

4.1 Language, politics and ideologies

Attitudes to language usage, variation and change are rarely, if ever, just about language. Language is political, and there are often agendas and ideologies at the heart of the debate. This view of language was taken up by Deborah Cameron, in her 1995 work *Verbal Hygiene*, who argued that people with conservative views:

use 'grammar' as the metaphorical correlate for a cluster of related political and moral terms: *order, tradition, authority, hierarchy and rules*. In the ideological world that conservatives inhabit, these terms are not only positive, they define the conditions for any civil society, while their opposites – *disorder, change, fragmentation, anarchy and lawlessness* – signify the breakdown of social relations. A panic about grammar is therefore interpretable as the metaphorical expression of persistent conservative fears that we are losing the values that underpin civilization and sliding into chaos. (Cameron 1995: 96)

In other words, using 'bad grammar' can mean 'behaving badly'. And because 'bad grammar' is so often aligned with new forms of a language that arise as a result of grammatical change, we can understand this attitude in terms of metaphor:

CONFORMING TO GRAMMATICAL RULES IS CONFORMING TO SOCIETY

CONFORMING TO GRAMMATICAL RULES IS A STATEMENT OF AUTHORITY

RESISTING LANGUAGE CHANGE IS GOOD BEHAVIOUR

As you will see in this chapter, this view of language is conservative and prescriptive. It supposes that there is a 'correct' way to use English, and that any changes to a language – especially those that challenge the standard variety – are damaging and threaten the very identity of 'proper English'. This is especially relevant in a globalised world, where English is increasingly used in ways that deviate from the standard. Because many people believe that English 'belongs' to Britain, they see it as their right and their role to defend changes and deviations. But – as you have seen throughout this book – language always changes. So isn't trying to defend something as slippery and dynamic as language a rather futile task?

Given the idea that attitudes to language change are inherently political, a useful approach to studying language can be found in *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA), such as the work by Norman Fairclough in his 2014 book *Language and Power*. CDA is attractive because it acknowledges the ways that language is often a projection of political and ideological views. Chapter 4 of *Attitudes to Language* (in this series) by Dan Clayton explores this method in more detail. In short, people who have prescriptive, conservative views to language often hold traditional, nationalist and parochial views on society itself.

KEY TERM

Critical Discourse Analysis: an approach to the study of both written and spoken language focusing on the ways that power is enacted

4.2 Prescription and description

The distinction between prescriptive and descriptive approaches to grammar is an important one in linguistics. Prescriptivists can be thought of as people who want to tell us how we *ought* to use language, while descriptivists want to tell us how we actually *do* use language. Rather than being a clear-cut, oppositional distinction, prescriptive and descriptive attitudes are best thought of as existing along a scale. The research task at the end of this chapter asks you to think about this further.

It should be noted that in certain contexts, all people probably hold some prescriptivist values. For example, a linguist who self-identifies as a descriptive liberal is still practising a form of prescriptivism if she asks her students to write an essay in a certain way, or objects to the way that a certain word is used, if it conflicts with her own ideas. This chapter will ask you to think about your own values and attitudes to language change.

Prescriptive and descriptive attitudes are manifested in different ways – one of them being 'grammars' of a language. Grammars are (usually) comprehensive handbooks, detailing the structure of a language. The following sections look at prescriptive and descriptive grammars in more detail.

4.2.1 Prescription

Prescriptive grammars can be thought of as usage manuals – they are typically arranged like a dictionary, containing an alphabetically sorted list of grammar topics that essentially tell their readers the 'correct' way to use language. The 'correct' version of English, according to prescriptive grammars, is Standard English, meaning that prescriptive grammars will often confuse informality with ungrammaticality. Section 4.3 argues for a reframing of 'correctness' to 'appropriateness', suggesting the term *register* as a useful notion here.

Prescriptive grammars also tend to be selective in what they cover, focusing on common 'errors' rather than the actual details of a language. Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 7) label this as 'aesthetic authoritarianism', where views on language usage and change are driven by no more than the author's personal

tastes. This does *not* mean that acquiring knowledge of Standard English is not a desirable skill: it is highly desirable, but only if users understand that it exists alongside other variations of English, and that usage of any variety depends on the sociocultural context of usage.

KEY TERM

Register: a particular variety of language as defined according to the way it is used in social situations and different contexts – for example, a register of formal English; a register of business English, etc.

Text 4A is the opening to *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* by Lynne Truss (2003), a widely sold 'zero-tolerance' usage guide to grammar, punctuation and spelling. It provides a good example of the views held by prescriptivists.

