

Accents

Different patterns of pronunciation- can be a feature of a dialect however, accent refers to the phonological aspect of words

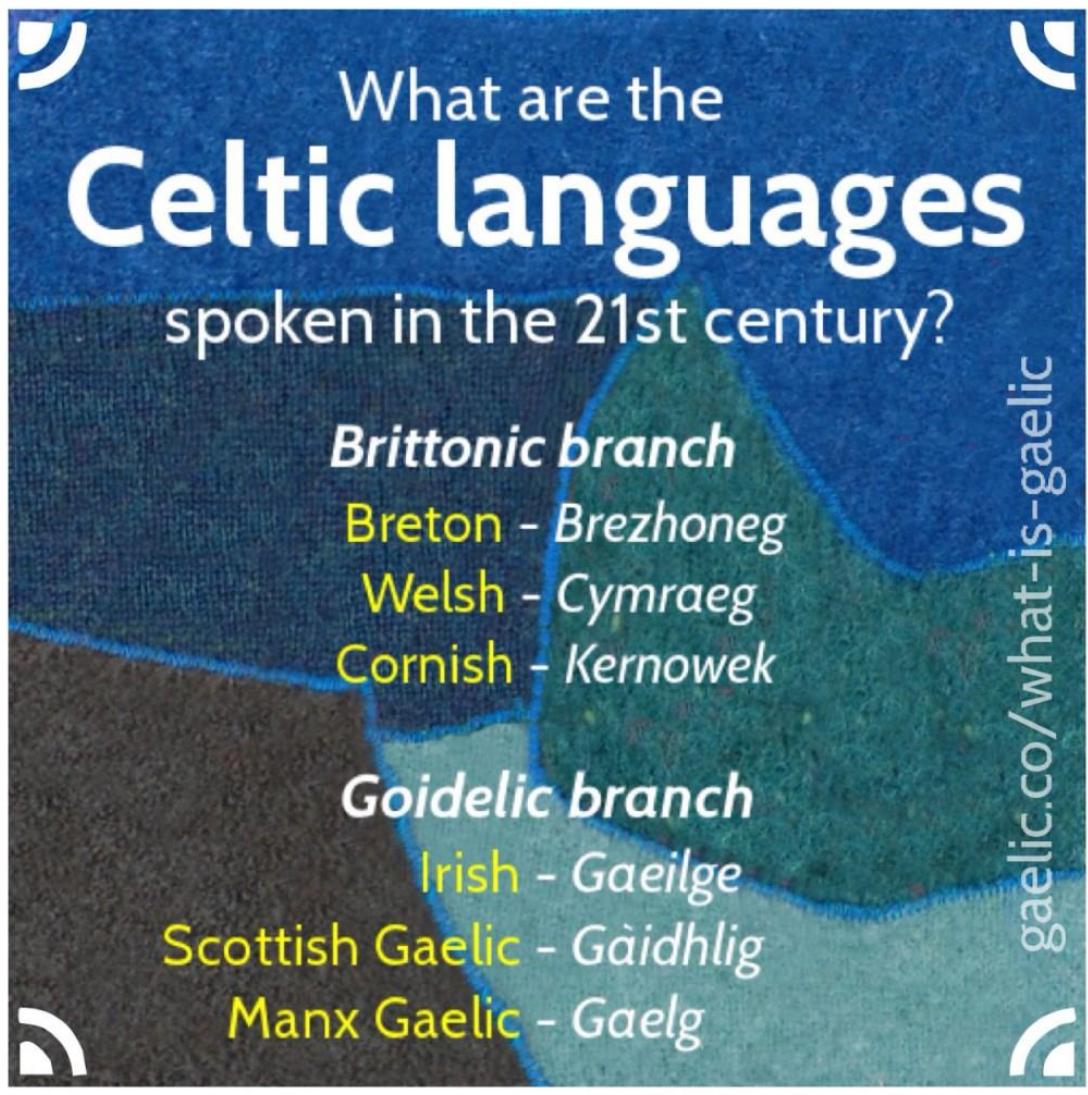
- Accents vary depending on the region
- For example, in England, most people can tell the difference between northern and southern accents due to vowel sounds
 - Northern accent- Grass with a short vowel sound, to sound like cat
 - Southern accent- Grass with a long vowel sound, to sound like card
- People who live near each other can tune in to smaller differences in each other's accents
- A social accent is the result of someone's class or background rather than the region they are from
 - The most recognisable English social accent is Received Pronunciation



