

## Anti-Muslim Hate Speech

Lucy Giannasi  
February 2016

In this essay, I will discuss the language policy and planning measures that have been put into place in order to reduce anti-Muslim hate speech in the UK. Thus, this applies to a collection of linguistic units, rather than a language or dialect, namely the lexicon of anti-Muslim prejudice (Spolsky, 2004). I will use the term anti-Muslim, rather than Islamophobic, as the latter suggests an irrational fear of Islam, whereas this hate speech spreads, incites, promotes or justifies hatred based on intolerance of the religion (Akdeniz, 2009). Despite our freedom to hold religious beliefs, anti-Muslim hate speech has existed in the UK for centuries (College of Policing, 2014). However, UK Muslims have been particularly vulnerable to hate speech since the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 (Mohideen & Mohideen, 2008) and this has also spiked after recent incidents e.g. the terrorism of the so-called Islamic State group (Awan & Zempi, 2015). Despite these desperate individuals being widely perceived as unrepresentative of Islam, which means 'peace' in Arabic, this elicits the unjust discrimination of all Muslims, who are the largest faith group subject to hate speech (Zempi, 2014). Reducing anti-Muslim hate speech is a particular concern in this nation-state, as, after Christianity, Islam is the next most common religion at 2.8% of the population (Chakraborti & Garland, 2009)

As mentioned above, anti-Muslim language was a problem in the UK long before the Internet emerged. However, regarding its domain of usage, 74% of reported anti-Muslim hate speech now occurs online (Feldman et al., 2013), particularly on social media sites (Burnap & Williams, 2015). Hateful language can thus be widely accessible, without editorial control and posted anonymously (True Vision, 2016a). Far-right groups also employ cyber hate that exacerbates religious tensions e.g. the English Defence League (EDL) and the British National Party (BNP) circulate anti-Muslim hate speech on Facebook and Twitter (Awan, 2014). This elicits an increase in anti-Muslim language and highlights the animosity towards Muslims that exists in the UK (College of Policing, 2014). However, hate speech perpetrators are more likely to be 'ordinary' members of the public than organised groups (Hall, 2005). Specifically, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) suggests that this language indexes White British males that are aged 25-59, whereas, at the other end of the sociolinguistic situation, the victims are often women, as they display 'visible' Islamic identity e.g. hijabs or niqabs (Feldman et al., 2013).

Regarding the linguistic forms associated with anti-Muslim prejudice, they often unfairly associate Islam with damaging concepts, such as terrorism, based on misconceptions about what Muslims do and believe (College of Policing, 2014). This stigmatises and 'others' UK Muslims (Awan & Zempi, 2015). For example, when combined with 'Islamic', the following terms perpetuate hatred: terrorists, radicals, extremists and militants (Mohideen & Mohideen, 2008). Tell MAMA (2013) exposed another high frequency category of sexual abuse and deviancy, e.g. 'paedo' and 'rapist',

## Anti-Muslim Hate Speech

Lucy Giannasi  
February 2016

as well as the prevalence of racist term 'paki', which shows that race and religion are often interlinked within hate speech (Awan & Zempi, 2015). Additionally, '#EDL' was common online, reflecting the affiliation of anti-Muslim hate speech with far-right groups. Tell MAMA (2014) represented these findings in a word cloud (appendix 1, page 9).

These language practices are heavily shaped by language ideologies i.e. shared beliefs or common attitudes towards anti-Muslim hate speech. Since the UK is large and complex, it is divided by conflicting ideologies, which are ranked hierarchically; I will describe these in accordance with Woolard & Schieffelin (1994). The lower ranking group, who use anti-Muslim hate speech, link this language to power e.g. in metalinguistic discourses, such as that of far-right groups, perpetrators explicitly outline that this language reiterates their view that Islam is inferior to the West (Mohideen & Mohideen, 2008). This association with the far-right suggests that this language is also an emblem of political allegiance. Thus, aggressive nationalism underlies this hateful language, as it contends religious diversity. This is also said to represent freedom of expression (Mohideen & Mohideen, 2008). The conscious awareness of these ideologies provokes a strong reaction from the more powerful end of the hierarchy: the majority of the UK and the Government. They instead link this language to morality i.e. by believing that anti-Muslim hate speech is morally wrong; this underpins our diverse society. This lack of support for anti-Muslim hate speech is due to it being prejudiced and associated with the far-right (Hall, 2005). Hence, language policy actors see anti-Muslim hate speech as a problem, which acts as a barrier to national harmony (Mohideen & Mohideen, 2008). Thus, the latter language ideology is ranked higher, as the linguistic forms are offensive and condemned by those in power.

