

# Editorial

Editorials in *English Today* have a history of relating research into the English language to current societal developments. In the case of this issue, this is a difficult task, it being written two weeks after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, which has brought, once again, to light the racism underlying many societies.

Often, or maybe even always, language and language use contribute to the development of racist attitudes, and English plays no exception. Regularly, English words and phrases are used with derogatory connotation and even to insult or threaten others. Whilst, because of that, we all avoid terms such as *kraut*, *white trash*, *kanake*, *gweilo*, *eskimo*, *camel jockey*, *collie*, *pickaninny* or *golliwog*, the offence committed through the use of phrases such as *Eenie, meenie miney mo*, *Hip hip hooray*, *Long time no see* and *No can do* seems to escape many users of English.

Just as unsettling are the ways the English lexicon is exploited for evasive statements. Over the last few weeks, euphemistic language use has frequently downplayed the atrocity of the murder of George Floyd. At the time of writing on June 18, there were 71.2 million Google hits for the search phrase ‘death of George Floyd’ versus just 23.9 million for ‘murder of George Floyd’. Many politicians, public news channels, as well as many quality newspapers have opted for phrases somewhere in-between, such as ‘killing of George Floyd’ (40.7 million hits) or ‘violent death of George Floyd’ (19,200 hits), thus avoiding full judgement of the racist attack.

Obviously, these problematic uses are not an issue with language(s) itself, but with its users, who have also employed English to address racism and to unite protest against it across the world.

People in countries as diverse as Australia, Japan and Switzerland have voiced their concerns and anger. In Zurich, protesters held posters with the slogans *no justice, no peace* and of course *black lives matter*, which have been used all around the

world. However, protesters also went beyond these with signs reading *I will never understand and racism is a pandemic too* or *queers stand in solidarity*. Additionally, the focus of the rallies was extended in slogans such as *Tokyo against racism* in Japan and *Always was always will be Aboriginal land* in Australia or *Standing against systems of oppression* in Zurich.

To address the full scope of racism, the phrases *people of color* and *person of color*, frequently abbreviated to *POCs*, have gained enormous popularity, particularly with individuals who are not black, but still subject to everyday racism; the phrase becomes a rally point for those who support the oppressed and their causes, as these link individuals of all complexions in worldwide protests against racism. During the last two weeks, *black*, *Indigenous* and *people of color* (organised, for example, via the website [www.thebipocproject.org](http://www.thebipocproject.org)) has mushroomed in public and mediated use. Again, the process of acronym formation that is so wide-spread in English, has led to the protestors overwhelmingly being referred to as *BIPOC*. However, despite the fact that these terms of reference are well-meant, criticism has been voiced from within black communities outside of America, for example by Canadian columnist Mohammed Adam (<https://ottawacitizen.com/opinion/adam-why-the-term-people-of-colour-is-offensive-to-so-many>).

It would seem to befit a field like English linguistics, which cherishes all varieties of English and all speakers of these Englishes, to fully and regularly engage in the discussion of English and racism, for example along the lines of the papers in Alim, Rickford and Ball’s edited volume *Raciolinguistics: How Language Shapes Our Ideas About Race*. Ideally, such an endeavour would be attempted in close collaboration with those who are subject to racism.

This issue is a special issue exploring the state of language use in the south of England. Guest editors

The editorial policy of *English Today* is to provide a focus or forum for all sorts of news and opinion from around the world. The points of view of individual writers are as a consequence their own, and do not reflect the opinion of the editorial board. In addition, wherever feasible, ET generally leaves unchanged the orthography (normally British or American) and the usage of individual contributors, although the editorial style of the journal itself is that of Cambridge University Press.

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Jenny Amos and Sandra Jansen have laboured over the past few months to produce a volume that surveys state-of-the-art approaches to sociolinguistic research in a region that is frequently overlooked.

## Reference

Alim, H. S., Rickford, J. R. & Ball, A. F. (eds.) 2016.  
*Raciolinguistics: How Language Shapes Our Ideas About Race*. Oxford: OUP. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190625696.001.0001

*The editors*

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