# Keep your English up to date
## Chav
## Professor David Crystal

Chav. It came to the fore as a word in 2005 really, I didn't remember hearing it much before that. It refers to a type of youth, supposedly uncultured, maybe a bit anti-social, perhaps even violent, but certainly marked out, at least from the point of view of the critic, by very bad taste.

Chavs are supposed to wear a lot of flashy jewellery, white trainers, baseball caps, sham designer clothes, girls expose a lot of mid-rift … nothing racial about it all, I should say.

Now, whether it's cool or not to be a chav, I couldn't say, at least, not at my age! I find the linguistics much more interesting. It's a problem though, the linguistics. Where does the word come from? It's been around since the 19$^{th}$ century. Lexicographer Eric Partridge mentions it in his huge dictionary of slang and unconventional English. He talks about it coming from Romany (the language of the gypsies), 'chavy' - a child, or 'chaval' - a boy. And then later it was used for 'men' as well.

But nobody knows who's reactivated it in recent times. It's a noun, 'a chav', 'chavs', and also an adjective - people talk about 'chav behaviour' or 'chav insults' and that sort of thing. O, don't believe the popular etymologies that you read sometimes in the press and on websites … I saw one the other day, people said, 'It's an acronym, 'chav', from council house and violent' - well, no, it isn't, that was made up in recent times. Appealing as these etymologies are, they're nothing to do with the real Romany history of this very interesting word.