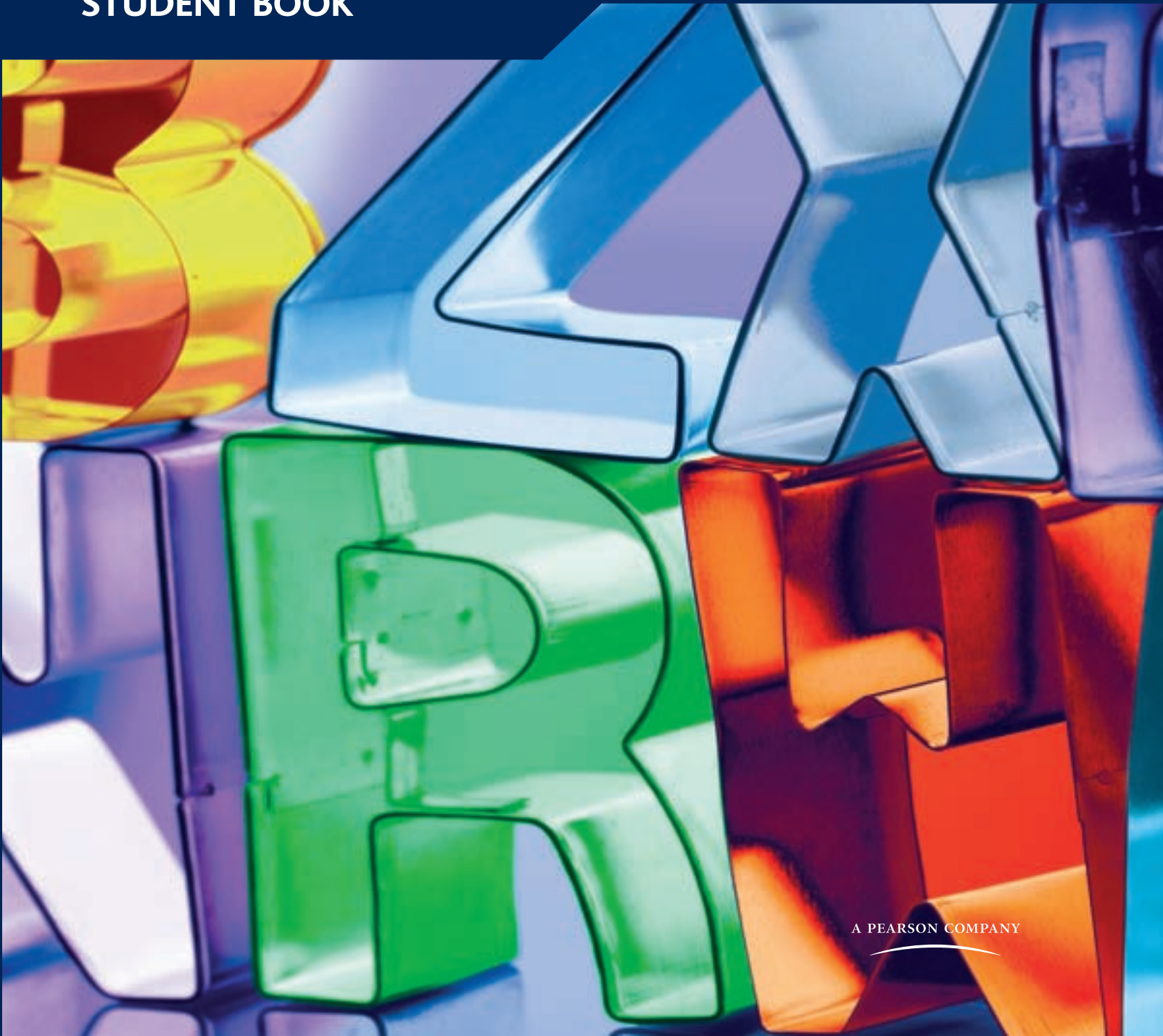


Edexcel GCE English Language: Context and Identity

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STUDENT BOOK



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A Level Component 1 : Language Variation

AS Level Component 1: Language: Context and Identity

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Language and context

In this section you will study the ways language varies according to the user: their age, gender, geographical background, ethnicity, occupation or status. You explore some theories about attitudes to language use, as well as some ideas about ways that meanings are implied by language use in a specific context.

This section begins with **context** as it is – almost always – the best way to approach any **text** and the way you should plan to analyse texts in the exam. The meaning of the term ‘context’ may be a bit fuzzy for you, but try imagining language (the ‘text’) completely out of context – disembodied words appearing out of nowhere, like this:

Hey there

Suppose you had no idea whether these words were spoken or written, let alone who they were addressed to or the situation. It would be impossible to know what this language text means. It could be a friendly greeting, an aggressive challenge, a cry for help, or have many other meanings. Not all examples are as extreme as this. You generally know a lot about the context of language use; this section tells you how to make the most of this knowledge.

1 Exploring the context

How do you analyse a text as an English Language student? (A text is any example of spoken, written or electronic language.) You begin by asking all sorts of questions about it.

These relatively simple ‘What? Who? and Why?’ questions all relate to the circumstances of the text – what we call its context. The questions relate to some important linguistic concepts – **mode**, **field**, **function** and **audience**.

- **WHAT** is it? → mode (text types)
- **WHAT** is it about? → field (topic)
- **WHO** produced it? → audience (the relationship between writer and audience)
- For **WHOM**?
- **WHY**? → function (purpose)

Activity 1

Read the following text. It was found one morning just inside the doorway of a bed and breakfast room.

*Dear Madam,
Many apologies for entering
your room in the darkest hour I
did not have my glasses on.
Mr Flynn*

1 Answer the bullet points below.

- What is it?
- What is it about?
- Who produced it?
- For whom?
- Why?

Focusing on the style

Once you have explored the context, you need to turn your attention to the detail of the words themselves. Ask yourself this question:

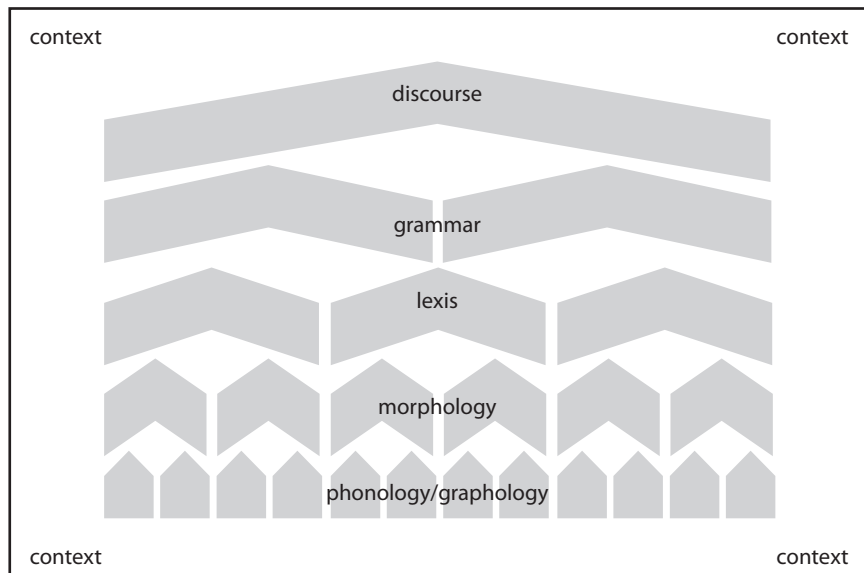
How does the style of language reflect this particular situation?

Close examination of text might bring some individual words, letters or punctuation marks to your attention. You may notice the appearance of the text. If you step back, you should be able to see whole sentence structures. A panoramic view would show you the shape of the whole text, including the way it begins and ends.

These key **levels** and **frameworks** are given special terms in language study.

- **Phonology** the sounds of language
- **Graphology** visual marks on the pages
- **Lexis** choice of words
- **Morphology** word structure
- **Grammar** sentence structure
- **Discourse** structure of the whole text

One way of understanding language study is to use the idea of 'levels', as if language were a physical structure. The smallest elements build up into larger structures, which then combine to form even larger structures, and so on.



Key terms

phonology	lexis
graphology	grammar
morphology	discourse

Activity 2

Discuss these questions on the style of Mr Flynn's note. Each question relates to one of the areas of language study listed above.

- 1 What does the choice of address ('Dear Madam') and sign off ('Mr Flynn') suggest? (This is a question on discourse.)
- 2 Why do you think the writer chose 'entering' rather than 'coming in'? (This is a question on lexis.)
- 3 Why do you think the writer says 'darkest' rather than 'dark'? (This is a question on morphology.)
- 4 What do you notice about spelling and punctuation? Does the handwriting tell you anything about the writer? (This is a question on graphology.)
- 5 Is the sentence structure in the note standard? In other words, is it appropriate for formal written English? (This is a question on grammar.)

Key terms

semantics formality
pragmatics register

Constructing meaning

Language analysis is not just a way of dissecting a text and labelling the parts. Language is essentially a means of communication, so the aim of language study should be to shed light on meanings and explain how they are conveyed.

Activity 3

Look at Mr Flynn's note again. How sincere do you rate the apology on a scale of 1–10? Some opinions about the note are given below – use your responses to these to argue for your view.

A His use of 'Mr' rather than a first name isn't really a mark of respect. It keeps his identity anonymous so makes him rather distant.

B Some of his word choices show he is respecting the person he is writing to, eg 'Madam' and 'entering'.

C The style sounds almost poetic in the phrase 'in the darkest hours', which is odd in this situation.

D The note is very brief, so overall it's not a heartfelt apology.

E The casual grammar in places makes me think he doesn't really care about what he is writing.

F He makes spelling and punctuation mistakes, but these are probably unintentional.

G The writer avoids saying the words 'I' or 'you', which would make the apology more direct and personal.

Writing about language

When you identify language features, always explain why they are significant to the whole context. For example: **There is a mixture of formality and informality in Mr Flynn's note. This is because an apology to a stranger usually involves a high degree of formality, but a handwritten note tends to be more informal.**

Two areas of language explore the ways meanings are constructed: semantics and pragmatics.

- When you talk about the associations of the phrase 'in the darkest hours', you are dealing with **semantics** (the relationship between words and meanings).
- When you try to work out what Mr Flynn really means by 'many apologies', you are discussing **pragmatics** (the ways meanings are implied in a social context).

Formality

One key concept in language study is formality: the way people adjust the tone of their language to suit the situation they are in.

Many people would think Mr Flynn's situation requires a fairly high degree of formality, as a stranger is writing to apologise for being in a woman's room late at night. Mr Flynn makes some effort to be formal, but the note remains quite casual in tone. Perhaps we need to know more about the social context – messing about at night might be common for Mr Flynn.

Activity 4

Role-play these scenarios in pairs. Be aware of the formality of the language you use. Then rank the situations according to their level of *formality/register*.

- F is interviewing M for a job.
- M and F are friends having coffee.
- F is a waiter serving M with coffee.
- M is complaining to neighbour F about his children.

Looking at context

In this part you will explore the important concepts for analysing context – mode, field, function and **audience** – in more detail. As you look at examples of texts, you will begin to use some precise terms to describe language features. You will deal with each of the key **frameworks and levels** of language – graphology, phonology, morphology, lexis, grammar and discourse.

Mode

What does mode mean in language study? In its broadest sense, it refers to the way that language is transmitted from person to person.

Activity 5

Look at the following examples of language use. They are all different language modes. Which of the five senses – sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste – is used for each?

- | | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| a Braille notice | d morse code message | g TV programme |
| b telephone call | e smoke signals/semaphore | h sign language accompaniment |
| c letter | f text message | i MySpace site |

Although smell can communicate feelings and the sense of touch is used in the Braille, human language uses hearing and sight as the main channels of communication. So spoken and written language are two important modes to study.

Spoken and written modes

Within the overall categories of spoken and written language, there are various sub-types, for example:

Spoken language		Written language	
• conversation	• interview	• letter	• essay
• lecture	• anecdote	• article	• novel

Activity 6

- 1 List further examples of sub-types under each main heading, as above.
- 2 Note any overlaps. For example, a story could be spoken or written. Some lectures include written language, in the form of handouts. Draw a Venn diagram like the one begun below to show this.



Is one mode more important than the other? In the history of language development, spoken language evolved first, with written language coming much later. This order of priority is also true for child language development: we all learned to speak before we could write. If you think about the amount of spoken versus written language, you use far more spoken language in a typical day. But, in terms of status, written language seems to have the upper hand. Perhaps this is because the ability to read and write is limited to people with access to education, which is the privileged minority in some societies. Written language also attained a higher status because it used to be the only way of leaving a permanent record, which was essential for government and law, although this situation has changed in recent times.

Electronic modes

Developments in technology have introduced new ways of transmitting and receiving language, apart from face-to-face speaking or writing on paper. This, in turn, creates new modes of language.

Activity 7

- 1 List modern technology (eg telephone, radio) for transmitting and receiving language. Which sense(s) does each use?
- 2 What new modes (eg radio phone-in, chatroom) do you use? For each, say whether it is interactive or one-way communication.

