

Language is one of the most basic means by which we communicate, making it incredibly powerful in shaping our thoughts, behaviors, and actions. Since language is used as a basis for all communication, it plays an immense power in every aspect of society including race relations, politics, international development, criminology, mental health and many more.

# 6 ways to practice better language habits

## Understand that many words have racially motivated origins

Look into their history and use them (if ever) appropriately. For example 'gyp' refers to being cheated, however it is a reference to the term 'gypsy' who are a group of people stereotyped as [cheaters and scammers](#). Another example is 'barbarians,' which refers to an uncivilized brutish person however '[barbarian](#)' originated in ancient Greece and referred to non-Greek [speakers](#).

## Be inclusive, and don't use jargon in your language

Many professionals in the development field use [highly jargonized language](#) that not only excludes those they are trying help, but others who are NOT professionals in the field.

## Look out for your biases

Many tend to biasly associate foreign accents with inferior culture or education, partly due to our brain using more power to process foreign accents thus deeming them inferior, and partly due to negative reinforcements of certain accents in the media.

## Pay attention to labeling and language use

Common triggering language, labeling stereotypes, and jargon terms to know and generally avoid include:

- [Geographical](#) -- first world, third world, developing and developed countries
- [Mental health](#) -- OCD, depression, suicide, and retard
- People's origins and groups of people -- [immigrant and expat](#), [ex-con and ex-felon](#), [uppity](#), [terrorist](#), and [exotic](#)
- Racial and racist vocabulary -- [N-word](#), [thug](#), and [tribe](#)
- Development and aid jargon -- [in the field](#), [beneficiaries](#)

## Be aware of manipulative language

Language has the power to shape and manipulate thought, so many take advantage of that to advance their own agenda. For example [many politicians](#) use the term 'welfare' under negative light even though it was a positive term successfully used in the United States by FDR to promote public responsibility. Due to language manipulation, 'welfare' became such an intensely hated term, that in a poll, people thought government should increase "assistance to the poor" but decrease "welfare."

## Teach kids language that does not generalize and stereotype

Did you know when adults make a generalized statement about a population such as, "boys have short hair," children develop stereotypes about 'all boys' being a single distinct social group who are all the same.