It is also noteworthy that anti-Muslim hate speech exemplifies language ecology, which is the interaction between language and its 'environment' i.e. the society using it (Haugen, 1972). Thus, anti-Muslim hate speech has far-reaching effects, as it is embedded in an ecosystem of 'real-world' contextual variables e.g. political, social, religious, cultural and psychological (Spolsky, 2004). Thus, anti-Muslim hatred not only manifests linguistically, but also physically; dangerous labels, e.g. 'terrorist' or 'paedo', scare non-Muslims (Mohideen & Mohideen, 2008) and provoke an increase in violent and often fatal attacks on UK Muslims (Zempi, 2014). There are also effects on religion, as many Muslims reduce hate speech by making their Islamic identity less visible e.g. removing headscarves (Awan & Zempi, 2015). Being victimised because of your religion greatly impacts your wellbeing, more so than for 'non-targeted' victims (HM Government, 2012). Thus, psychological effects of anti-Muslim hate speech are vast, with victims reporting isolation, depression, loneliness, anxiety and low confidence (Awan & Zempi, 2015). Since UK Muslims then feel rejected from society, anti-Muslim hate speech impacts wider communities in terms of cohesion, tension and fear of crime (College of Policing, 2014). However, I will now

## Anti-Muslim Hate Speech

Lucy Giannasi  
February 2016

discuss the other aspect of this bidirectional relationship, in which changes in society elicit changes to anti-Muslim language.

As aforementioned, anti-Muslim hate speech increases dramatically in the UK in the aftermath of 'trigger' events on local, national and international scales (Awan & Zempi, 2015). This includes terrorist attacks e.g. 9/11 in 2001, the 2005 London bombings and the 2013 murder of Lee Rigby in Woolwich, London. This is particularly notable immediately after these incidents e.g. Burnap & Williams (2015) observed a significant rise in anti-Muslim hate speech on Twitter in the two weeks following the Woolwich murder. Similarly, thousands of UK Muslims were subject to hate speech in the days following 9/11 and 14% received verbal abuse in the week after the 2005 bombings (Iganski, 2008). These 'trigger' events can also alter the content of anti-Muslim hate speech e.g. the child exploitation scandal in Rotherham arguably elicited the change in focus from terrorism to grooming (Awan & Zempi, 2015). This again exemplifies language ecology, as hate speech is dynamic and changes in language are associated with non-linguistic variables (Spolsky, 2004).

I substantiated these findings by researching the Twitter response to the Paris shootings of so-called Islamic State terrorists on November 13<sup>th</sup> 2015 (appendix 2, page 10). I isolated relevant data using the popular hashtags '#parisattacks' and '#prayforparis' and removed overtly non-UK tweets. The hateful tweets that were selected were all written within a week of the attack, which aptly illustrates how 'trigger' events inflame anti-Muslim hate speech. In accordance with Tell MAMA (2014), derogatory terms 'muslim scum', 'ragheads' and 'muzzie' were evident. However, there were no instances of 'paedo', as this high profile incident triggered the category of terrorism e.g. 'jihad'. Hateful terms for Islam, e.g. '#religionofpiss', were coupled with 'paki' and other offensive racist terms 'sand nigger' and 'sand apes', which reiterates the conflation of religion and race. From an ecological perspective, the term 'Britain First', which is a relatively new, far-right political party with an explicit anti-Muslim agenda, shows how politics shapes anti-Muslim hate speech.

