

# Using the British National Corpus 2014 in language teaching: Introducing BNClab

Dr Dana Gablasova

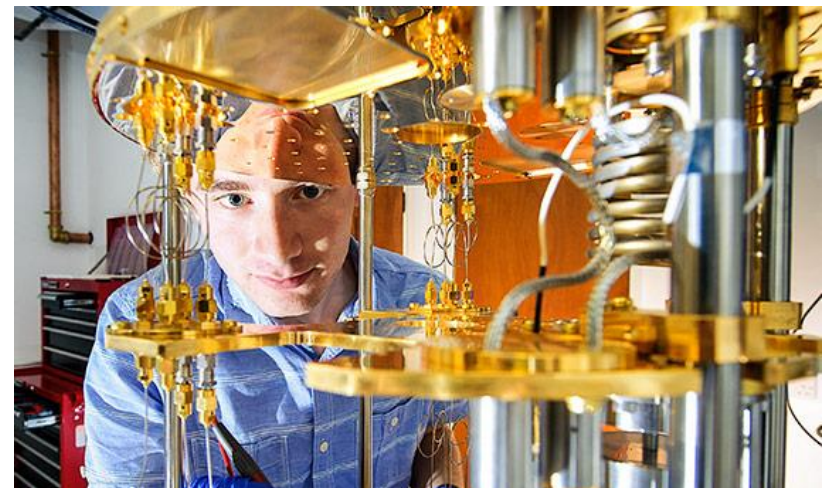
# Power of data: Experiments & discovery



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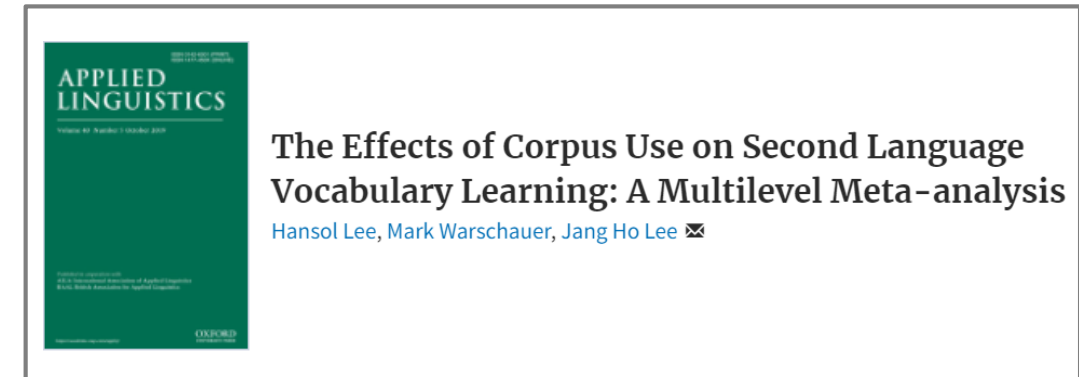
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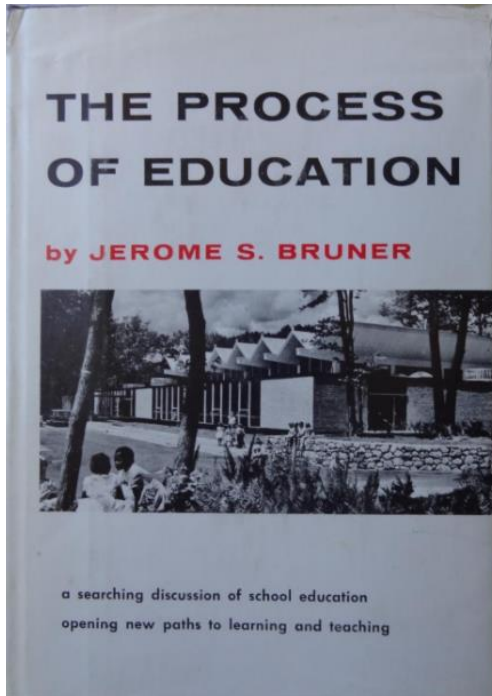
# Data-driven learning

**Data-driven learning** is a form of **corpus-based learning**, in which evidence from a corpus (electronic database of language samples) is used to search for **patterns** in language use and to **draw students' attention to these patterns**

## Benefits

- **Cognitive benefits:** being exposed to **natural distribution of patterns in language** (e.g. collocations and formulaic units) allows for their **implicit acquisition**; in turn implicit knowledge is more automatized
- **Pedagogical:** teaching the language as it is used by **real users & real setting** – easier to transfer from classroom learning to other contexts
- **Motivational:** students know that they are working with **authentic language** and thus getting ready for real-life situations; confidence-building





# Discovery learning

## Origins

Discovery learning is a major educational theory from 1960s, part of constructivist learning, championed and developed by Jerome Bruner

## Principles

The main idea: to (1) present students with data and evidence and guide them to (2) use their existing knowledge and experience in order to (3) discover new facts and relationships or to expand their existing knowledge

## Benefits

- **Cognitive benefits:** knowledge which students have to work at attaining (have to engage with), will be **more robust**, the students will **retain it for longer** than if they were just presented the information/facts
- **Motivational benefits:** it is **empowering** to experience that you, as a learner, can discover new knowledge by yourself, it also may increased students' **confidence**
- **Pedagogical benefits:** The students engage in and gain experience with **self-directed** and **autonomous** learning

# British National Corpus 2014: From the corpus to the classroom



# British National Corpus 2014

## British National Corpus 2014 (2013-2021)

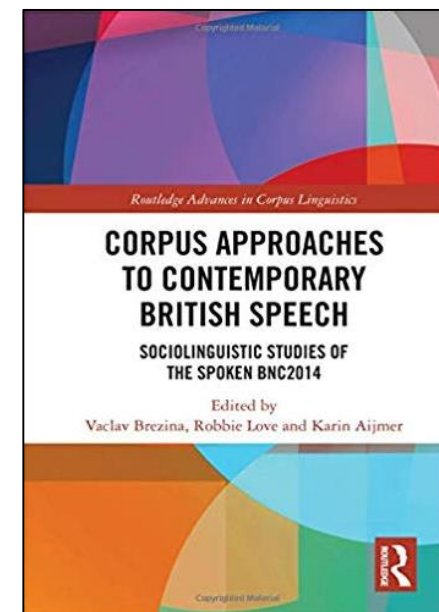
- 100M words; 88,171 files, 8 genres, 52 subgenres

## British National Corpus 2014 - Spoken

- 10 million words, 668 speakers in 1,251 recordings, informal conversations
- More from: Love, Dembry, Hardie, Brezina & McEnery (2017). The Spoken BNC2014: Designing and building a spoken corpus of everyday conversations. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, 22(3), 319-344.

## British National Corpus 2014 – Written

- 90 million words
- Genres: Academic prose, Fiction, Newspapers, Magazines, E-language (e.g. text messages, emails, tweets, Facebook posts), Other (e.g. TV scripts)
- More from: Brezina, Hawtin & McEnery (2021). The Written British National Corpus 2014–design and comparability. *Text & Talk*, 41(5-6), 595-615.



# BNClab: Bringing the BNC2014 into language classrooms

**BNCLAB: a platform for corpus-based exploration of spoken and written British English** developed at Lancaster University to give easy access to a large collection of language data from BNC2014. The platform contains large samples from two major corpora:



## **The British National Corpus 2014:**

- 5M sample representing informal conversation between British English speakers from 2000s.
- 5M sample representing different genres of current written British English (1M per main genre)



**The British National Corpus:** a 5M sample representing informal conversations between British English speakers from the 1990s.

## **FOCUS ON....**

- Current language use
- Changes in language
- Variation according to a range of sociolinguistic variables (gender, age, region & social class)

# BNClab: Pedagogical motivation

## Current English use

- What does spoken interactive communication look like today?
- How do spoken and written communication differ from each other?

**Sociolinguistics:** How does language vary according to users and social settings?

**Pragmatics:** How does language choice affect people's communication?

## Practical need

**Access to data:** provide teachers & students with access to large and systematic collection of current spoken and written British English data – to be used in the classroom as well as for individual projects/independent learning

## Research-led teaching

- Based on **most recent corpus resources** (the BNC2014)
- Based on **recent corpus-based/linguistic findings** about language use
- Guiding students to discover these findings for themselves

## Corpus-based teaching & learning

- Exposure to authentic language
- Searching for patterns – discovery learning & engagement with the data
- Flexibility of topics & materials

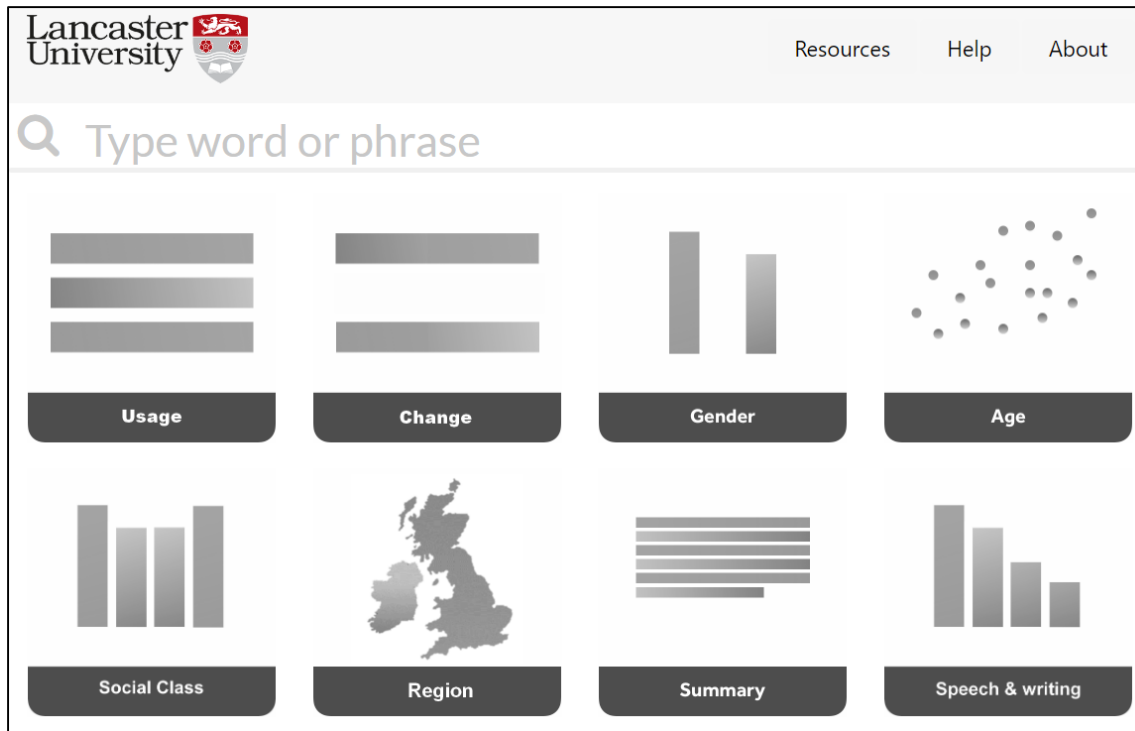
## Innovation in corpus-based teaching

- Address issues raised previously in corpus-based learning
- Visualisation of data to help interpretation & pattern discovery



# BNClab interface

Inactive: Before the search

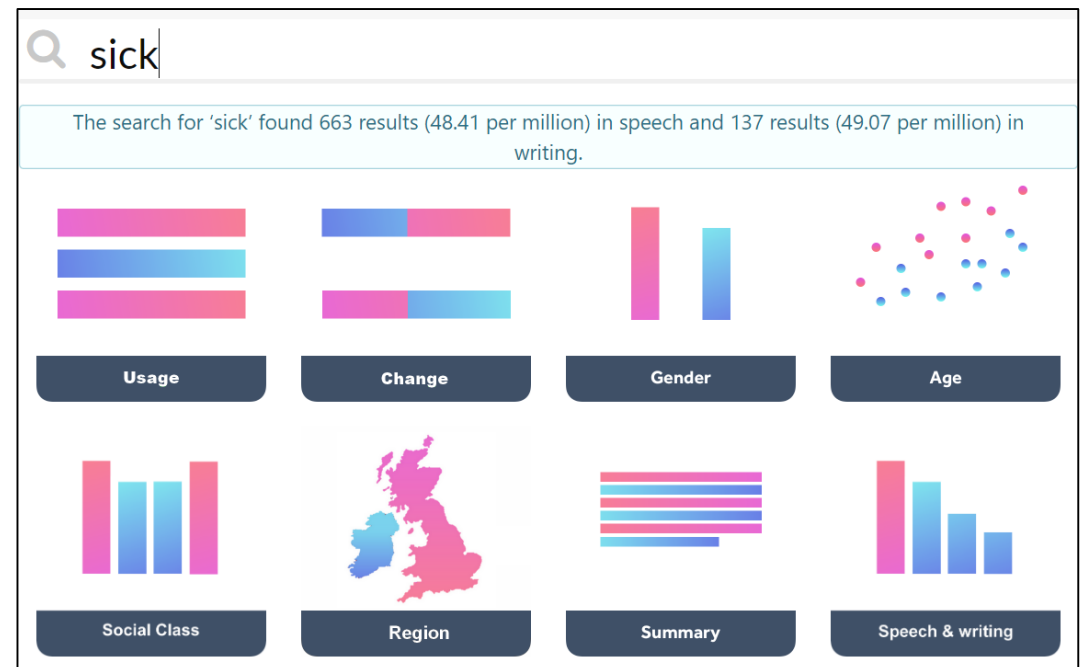


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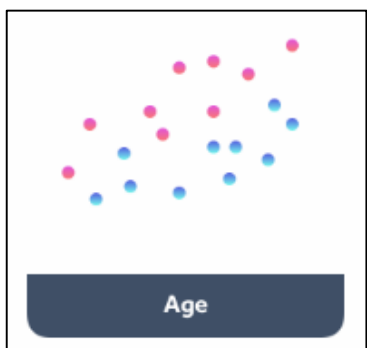
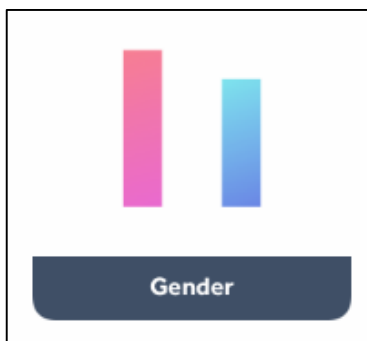
## Types of searches