Writing about language

- In your study of English Language, you will be able to experience a range of modes: *hearing* actual speech, *listening* to audio, *watching* visual recordings, *following* hyperlinks on computer, etc. But in this book and on your exam paper you will only be able to see written versions of spoken and electronic language. This means that you can only imagine body language and tone of voice. Your analysis must focus on the words used.
- When you use these terms and concepts, show that you are aware of subtle degrees, connections and overlaps. For example, a public text is usually carefully planned and message-oriented, but may appear to be spontaneous and include some social, context-dependent language use in order to create a sense of an 'in-group'. For example, a poster advertising a cable TV company listed all the advantages as bullet points, finishing with a final bullet: 'Um, that's all.'

These electronic modes of language use are significant because they are often a fusion of spoken and written language. For example, a website can combine written text on the screen with access to audio clips of speech. Even where there is not a combination of speech and writing, there are interesting overlaps. A text message uses only writing on a screen, but operates like a spoken conversation in many ways because it is interactive. A radio broadcast uses only spoken language, but it may be read from a written script. Some media broadcasts are interactive, inviting phone calls, emails or text messages from the listeners.

In order to analyse the way language is used in electronic modes, you need to be aware of the distinctive features of spoken and written language.

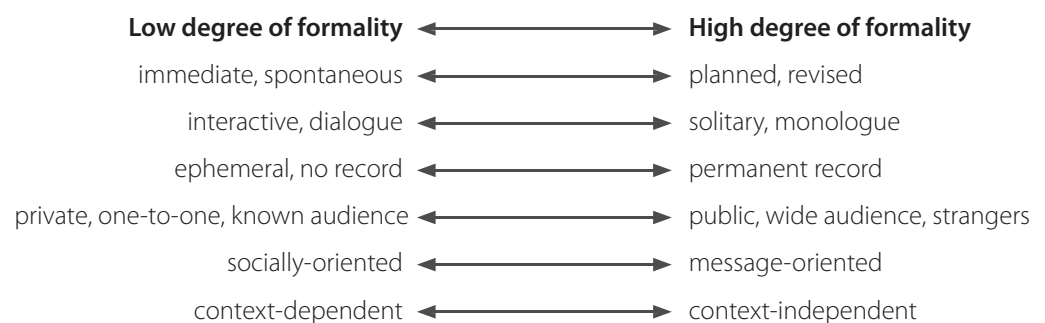
Contexts of spoken and written language

Before you consider all the interesting areas of overlap, think of the differences between the typical situations for speaking and writing.

Speaking tends to be more immediate. There is generally little time for planning what to say, as the other person is there waiting for a response. Except in a few public situations, there is no permanent record of speech. These are all features associated with **informality** in the style of language use.

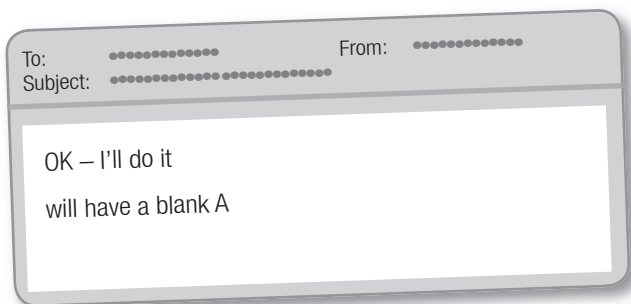
Writing, on the other hand, is often produced over a period of time, without the reader present. There are chances to plan and revise what you want to communicate, which is just as well, as writing is permanent. Written language often has a large, public audience. These are all features associated with formality in the style of language use.

It is useful to think of these aspects as a sliding scale from one extreme to another, often connected to the degree of formality.



At one extreme, we use language to maintain social relationships. At the other end of the scale, the purpose is to communicate facts and information. If the message needs to reach a wide range of people, the language use should be as clear and explicit as possible (context-independent).

Look at the following email as an example of context-dependent language use.



Key terms
 informality
 deixis

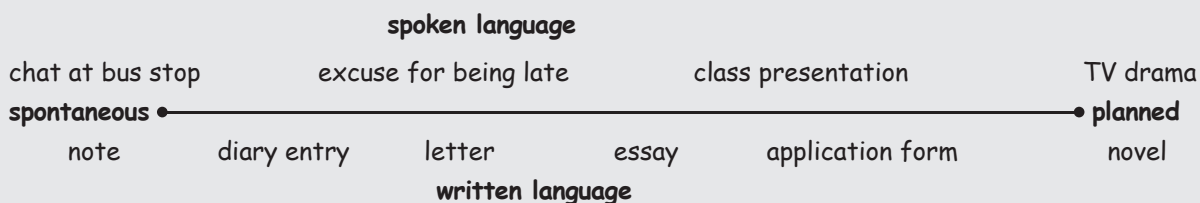
No one outside the situation could know what 'a blank A' means or what 'it' refers to. The term 'deixis' (from Greek, meaning 'pointing') describes words that refer (point) to something. All pronouns (I, you, he, she, it, we, they) refer to a person or thing. Sometimes it is clear in the text what they refer to, but in this case there is no information about the identity of 'I'.

It would be too simple to say that all speaking is casual, social interaction and all writing is carefully planned, formal information. So now you will consider all the subtle variations in people's use of language.

Activity 8

Choose one of the scales listed above, for example, ephemeral ←————→ permanent and draw a line to represent it.

a Place examples of spoken and written language along the line. For example:



b Compare your scale with others' and comment on any similarities or differences.

The degree of planning is often connected to the type of audience, rather than the mode. Whether writing or speaking, a large group of strangers generally causes more planning. However, if you have a very sensitive message to convey to a loved one, you may well rehearse your words carefully.

Similarly, people tend to plan more carefully if the speaking or writing is going to leave a permanent record. Many public figures publish their diaries, which are much more polished and self-aware than those intended to remain private.

Context of electronic language

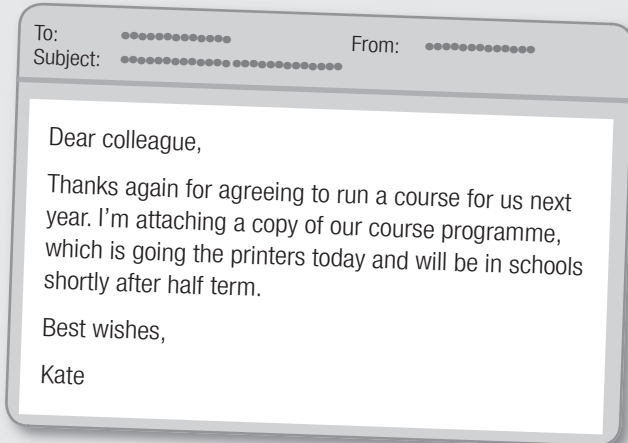
Where does the electronic mode fit into this framework? Let's start with the most widely used form of electronic communication – email messages.

Emails are generally interactive, as the response can follow within minutes. They can be carefully planned (depending on the audience and purpose), but are usually addressed to and read by a single person. Emails are permanent and, even if deleted, can be retrieved from a hard drive. Text messages, on the other hand, are always private, whereas websites like MySpace have more public access than emails.

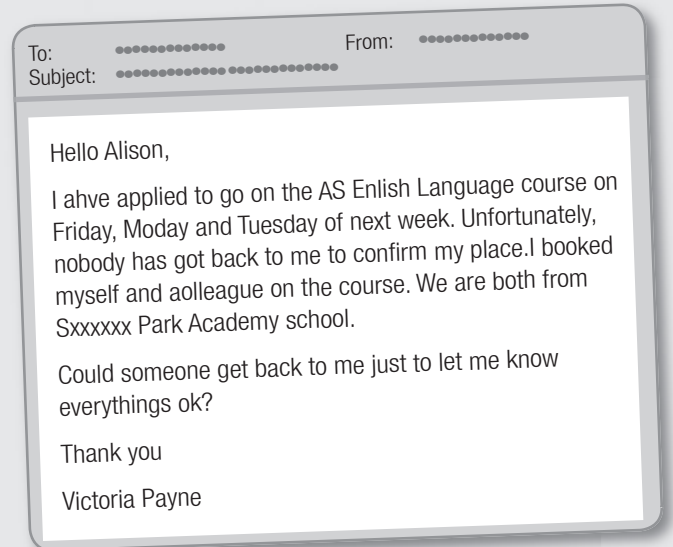
Activity 9

1 Read the following emails.

Email A



Email B



2 Place each email at a point on each of the formality scales below.



Comment on any significant language features, including **terms of address**: the way each person addresses and names themselves and the other.

This type of analysis of mode is beginning to focus on the language, for example, the discourse (terms of address) and graphology (typing errors). The next part looks in more detail at the lexis of spoken language, in comparison to written language.

Lexis of spoken language

Of course, people can use any words they choose, whether speaking or writing. But the lexis tends to differ slightly, with writing often being more formal and impersonal in tone and speaking using more colloquial language. The term '**colloquial**' literally means 'speaking together'. These general assumptions about the style of written and spoken language are supported by research.

The CANCODE project is a collaboration between Cambridge and Nottingham Universities. They collected 5 million words of spontaneous spoken English to create a **corpus** (from the Latin, literally meaning 'body'). It was funded by Cambridge University Press, who own the copyright. This collection of data can be analysed by computers to observe statistical evidence. For example, what is the most commonly used word in the English language? Is it the same word for both speaking and writing?

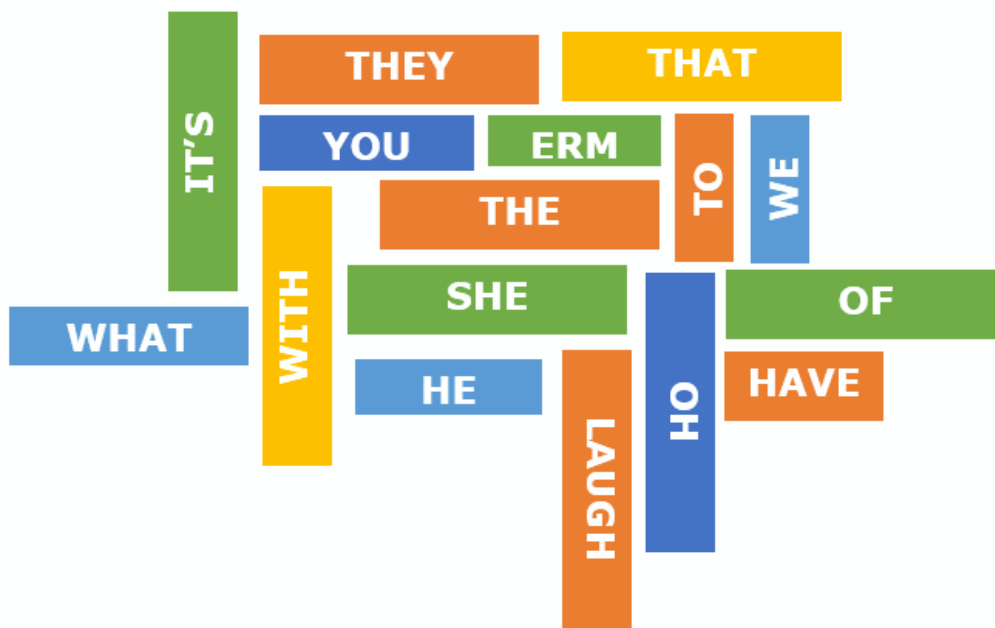
Independent research

Find a range of examples from your electronic language use (emails, text messages, MySpace, etc) and analyse them using the scales above. Is there anything unusual or surprising about the language use? Can you explain it? Read *The Language of ICT* (Shortis, 2000).

Activity 10

Key terms

colloquial	filler/filled
corpus	pause
lexical item	backchannel
terms of address	behaviour



- 1 Search online for the top 40 spoken words and the top 40 written words. Use the search term 'CANCODE Top 40 words'.
- 2 List all the words that are commonly used in spoken language, but are not so frequent in written language.
- 3 You might wonder why some of the spoken language was counted as words, rather than noises or sounds. The decision was based on whether they convey an identifiable meaning. With a partner, discuss the following questions. Use the comments in the box below as a starting point for your ideas.
 - a Why is a laugh included, but not a cough?
 - b Why is 'mm' listed as a separate item to 'er' and 'erm'? (The technical term for these is '**filler**' or '**filled pause**')
 - c Why is 'yeah' counted as a separate word to 'yes'?

Meaning of noises and sounds

- The term '**backchannel behaviour**' refers to noises the listener makes in the background as response to what the speaker is saying.
- A laugh is more deliberate than a cough. A short laugh can show that you are agreeing or sympathising with the speaker.
- The filled pause, 'mm', often occurs as the listener signals that they are listening, but wants the speaker to carry on.
- 'Er' is used by the speaker to fill a pause between words, perhaps because silence is uncomfortable.
- 'Erm' usually fills a pause between the boundary of complete sentences to indicate that the speaker has not finished their turn and wants to keep talking.
- The word 'yes' is a clear affirmative, usually in response to a question.
- The word 'yeah' can be used for the affirmative in informal situations, but it is often used as backchannel behaviour as the listener shows support for the speaker.