Dialect

Variation in language with its own distinctive features of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation and is usually used to describe language that's particular to a specific region

- Different dialects have different words for things
 - Someone from Yorkshire might say anyway for anyway
 - People in Lancashire might call a bread roll a barm or a sandwich a butty
- Sentences often contain non-standard grammar
 - them as a demonstrative adjective
 - double negatives- we don't want none
 - missing plurals- it costs four pound
- Some grammatical variations are specific to a particular dialect e.g. people from Yorkshire might miss out the definite article the e.g. I cleaned car and Scouse dialect has youse as the plural of you
- Most regional dialects have an accent to go with them e.g. Someone from Georgie might say the word town like toon



Change in regional variation

Accents aren't fixed. They're often exposed to other variations and can end up changing and sharing linguistic traits as a result of this contact

- **Dialect Levelling** = gradual loss of differences between distinctive dialects or accents. When nearby dialect forms come into contact, some of the features might transfer and become present in both
 - e.g. features of Estuary English such as th-fronting have spread into neighbouring regions
- **Code switching** = changing to different varieties of English depending on the situation
 - e.g. schoolchildren of ethnic minorities who go to school in England might use Standard English (SE) in school, a pidgin or creole when with friends and another language at home

Status and solidarity values

- Two sets of values people use to judge speakers according to how they sound
- Accents that carry high status might imply things like education, wealth and intelligence e.g. RP
- Accents that are rated as high solidarity might imply speakers are trustworthy, friendly, kind and good-natured e.g. regional variations
- Accents that are high status are sometimes low solidarity

Koineisation = when 2 existing dialects come into contact with one another and create a new variety that influences both

- koine remains distinct from the original dialects
- e.g. Liverpool English

Factors affecting Individual speakers

Geography:

- Moving to another part of the country - hear less of own accent e.g. university
- Altering speech to be understood or adopting elements of the broader accent to become less noticeable

Media has an influence on the way people speak as they end up imitating popular catchphrases