Text 4A

Either this will ring bells for you, or it won't. A printed banner has appeared on the concourse of a petrol station near to where I live. 'Come inside,' it says, 'for CD's, VIDEO's, DVD's, and BOOK's.'

If this satanic sprinkling of redundant apostrophes causes no little gasp of horror or quickening of the pulse, you should probably put down this book at once. By all means congratulate yourself that you are not a pedant or even a stickler; that you are happily equipped to live in a world of plummeting punctuation standards; but just don't bother to go any further. For any true stickler, you see, the sight of the plural word 'Book's' with an apostrophe in it will trigger a ghastly private emotional process similar to the stages of bereavement, though greatly accelerated. First there is shock. Within seconds, shock gives way to disbelief, disbelief to pain, and pain to anger. Finally (and this is where the analogy breaks down), anger gives way to a righteous urge to perpetrate an act of criminal damage with the aid of a permanent marker.

Truss clearly feels strongly about language. She equates feelings caused by language use to the death of a loved one, and evokes images of the devil to describe people who use certain linguistic forms. Although her writing may appear humorous, there are some serious issues with these kinds of attitudes. Firstly, Truss's argument is flawed. She seems to base her views on the imaginary idea that at some point in the past there was a 'golden age' of grammar, when everybody was capable of using 'correct' forms of English, and that those abilities

have gradually declined over time. This is called a **declinist** view of language change, an ideological view criticised by Lane Greene (2011: 47):

A hundred and forty years ago, one in five Americans was illiterate. Now less than one in a hundred is – and this fall began during a hundred years of 'separate but equal' dismal schools for blacks in America. In Britain, illiteracy is rarer still. It may be true that formal grammar was taught more extensively in good schools in the past. But the notion that once upon a time, every schoolboy was an H.W. Fowler, every schoolgirl a perfectly punctuating Lynne Truss, but today no one can put two words together simply holds no water. Where is the former golden age of the written word?

KEY TERM

Declinist/declinism: a tendency noted by Lane Greene for prescriptivists to view language as being in a state of constant decline from a once great peak

This 'golden age' never existed. And yet, every generation and every era of language change has a body of people who pine for it, who yearn nostalgically for an (imaginary) time where people spoke 'properly' and 'falling standards' were tackled head on. One of the earliest and most publicised complaints about the English language came from Jonathan Swift, who, in his 1712 public letter entitled *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue*, wrote:

our Language is extremely imperfect; that its daily Improvements are by no means in proportion to its daily Corruptions; and the Pretenders to polish and refine it, have chiefly multiplied Abuses and Absurdities; and, that in many Instances, it offends against every Part of Grammar.

Swift's idea was to create an academy for the protection and defence of the English language, much like French prescriptivists had done in the shape of the *Académie Française*. He proposed that:

some Method should be thought on for ascertaining and fixing our Language for ever; after such Alterations are made in it as shall be thought requisite.

Modern-day prescriptivists continue to yearn and pine for this imaginary golden age of language. And they are not hard to find: looming large in the pages of the (mostly right-wing) media, and in bestseller usage guides such as those by Lynne Truss (2003), John Humphrys (2005) and Neville Gwynne (2013). Section 4.2.3

explores some of the reasons why the voice of prescriptivism continues to be heard. Indeed, the very fact that prescriptivism prevails is a fascinating area of language study. To dismiss or brush off the prescriptivists would be counter to the aims of descriptive linguistics, which are to describe and understand all forms of language and discourse about language.

Case study: prescriptivism in action

In April 2017, a news story about a Bristolian self-styled 'grammar vigilante' came about, concerning a man who spends his nights covertly correcting misplaced or missing apostrophes on shop signs, posters and billboards. Is this prescriptivism, or is it just innocuous fun? Before you read on, you might like to think about your own ideas on this issue.

An article by the linguist Rob Drummond (2017) argued that such behaviour normalises and champions prescriptivism, and only serves to promote the idea that it's acceptable to pick on people because of the way they use language. Despite the fact that the rules for when the apostrophe should and shouldn't be used are not as fixed as you might think, prescriptivists are often quick to point out – and laugh at – other people's linguistic choices. Apostrophe mis/usage might seem like a minor 'offence', but if these kinds of attitudes are scaled up to things such as accents, dialects and entire languages then it quickly becomes a much more serious issue. To make the point clear: is there any difference between deriding someone for misplacing an apostrophe and deriding someone for choosing to speak in a local dialect? What about the difference between deriding someone for misplacing an apostrophe and deriding someone who chooses to speak in their native language rather than English? Although the 'gap' between these things might appear large, the underlying values, ideologies and attitudes towards language are similar.