Independent research

Keep a notebook record (if you cannot make audio recordings), and note when laughs, filled pauses or 'yeah' occur in spoken language. Why do speakers use these sounds? If it is fair to call them 'words', what do you think they mean? There is little published research, but you could type 'yeah backchannel' into a search engine to find articles on the internet. The University of Pennsylvania, for example, provides a lot of useful notes for students.

Activity 11

Investigate the frequent occurrence of these words in spoken, but not written language:

so well like right know just OK

- 1 Provide examples of each word in spoken language use, for example:
 - **Are you well?**
 - **That was well good.**
 - **Well, what are you waiting for?**
 - **It was not ... well ... not really suitable.**
- 2 Comment on the function of the word (the way it is used), in addition to its literal meaning, for example:
 - **'Well' literally means the opposite of 'ill'.**
 - **It is used as an *intensifier* (similar in meaning to 'very' or 'extremely').**
 - **It is used to mark, or signal, the beginning of a new topic.**
 - **It is used to fill a pause, as the speaker hesitates and thinks what to say.**

You will notice that all these words are used in different ways in spoken language. They often have an interactive function, indicating that the speaker is involved in a dialogue and is willing for the other person to join in. In spoken language, the word 'know' usually occurs in a phrase, 'you know what I mean' or 'don't you know?' The term '**marker of sympathetic circularity**' refers to its function of checking the other person is still 'with you'. **Tag questions**, such as 'aren't you?' or 'didn't she?', have a similar interactive function.

The linguist Professor Ron Carter suggests that it is more revealing to use the term 'purposefully vague language' for certain features of spoken language, such as 'sort of', 'kind of', 'stufflike that', 'and so on', etc. Although there are situations that require absolutely precise information, social talk between equals is not one of them. In examples such as, 'about ten-ish', 'slim-ish', Carter describes '-ish' as a 'democratic morpheme'!

Take it further

- 1 Use a search engine to research uses of the word 'like' in contemporary spoken language and attitudes towards its use. Type the words 'like quotative' or 'like discourse marker' into a search engine to find relevant articles on the internet. Wikipedia can often be a good place to start. BBC Voices website is also an excellent forum – go to 'Your voice', then 'The art of conversation'.
 - a List the various functions of the word 'like'.
 - b Why do you think its use is both common among younger people and stigmatised (criticised as non-standard)?
- 2 Use a search engine to find out about increasing use of 'innit' as a tag question. Try BBC Voices websites as a first stop. **Search online for the article 't's inglish, innit'** Do you agree with the points made in the article?
- 3 Add to your research into the features that are characteristic of spoken language. Look in the bibliography for suggestions of books on the topic. You might begin with *The Language of Speech and Writing* or *Language and Creativity: The Art of Common Talk*, both by Ron Carter. Is it enough to say that spoken language is informal, whereas written language is formal?

Grammar of spoken language

Spoken language uses some structures that are not so common in formal written language. You have already come across the terms 'deixis' (page 15) and 'intensifier' (page 18). Here are more useful terms to describe grammatical structures.

Discourse markers are particular words (often adverbs) and phrases used to mark boundaries in conversation between one topic and the next. They function rather like a new paragraph in writing. For example:

Anyway, give Jean a ring and see what she says.

Right, okay, we'd better try to phone and see what they have to report.

Interrogative and **imperative** sentence structures are used more in spoken language because it is often a two-way communication, with the possibility to ask questions, make requests and give instructions. Interrogatives are easy to spot as they are followed by a question mark. Imperatives use the verb in its simple form, or add 'do' or 'don't'.

Can you help me with this?

Which one do you mean?

You don't mind, do you? (tag question)

Quick, grab hold of the end.

Do give it a rest.

Don't touch that.

Ellipsis happens when speakers leave out some parts of the full structure because they assume the listener already understands this information. An alternative term for abbreviated structures is minor sentence.

Coming to mine this evening? (Are you ...)

Amazing party! (It was an ...)

No idea. (I have ... what you are talking about.)

Modal expressions are words and phrases that indicate the attitude of the speaker towards the situation they are describing.

I suppose it must be sort of difficult to phone or whatever.

I feel they maybe should resign really.

We maybe ought to perhaps have a word with him about it.

Key terms

intensifier

marker of sympathetic
circularity

tag question

discourse marker

interrogative

imperative

ellipsis

modal expression

Writing about language

- Avoid making negative comments about spoken language, such as it is 'lazy', 'sloppy', 'not proper English'. Instead, think positively about the reasons for, and effects of, using language in an informal, apparently spontaneous way.
- You need to show your knowledge and understanding in three ways:

- 1 Use accurate *terminology* to describe the language use in the texts and context.
- 2 Explain the *effects*.
- 3 Analyse the *connections* between the language and the *context* of its use.

Here is a short example of a teacher addressing a Year 11 class: 'Um, OK, can we have a bit of quiet now?'

The speaker uses a filled pause (**terminology**), 'um' and the discourse marker 'OK' to indicate she is about to say something. Her style seems quite relaxed and informal (**overall effect**), perhaps because she has a good relationship (**context**) with her class. She uses an interrogative (**terminology**) structure, but it functions (**effect**) as an instruction. It is less assertive (**effect**) than saying bluntly 'Be quiet!' and maintains (**link to context**) the cooperative relationship with the class.

Writing about language

You should use precise linguistic terminology wherever possible. But do not be afraid to create your own way of describing some subtle effects. This is the way that new linguistic terms come about. If your point is **clear** – and it is an interesting one – you will gain credit.

Multi-modal texts

So far, you have looked at some distinctive features of spoken language: the words most commonly used and a few common grammatical structures. We are assuming a contrast here with written language; in other words, these types of features are *not* commonly found in written language. At the two opposite ends of the scale, the stereotypical style of writing is a carefully constructed monologue addressed to a large, unknown audience; the stereotypical style of speaking is a spontaneous conversation with one or two familiar people.

But, of course, language use is more complex and interesting than that. If we think of the image of a spectrum like a rainbow, styles of language shade into and overlap with each other. For example, people sometimes write as if they were speaking to a friend or they speak from a carefully planned script to a large audience. Nowadays, we have the fascinating phenomenon of electronic language use, which really does blur the boundaries between speech and writing. Although often written, it tends to be done without much pre-planning and is an interactive dialogue. The resulting style might be called, like new genres of music, 'crossover' or 'fusion'.

What you have learned

- ✓ Mode refers to the three main channels for communicating language: speech, writing, electronic communication
- ✓ There are some key differences between spoken and written language.
- ✓ It is helpful to think of a scale, or continuum, between two extremes.
- ✓ Electronic language shares features of both speech and writing.
- ✓ Multi-modal texts also merge the typical features of speech and writing.

Key terms

subject-specific lexis
semantic field
jargon
field-related jargon

Field

The field of a text is its topic or subject matter. This will clearly influence the choice of lexis. For example, a leaflet about training dogs will contain many words relating to dog breeds, equipment, etc. The term for such a group of words is **subject-specific lexis**. Such an obvious point might not be worth making, but you might notice an underlying **semantic field** – other groups of words related by meaning – that is not so directly linked to the main topic. Menus, for example, tend to connect food with comfort, by using words like ‘nestling on a bed of ...’. The presenter Jeremy Kyle was quoted in an article in the *Daily Mirror*, defending his TV confrontational show: ‘Some people will always think I’ve got the eyes of Satan. Others will think I’m a TV God.’ His choice of the words ‘Satan’ and ‘God’ suggest that he considers himself of a similar status. You might think of alternative words to express his point that some people dislike him and others approve.

Activity 12

Search online for a report about a sports event or competition.

- Apart from the name of the sport and the word ‘sport’, what other related words do you notice?
- What effect does this have?



Take it further

Look at the work of the Campaign for Plain English on www.plainenglish.co.uk. Which people and organisations do they target? Do you agree that it is important to write in a clear and simple style?

Jargon – to impress and oppress?

The term **jargon** (which derives from an Old French word meaning ‘warbling of birds’) is often used in a negative sense for unnecessarily complicated words. Sometimes people involved in a particular occupation or hobby do seem to delight in using words that no one else can understand. The Campaign for Plain English promotes clarity in public documents and makes an award each year for the worst example of ‘gobbledygook’. In 1994, the politician Gordon Brown provided one example:

new theories of economic sovereignty across a wide range of areas ... the growth of post-neo-classical endogenous growth theory and the symbiotic relationships between growth and investment in people and infrastructure.

Often, however, specialised technical jargon helps precise communication. Medicine is one area where specialised vocabulary is an advantage (if not a necessity). Linguistics is another! This type of language is called **field-related jargon**. It is still important to use jargon carefully, with the aim to be precise and clear, not for the pleasure of using big, obscure words.

Activity 13

- Which of these are names of figure-skating moves, rather than phonetic (the study of the sounds of language) symbols?*
- Choose a topic you are familiar with – a hobby, interest, occupation, etc.
- List 10 examples of field-related jargon. Include two that you have invented.
- Exchange lists with another student and see if you can identify the fake jargon.

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Crossed Lambda | • Closed Reverse Epsilon |
| • Inverted Omega | • Yogh |
| • Inside Ina Bauer | • Bullseye Polish Hook |
| • Long-Leg Turned Iota | • Back-Tail Gamma |

Use of appropriate sentence structures

Although the field of a text has most impact on the use of lexis, you may want to comment on the grammar, if it affects the tone or degree of formality. Some topics, such as death or religion, are very sensitive and require an appropriate style of sentence structure, as well as vocabulary. Some topics like pop music and fashion are less serious and so a more informal style is fine.

Activity 14

- Read the extract text to the right. The mode is a leaflet, left in each room in a chain of hotels.
 - Identify the two contrasting semantic fields.
 - What do you notice about the grammar of the text?
- Comment on the effect of these language choices.

Remember it is important to develop your initial general impression of the register of a text, by:

- making a more specific point
- providing evidence from the text
- explaining the relevance (the ways the language choices suit the context)

1

FIVE MINUTES

To breathe:

Sit in the lotus position, close your eyes, relax and breathe in deeply.

2

FIVE MINUTES

To tone up:

Sit with a straight back, stretch out your arms and bend your body forward as far as you can go.

3

FIVE MINUTES

To relax:

Pull your knees up against your chest, put your chin on your knees, then rock forward and backwards and from side to side.

This leaflet uses the semantic fields of work and leisure. The list does not use complete sentences, such as 'to breathe'. There are imperatives telling the reader what to do, for example 'bend your body forward'. It is very informal for a hotel leaflet.

Needs to be specific about the field and provide examples

Negative point — needs to explain why this is relevant

Explanation misunderstands primary function of leaflet

Too general — what type of register is it? How does this language use suit the context?

Notice how this response just skates the surface at first, then digs out a few random examples. Can you improve on this example?

You can see from this example that it is difficult to comment on the field of a text, without discussing its function.

What you have learned

- ✓ Field refers to the subject matter of the text as shown in the choice of lexis.
- ✓ You can use these terms: subject-specific lexis, field-related jargon, semantic field.
- ✓ It is not particularly interesting to notice that there are words from the field of sailing in a handbook about sailing, but it would be interesting if there was an underlying semantic field connecting sailing with flying or freedom.

[*Inside Ina Bauer is the only skating move.]

Function

You may be familiar with the purpose of texts being described in a limited number of ways as to inform, persuade, entertain, and so on. However, it is important to develop the concept of purpose further. The related term 'function' encourages you to see that language has many more than the few purposes mentioned at GCSE. People use language for all sorts of communicative functions, some specific (eg weather forecasting, exchanging faulty goods) and others more broad (eg interacting, expressing feelings). An example of language use with a very specific function would be:

I name this ship Queen Mary II.

Multi-functional texts

Most language functions are more complex and cannot be described in a single phrase. Often people are trying to achieve several things at once. It is important to understand as much as possible about the situation, before reading the text.

Activity 15

The exam paper will always give you any significant details about the text. For example, here are the significant details about the text in Activity 16:

It is the 'Health and Safety' paragraph from the information section of a leaflet given out at a festival.

- 1 Before you read the text itself, think about what you expect from the context, for example:

mode	- leaflet	- suggests clear and simple style
	- public, message-oriented	- ditto
field	- health & safety	- suggests serious tone, legal jargon
function	- information	- suggests clear style
	- advice	- suggests use of imperatives

- 2 Then think about the whole situation and any underlying purposes. At a music festival, it's unlikely that anyone will read the whole leaflet carefully. In that case, why would the organisers print the information and advice?

Activity 16

Read the text with these thoughts about the context in mind.

- a What are the field and function (the sort of information and advice the text gives)?
- b Identify the language features that convey this.
 - **Lexis** – Can you group vocabulary into related fields? To what extent is the vocabulary formal or informal?
 - **Grammar** – What sentence structures are used? Does it include interrogatives or imperatives? Is the reader addressed directly as 'you'?
- c What effect does this style have?

