

Dialects – where can we find them?

LESSON GOAL

To teach students about factors beyond region that play a role in analysing language variation (gender, age, language change, social class, etc.)

LESSON OBJECTIVE

- describe a linguistic feature and how it relates to theory of variation (comprehension)
- find and inspect examples of a linguistic feature (analysis)
- practice the search function for further features (application)
- differentiate between different features and measure the meaningfulness of different social factors

Task 1

Demonstrative ‘them’ is a non-standard form that is often used in spatial deictic contexts (i.e. where the pronouns are referring to an entity nearby) or in other contexts where the speaker is referring to a noun phrase. The standard form is ‘those’, as in ‘Give me those books’.

The feature is relatively well known as a non-standard feature and is used throughout the UK and Ireland. Hughes, Trudgill and Watt (2005:31ff) point out that demonstrative ‘them’ is typical in Northern English dialects, albeit not exclusively used in that region.

Students should discuss how they understand the term ‘dialect’ and see whether the feature fits that description: a good leading question here is whether dialects only ever refer to regional variation.



Suggested time : 10 minutes

Task 2

Here, students can see and test out how the search tool of BNClab works on different levels by combining word class terms with lexical search terms.

They should find **286** results.

The output will be randomized, so each group should find different examples in their concordance tab.

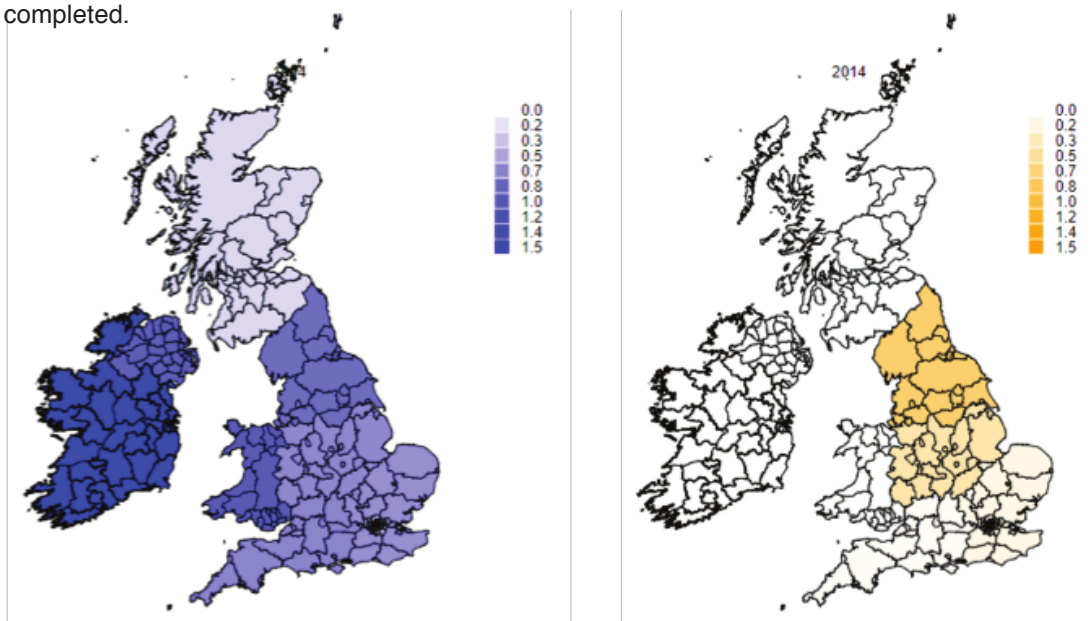
| | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | S: a fair whack like yearly | for them lot | so he's earning a |
| 3 | S: we doing them do one | of them classes | ? S: oh yeah S: and then |
| 4 | S: exactly so you just look | at them jobs | like oh I could apply |
| 5 | S: know? it's one | of them things | S: what? your brother? |
| 6 | S: local swimming pool inside one | of them sports | halls S: yeah S: so I 'm |
| 7 | S: we have put boundaries down | with them lot | and we 've stopped hanging |
| 9 | S: they got me in one | of them computers | where my eyes could point |
| 10 | S: so he he's one | of them people | S: he sounds like a dolphin |



Suggested time : 5 minutes

Task 4

If still unfamiliar with the tool, help navigate students to the Region button after the search from the previous task is completed.



In 1994, the feature is used at highest rates in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Wales, and North England, with Scotland showing the lowest use. In 2014, the feature is used less frequently overall with only North England and Midlands showing noticeable use.

'I says' (883 hits) shows a very similar distribution to demonstrative 'them'. 'Hanky' (16 hits) is used predominantly in Scotland and the South East of England. 'Jeez' (71 hits) is used mostly in the South, but the spread North over time is striking. 'Ain't' (1932 hits) is used mainly in the South and is decreasing. 'They was' (125 hits), again, shows a drastic decrease over time. It is used predominantly in Southern English varieties, Wales, and Scotland.

Students are encouraged to spend some time looking up other dialect features and compare their results in groups/class.



Suggested time : 20 minutes

Task 4

Here, the students should click through the individual buttons. Encourage them to take notes of their findings so that any subsequent discussion in class is based on evidence from the corpus.

Gender: No noticeable distinction between men and women in either year, but an overall decrease of use for both sexes.

Age: In 1994, more younger speakers seem to be using the feature at frequent rates. In 2014, the use is overall lower, with fewer speakers using it. There is no noticeable stratification across age.

Social Class: In 1994, there is a stark contrast in use between working class and middle class. In 2014, that distinction is gone and working class show the lowest use overall.

Students are encouraged to discuss the broader contexts of regional dialects, as well as to think about the specific feature. Possible starting points to get them going: dialect levelling (dialects converge and standardize in some ways as social mobility increases), language pedantry and stigmatization of non-standard forms (opposed to this: positive evaluation of dialects?).



Suggested time: 15 minutes