

Linguistic discrimination and language ideologies

What form does discrimination take in language?

How is grammar used as a tool of discrimination?

How do we fight language prejudice?

About me



Me,
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writer

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Because
Language, a
podcast

becauselanguage.com

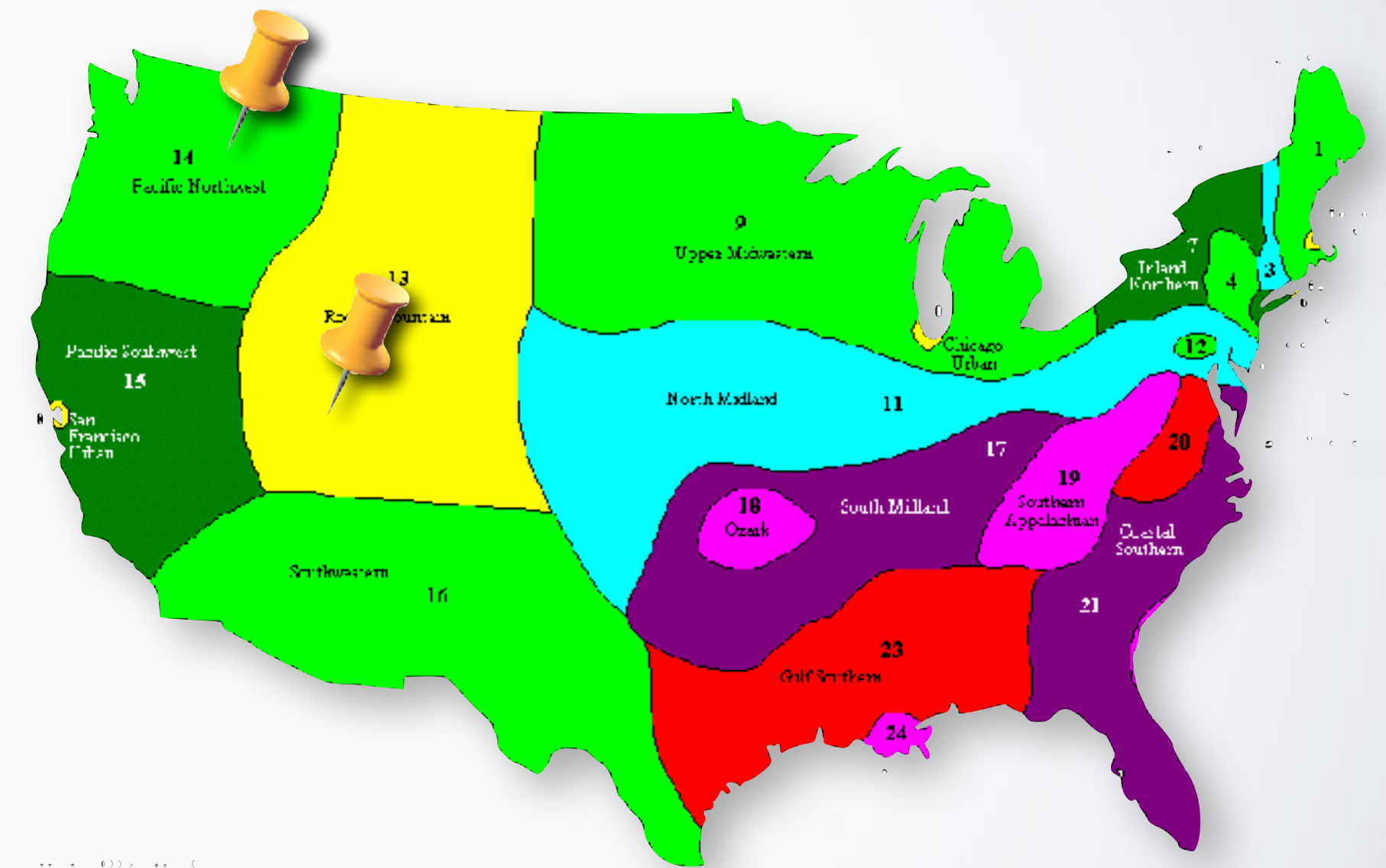


The Speakeasy on
ABC Radio Perth, a
weekly talkback show

danielmidgley.com/speakeasy/

What's with the accent?