Health & Safety

In the interests of Health and Safety, ensure wristbands are worn at all times and are securely fastened. Under 16s must be accompanied by an adult over 18 years of age. Glass drinks bottles or food containers are prohibited. You will be required to dispose of unauthorised items before entry onto the festival's premises. Illegal substances, fireworks, any item that may be reasonably considered a weapon will be confiscated. See the website for further details.

Writing about language

Remember to consider all the aspects of context to get a full picture. So far you have mode, field and function. For example, you might begin a response like this:

This leaflet has been designed to give out to everyone attending a music festival. The heading indicates its function to provide information and advice about health and safety. The layout of any leaflet allows the reader to skip sections and find topics of interest, so few people would read this section carefully when they are enjoying a weekend festival of music. Its primary function may be to satisfy legal requirements. I expect the lexis to be in the field of health, safety and law, with some references to leisure and fun. I expect the sentence structures to be clear, but not simple, as the organisers need to explain precisely. There may be imperatives to express warnings and instructions ...

Key terms

declarative
transactional
phatic

Cross purposes?

The **health and safety** text was public and message-oriented, so it used **declarative** sentences. This term refers to the following structure, often used to make statements about facts:

Glass drinks bottles or food containers are prohibited.

The term '**transactional**' also refers to language used to pass on information. In personal and interactive situations, the language use is often more socially-oriented. Statements such as 'It's been a miserable June' are not intended as information about the weather, but as a polite ice-breaker with strangers. This convention is restricted to the UK, and perhaps to older people; other social groups use different strategies to strike up a friendly conversation. This is **phatic** function, referring to the social, rather than the message, aspect of communication.

Activity 17

- 1 Look at the following situations where you might use private, i.e. *addressed to a single person*, language (spoken, written and electronic).
 - Homepage for MySpace/Facebook, etc.
 - Introducing yourself to an attractive person at a party
 - Personal statement on a job application form
 - Note to a family member asking to borrow money
- 2 Add some more examples from your own experience and describe the main and the various underlying functions of each example.
- 3 What strategies might you use to achieve these functions?

A personal statement on a job application form has the main function of persuading the reader to give you a job or an interview. In order to achieve this, you need to show you have the necessary skills by providing information about your qualifications and experience. You also need to reveal your personality by writing about your hobbies and interests. The presentation is vital, so you need to make sure the handwriting, spelling and punctuation are all effective.

Human communication often involves the need to present oneself in a positive light. For some people, this involves a degree of boasting; others play a more downbeat or humorous role.

The subtle art of persuasion

Although declarative sentence structures make up the major part of language use, human communication is not principally concerned with passing on information. It is always interesting to consider whether there is an underlying persuasive purpose. The following text, for example, was seen on the back of a bus underneath a close-up photo of a young child's face.

You'll never sleep.
She'll never wake.

The small print 'Don't drink and drive'. Advertisers need to use subtle means to attract our attention, as we have become so familiar with the direct approach.

Independent research

Look at the campaigns on websites for various charities such as the NSPCC or Amnesty International. What tactics do they use to attract interest and donations? The visuals are often the most noticeable part, but look at the way they use language to reinforce the message.

Writing about language

The terms to describe the actual structure of sentences are: declarative, interrogative, imperative. But remember that the function of a sentence might be different from its structure, for example, the interrogative structure 'What time do you call this?' functions as a reprimand.

What you have learned

- ✓ You should have developed your awareness of purpose to see that language often performs a number of overlapping functions.
- ✓ You can add to the concepts of persuasion, entertainment and information, and consider the distinction between language as a means of passing on information and language as a means of forming social bonds.
- ✓ You can use these pairs of terms: message-orientated and socially orientated; ideational and interpersonal; transactional and phatic.

Audience

The relationship between the writer and the audience, the reader or listener, plays a very important part of communication. Participants' roles and status affect the kinds of language chosen, particularly in respect of the degree of formality.

Although it is not a precise, technical term, the word 'tone' is often used to describe the degree of formality or 'the kind of language chosen'. The relationship between the speaker or writer and the listener(s) or reader(s) has a shorthand term: the **addresser–addressee relationship**. When you describe this, it is useful to consider the formality scales.



Key terms

structure
audience
addresser–addressee
relationship

Activity 18

- 1 Think about these situations of language use again and add some ideas of your own.
 - A man writes a note of apology to the unknown woman whose room he went into in the middle of the night.
 - A teacher emails the organiser of a training course at a local university to ask for confirmation of booking.
 - The prime minister welcomes delegates to a conference on education.
 - A music festival leaflet provides information about health and safety for everyone attending the weekend.
- 2 For each one, describe the participants – their relationship, roles and status.
- 3 How might this affect the tone or degree of formality used?

Take it further

Read *New Labour, New Language* by N. Fairclough, pages 97–118. Do you agree that Blair managed to present himself as a 'normal person', as well as a public leader?

You can see that the other three aspects of context have an influence on **audience**

- Mode – If you are speaking to someone, you can usually become more friendly than in writing.
- Field – If you are talking about a serious subject, you might keep your language focused on the topic and not stray into social pleasantries.
- Function – If you need to apologise to someone, your role will be more humble than if they need to provide you with a service.

Language and power in social interaction

The study of language and power is now an important area of linguistics. For example, people have analysed the way Tony Blair, as prime minister, used language, and have compared it to Margaret Thatcher's style. It is interesting that Thatcher, a woman, adopted a more obviously powerful role in her interactions with the media. Tony Blair, on the other hand, often played a less assertive role, speaking tentatively and allowing people to interrupt him.

Independent research

You can find interesting ideas about the way language reveals relationships and status in disciplines such as psychology or less academic areas like assertiveness training, counselling and even sales techniques. Concentrate on a small area, such as the use of questions or negative statements. What do they suggest is the effect of such language use?

Activity 19

Use a pack of playing cards, with number 2 representing the lowest status and Ace, King, Queen the highest status.

- 1 In turn, each person picks a card from the pack and goes outside the room. Assume the status shown on your card and the role of someone arriving late for class.
- 2 Enter the room and take your place, saying whatever you think appropriate for your role and status.
- 3 The group should guess your status and explain their reasons. Although body language is significant, it is outside the scope of English language study. You may comment on tone and volume (see pages 39–40) of voice, as well as the words used.

Hitting the right tone

It is generally easier to find the right words in familiar (from the word 'family') situations, which we can specify in the following ways.

- **Mode** speaking, rather than writing, because there is the chance for feedback and you can change tack, if things seem to be going badly
- **Private–public** one person or a small group, rather than a large group
- **Relationship** people you know, rather than strangers
- **Field** on subjects both parties/you feel comfortable with
- **Function** for a non-serious purpose.

Let's look at language use in more tricky situations – where the person is writing to a large group of people, who are not known on a personal level, to persuade them to change their behaviour.

Activity 20

Read these two texts and for each, assess:

- a the relative status of writer to readers on a scale of 1 to 10
- b how effective it is in achieving its purpose.

Text A letter sent by a junior school headteacher to parents

Dear Parents

We are encountering a lot of problems with the payment and collection of dinner money and need your help in resolving them.

Therefore may we remind you that the cost of school meals is XXp.

5 The correct amount of dinner money should be paid on Monday morning in a labelled packet or envelope, regardless of the number of dinners your child will require during the week and the days that he/she will be having them. Late and incorrect payment of money, and an increasing amount of unidentified loose dinner money being sent into school, is creating a great deal of extra administration and taking up an excessive amount of the clerk's time. This means that other essential work cannot be done and affects the whole school.

10 Please note that if dinner money is not received on Monday or on the first day of the week that a child is in school and having a school meal, a dinner will not be ordered on following days.

Your cooperation regarding this matter will be much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Text B notice pinned above the sink in a B&B bathroom

Save water!

Please be so kind as to ensure that the taps are turned off completely.

It is very easy to leave these taps slightly open, and they sometimes 'bounce' back a bit when you close them.

Thank you very much for your help.

Identifying formal grammar

There are several accepted ways of being more formal. Often this simply means being less personal and direct. These three features of grammar are highly significant in the analysis of language and power:

- avoiding the **first** and **second person pronouns** (I/me, you) and referring in general terms to 'people' or even 'one'
- avoiding the **active voice** and choosing **passive** forms
- avoiding verbs, wherever possible, and using nouns instead (called **nominalisation**).

Key terms

first person pronoun
second person pronoun
active voice
passive voice
nominalisation
footing

Activity 21

Look at the examples of nominalisation and the passive voice that are underlined in the headteacher's letter on page 28.

- 1 Transform these into the more direct forms, for example:

nominalisation

collection of dinner money

passive voice

dinner money should be paid

verb

we can't collect the dinner money

active voice

you should pay your child's dinner money

- 2 What do you notice about the use of personal pronouns in the original and the transformed text?
- 3 How has the tenor changed in your transformed text?

Most people feel that the B&B notice is written as if writer and reader share a relatively equal status. The writer shows respect to the guests and makes the request very politely, appealing to their better nature. The headteacher's letter, on the other hand, is written as if from a superior status, talking down to some badly behaved parents. The threatening tone of voice might alienate the readers, so the more personal rewritten version would be more effective.

Shifting the footing

The sociologist, Goffman uses the term '**footing**' to refer to participants' stance towards each other. In everyday language, we use this metaphor when we talk about getting off on the wrong foot or being caught off-guard, etc. Goffman points out that the footing can shift during an interaction. When we meet a person for the first time, we might start off on a formal footing, with some conventional politeness. If we find some common ground, it can change to a more relaxed footing. These changes in relationship are linked to shifts in the language used. It might be slight changes in the tone of voice, sudden introduction of taboo language or less direct ways of making requests.

Take it further

Try changing the tenor of the B&B notice in various ways: more superior or pleading, etc. Notice the changes you made to the language. Did you change the lexis or grammar? You might think the graphology (visual layout) is important or that the discourse (overall structure) is more important than the words and sentence structures.

Activity 22

Read this exchange of text messages with a forensic approach (ie as a language detective). It began with B phoning A, but not leaving a voice message.

A: The phones broke u wil have 2 send text that's al i can get x
B: Is that ian? I only recognise names not numbers. Alison
A: No u just tried 2 phone
B: But who are you? I an asap at texting
B: Just worked it out you are the bastard who nicked my stuff watch this space

(No reply)

A: sorry love but am a girl and this sim was 2nd hand I got it from stole of the market it nothing 2 do with me
B: get rid of it before you get done for it
A: Ok love thanx 4 lettin me no x

- 1 What can you tell about the participants – their relationship, status and roles? Do you think A is a girl? Why do you think this?
- 2 Does the footing change over the interaction?
- 3 Identify features of language use – lexis (words), grammar (sentence structures) or terms of address (names for people) – to support your points about the tenor of this text.
- 4 Read the two responses below. Which do you find more convincing? Why?

Theory A

5 The two people texting each other are not sure of the other person's identity, but they write in an informal style as if communicating with a friend. Person B seems older and better educated, as she uses more conventional spelling and punctuation, but doesn't understand predictive text. She signs off with her full name (more like a letter than a text) but never uses friendly signs like 'x'.
10 She is in control of the exchange, asking all the questions (who are you?) at the beginning and then giving commands (watch this space) towards the end. She changes from polite language use to using slang (nicked) and taboo words in order to frighten Person A. I think Person A is a young girl, as she uses a lot of typical abbreviations (2, u) and affectionate signs, such as the 'x' for a kiss and the term 'love' to address Person B. She sounds worried about the messages, and is very polite to Person B, apologising, explaining her situation and thanking her at the end. Her polite, friendly language is in contrast to the aggression of Person B.

Theory B

5 The two participants begin with an awkward exchange. Person B simply wants to be clear about who she is addressing. Person A does not respond in a natural way when he or she gets the first text message. The fact that he or she withholds their name suggests a guilty conscience, even though Person B has not mentioned anything about a stolen phone yet. The footing changes dramatically after the silence. Person B changes from polite friendliness to accusations, insults and threats. Her language use becomes less standard, using slang lexis and grammar (get done for it) and no longer punctuating sentences. Under the tough exterior there is probably a bit of fear, otherwise why would she offer the helpful advice to 'get rid of it'? I think Person A is a young male; even though 'x' might be more common for females, the way he uses the term of address 'love' sounds more like a male pattern of speech. He is not well-educated (eg non-standard verb form 'broke') and seems to have a Northern accent: the misspelling of 'stole' for 'market stall'.
10

What you have learned

- ✓ The context is the situation, which affects and explains the way language is used.
- ✓ There are four important aspects to context:
 - **Mode** –
 - first the channel: whether speech, writing or electronic communication
 - then other sub-types/genres, such as interviews, letters, emails
 - **Field** – the use of vocabulary related to subject areas, such as sport or warfare
 - **Function** – the reasons or aims of the language use, including overt and underlying purposes
 - **Tenor** – the relationship established between addresser and addressee.
- ✓ The register or formality is the variety or style of language used, appropriate to the context.
- ✓ You should use the idea of scales, ranging from the most formal to the least formal.
- ✓ You can use the formality scales to analyse the connections between context and text more precisely.

