



## Section A: English in the world

### Question 1

Read the following text, which is an extract from an article posted on *The Conversation* website in 2020.

Discuss what you feel are the most important issues raised in the text relating to the varying use of English globally. You should refer to specific details from the text as well as to ideas and examples from your wider study of English in the world. [25]

#### **'It don't be like that now' – the English history of African American English**

After students at a California high school were recently told to 'translate' Black English phrases into Standard English, a community member at a school board hearing said: 'The last thing they need – our children – is to be forced to attend class and to be mocked and bullied by students because of a lesson plan used to highlight African American Vernacular English.' 5

Few dialects of English have garnered so much negative attention. From the classroom to the courtroom, the place of African American Vernacular English is hotly debated. This is because people associate it with linguistic features now denounced as grammatically incorrect, like 'double negatives' or verbs that don't agree with their subjects. For example: 10

*You might as well not tell them, 'cause you ain't getting no thanks for it. You might as well not tell them nothing about it, only just leave it in the hands of the Lord.*

*'Cause I knows it and I sees it now.*

Teachers and language mavens<sup>1</sup> chalk these features up to 'bad' English. Some linguists contend that they're not English, but rather the legacy of an English-based creole once widespread across British North America. 15

As a sociolinguist specializing in the structure of the spoken language, my team has been grappling with this issue for years.

Our research shows that many of these stereotypical non-standard features are direct offshoots of an older stage of English – that of the British who colonized the United States. 20

#### **The 'northern subject rule'**

Consider the present tense. In Standard English, only verbs in the third-person singular are inflected with -s, as in, 'he/she/it understands.' In African American Vernacular English, on the other hand, not only does the verb sometimes remain bare in the third person (e.g. 'He understand what I say'), it may also feature -s in other persons, as in, 'They always tries to be obedient.' 25

Our research on old grammars taught us that the Standard English requirement that subject and verb agree in the third-person singular is actually relatively recent. 30

To our surprise, quantitative analysis of the way speakers used the present tense in our early Black English database showed that they follow a pattern described by the grammarian James Murray in 1873.

This pattern, known as the 'northern subject rule', involves leaving the verb bare when the subject is an adjacent pronoun ('They come and take them') and inflecting it with -s otherwise ('The birds comes and pecks them'). 35

### **The problem with ignoring the past**

A linguistic pattern as detailed as the northern subject rule could not have been innovated by members of these far-flung communities independently. Rather, our comparisons confirmed that it was inherited from a common source: the English language first learned by enslaved individuals in the US colonies. 40

<sup>1</sup>*mavens*: people with good knowledge or understanding of a subject

## Section B: Language and the self

### Question 2

Read the following text, which is an extract from an article published on the BBC News website in 2020.

Discuss what you feel are the most important issues raised in the text relating to the ways in which language can shape and reflect personal and social identity. You should refer to specific details from the text as well as to ideas and examples from your wider study of Language and the self. [25]

#### Should schools be allowed to ban slang words like ‘peng’?

Fam, imagine if man said you couldn't use words like 'peng', 'basically' and 'dem tings dere' in your classroom.

Didn't understand any of that?

This might be because you were born in a different generation.

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Just imagine if you were not allowed to use slang words that meant 'beautiful' or 'lots' when you were in school.

That is the case for some students, who are being urged to ditch slang words in lessons in order to teach them how to use formal English.

In fact, some schools have even introduced anti-slang posters and stickers, grammar police badges and word jails, where slang is written on posters with jail images.

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Does that mean that pupils studying there have to tell their classmates they look 'jolly well splendid' rather than a 'peng ting'?

However, a linguistics expert is warning that slang bans may actually cause more harm than good.

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'There's no incorrect or correct way of using language,' says Ian Cushing, a lecturer in education at Brunel University London.

He carried out a study by visiting schools and speaking to teachers in England over a year and found examples of slang being banned and policed in lessons.

These included words such as 'peng', 'bare' or abbreviations such as 'emosh' for emotional.

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There were slang bans at about 20 of the schools he visited, which were mostly located in urban areas.

'Language is just one part of your identity – just the same way you wear your hair and clothes,' said Dr Cushing.

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'Young people will police their own language – they don't need other people to police it for them, they understand the context of their situation, and know when to shift it accordingly.'

'Shakespeare is full of slang and we don't see teachers banning that – there's a hypocrisy here, which is rooted in cultural and linguistic snobbery.' 30

The linguistics academic says slang is a natural way of speaking, and banning it may be a threat to a person's identity.

It may also make students feel discriminated against and less motivated to take part in lessons.

'Young people are typically the innovators of language change, so actually we should be celebrating that rather than banning it in the classroom,' said Dr Cushing. 35

However, other people argue that a slang ban is indeed necessary.

Chris McGovern, chairman of Campaign for Real Education, says allowing slang is not doing any favours for underprivileged children.

He says they are left in an 'employment gutter' because of their 'linguistic impoverishment'. 40

'In the UK today, around nine million adults are functionally illiterate, and many of them suffer under-employment, unemployment or destitution as a consequence.'





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