- Words and phrases [e.g. 'you guys']
- Word classes [e.g. 'walk' as a noun; all nouns]
- Lexico-grammatical structures [e.g. split infinitive]
- Semantic categories [e.g. 'Emotions', 'Colours']

Active: After the search – 'sick'

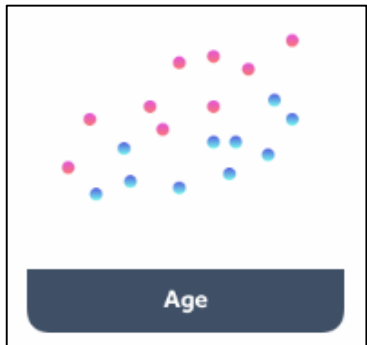
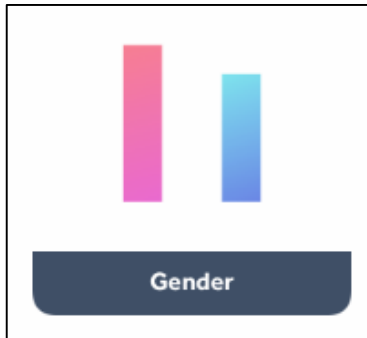


# BNClab interface: Functionality

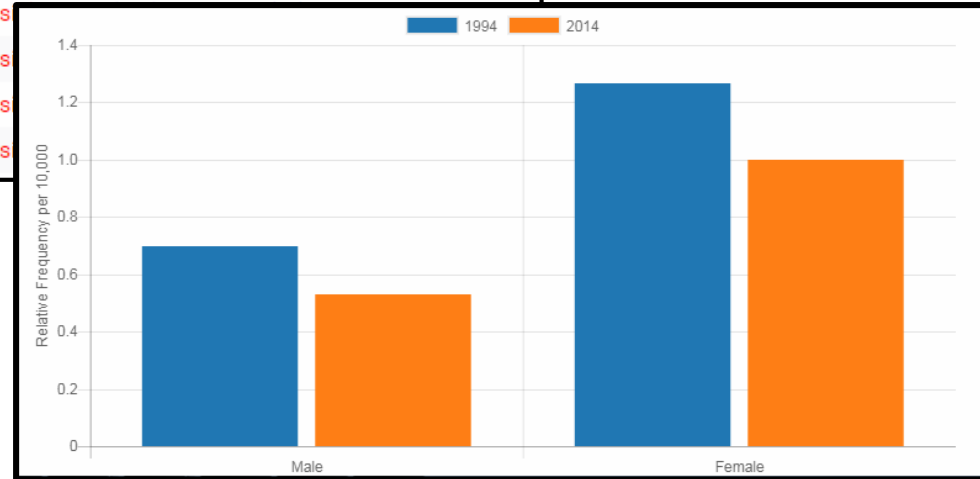


S: erm I think he 's at I think he 's sick I 'll check on I 'll ask her when he  
S: might say I do n't know I think he 's sick I may I 'm gon na ask him when I  
hey 'd probably be full of gratitude hooray 's sick hooray S: hooray oh thank you thank you S: I thin  
S: , oh my knees face each other , it 's sick S: So do mine S: no it is n't , we to  
S: and buy the game , oh my god it 's sick S: I thought you , could of stayed the night ,  
S: that it 's really good you now say it 's sick S: yeah that 's been around for a while yeah S: th  
S: God ! I hate that fucking record ! S: It 's sick ! S: What 's wrong with that ? It goes on  
S: . What do you think of it ? S: It 's sick ! S: What do you think ? It 's a S: It  
S: n no where he was from S: what ? S: It 's sick is n't it S: are you serious ? S: yeah S: and he  
ecking the place systematically . Yeah . It 's sick ! You can turn them off . Well it 's

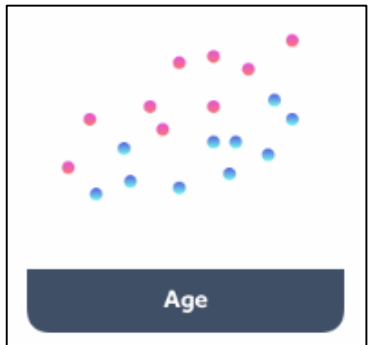
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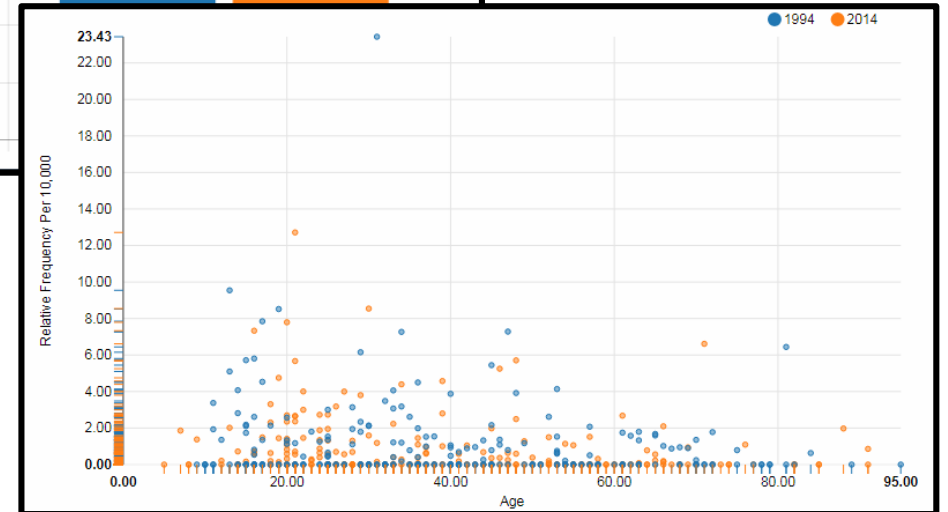
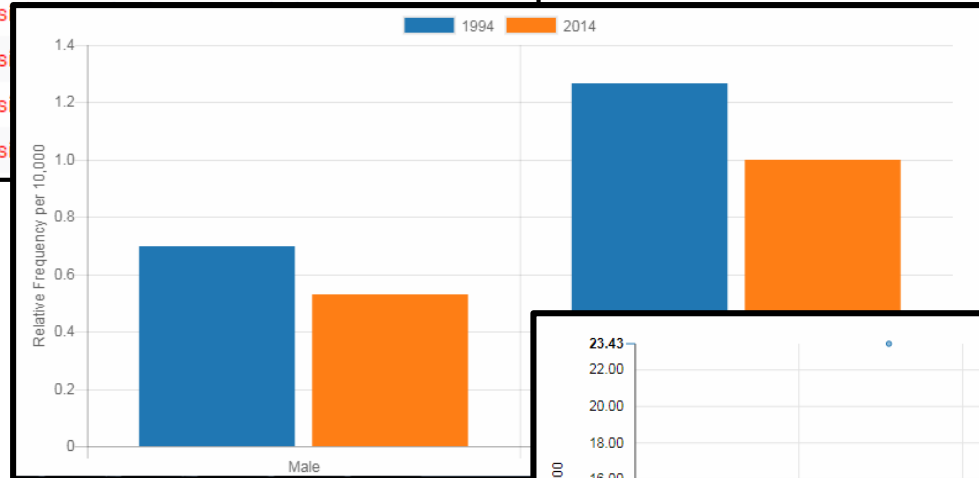
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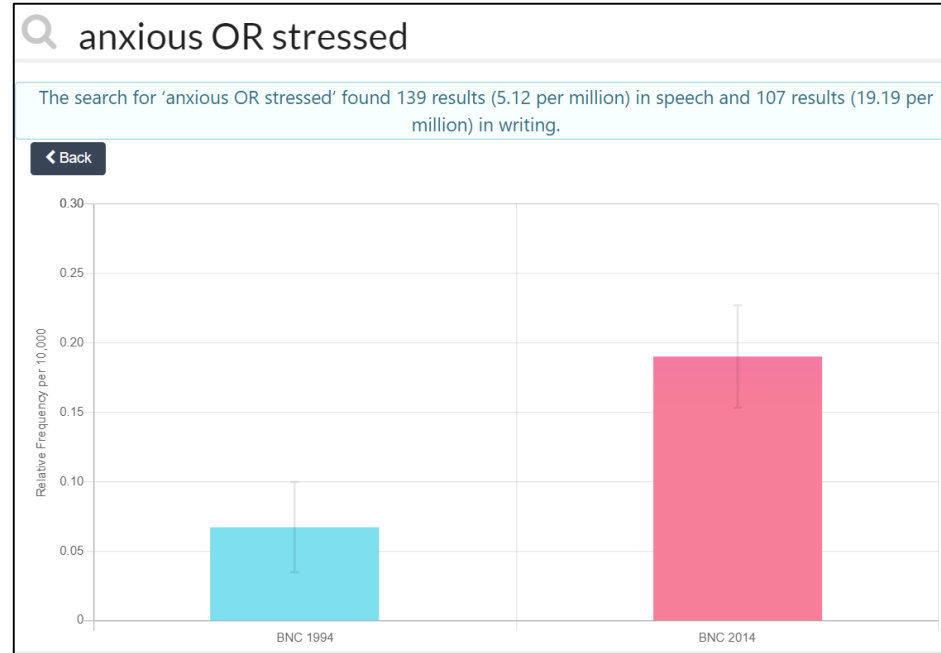
# BNClab interface: Functionality



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# BNClab interface: Functionality



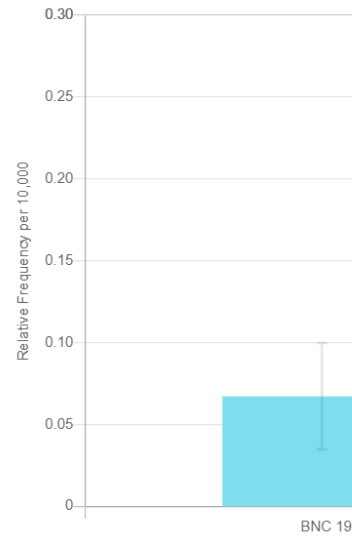
# BNClab interface: Functionality



anxious OR stressed

The search for 'anxious OR stressed'

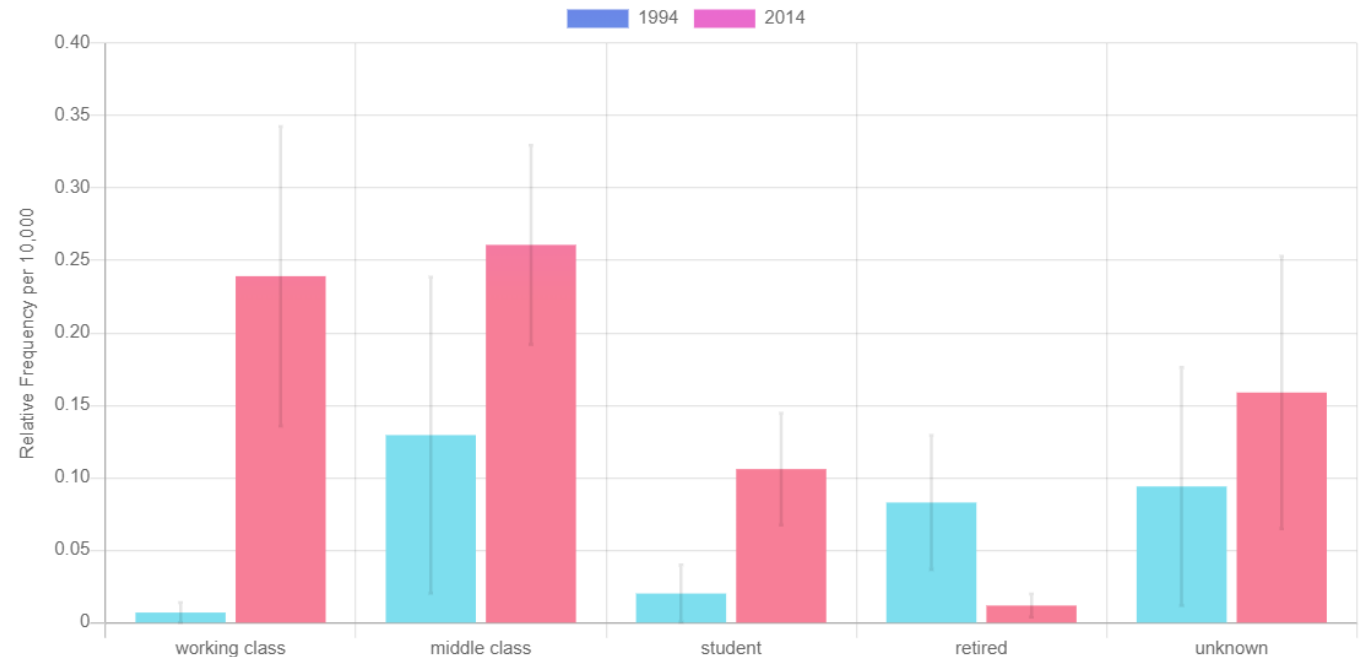
Back



anxious OR stressed

The search for 'anxious OR stressed' found 139 results (5.12 per million) in speech and 107 results (19.19 per million) in writing.

