dialect levelling

What were the results?

There was clear evidence of dialect levelling in [lexis](#). Dialect words for *snails* such as ‘hodmedods’ and ‘dodmans’ were already geographically restricted to eastern England in the SED but this had become even more the case in the EDA data. ‘Snail’ had become the dominant form for all age groups but especially for younger people, suggesting that ‘hodmedods’ and ‘dodmans’ are becoming increasingly unused.

Words for *autumn*, including ‘fall’ and ‘backend’ were also examined. ‘Fall’ – the dominant form in North America now – was widespread in the

activities for research summaries

Introduction to the Activities Section

This section has been designed for teachers to use with students. It gives you a range of activities to use with students based on the research summaries and Q&As in Section 1 of the pack. Some of the tasks are based on specific research summaries and others are more generic, leaving you the choice of which summaries to set. The thinking behind this is that you can use a generic worksheet template with any summary (and perhaps Q&A) to set a group or class of students a range of research or transformation tasks.

- Generic worksheets
- Transformation tasks

Each of these activities involves using a worksheet template (ideally, printed onto A3 paper) and allocating a specific summary (and Q&A) to each student or group of students. The grids specify the tasks for students and generally take the form of a reading and summarising task to begin with, followed by a transformation task in which the content of the summary and Q&A are turned into a new form.

1. Podcast introduction
2. Talk to students
3. Introduction to online article

Worksheet 1: podcast

Name:

Research summary title and page refs:

Spend a few minutes reading the research summary and the Q&A that goes with it, then complete the tasks that are outlined below.

Task 1: In your own words, summarise the key aims and finding of this study in 4-5 one sentence bullet points.

Task 2: You have been asked to present an introduction to this research for a podcast about language aimed at A level and university students. Write the text of your introduction in about 300-350 words, outlining the following:

- Who did the research
- What it's about
- What other areas of work it relates to in the field of language diversity
- Why the podcast is useful and interesting to listen to.

Task 3: Imagine you are one of the hosts of the podcast. Think of two follow-up questions you would like to ask the linguist about their work.

glossary

Term or concept	Definition	Summary and Q&A
Accent acquisition	When a person picks up a new accent and begins to speak differently to how they did previously, normally after relocating to a new place.	Life Changes and Accent Changes
Accent attitudes	A person's judgements, ideas and opinions about an accent or people with that accent.	Who Sounds Competent and Who Sounds Trustworthy? Class Judgements 50 Years of Accent Bias in Britain Legal Judgements Implicitly Prejudiced? See also: A Dutch Chav from The Hague? Stereotypes and Street Talk The Media and MLE The (White) Ears of Ofsted Who is a Native Speaker of English? 'A lot of them write how they speak' Taps, Stops and Chavs
Accent bias	Any situation in which an accent is viewed more positively or negatively than another or when an individual has been judged, treated in a certain way or commented on because of their accent.	A Dutch Chav from The Hague? Class Judgements 50 Years of Accent Bias in Britain Legal Judgements Implicitly Prejudiced? Who is a Native Speaker of English? See also: Stereotypes and Street Talk The Media and MLE The (White) Ears of Ofsted Who Sounds Competent and Who Sounds Trustworthy? 'A lot of them write how they speak' Taps, Stops and Chavs