You are listening to a blend of
US Pacific Northwest accent,
Rocky Mountain accent
West Australian accent?
How do Australians respond
when hearing a n American
voice on the radio?



Language privilege

About 95 percent of scientific research is in English

What effect does this have on international researchers?

How do we overcome this?



Different expectations online

non-english speaker: I am awfully sorry at the terrible state of my English abilities, as for the English language is not my mother tongue. I hope you forgive me for every foolish mistake I make.

english as first language: lol it okei

Language and identity

Language is a proxy for

race

gender

age

social group

national origin

Anytime a group is disesteemed, this can show up in language.

Accentism for teachers

Teachers who have learned English as a second language have difficulty

“They hide us”

Accentism for teachers

From a former student

As you know, I am from Singapore, and I thus speak with a Singaporean accent. I am extremely self-conscious about my accent, having been told in the past that I have a 'weird' accent. It has caused me to be very shy when speaking to other people, especially to Australians. I have even been told by another ESL teacher that I wouldn't be able to work as an ESL teacher here because students want to learn English from an Australian teacher to learn the Australian accent. I was simply wondering if you have any tips and suggestions on how I can go about reducing my accent, or to pick up the Australian accent. Unfortunately, I am very accent deaf. I can understand a wide variety of English accents but I can never tell the origin of the accent. My partner constantly laughs at me for being unable to distinguish between British, Australian and American accents even though I don't have any trouble understanding any of them. Do you have any ideas how to help me please?

Accentism for teachers

My response:

I feel kind of sad reading your email because it means you've had a lot of prejudice directed against you, and it's unfair that you've had this placed on you, and been made to feel bad about the way you speak. Part of my life's work is highlighting examples of this kind of linguistic prejudice, and making the point to people that it's not okay.

Seriously, if this were about discrimination based on skin colour, and someone said "Could you please not be so [Asian, Black, fill in the blank], we'd say, "Get bent, you bigot." But when it's about language (which is a proxy for race, social class, national origin, and lots of other stuff), we say, "Gee, I'd better fix the way I talk." Please don't internalise the discrimination that people are putting on you. The way you talk is awesome.

But while everyone's waiting for the message to get around, you still face prejudice because of your accent, and you think maybe some accommodation is in order because people are racist pricks. My advice: if you have a hard time with accents as you say, then vocal training won't make you sound Australian, but it might make you sound ridiculous. But what are the markers of the Singaporean accent? Are there one or two things that you can tone down? Try to identify what those things are. But like I say, don't succumb. Be your awesome self. That includes your language.

Accent “reduction”?

“Our research indicates that more strongly accented people are missing out on jobs and at times working at a level lower than their qualifications would suggest.”

Why might this be?

How do we fix this?

Accent Reduction Training, Accent Coaching, Foreign Accent Modification

See also: New Group Training- Accent Reduction Fundamentals.

Research

Our research indicates that more strongly accented people are missing out on jobs and at times working at a level lower than their qualifications would suggest.

Some native English speakers report that they will not give the extra time that it takes to understand people with accents.

As a result people with accents may be missing out on business opportunities and conversations because they can not be understood.

One client reported that she was told she would not be considered for a position as Business Analyst in a large organisation because of her Indonesian accent.

Benefits of Accent Reduction Training

- Feeling more confident communicating in all settings
- Less time spent repeating yourself
- Less time clarifying your message
- Less frustration for you and your listeners
- A benefit you have every time you speak, for the rest of your life!



Sexy accentism is accentism

Why are some accents thought of as “sexy”?

These judgements have almost nothing to do with the sound of the language

and everything to do with how we feel about the people

Scottish men and Spanish women have the world's sexiest accents, survey reveals

By [Katherine Scott](#) | 3 months ago

“For 86 per cent of women, the Scottish accent was deemed sexiest, while 88 per cent of men found a Spanish accent irresistible.”

“And despite rating the Spanish accent highly, a measly 31 per cent of men found a Mexican accent sexy on a woman, making it the second-least-attractive accent.”