Back

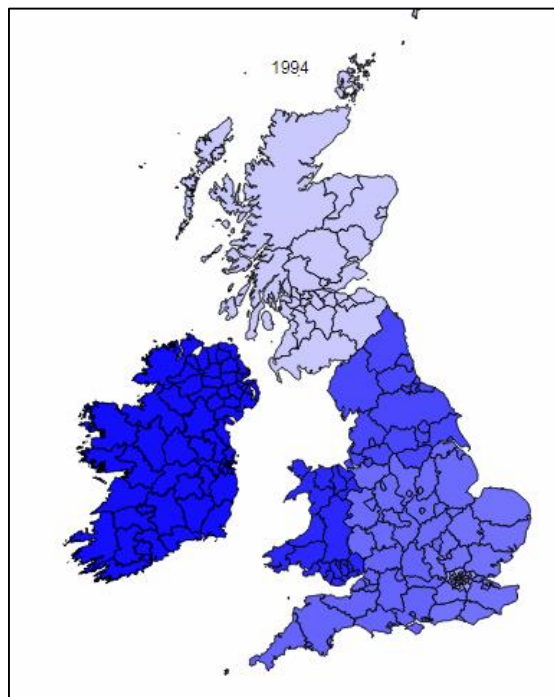




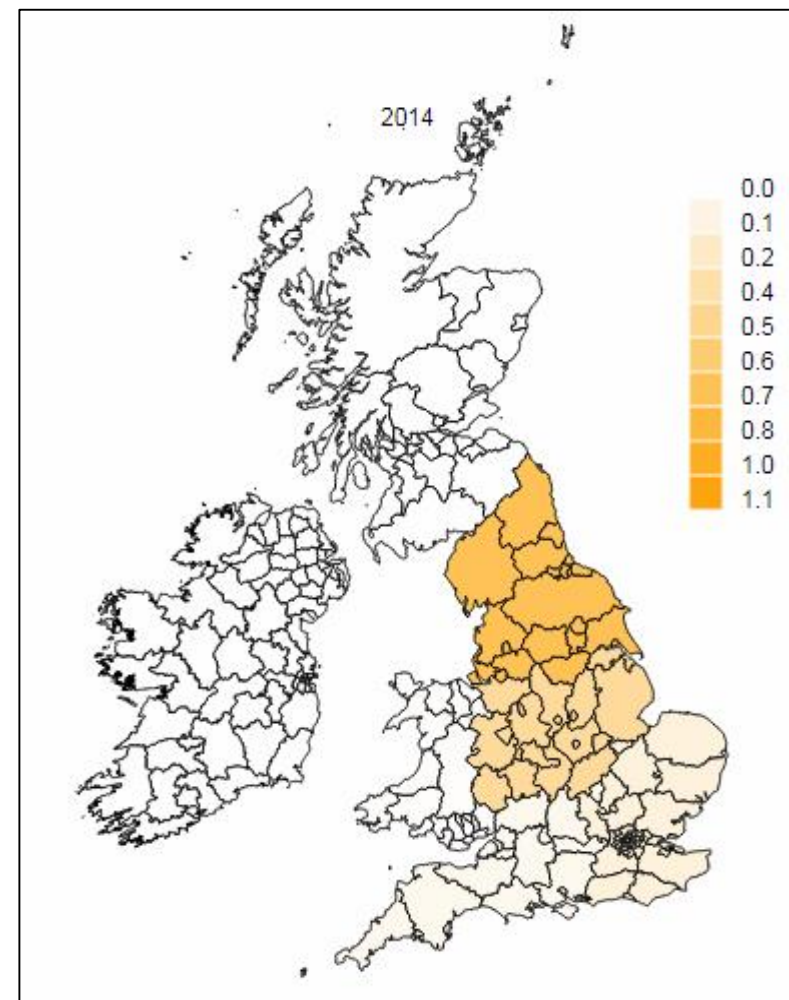
# BNClab interface: Functionality



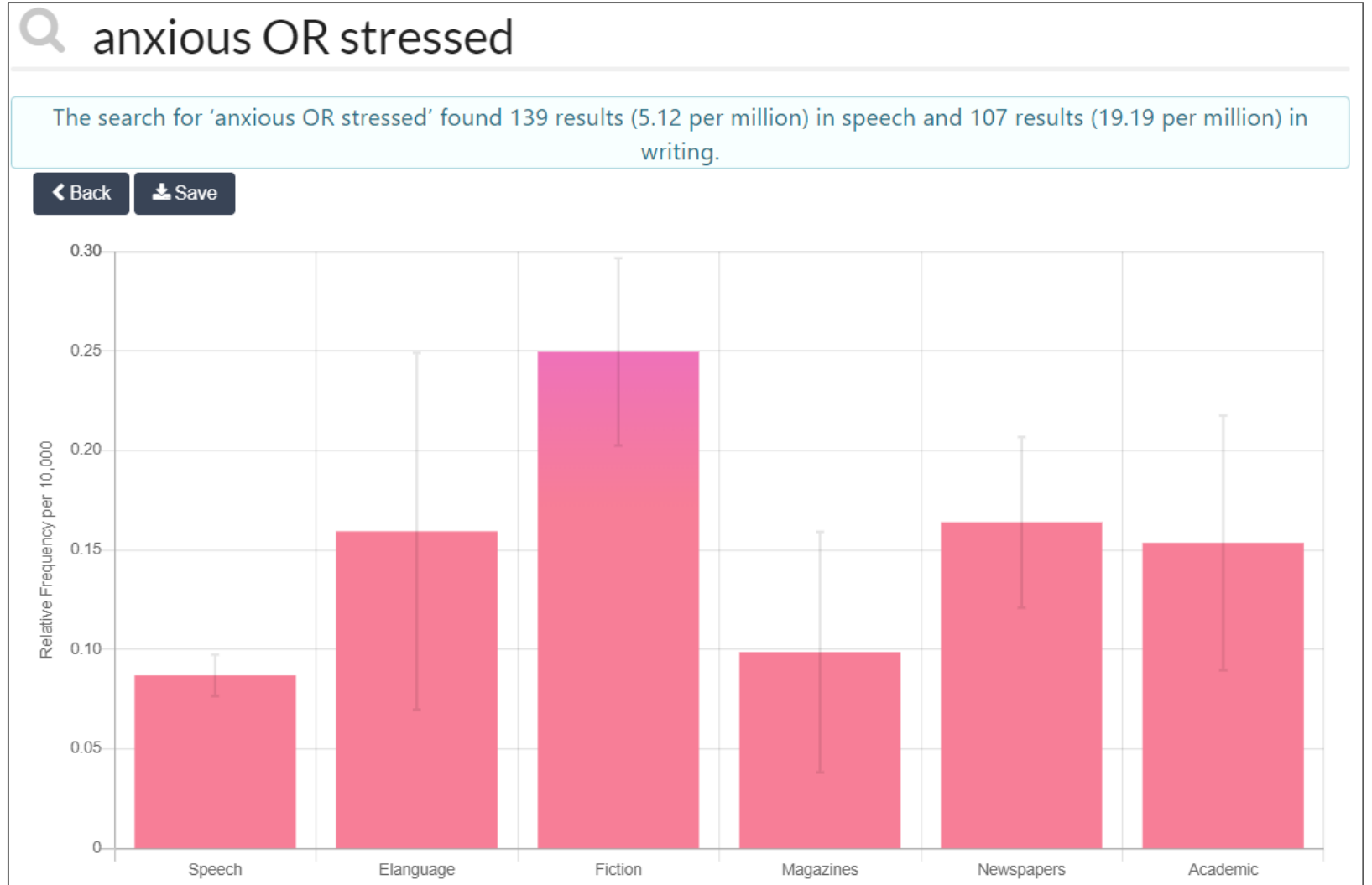
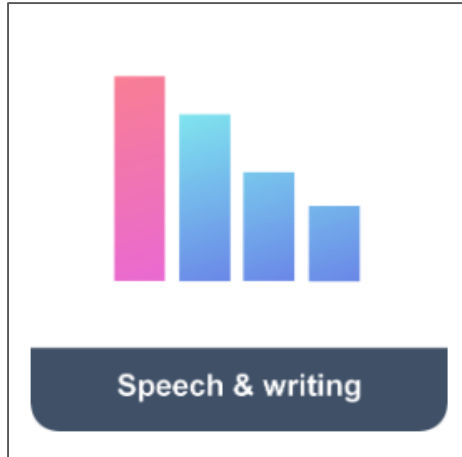
Them + PL noun




other little bedroom out with all      **them boxes**      and that S: oh yeah S: I got one  
own radiating around remember      **them tree**      roots coming out from the feet



# BNClab interface: Functionality



# Searching BNClab: Words & phrases

 you guys

The search for 'you guys' found 384 results (28.04 per million).

6

S: was really sweet cos and were just talking  
football it was like yeah we 'll just leave

you  
guys

to it me and S: oh S: will just natter S: 's nice S: I  
liked him erm and er yeah

7

S: mean you 've had no help ? and I was like no  
the GP just said that

you  
guys

would sort me out with this they were like oh  
right at the end of the like

8

S: cos they saw that I was with at the smokers  
and I was like I 'll meet

you  
guys

in there S: yeah S: and then they obviously  
came back to smoke as I was gone cos I

9

S: right S: erm so the guy he text me and he  
was like oh I ca n't believe

you  
guys

did this to me it was torture I was completely by  
myself I had no one to


# Searching BNClab: Word classes

Q (walk NOUN)

The search for '(walk NOUN)' found 569 results (41.54 per million).

1	erm S: lots of letters so it is quite a long	<b>walk</b>	when you get in B so he might have thought
2	oh S: now that the funny horses we saw from a	<b>walk</b>	from the walk from did n't we ? S: yeah was
3	the S: funny horses we saw from a walk from the	<b>walk</b>	from did n't we ? S: yeah was that with ?
4	minutes S: cos I 've got when I went on the	<b>walk</b>	I I I put the big thick sweater on where
5	middle but fine yeah S: and it seemed quite a long	<b>walk</b>	but I mean it was a doable walk because I
6	a S: long walk but I mean it was a doable	<b>walk</b>	because I had S: no these people reckon it 's literally
7	blowing S: so perhaps we we could go for a little	<b>walk</b>	and go and nose at park see what they 're

# Searching BNClab: Semantic categories



The search for 'COLOUR' found 13,260 results (968.13 per million).

40	it S: 's you know those big plasticity ones that are	red	yellow and blue with wheels ? S: oh boxes not big
41	's S: you know those big plasticity ones that are red	yellow	and blue with wheels ? S: oh boxes not big plasticky
42	know S: those big plasticity ones that are red yellow and	blue	with wheels ? S: oh boxes not big plasticky clothes ?
43	dog S: and basket S: oh right I know what you mean	yellow	and black S: we have n't got one of them in
44	basket oh right I know what you mean S: yellow and	black	S: we have n't got one of them in have we
45	but S: brilliant sun as well the sky is still quite	grey	S: yeah erm if I can I want to finish a
46	go S: to the disabled car park and put use my	blue	badge and then you could walk me we could or
47	not S: a problem mm ah but you might need your	blue	badge in S: yes and then could you drive round if
48	? I do n't know S: I think I think the	blue	one is open but the old one is not open
49	they S: should do because somebody else came round in a	white	van and S: helped themselves S: yes S: yeah yeah S: erm but I

# Searching BNClab: Combined searches

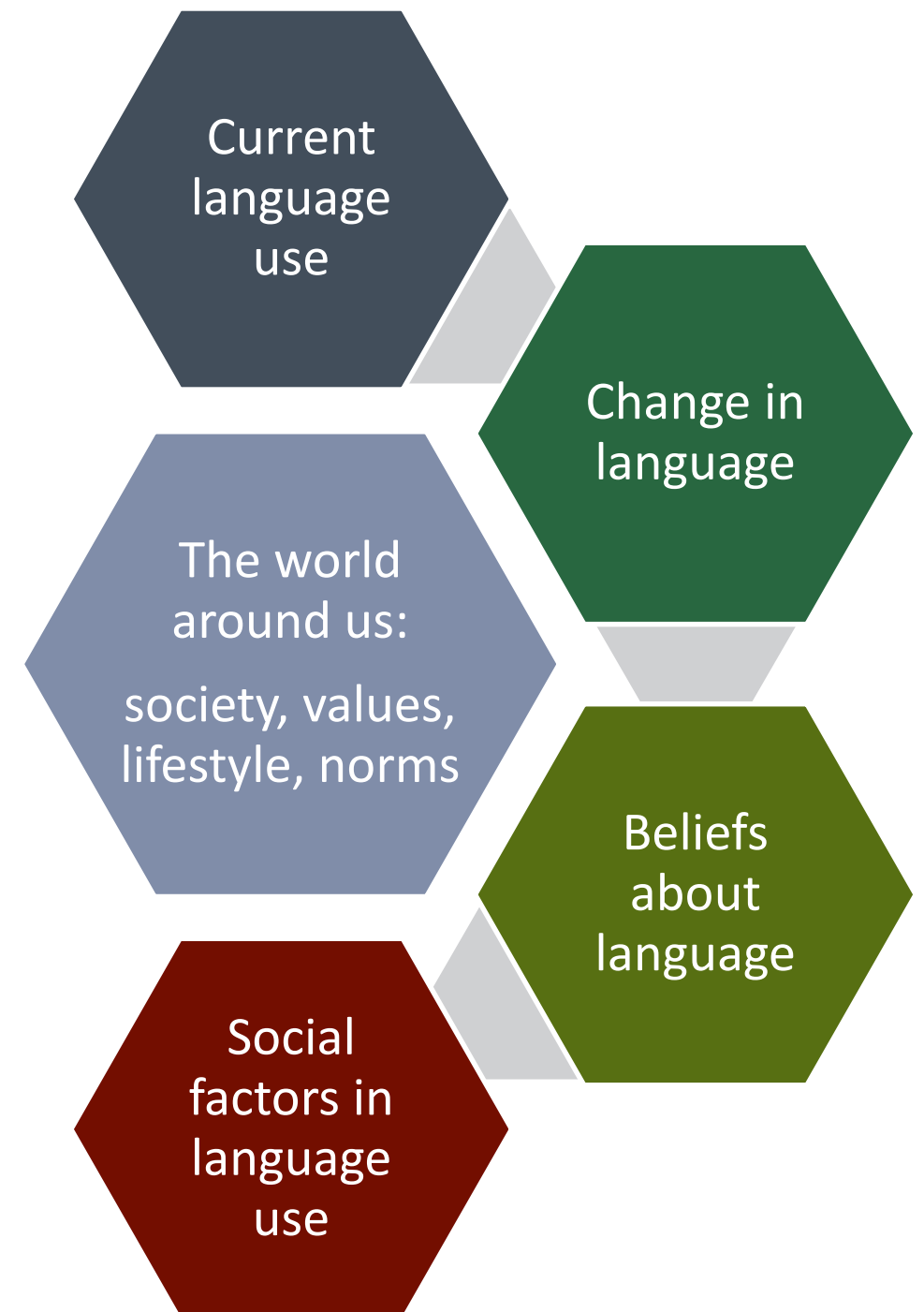
Q (PREPOSITION) (them) (NOUN)

The search for '(PREPOSITION) (them) (NOUN)' found 286 results (20.88 per million).