4.2.2 Description

Descriptive grammars resemble a documentary, in that they describe and document the way that language is used, varies and changes. They do not deride or bemoan change, but acknowledge it as an interesting aspect of language. Instead of complaining about a new word or pronunciation (as in the prescriptivist tradition), descriptive linguists seek to collect linguistic data with the aim of exploring and understanding patterns. This is a serious undertaking, and the well-known comprehensive grammars of the English language are thousands of pages long. They are also never 'complete', considering the fact that language undergoes a constant process of change. As such, descriptive grammars provide a synchronic snapshot of what a language looks like at a particular moment in time.

4.2.3 Why do prescriptivism and descriptivism exist?

You might think that prescriptive grammars are rather outdated. All linguists would certainly agree that they have no place in modern linguistics, and clash with the aims of the discipline. And yet, they continue to be published, bought and revered. Prescriptivism is very much alive and well. Consult the comments section of any online article about language use and change, and you will find a breeding ground for prescriptive views on language. But why does prescriptivism continue? Where do prescriptive attitudes come from? The answers lie with something that was covered at the very beginning of this chapter: attitudes to language are always about more than just language. Some of the reasons why attitudes to language exist include the following:

- The general public tends not to question the need for prescriptivism, and instead it becomes seen as common sense. To many people, the need for grammar rules is as common sense as the rules themselves. Cameron argues that 'the idea that some ways of speaking and writing may be preferred to others, that linguistic performance may legitimately be evaluated and if necessary criticized, is absolutely central to the ordinary speaker's whole conception of language' (1997: 10).
- The media often consult non-linguists about real-world language issues, or include very limited comments from linguists. For example, a *Daily Telegraph* story about the lack of punctuation marks on the new £5 note in England featured just one short statement from a linguist and multiple statements from non-linguists. This meant that the angle of the story was biased in favour of prescriptive views, downplaying the voice and opinions of descriptive linguists. Sadly, many articles about language follow a similar pattern. In turn, the public gets limited exposure and education about language from the perspective of linguists.
- The media often misrepresent linguistic research so it becomes reframed as prescriptivism, rather than the descriptive work found in the original research. See the case on vocal fry, in Section 4.4.1 of this chapter, for an example of this.
- Language is an integral part of identity and perceived behaviour. So-called 'etiquette guides' have always been popular, and give advice about dress codes and table manners alongside language use. Michael Halliday labels this kind of prescription as 'linguistic table-manners' (2009: 431), promoting artificial rules that can gradually become part of a speaker's repertoire.
- People's beliefs about language are grounded in a lifetime of usage: established in childhood and built up through experience. Thus, people tend to be rather sensitive and nostalgic about language, often becoming set

in their ways, and see change as an intrusive threat to their linguistic and personal identity.

- There is a belief that prescriptivism is necessary for efficacy, clarity and language maintenance, as well as supporting ideologies around nationalism and linguistic imperialism.
- Standard English is seen as the norm in schools, often at the expense of other varieties. Activity 4.1 explores attitudes to language usage, variation and change in the context of education in further detail.

4.2.4 Register

The notion of register is an important and useful one when it comes to describing linguistic usage, variation and change. This rejects the contrast between 'correct' and 'incorrect' language, reframing language as 'a series of contextually appropriate choices'. To be clear: this does not mean that descriptive linguists think that 'anything goes' in language.

ACTIVITY 4.1

Register and re-writing

Read Text 4B, a reproduction of a sign placed on the gates of a school in south London in 2013.

Despite its obvious prescriptive attitudes, this sign raises an important point about language, in that certain linguistic choices are more appropriate than others, in certain contexts. Write a text that adopts a more descriptive approach to this issue, suitable for young children. For example, you could:

- Create a lesson plan for primary school children where they learn about different attitudes to language.
- Write an extract from a National Curriculum document providing guidance and information about what aspects and attitudes to language should be studied in schools.
- Rewrite Text 4B so that it acknowledges the importance of register and appropriateness, rather than framing language in terms of correctness.

You should consider what is meant by register in your writing. Once your text is complete, provide a short commentary on your own writing, where you reflect and justify the choices you made. See Giovanelli (2016) for an interesting discussion of language policing in schools.

Text 4B

<p>Banned Words:</p> <p>COZ AINT</p> <p>LIKE BARE</p> <p>EXTRA INNIT</p> <p>YOU WOZ and WE WOZ</p> <p>Beginning sentences with BASICALLY</p> <p>Ending sentences with YEAH</p>

4.3 Metaphors and attitudes to change

Text 4C is an extract from an article published in *The Telegraph* in October 2006. It was written by John Humphrys, a well-known prescriptivist and author of various 'pop-linguistic' books such as *Lost for Words: The Mangling and Manipulating of the English Language*. As you read Text 4C, think about the metaphors that underpin Humphrys' views of what language is, and his attitude to language change. *Today* is a radio programme co-presented by Humphrys.

