

Part 3

LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL CLASS

LANGUAGE AND POWER

- Gender, Sexuality, Ethnicity, Race and Social Class

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Ekstern redaktion: Birgitte Prytz Clausen

Forlagsredaktion: Anders Hassing

Grafisk tilrettelægning og omslag:

Annette Wendelboe Jensen

Tryk og repro: Tarm Bogtryk A/S

INTRODUCTION

1. Which of the following statements do you find to be the most reasonable to describe why there is inequality?

Most countries in the Western world today are meritocracies where the greatest power and highest social positions go to people with the most abilities.

OR

Most countries in the Western world are still divided by inequality into an unfair system of a lower/working, middle and upper class where people stay in the social classes they are born into.

2. Vicky Pollard is a character from the BBC show Little Britain who is supposed to represent a 'stereotypical chav'. Research the concept 'chav' and describe how the programme makers have created this stereotype visually (clothes, hair style, etc.). You can watch clips of Vicky on youtube.com.
3. Below are two conversations from the show. What are the writers telling us about Vicky through these dialogues?

Social Worker: *Vicky, where is your baby?*

Vicky Pollard: *Swapped it for a Westlife CD.*

Social Worker: *Vicky, how could you do such a thing?*

Vicky Pollard: *I know. They're rubbish.*

- [Vicky has walked out of the class and left the pram with her baby in behind]

Teacher: *Vicky aren't you going to take your baby?*

Vicky Pollard: *No don't worry I've got loads at home.*

4. Which social taboos does Vicky Pollard offend against?

Social taboo

A word which is avoided by most people because it is extremely offensive or embarrassing.

5. After seeing this caricature of parts of the British working class, how can it be that 57% of adults in the UK claim to be working class even though only 37% are working in traditional "blue collar" jobs?

Source: BBC NEWS 2007 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/6295743.stm

Kate Fox

Kate Fox is a social anthropologist who works at the Social Issues Research Centre in Oxford. She has focused on many aspects of the social interaction of humans such as drinking, flirting, beauty and body image, gossip aggression, disorder, violence, individualism and mobile phones. She has written a number of books, is frequently quoted in the press and has a regular column for *Psychologies Magazine*. For more information go to http://www.sirc.org/about/kate_fox.html

Watching the English – The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour

From Kate Fox's book 'Watching the English – The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour' (2005). From the chapter 'Linguistic class codes'. Kate Fox is a social anthropologist who does work in human behaviour and social relationships – how people talk, behave and form opinions about each other.

Kate Fox

All English people, whether they admit it or not, are fitted with a sort of social Global Positioning Satellite computer that tells us a person's position on the class map as soon as he or she begins to speak. There are two main factors involved in the calculation of this position: terminology and pronunciation – the words you use and how you say them. Pronunciation is a more reliable indicator (it is relatively easy to learn the terminology of a different class), so I'll start with that.

calculation sb. *beregning*
terminology sb. *terminologi* (*fagudtryk inden for et bestemt fag*)
pronunciation sb. *udtale*
reliable adj. *pålidelig*
accurate adj. *præcis*
unintelligible adj. *uforståelig*
glottal stop sb. *stød*
omission sb. *udeladelse*
drop vb. *udelade*
the pot calling the kettle black *den ene har ikke noget at lade den anden høre.*

THE VOWELS VS CONSONANTS RULE

The first class indicator concerns which type of letter you favour in pronunciation – or rather, which type you fail to pronounce. Those at the top of the social scale like to think that their way of speaking is 'correct', as it is clear and intelligible and accurate, while lower-class is 'incorrect', a 'lazy' way of talking – unclear, often unintelligible, and just plain wrong. Exhibit A in this argument is the lower failure to pronounce consonants, in particular the glottal stop – omission (swallowing, dropping) of Ys – and the dropping of 'h's.

But this is a case of the pot calling the kettle (or ke'le, if you prefer) black. The lower ranks may drop their consonants, but the upper class are equally guilty of dropping their vowels. If you ask them the

time, for example, the lower classes may tell you it is 'alf past ten' but the upper class will say 'hpstn'. A handkerchief in working-class speech is 'ankercheef', but in upper-class pronunciation becomes 'hnrchf'.