Furthermore, globalisation has also increased anti-Muslim hate speech, as improved mobility has resulted in more religious diversity in the UK, which is particularly prominent in major cities due to job availability etc. Therefore, nearly 40% of UK Muslims live in London (Iganski, 2008), which thus yields the most anti-Muslim hate speech (Feldman et al., 2013). Not only do Muslims enter the UK by choice, in order to access opportunities, but there has also been a surge of refugees fleeing conflict into European countries (Awan & Zempi, 2015). There is a corresponding increase in hate speech, as not everyone supports these new multi-faith UK communities, due to political reasons or bigotry etc. (College of Policing, 2014).

## Anti-Muslim Hate Speech

Lucy Giannasi  
February 2016

Another socio-economic factor that increases anti-Muslim hate speech is the media (Awan & Zempi, 2015), which increasingly emphasises the differences between Islam and the West, whilst characterising Muslims as a homogenous group that are alien and 'other' (Johnson & Milani, 2010). For example, the UK newspaper, the Daily Mail Online, somewhat archaically adopts the term Isis (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) (Mail Online, 2016), which maintains the link between the terrorist group and Islam, rather than stripping them of their religion or at least questioning it. This provokes anti-Muslim hate speech in the comments, as terrorists are discussed as if synonymous with Islam and Muslim refugees (appendix 3, page 12).

As illustrated above, anti-Muslim hate speech does not correspond with the majority UK language ideology. Thus, interventions are vital in order to prohibit this hate speech, which could otherwise lead to major conflict (Spolsky, 2004). The national UK Government is the actor that implements this proposal via overt language policies and laws. Specifically, Section 29B of the Public Order Act 1986 makes it an offence for a person to use threatening words or behaviour, or display any written material which is threatening, with the intention to stir up religious hatred (College of Policing, 2014). The Government commits to accurately recording faith-based hate speech within the National Crime Statistics (HM Government, 2012). These policies must be tentatively balanced with section 29J of the above act, which entitles UK residents to freedom of expression (Akdeniz, 2009).

The Government also funds Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks), which provides the means to report, record and analyse anti-Muslim hate speech (Tell MAMA, 2016a). They document high frequency words that characterise the language of anti-Muslim prejudice, as well as analysing the effects of 'trigger' events (Tell MAMA, 2013). After building a sound understanding of the meanings of these hateful terms, Tell MAMA work closely with government agencies and inform policy. The police and the CPS can link this language to perpetrators in anti-Muslim incidents e.g. police officers should take into account the conflation of racial and religiously aggravated hate speech when recording racial hate crimes, as perpetrators may also have used anti-Muslim language (Tell MAMA, 2014). In order to raise awareness of Tell MAMA and further inhibit anti-Muslim hate speech, the Department for Communities and Local Government funded police officers to conduct community-based outreach activities in mosques and youth centres etc. (Feldman et al., 2013).

Furthermore, the Internet is viewed as simply another tool used to disseminate anti-Muslim hate speech. Thus, cyber hate can be a criminal offense, with perpetrators being charged under the Public Order Act 1986 and other communication offences e.g. a number of arrests were made following the Woolwich attack, as hate speech on Twitter and Facebook incited hatred and violence against Muslims (Awan, 2014). Additionally, the Association of Chief Police Officers set up the True Vision website, which is

## Anti-Muslim Hate Speech

Lucy Giannasi  
February 2016

the main tool in combating and reporting illegal anti-Muslim hate speech online (True Vision, 2016a). If hateful content is not illegal, the website suggests that you report it to the police, report it to the hosting company or contact the website administrator to remove it. Counter-speech is another effective method of eradicating anti-Muslim hate speech online, as it challenges false information and promotes diversity (Foxman & Wolf, 2013). Hence, the UK Government also runs a national No Hate Speech Movement, alongside other member states of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2012). This reduces cyber hate by equipping young people with the skills to act against prejudice, show solidarity with victims and neutralise unfair stereotypes of Muslims that are depicted in the media (Foxman & Wolf, 2013).