Text 4C

Mind your language – it matters!

'Understanding the basic workings of grammar liberates. If you don't know how to construct a sentence, how can you express yourself?'

In the first exclusive extract from his new book on language, Humphrys argues that we must safeguard grammar and clarity in an age of texting, slang and hype.

There are one or two certainties on *Today*. You know that a story about cruelty to animals will always get a bigger reaction than one about cruelty to children. You know particular subjects will stir great passion in the breasts of a certain section of Radio 4 listeners: 'elf 'n' safety rules; political correctness gone mad; anything about the Union Jack and, of course, anything about the English language. It is one thing we have in common. All of us. You and I and the slightly menacing young hoodle hanging around on the street corner. We all care about language. Your concern may be different from the young hoodle's.

You might contemplate climbing Everest naked before splitting an infinitive. He cares just as passionately about using language that proves his street cred. We each need to take care. His language is changing almost every day. A word that was a compliment yesterday may be an insult tomorrow. Ours is changing too – more slowly, but just as surely.

Language is more than a tool for expressing ourselves. It acts as a mirror to our world, reflecting back to us the way we live. It reflects our attitudes about the way we see things and how we are seen by others: in public life; in politics and commerce; in advertising and marketing; in broadcasting and journalism. Yet the prevailing wisdom about language seems to be that 'anything goes'. Word by word, we are at risk of dragging our language down to the lowest common denominator and we do so at the cost of its most precious qualities: subtlety and precision. If we're happy to let our common public language be used in this way, communication will be reduced to a narrow range of basic meanings.

Linguists would no doubt agree with certain things that Humphrys touches on, namely, the idea that language does matter. Nobody would disagree with the sentiment here – linguist or not. But Humphrys' prescriptive views are soon made obvious when you think about the way that he construes what language is, and *what* it matters for. Metaphor is a particularly useful tool for exploring attitudes, perceptions and ideologies that people hold, and you can find the following metaphors in the text:

BEING LITERATE IS FREEDOM

'Understanding the basic workings of grammar liberates'

PARTS OF A LANGUAGE ARE CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS

'If you don't know how to construct a sentence'

GRAMMAR IS AN OBJECT TO BE DEFENDED

'We must safeguard grammar'

'We do so at the cost of its most precious qualities'

USING 'INCORRECT' GRAMMAR IS A DANGEROUS ACTIVITY

'You might contemplate climbing Everest naked before splitting an infinitive'

DOWN/SMALL IS BAD

'We are at risk of dragging our language down to the lowest common denominator'

'Communication will be reduced to a narrow range of basic meanings'

The 'anything goes' argument that Humphrys invokes is a popular one amongst prescriptivists. And yet, it is not a view that descriptive linguists hold. Instead, descriptive linguists argue that language use is contextually bound, and that context yields different levels of appropriateness. Once again, the importance of register is apparent as a useful way of describing usage, variation and change.

4.3.1 Aitchison's metaphors

In a 1996 lecture entitled *A Web of Worries*, Jean Aitchison questioned the way that language change was represented in the media, citing examples such as 'we are plagued with idiots on radio and television who speak English like the drags of humanity, to the detriment of our children' and 'the language the world is crying out to learn is diseased in its own country'. Aitchison argued that such views of language change were evidence of people being ill-informed on linguistic matters, and that such views are somewhat futile, given the inevitability of change. For her, many people's ideas on language were outdated – a 'cobweb of old ideas [that] ensnares people as they think about language'.

Although she didn't use the x is y convention for structuring metaphors, she argued that most journalism drew on three assumptions to represent people's attitudes to language change, which can be re-written as the following metaphors:

1 LANGUAGE CHANGE IS A DISEASE

2 LANGUAGE CHANGE IS LAZY BEHAVIOUR

3 LANGUAGE IS A LISTED BUILDING

The first metaphor, LANGUAGE CHANGE IS A DISEASE, is often called the 'infectious disease' assumption. This is based on the idea that we somehow 'catch' changes from each other, and that we ought to fight and resist these changes. You might notice that this resonates with a metaphor picked out from Cameron's work, namely one of RESISTING LANGUAGE CHANGE IS GOOD BEHAVIOUR. Aitchison acknowledges the fact that change comes about because of social contact, as do diseases – but that things catch on and people change because *they want to*: they want to adhere to social groups, follow the latest trends, and so on. The disease metaphor also rests on the assumption that there is some kind of 'cure' or 'vaccine' for successfully treating language change. If change is a disease, then are prescriptivists and groups such as the Queen's English Society the doctors? If so, the disease is winning.