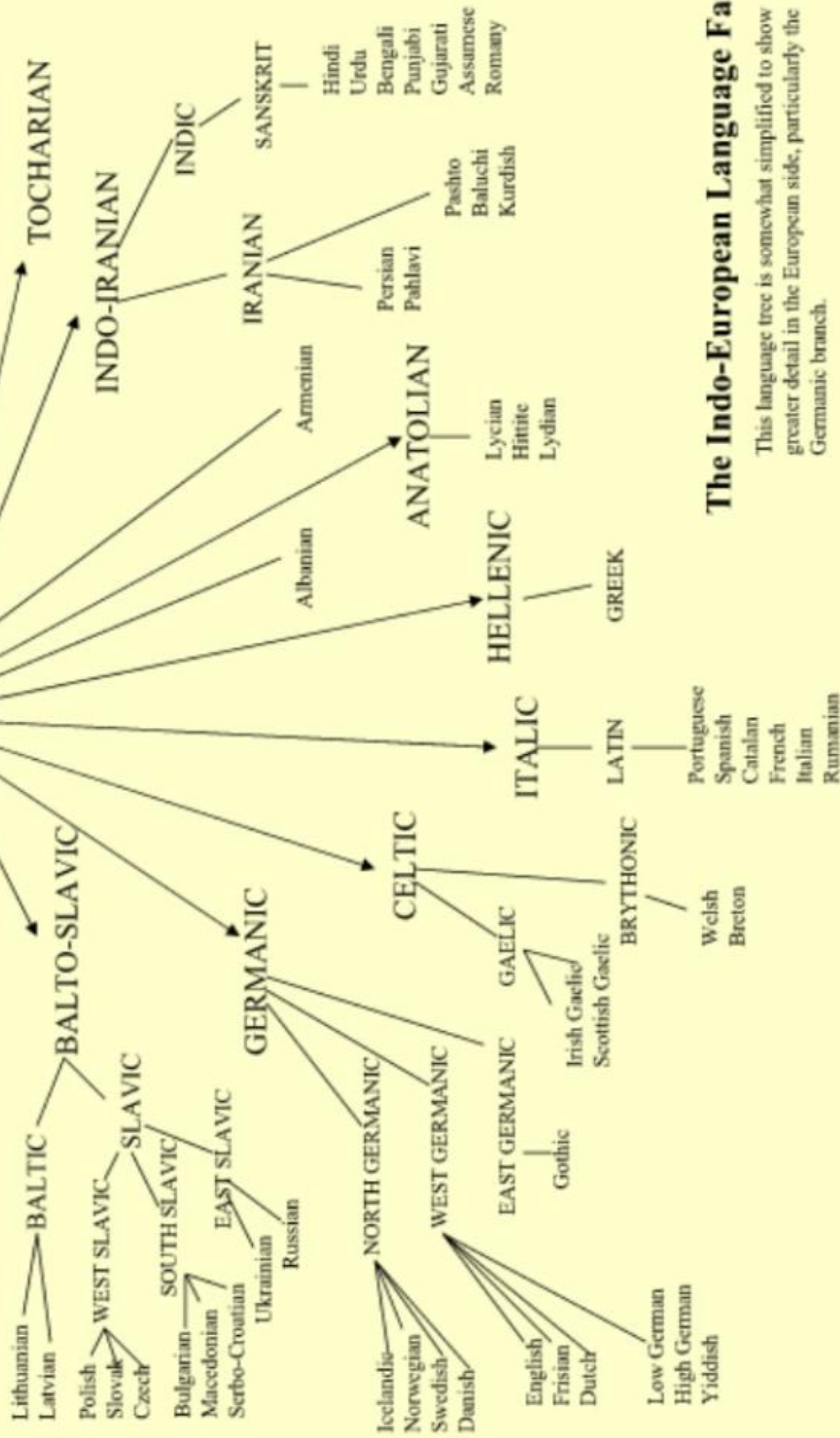
Attitudes to others

- Professional environments can affect speakers - might try to adopt a more formal way of speaking or try to suppress elements of a regional accent
- Some regional accents appear to be associated with straightforward, honest people many companies locate call centres in areas with distinctive accents for this reason

Standard English (SE)

- = a **social dialect of English with distinctive features of vocabulary, grammar and spelling**

Proto-Indo-European



The Indo-European Language Family

This language tree is somewhat simplified to show greater detail in the European side, particularly the Germanic branch.

- A standard form of a language is one that is considered to be acceptable or correct by educated speakers
- In medieval English people in different parts of the country spoke very different dialects making communication difficult
- SE used today started as the regional dialect of the East Midlands- influence spread and it was the dialect used in print as more was printed variations in spelling and grammar were ironed out
- People began to codify the language in dictionaries and try to regulate it by writing books of grammar rules. **Johnson's dictionary**, printed in **1755** aimed to standardise spelling and meaning
- SE became associated with education, class and power, rather than any particular region

Situations that SE is used

SE is the most widely understood variety of English and is used in lots of different fields:

- Education- SE is the variety of English taught in schools, and it's what people are taught when they learn English as a foreign language
- Media- it's used in newspapers and by newsreaders on the TV or radio
- Formal documents- it's the language used in essays, business letters and reports
- Formal speech- it is expected that people speak using Standard English in formal situations like business negotiations and public announcements

Standard English and formality

SE has different degrees of formality

- Mother appeared exceedingly fatigued following the intense culinary efforts required to satiate her offspring
 - excessively formal, prescriptivists would say syntax, grammar and spelling is 'correct'
- Mother looked bloody shattered after cooking tea for the kids
 - contains swearing and informal terms however, syntax, verb forms and spelling would be considered 'correct' from a prescriptivist view and elements are consistent with SE features
- Mum was tired having made us all dinner
 - not classed as SE because of the use of the verb were- using plural form instead of singular making sentence grammatically incorrect

Received Pronunciation (RP)

- **a social accent traditionally associated with educated people and the upper class**
- It is different from other accents as it doesn't indicate which region the speaker is from
- Traditionally RP and SE are linked and this would be the most prestigious way of speaking
- Most recognisable examples of RP are how the Queen speaks and the traditional speech of BBC presenters- people sometimes call RP Queen's English or BBC English
- Because RP has been seen as standard way of speaking English it's the accent taught to use when people learn English as a foreign language

Features of RP:

- long vowel sounds in words like grass and castle
- long vowel sound in words like come and under
- pronouncing hs and ts in words like hat and letter

Change in RP

BBC newsreaders still use SE but they now speak it in a range of regional accents. RP is still associated with educated and upper class speakers but its association with authoritative voices has diminished