Young women are language trendsetters

Young women seem to be doing two things:

uptalking

vocal fry

and these changes are spreading through other age and gender groups

NYT: [They're, Like, Way Ahead of the Linguistic Currrrve](#)



The War on Women's Voices: 2015

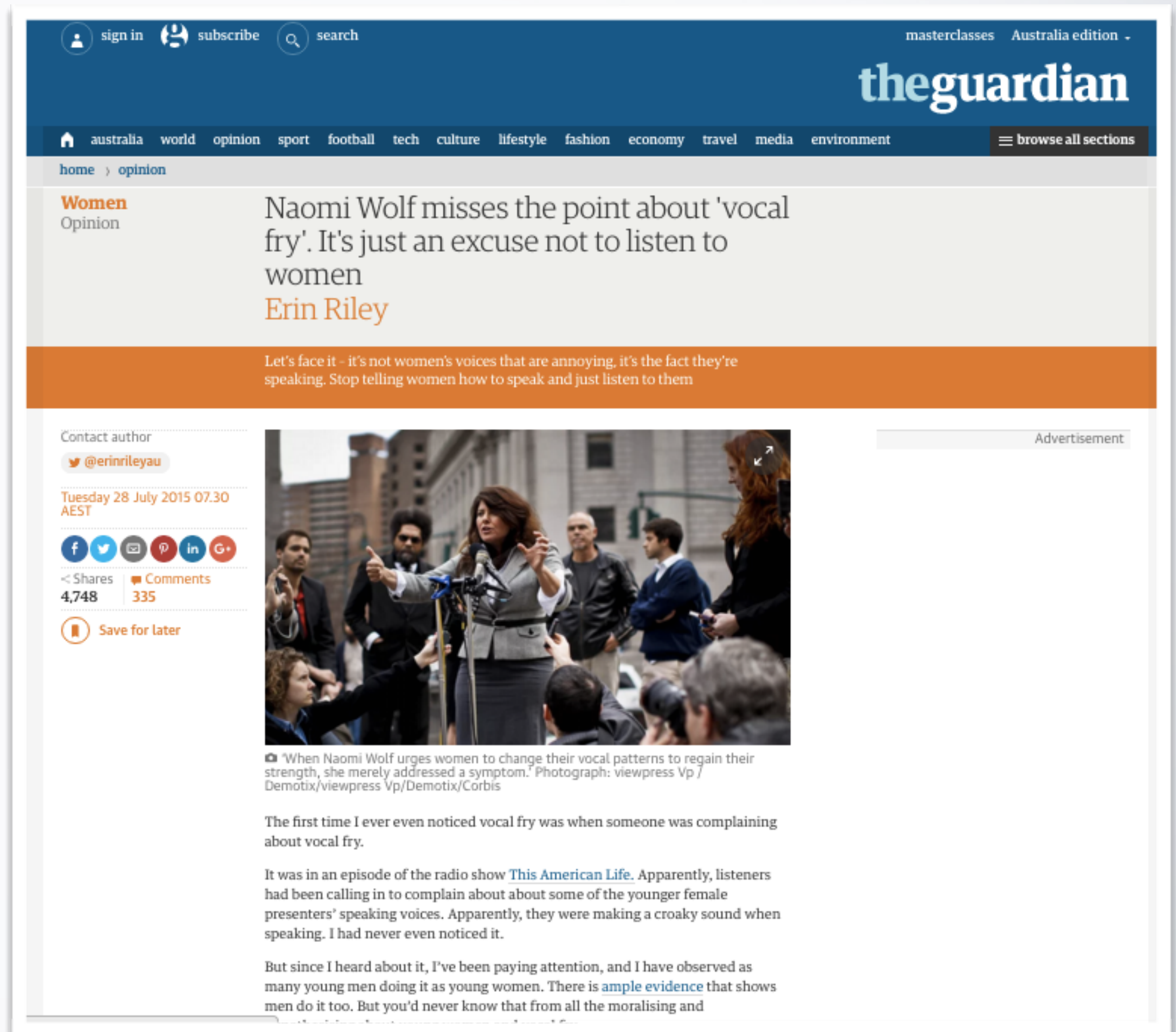
‘Many devoted professors, employers who wish to move young women up the ranks and business owners who just want to evaluate personnel on merit flinch over the speech patterns of today’s young women. “Because of their run-on sentences, I can’t tell in a meeting when these young women have said what they have to say,” confided one law partner.’