9	speaking or S: yeah but if they got me in one	of them computers	where my eyes could point at it and like make
10	's actually true S: I do so he he 's one	of them people	S: he sounds like a dolphin you know what I
11	? do you just smoke when you drink ? S: one	of them people	S: fucking not a committed smoker S: no S: remember I
12	well he found out that I 'm at uni S: one	of them people	that S: and he 's added me on Facebook and
13	that S: it will be a good idea not to go	on them lozenges	I can't take them they just S: yeah S: I 've
14	I had earplugs in all the way S: they had one	of them things	in airport S: yeah S: we actually found a smoking place S: it



# What sort of questions can students explore with BNClab?



# Exploring language (information) around us

**BBC** Sign in Home News Sport Weather iPlayer

**NEWS**

Home Coronavirus Brexit UK World Business Politics Tech Science Health Family & Education

Family & Education Young Reporter Global Education

## More swearing but parents want children protected

By Sean Coughlan  
Family and education correspondent  
8 hours ago



Swearing is increasingly seen as part of adult life, but parents want to keep controls on it, says research from the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC).

Search The Guardian UK edition

For 200 years

## Swearing on rise but parents still don't want kids hearing it, report finds

Third of people say they use strong language more than they did five years ago, according to BBFC survey



▲ Six in 10 people say strong language is part of their daily lives. Photograph: youngID/Getty Images

Swearing in everyday life is on the rise, according to research, but parents do not want to see it increase in the film and television their children watch.

“The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) published a **report** on Thursday into **attitudes towards swearing** and whether people want a more liberal approach in media content.

It includes a **survey of 1,000 people** that found...”

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-57419263>

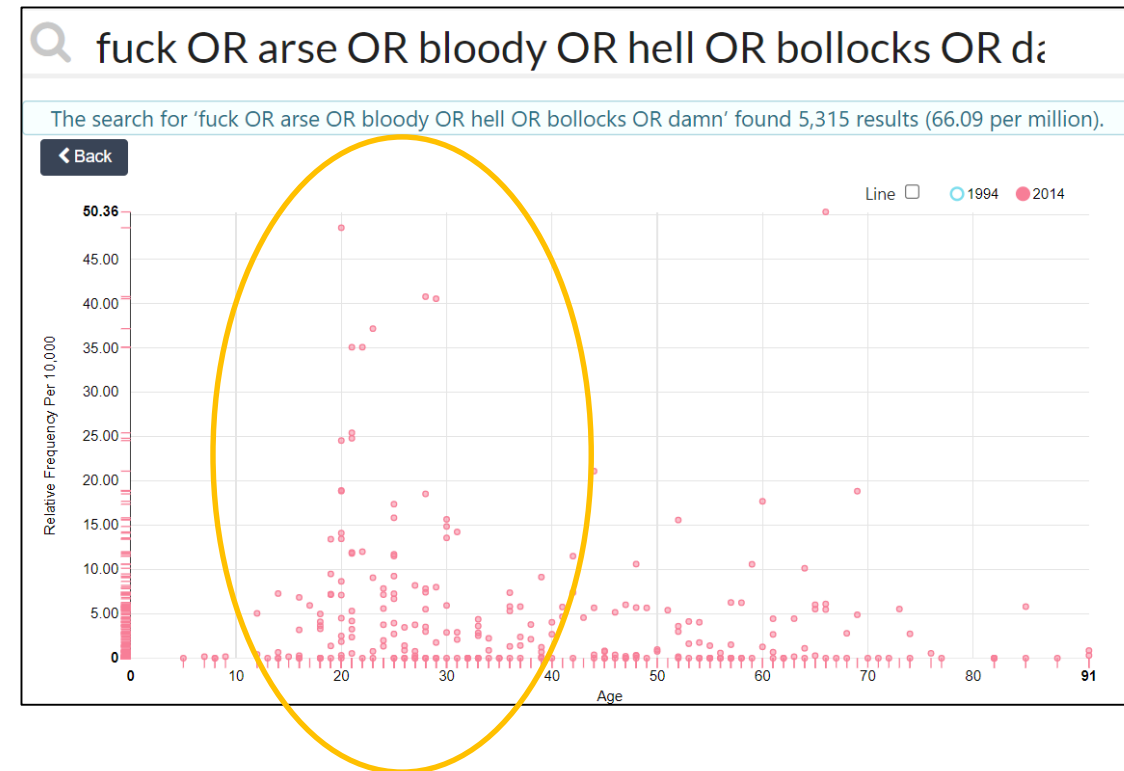
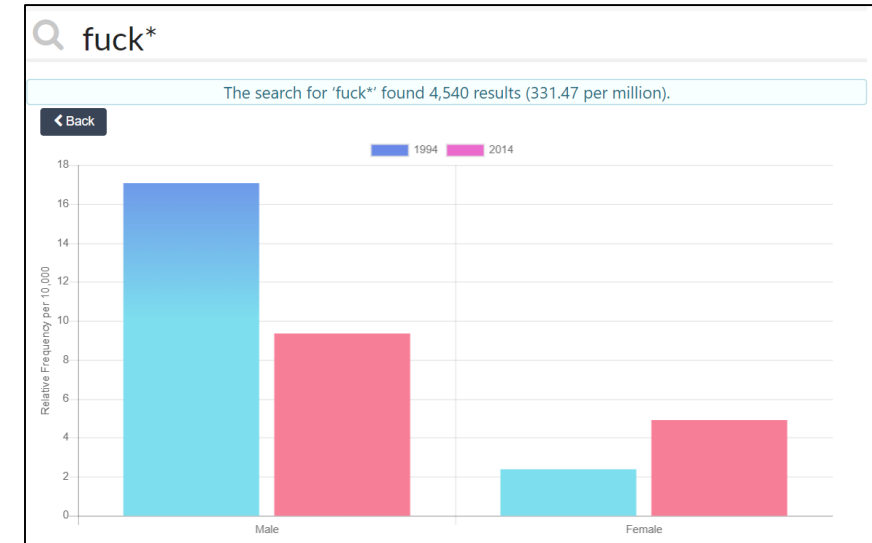
[www.theguardian.com/science/2021/jun/10/swearing-on-rise-but-parents-still-dont-want-kids-hearing-it-report-finds](https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/jun/10/swearing-on-rise-but-parents-still-dont-want-kids-hearing-it-report-finds)

# What can corpus data tell us about this?

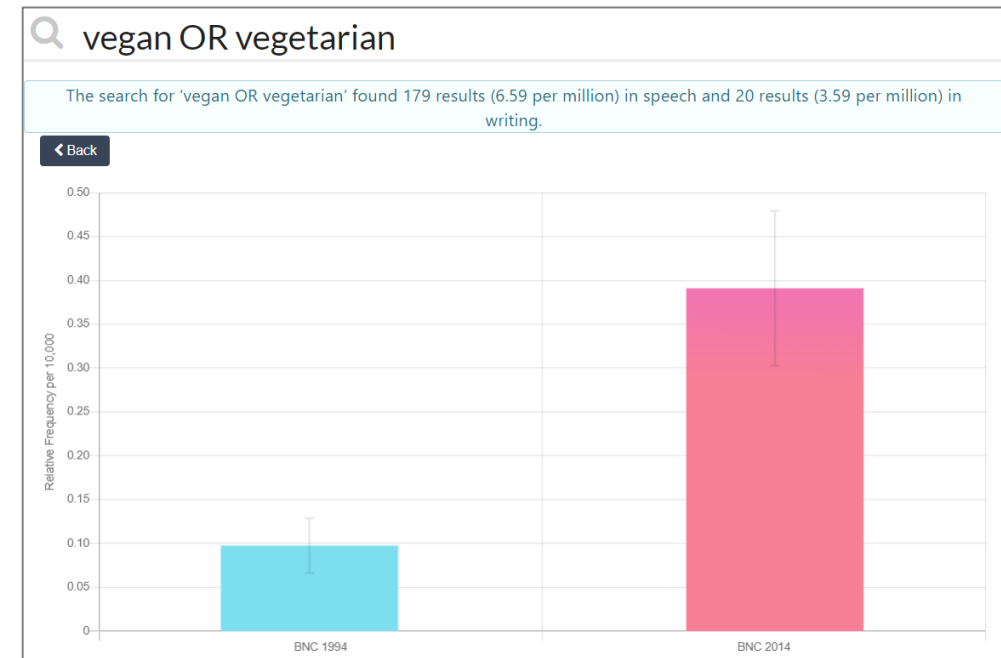
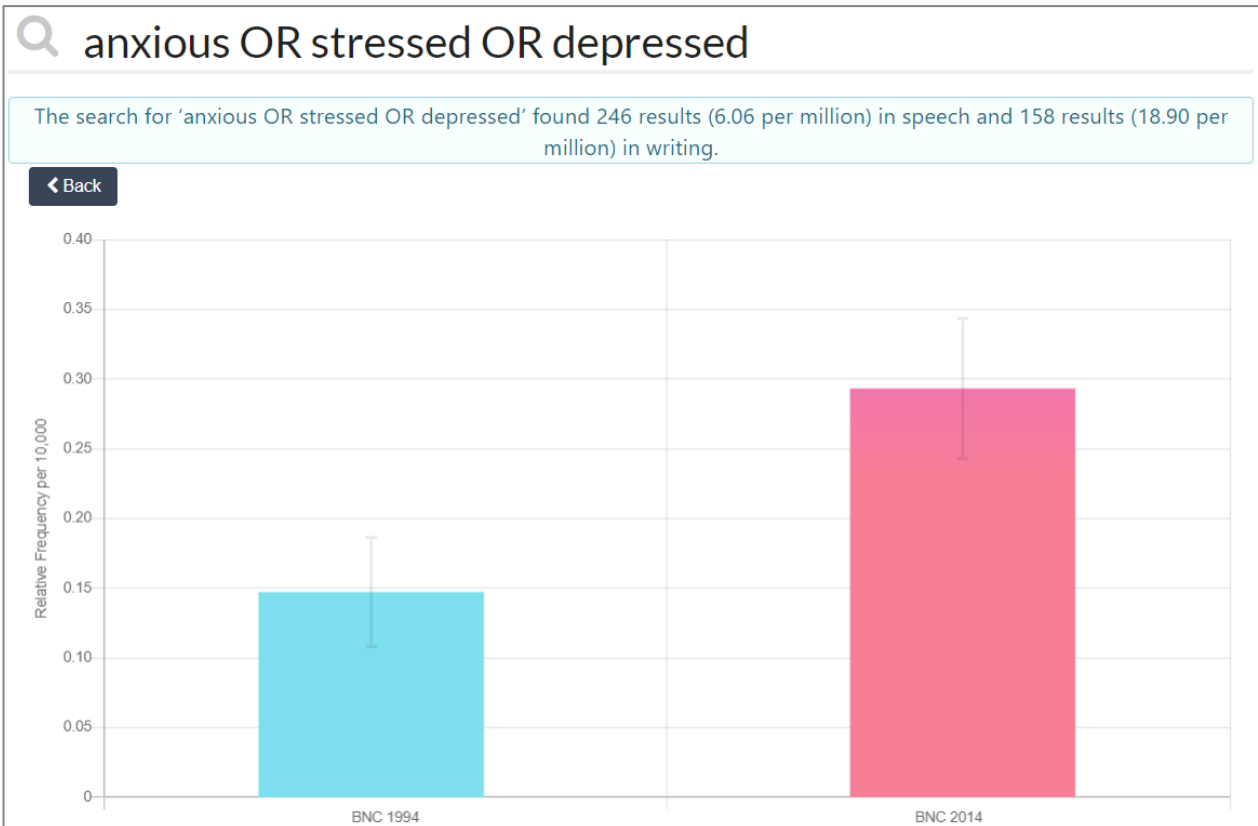
The [British Board of Film Classification \(BBFC\)](#) published a report on Thursday into attitudes towards swearing and whether people want a more liberal approach in media content.

It includes a survey of 1,000 people that found:

- Six in 10 people say strong language, such as the F word, is part of their daily lives.
- About a third of people say they use strong language more than they did five years ago. The figure is slightly higher for women (32%) than men (27%).
- There is a generation divide when it comes to swearing with 46% of [generation Zs](#) - people born after 1996 - saying they frequently use strong language. That compares with 12% for people aged 55-64.
- Asked about swearing in public, 65% of over-55s say they would never do it; for 18-24-year-olds the figure is 25%.
- Most parents don't want their kids hearing them swear with only one in five admitting they are comfortable using strong language in the home.