- only 3% of Britain still uses RP in its traditional form
- There has been downward convergence and levelling of RP over the years-
 - may have been modified because accent is so distinctive
 - levelling helps people to integrate with the other language varieties in society
- The decline in RP is linked to the rise of Estuary English- spread because Cockney speakers use it as a higher status variety and RP speakers converge on it as a standard variety
- Estuary English is viewed as a classless variety of English which has helped it to spread further than other varieties as few prejudices exist alongside it

Sociolect

varieties of language used by particular social groups to provide identity. Depends on:

- Socio-economic status- studies have shown middle and upper class people tend to use more standard forms than lower class people who are more likely to be regional dialects
- Education- studies show that well educated people are more likely to use SE and RP and are less likely to use sentence structures from regional dialects
- Age- sociolects used by teenagers tend to include more non-standard forms and slang than adults. Also more influenced by popular culture.
- Occupation- every occupation has specialist terms and technical vocabulary - jargon
- Belief system and culture- religious groups use specialist vocabulary, UK society is multicultural so lots of words from other languages have become part of other sociolects

Situation

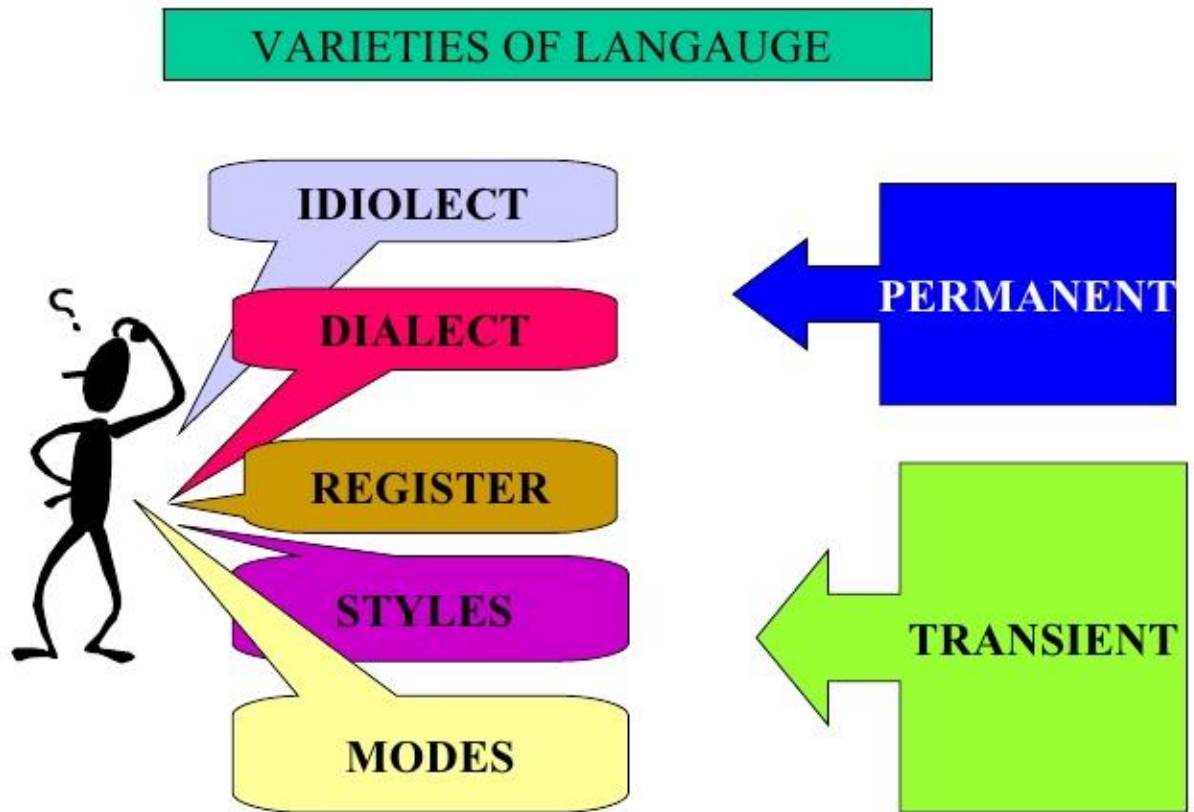
- Language that's appropriate in one social group might not be appropriate in another
- People adapt to the situation they are in for example:
 - Politicians tend to use SE when they're making a political speech because of the formal situation but when talking to individuals on the street they might use non-standard English and features of regional dialects
 - lots of people speak differently with friends and parents e.g. might use more slang
 - Some people have a telephone voice- often closer to RP