Upper-class vowel-dropping may be frightfully smart, but it still sounds like a mobile-phone text message, and unless you are used to this clipped, abbreviated way of talking, it is no more intelligible than lower-class consonant-dropping. The only advantage of this SMS-speak is that it can be done without moving the mouth very much, allowing the speaker to maintain an aloof, deadpan expression and a stiff upper lip.

The upper class, and the upper-middle and middle-middle classes, do at least pronounce their consonants correctly – well, you'd better, if you're going to leave out half of your vowels – whereas the lower classes often pronounce 'th' as 'f' ('teeth' becomes 'teef', 'thing' becomes 'fing') or sometimes as 'v' ('that' becomes 'vat', 'Worthing' is 'Worving'). Final 'g's can become 'k's, as in 'somefink' and 'nuffink'. Pronunciation of vowels is also a helpful class indicator. Lower-class 'a's are often pronounced as long 'i's – Dive for Dave, Tricey for Tracey. (Working-class Northerners tend to elongate the 'a's, and might also reveal their class by saying 'Our Daaave' and 'Our Traaacey'.) Working class 'i's, in turn, may be pronounced 'oi', while some very upper-class 'o's become 'or's, as in 'naff orf'. But the upper class don't say 'I' at all if they can help it: one prefers to refer to oneself as 'one'. In fact, they are not too keen on pronouns in general, omitting them, along with articles and conjunctions, wherever possible – as though they were sending a frightfully expensive telegram. Despite all these peculiarities, the upper classes remain convinced that their way of speaking is the only proper way: their speech is the norm, everyone else's is 'an accent' – and when the upper classes say that someone speaks with 'an accent', what they mean is a working-class accent.

[...]

The Seven Deadly Sins

There are, however, seven words that the English uppers and upper-middles regard as infallible shibboleths. Utter any one of these 'seven deadly sins' in the presence of these higher classes, and their on-board class-radar devices will start bleeping and flashing: you will immediately be demoted to middle-middle class, at best, probably lower – and in some cases automatically classified as working class.

frightfully adv. *skrækkelig*
clipped adj. *staccato*
abbreviated adj. *forkortet*
aloof adj. *fjern*
deadpan adj. *udtryksløs*
stiff upper lip *bide tænderne sammen*
keen adj. *at kunne lide*
conjunction sb. *konjunktion*
peculiarity sb. *sæthed*
proper adj. *korrekt*
infallible adj. *ufejlbarlig*
shibboleth sb. *løsen (et ord el. en sætning man bruger til at identificere sig med; fx for at komme ind i en bygning el. for at få adgang til bestemte oplysninger).*
utter vb. *udtale*
device sb. *anordning*
bleep vb. *bippe*
demote vb. *degradere*

Pardon

This word is the most notorious pet hate of the upper and upper-middle classes. Jilly Cooper recalls overhearing her son telling a friend 'Mummy says that "pardon" is a much worse word than "fuck"'. He was quite right: to the uppers and upper-middles, using such an unmistakably lower-class term is worse than swearing. 5
Some even refer to lower-middle-class suburbs as 'Pardonia'. Here is a good class-test you can try: when talking to an English person, deliberately say something too quietly for them to hear you properly. A lower-middle or middle-middle person will say 'Pardon?'; an upper-middle will say 'Sorry?' (or perhaps 'Sorry - what?' or 'What - sorry?'); but an upper-class and a working-class person will both just say 10
'What?' The working-class person may drop the T - 'Wha?' - but this will be the only difference. Some upper-working-class people with middle-class aspirations might say 'pardon', in a misguided attempt to sound 'posh'.

Toilet

'Toilet' is another word that makes the higher classes flinch - or exchange knowing looks, if it is uttered by a would-be social climber. 15

The correct upper-middle/upper term is 'loo' or 'lavatory' (pronounced *lavuhtry*, with the accent on the first syllable). 'Bog' is occasionally acceptable, but only if it is said in an obviously ironic-jocular manner, as though in quotes. The working classes all say 'toilet', as do most lower-middles and middle-middles, the only difference being the working-class omission of the final Y. (The working classes may also sometimes say 'bog', but without the ironic quotation marks.) Those lower- and middle-middles with pretensions or 20
aspirations, however, may eschew 'toilet' in favour of suburban-genteel euphemisms such as 'gents', 'ladies', 'bathroom', 'powder room', 'facilities', and 'convenience'; or jokey euphemisms such as 'latrines', 'heads' and 'privy' (females tend to use the former, males the latter). 25
30