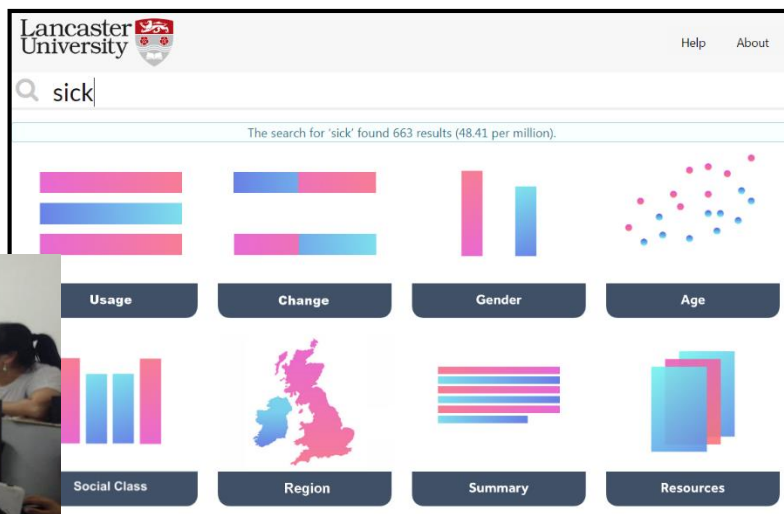
# Social trends: Language change



# How to bring BNC2014 into English language classrooms?

Different ways (tasks) in which you can bring corpora into the classroom:

- offline (paper-based)
- online (computer-based)



## Task 3

Look at the following examples of disagreement from conversations of English learners in the Trinity Lancaster Corpus. Although they all express disagreement with the previous speaker, they differ in the strategies used to express the opposing view.

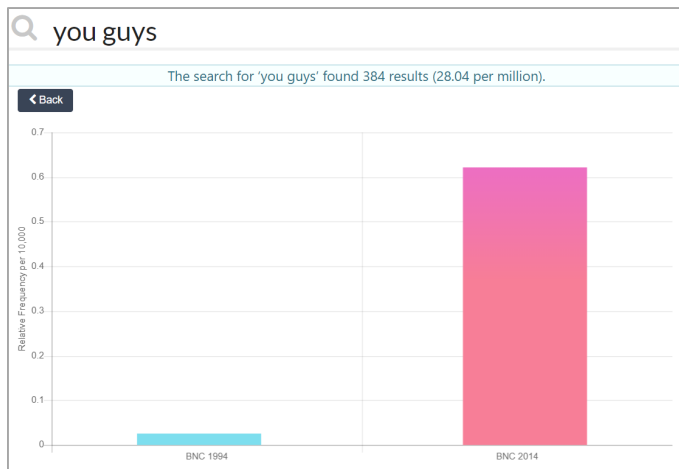
Do you think that some of the examples can be considered more polite than others? Rank the examples using the following scale: (1) not polite – (2) polite – (3) very polite

Example	Your score
A I completely disagree with this because er I repeat as I said ...	
B I agree with this point but don't you think maybe the fact that times are changing is a good thing?	
C but I personally would disagree that that money would necessarily be spent on that	
D erm no no it's not so	
E well I'm not totally convinced but er you know I live in a really traditional family	
F mm I can understand your opinion erm but I was still wondering...	
G I can't agree with you	
H er er I think erm I think they I think they are wrong	
I I think they're completely wrong	
J no way	
K I I I can understand what you 're saying but I'm not I don't agree with that	

When you are done, compare your rating with a partner and discuss the following questions:

- Did you have similar ratings?
- What expressions made the disagreement more or less polite?
- What strategies of polite communication have been demonstrated in the sentences ranked as polite and very polite?

# How much corpus-based learning do we need ?



LANGUAGE and AGE

### Does age affect how people talk about emotions?

Emotions play an important role in our lives, influencing how we think and behave. For example, they may motivate us to pursue activities that we associate with positive emotions such as joy and happiness. On the other hand, we may tend to avoid those activities that make us experience negative emotions such as anxiety, guilt or embarrassment. As people progress through their lives, the way they perceive the world around them changes gradually, which in turn has an impact on how they experience, interpret and express their emotions. Many of these changes will also be reflected in how people talk about emotions and what language they use to express their feelings. This worksheet explores how people express emotions through language and whether this is affected by their age. To discuss these topics, we will use findings and data from the British National Corpus and from the British National Corpus 2014.

**Key terms** emotions age affective experience spoken language

#### Task 1

There are different ways in which people can express their emotions in spoken communication and some of these do not necessarily involve words but may, for example, use body language. How many different emotions can you think of? List as many as you can in the space below.

Now consider which words can be used to refer to or express different emotions. Pick three of the emotions that you have noted down above and list different words that can be used to express them.

E.g. ANGER: angry – irritated – frustrated – pissed off – furious – seething – mad at someone ...

#### Task 2

In this task, we will look at whether people's age influences how often they use emotive words. In BNClab, type in EMOTION (using capital letters) and go to the Age button to see whether older and younger people use these words with the same or different frequency. To see the trend in the data more clearly, tick the 'Line' box; this will place a line in the graph, showing the overall tendency in the data and helping with interpreting the results. This task uses a method called semantic tagging in which all words related to a particular semantic field; in this case, emotions, have been identified in the corpus.

- What trend have you discovered in the data? Do younger and older people use words expressing emotions with a similar frequency?
- Can you think of some reasons explaining the patterns in the data?

#### Task 3

Interjections and exclamations serve to convey a broad range of emotions, such as joy, surprise, pain and excitement. Look at the set of exclamations below – do you think some of them are more typical for younger or for older people? First note down your hypothesis and then check your intuition in BNClab by typing the expressions in and using the Age button. You can also try searching for exclamations of your own choice. Before checking the corpus, briefly discuss the factors that you have considered when forming your hypothesis.

Bloody hell	Hypothesis: _____	Findings: _____
Oh dear	_____	_____
Oh man	_____	_____
Oh my god	_____	_____
Oh shit	_____	_____

Looking at the patterns, can you think of the reasons why some of the expressions may be more or less common for speakers from different age groups?

#### Task 4

From a linguistics perspective, swearwords serve to conveying strong emotions through language. Although swearing is often associated with expression of negative emotions such as anger and frustration, they can equally express strong positive feelings such as joy and excitement. In this task, we will look at the relationship between age and swearing in order to find out whether the use of this linguistic resource for expressing emotions is affected by the age of the speaker. In particular, we will focus on the swearwords that serve as intensifiers, adding emphasis or force to the words that follow them as in *fucking awful*, *bloody insane* or *fucking awesome*.

In BNClab, first search for the following swearwords that act as intensifiers: *bloody*, *fucking* and *blasted*. Then use the Age button to see whether they tend to be used by younger or older people. You can either type the words in one by one, or search for several words simultaneously using OR (you can also add additional words): *fucking OR bloody OR blasted* [OR your own word...]

After you've done the searching, discuss with your partner or group:

- Which words did you search for?
- What pattern related to the age of speakers have you discovered?
- What factors can explain the pattern that you have found in the data?

#### Research bite

Researchers in psychology and cognitive development have long observed the relationship between people's age and the way they experience and express emotions. Major theories in these fields suggest that "as individuals grow older, they become increasingly motivated and able to regulate their emotions, which could result in reduced negativity and enhanced positivity" (Gajdosova et al. 2014, p.1). In other words, with increasing age, the combination of psychological and social factors may contribute to people experiencing positive rather than negative emotions. Can you think of different ways in which these emotions could be reflected in people's language? How could you test this hypothesis using corpus analysis and BNClab?

Kunzmann, U., Kappes, C., & Wöppel, C. (2014). Emotional aging: a discrete emotions perspective. *Frontiers in psychology*, 5, 1-5.

Lancaster University



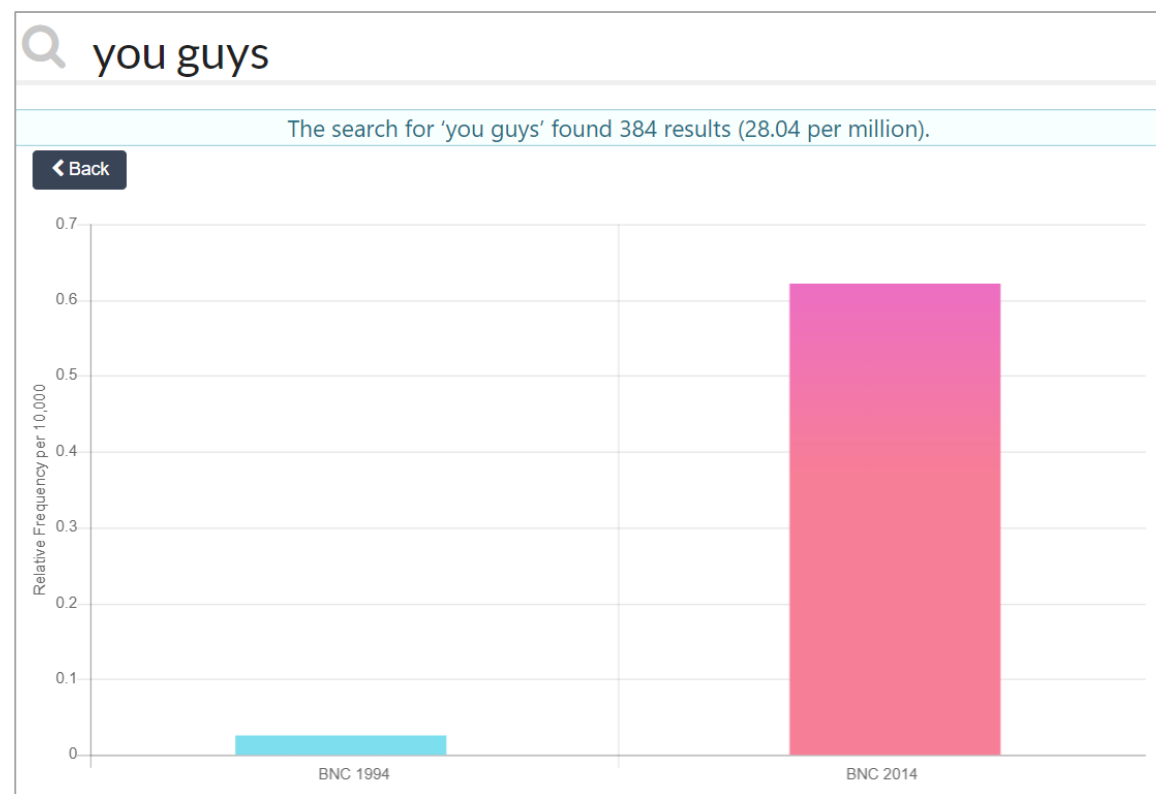
# 1. Frequency information about language use

## Narrative format

“Pronouns are often considered to be a relatively straightforward word class because it is believed that they do not undergo much change. However, this is not entirely true. When we look at how pronouns are used by British English speakers in their communication today, we can see some interesting patterns and changes developing over time.”

- The BNC 2014 – a large corpus of spoken informal British English – showed that expressions such as ‘you guys’ have increased considerably in spoken use.
- Can you think of reasons behind this increase?

## Graph format



## 2. Searching for & discovering patterns in a corpus

- A. Students can be asked to search for a specific words or grammatical structures
- B. Students can be asked to formulate their own questions and search terms

### Task 3

Interjections and exclamations serve to convey a broad range of emotions, such as joy, surprise, pain and excitement. Look at the set of exclamations below – do you think some of them are more typical for younger or for older people? First note down your hypothesis and then check your intuition in BNClab by typing the expressions in and using the Age button. You can also try searching for exclamations of your own choice. Before checking the corpus, briefly discuss the factors that you have considered when forming your hypothesis.

Bloody hell

*Hypothesis:*

*Findings:*

Oh dear

Oh man

Oh my god

Oh shit

Looking at the patterns, can you think of the reasons why some of the expressions may be more or less common for speakers from different age groups?

#### LANGUAGE and AGE

##### Does age affect how people talk about emotions?

Emotions play an important role in our lives, influencing how we think and behave. For example, they may motivate us to pursue activities that we associate with positive emotions such as joy and happiness. On the other hand, we may tend to avoid those activities that make us experience negative emotions such as anxiety, guilt or embarrassment. As people progress through their lives, the way they perceive the world around them changes gradually, which in turn has an impact on how they experience, interpret and express their emotions. Many of these changes will also be reflected in how people talk about emotions and what language they use to express their feelings. This worksheet explores how people express emotions through language and whether this is affected by their age. To discuss these topics, we will use findings and data from the British National Corpus and from the British National Corpus 2014.

Key terms: emotions, age, affective experience, spoken language

##### Task 1

There are different ways in which people can express their emotions in spoken communication and some of these do not necessarily involve words but may, for example, use body language. How many different emotions can you think of? List as many as you can in the space below.

Now consider which words can be used to refer to or express different emotions. Pick three of the emotions that you have noted down above and list different words that can be used to express them.

E.g. ANGER: angry – irritated – frustrated – pissed off – furious – seething – mad at someone ...

##### Task 2

In this task, we will look at whether people's age influences how often they use emotive words. In BNClab, type in EMOTION (using capital letters) and go to the Age button to see whether older and younger people use these words with the same or different frequency. To see the trend in the data more clearly, tick the 'Line' box; this will place a line in the graph, showing the overall tendency in the data and helping with interpreting the results. This task uses a method called semantic tagging in which all words related to a particular semantic field, in this case, emotions, have been identified in the corpus.

- What trend have you discovered in the data? Do younger and older people use words expressing emotions with a similar frequency?
- Can you think of some reasons explaining the patterns in the data?

##### Task 3

Interjections and exclamations serve to convey a broad range of emotions, such as joy, surprise, pain and excitement. Look at the set of exclamations below – do you think some of them are more typical for younger or for older people? First note down your hypothesis and then check your intuition in BNClab by typing the expressions in and using the Age button. You can also try searching for exclamations of your own choice. Before checking the corpus, briefly discuss the factors that you have considered when forming your hypothesis.

Bloody hell *Hypothesis:* *Findings:*

Oh dear

Oh man

Oh my god

Oh shit

Looking at the patterns, can you think of the reasons why some of the expressions may be more or less common for speakers from different age groups?

##### Task 4

From a linguistic perspective, swearwords serve to conveying strong emotions through language. Although swearing is often associated with expression of negative emotions such as anger and frustration, they can equally express strong positive feelings such as joy and excitement. In this task, we will look at the relationship between age and swearing in order to find out whether the use of this linguistic resource for expressing emotions is affected by the age of the speaker. In particular, we will focus on the swearwords that serve as intensifiers, adding emphasis or force to the words that follow them as in *fucking awful*, *bloody insane* or *fucking awesome*.