The screenshot shows the Guardian Australia website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for 'sign in', 'subscribe', and 'search'. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with various sections like 'australia', 'world', 'opinion', 'sport', 'football', 'tech', 'culture', 'lifestyle', 'fashion', 'economy', 'travel', 'media', and 'environment'. The main article is titled 'Young women, give up the vocal fry and reclaim your strong female voice' by Naomi Wolf, categorized under 'Feminism Opinion'. A sub-headline reads: 'What's heartbreaking about the trend for destructive speech patterns is that yours is the most transformational generation - you're disowning your power'. Below the article title, there are social media sharing icons (Facebook, Twitter, Email, Print, LinkedIn, Google+) and statistics showing 66,464 shares and 560 comments. A 'Save for later' button is also present. The article text begins with 'Patriarchy is inventive. The minute a generation of women has figured out how to not be enslaved by Ideology A, some new cultural pressure arises in the form of Internalisation B, making sure they don't get too far too fast. The latest example: the most empowered generation of women ever - today's twentysomethings in North America and Britain - is being hobbled in some important ways by something as basic as a new fashion in how they use their voices.' An illustration of a woman's profile with a smartphone near her mouth is shown. A small caption below the illustration states: 'A study found that this speech pattern makes young women who use it sound less competent, less trustworthy, less educated and less hireable.' Illustration: Noma Bar. To the right of the article is an advertisement for 'The day's big stories' with a logo and an envelope icon.

Language policing is a form of discrimination

‘Vocal fry is not a problem. It is merely another excuse to dismiss, ignore and marginalise women’s voices, both literally and figuratively. And it’s just the latest in a long history of finding excuses not to listen to what women, especially young women, say.’