Serviette

A 'serviette' is what the inhabitants of Pardonia call a napkin. This is another example of a 'genteelism', in this case a misguided attempt to enhance one's status by using a fancy French word rather than the 35
plain - old English one. It has been suggested that 'serviette' was taken up by squeamish lower-middles who found 'napkin' a bit too close to 'nappy', and wanted something that sounded a bit more

notorious adj. *berygnet*
pet hate sb. *yndlingsaversion*

pardonia sb. *et nedsættende udtryk om den lavere middelklasse, der kombinerer 'suburbia' og 'pardon'.*

misguided adj. *misforstået*

posh adj. *overklasse-*
flinch vb. *krympe sammen*
social climber sb. *en der klatrer op ad den sociale rangstige.*

jocular adj. *spøgefuld*
in quotes i *gåseøjne*

pretension sb. *forsøge at give sig ud for at være*

aspiration sb. *stræbe efter*

eschew vb. *undgå*

suburban adj. *forstads-*

genteel adj. *fattigfin-*

euphemism sb. *forskønnende omskrivning*

inhabitant sb. *indbygger*

enhance vb. *forstærke*

squeamish adj. *sart*

refined. Whatever its origins, 'serviette' is now regarded as irredeemably lower class. Upper-middle and upper-class mothers get very upset when their children learn to say 'serviette' from well-meaning lower-class nannies, and have to be painstakingly retrained to say 'napkin'.

Dinner

There is nothing wrong with the word 'dinner' in itself: it is only a working-class hallmark if you use it to refer to the midday meal, which should be called 'lunch'. Calling your evening meal 'tea' is also a working-class indicator: the higher echelons call this meal 'dinner' or 'supper'. (Technically, a dinner is a somewhat grander meal than a supper: if you are invited to 'supper', this is likely to be an informal family meal, eaten in the kitchen - sometimes this is made explicit, as in 'family supper' or 'kitchen supper'. The uppers and upper-middles use the term 'supper' more than the middle- and lower-middles). 'Tea', for the higher classes, is taken at around four o'clock, and consists of tea and cakes or scones (which they pronounce with a short 'o'), and perhaps little sandwiches (pronounced 'sanwidges', not 'sand-witches'). The lower classes call this 'afternoon tea'. All this can pose a few problems for foreign visitors: if you are invited to 'dinner', should you turn up at midday or in the evening? Does 'come for tea' mean four o'clock or seven o'clock? To be safe, you will have to ask what time you are expected. The answer will help you to place your hosts on the social scale.

Settee

Or you could ask your hosts what they call their furniture. If an upholstered seat for two or more people is called a settee or a couch, they are no higher than middle-middle. If it is a sofa, they are upper-middle or above. There are occasional exceptions to this rule, which is not quite as accurate a class indicator as 'Pardon'. Some younger upper-middles, influenced by American films and television programmes, might say 'couch' - although they are unlikely to say 'settee', except as a joke or to annoy their class-anxious parents. If you like, you can amuse yourself by making predictions based on correlations with other class indicators such as those covered later in the chapter on Home Rules. For example: if the item in question is part of a brand-new matching three-piece suite, which also matches the curtains, its owners are likely to call it a settee.

Lounge

And what do they call the room in which the settee/sofa is to be found? Settees are found in 'lounges' or 'living rooms', sofas in 'sit-

irredeemably adv. *uopretteligt*
painstakingly adv. *omhyggeligt*
echelon sb. *lag*
upholstered adj. *polstret*
exception sb. *undtagelse*
anxious adj. *ængstelig*
prediction sb. *forudsigelse*
correlation sb. *sammenhæng*

ting rooms' or 'drawing rooms'. 'Drawing room' (short for 'withdrawing room') used to be the only 'correct' term, but many upper-middles and uppers feel it is bit silly and pretentious to call, say, a small room in an ordinary terraced house the 'drawing room', so 'sitting room' has become acceptable. You may occasionally hear an upper-middle-class person say 'living room', although this is frowned upon, but only middle- 5
 middles and below say 'lounge'. This is a particularly useful word for spotting middle-middle social climbers trying to pass as upper-middle: they may have learnt not to say 'pardon' and 'toilet', but they are often not aware that 'lounge' is also a deadly sin.