In BNClab, first search for the following swearwords that act as intensifiers: *bloody*, *fucking* and *blasted*. Then use the Age button to see whether they tend to be used by younger or older people. You can either type the words in one by one, or search for several words simultaneously using OR (you can also add additional words): *fucking OR bloody OR blasted* [OR your own word ...]

After you've done the searching, discuss with your partner or group:

- Which words did you search for?
- What pattern related to the age of speakers have you discovered?
- What factors can explain the pattern that you have found in the data?

##### Research info



Researchers in psychology and cognitive development have long observed the relationship between people's age and the way they experience and express emotions. Major theories in these fields suggest that "as individuals grow older, they become increasingly motivated and able to regulate their emotions, which could result in reduced negativity and enhanced positivity" (Guzmán et al., 2014, p. 1). In other words, with increasing age, the combination of psychological and social factors may contribute to people experiencing positive rather than negative emotions. Can you think of different ways in which these emotions could be reflected in people's language? How could you test this hypothesis using corpus analysis and BNClab?

### 3. Discovering a pattern in the data selected from a corpus

#### Task 2

Read the following concordance lines taken from conversations between British English speakers included in the British National Corpus 2014. In each example, decide whether 'they' or 'their' refer to the third person singular (SG) or third person plural (PL) and put SG or PL next to the sentences.

1	how are the sprouts? S:huh? S: how are the sprouts, are	they	acceptable? S: oh I 'm loving them	
2	accidents you 've seen like bumps and stuff um I have yeah I have yeah I saw someone get their	their	front wheel bent like that was really bad They were alright it was quite a	
3	strong impression based on what you see as to what kind of person	they	are (.) you get huge amount of clues don't you when you	
4	I like wanted to buy a Minecraft realm with my friends then	they	could go on with me S: well Minecraft costs money	
5	like for a lot of people people don't like cooking and	they	don't like the effort S: yeah S: or they just don't do	
6	hanges it (.) mm I mean like a professional winer person or whatever	they	're called (.) would like (.) professional winer probably not the same	
7	always tell which hand he was writing with the person I sit next to in English broke	their	left hand which was their main hand so they had to write with their right	
8	hint with that (.) I think if you took sent a photo to someone and they	they	stopped replying you would take the hint wouldn't you	
9	there's just no point it's like asking someone if	they	're pregnant if you're not sure like just don't like	
10	contacts his lecturer and says oh I've been talking to this person and	they	're interested in about academic integrity I explained to them how you	
11	hey were travelling abroad and he lives there with her now	they	have a child and erm I was talking to him about it	

#### Discovering & interpreting a pattern in BNC 2014:

Show students extracts that illustrate a pattern and let them identify it

Contrasting different patterns works really well. You can ask which examples came from:

- Spoken vs written English?
- Different genres
- Formal and informal situation?
- Native vs non-native speakers?
- Polite vs less polite communication?

# BNClab teaching materials: Structure

Introduction  
to the topic

Series of  
tasks

**LANGUAGE and ATTITUDE**

## Why are people judged by the way they speak?

This worksheet looks at language attitudes and how the way people speak can influence how they are perceived and evaluated by others. We will discuss where attitudes on language come from, why people have such strong opinions on language and why there is a link between language and our impression of a person.

**Key terms** standard attitude ideology change

### Task 1

In 2017, the new BNC2014 was released and the linguists behind its compilation noticed some of the changes they had noticed in our spoken language since the 1990s (when the older BNC1994 was released). Among these changes was the higher use of 'like' at the start of sentences and an increased use of split infinitives ('to boldly go' instead of 'to go boldly'). The below comment was sent in as a response to an interview on the BBC and illustrates the attitudes some people have about language change.

**LANGUAGE and ATTITUDE**

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As a person who was always brought up to speak properly and grammatically, I was absolutely shocked to read of your pronunciation that starting a sentence with 'so' or 'like' have become part of modern English. According to you, this is the way people speak and is a part of normal everyday speech. Well it is **WRONG** and people like you should be saying so and encouraging the public to speak properly. I suppose the next thing will be that 'Hi there you guys' is quite correct? You set absolutely no example at all. I am sick and tired of hearing terrible English and pronunciation on the radio and television. I also hate the way people pronounce the letter 'r' in the northern way, rather than a long 'r'. Correct and clear speech is so important and sounds lovely.

I await your comments.

In groups, discuss whether you agree or disagree with the statement.

### Task 2

Look again at the statement above. The writer uses a range of adjective and adverbs to express their attitude on language. Make a list of these adjectives and adverbs.

ADJECTIVES	ADVERBS

**Tasks** a combination of:

- Practical discovery of patterns
- Productive language tasks (practicing the ling. feature/function)
- Discussion of findings
- For teachers: Teaching notes for each student worksheet

# CURRENT SPOKEN ENGLISH

- Lexical change: Why does English keep on changing?
- How does technology affect spoken English today?
- How does language reflect our changing attitudes to health?

## LANGUAGE CHANGE

### Lexical change: Why does English keep on changing?

Languages, including English, keep on changing. The changes can be related to the way we pronounce words or to the vocabulary and grammatical structures that we use. Some of the changes can be swift and noticeable, other changes occur more gradually and we hardly notice them. So what are the reasons for these linguistic developments? In many cases, the developments in language reflect the changing needs of the speakers and the changes in the environment in which we live. In this worksheet, we are going to explore lexical changes that have occurred in present-day English over the period of last twenty years. In particular, we will discuss how changes in society affect the words we use in our everyday conversations.

language change — technology — society — lifestyle — lexical changes

#### Task 1

How did the society change over the past twenty years? Discuss some of the major changes with your partner or a group. Which of these changes do you think have affected our language and the words we use? Use the space below to make notes on both, the areas of change in society and the changes in the language use.

Changes in society

Any related linguistic changes?

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

## LANGUAGE CHANGE

### How does technology affect spoken English today?

There are many reasons why languages change. Some of the main reasons are related to the developments in our society. These changes can be related to political and social changes as well as to our changing lifestyle, values and attitudes. Another major area of life which affects our daily language use is technology. In this handout, we explore how technological developments have affected spoken English over the last twenty years.

language change — technology — lexical innovation

#### Task 1

Let's first think about the role technology plays in our lives today and how this changed over the last twenty years. List some of the areas where, in your opinion, technological developments brought about most radical changes in our society.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Let us now check whether the growing role of technology has been reflected in our use of language. We will search for all words related to technology in BNClab, you can do this by typing TECHNOLOGY in the search window. Now go to the Change button and compare whether people talk about technology more today than they used to in the 1990s.

#### Task 2

In this task, we are going to explore how the existence of the Internet has affected people's lifestyles and how this can be observed through the use of language today.

Search for the word *online* in BNClab (you will see that while this is a relatively frequent word today with nearly 400 hits, *online* was not used in the 1990s at all). Next, go to the Usage button and scan the concordance lines noting the context in which *online* appears. Note down the type of activities people talk about doing online and the words related to them.

e.g. Online banking: accounts, banking, ...

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## LANGUAGE CHANGE

### How does language reflect our changing attitudes to health?

Over the last twenty years, the society has changed in many respects. One of the areas in which our lifestyles and thinking have developed is related to people's approach to health and to a growing awareness of importance of care for both mental and physical health. This may be due to public health campaigns, better access to information about health-related issues as well as better understanding of consequences of some lifestyle choices such as smoking or certain types of diet. In this worksheet, we are going to explore how these changes in approaches to health have been reflected in people's language use.

Language change — healthcare — health — lifestyle — mental health

#### Task 1

How did the society change over the past twenty years? Discuss some of the major changes with your partner or a group. Which of these changes do you think have affected our language and the words we use when talking about health and healthcare? Did some new words appear or are some words used more often than previously? Use the space below to make notes on both, the areas of change in the society and the changes in the language used to talk about health. A few Guardian headlines were selected to help you with the brainstorming.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Health** / Weekend lie-ins not enough to recover from sleep loss, study finds

**Cancer** / Nearly half of all

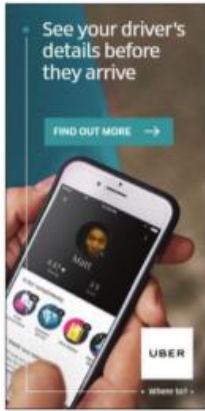


# CURRENT SPOKEN ENGLISH

## Changing pronouns: Understanding singular *they*

Pronouns are often considered to be a boring word class. Learners often believe that, unlike nouns and adjectives, the members of the pronoun group do not change much. However, this is not entirely true. When we look at how pronouns are used by English native speakers in their spoken communication today, we can see some interesting changes over time. In this handout, we use findings and examples from the British National Corpus 2014 to talk about how pronouns are used in conversations of English speakers in the UK. In particular, we are going to focus on the use of singular *they*, a feature that is very common in current spoken English.

### Task 1



We will consider the changes in the use of the well-known pronoun 'they'. This pronoun usually refers to third person plural such as in this example: *'It was my birthday yesterday and my friends came over for a cake. They didn't leave till well after midnight'*. This is a very straightforward use of 'they'. However, in current English, 'they' is also used for a different function, referred to as 'singular they' in which the pronoun refers to third person singular.

Consider the following two examples from current English use in the UK that involve the use of 'they' or 'their' and discuss who these pronouns refer to.

- a. Look at the advertisement from Uber and consider who 'they' refers to.
- b. Consider also the following extract from an article in The Guardian entitled "Why should a primary school separate girls and boys for sports day?" written by Anna Kessel and published on 5 June 2018:  
*"Back in Inverness one parent reportedly said that their son had been bullied as a result of being beaten by a girl."*

### Task 2

Read the following concordance lines taken from conversations between British English speakers included in the British National Corpus 2014. In each example, decide whether 'they' or 'their' refer to the third person singular (SG) or third person plural (PL) and put SG or PL next to the sentences.

1	how are the sprouts? S:huh? S: how are the sprouts, are	they	acceptable? S: oh I 'm loving them	
2	accidents you've seen like bumps and stuff um I have yeah I have yeah I saw someone get their	their	front wheel bent like that was really bad They were alright it was quite a	
3	strong impression based on what you see as to what kind of person	they	are (.) you get huge amount of clues don't you when you	
4	I like wanted to buy a Minecraft realm with my friends then	they	could go on with me S: well Minecraft costs money	
5	like for a lot of people people don't like cooking and	they	don't like the effort S: yeah S: or they just don't do	
6	changes it (.) mm I mean like a professional winner	they	're called (.) would like (.) professional	



# COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS

## SPOKEN COMMUNICATION

## LEARN WITH CORPUS

### How to disagree politely in spoken English?

People disagree very often with each other in everyday communication; in fact, disagreeing is a very common and important part of expressing our opinions and sharing them with others. While it is important to express our opinions, disagreeing with others can have negative impact on people's social relationships. However, there are ways in which we can soften the negative impact of disagreement and lower the likelihood of offending others. This worksheet focuses on different strategies which can help speakers to disagree with each other politely. The worksheet uses examples and findings from two large corpora of spoken English: the *British National Corpus 2014*, which represents current spoken British English and the *Trinity Lancaster Corpus*, which represents spoken English from learners of English at different levels of proficiency, from intermediate to very proficient speakers.

#### Task 1

First reflect on these three questions:

- What does it mean 'being polite' or 'speaking politely'?
- Why do people try to be polite?
- What are some ways in which people can show politeness?
- Why do people sometimes avoid disagreeing with others?

To help you consider these questions, think of a situation when you disagreed with one of your friends, a member of your family or someone at your workplace/school. How did you express disagreement in these situations? What did you say? Make a note of some of the expressions that you would use (translate them into English, if they are in a different language). Compare them with your partner or a group.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

#### Task 2

Look at the following examples from conversations of British English speakers. Decide whether the speakers a) agree or b) disagree with each other. Underline the expressions used by these speakers for agreeing and circle the expressions used to signal disagreeing. Compare your answers with a partner.

##### Topic: Previous skills and employment

Emily: you weren't a technician.  
Peter: well actually I was cos that's what  
Emily: what?  
Peter: I went on to do after teaching I  
was a technician wasn't I at the uni?

Topic: Having too many tasks in a teaching job  
Helen: I've got so many things  
Rachel: yeah well that's a good thing unlike better  
than having nothing  
Helen: well absolutely but it I mean with the with  
this, you know, problem came up again

##### Topic: Politics and tactics for winning an election

Michael: and yeah it it lacks substance it just was too easily exposed  
Josh: it did I and I totally agree but I still think with erm if they had had a Blair type of figure in terms  
of charisma erm presenting that suite of policies I suspect they would have won

#### Task 3

Look at the following examples of disagreement from conversations of English learners in the Trinity Lancaster Corpus. Although they all express disagreement with the previous speaker, they differ in the strategies used to express the opposing view.

Do you think that some of the examples can be considered more polite than others? Rank the examples using the following scale: (1) not polite – (2) polite – (3) very polite

Example	Your score
A I completely disagree with this because <u>ex</u> I repeat as I said ...	
B I agree with this point but don't you think maybe the fact that times are changing is a good thing?	
C but I personally would disagree that that money would necessarily be spent on that	
D erm no <u>no</u> it's not so	
E well I'm not totally convinced but <u>ex</u> you know I live in a really traditional family	
F mm I can understand your opinion erm but I was still wondering...	
G I can't agree with you	
H <u>ex</u> <u>ex</u> I think erm I think they I think they are wrong	
I I think they're completely wrong	
J no way	
K I I I can understand what you're saying but I'm not I don't agree with that	

When you are done, compare your rating with a partner and discuss the following questions:

- Did you have similar ratings?
- What expressions made the disagreement more or less polite?
- What strategies of polite communication have been demonstrated in the sentences ranked as polite and very polite?

#### Task 4

In this task, we will explore a very common strategy for softening expression of disagreement and making it more polite. This is achieved by, first, agreeing with the previous statement and showing that you understand the point, before saying that you, in fact, disagree with the view.