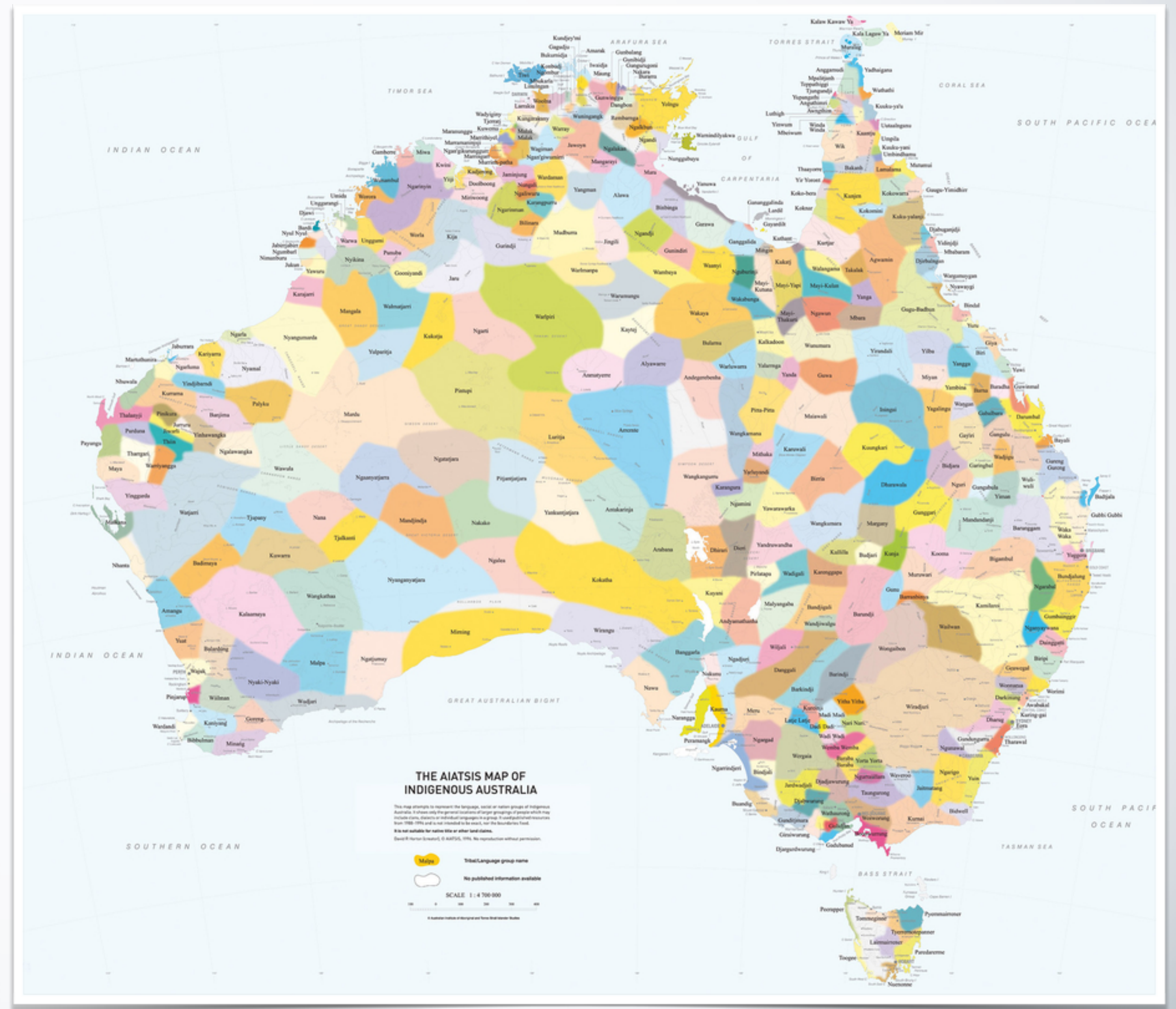


Australian Aboriginal languages

At the time of
European invasion in