The second metaphor, LANGUAGE CHANGE IS LAZY BEHAVIOUR is often called the 'damp spoon' assumption. This is based on the idea that certain forms of language are 'vulgar' and 'lazy': the reaction that some people might have when somebody leaves a damp spoon in the sugar bowl, or spreads butter with the bread knife. This view assumes that it is sloppiness and laziness that

causes languages to change – the idea that people simply cannot be bothered to articulate speech sounds or write ‘properly’. As you saw in Chapter 3, processes of phonological change mean that speakers do indeed change the articulation of speech sounds, but this is not because of laziness – it’s because of muscular efficiency and various types of connected speech phenomena.

The third and final metaphor, LANGUAGE IS A LISTED BUILDING, is often called the ‘crumbling castle’ assumption, and is underpinned by a declinist view. This is based on the idea that the English language is a beautiful, old building that needs to be protected and preserved. Aitchison criticises the way people often treat language, as if it were like ‘parks, national forests, monuments, and public utilities [...] available for properly respectful use but not for defacement or destruction’. She goes on to say that the metaphor itself simply doesn’t hold, because it implies the language was once carefully and lovingly constructed, until it reached a point of maximum aesthetic splendour. Note that this idea resonates with the fictional ‘golden age’ of grammar that prescriptivists often yearn for, something that was covered in Section 4.2.1.

LANGUAGE IS A TIDAL FLOW

To try and resist such metaphors, in 1999 the linguist David Crystal proposed the metaphor of LANGUAGE IS A TIDAL FLOW to explain language change. This metaphor captures the idea that language is like a tide – constantly changing and shifting in unpredictable ways, whilst retaining some form of uniformity and pattern. The tide brings in new words and removes others in natural ways. In adopting this metaphor, Crystal argues that a view of language change shifts towards one where changes are not for the worse or better, but ‘just changes, sometimes going one way, sometimes another’ (1999: 2).

4.4 Attitudes to phonological change

This section considers some of the attitudes around certain types of phonological change – that is, the way that people sound when they speak.

4.4.1 Vocal fry

If you articulate a vowel sound slowly, tense your vocal folds and don’t allow much air to pass through them, then you may well be producing a sound known as *vocal fry* or *creaky voice*. This feature of pronunciation was the subject of much media attention in 2011, when *Science Now* reported that:

A curious vocal pattern has crept into the speech of young adult women who speak American English: low, creaky vibrations, also called vocal fry. Pop singers, such as Britney Spears, slip vocal fry into their music as a way

to reach low notes and add style. Now, a new study of young women in New York State shows that the same guttural vibration – once considered a speech disorder – has become a language fad.

KEY TERM

Vocal fry/creaky voice: a way of speaking that constricts the vocal folds and creates a creaking, low frequency sound

Attitudes to language change

The attention came because an academic journal paper (Wolk, Abdelli-Berruh and Slavin, 2012) had found that vocal fry was a popular form of speech amongst young American women. But the media stories that surrounded it focused on the idea that this was somehow a new form, propelled into mainstream usage by celebrities such as Britney Spears and Kim Kardashian. In fact, it has been around for a much longer time, as highlighted in a blog post on the *Language Log*: (www.cambridge.org/links/esccha6010). Deficit views of vocal fry soon emerged in the UK media, with these ‘destructive speech patterns’ (www.cambridge.org/links/esccha6011) being blamed on hurting women’s job prospects – despite the fact that it is also a phonological feature of men’s speech. Again, we see an example of prescriptive attitudes to change tied up with wider discourses around gender, age and status – all of which is based on the misreporting of academic research. Text 4D is a selection of tweets expressing various attitudes to vocal fry.

Text 4D

Warmachine
So, I make conversation with a young woman on the train and she starts doing that vocal fry 🙄

11:51 pm · 20 Sep 2017

Franfile
If you speak in public and/or do interviews, please look up “vocal fry” and find someone who can help you avoid it. #P5a

10:33 pm · 20 Sep 2017

Dana S.
OMG this woman's voice doesn't just have “vocal fry”, it's been batter-dipped and charred beyond belief. Ughhhh my poor ears.

12:54 am · 21 Sep 2017

4.4.2 Rising intonation

Rising intonation is a phonological feature that has attracted much attention in the press, the general public and in linguistic research. Normally an intonation pattern heard at the end of questions, rising intonation is increasingly used with statements, especially over the last 20–30 years. Despite a widespread discourse in the media that uptalk displays uncertainty and insecurity, the linguist Paul Warren (2015) argues that rising intonation actually has a wide range of social and semantic functions. For example, it is often used when the speaker is the owner of the information rather than the seeker of information, and is used as an invitation to communicate, rather than simply checking understanding or showing insecurity.

