



Curriculum subject: English Language

Level: Key Stage 5, Undergraduate (English Language/Linguistics)

Topic: Lexical variation

Article

[Lexical variation across the UK](#)

Activities

1. Make a list of the terms of endearment, such as *dad* or *gran*, that you use within your family. Do you know of any alternatives among your friends or in different parts of the country?
2. Make a list of words you associate with the dialect of the area you live in. Interview other members of your family/community to see if they can add to your list. Which words do you associate with older generations and which words are used by speakers of all ages? A good area of vocabulary to start with is words associated with emotions, states of mind or personality traits – *happy, angry, moody, grumpy, pleased, annoyed, drunk, attractive, unattractive, badly-behaved, stupid* etc.
3. Listen to a selection of recordings on this site (between five and ten) from different parts of the UK and list any unusual items of vocabulary. Use a dictionary to find the meaning of the words and try and categorise each word or phrase according to the following criteria:
 - Do you hear the word/phrase in your area or not?
 - Do you and your friends use it or not?
 - Do you associate it with older or younger speakers?
 - Do you think it is peculiar to certain regions?
4. Look at the list (below) of 'unmediated' recordings featured on this site. Listen to a couple of recordings – one from near where you live and another in a different part of the country



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| England | Scotland | Wales | Northern Ireland |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Whitehaven | Uig | Bangor | Londonderry |
| Middlesbrough | Portsoy | Resolven | Downpatrick |
| Bradford | New Cumnock | | |
| Salford | | | |
| Boston | | | |
| Bristol | | | |
| Castle Bromwich | | | |
| Peckham | | | |
| Southall | | | |

Research task

Traditional children's games and songs are a treasure trove of local words and a rich source of linguistic invention. Even the simplest game of chase has a number of different names that vary according to where you are in the UK – *dobby*, *it*, *tag*, *ticky* or *tig*, for instance. Research by Peter and Iona Opie in the 1950s and 1960s also unearthed an enormous range of regional truce terms, such as *barley*, *cross keys*, *fainites*, *kings*, *pax*, *scribs*, *skinchies*, and *full stop*. These are all words or phrases children shout while crossing their fingers to indicate they are briefly withdrawing from a game of chase and therefore cannot be caught.

Complete a survey of words and terms associated with children's playground games below. Compare your results with those of a classmate and, if possible, someone who lives in a different part of the country – perhaps a relative or friend.

Think of a basic chasing game, where one person is trying to catch the other players, and consider the following:

- What do you call this game?
- How do you refer to the person chosen to catch the others?



- What does the catcher shout out when he/she touches someone?
- What do you call the 'safe area' where you cannot be caught?
- What word do players use to tell the chaser they cannot be caught, if they want a rest or need to leave the game briefly (do players also cross their fingers or use some other hand signal)?

Think of games that are variations on this basic chasing game and consider the following:

- What do you call the game where players cannot be caught if they are off the ground?
- What do you call the game where players who are caught stand still with their arms outstretched until freed by another player touching them?
- What do you call the game where you have to run from one base to another without being caught?
- What do you call the game where one player leans against a wall while the others try and creep up without the player against the wall spotting them moving? (What phrase does the player against the wall have to say in this game before turning round?)

Think of the chasing game where players have to hide and try and get back to home base before the catcher finds them. Consider the following:

- What do you call this game?
- What is your name for the home base in this game?
- What phrase does the catcher use when they spot someone in this game?
- What phrase do players use in this game if they beat the catcher back to base?
- What phrase do players use in this game if they beat the catcher back to base and want to free any other players who have already been caught?

Think of how these chasing games are 'managed' and consider the following:

- What do you shout out if you want to go first at a game, or if you want to avoid being picked as the chaser?
- What method do you generally use to decide who is the seeker/chaser?
- If you use a counting-out rhyme, do you count bodies, hands or feet?



- Give a couple of examples of well-used counting-out rhymes or dips.
- How do you decide how long the seeker/chaser will give the other players to take up their positions?