<p>MOST RELIABLE</p>  <p>1. RP (AGAIN) 2. YORKSHIRE 3. EDINBURGH 4. AUSTRALIAN 5. WELSH</p>	<p>MOST INTERESTING</p>  <p>1. RP (AGAIN) 2. AMERICAN 3. IRISH 4. GEORDIE 5. EDINBURGH</p>
<p>MOST FRIENDLY</p>  <p>1. RP (AGAIN) 2. GEORDIE 3. EDINBURGH 4. AMERICAN 5. YORKSHIRE</p>	<p>MOST ATTRACTIVE</p>  <p>1. RP (AGAIN) 2. EDINBURGH 3. AUSTRALIAN 4. YORKSHIRE 5. IRISH</p>

Idiolect

the unique language of an individual as result of a unique combination of influences:

- where someone is from and the regional accents and dialects influencing them
- social background- socio-economic status, age, religious beliefs, education, gender, schools, sports teams and groups of friends
- personal characteristics- personality



Slang

informal, non-standard words and expressions that tend to be used in the vernacular
it's often inventive and creative, and enters the language in lots of different ways

New meanings for existing words:

- e.g. sick meaning good

Shortening existing words

- e.g. telly, rents, beaut

New words

- e.g. yonks

Different purposes of slang

- Slang identifies people as part of a social group- part of sociolect to suggest shared values
- Slang can act as a code to exclude outsiders e.g. groups of teenagers might use slang to establish a sense of identity separate from the adult world
- The two main purposes of slang are to be **rebellious or entertaining**

Slang and social taboos

- There's lots of slang for taboo subjects- things that are thought of as inappropriate or unacceptable to talk about in formal social situations e.g. words for sex and bodily functions
- Some of the most common and offensive slang words are swear words
- It is seen as taboo to swear in some situations e.g. in class at school- way of rebelling
- In other situations swearing is an accepted part of a group's sociolect, and people do it to fit in and be entertaining
- Not all slang is taboo language, but there's a lot more slang for taboo subjects than for any others

Social and region specific slang

- Some slang words are familiar to lots of speakers e.g. most people in the UK know that tenner is short for £10
- Slang also varies depending on which region speakers are from. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish slang words from regional dialect variant words
- Example of regional slang is Cockney rhyming slang e.g. butcher's hook - look
- The slang a person uses also depends on social factors
- Some slang will only be used by very small social groups e.g. a particular school
- Some reflects multiculturalism, as slang can come from lots of different cultures e.g. tucker is an Australian slang word for food
- The media also influences slang and gives people access to different subcultures
 - e.g. Hip Hop culture has introduced Black American slang that lots of English speakers no recognise e.g. bling

Slang and context

- The amount and type of slang used depends on the situation a person is in
- Who you're with can have a big impact e.g. you might want to give a different impression of yourself to your friends than you do to your grandparents
- Time and place can also have an effect e.g. in a formal context
 - like a business meeting, people are unlikely to use much slang or taboo language- it would be unprofessional
 - In an informal context, like having dinner with friends, people are more likely to swear

Slang in written language

- Used in multi-modal texts like emails
- The amount and type of slang used depend on the purpose and audience of the text
- The reasons for including slang in writing can be to appear informal and accessible to audiences. Taboo language can be included to shock the audience



Changing slang

Slang changes very quickly as words go in and out of fashion

- Lots of slang words used to be popular but they wouldn't be used anymore e.g. cits for citizens
- Slang terms can quickly start to sound dated e.g. mega (good) This happens especially with teenage slang. When adults and young children start using it, the slang becomes more mainstream and then teenagers stop using it

- Sometimes slang terms become so widely used that they become part of Standard English e.g okay and phone. These words were once considered informal, but now it would seem formal to say telephone
- The opposite can also happen- words can go from being formal or acceptable to being classed as vulgar. An example of this is the word, ****, which wasn't thought of as informal until the 17th century

Attitudes towards Standard English

SE is a social dialect usually associated with educated, middle and upper class people. It is the language of formal speech and writing

Regional dialects were associated with the uneducated and the lower classes, so it was seen as important to be able to use English 'properly' to be successful

Prescriptivists

- see Standard English as the 'correct' and 'pure' form of the language
- Other varieties are sometimes thought to be 'corruptions' of it
- There's a view that if you are using another dialect you aren't using English 'properly'