We will use BNClab to search for more examples of this type of disagreement by typing one of the following expressions in the search window: *yes but* – *yeah but* – *right but*. Go to the Usage button and find three different expressions of disagreement. Note these down and compare them with your partner or a group, underlining any other expressions helping to make the expression of an opposing view less direct and more polite.

Next, pick one of the topics to discuss with a partner. When expressing opposing views, try to use different strategies and expressions that you've identified in Tasks 2-4.

- Everybody should have a right to free education
- People should be able to freely choose the country where they want to live



Image: Designed by Freepik.com.

# How to disagree politely in spoken English?

## Why do people use swearwords in spoken English?

Swearwords are part of taboo language and many people connect swearing with the intention to cause offence. However, the role of swearwords is much more complex than that. From the linguistic perspective, swearwords are usually defined as words that are used to express the speaker's emotional state and to communicate this information to the listener. While the emotion conveyed by swearwords is often that of anger or frustration, swearwords can also play a positive role in building of relationships and indicate to other people that they are accepted as friends. Since swearing is relatively common in spoken informal English, this worksheet seeks to help learners of English to interpret the use of swearwords in spoken communication. The tasks use data and examples from the British National Corpus 2014 to explore why people use swearwords, who uses swearwords and how frequent swearwords are in conversations.

### Task 1

How frequent are swearwords? In this task, we look at how frequent swearing is in informal spoken English. Look at the following swearwords and place them on a scale from the least frequent (the blue end) to the most frequent (the red end). Underline the swearwords that you haven't encountered before; you can check their meaning in a dictionary and their use in BNClab using the Usage button.

arse - bitch - bloody - bullshit - cunt - damn - dickhead - fuck - fucking - piss off - shit



Now go to BNClab and check whether your intuition was correct. Type the swearwords one by one, and use the Change button to find the frequency of each word in current English. Tip: Type the swearwords using capital letters to search for all forms of the word (e.g. *damn*, *damned*). Discuss the following questions:

- Was your intuition correct?
- What factors may affect how frequent a certain swearword is?
- Looking at the frequency of the swearwords in the corpus, how common is swearing in spoken British English? Do you think it is a common feature of informal conversations?

# SPOKEN COMMUNICATION

### Task 2

Who uses swearwords? It is sometimes believed that swearwords are used predominately by certain groups of people, for example, by men rather than women, and by people from the working class rather than students and people from the middle class. In this activity, we are going to check these hypotheses. Look up the following swearwords in BNClab and note down which groups in terms of age, gender and social class use them most.

	GENDER	AGE	SOCIAL CLASS
bullshit	<i>e.g. Women slightly more than men</i>	<i>Mostly younger people</i>	<i>Mostly students &amp; middle class</i>
bloody	_____	_____	_____
dickhead	_____	_____	_____
fucking	_____	_____	_____
shit	_____	_____	_____

# SPOKEN COMMUNICATION

## SPOKEN COMMUNICATION

## LEARN WITH CORPUS

### Speaking English fluently: What does spoken English *really* look like?

This worksheet looks at fluency in spoken English and, in particular, on features that make it less fluent such as hesitations, gaps in vocabulary and false starts of sentences. These are often considered to indicate problems with the ability to keep a fluent flow of speech. Such features are also often believed to be typical for learner language. Some learners also feel self-conscious about these features in their speaking and this awareness makes them less confident at speaking and less willing to take part in conversations. However, it is useful to realise that all of these features represent very common characteristics of spoken language in general, whether by native or non-native speakers. In this worksheet, we are going to look more closely at these types of disfluencies in the conversations of native speakers of British English. The tasks use data and examples from the British National Corpus 2014 and from the Trinity Lancaster Corpus of spoken L2 English to explore some of the typical features of spoken interaction and the reasons for their occurrence.

#### Task 1

When we think about spoken language, fluency is often mentioned.

- What do you think 'being fluent' in a language means?
- What are some ways in which we can tell whether someone is fluent or not?
- Are there any areas of spoken interactive English that you think are especially challenging for you?

Discuss these questions with your partner or your group

#### Task 2

Look at the following examples from conversations in English. Some of the examples come from native speakers of English in the British National Corpus 2014, others come from learners of English from the Trinity Lancaster Corpus. Try to guess which examples came from (a) native speakers and which from (b) learners of English. Discuss what factors helped you to decide between the two groups of speakers.

1. S1: and you could always tell which student was which department you know? so oh yeah yeah just I mean very erm oh gosh what's the word? very oh I'll think of it in a minute S2: distinctive? S1: ~~ex~~ well yeah that

2. S1: I do ~~ex~~ I don't go I don't go over forty knowing it ~~ex~~ in into erm even like on any of the roads [discussing the usual speed of driving]

3. S1: my computer scientist erm colleague person who was who was who really helped us out she's been doing a lot of analysis today this was her Wednesday

5. S1: I don't know whether that is actually possible it probably is erm but yeah I mean this idea of surveillance you know from parents I mean I don't think it's surveillance I mean it's you know it's not surveillance it's supervision you know which is which is fine some people some parents are very strict with supervising their children

4. S1: mmm well I think they should have allowed the big banks to go bankrupt and should not have rescued them what might have followed if ~~ex~~ if the big banks had disappeared? S2: well I think that if the big banks have disappeared people will the ~~ex~~ economy the economy of a country will go down

6. S1: of the directors of the school is the chair and then they have various other committee people but it's a lady in actually called who is who's been who's the director of studies in one of the schools in the and she's been doing it for about twenty years but

7. S1: what kind of ~~ex~~ techniques do you apply with technology? E: erm well I use I use it in in teaching all aspects of English spoken written ~~ex~~ listening and yes so and pronunciation erm but I don't think it's always necessary to have the latest S1: right erm for ~~ex~~ some people ~~ex~~ it's necessary yeah but for me it's not necessary ~~ex~~ because ~~ex~~ my students are not ~~ex~~ able to buy the latest technology in the world and but I think that they like to work with that do you think so?

#### Task 3

Learners of a foreign language sometimes struggle to find the right word to convey what they want to say. This may result in pauses in conversation and in the need to reformulate the sentence or having to explain what they mean by using a paraphrase. Sometimes, learners may find these gaps in their vocabulary knowledge embarrassing. However, searching for the right word in spoken communication is not unique to learners; rather, it is a common feature of any unplanned spoken interaction. In this task, we are going to look at how native English speakers experience and deal with lexical gaps in their speech.

Go to BNCLab and type in the following expression: *what's the word*. This will give you examples where speakers searched for a word they could not recall or didn't know. Answer the following questions:

- How many examples did you find?
- Go to the Usage button and note down some of the words that the speakers looked for.

#### Task 4

Pauses and hesitation sounds are considered to be a very common feature in spoken learner English. Often, they are attributed to the fact that learners need to think more carefully about their grammar or vocabulary than native speakers do. However, some of the hesitation is just a normal feature of spoken language in which speakers interact with each other and produce language on the go.

Search BNCLab for two common hesitation sounds, *erm* and *ex*, using the following search term: *ex OR erm* [this will search for both words at the same time]. After your search, discuss the following questions:

- How many examples did you find?
- Do you think hesitation is a frequent feature in spoken communication of native speakers of English?
- What function do hesitation sounds fulfill in people's speech? Use the Usage button to find examples to support your explanations. You can also use the Age button to see whether the frequency of hesitation sounds changes with age.

#### Task 5

In this task, we are going to reflect on what are some common features of spoken interactive communication. Think about the examples of spoken language you have looked at in Tasks 2 to 4.

- Make a list of the various disfluencies typical for spoken interaction.
- Can you think of some reasons why these occur when people speak to each other?

Make a note of your ideas. When you are finished, compare and discuss them with your partner or a group.



Speaking English fluently: What does spoken English *really* look like?



# SPOKEN COMMUNICATION

## Task 2

Look at the following examples from conversations in English. Some of the examples come from native speakers of English in the British National Corpus 2014, others come from learners of English from the Trinity Lancaster Corpus. Try to guess which examples came from (a) native speakers and which from (b) learners of English. Discuss what factors helped you to decide between the two groups of speakers.

1. S1: and you could always tell which student was which department you know? so oh yeah yeah just I mean very erm oh gosh what's the word? very oh I'll I'll think of it in a minute S2: distinctive? S1: er well yeah that

3. S1: my computer scientist erm colleague person who was who was who really helped us out she's been doing a lot of analysis today this was her Wednesday

5. S1: I don't know whether that is actually possible it probably is erm but yeah I mean this idea of surveillance you know from

2. S1: I do er I don't go I don't go over forty knowing it er in into erm even like on any of the roads [discussing the usual speed of driving]

4. S1: mm well I think they should have allowed the big banks to go bankrupt and should not have rescued them what might have followed if er if the big banks had disappeared? S2: well I think that if the big banks have disappeared people will the econom the economy of a country will go down

### SPOKEN COMMUNICATION

### LEARN WITH CORPUS

#### Speaking English fluently: What does spoken English really look like?

This worksheet looks at fluency in spoken English and, in particular, on features that make it less fluent such as hesitations, gaps in mid-sentence and false starts of sentences. These often contribute to native speakers with the ability to keep a fluent flow of speech. Such features are also often believed to be typical for learner language. Some learners also feel self-conscious about these features in their speaking and this worksheet helps them to feel confident in speaking and feel willing to take part in conversations. However, it is useful to realise that all of these features represent very common characteristics of spoken language in general, whether by native or non-native speakers. In this worksheet, we are going to look more closely at these types of disfluencies in the conversations of native speakers of British English. This task uses data and examples from the British National Corpus 2014 and from the Trinity Lancaster Corpus of spoken L2 English to explore some of the typical features of spoken interaction and the reasons for their occurrence.

#### Task 1

When we think about spoken language, fluency is often mentioned.

- What do you think 'being fluent' in a language means?
- What are some ways in which we can tell whether someone is fluent or not?
- Are there any areas of spoken interactive English that you think are especially challenging for you?

#### Task 3

Learners of a foreign language sometimes struggle to find the right word to convey what they want to say. This may result in pauses in conversation and in the need to reformulate the sentence or having to explain what they mean by using a paraphrase. Sometimes, learners may find these gaps in their vocabulary knowledge embarrassing. However, searching for the right word in spoken communication is not unique to learners; rather, it is a common feature of any unplanned spoken interaction. In this task, we are going to look at how native English speakers experience and deal with lexical gaps in their speech.

Go to [BNCweb](#) and type in the following expression, *what's the word*. This will give you examples where speakers searched for a word they could not recall or don't know. Answer the following questions:

- How many examples did you find?
- Go to the [Lexique](#) button and note down some of the words that the speakers looked for.

#### Task 4

Pauses and hesitation sounds are considered to be a very common feature in spoken learner English. Often, they are attributed to the fact that learners need to think more carefully about their grammar or vocabulary than native speakers do. However, some of the hesitation in just a normal feature of spoken language in which speakers interact with each other and produce language in the go.

Search [BNCweb](#) for two common hesitation sounds, *um* and *er*, using the following search term: *er OR um* (this will search for both words at the same time). After your search, discuss the following questions:

- How many examples did you find?
- Do you think hesitation is a frequent feature in spoken communication of native speakers of English?
- What function do hesitation sounds fulfil in people's speech? Use the [Lexique](#) button to find examples to support your explanations. You can also use the [Age](#) button to see whether the frequency of hesitation sounds changes with age.

#### Task 5

In this task, we are going to reflect on what are some common features of spoken interactive communication. Think about the examples of spoken language you have looked at in Task 2 (a & b).

- Make a list of the various disfluencies typical for spoken interaction.
- Can you think of some reasons why these occur when people speak to each other?

Make a note of your ideas. When you are finished, compare and discuss them with your partner or a group.



# SPOKEN COMMUNICATION

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Go to BNClab and type in the following expression: **what's the word**. This will give you examples where speakers searched for a word they could not recall or didn't know. Answer the following questions:

- How many examples did you find?
- Go to the Usage button and note down some of the words that the speakers looked for.

**SPOKEN COMMUNICATION**

**Speaking English fluently: What does spoken English really look like?**

This worksheet looks at fluency in spoken English and, in particular, on features that make it less fluent such as hesitations, gaps in vocabulary and flow, and reformulations. These are often considered to indicate problems with the ability to keep a fluent flow of speech. Such features are also often believed to be typical for learner language. Some learners also feel self-conscious about these features in their speaking and this experience makes them less confident in speaking and less willing to take part in conversations. However, it is useful to realise that all of these features represent very common characteristics of spoken language in general, whether by native or non-native speakers. In this worksheet, we are going to look at some of these features of spoken language in the conversations of native speakers of British English. This task uses data and examples from the British National Corpus 2014 and from the Tinnily Lancaster Corpus of spoken L2 English to explore some of the typical features of spoken interaction and the reasons for their occurrence.

**Task 1**

When we think about spoken language, fluency is often mentioned.

- What do you think 'being fluent' in a language means?
- What are some ways in which we can tell whether someone is fluent or not?
- Are there any areas of spoken interactive English that you think are especially challenging for you?

Discuss these questions with your partner or your group.

**Task 2**

Look at the following examples from conversations in English. Some of the examples come from native speakers of English in the British National Corpus 2014, others come from learners of English from the Tinnily Lancaster Corpus. Try to guess which examples come from (a) native speakers and which from (b) learners of English. Discuss what factors helped you to decide between the two groups of speakers.

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# BNClab teaching materials

<http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/corpusforschools/>


CURRENT SPOKEN ENGLISH

LEARN WITH CORPUS

## Changing pronouns: Understanding singular they

Pronouns are often considered to be a boring word class. Learners often believe that, unlike nouns and adjectives, the members of the pronoun group do not change much. However, this is not entirely true. When we look at how pronouns are used by English native speakers in their spoken communication today, we can see some interesting changes over time. In this handout, we use findings and examples from the British National Corpus 2014 to talk about how pronouns are used in conversations of English speakers in the UK. In particular, we are going to focus on the use of singular they, a feature that is very common in current spoken English.