1788

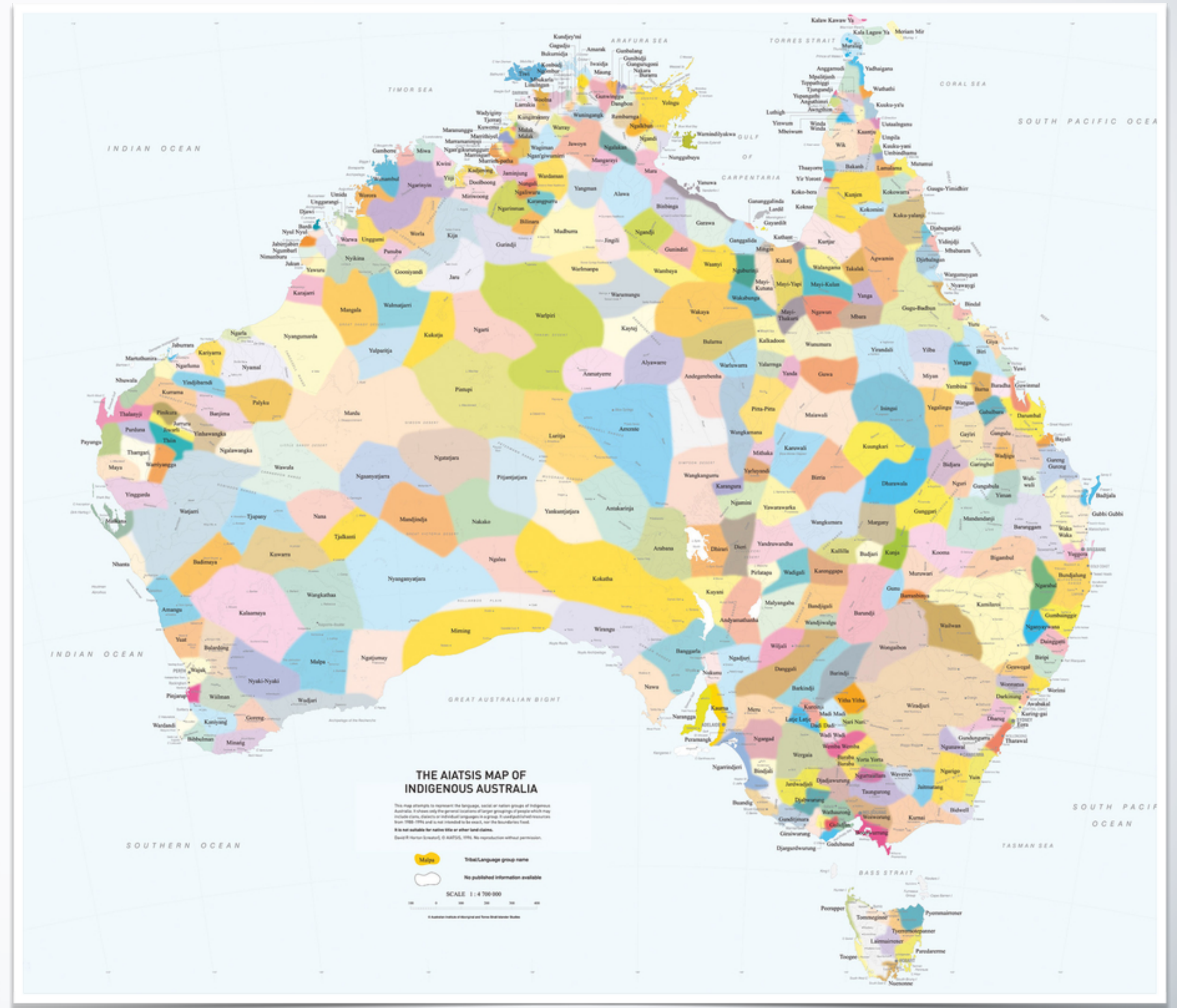
there were hundreds
of Australian
languages

