

Exploring English: Variation and Change

Dates	Thursdays 1, 8, 15 and 22 February 2018
Times	18.00–20.00
Location	Harry M Weinrebe Learning Centre
Level	All levels
Class size	Maximum 16 participants

Course description

All languages change over time, and vary according to place and context. Change may result from significant socio-political events such as invasion, colonisation and migration, or reflect more organic social and cultural change within a speech community. The way we speak is also influenced by many factors – our family roots, our social and educational background, our working environment, our friends and our own sense of identity. Join four of the UK's leading linguistic experts and explore how they investigate and document the continuing story of variation and change in the English spoken here in London, across the UK and around the world.

Week 1: British Dialect Surveys (Jonnie Robinson, British Library)

Do you say *ma*, *mam*, *mum*, *mom* (or maybe *mummy-ji*, *muma*, *mater* or *old girl*)? Do you pronounce *baths* to rhyme with *maths*? Are you *sat* or *sitting* while reading this? In our first session we'll explore how linguists record dialect words, localised pronunciation and non-standard grammar, focusing primarily on the findings of the first comprehensive study of vernacular speech in England, the *Survey of English Dialects* (1950-1961), and its successor, *Voices* (2004-2005). We'll examine original survey data, listen to archival and present-day sound recordings, and reflect on how our linguistic choices give subtle clues to our individual and shared identities.

Week 2: Multicultural London English (MLE) (Professor Jenny Cheshire, Queen Mary, University of London)

Cockney is the variety of English traditionally associated with London, but during the last thirty years or so a new London English has emerged – MLE. In week two we'll look briefly at what has happened to Cockney, but mainly we'll explore the characteristics of MLE and those who speak it. We'll explore how, why, and where in London MLE has emerged, and what people think about this new way of speaking. We'll end by considering the future of MLE: is it just 'a London thing', likely to become the new Cockney, or will it spread beyond London?

Week 3: Understanding Language Change (Distinguished Professor Tony McEnery, Lancaster University)

Day by day, word by word, language evolves around us. Observing that change in spoken language is particularly difficult: much speech is spoken and lost instantly. To observe change in speech we need huge volumes of data and a reliable record of what was said, so that we can identify the many small changes that accumulate into a bigger change over time. In our third session, we'll explore the British National Corpus (BNC) – a collection of language (called a 'corpus') containing millions of words of transcribed conversational English, collected over two decades. We'll consider how the Corpus, for the first time, allows us to systematically study change in everyday spoken English – and look at some of the highlights from the findings of the project so far, from the decline of the word 'marmalade' to changes in the use of bad language in conversational British English.

Week 4: English as a Global Language (Professor Devyani Sharma, Queen Mary, University of London)

Many common phrases in British English have travelled a very long way. If you *pass the buck*, *stake a claim*, or have an *ace up your sleeve*, you're using American frontier language. If you *have a dekko* or are *doolally* in East London, you're using colonial borrowings from India. In our final session, we'll explore the story of English beyond the shores of Britain. We'll look at how colonial and postcolonial history and politics have caused English to develop radically different forms and identities around the world, including native dialects such as Australian English, creole languages in the Caribbean, new Englishes in Africa and Asia, and brand new adopters in places such as Japan and Chile. We'll end with a peek into the future: are we headed for an English-speaking world?

Tutors

Jenny Cheshire is Professor of Linguistics at Queen Mary, University of London and a Fellow of the British Academy. She has co-directed two recent large research projects on Multicultural London English, and is now working on Multicultural Paris French. She has written or edited several books including *Variation in an English Dialect*, *English around the World*, and, with Peter Trudgill, *The Sociolinguistics Reader*. She is editor of the journal *Language in Society* and of the *Linguistics Research Digest* blogpost (where there are several accounts of Multicultural London English).

Tony McEnery is Distinguished Professor of English Language and Linguistics at Lancaster University. He is currently Director of Research and Interim Chief Executive at the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), on secondment from Lancaster University. Tony was Director of the ESRC Centre for Corpus Approaches to Social Science (CASS) at Lancaster and has published extensively on corpus linguistics.

Jonnie Robinson is Lead Curator of Spoken English at the British Library. Jonnie is responsible for the Library's extensive archive of sound recordings of British accents and dialects. He has worked on two nationwide surveys of regional speech, the *Survey of English Dialects* and *BBC Voices*, and in 2010 co-curated the world's first major exhibition on the English Language, *Evolving English: One Language, Many Voices*. He has recently contributed to a publication on present-day southern British English dialects and is currently preparing a book on dialect in the East Midlands.

Devyani Sharma is Professor of Sociolinguistics at Queen Mary, University of London. Her research examines grammatical, phonetic, and social change in postcolonial and other bilingual contact varieties of English. Her recent co-edited works include *The Oxford Handbook of World Englishes* (Oxford University Press, 2017), *English in the Indian Diaspora* (Benjamins, 2014), and *Research Methods in Linguistics* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Suggested reading

BBC Voices Recordings (online: <http://sounds.bl.uk/Accents-and-dialects/BBC-Voices>)

Dick Leith, 'The spread of English beyond the British Isles' and 'The development of English pidgins and creoles', in David Graddol, Dick Leith and Joan Swann, *English: History, Diversity, and Change*, pages 194-221 (Routledge, 1996)

Edgar Schneider, 'Models of English in the World', in M. Filppula, J. Klemola, and D. Sharma (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of World Englishes*, pages 35-57 (Oxford University Press, 2017)

Survey of English Dialects (online: <http://sounds.bl.uk/Accents-and-dialects/Survey-of-English-dialects>)

Previous skills, knowledge or experience

None required. A willingness to participate in group discussion will help you get the most from this course.

Facilities and refreshments

Please note that the Learning Centre will open to participants 15 minutes before the stated start time. Tea and coffee will be provided at each session.