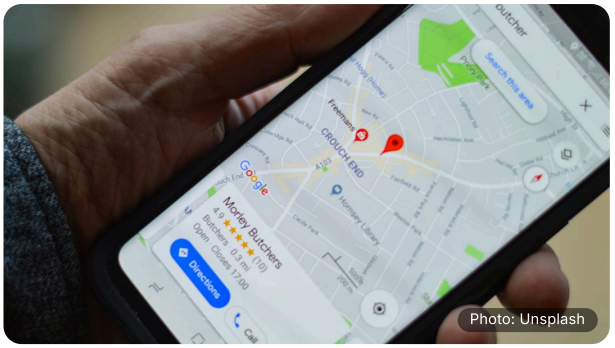
Irish watchdog fines Google over tracking

LEVEL C1



I. WARM-UP

1. When did you last change a phone privacy setting? Why?
2. What benefits do you get from location-based services?
3. Which tech firms, if any, do you trust with your data?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

regulator
an authority that sets and enforces rules in a sector

manipulate
to influence someone in an unfair or hidden way

infer
to reach a conclusion from clues rather than explicit statements

geolocation
finding a device's position using digital signals

surveillance
close monitoring of people or behaviour, often by organisations

compliance
the act of following a law, rule or official order

enforcement
actions that ensure rules are obeyed, including penalties

spokesperson
a person who officially speaks for an organisation

III. READING

It was Ireland's Data Protection Commission (DPC) that fined Google €403m for how it processed users' location data, after complaints from seven European consumer groups that the company manipulated people into constant phone tracking.

The case began with 2018 research by Norway's consumer agency suggesting geolocation can expose private facts such as religion, political leanings, hospital visits and sexual orientation.

After a six-year investigation, the DPC said users could have been unaware their location was used to target adverts or to infer their interests and health.

The watchdog examined "web and app activity", "location history" and "location accuracy" between 25 May 2018 and 4 February 2020, and ordered compliance with the EU's GDPR within six months.

BEUC, the European Consumer Organisation, called geolocation one of the most invasive forms of consumer surveillance and warned that late enforcement weakens protection. A Google spokesperson said the ruling concerns historical policies and that, from 2019, the firm launched tools making location controls simpler.

The Irish regulator has also fined Meta €1.2bn, TikTok €530m and Instagram €405m, reflecting its EU-wide role over US tech firms headquartered in Ireland.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **The Guardian***: "Google fined more than €400m by Irish...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Who imposed the fine and how much was it?
2. What sparked the DPC inquiry?
3. What did the DPC say users might not have realised?
4. Which data features did the DPC examine and what deadline did it set?
5. Name one other company previously fined by the Irish regulator.

V. DISCUSSION

1. Are large fines enough to change big tech behaviour? Why or why not?
2. When does helpful location data become invasive surveillance?
3. Should regulators act faster even if cases are complex?
4. How much control do users really have over tracking settings?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Adding emphasis - cleft sentences

Use a cleft (It + be + X + that/who) to emphasise X. The cleft highlights one part of the sentence for focus.

*"**It was Ireland's Data Protection Commission (DPC) that** fined Google €403m."*

*"**It is geolocation that** can expose private facts such as religion."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

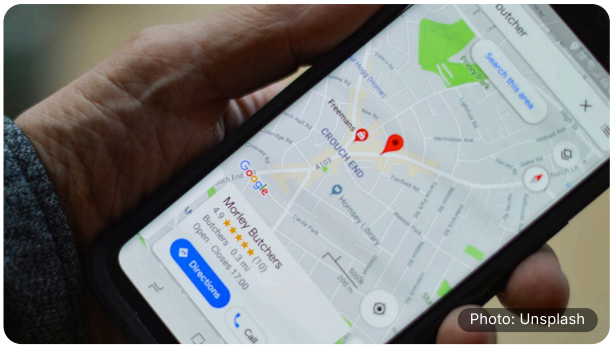
Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. It was consumer groups (that / what) raised complaints in Europe. _____
2. It was Google's spokesperson (which / who) mentioned the tools. _____
3. It was a Norwegian study (that / what) started the case. _____
4. It was the GDPR (what / that) the DPC ordered Google to follow. _____
5. It was researchers in Norway (which / who) studied geolocation. _____

Teacher's Notes

TEACHERS ONLY

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.



I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8–10 minutes warm-up, 10 minutes vocabulary, 12–15 minutes reading, 12–15 minutes comprehension, 8–10 minutes grammar, 12–15 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach regulator, manipulate, infer, surveillance, compliance, geolocation; check learners can explain GDPR and phone location settings in simple terms.
- Run the reading in pairs, then clarify as a class. The topic touches privacy and sensitive inferences (religion, health, sexual orientation), so invite learners to discuss the news without sharing personal data and say they may answer in general rather than personally.
- Differentiation: stronger students summarise BEUC's critique in two sentences; others list three concrete benefits and three harms of location data, then compare.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Poll quick reactions, then ask for concrete examples or evidence to support claims.
2. Prompt for borderline cases (maps vs. ad tracking) and why the line shifts for people.
3. Split the room: one side argues speed, the other due process; then swap roles.
4. Have students open their settings menu (if comfortable) and report one thing they learned.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Debate: In teams, prepare 2-minute opening statements for or against the DPC's €403m fine, then rebut.

Writing: Write a 120-word consumer notice explaining how to manage Google's location settings.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

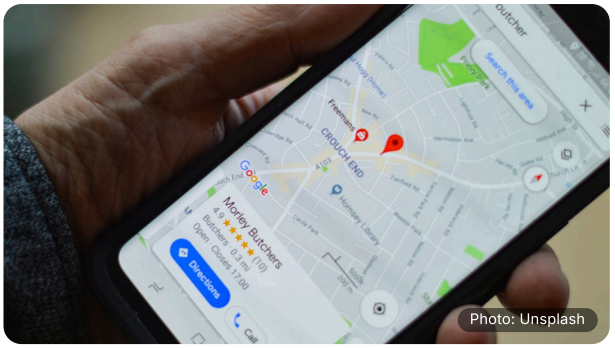
Grammar exercise: Adding emphasis - cleft sentences

Discussion: open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

Answer Key

TEACHERS ONLY

These answers are for teachers only. Please do not share this page with students.



IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Who imposed the fine and how much was it?
   Ireland's Data Protection Commission; €403m.
2. What sparked the DPC inquiry?
   Research by Norway's consumer agency on risks from geolocation.
3. What did the DPC say users might not have realised?
   That location data was used to target adverts or infer interests and health.
4. Which data features did the DPC examine and what deadline did it set?
   Web and app activity, location history and location accuracy; six months to comply with GDPR.
5. Name one other company previously fined by the Irish regulator.
   Meta, TikTok or Instagram.

V. DISCUSSION

Open answers. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: Use a cleft (It + be + X + that/who) to emphasise X. The cleft highlights one part of the sentence for focus. (Examples constructed.)

> "**It was Ireland's Data Protection Commission (DPC) that** *fined Google €403m.*"
>
> "**It is geolocation that** *can expose private facts such as religion.*"

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. It was consumer groups (that / what) raised complaints in Europe. **that**
2. It was Google's spokesperson (which / who) mentioned the tools. **who**
3. It was a Norwegian study (that / what) started the case. **that**
4. It was the GDPR (what / that) the DPC ordered Google to follow. **that**
5. It was researchers in Norway (which / who) studied geolocation. **who**