Now about 20 or 30
are still healthy




Australian Aboriginal languages

European settlers
made a concerted
effort to destroy
Aboriginal culture
stealing children
breaking up families
splitting up
communities
language death / loss



White Australia policy

English was used as an exclusionary tool



The **Immigration Restriction Act of 1901** ('White Australia Policy') stated that immigrants had to write and sign, in the presence of an Immigration Officer, a passage of fifty (50) words in a European language as directed by the officer.

The **Dictation Test** was usually first given in English. If the prospective immigrant passed, but was considered to be racially or politically unsuitable, the officer could then give the test in another European language.

The Dictation Test was given:

- 805 times in 1902-1903; 46 people passed.
- 554 times in 1904-1909; only 6 people passed.
- After 1909; no person passed the Dictation Test.

People who failed the test were refused entry to Australia and were deported.

Give it a go yourself! Would you be allowed into Australia?

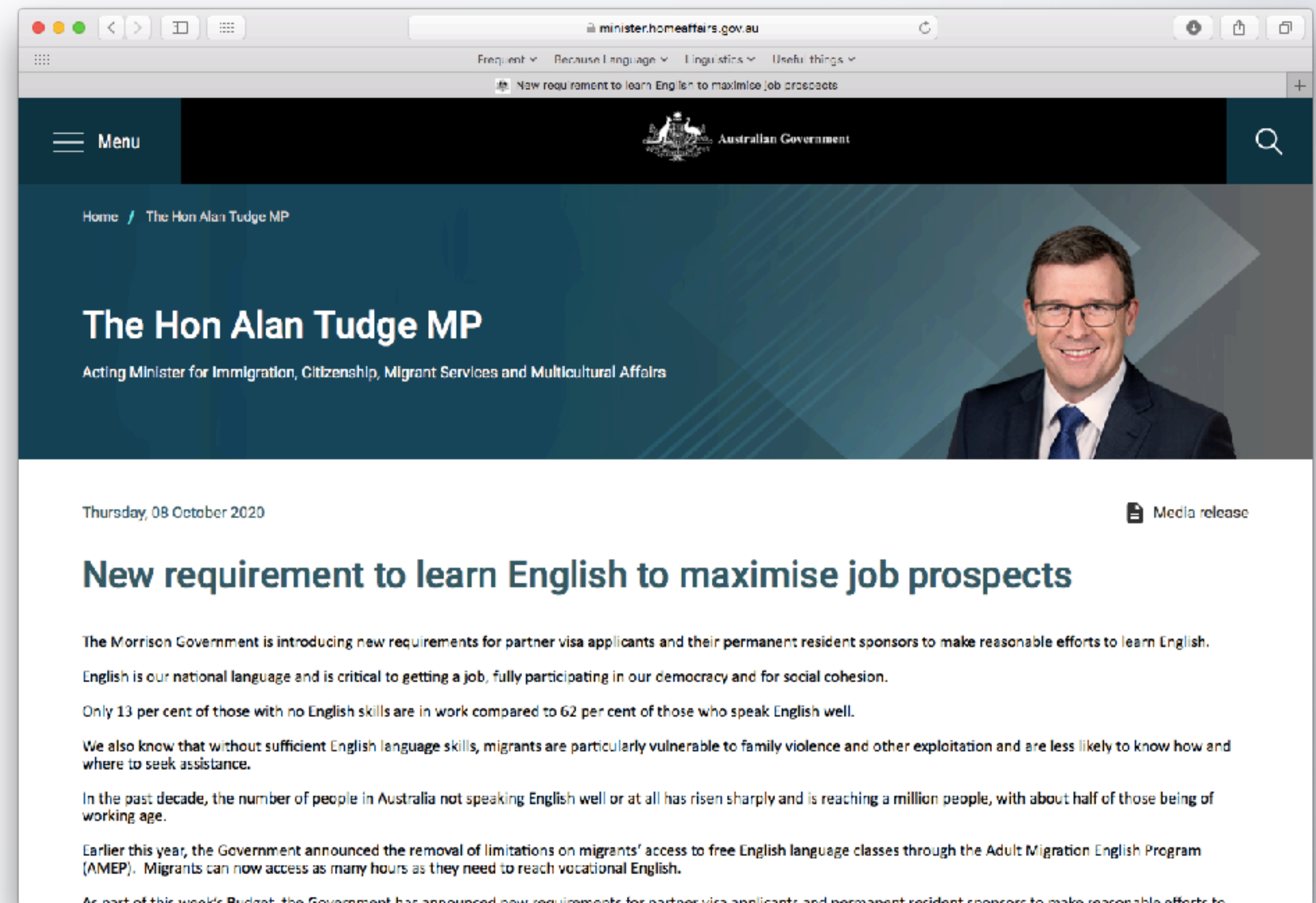
Language policy today

The Australian government has been trying to reinstate a language test for citizenship/permanent residency/partner visa

Level 6 IELTS, three tries

“reasonable effort”

Who will do well in this test?



Signage in Australia

Strathfield, Australia tried this in 2018

“All signage is to be displayed in the English language, with a direct or near direct translation into another language using smaller letters or character ... [which] must not exceed more than 30% of the overall size of the English language text.”



1 get comments

From radio listeners

“Re Daniel M having a problem with the feds English language requirements for visas. Understandable as he being an American cannot speak English, so would require intensive training to be able to make himself understood.”

“Daniel... clutching at straws. Stick to just your ABC entertainment and leave politics to others.”

“He’s talking rubbish and should learn English himself!!!”

1 get comments

From radio listeners

‘You gotta love my mum says of Daniel, "what can a yank possibly teach us about English”’

“Do not change OUR language. How dare you!!!”

Who gets to know?

Who is an expert?

- Teaching a language class

- Doing a show about language

- Telling someone about language

All these things involve making a claim to expertise

- For many people, you only have a claim to expertise if you sound “right”

Multilingualism in Australia

Australia is a multilingual country

About 300 languages are spoken
in Australia

One in four people speaks
another language at home

For schoolkids, it's one in three

Migrants do a great job learning
English



Linguistic prejudice and AAE

Stanford linguist John Rickford says prejudice toward African American dialect can result in unfair rulings