Key frameworks and levels

One important aspect of your approach to analysis of texts is to consider all the relevant contextual factors. 'Looking at context', explored four important aspects: mode, field, function and **audience**, including some analysis of the text. This forms part of your 'linguistic method'. The other essential ingredient is the ability to focus on the language of the text. Text and context are two sides of the same coin, so it was impossible to discuss context without looking at some language features. You have already used the terms in the margin boxes in text analysis. Now this part of the book provides you with a more complete toolkit for analysing the key **frameworks and levels** of language.

'Key frameworks and levels' is quite a daunting piece of jargon, but this is what **linguists** call 'the important bits' of language.

What **constitutes** (makes up or forms) language? Is it just a matter of individual words or do we have to take into account the grammatical structures? Surely the sounds can have an influence if language is spoken, or the appearance if it is written down?

Remember the diagram at the beginning of the book? It represented the various levels of language, building up towards grammar (sentences) and discourse (texts). Let's begin at the base, with the smallest elements: graphology and phonology.

Graphology

You will know the words 'photograph', 'graphics' and even 'graphology' (in the popular sense of the study of handwriting). In language study, a 'grapheme' is the smallest distinctive unit in the writing system of a language (which most people call a letter or symbol). Graphology is the study of the visual aspects of written language, such as spelling, punctuation marks, fonts, layout and logos.

Activity 23

Note all the language texts around you in the classroom, or that you encounter in a typical day.

- 1 In which genres is graphology a 'vitally important part'? Think of examples where the artist's or designer's role is as important as the writer's.
- 2 Which examples of language use do not rely so much on their visual presentation?
- 3 Can you make a general statement about the types (audiences, functions, etc) of language use in which the visual aspect is a key constituent?

Most people would agree that visual impact is a key constituent for young readers. But it is more widely used than that. Visuals are used to attract attention to vital information and also for the purposes of selling. Or do you feel that *all* contemporary readers need attractive visual presentation in order to read anything? If you look at texts written at least 50 years ago, you will immediately notice a difference in the appearance of the language: the font size is generally smaller, the pages more dense with print. Some people suggest one reason is that modern texts have more competition: there is far more printed material around us, as well as competition for our attention from other media, such as radio, television, cinema and the internet.

Key term

key level key framework

lexis and semantics

semantic field, field-specific lexis, jargon, slang, colloquial, terms of address

grammar

sentence structures: declarative, interrogative, imperative, tag question, ellipsis, minor sentence, active voice, passive voice

word classes and functions: pronouns, deixis, nominalisation, intensifier

discourse

backchannel behaviour, marker of sympathetic circularity, filler, filled pause, modal expression, discourse marker, addresser–addressee relationship, footing

Writing about language

For English Language A Level, you only need to have a basic understanding of the visual choices and effects. Do not spend too much time describing the visual appearance of texts in the exam. You will gain marks for understanding the significant points, then moving on to other aspects, such as lexis or grammar.

Remember that you may not always see what the *original* version of the text looks like (in this book or the exam); sometimes you may only see a typewritten representation. You can only comment on graphology if you can see the original.

You will notice that most advertisements gain their impact from both visuals and verbal language. Advertising companies often recruit English language graduates to create the written text: a highly successful campaign for Toyota cars, for example, was written by graduates from Nottingham University. A slightly different area of persuasive language is in campaigns for various causes.

Activity 24

Look at these examples from the Government's THINK! campaign.

**You're four times
it's hard to
more likely to
concentrate on
have a crash
two things
when you're on
at the same time.
a mobile phone.**

Switch off! Lose control Write off car Kill girlfriend OK



- 1 What does each plain text version lose?
- 2 Comment on the effective use of visuals in each advertisement.

Independent research

Use a search engine to find the visual, audio and print advertisements for THINK!, NSPCC, Amnesty International or any charity that interests you. How important are the visuals? Would the text alone still be effective?

Are abbreviations contagious?

The controversy around mobile phones is not just about the dangers of driving while using the phone. There is a lot of media comment about the effects of text message style on students' writing skills. The consensus seems to be that other writing skills (in particular, essays) are damaged by the use of SMS, because the use of abbreviations carries over from one mode to the other. There is similar concern about the language used in chatrooms and on instant messaging services. Is this concern justified or are the facts exaggerated to make a better story? The following activities explore the use of abbreviations.

Activity 25

- 1 See if you can understand this text easily.

WERV U BIN? PPL R starting to use SMS abbreviations all the time, OTOH not everyone understands what BCNU means. 2 SIT W/ SOM1 by MOB or email, SMS abbreviations R GR8. IOW, JIC SOM1 sends U a MSG like this, U need a COD 2 decipher it. HTH :-)

The text above comes from the website of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*. Judy Pearsall, Publishing Manager for English Dictionaries, said 'In Oxford Dictionaries we have been monitoring the phenomenal growth of text messaging with great attention: its influence is now such that we felt it was time to treat it as an integral part of English.'

- 2 Look at your outbox to see the way you spell words in text messages. Conduct a survey in your class and among other people you know.
- 3 What abbreviations do you use? Why? For each abbreviation:
 - a do you always spell the word like this? Why?
 - b do you spell the word like this in other types of written language?

Text translation

Where have you been? People are starting to use SMS abbreviations all the time. On the other hand not everyone understands what 'be seeing you' means. To stay in touch with someone by mobile or email SMS abbreviations are great. In other words, just in case someone sends you a message like this, you need a *Concise Oxford Dictionary* to decipher it. Hope this helps.

It is true that abbreviations allow the sender to be brief – this is useful for time, space and money. But is it true that people are using the number of new abbreviated words claimed in the media? Surveys among young people often come up with surprising results: many say they have never used or seen abbreviations like OTOH or even know what they mean.

Activity 26

Research the use of text-messaging abbreviations in your social group.

- 1 List the abbreviations you use in text messages and those used by your friends and family.
- 2 Look at a list of abbreviations.
Which do you recognise? Which do you regularly use?
- 3 Suggest reasons why some people use a lot of abbreviations and others very few.
- 4 Think of other writing situations where you would avoid abbreviations.

Independent research

- You can access research and debates about the effects of text message language on writing skills on many websites, eg www.literacytrust.org.uk. Do you think that new forms of electronic communication are harming young people's writing skills in more formal situations?
- BBC Radio 4 broadcasts regular programmes about language, often available as podcasts.

Many of the 'shock-horror' stories about language come from a lack of understanding about language variation according to context and over time. The media rarely invite language experts to discuss these issues, but there are notable exceptions. (See the Independent research box.)

Activity 27

Take it further

Read Chapter 1 in *The Language Web* by Jean Aitchison for a linguist's accessible discussion of language change and variety. Do you agree with her claim that 'the web of worries surrounding change turns out to be ... somewhat like the worries each new generation of parents has about its offspring'?

Why would an effective language user change their style of language when

- sending a text message to a friend?
- writing an essay for an exam?

Use the formality scales to demonstrate the contextual differences. Place each genre (SMS or ESS) on the line.

The first has been done as an example. Text messages are saved for a short time in the mobile phone memory. Exam papers are kept in an archive for several years.

ephemeral _____ _____ _____ permanent
private _____ public
interactive _____ monologue
socially-oriented _____ message-oriented
spontaneous _____ planned



What you have learned

- ✓ Graphology is the study of the visual elements of language.
- ✓ No technical terms and concepts were introduced. Why?

Phonology

Phonology is the study of the sounds of a language. The way language sounds is highly significant. It is much easier to disguise your identity in writing than in speaking.

It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman despise him.

From *Pygmalion*, George Bernard Shaw

Many people feel self-conscious about the way they sound. According to some research, people's greatest fear is of public speaking (death comes second!) Hence the metaphor used by live performers: 'I died out there.'

Although the examination gives you written versions of texts to analyse, you need to understand some aspects of the sounds of spoken language. The first is the relationship between the basic elements of speech and writing: **phonemes** and **graphemes** (letters).

Phonemes, sounds and letters

What is a phoneme? Is it just the technical jargon for a sound? And does each sound correspond to a letter of the alphabet? First the technical definition:

A **phoneme** is a distinctive sound with a function in a particular language.

Activity 28

Answer the questions in the next activity to see how phonemes relate to sounds and letters.

- 1 How many letters are there in the English alphabet?
- 2 How many different sounds can you make? More than this, many more?
- 3 How many phonemes do you think there are in the English language? The same number as letters, fewer, more?
- 4 What point does the following verse (and many more like it) make?

'Our Strange Lingo'

When the English tongue we speak,
Why is break not rhymed with freak?
Will you tell me why it's true
5 We say sew but likewise few?
And the maker of the verse,
Cannot rhyme his horse with worse?
Beard is not the same as heard
Cord is different from word.
10 Cow is cow but low is low
Shoe is never rhymed with foe.
Think of hose, dose, and lose
And think of goose and yet with choose
Think of comb, tomb and bomb,
15 Doll and roll or home and some.
Since pay is rhymed with say
Why not paid with said I pray?
Think of blood, food and good.
Mould is not pronounced like could.
20 Wherefore done, but gone and lone –
Is there any reason known?
To sum up all, it seems to me
Sound and letters don't agree.

In many languages, 'sounds and letters do agree', certainly much more than in English. When you study the history of English language, you will understand some of the causes of this inconsistency. For now, here is an introduction to some important concepts in phonology.

Key terms

grapheme phoneme

Independent research

Find out about the use of ITA, the Initial Teaching Alphabet, Why was this new system of spelling introduced? What are the objections to it?

There are 44 phonemes in the English language (only 43, if you speak with a northern accent). Of these, 24 are **consonant** sounds and 20 are **vowel** sounds. You can see immediately that there are not enough letters to represent each sound. This is a particular problem with vowels, where five letters have to stretch to 20 sounds. Some doubling up is one solution, for example, using combinations of the letter 'e' to represent three phonemes:

pet pert peat

and combinations of the letter 'o' to represent another three phonemes:

cop cope coop.

But there are no consistent rules to explain this. 'Pert' rhymes with 'curt' and 'coop' with 'group', 'threw' and 'through'. You probably know at least five different pronunciations of the letter combination 'ough'. Hence all the time and effort spent teaching spelling and various campaigns to introduce a simplified spelling system for English.

Activity 29

Group words from the list below according to vowel sound, not spelling. In 'Received pronunciation', the first 11 words in the list (the first column) each have a different vowel sound. However, if you speak with a northern accent, you may pronounce 'luck' and 'look' the same way, so you will have 10 groups, rather than 11.

dinner	took	care	late
hell	winner	fell	wine
cat	matter	duck	that
look	cook	like	mucky
luck	mare	hatter	tart
hall	groom	smart	pat
car	baked	hare	fall
room	duke	doom	far
fare	gin	Nell	puking
mate	made	gate	
nine	hat	twins	

Variation in pronunciation

One reason for not making any change to spelling is all the different accents of English. Across the regions of the UK, and around the English-speaking world, there are variations in pronunciation. Which accent do you associate with the official spelling of a word?

For example, is 'grass' to be spelt with a long /aaah/ sound to rhyme with 'farther' or with a short /a/ sound to rhyme with 'grab'? If you choose the first, it suggests that people using the other pronunciation are 'wrong', and it does not help them spell the word. (See Part 1, page 65 for more discussion on Received Pronunciation (RP) and regional varieties of English.) What happens if everyone gradually changes to the other way of pronouncing the word (because changes in pronunciation do happen over time)?

As well as regional accents, there are other variations in pronunciation. Think of words like 'yes' or 'really'. You pronounce each one in different ways, if you are speaking quickly or slowly emphasising it. Writers can use the alphabet to represent unusual pronunciations:

*yeah, yeh, yep, yup
reeli, rahli, rilli.*

Non-standard spelling is used in representations of the speaking voice in literature, for example, and also in magazines, emails, chatrooms and text messages. The aim is not to represent the sounds accurately, but to give a flavour of a particular accent. Here are some examples from a teenage magazine.

I just lurve Ker-azy! she's gonna be brilliant squeeze 'em bustin' for a wee

The term 'elision' refers to the omission of sounds. This often happens in connected speech: 'she is' becomes 'she's', 'going to' becomes 'gonna', 'squeeze them' becomes 'squeeze 'em'. You can see that the apostrophe indicates a missing sound. Words ending in '-ing' are often pronounced '-in'. Strictly speaking, no sound has been omitted here; it is a change in sound. If you say such words aloud (eg 'sing' and 'sin'), there is no hard 'g' pronounced at the end of the first word. You should feel, as well as hear, the different quality of sound. The first is nasal – try saying both with your nose pinched.

Key terms

consonant
vowel
elision

Activity 30

Read aloud these examples of non-standard spelling to hear the pronunciation suggested. Comment on any similarities between the two examples.