KEY TERM

Rising intonation: using a rising tone as an utterance ends. Generally used when asking a question, but now more prevalent in statements. Can also be referred to as high-rising terminals or uptalk

Warren criticises the way that certain social groups – particularly young women – have been lambasted in the press and the public. He argues that the link between uptalk and young women is based on stereotypes, not linguistic research. And the results of his research conclude that:

We have seen that uptalk is not exclusively linked to young speakers, nor to women. Increasingly it is reported in the speech of older speakers, and in that of men. It would perhaps be more appropriate to consider uptalk's distribution among speakers as a reflection of the functions that it fulfils and of the needs or desires of different speaker groups to express those functions. (Warren 2015: 189)

ACTIVITY 4.2

Attitudes to rising intonation

Search online for 'uptalk' or 'rising intonation' and prepare a report about the ways that this phonological property is represented in the press and in public discourse. How do the attitudes compare with the work of Paul Warren? Do they convey a prescriptive or descriptive view of language use, variation and change?

As a starting point, you might try:

www.cambridge.org/links/esccha6011

www.cambridge.org/links/esccha6012

4.5 Attitudes to lexical change

In Chapter 3, some of the processes of lexical change were explored. In the following sections, some of the attitudes towards this type of change are presented.

4.5.1 Americanisms

British English speakers have long held attitudes towards the American influence on English. For some people, Americanisms are a 'corruptive force' that are 'killing' the English language, as suggested in a 2017 book by Matthew Engel. In the book, Engel rallies British English speakers to 'defend' the English language, seemingly misunderstanding that language is *not* a physical object that can be owned and protected and that the metaphor of LANGUAGE IS WAR is an inappropriate way to think about language change. But, Engel is not alone in such prescriptive views. A quick look at the *Cambridge English Corpus* reveals some interesting attitudes, as shown in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: Cambridge English Corpus results for Americanisms

more than someone.) Readers are probably more accustomed to Americanisms or even Britishisms but the change was pleasant. There was no apprehal I trust they will follow this dicta up by purging the shelves of all Americanisms. </p>
<p>Like gotten, totally, that rocks, and I ne </p>
<p>they had met. They wedded at the pure German. Americanisms have crept in to our language. One wrote: "You spoke about your life without </p>
<p>11702am. </p>
<p>Isn't it just the way things are these days? I'm so done with that. I'll kick it to the life, g... </p>
<p>BT @flemall21: Haha, Emma's complaining I use too many Americanisms in my columns. I'm so done with that. I'll kick it to the life, g... </p>
<p>are expected to be able to spell correctly and show little fear. They use Americanisms, even though most aren't American. When their children achieve their goal </p>
<p>of a +wooded those of you who are golfers). As for Oz absorbing Americanisms, I will respond with the one phrase I bring back. "Trailer" </p>
<p>All of the things we have been discussing do so because they see them as Americanisms or American usages. One such reader wrote, "Recently I saw 'trailer' in a </p>
<p>Even in Britain, America's partner in Anglo-Saxon capitalism, Americanisms have spread in recent years. The country's most prominent businessmen, </p>
<p>many of the nuances are lost to non-Arabic readers, the oft-very Americanisms creeping into our language but in this case, creating a bizarre image of the </p>
<p>rd not wrong to pick up on them. Australians really do use a lot of Americanisms, and any novelist who doesn't acknowledge that will be treating Australi </p>
<p>an open mind and an infectious enthusiasm. </p>
<p>He uses Americanisms such as 'and 'to good effect. His speech is li </p>
<p>strenuous ground, they have, for years, been quoting neurologist Americanisms, such as 'game on'. Fortunately, grown men still call each other 'love'. 'I </p>
<p>et Maguire's character expressed himself largely through generic Americanisms. "When you're up to your ass in alligators, it's hard to remember that you </p>
<p>nd, but, unlike Dylan's guanine-edge bang and Jagger's tortured Americanisms, it's abhorred. </p>
<p>And if you're susceptible to it, there's a polysyn </p>
<p>- Shagged, wuss, snuff, respect, sorted, wicked, geezer and some Americanisms - and boy </p>
<p>WOW, yuck, ooops, an </p>
<p>What's over-used, over-used and over here in print? </p>
<p>Americanisms, that's what. </p>
<p>Last month Feedback got an email from Malcolm </p>
<p>nd sociological clowns still flourished, but the intrusion of vigorous Americanisms and vivid domestic usage from popular culture helped to confound Orwell's </p>
<p>need for plain English. But in a chapter entitled make that trade! Americanisms", the manual betrays both an unsteady, nationalistic bias and an ignorant </p>
<p>affluence. Medical Fears, 1, 138). She also barge-vent, Dictionary of Americanisms, 347), 404, bolts de vodka, n.m. Buffalo chips. On the Great Plains dried the </p>
<p>my </p>
<p>This word and its forms 'tearly' and 'teachier' are Americanisms we can do without while we have the words 'evidence' and 'sair'. </p>
<p>peas group, and colleagues say he still does his conversation with Americanisms. Most recently he has chaired the trading group Ecol Logistics, which he </p>

