

We use language to express our thoughts, form relationships with others, and build communities. The focus is always on the individual. If you study language you study people, and people are as different as chalk from cheese. So their language will be different too.

Sometimes it's regional background that makes the difference. If you hear someone say *That's a bonny wee child*, the speaker is probably from Scotland, because words like *wee* (little) and *bonny* (pretty) are hardly ever used anywhere else. And someone who says *My car's hood and windshield were damaged* probably has an American background; someone from the UK would say *bonnet and windscreen*.

Often it's social background that makes the difference. In the 1950s in Britain there was a lot of publicity about how upper-class (U) people used different words from those used by other classes (non-U). U speakers had *luncheon* (or *lunch*) in the middle of the day and *dinner* in the evening. Non-U speakers had *dinner* in the middle of the day. *Luncheon* is rare today, but there is still a social divide between *lunch* and *dinner*.

Above all, these days, it's the technology that makes the difference. The internet allows people to express their individuality in ways that were inconceivable a few years ago. Emails vary from highly formal (*Dear Professor Crystal*) to highly informal (*Yo, Dave!!*). Older people often keep the rules of punctuation and capitalisation they once learned; younger people often try out new ways (*i dont think so – LOL*).

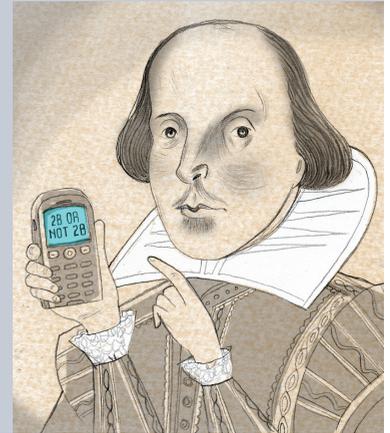
But times are changing. As more older people start to use the internet, they are also using the latest abbreviations more and more. BRB (Be right back).

Glossary

background (noun) – the type of family, social position or culture that someone comes from

BRB (verb) – internet abbreviation for *Be Right Back*; you use this to say informally that you will return soon

LOL (verb) – internet abbreviation for *laughing out loud*; you use this to say informally that you think something is funny



Warm up

- Are these sentences true (T) or false (F) for you?
 - I speak more than one language.
 - I speak differently at work to how I speak at home.
 - My language has many different dialects.
 - There is more than one language in my country.
 - Rich people speak differently to poor people.
- Work in pairs and compare your answers. Do you agree?

Reading

- Read the text *Same language but different*. What three factors does the author mention?
 - differences in geography
 - differences in social class
 - differences in age
 - differences in technology
- Read the text again and decide if these sentences are true (T) or false (F).
 - People are very different, so language is different.
 - Hood* and *windshield* are British English words.
 - U speakers had lunch in the evening.
 - Technology always makes language very formal.
 - Young people don't use capital letters in the same way as older people on the internet.
 - Young people are inventing new ways of using capital letters.

Language focus

Find words or expressions in the text with these meanings.

- to be very different (lines 2–3)
- uncommon (line 14)
- most importantly (line 16)
- impossible to think about or imagine (line 17)

Speaking

Do you think the differences in English that the author talks about are true for your language? Think of some examples. Use the questions below to help you.

- How do people start and finish emails in your language? Is it formal or informal?
- Are there different parts of your country that use different words to mean the same thing? Can you give an example and explain it in English?
- Are there abbreviations on the internet in your language like *LOL* or *BRB*?