Task 1



See your driver's details before they arrive

Find out more

We will consider the changes in the use of the well-known pronoun 'they'. This pronoun usually refers to third person plural, as in *My birthday yesterday and my friends came over after midnight*. This is a very straightforward use of English, 'they' is also used for a different use of the pronoun refers to third person singular.

Consider the following two examples from the British National Corpus 2014 that involve the use of 'they' or 'their' and decide whether they refer to third person plural or singular.

a. Look at the advertisement from Uber and decide whether 'they' refers to third person plural or singular.

b. Consider also the following extract from a primary school separate girls and Kessel and published on 5 June 2018: *"Back in Inverness one parent reportedly saw a result of being beaten by a girl."*

Task 2

Read the following concordance lines taken from conversations between British National Corpus 2014. In each example, decide whether the singular (SG) or third person plural (PL) and put SG or PL next to the sentence.

1	how are the sprouts? S: huh? S: how are the sprouts, are they acceptab
2	accidents you've seen like bumps and stuff um I have yeah I have yeah I saw someone get their their front wh
3	strong impression based on what you see as to what they are ( ) yo don't you
4	I like wanted to buy a Minecraft realm with my friends then they could go
5	like for a lot of people people don't like cooking and they don't like just don't
6	hangs it ( ) mm I mean like a professional winner person or whatever they've called
7	always tell which hand he was writing with the person I sit next to in English broke their left hand
8	hint with that ( ) I think if you look sent a photo to someone and they stopped
9	there's just no point it's like asking someone if they've pregn don't like
10	contacts his lecturer and says oh I've been talking to this person and they're intere
11	hey were traveling abroad and he lives there with her now they have a d

Task 1

In today's English, 'you' refers to second person singular in both formal and informal contexts, as well as to second person plural. In order to avoid confusion, there are some strategies for speakers to signal who they mean when using 'you'. We are going to explore one of such forms: 'you guys'.

Type this phrase in BNClab and look at the first 15 concordance lines that you find. Now consider the following questions:

- Can you describe the purpose of the expression?
- What would happen if we replaced the expression in these sentences by 'you'?
- After you've looked at the concordance lines, can you think of other expressions that work in a similar way?

Task 2

Read the following concordance lines taken from current British English in the British National Corpus 2014 and then decide in each example whether 'you' is used as second person:

A. singular	B. plural	C. impossible to know						
1. so S: what sort of form did it take? did you go there? S: well there were fifteen from around	2. to S: I don't have anything to print what are you printing? S: I've got reports and cases to read	3. turns S: wasn't it like I stay here tonight you go home S: yeah go home mind you home's	4. the okay and I'm going S: anyway I'll see you soon S: right thank you very much for	5. didn't learn nothing really S: what did you? did you just sit round a table and just play around on	6. turns S: the sharing but I'll be able to show you that S: I think you would S: further down the line	7. remember have a look when we go to the tip you keep taking I'll just go upstairs S: when	8. S: nice, that is nice wine as well, thank you very much it's quite nice isn't it? S: mm	9. worried about their better not working so and they said oh yeah you can have a bath if you want because they've got this

For the sentences you marked as 'plural' or 'impossible to know', can you suggest a strategy or a phrase which would signal more clearly that 'you' was intended as a plural pronoun. You can use the expressions you listed in the previous task or think of some new ones.

Example:

S: what sort of form did it take? did you go there? S: well there were fifteen from around

SPOKEN COMMUNICATION

LEARN WITH CORPUS

## How do fictional conversations differ from real speech?

Informal spoken communication has various characteristics that make it different from other types of communication (e.g. written or online discourse). Using findings and examples from the British National Corpus 2014 (BNC2014), this worksheet discusses some of the unique features of informal spoken language and how close fictional language is to how we speak in real life. We will look at different types of spoken language - from written dialogue in novels, to written-to-be-spoken dialogue in dramas, television and movies, to spontaneous natural conversation. Contrasting these different representations of spoken language with real conversations between British English speakers from the BNC2014 can help us identify typical characteristics of spoken communication in English.

SPOKEN COMMUNICATION

TEACHER HANDOUT

## How do fictional conversations differ from real speech?

LESSON GOAL

To teach students about characteristics of spoken (informal) communication by highlighting differences between real and fictional (scripted, written) dialogues.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- To identify various features of spontaneous spoken communication
- To compare natural spoken conversation to other types of communication
- To discuss reasons for differences between spontaneous and fictional dialogues

LANGUAGE CHANGE

## Lexical change: Why does English keep on changing?

Languages, including English, keep on changing. The changes can be related to the way we pronounce words or to the vocabulary and grammatical structures that we use. Some of the changes can be swift and noticeable, other changes occur more gradually and we hardly notice them. So what are the reasons for these linguistic developments? In many cases, the developments in language reflect the changing needs of the speakers and the changes in the environment in which we live. In this worksheet, we are going to explore lexical changes that have occurred in present-day English over the period of last twenty years. In particular, we will discuss how changes in society affect the words we use in our everyday conversations.

language change — technology — society — lifestyle — lexical changes

Task 1

How did the society change over the past twenty years? Discuss some of the major changes with your partner or a group. Which of these changes do you think have affected our language and the words we use? Use the space below to make notes on both, the areas of change in society and the changes in the language use.

Changes in society	Any related linguistic changes?

Task 2

We are now going to look at some ways in which our society changed and the areas of language that changed along. Perhaps one of the most dramatic changes have occurred with respect to technological development. Innovation in technology and our growing engagement with different types of technological devices have resulted in changes in the words we use to talk about new products and devices.

Can you think of some words related to technology that have not been in use in the 1990s but are quite frequent today? Use the Change button in BNClab to check your ideas. Note down the words and their frequency below - what is the most frequently used new word that you could find?

e.g. email 616 times

iPhone

Research tips

Lexical change is an ongoing process. Some new words are related to very short-lived phenomena and appear and disappear quickly from our use and vocabularies. Others stay for a longer time. The best source of information about when and how words entered the English language can be found in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) whose task it is to capture and record changes in the lexicon of the English language.

"Whether by sudden invention or unhurried evolution, words come into the English language in all manner of ways. The Oxford English Dictionary's mission is to record all of these word stories, capturing their development as they continue to unfold." (25 February, 2019 at <https://public.oed.com/about/>)

Several times a year, the Dictionary publishes new entries that have been added to the dictionary. You can check these updates on <https://public.oed.com/updates/>. For example, January 2018 saw the addition of 'binge-watch' and 'energy vampire' to the Dictionary.

LANGUAGE AND GENDER

## Differences between men and women: the case of swearing

Swearing plays an interesting role in language use - it can fulfil a lot of functions. Swearing is a common feature of everyday language, typically used in situations of anger, frustration, but also as a sign of solidarity and group membership. Swearwords appear quite frequently in language, especially in spoken informal communication, as documented by data from the British National Corpus 2014. A common stereotype about language use is that men swear more than women do. This impression is further enforced by societal norms and beliefs in "proper etiquette" for women, something we also explore in the research bite below. But is this really the case? This worksheet focuses on swearwords and whether gender plays a particular role in their use, in terms of both gender of the speaker, and gender of the addressee of the swearword.

Key terms (non-standard) swearing semantic fields lifetime change

Task 1

Make a list of some frequently used swearwords.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Now think about the following questions and make a note next to each swearword:

- Which of these words are used predominately for women and which for men?
- Do you think that some of these words are more often used by men and some by women?

Compare your notes with a partner. Looking at the swearwords, think about the following questions:

- What associations (semantic fields) are linked with typical swearwords aimed at women, and what associations are linked with swearwords aimed at men?
- What do you think affects this pattern in the use of swearwords?

Task 2

From your list above, pick two or three swearwords. Go to BNClab and using the Gender button check whether there is an actual gender divide in how these swearwords are used in BNC1994 and BNC2014. Are the results what you expected? Why or why not?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Task 3

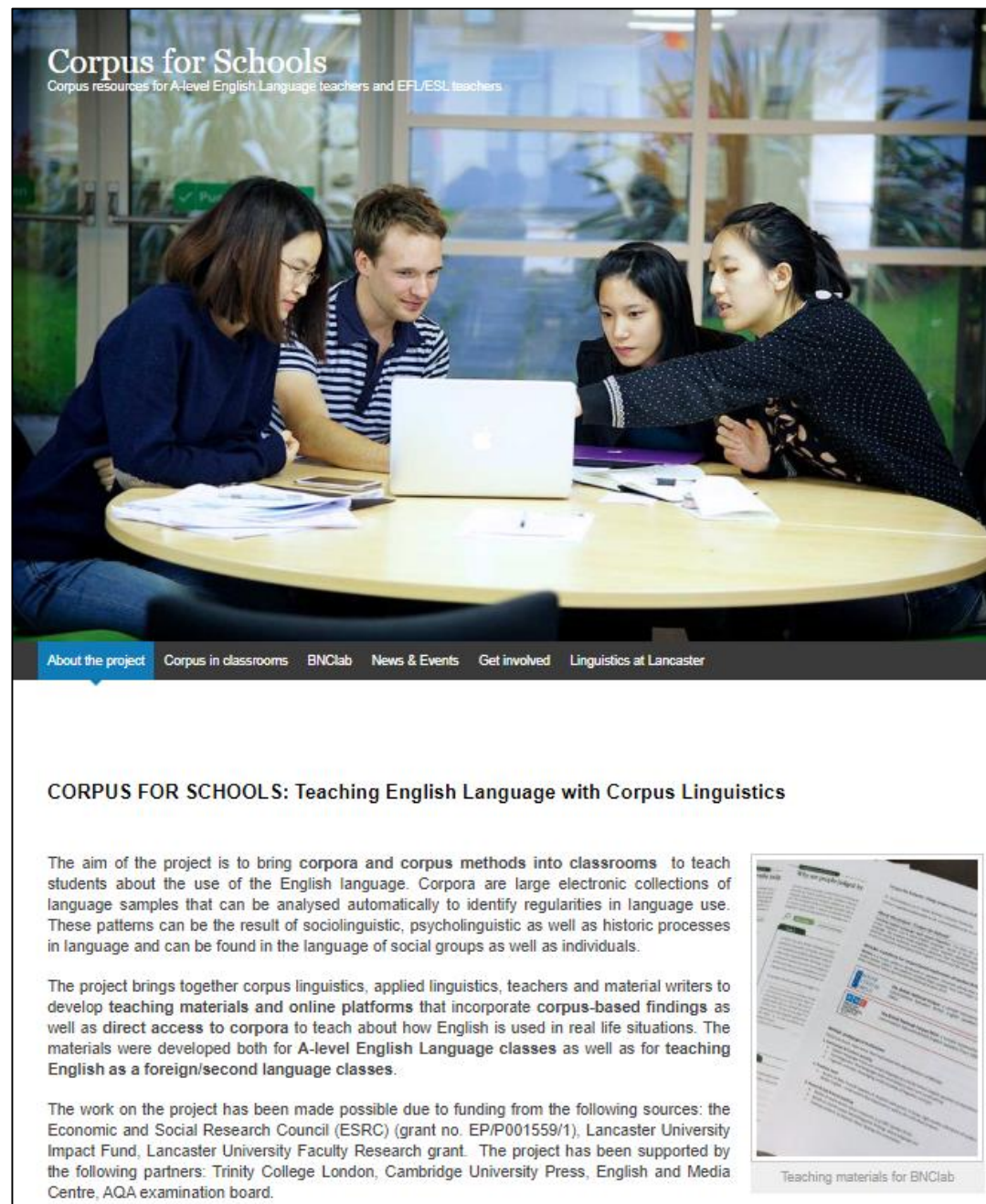
We are now going to focus on possible gender effects on one of the most frequent swearwords in British English - 'fucking'. Type this word in BNClab and look at the results under the Gender button. What trends can you notice with respect to:

- The use of the swearword in the 1990s and 2014?
- The use of swearwords by men and women in these two time periods?
- What overall trend have you observed? How did the effect of gender change from the 1990s to 2014?



# 'Corpus for Schools' project

- To bring **corpora** and **corpus methods** **into classrooms** to teach students about the use of the English language
- To draw on the benefits of **discovery learning** and **problem-based learning**
- To provide **free corpus resources** for students and teachers



The screenshot shows the homepage of the 'Corpus for Schools' project website. At the top, there is a header with the title 'Corpus for Schools' and a subtitle 'Corpus resources for A-level English Language teachers and EFL/ESL teachers'. Below the header is a large photograph of four students (three women and one man) sitting around a round table, looking at a laptop. A navigation bar is positioned below the photo, containing links: 'About the project', 'Corpus in classrooms', 'BNCLab', 'News & Events', 'Get involved', and 'Linguistics at Lancaster'. The main content area has a heading 'CORPUS FOR SCHOOLS: Teaching English Language with Corpus Linguistics'. It contains three paragraphs of text explaining the project's aim, its components, and its funding sources. To the right of the text is a small inset image showing a sample of teaching materials for BNCLab, which includes a table with linguistic data and a list of exercises.

Corpus for Schools  
Corpus resources for A-level English Language teachers and EFL/ESL teachers

About the project | Corpus in classrooms | BNCLab | News & Events | Get involved | Linguistics at Lancaster

## CORPUS FOR SCHOOLS: Teaching English Language with Corpus Linguistics

The aim of the project is to bring corpora and corpus methods into classrooms to teach students about the use of the English language. Corpora are large electronic collections of language samples that can be analysed automatically to identify regularities in language use. These patterns can be the result of sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic as well as historic processes in language and can be found in the language of social groups as well as individuals.

The project brings together corpus linguistics, applied linguistics, teachers and material writers to develop teaching materials and online platforms that incorporate corpus-based findings as well as direct access to corpora to teach about how English is used in real life situations. The materials were developed both for A-level English Language classes as well as for teaching English as a foreign/second language classes.

The work on the project has been made possible due to funding from the following sources: the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (grant no. EP/P001559/1), Lancaster University Impact Fund, Lancaster University Faculty Research grant. The project has been supported by the following partners: Trinity College London, Cambridge University Press, English and Media Centre, AQA examination board.

Teaching materials for BNCLab



Thank you!