Example A extract from the poem 'Caribbean Woman' by Jean Binta Breeze

oh, man,
oh, man,
de caribbean woman

oh, man, oh, man, de caribbean woman

5 she doan afraid a de marchin beat
she doan care ho he timin sweet
she doan care if she kill a man
jus doan mash up she plan

caribbean woman does

10 cry
like rain sprinkle
early Friday mawnin
does

15 bawl like tundastorm
late satday night

Example B text messages sent to a teen magazine

JST LYK 2 TELL EVRY1 DAT U'R ALL SPECIAL NO MATTA WOT ANY1ELSE SAYS! GO READAZ!
FIONA XOX

I LOVE READIN UR MAG & WANT 2 THANK EVRY1 HU MAKES IT GREAT! ALSO, ALLY ZIEGLER,
U R A COOL CUZIN! LUV U X LOTTIE T X

It is interesting that some distinctive features of African-Caribbean accents are being used by teenagers in general: 'DAT ... MATTA ... READAZ ... CUZIN'.

Using IPA symbols

A vital tool for students of phonology is the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet). If you look in most dictionaries, you will see it used immediately after the word, within slashes, like this:

fuse /fju:z/ *noun* **1** a device for igniting a bomb. *verb* **2** to fit a fuse to.

You do not need to learn this alphabet by heart, but it helps to become familiar enough with the symbols to read words and understand the pronunciation represented.

Independent research

You can learn to read IPA on various websites, for example cla.calpoly.edu/~jrubby/phon/learnipa

p/eɪ/n	[pain]
ɔ:/l	[all]
eə	[air]
k/ɔ:/s	[course]
t/əu	[toe]
m/e/d/ɪ	[medal]
p/eə	[pear]
k/ɔ:/s/t	[cast]
r/aɪ/t	[right]
p/l/eɪ/s	[place]
g/æ/m/b/ə/l	[gamble]
ɔ:	[awe]
k/æ/r/ə/t	[carrot]
ɜ:n	[earn]
k/j/u:	[queue]
f/r/æ/n/k	[frank]
k/ɔ:/d	[chord]
s/e/n/t	[scent]
f/eə	[fair]
t/ɪə/z	[tears]
k/æ/n/v/ə/s	[canvas]
s/ɪ/m/b/ə/l	[symbol]
p/ɪə	[peer]
w/eɪ/v	[wave]
g/eɪ/t	[gate]
h/j/u:	[hue]
k/ɔ:	[core]

Activity 31

The term 'homophone' refers to words that sound the same, but have two or more different representations in writing, each with a separate meaning. For example 'bear' and 'bare'.

- 1 Read aloud each of the IPA transcriptions below.
- 2 Write down at least two words with each pronunciation. The first one has been done as an example.

Social attitudes to pronunciation

Some differences in pronunciation pass without comment. Others mark out the speaker as part of a particular social group. The concept of **prestige** refers to pronunciation considered to be superior. The opposite concept is that of **stigmatised** pronunciation.

Try substituting an /e/ sound (as in 'get') for the /a/ in the words 'happy' and 'marry'. If you use this pronunciation for 'Oh, Harry/Harriet, I'm so happy. Will you marry me?' it will sound like an upper-class character from a 1950s film. This used to be a prestige accent, but now it sounds ridiculous.

Now try dropping the /h/ in the words 'Harry' and 'happy' and you will sound more like a character from *East Enders*. Other characteristics of a Cockney accent are:

- substituting a **glottal stop** for /t/ so 'better' and 'brittle' become 'be'er' and 'bri'le'
- substituting a /w/ for /l/ so 'Phil Mitchell' becomes 'Phiw Mitchew'.

These variations in pronunciation used to be stigmatised. But attitudes are changing as a wider range of regional accents are heard on radio and television. Now there is a sort of **covert prestige** in using previously stigmatised forms.

Activity 32

Work in groups. Say the following words out loud.

- a How many different ways can each word be pronounced?
- b Do some pronunciations suggest a particular region or social status?

hanging apathetic garage either scone jewellery

Key terms

prestige
stigmatised
glottal stop
covert prestige

Stress, pitch and intonation

These aspects of spoken language are sometimes called 'supra-segmental' – quite apart from the individual phonemes. **Stress** refers to the amount of emphasis put on a syllable. Think of stress as a drum beat or rhythm, rather than extra volume. If each person in your group claps out the rhythm of their full name, you should be able to hear some different stress patterns.

Every polysyllabic word has a pattern. Can you hear that the main stress falls on a different syllable in each pair of place names?

'Manchester Ib'iza Liver'pool 'Birmingham Ma'jorca Horning'sea

Note: It is difficult to find three-syllable words with the main stress on the final syllable.

In connected speech, normally only the content words are stressed. This is shown with a mark like this ' in front of the word, for example:

I'll 'find a 'piece of 'cake.

Key terms

stress

schwa

Activity 33

- 1 Mark the words you stress when you say the following sentence in a natural speaking voice. You could try clapping to the beat of the sentence.

Mary is staying in Prague.

- 2 Now repeat the sentence, putting the main stress on the word in italics.

Mary *is* staying in Prague.

Mary is staying *in* Prague.

What is the change to meaning? If you think of the sentence as part of a conversation, imagine what the other speaker has just said.

If you put stress on one of the grammatical words, it is called emphatic or contrastive stress, because of the way the meaning changes – to emphasise or contradict something. In written English, contrastive stress is often represented by capital or bold letters. An apostrophe indicates elision on unstressed words or syllables:

Mary's staying.

Me 'n my friend.

The schwa sound

The most common phoneme in spoken English has its own name: the **schwa**. The symbol is an inverted letter 'ə'. The schwa sound occurs in nearly every polysyllabic word and is sometimes called a 'weak' vowel because it is used for most unstressed syllables, eg 'ə yə waitɪn tə see cə'mɪlə' (Are you waiting to see Camilla.) The other 'weak' vowel sound is the /ɪ/ in words like 'pin', 'still', 'fit'.

Activity 34

- 1 Say these words out loud. They all look like four-syllable words in written form.

comfortable vegetable jewellery

- 2 How many syllables do you pronounce if speaking naturally? Where does the main stress fall?
- 3 Now look up the words in a dictionary. Note which syllable is marked for stress (with ') and where the schwa or /ɪ/ sound occurs.

Writing about language

Although you will only be examined on written versions (transcripts) of spoken language, you should prepare for the exam by listening to English, as well as reading it.

Key terms

pitch
intonation

Pitch and intonation

Pitch and intonation are tricky to write about – and to test in exams – but are an essential aspect of meaning in spoken language. Here is a quick definition of each and a brief indication of effects.

Pitch refers to level – whether high or low. It is hard to represent pitch in written language, except in added descriptions, for example:

she muttered softly ...
her voice rising to a shriek ...

It can be very , however, in conveying underlying meanings. (See pages 86–90 on pragmatics – the study of what the speaker, rather than the sentence, means.)

Derren Brown (of Channel 4 fame) has this to say about what pitch can reveal:

Voices tend to be higher and louder than normal when we want to draw attention to what we are saying, and lower and quieter when we want to show withdrawal or distance from the issue. A person saying that he is not bothered by an issue may be lying if his voice pitch has risen.

Take it further

Use a search engine to look for discussion about 'Uptalk'.

Do you agree that rising intonation on statements is mainly used by young females and signals a lack of status?

Pitch also forms one physical difference between female and male voices: the latter being generally lower after the voice 'breaks' in adolescence. When you study language and gender, it is interesting to consider the attitudes towards the pitch of an individual's speech. Margaret Thatcher was advised to deepen her voice to convey more authority, for example.

Intonation refers to the tones, or tunes, over a whole utterance – whether rising or falling. This is also hard to represent in written language. A general principle is that a falling intonation signals a statement or command; a rising intonation signals a question. You may have noticed a recent phenomenon in spoken English, where people end statements on a rising tone, so that it sounds like a question. The term HRT, High Rising Intonation, has been invented to describe this. Try saying these – or any statements – ending on a rising intonation.

I really enjoyed that film.
I don't think that's a good idea.

Attitudes to this habit are mainly hostile, seeing it as something imported from abroad and taken up without thought by young people. Others suggest that it is a way of expressing yourself in a tentative manner, allowing others to contribute their opinion. Still others say that it is a mark of the unassertive language that keeps females from positions of power.

What you have learned

- ✓ Phonology is the study of the sounds of language.
- ✓ You should understand some key concepts in phonology: the distinction between phoneme and letter, consonant and vowel.
- ✓ If you are familiar with the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet), you will be able to read written representations of pronunciation: in dictionaries and textbooks. You should, at least, understand what the terms 'schwa' and 'glottal stop' refer to. This will help you understand some variations in pronunciation, such as regional dialects. This includes aspects such as stress, pitch and intonation.
- ✓ You should also be aware of social attitudes towards accents.

Morphology

Morphology is the study of word structure. You need to understand:

- the principles of word formation – the way words are put together
- the impact on formality – the effect on style of using particular types of words.

We barely notice word structure with familiar words, but it becomes clear with newly invented words. The website www.wordspy.com is a good place to start exploring new words as it gives a concise explanation of a word's formation plus examples of its use. Here are some examples:

- glamping glamour + camping
- ninja loan a loan to someone with No Income No Job or Assets
- Potterhead someone who is a big fan of the Harry Potter books.

From an early age, children intuitively understand the ways words are formed and create their own, for example 'killness' is a concise term for a terminal illness. You should know the terminology for this principle of word formation: a **blend**. It seems to be one of the most common ways of creating new words in the twenty-first century. More 'traditional' principles follow.

Derivation and borrowing

Let's begin with the words 'morphology' and 'morpheme'. They are each formed by the principle of **derivation**: taking a basic unit and adding extra parts.

Activity 35

- 1 List other words including 'morph' or 'ology' or 'eme', for example 'metamorphosis'.
- 2 Does this give you enough information to work out the meaning?
- 3 Use a dictionary to find out the origin of each word. (It usually comes after the definition.)
- 4 Look up the meaning of '-eme' and 'meta-' in any concise dictionary.

Word structure is straightforward. The smallest meaningful unit of language is a **morpheme**. Every word must have at least one morpheme – the **root** of the word. Many root words in English are **borrowed** from other languages. Many are from Latin and Greek, but, for example, 'score' is a loan word from Old Norse and 'zombie' is from Kongo, a language spoken in the Congo. (**Etymology** is the study of word origins.) If you go to the webpage <http://www.childrensuniversity.manchester.ac.uk/interactives/languages/words/borrowing/> you can test out your awareness of the origins of many English words. The optional extras are **prefixes** or **suffixes** (added to the beginning or end of words). Shakespeare invented these words from the existing root words 'heart' and 'meditate':

- dishearten dis + heart + en
- premeditated pre + meditate + (e)d.

Neologisms

From these three basic types of morphemes (root, prefix and suffix), the potential combinations are infinite. In fact, **neologisms** (new words) are created all the time. It is not necessary to provide definitions of new words. Their meaning can be worked out from the structure of the word and its use in context.

Key terms

blend	borrowed
derivation	etymology
morpheme	prefix
neologism	suffix
root	

Independent research

Use a search engine to find more examples of Shakespeare's new words, eg www.nosweatshakespeare.com. How many are still in common use today?

Take it further

Find out more about the origins of English, eg on www.ruf.rice.edu/~kemmer/Words/loanwords. Why do you think there are so many words from Latin and French, compared with borrowings from African or Asian countries?

Activity 36

- 1 List the existing words that have 'chew' as the root, for example 'chewable'.
- 2 Invent some new words with 'chew' as the root.
- 3 See if another person can supply the definition for each new word. For example, 'mischew' might be when you bite the inside of your cheek by mistake and 'chewitis' a painful condition when you keep biting the inside of your cheek by mistake.

Independent research

Access to a good dictionary is vital for morphology. The most complete dictionary is the OED, which runs to 20 volumes.

Note: If your school or college does not have a subscription to the online version, you can get access at home via your local library card.

You can see from the above activity that the principles of word formation are intuitively understood. In theory, anyone can invent a new word.

But there are other processes before the word becomes an accepted part of the language. Some new words disappear as quickly as they appear. A word needs to be used consistently for a while by a variety of people, in writing as well as speaking. A final mark of approval is an entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED).

The status of new words

Who decides which words go in a dictionary? It is rather like a decision by a committee. A number of people must report evidence of its use to the editors of the dictionary. **A few years ago, there was an attempt to get members of the public involved in this process through an online petition for the word 'bouncebackability' to be included in the dictionary.**

Activity 37

- 1 Analyse the formation of the word 'bouncebackability'.
- 2 Provide a definition for it.
- 3 Find examples of its use, using a search engine.
- 4 Comment on its level of formality – who uses it, where, about what.

The OED and other dictionaries have now accepted **bouncebackability** as a word. *Macmillan English Dictionary* website www.macmillandictionary.com provides a definition and two examples of its use in *The Guardian* and *The Scotsman* newspapers in 2004. It has been used, not only on sports pages, but also in political comment, for example, about Michael Howard when he was leader of the Conservative Party.

Like many new words in their youth, 'bouncebackability' is considered to be **colloquial**, if not **slang**. These terms indicate that the word conveys an informal tone. Most dictionaries indicate their judgement about the level of formality. Remember, this is not a fixed decision. It is important to notice the date of your dictionary and try to use an up-to-date one.

Key terms

colloquial
compounding
slang

Compounding

Another common principle of word formation is **compounding**. The example in Activity 37 joined two root words together, before adding some suffixes: 'bounce' + 'back'. Many compound words are so familiar that you may not notice their structure, for example, 'railway', 'homework', 'grandmother', etc.