When assessing this UK policy, it is evident that it has elicited a change in attitudes towards anti-Muslim hate speech; the last decade has seen the UK become diverse and vibrant, with people finding it increasingly unacceptable to use hateful language on the basis of religion (HM Government, 2012). This perceived severity of anti-Muslim hate speech is reiterated by greater legal protection for victims and enhanced sentences for perpetrators. This success is accentuated through comparison to the US, which does not share robust hate speech laws due to their First Amendment concerning free speech. For example, in 2012, far-right groups displayed posters containing anti-Muslim hate speech in subway stations, however US courts ruled that they remain displayed, as the group was free to express its views (Foxman & Wolf, 2013). Thus, although criminal law was integral to this change in UK attitudes, as it is a deterrent for serious offences, it is still perhaps the weakest tool in counteracting anti-Muslim hate speech, as the criminal justice process is relatively slow and only applicable in certain instances (Foxman & Wolf, 2013).

Regarding Tell MAMA, negative attitudes are expected from those who incite hatred, however positive feedback from UK Muslims resounds on social media: 'Before @TellMamaUK went live, fighting Islamophobic speech and threats, was difficult on Twitter. They have been a real blessing' (Tell MAMA, 2016b). They were pleased that Tell MAMA accounted for their distinctive faith and cultural needs, unlike general services such as Victim Support (Zempi, 2014). This encouraging reaction enabled Tell MAMA to reach out to over 2.8 million UK residents and the consequent ongoing funding allowed them to spend three years compiling evidence of anti-Muslim language. This was a major success, as the CPS was receptive to their advice on the changing nature of language and incorporated this into the Prosecutor's Guidance on anti-Muslim hate speech (Tell Mama, 2015). Thus, prosecutors are now better advised on charging perpetrators using up-to-date terms. Other achievements include the closure of 1,370 social media accounts that propagated anti-Muslim hate speech. Also, Mühlhäusler (2000) would argue that their police outreach activities in mosques etc. are

## Anti-Muslim Hate Speech

Lucy Giannasi  
February 2016

extremely ecological, as this involves the community in hate speech reduction.

Similarly, the UK police's website, True Vision, has successfully reached out to anti-Muslim hate speech victims via social media and increased in popularity; their Facebook page has over 16,000 likes and predominantly five star reviews (True Vision, 2016b). Another effort to reduce anti-Muslim hate speech online was the No Hate Speech Movement. Although this is relatively new campaign has little tangible feedback, this illustrates the Government's acknowledgment of the impact of counter-narrative in reducing hate speech, as dynamic forces in everyday language communities, such as Twitter, are more powerful than overt language policies (Spolsky, 2004).

However, a problem that curbs this success is the indifferent attitudes of social media sites towards anti-Muslim hate speech and associated policy e.g. Twitter suggest that victims block perpetrators or delete their account (Awan, 2014). The global nature of the Internet also renders it difficult to enforce laws, as available anti-Muslim hate speech may be distributed from outside the UK; this challenges the idea of a nation-state itself (Akdeniz, 2009). These difficulties often lead to UK Muslims feeling failed by the policy e.g. there were 1,432 online cases of anti-Muslim hate speech in 22 months, with not enough done to investigate it (Awan, 2014). However, Awan & Zempi (2015) suggest that anti-Muslim hate speech could be further prevented if social media sites introduced specific options to report it and more effort was put into tracking and preventing those who use inflammatory language online.

The UK Government may also have overlooked a salient method of reducing anti-Muslim hate speech, namely mass education. Dei & Asgharzadeh (2003) argue that the language practices and ideologies within formal education spill out into wider society and can eradicate social barriers, as in their Ghanaian example. Awan & Zempi (2015) suggest that the Department of Education should challenge anti-Muslim hate speech via school workshops and improve the guidance for teachers as to how to tackle hate speech. Although teachers are arguably high in the social hierarchy, this role of lower-level personnel creates a sense of community involvement. Mühlhäusler (2000) argues that this is a more ecological and less top-down approach to language policy than specialist management.