Descriptivists

- all varieties of English are equal, no reason why SE should be seen as better than any other dialect, claim people shouldn't be considered uneducated

Whether SE is appropriate depends on mode and context

Attitudes towards accents and dialects

Someone's accent and dialect is often a good indication of where they're from. But it can also influence attitudes about a speaker's social background and education

- Some people assume that people who use regional dialects are poorly educated or lower class
- Regional varieties are often associated with being down-to-earth and modest e.g. because regional accents are seen as being more accessible to audiences they are used more in voice overs in adverts

People sometimes make assumptions about others based on the variety of English they use e.g. people from the north of England often think with southern accents sound 'posh'

- Workman (2008) studied people's perceptions of different accents. Participants listened to recordings of different accents whilst they looked at peoples photos
- People rated intelligence depending on the accent they thought they had
- Yorkshire accents were rated as sounding most intelligent
- Birmingham accent was rated as much less intelligent
- Shows the strength of stereotypes

Attitudes towards slang

Slang is sometimes seen as low level, vulgar language which shouldn't be used in writing or formal situations

- some people think slang is undermining standards by not using the language 'properly' assuming the people who use lots of slang are lower class and uneducated
- Slang is seen as the language of informal speech, so it's considered inappropriate to use it in a formal context
- This is because slang has a reputation for being rebellious and subversive, so it isn't formally accepted as a variety of English
- Some people worry that it doesn't follow the 'proper' spelling and grammar rules
- However, most slang words do follow the rules of Standard English- they're just more flexible
- People who are interested in slang argue that it's an intelligent and creative variety of language that changes and develops very quickly and can serve an important purpose in social contexts as it identifies people as part of a group.



Regional varieties and slang in education

- Linguists like **Milroy and Milroy (1985)** have argued that it's not fair to correct children for using non-standard varieties of English
 - Children who use regional varieties of English end up struggling at school because Standard English is unfamiliar to them. Because regional dialects are linked to social class, it's often working class children who are put at a disadvantage because they're told that the language used is wrong
 - The Milroys argued all varieties should be valued equally and children shouldn't be discouraged
- **John Honey (1997)** argues that children should be taught Standard English at school because this is the only way to make sure all children have equal opportunities
 - Children will be disadvantaged if don't use the prestigious Standard English
 - E.g. might miss out on job opportunities because non-standard spellings are used in applications so employers might assume they are unintelligent
 - Viewpoint sees non-standard varieties as barriers to universal communication
 - Non-standard varieties appropriate for informal speech but SE should always be favoured because it ensures universal understanding
 - Called **bidialectism**- children end up using two dialects

Language and Gender

12/06/2017

Language and Gender: Studies and Theories

Starter
Do you watch any non-scripted television programmes? How do men and women speak in them?

Term of the day:
theory
Theories are explanations of something, based on its principles. Today we will explore a range of language and gender theories. Remember that your analysis might support or contrast with a theory, but it will never prove or disprove it!

LO: To explain and evaluate a range of Language and Gender theories.

Studies have shown that **women tend to use accents from a higher social class than men**

- **Trudgill (1983)** studied men and women's social class accents. He found that women's pronunciation was closer to Received Pronunciation (RP) the accent that's usually seen as the most prestigious
- **Cheshire (1982)** studied the speech of adolescent girls and boys, and found that boys tended to use more non-standard grammatical forms e.g. ain't, than girls

Using Standard English and RP gives a person **overt prestige**- the prestige of being associated with a respectable, well-off society. Women tend to seek overt prestige more than men

Using non-standard English gives a person **covert prestige** - they seem a bit rebellious and independent. Men are more likely to see covert prestige than women

Women and prestigious forms

There are several possible reasons for why women use more prestigious language

- Women might be less secure than men in terms of social status. If they feel that they have an inferior position in society, then they might use more prestigious language to overcome it
- Society generally expects higher standards of behaviour from women- they're expected to behave like 'ladies' and use 'ladylike' language
- Men already have a higher social status than women, so they don't need prestigious forms to improve it. Instead, they seek covert prestige by using non-standard language that seems tough and rebellious
- Non-standard language is traditionally associated with working-class men, so men might use it to show they share traditionally masculine qualities

Important: These explanations are based on studies of a **few men and women in the 1980s** so gender roles have changed and it cannot be used as a generalisation

Deficit model- Lakoff

Robin Lakoff identified features that she felt were characteristic of women's language

- Hedges and fillers- fragments of language like sort of, kind of, maybe
- Apologetic requests- e.g. I'm sorry but would you mind closing the door
- Tag questions- e.g. this is nice, isn't it?
- Indirect requests- e.g. it's very noisy out there (meaning- could you close the door)

Lakoff also pointed out that women tend to speak less than men, use fewer expletives and use more intensifiers

She argued that these features of women's language reflected women's inferior social status, and made it worse by making them seem indecisive and needy.