Activity 38

- 1 List all the compound words in the text below.
- 2 Note the ones that also include some derivation.
- 3 Comment on the levels of formality.

Key terms

abbreviation

Standard English

No, Dubai doesn't do it for me. If its 8-lane-mega-highways, multi-storey buildings and state-of-the-art shopping malls weren't enough, the city exists in a state of construction-frenzy to replace the natural world with its artificial mirror-image. There's the world's largest indoor ski-slope, a chill-out bar entirely formed from ice, a giant wave-cum-hotel, beside its superior 7-star rival in the shape of a sailing-boat. Dubai's look-at-me-I'm-so-tall building remains in limbo, as more and more floors have to be added to top the latest competitor.

Abbreviations

Abbreviation is common in many areas of language use (people's names, for example), perhaps because we are always looking for shortcuts. Again, you need to consider the influence of time on attitudes to these shortened forms. When it first happens, the effect is informal, but this can wear off as people forget there was ever a full version. Consider the words 'fridge', 'vet', 'bus', 'pram'. All are abbreviations of the original word, but are now perfectly acceptable as **Standard English**.

Some abbreviations, such as 'sis', 'hubby', 'pic', however, are *only* used in informal situations or speaking, or writing for a non-serious purpose, between friends. Others like 'pop', 'mic' (for microphone), 'fan' (from fanatic) fall somewhere between the two extremes. Creating new abbreviations creates the most informal tone. For example, 'Soz, I apologe' was used as a deliberately humorous, non-sincere apology between friends.

Activity 39

Look at the following list of words taken from the first few pages of a teen magazine.

- 1 Note the formation of each word (borrowing, compound, derivation, abbreviation).
- 2 Rate the level of formality of each word on a scale of 1 to 10. Look in a recent dictionary to see if each word is listed and note any comments about its formation and level of formality or use the spellcheck tool to see if each word is accepted by the dictionary on your computer.
- 3 Do abbreviations tend to be more informal than other word structures?

1 fab	10 biopic	19 boy-obsessed	28 hassle	38 earth-friendly
2 shortlisted	11 micro-miniskirts	20 full-on	29 hippies	39 cutting-edge
3 gorge (boys)	12 celeb	21 hottie	30 fair-trade	40 anti-sickness (medication)
4 pint-sized	13 bra	22 wakeboarding	31 planet-friendly	41 stepdad
5 goalie	14 bimbos	23 showbiz	32 eco-friendly	
6 'mare	15 mag	24 sleepover	33 sweatshops	
7 bandmate	16 fitties	25 diva	34 recycling	
8 big bro	17 hols	26 down-to-earth	35 must-haves	
9 playlist	18 jetting off	27 fave	36 big-brand	

- 4 Words 29–38 came from an article about fashion that does not harm the environment. Words 39 and 40 were the only examples of neologisms in a real-life story about leukaemia. Do you think the field (subject matter of the articles) affects the level of formality in the choice of words?

Key terms

onomatopoeia

acronym

word-class

Onomatopoeia and the rest

Some theories about the origins of language suggest that the very first words were based on **onomatopoeia**. Perhaps the words 'push' and 'pull' imitated the action they referred to and came about because sign language was no longer possible, when hands were occupied. Most words have no relationship to their meaning, but a few are imitative. These examples also come from a teen magazine. Can you add more?

splurge smooch yummy

Blends combine two existing words, for example, 'motel' from 'motor' + 'hotel' and 'skurfing' from 'ski' + 'surfing'. This is a particularly common trend in word formation nowadays. Because of this – and the element of playfulness – the stylistic effect is modern and humorous.

Acronyms are also becoming a popular method of word formation, often to name new inventions, groups or organisations, such as BASIC (Beginners All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code) and WASP (white Anglo-Saxon protestant). If it is simply a sequence of initial letters like MRSA (methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus, a notorious cause of infections in hospitals), it is called an abbreviation, or alphabetism.

Sometimes new words are created without making any changes to the form of an existing word. Instead, the word is used for a different function. The most common change of **word-class** is from noun to verb. This is commonly regarded as an 'Americanism', although it has been done for centuries without comment. (The verbs 'to mine' and 'to waltz' almost certainly began life as nouns.) However, recent examples tend to be regarded as pretentious 'management-speak'. For example, the use of 'passport' and 'ring-fence' as verbs in this statement by David Blunkett:

If authorities passport on the additional resources and you then ring-fence, the additional £2000 uplift will be available on a ring-fenced basis.

You might also have noticed the opposite trend – using a verb as a noun in 'uplift' – and also turning a noun into an adjective in 'ring-fenced'.

Writing about language

Try to use precise terminology. For example, notice how the comments below on the sentence 'I couldn't be in it appazza' in the editor's letter in Sugar Lad Mag become more focused.

- The writer does not use a proper word.
- The writer uses a made-up word.
- The writer uses a slang word.
- The writer uses a neologism.
- The word is formed by abbreviation from 'apparently'.
- The abbreviation adds the contemporary suffix 'azza', often used to shorten people's names as in *Gazza*.

In longer questions, always add a comment explaining the effect of the feature you have identified, eg:

This word is non-standard and does not occur in any mainstream language use. This type of ultra-modern slang creates a youthful style appropriate for the publication and its intended audience.

What you have learned

- ✓ Morphology is the study of word formation. You have learned the technical terms for the units that make up words: morpheme, prefix, root, suffix.
- ✓ You have learned some concepts for discussing the origins and forms of words: etymology, neologism, borrowing, compounding, abbreviation, onomatopoeia, blend, acronym.
- ✓ You have used some concepts for discussing the status of (and attitudes to) words: Standard English, colloquial, slang.

Lexis and semantics

Lexis comes from the Greek, meaning 'word', and is a more technical term for vocabulary. In the part on morphology, you explored the origins of words, their formation and the impact on formality. The next part on grammar looks at the functions of different word classes in sentence structures. This leaves the most significant thing about the vocabulary of a language:

Lexis is the most important means we have of expressing our ideas and experience.

(*A Dictionary of Stylistics*, K. Wales)

So – not before time, perhaps – this part of the book focuses on meaning. It will use three key concepts to organise useful terms for the analysis of words and meanings: **literal**, **associative** and **figurative**.

Literal meanings

Semantics is the study of the relationship between words and meaning. In some cases, this relationship is straightforward: x word = y thing. The easiest way of explaining what the word 'cup' means is to point to a cup. It is obviously more difficult with abstract nouns such as 'love'; adjectives like 'beautiful', which are relative or evaluative; and verbs used in an abstract sense, for example, 'drive me crazy'.

A dictionary definition provides (or attempts to provide) the **denotation** of a word – the thing it refer to. It may include **synonyms** (meaning the same) or **antonyms** (meaning the opposite). For example, the dictionary explains the meaning of 'baby' as a very young child, or infant, especially one not able to walk. You could add an antonym: not an adult, not a grown-up. Dictionaries often provide several definitions, showing the ways the literal meaning is extended: 'baby' also means excessively childish, someone regarded with affection, a special achievement, or concern (eg 'that project is my baby').

Activity 40

- 1 Explain the meaning of these words: home, lady, clever, win.
- 2 What methods did you use?
- 3 Were some harder to explain than others? Why?

You probably found it was difficult to find exact synonyms. The related words (clever, intelligent, brainy, etc) do not have exactly the same meaning. A 'lady' is not exactly the same as a 'woman' or a 'female'. If you thought of using an antonym, 'gentleman' is not always used as the exact opposite of 'lady'. In tennis, there is a ladies' championship and a corresponding men's, not gentlemen's, championship.

Associative meanings

The saying 'a house is not a home' refers to the emotional meanings associated with the word 'home'. The term **connotation** is familiar from GCSE study and refers to associative shades of meanings. Let's look at some ways that words acquire these shades of meaning.

For example, in recent years, politicians have talked about 'winning the war on asylum'. Is there anything odd about this combination of words? In *A Dictionary of Stylistics* by K. Wales, the term **collocation** (literally meaning 'located together') refers to 'the habitual or expected co-occurrence of words'. A computer corpus can provide the words that often occur before and after each individual word or you can use your memory. For example, the words collocated with the word 'war' are:

wage	war	against	(name of country)
win	<u>war</u>	on	drugs/crime/want/famine
lose	<u>war</u>	with	(name of country)

Now let's look at the collocation of the word 'war' with 'asylum'. The entry in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1995) for 'asylum' gives its origin as:

So, the two words together mean:

war	on	asylum
attack	on	a place of safety from attack

Middle English via Latin from Greek *asulon* 'refuge' (as in A-, *sulon* 'right of seizure')

Key terms

literal meaning
associative meaning
figurative meaning
denotation
synonym
antonym
connotation
collocation

Key terms

figurative
metaphor

Writing about language

When you refer to the connotations of lexis be more precise than 'it is positive/negative' and explore the collocations of the word, for example:

The word 'asylum' has begun to acquire connotations of threat, rather than its literal meaning of a refuge, where a person can be safe. This is because of its association first with ideas of madness (a mental asylum) and more recently with fears about the number of people escaping to Britain from foreign countries. The phrase 'asylum seeker' is often collocated with words signifying danger or large numbers, eg 'hordes of/the threat of asylum seekers'.

Activity 4 I

- 1 List other collocations of the word 'asylum' (from memory or using a search engine).
- 2 Does the connotation of 'asylum' change as the collocation changes?

Sometimes the emotive meanings of words have a stronger impact than the literal sense. The term 'asylum seekers' has gained dangerous undertones.

Figurative meanings

As well as having associative meanings, words can also be used in a **figurative** way. This term refers to the extension of meaning from a literal to a metaphorical sense. Our five physical senses are often used in abstract, figurative ways, for example:

I see your point.
She sounded a bit off to me.
That left a sour taste in my mouth.
It touched a nerve.
I smell a rat.

Metaphors for love include ideas of fire, a journey, madness, etc. These few examples only scratch the surface. Once you are on the lookout for metaphors, they will pop up all over the place. The metaphors a writer or speaker uses can reveal underlying attitudes or assumptions. In the 1950s, for example, language about homosexuality used metaphors of sickness and disease, suggesting it could be 'caught' and 'cured'. More positively, banks often use gardening metaphors to encourage people to believe that money really can 'grow'. You can see that the concepts of figurative and associative language are linked.

Word origins

The part on morphology (pages 41–44) touched on the fact that English words are derived from a variety of language sources. You will find information about the source of a word at the end of its dictionary definition, often in square brackets. You will study the history of the language in more detail at A2. For AS, you need awareness of some significant aspects of word origins.

Anglo-Saxon formed the basis of Old English and those words still used in Modern English tend to be for basic concepts like food, family, shelter, the natural world, etc. Latin is also an important source of many English words, some coming into the English language via Old French. Other significant sources are Old Norse and Greek. In this way, English differs from Romance languages (such as French, Spanish, Italian), which are predominantly derived from a single source – Latin. Because of the variety of influences, English has a particularly large vocabulary, often including synonyms from different language sources, although such words each have slightly different collocations, connotations and levels of formality.

Independent research

- Read the origin of these ideas about the influence of metaphors in *Metaphors We Live By* by G Lakoff and M Johnson (University of Chicago Press, 1980).

Activity

- 1 Use a dictionary to look up the language origin of the following words.
kingly royal regal ill murder homicide smell scent perfume odour
- 2 Compare the usual collocations of each word.
- 3 Comment on the connotations and level of formality.

Activity 43

Read the following extract from an open letter from Ian Brady to the home secretary, Jack Straw.

Myra and I once loved each other. We were a unified force, not two conflicting entities. The relationship was not based on the delusional concept of folie à deux, but on a conscious/subconscious emotional and psychological affinity. She regarded periodic homicide as rituals of reciprocal innervation, marriage ceremonies theoretically binding us ever closer.

5 As the records show, before we met my criminal activities had been primarily mercenary. Afterwards, a duality of motivation developed. Existential philosophy melded with the spirituality of death and became predominant. We experimented with the concept of total possibility. Instead of the requisite Lady Macbeth, I got Messalina. Apart, our futures would have taken radically divergent courses

- 1 Use a dictionary to find out the meaning of the words the writer uses. Also notice their etymology (originally from Old English, or Middle English from French, Latin or Greek).
- 2 Try to express the writer's point in Plain English.
- 3 What different effect does the writer's choice of lexis convey?

Activity 44

Read the two responses below to the following question about the letter in Activity 43: Comment on the style of this text. What are the writer's purposes and how does he try to achieve this? Which is the more revealing analysis?

Perhaps you noticed that the letter writer uses relatively simple sentence structures in contrast to the complex lexis.

Response A

5 The use of Latinate lexis (reciprocal innervation) creates a high register. Although the writer uses the word 'homicide', it is not clear that he is referring to his own crimes. His style is highly educated, using jargon from the field of psychology and literature, perhaps because he has a university degree. He uses the style of a very intelligent lawyer (as the records show), as he is trying to defend himself (before we met my criminal activities had been primarily mercenary).