Sweet

Like 'dinner', this word is not in itself a class indicator, but it becomes one when misapplied. The upper-middle and upper classes insist that the sweet course at the end of a meal is called the 'pudding' – never the 'sweet', or 'afters', or 'dessert', all of which are *déclassé*, unacceptable words. 'Sweet' can be used freely as an adjective, but as a noun it is piece of confectionary – what the Americans call 'candy' – 15
 and nothing else. The course at the end of the meal is always 'pudding', whatever it consists of: a slice of cake is 'pudding', so is a lemon sorbet. Asking: 'Does anyone want a sweet?' at the end of a meal will get you immediately classified as middle-middle or below. 'Afters' will also activate the class-radar and get you demoted. Some American-influenced young upper-middles are starting to say 'dessert', and this is 20
 therefore the least offensive of the three – and the least reliable as a class indicator. It can also cause confusion as, to the upper classes, 'dessert' traditionally means a selection of fresh fruit, served right at the end of a dinner, after the pudding, and eaten with a knife and fork.

[...]

Class-denial Rules

We are clearly as acutely class-conscious as we have ever been, but in these 'politically correct' times, many of us are increasingly embarrassed about our class-consciousness, and do our best to deny or disguise it. The middle classes 30
 are particularly uncomfortable about class, and well-meaning upper-middles are the most squeamish of all. They will go to great lengths to avoid calling anyone or anything 'working class' – resorting to polite euphemisms such as 'low-income groups', 'less privileged', 'ordinary people', 'less educated', 'the man in the street', 'tabloid readers', 'blue collar', 'state school', 'council estate', 'popular' (or sometimes, among themselves, less polite euphemisms such as 'Sharon and Tracey', 'Kevins', 'Essex Man' and 'Mondeo Man'). 35

frowned upon vb. *ikke velset*
 misapplied adj. *anvendt forkert*
déclassé adj. *give lavere social status*
 confectionary sb. *konfektur*
 demote vb. *degradere*
 offensive adj. *stødende*
 disguise vb. *tilsløre*
 resort to vb. *ty til*

These over-tactful upper-middles may even try to avoid using the word 'class' at all, carefully talking about someone's 'background' instead – which always makes me imagine the person emerging from either a Lowry street scene or a Gainsborough or Reynolds country-manor portrait, depending on the class to which 'background' is intended to refer. (This is always obvious from the context: 'Well, with that sort of background, you have to make allowances ...' is Lowry; 'We prefer Saskia and Fiona to mix with girls from the same background ...' is Gainsborough/Reynolds.)

All this diplomatic euphemising is quite unnecessary, though, as working-class English people generally do not have a problem with the c-word, and are quite happy to call themselves working class. Upper-class English people are also often rather blunt and no-nonsense about class. It is not that these top and bottom classes are any less class-conscious than the middle ranks; they just tend to be less angst-ridden and embarrassed about it all. Their class-consciousness is also, in many cases, rather less subtle and complex than that of the middle classes: they tend not to perceive as many layers or delicate distinctions. Their class-radar recognizes at the most three classes: working, middle and upper; and sometimes only two, with the working class dividing the world into 'us and the posh', and the upper class seeing only 'us and the plebs'.

emerge vb. *dukke frem*
 Lowry, L.S. (1887-1976)
 engelsk maler, hvis male-
 rier portrætterede livet i
 Nordenglands industri-
 kvarterer.

Gainsborough, Thomas
 (1727-1788) engelsk
 portræt- og landskabs-
 maler, som portrætterede
 den engelske overklasse.

Reynolds, Sir Joshua
 (1723-1792) engelsk
 maler, som malede for-
 skønnende portrætter af
 overklassen.

country-manor sb.

herregård på landet

allowance sb. *tage hen-
 syn til*

blunt adj. *meget direkte*
 angst-ridden adj. *plaget
 af angst*

plebs sb. *masserne*

Pre-reading

1. Below you find some examples of lower class and upper class speech. Try to group them as either working class or upper class speech.