She said that women's language is weak compared to men's preventing women from being taken seriously. Explanation= **deficit model**

Deficit model- O'Barr and Atkins

Suggested an alternative explanation to the deficit model

- They analysed transcripts of American courtroom trials
- They found that male and female witnesses who were of low social status and/or inexperienced with the courtroom practices both showed many of the linguistic features that Lakoff labelled female
- This suggests that the kind of language Lakoff describes as female isn't only found in women, and might be more to do with individuals feeling powerless

Lakoff's research is quite old

- More recently, researchers like **Holmes (1984)** have suggested that 'women's language' doesn't show weakness, but a desire to co-operate
- Linguists like **Cameron (2007)** argue that there are actually very few differences between men and women's language, and situation affects how people speak much more than gender

Dominance model

- Zimmerman and West (1975) recorded interruptions in conversations between men and women
- They found that **96%** of the interruptions were by men
- This suggested that men are dominant in male-female conversations. They argued that this reflects male dominance in society

Difference model

Tannen (1990) described male and female conversational style in terms of difference

Men:

- Men are concerned with status and independence e.g. they interrupt a lot
- They give direct orders e.g. pass me that, and don't mind conflict
- Men are interested in gaining factual information and finding solutions to problems

Women:

- Women are interested in forming bonds- so tend to talk less and agree more than men
- They usually give polite, indirect orders and try to avoid conflict
- Women aim to show understanding by compromising, and offering support rather than solutions

The reasons for these differences could be to do with the topics discussed in single-sex groups e.g. traditionally male topics have focused on work and sport where factual information and status are important. Traditionally female topics have centred on the home and family, where emotions, support and compassion are important

Problems with these explanations

Beattie (1982) questioned Zimmerman and West's idea that men interrupting women was a sign of dominance

- He suggested that interruptions can be supportive and show the person is listening
- e.g. if they repeat what the speaker is saying, or say things like yes or mm

Cameron (2007) argues that a lot of research is biased because there has been more focus on the differences between male and female language, which are actually quite small rather than the similarities

Representation of men and women



Men and women are represented differently

- Sexist language is language that insults, patronises or ignores people on the basis of their gender
- There is a lot more sexist language about women than men
- Some language implies that the male version is the norm, and the female version is different or wrong

Marked terms

- These are words that reveal a person's gender e.g. policemen, wife
- Unmarked terms don't reveal the person's gender e.g. police officer, spouse
- Some words are marked by a feminising suffix e.g. actress, usherette, comedienne
- The suffix implies that the male version is the original or the norm, so it seems superior to the female version

Generic terms

- This is when a unmarked term is used to refer to both men and women
- It's nearly always masculine terms which are used to mean people in general, rather than just men
- The most common example is the word man, e.g. the noun mankind, or the verb to man the desk
- Generic terms refer to everybody, but using them can make females seem invisible by ignoring them. When this occurs, women are said to be occupying negative semantic space

Lexical Asymmetry

- Refers to pairs of words that appear to have a similar meaning, but **aren't equally balanced**
- e.g. bachelor and spinster (unmarried man and unmarried woman)
- The connotations of bachelor are usually positive- it's associated with a man living a carefree, independent life
- The connotations of spinster are usually negative- it implies that the woman has been unable to find a partner

Patronising terms

- **Words used by speakers that imply superiority over the person they're talking to**

- Terms that imply someone is younger than the speaker can be patronising e.g. girls, young lady
- Terms of endearment can be patronising in some circumstances e.g. love, dear, sweetheart
- Whether a word is patronising depends on the context e.g. a male employee who addresses a female colleague as love could be seen as patronising, but boyfriends and girlfriends calling each other love might not

Sexist grammar

The idea that **male is the norm is also evident in English grammar**

Pronouns

- the 3rd person masculine pronoun he or his is often used to refer to both men and women