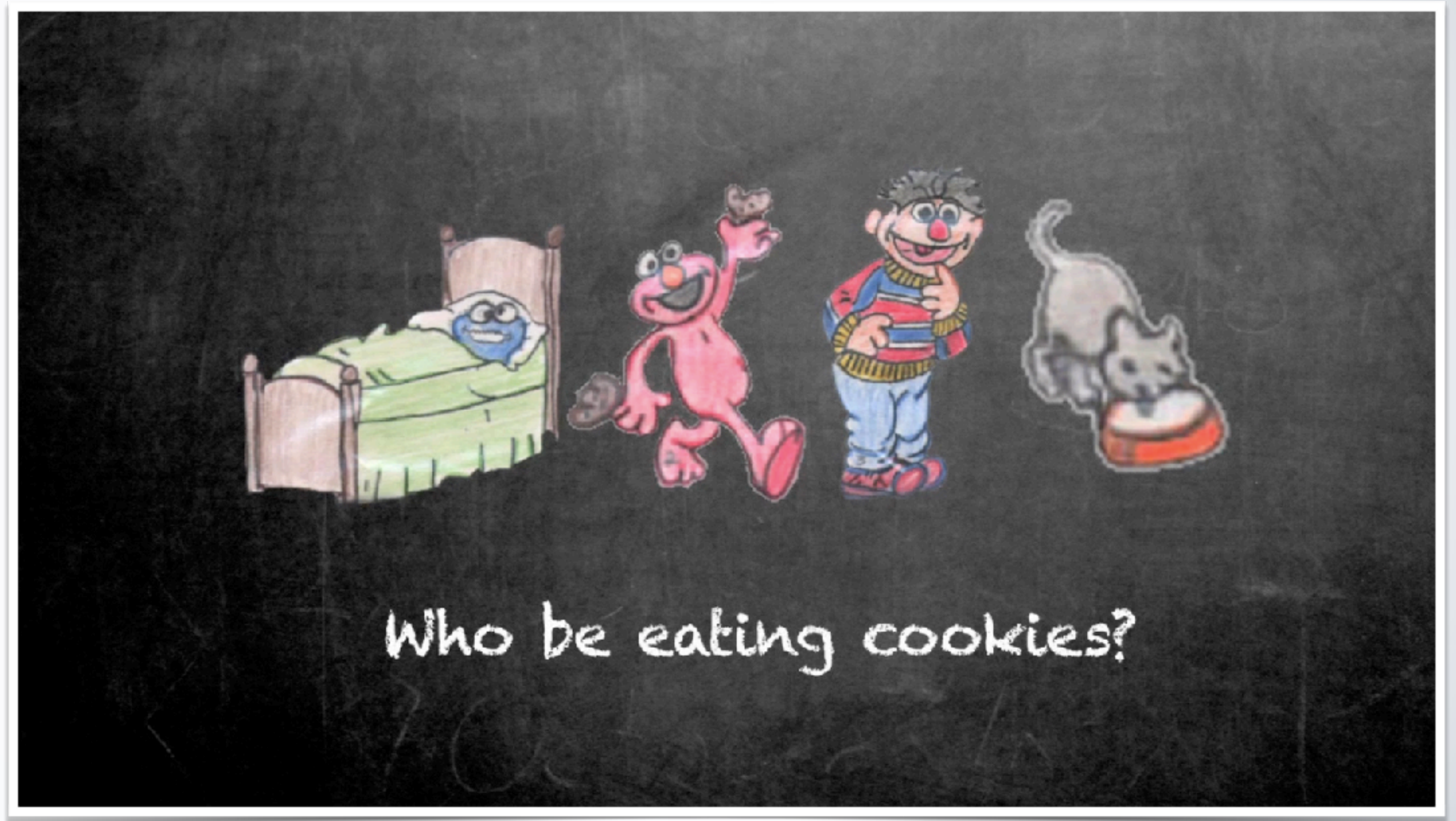


[news.stanford.edu/news/2014/
december/vernacular-trial-
testimony-120214.html](https://news.stanford.edu/news/2014/december/vernacular-trial-testimony-120214.html)

AAE: Who be eating cookies?

Research from Janice Jackson: Kids with an AAE background could use *habitual be* as young as 5 or 6.

Slate article: [Why We Be Loving the “Habitual Be”](#)



Pronouns and non-binary people

A hot topic in English

If someone doesn't identify as male or female
they often use *they* as a pronoun

Often criticised on grammatical grounds
but this can be a stand in for prejudice

Why language ideologies?

People don't have language attitudes because they're horrible people

Language ideologies are incredibly pervasive

People have them because they want the same things everyone wants

- Safety and security

- Being understood

- Having a social group

What to do?

There are two ways to work on this:

- Help individuals avoid discrimination by modifying their behaviour

- Help students to “pass”

- Reduce bias and discrimination by educating the public about harmful language ideologies

The first option is doomed to fail
because it's not about language

Thank you

And questions

X Semana de Letras UTFPR, 2020-10-29