- 'alf past ten'
- 'ankercheef'
- 'hnrchf'
- 'ke'le'
- 'hpstn'

Upper class	Working class

2. What do the two groups leave out or change when they pronounce a word?
3. Below are a couple of examples of working class speech. What consonants do working class people tend to change?
 - 'teef'
 - 'somefink'
 - 'fing'
 - 'nuffink'

Analysis

1. Read the first paragraph of the text.
2. Explain how Kate Fox uses a GPS as a metaphor for the way English people judge each other's speech.
3. Read the first part of the text **THE VOWEL VS CONSONANT RULE**.
4. Find adjectives for the way the upper class describes the differences between their own way of speaking and the lower class way of speaking.

Upper class	Lower class
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
	5.

5. Explain how this quote shows Kate Fox's opinion of the upper class.

"The only advantage of this is that it can be done without moving the mouth very much, allowing the speaker to maintain an aloof, deadpan expression and a stiff upper lip"
(p. 125)

6. In which context is the term 'exhibit A' normally used, and why do you think Kate Fox uses it to talk about the way the upper class form an opinion about the lower classes?
7. Read the rest of the text.
8. In which context is the term 'Seven deadly sins' normally used? Why does Kate Fox use it about words like 'pardon' and 'toilet'?

9. Fill in the grid below:

	Upper class	Middle class	Working class
Apologetic words			
Words for toilet			
Words for serviette			

10. Place the words for meals (dinner, supper, etc.) mentioned in the text on the scales below

Lower class

Early → Midday → Evening

Middle class

Early → Midday → Evening

Upper class

Early → Midday → Evening

11. Name eight of the euphemisms the middle class uses about the working class?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

12. Why do they not just use the term 'working class'?

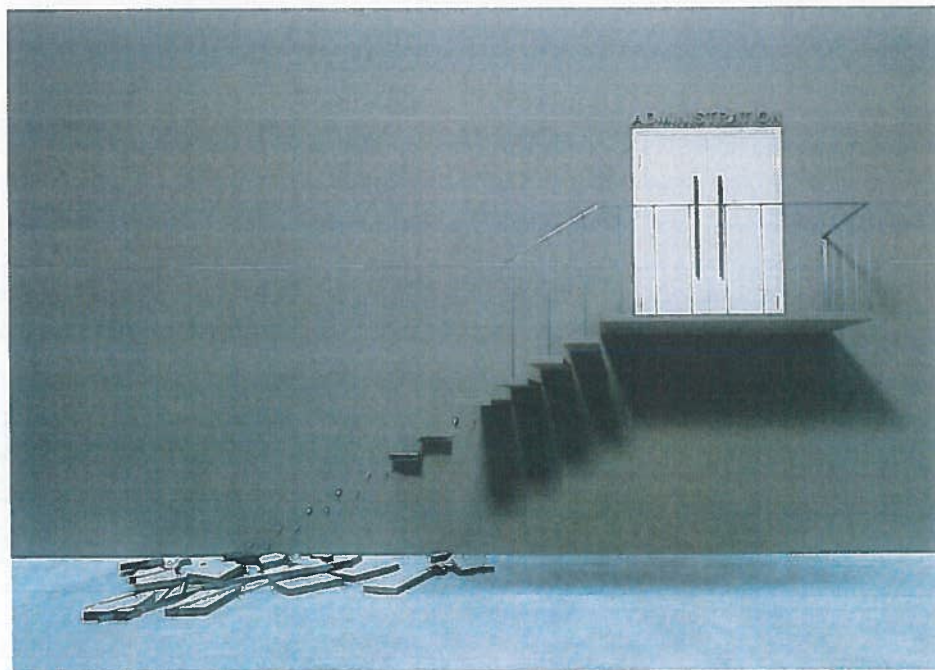
13. Why does Kate Fox use the term 'c-word' for talking about class?

Contextualisation

1. Discuss whether the following statements are true or false:

	True	False
The way you speak means something when it comes to getting a job or dating	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It can be a good idea to change your way of speaking to move up in society	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some ways of speaking are better than others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We should not have rules for the way people speak	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Look at Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset's installation *Social Mobility* below. Look up the concept 'social mobility' and discuss what Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset want to say with their installation.



Social Mobility (Staircase), 2005 – Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset. Courtesy the artists and Galleri Nicolai Wallner. Photo: Anders Sune Berg.

Social mobility

The ability to move from one social class to another.