Syntax

- When one gender specific word is always placed before another, it's known as order of preference
- e.g. mr and mrs, men and women, sir and madam
- Usually the male term comes first

Insults

There are a lot more insulting terms for women than there are for men. This is known as **over-representation**

- Lots of insulting terms for women have an animal theme e.g. *****, cow
- There are lots of words to label women as promiscuous e.g. ****, ****, slapper
- There are hardly any equivalents for men. Terms like stud tend to have positive connotations
- Terms like man whore or man **** tend to be used comically, and imply that the female version is the norm
- The lack of an equivalent for something is known as **lexical gap**

Sexist language can be avoided

- The Sex Discrimination Act was passed in 1975 to protect people from sexual discrimination and harassment, especially at work and school
- It reflected the work of feminist campaigners who wanted to promote equality between men and women
- Part of this campaign was a push to get rid of sexist language
- The idea is that language doesn't just reflect sexist attitudes- it helps to keep them alive
- So if you change discriminatory language, then people's attitudes might change too
- Often called **political correctness**
- Sexist terms can be avoided replacing them with gender neutral ones

Changing sexist language

- Marked terms can be replaced by unmarked terms e.g. head teacher instead of headmaster or headmistress
- Feminising suffixes can be dropped e.g. a female manager is called a manager not a manageress
- Instead of Mrs or Miss, the titles Ms is often used, so you can't tell whether a woman is married

- The generic use of man can be replaced by gender neutral terms e.g. humankind instead of mankind, workforce instead of manpower
- The generic use of the masculine 3rd person pronoun (he) can be replaced by he/she, s/he or they. Sentences can be made gender neutral by using the plural instead

Different views about sexist language

- The point of encouraging people to avoid sexist language is to ensure people will be treated equally, and not feel they're being singled out, or ignored because of their gender
- Sometimes there are problems with trying to control language in this way
 - people feel its overbearing and find it frustrating as they feel they can't speak freely
 - some people argue this can create resentment towards the group of people it is designed to protect
- It's hard to enforce the use of non-sexist language
 - Some people think that condemning all sexist language ignores context and intent
 - E.g. if everyone understands that a comment is a joke, and nobody is offended by it, then it's pointless to have laws that stop people from making it

Some people complain that Language is declining

Editorials in newspapers and magazines often have their say about the state of language today. The often link change to a sense of decline rather than development. Some also link what they see as the deterioration of language with the state of society in general.

Writing for a non-specialist audience means journalists can get the point across in many ways. For example:

- Creating pessimistic atmosphere by using terms with negative connotations like culprit
- Juxtaposing an idealised form of English with a physical fall or collapse and lack of civilisation
- Use of superlative adjectives to give the text an air of authority and to make it seem more serious
- Declarative sentences to make the writing sound authoritative and make the opinions seem definite and unquestionable

Some writers embrace language change

Not everyone has the same feelings about language issues. This requires a different approach. For example:

- Tone and style may be completely different
- Writing may personify English giving it personality so it seems alive aiming to make the reader feel like language can't be controlled by prescriptivism
- Using familiar human situations making it easier for non-specialists to understand
- Use of rhetorical questions leading the reader to agreement

Non-specialist books on language

Non-linguists are now quite well informed about language. This has resulted in lots of different opinions - everyone's got their own view on what constitutes 'good' or 'bad' English and whether they accept or understand certain phrases.

- Linguists write non-specialist titles, like David Crystal's *By Hook or by Crook: A Journey in Search of English* and *Txting: The Gr8 Db8* (2008) which are both very descriptive
- There are also books like *How to talk proper in Liverpool: Lern Yersel' Scouse* or *Larn Yersel' Geordie* series, which are examples of light-hearted popular titles that document regional variations. There are also plenty of books about the differences between men and women in terms of language and gender
- Journalists/broadcasters who aren't necessarily experts on linguistics sometimes write about language e.g. Melvyn Bragg's *The Adventure of English* (2003)

Most English speakers accept
the fact that the language
changes over time, but don't
accept the changes made in
their own time.



Tasks:

1. When is slang used and what associations does it have? Is it ever appropriate to use slang? Write a full response about the use of slang and taboo language.
2. Do you think language is sexist? Why or why not? Explain your views in full.
3. Do accents matter? Why or why not? Write a full response.
4. Describe the different ways language changes and why. Do you think this is this a good thing?
5. Describe ways that you manipulate your own language and why.