Note how many people wish to remove Americanisms from the language, in examples such as 'purging the airwaves of all Americanisms', or the idea of Americanisms 'creeping into' British English. In response to Engel's book, the American linguist Lynne Murphy took a more descriptive, linguistically informed take – Text 4E is an extract from this (you can read the full article here: www.cambridge.org/links/esccha6005).

Engel has the opinion that Britons should fight against American English. But this opinion is based on various claims or assumptions

- about what English *is* in the US and UK. For example, though he's not southern in origin, the *English* he talks about is very much the south-eastern standard—take, for instance, the claim that *pants* meaning 'trousers' is American and *trousers* is British—a common oversimplification, **but an oversimplification all the same**.
- about the nature of the 'Britishness' that he wants to protect.
- about how language changes, and how it is or is not changing in the UK and US. For example, what's the role of regional identity or **social class** in how English changes in Britain?
- about the relationship between language and culture.

This last point is important. Engel's real enemy is not American words, but changes to British culture. Thatcherism, Blairism, loss of interest in the countryside, all are blamed on 'Americanisation'. The extent of that can be debated, but Engel wants to situate the problem in words.

4.5.2 Language change and technology

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, technology plays an important role in language change. It brings about new words and meanings, such as *emoji*, *wireless router* and *4G*, and changes the way we actually communicate – with text messages, messenger apps and social media all yielding new and innovative forms.

People's reaction to new technology-related words will often be based on whether they see the technology as having linguistic potential or limitations. People who engage with technology and welcome new inventions are much more likely to have positive reactions to new linguistic forms, whereas people who feel resistant about technology are likely to complain about language change. An interesting illustration of this can be seen by focusing on one particular technological innovation, and examining the attitudes and discourses around this.

The case of emoji

In 2015, *Oxford Dictionaries* named their 'word of the year' as: 🍌. Officially known as the 'Face with Tears of Joy' emoji, it was chosen because it was the most frequently used emoji across the entire world that year, made up 20 per cent of all UK emoji use, and reflected a sharp increase in the use of the

word *emoji* itself, indicating a significant shift in the habits of computer-mediated communication. Before reading on, complete Activity 4.3, which asks you about your own attitudes to technology and language change.

KEY TERMS

Emoji: a term to describe visual icons (representations of facial expressions, actions and objects) used in social media messaging

Computer-mediated communication (CMC): any form of communication that uses the medium of a keyboard or digital device, rather than being spoken or written

ACTIVITY 4.3

Attitudes to technology and change

Oxford Dictionaries' words of the year are selected because of their prevalence in language use (with data taken from language corpora), as well as observations from lexicographers (dictionary editors) and the general public. Table 4.1 lists the words of the year from 2005–2016, from the UK and the USA. Consulting this list, which ones were chosen as a result of technology? What are your reactions to these new forms? Do you use them? If so, in what contexts? What do you think other people's attitudes and reactions to these would have been? If you are unsure about the meaning of any of these words, see if you can work it out before looking them up in a dictionary.

Table 4.1: *Oxford Dictionaries'* words of the year

Year	UK word of the year	USA word of the year
2005	sudoku	podcast
2006	bovvered	carbon-neutral
2007	carbon footprint	locavore
2008	credit crunch	hypermiling
2009	simples	unfriend
2010	big society	refudiate

Year	UK word of the year	USA word of the year
2011	squeezed middle	
2012	omnishambles	GIF (when used as a verb)
2013		selfie
2014	vape	
2015		👉
2016	post-truth	

As you might have guessed, complaints about 🤔 were commonplace, with most of them questioning the status of 🤔 as an actual word. The choice was no doubt brave, but certainly reflected real-life language use and change. Emojis are a particularly interesting example of innovation and change, with Casper Grathwohl, President of Oxford Dictionaries, saying:

You can see how traditional alphabet scripts have been struggling to meet the rapid-fire, visually focused demands of 21st century communication. It's not surprising that a pictographic script like emoji has stepped in to fill those gaps – it's flexible, immediate, and infuses tone beautifully. As a result, emoji are becoming an increasingly rich form of communication, one that transcends linguistic borders.

