

# Street language

## Level

Pre-intermediate and above (equivalent to CEF level A2–B1 and above)

## Comment

This eLesson is about the culture of youth street talk which is used by young people in many urban areas of England. The text discusses its origins and the reasons for its relatively rapid growth. It also looks at recent attempts to rewrite some of Britain's great literary classics (Shakespeare and Dickens) into 'youth speak'.

## How to use the lesson

- 1 Ask students to write down how many languages exist in their country and then compare notes with their partner. In a monolingual class, show a map of the students' country and ask students how the language(s) change(s) in different parts. Encourage students to think about accent, words and dialect.
- 2 If you have the facilities, play students an extract of English youth street talk, eg hip-hop, grime or rap music. Students give their response to the music and the sound of the English used.
- 3 Ask students to think of how the language spoken in their country by young people might differ from how adults use it. Encourage them to think of key words or phrases, intonation or any other features of English which make young people sound different.
- 4 Write *youth street language* on the board, clarifying the word *youth*. Tell them they are going to see some examples of English youth street talk. Students complete exercise 1. In feedback, highlight the fact that sometimes the words are similar but pronounced differently eg *nothing* (/nʌθɪŋ/) and *nuffin* (/nʌfɪn/); sometimes they use standard English words but to mean something different, eg *sick*, *heavy* and *feel*. The grammar can also change, eg *do you feel me?* Ask students why they think youth languages are used. At this point, clarify the word *cool* (informal).
- 5 Let students read the three choices in exercise 2 and check any necessary words. Give students a few moments to read for gist.
- 6 Refer students to the Glossary. Students complete the deeper comprehension task (exercise 3). Write up this question for early finishers: *How is youth street talk different from standard English?* Let students compare answers before feedback.
- 7 Tell students they are going to discuss some important and challenging ideas, and they should push themselves to try and do this in English (exercise 4). Do the first one together as a whole class, and encourage students to give different opinions. Students write the relevant letters in the grid, before discussing in pairs or groups of three.
- 8 If appropriate for your group, students complete the adjective task (exercise 5). If you think your students may be (semi) familiar with most of the words, provide the first letter only of each missing word. With less confident students, first put up the missing adjectives randomly on the board (see answers below), allowing them to refer to the Glossary or a dictionary.
- 9 To end the lesson, if students have enjoyed the focus on this different variety of English, you could look at some other street language – Cockney rhyming slang – which is still used by Londoners today. Write out the examples below on individual slips and stick them around the room (do not give the answers in brackets!) Do an example together first, explaining how the rhyming works, eg *Give us your **bees and honey** or*

*I'll shoot!* (money). Then students in pairs study the examples and decide on the meaning of the words in bold:

- a *Get up those **apples and pears** to bed!* (stairs)
- b *The girl put the money in her **sky rocket**.* (pocket)
- c *That guy was a **tea leaf** (thief) so he spent some time in prison.*
- d *He put the whole cake in his **north and south**.* (mouth)
- e *When you have a minute to talk, just pick up the old **dog and bone**.* (phone)
- f *Can you **Adam and Eve** it?* (believe)
- g *If you're lucky, you'll get to meet the **baked bean**.* (queen)
- h *That dog worked really hard, but now he's **brown bread**.* (dead)
- i *It's nice and sunny. Put some cream on and brown your **bacon and eggs**.* (legs)
- j *Don't be so silly. Just use your **loaf of bread**.* (head)

At the feedback stage, tell students that in Cockney rhyming slang the rhyming word is often dropped in use, eg *Get up those apples!* (stairs) *Use your loaf!* (head) *Give us your bees!* (money).

### Answer key

1 1 c      3 e      5 f      7 a  
2 g      4 h      6 b      8 d

2 c

- 3
- 1 The English they might hear is different from what they have learnt / heard before.
  - 2 The internet allows it to be spread around very quickly.
  - 3 It's considered 'cool' or fashionable.
  - 4 He wants to attract young people to the classics by making them relevant to them.
  - 5 They feel he has destroyed beautiful writing by changing it.
  - 6 It is exclusive, and shuts out those not in the group or community.

4 Students' own answers

5 1 surprised                      3 distinct                      5 cool                      7 relevant  
2 comforting                      4 popular                      6 passionate

### Related websites

The following websites might be useful, for either yourself or your students.

<http://www.yoofspeak.net/> (Baum)

<http://yourlisten.com/channel/content/48696/BBC%20Radio%20Kent%20Interviews%20Martin%20Baum> (Baum)

<http://www.urbandictionary.com/>

<http://www.putlearningfirst.com/language/12dial/street.html> (Youth speak)

<http://www.putlearningfirst.com/language/12dial/blackenglish.html> (Youth speak)

[http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~kemmer/Words04/usage/slang\\_cockney.html](http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~kemmer/Words04/usage/slang_cockney.html) (Cockney rhyming slang)

<http://www.hintsandthings.co.uk/library/rhymingslang3.htm>