Nonetheless, regarding changes to the sociolinguistic situation, there has been a significant increase in anti-Muslim hate speech recorded, both by the police and Tell MAMA (Awan, 2014). However, this is not to say that the policy is unsuccessful and hate speech has increased, but rather that victims are more aware of the policy, have increased in confidence and found reporting easier. Although underreporting is somewhat rectified in the UK, this is still not representative of the amount of anti-Muslim hate speech, as it

## Anti-Muslim Hate Speech

Lucy Giannasi  
February 2016

is often confused with racist language and victims may not speak English, rendering reporting unlikely (College of Policing, 2014). However, the UK police's more accurate recording of anti-Muslim hate speech is commendable in comparison to the lax recording of faith-based hate speech by US law enforcement (Woods, 2015).

To conclude, this essay reviewed the language policy and planning measures that have been put into place in the UK to reduce anti-Muslim hate speech. This exposed an example of language ecology, as, for example, this language increases in response to 'trigger' events such as terrorism. The Government not only implemented language laws, but also funded non-governmental projects e.g. Tell MAMA. These measures have successfully influenced UK attitudes, as anti-Muslim hate speech is perceived as increasingly unacceptable. Other achievements included an increase in reporting of anti-Muslim hate speech, the removal of inflammatory social media accounts and up-to-date advice for prosecutors on hate speech. However, this essay suggests how the sociolinguistic situation could be further improved e.g. via mass education.

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## Anti-Muslim Hate Speech

Lucy Giannasi  
February 2016

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## Anti-Muslim Hate Speech

Lucy Giannasi  
February 2016

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Appendix 1



**Anti-Muslim Hate Speech**

Lucy Giannasi  
February 2016

(Tell MAMA, 2014)

Appendix 2

## Anti-Muslim Hate Speech

Lucy Giannasi  
February 2016

 **Maler**  
@JrMaler  [Follow](#)

@TRobinsonNewEra as usual #Islamic #terrorism #Jihad is involved #ParisAttacks. Libs & #Paki #Muslims came with "#terrorism has no religion"

12:06 AM - 14 Nov 2015

 **Sniff Jenkum**  
@SniffJenkum  [Follow](#)

Advice for Muslims in Europe right now? Shut the fuck up and pray to Allah we don't finally come to our senses. #ParisAttacks #MuslimScum

LIKE

1



12:54 AM - 14 Nov 2015

 **? ?**  
@ggpol03  [Follow](#)

#ParisAttacks Friday 13th November will be marked as "Burn a Quran day" #Islam #Muslims #RagHeads



3:27 PM - 15 Nov 2015

 **BUBBA HILLBILLY**  
@BUBBAHILLBILLY1  [Follow](#)

@genophilia #ParisAttacks show 1st World country invaded by 3rd world #isis #Muzzie #SandApes rest of #Europe, hows that #Diversity Taste?

11:32 AM - 14 Nov 2015

## Anti-Muslim Hate Speech

Lucy Giannasi  
February 2016



**Lee Shore**  
@leeshore4



Follow

Close the borders  
Not racist. Just common sense.

[#britainfirst](#) [#ParisAttacks](#)

1:50 AM - 14 Nov 2015



**permissive society**  
@Suspicious998



Follow

[#PrayForWorld](#) [#UneBougiePourParis](#)  
[#PrayForParis](#) [#FightForParis](#) [#ParisAttacks](#)  
usual [#sandnigger](#)



11:45 PM - 14 Nov 2015



**पीयूष**  
@piyush\_K



Follow

Mullas will come on Prime Time & speak their default prawachan - 'TERRORISM HAS NO RELIGION' [#ParisAttacks](#) [#ReligionOfPeace](#)  
[#ReligionOfPiss](#)

6:22 AM - 14 Nov 2015

## Anti-Muslim Hate Speech

Lucy Giannasi  
February 2016

### Appendix 3

	<b>Rockseadyeddie</b> They need to do alot more to embrace the West and fight against Islam. Can't have it both ways but unfortunately they Egypt plays both cards like most middle East and North African countries. Don't go, end of problem.		
	<b>Jersey Jets</b> The re li jun of pi s s	<a href="#">New Comment</a>   <a href="#">Reply</a>	Click to rate  32  9
	<b>Neverstop</b> Recent convert to ISLAM but his religion had nothing to do with ISIS. Right!		Click to rate  195  5
	<b>NK Brian</b> They come in as refugees and then attack us		Click to rate  24  0

(Mail Online, 2016)