This is certainly an extreme-descriptivist view, and did not sit well with many people. Below is a list of comments taken from a *Daily Mail* article about 🤔:

- The degradation of our language continues.*
- I'm of the generation that can still remember Queen's English. I dread to think which language we'll be speaking in a few years' time.*
- Simply a crutch for a generation which has such a poor standard of literacy that they have to be given a symbol in order to express their emotions.*
- Little cartoons for little illiterate (adult) children. This is our future.*
- I literally don't understand how people survived without emojis. I post at least 10 emojis on every snapchat, Instagram post, Facebook status and Tweet. It's the only way to communicate these days. The vile baby boomers wouldn't understand. They spend their miserable lives complaining about immigrants and watching trash like Coronation Street.*

There are two discourses that emerge from this data:

- New forms of a language threaten the perceived status of a language, as does the attitude underpinning comment (a). This resonates with Atchison's ideas on attitudes to language change, perhaps most notably the LANGUAGE IS A LISTED BUILDING metaphor.
- Different generations have conflicting attitudes towards language change. Although we cannot be certain of the ages of the people who posted the comments above, look again at comments (b), (c), (d) and (e), which all assume that there is a correlation between acceptable forms of language use and age.

The linguistic argument is that emojis offer a real affordance in language, and allow us to become better communicators, as written by the linguist Vyvyan Evans in his 2017 book *The Emoji Code*. He suggests that they can work as helpful non-verbal cues, allowing us to better express our emotions and attitudes in written language in more nuanced ways. These kinds of non-verbal cues – gesture, facial expressions, laughing, smiling, crying, and so on – are usually restricted to face-to-face, spoken channels of communication. Emojis therefore offer us a multi-modal system of communication, combining spoken and written forms of a language – or, as quoted above, to 'transcend linguistic borders'. Evans suggests that the use of emojis can help to avoid the 'angry jerk' phenomenon, which is when a person receives an email or other text-based form of digital communication, and it is misinterpreted with regards to the intended meaning. Emoji can add nuance to an expression, encoding non-verbal cues that would otherwise be missing.

A useful source of information where you can find more on emojis, technology and change is the *English and Media Centre's* blog: www.cambridge.org/links/esccha6006, which also features an argument for teaching emojis in schools.

KEY TERM

Multi-modal communication: a way of communicating that uses multiple channels (e.g. speech and body language)

PRACTICE QUESTION**Attitudes to language change**

Evaluate the following statement:

Large numbers of intelligent people condemn and resent language change, regarding alterations as due to unnecessary sloppiness, laziness or ignorance (Aitchison 2012: 4)

In your answer, you could discuss:

- some of the different attitudes to language change
- the reasons why different attitudes exist
- particular examples or case studies of language change.

RESEARCH QUESTION**Evaluating articles about language**

There are hundreds of opinion articles about language available online. Find around 20 articles, and for each one:

- Read it through and place it along a continuum, with 'prescriptivism' at one extreme and 'descriptivism' at the other. Briefly justify why you have placed it there.
- Consider the context of the article. What are the intended readership and the political stance of the publication? Is there a correlation here between these contextual factors and the position on the prescriptivist–descriptivist continuum?
- What are some of the more obvious metaphors for language used? For example, do they talk about language as if it were AN OBJECT TO BE DEFENDED, or as if it were A RESOURCE?

Although you shouldn't struggle to find articles, the following sources might be a good starting point:

- *The Telegraph*, April 2017: *The new £5 note has a major grammar blunder... But have you spotted it?*
- *Oxford Dictionaries*, November 2015: *Beyond words: how language-like is emoji?*
- *The Guardian*, May 2015: *ICVMI, English language is changing faster than ever, says expert.*

Wider reading

You can find out more about the topics in this chapter by reading the following:

Ideology, politics and language

Cameron, D. (1995). *Verbal Hygiene*. London: Routledge.

Milroy, J & Milroy, L. (2012). *Authority in Language*. London: Routledge.

Wardhaugh, R. (1999). *Proper English: Myths and Misunderstandings about Language*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Attitudes to usage, variation and change

Curzan, A. (2016). *Fixing English: Prescriptivism and Language History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hitchings, H. (2011). *The Language Wars: A History of Proper English*. London: John Murray.

Kamm, O. (2015). *Accidence Will Happen: The Non-Pedantic Guide to English*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.