Response B

5 The writer uses language as a smokescreen to disguise the terrible reality of his actions. Instead of saying 'I was a petty thief' he chooses Latinate lexis: 'my criminal activities had been primarily mercenary'. He effectively 'blinds the reader with science' by choosing lexis from a number of academic fields. The phrase 'periodic homicide' has a bland, abstract effect compared with the plain alternative: 'we often killed children'. He creates a distant tenor between himself and the reader, suggesting that he is more intelligent. The only simple sentence is the first one: 'Myra and I once loved each other.' He seems to suggest a connection between love and killing, as there is a strong semantic field of emotions (relationship, marriage) throughout. He also suggests positive connotations for killing in the collocation between 'spirituality of death'.

What you have learned

- ✓ Semantics is the study of meanings.
- ✓ You should remember the concept of semantic field.
- ✓ You can organise the terms and concepts into three types of relationship between words and meanings:

Literal	Associative	Figurative
denotation	connotation	metaphor
synonym	collocation	
antonym		

Grammar

What is grammar – a, b or c?

- a the most scary part of the course
- b essential for good manners
- c the way we make sentences.

Although the last definition sounds too simple to be true, it is the closest to an accurate definition, with its connotation of 'building'. Sometimes called 'syntax', grammar is the study of forms and structures within sentences, while discourse looks at structures bigger than a sentence.

A **prescriptive** approach lays down the rules for 'correct grammar'. A **descriptive** approach describes in a neutral way the grammar that is in use. Some people do associate grammar with good manners. A prescriptive approach works like a guide to etiquette: it explains the rules for language behaviour at a certain point in society. This is the attitude to language use that you will often hear in 'sound-bites' in the media, whether it is Prince Charles bemoaning the poor English skills of his workers or the Conservative politician Norman Tebbit claiming a connection between loss of grammar and increasing crime rates!

Taking a descriptive approach

Although you need to understand about the strong feelings people have about language, a descriptive approach is the one used by linguists and on the A level English Language course. Some books attempt to provide a full account of all the grammatical forms and structures of English, and they run to hundreds of pages. You do not need to *know* everything about the grammar of English, but you should be *able to work out* anything you need. You can do this if you have an intuitive understanding of the basic principles of structure and access to a good reference book. First apply your intuitive knowledge of the English language in this next activity and explore your own attitudes to grammar, making sense and good manners.

Key terms

prescriptive
descriptive

Activity 45

- 1 Read the sentences below.
 - a Which do you think are completely ungrammatical?
 - b Which ones are you unsure about?
- 2 Explain your reasons. Which ones are to do with 'manners' and which are about making 'sense'?
 - Flatpacks: hate you just don't them.
 - You've gotta come 'ere quick.
 - That's the sort of person I can never get on with.
 - Softly flows the river Don.
 - Pupils will now take less exams at A Level.
 - Fat people eats accumulates.
 - No worst there is none.
 - If anyone is interested in this job, they should apply in writing.
 - And our task is to boldly go where no man has been before.

Take it further

Find out about the basis for some of the rules of 'grammar etiquette', such as:

- You must never split an infinitive.
- Do not end a sentence with a preposition.
- Never use the plural pronoun, 'they'; to refer to a singular antecedent.

Either use a search engine or read the short book *Who Cares about English Usage?* by David Crystal (Penguin, 1984).

A grammar survival kit

There is not space in this part to teach you everything you ever wanted to know about grammar. Instead, it will demonstrate some useful ways of organising and using your knowledge. It is like the joke definition of 'good taste': a person who knows how to play the accordion, but chooses not to. You cannot use every grammatical term and concept when you analyse a text. There may not be any examples of that feature. Or, if they are present, there may not be anything interesting to say about them. You must use your judgement and make choices for each particular example of language use. However, you can do some initial planning and decide on a shortlist of the most useful terms and concepts. To some extent, this will be a matter of personal choice, but some aspects of grammar stand out as particularly significant for style.

Activity 46

Here is one example of a grammar survival kit, listing some key terms.

Short of time and space in your brain? Never travel without these essentials.

Word level

pronoun:	personal versus impersonal
verb:	modal auxiliary
noun/verb:	nominalisation
determiner etc:	deixis
adverb:	intensifier
	discourse marker
	hedging

Phrase level

verb phrase:	passive voice (versus active)
noun phrase:	pre- and post-modification

Clause level

adverbial:	movable, optional
------------	-------------------

Sentence level

subordinate clause:	
ellipsis/minor sentence:	
interrogative:	
imperative:	
negative:	

- 1 Which terms are already familiar to you?
- 2 Cut the survival kit down even further to five essential items.
- 3 Give reasons for your choice and compare it with another person's.

Writing about language

When you analyse texts, avoid the common fault of mentioning everything you know. Only refer to the significant features. This means that you have to add a comment explaining why you picked out that particular feature. Compare, for example, the value of these two comments on my written introduction.

- 1 *The writer uses a formal style with a mixture of compound and complex sentence structures. There are many verbs, eg 'demonstrate'.*
- 2 *The function of the introduction is to make a clear, persuasive point. The writer gives advice by using the verbs: will, may, must. It moves from the negative 'you cannot' to the positive 'you can'.*

Look back at the page references to remind yourself of the grammar terms already introduced. This part will show each of the new terms in action, but first compare your streamlined survival kit with my top five grammar concepts. I would not travel without:

pronoun modal auxiliary adverb ellipsis interrogative

The only one not already introduced in this book is the modal auxiliary. The term is a bit of a mouthful, but it is easy to identify modal verbs and interesting to analyse their subtle effects.

Modal auxiliary verbs

The part on mode introduced the term ‘modal expressions’ for words and phrases used to express the speaker’s attitude to what they is saying, for example ‘Honestly, I really don’t believe that.’ There are about 10 **modal auxiliary verbs** that have a similar function – they add meaning to, or modify, other verbs and so must be used in combination with a main verb.

Modal auxiliary verbs		+ Main verbs
Present	Past	+ stay/go, etc
can	could	
may	might	
shall	should	
will	would	
ought to		
must		
have to		

So, it is easy to learn the list, but what do modal verbs *do*? They perform three or four slightly different, but overlapping functions.

The pairings above indicate **present** and **past tense** forms, for example:

‘I could stand on my head when I was young. I can’t do it now.’

The example above shows one of the meanings modal verbs express: the degree of ability and possibility. Another person might join in with their opinion:

‘You could do it; you should try.’

And then the original speaker might say:

‘Mm, I might ... No, I will, I must do it.’

As you see from these examples, modal verbs can also indicate degrees of obligation or necessity. The shades of meaning are not absolutely clear: is it a stronger obligation to say ‘you should go’ or ‘you ought to go’?

Modal verbs allow us to talk about hypothetical situations. Sometimes people use the term ‘conditional’ to describe the function. Consider the possible replies to the question: ‘What will you do, if there is a bus strike tomorrow?’ You could use modal verbs to express degrees of probability and certainty: I might ..., I could ..., I will ...

Yet another role of modal verbs is to express degrees of politeness and formality. You may (or might?) remember a teacher telling you, ‘Don’t say “can I”, say “may I leave the room”.’

Take it further

Read *New Labour, New Language*, Fairclough (Routledge, 2000), pages 6–8. Notice that this highly sophisticated analysis of political language does not use any concepts outside the survival kit. Which terms does the writer use?

Key terms

modal auxiliary verb
present tense
past tense

Activity 47

- 1 Search online for Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech. Look at the section that begins 'But there is something that I must say to my people...' and finishes 'we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.' (You can watch a video recording and read the full transcript on various websites, such as <http://www.holidays.net/mlk/speech.htm>)
- 2 Think about the full context of his speech – the historical situation in the USA, his purposes, his audience – before analysing the language.
- 3 Note the range of modal auxiliary verbs he uses. What is the effect?
- 4 What pronouns does he use – to address his audience, to refer to himself and other people? What is the effect?
- 5 Note his use of negatives. Does this create a negative effect?

On page 50, you saw the grammar survival kit set out on different levels, building up from single words to whole sentences. It is generally easier to notice words and sentences. Now let's look at the stages in between – phrases and clauses – taking just one example from each.

Noun phrases

The first words a young child learns are usually nouns: Mummy, Daddy, teddy, juice, and so on. The next step involves some grammar – building structures by combining single words into meaningful groups. Some grammar books use the terms 'noun groups' or 'verb groups' instead of the more traditional term used here – **phrase**.

In English, the usual pattern for noun phrases involves **premodification** – putting words before the noun. You can see the types of words used in this way from these examples of a child's language use:

my daddy orange juice big teddy.

Post-modification, as the name suggests, builds onto the end of the structure, rather than the beginning. In languages like French, you can simply add the same sort of single words as are used before the noun (eg teddy big) but this does not sound 'grammatical' in English. This next example shows the way a 4-year-old child intuitively knows how to construct a complex noun phrase from the single word, 'lion' (even if it is not elegant):

Do you mean the lion what is on the seat what goes on the toilet what you are not big enough to sit on your own?

A useful technique for spotting where a noun phrase begins and ends is 'substitution'. Try using a pronoun, such as 'it' or 'that', instead. What did it replace? That is your noun phrase.

Do you mean that [the lion what is on the seat what goes on the toilet what you are not big enough to sit on your own]?

You will see from that example that post-modification of noun phrases often results in a complex style. That is because the speaker/writer needs to express something in precise detail. Complex noun phrases are a common feature of formal styles of writing, such as technical reports and academic essays. It needs to be handled well, however, as the style can easily become unwieldy.

Key terms

phrase

premodification

post-modification

Activity 48

- 1 The Campaign for Plain English selected one of the texts below for a Gobbledygook award. Which one do you think it was?
- 2 Find one noun phrase from each text and identify the main noun inside it.

The GENIUS project (based at the University of Reading)

The project is structured around multifaceted incremental work plan combining novel content design based on new pedagogical paradigms blended with the e-learning environments to facilitate hybrid mode of delivery. This is combined with series of educational experiments on the target learner groups with possibilities to adjust the approach and disseminate the interim and final results.

Introduction to *The Feminist Critique of Language*, edited by Deborah Cameron (1998)

I have structured this volume around three main themes: the theme of silence and exclusion, which also raises the question of women finding an authentic voice in which to speak and write; the theme of representation, in which the cultural meaning of gender is constructed and contested, and the theme of how and to what end we become gendered through our linguistic behaviour.

Key terms

clause

adverbial

hedge

Clauses and adverbials

Building up from phrases, you come to the next level of **clause** structure. You may be familiar with the terms 'subject', 'verb' and 'object'. Every clause must have at least a subject and a verb, for example: Pigs / may fly. Many clauses add on an object: The children / are flying / brightly coloured kites.

Adverbials are worth looking at closely because they are optional extras. The other interesting way that adverbials function is that they are movable. These two factors provide you with tests for identifying the adverbial part of structures. If you think something might be an adverbial, try deleting it (Does the structure remain intact?) or try moving it to another part of the structure (Is that possible?).

Now for the reason adverbials are so fascinating. The familiar chant is 'adverbs describe how, when and where the verb happened'. This is only their 'daytime' job. To continue with that metaphor, adverbs (and adverbial phrases and adverbial clauses) have all sorts of 'undercover' functions. One is to reveal the attitude of the writer/speaker to what they are saying:

The driver had supposedly been drinking.

According to the barman, the driver had been drinking.

Some adverbs function as **hedges** to soften the force of a statement. Other can intensify the force of a statement:

I only wanted to find out how much it cost.

I really wanted to find out how much it cost.

You saw on page 19 that some adverbials (including single adverbs, adverb phrases and adverbial clauses) function as discourse markers, indicating changes of topic:

Now, I want to move on to discourse.

For the final level of language analysis, let's look at discourse.

Moving on to the final point then, I want to look at discourse.

There is obviously (adverb to reassure) a lot more you can learn about grammar. Remember that you can produce a revealing analysis using a limited 'palette' of terms. As with all aspects of English study, 'It's not about how much you have, but what you do with what you've got' (song lyrics by Si Kahn).

What you have learned

- ✓ Grammar is the study of structures within sentences.
- ✓ You can think of the structure as a hierarchy of levels, building up from individual words:
 - one or more words combine to make a phrase
 - one or more phrases combine to make a clause
 - one or more clauses combine to make a sentence.
- ✓ There are so many grammatical terms and concepts, you need to be selective. Gradually build up a toolkit of useful terms for each level of structure. The grammar survival kit on page 50 provides you with a starting point.

Key terms

text structure/genre
conventions
term of address
greeting
salutation

Discourse

Discourse is, perhaps, the most fascinating area of language study. The only disadvantage is that people use the term in slightly different ways. *The Dictionary of Stylistics*, Wales, actually provides 10 definitions, but these can be simplified into three main aspects.

Discourse is the study of the:

- 1 whole text in context, which includes aspects such as mode, function and addresser–addressee relationship
- 2 overall structure of written texts and spoken conversations
- 3 way that texts transmit an underlying ideology.

Definition 1 summarises the overall approach of A-level English Language study. This guide follows the important principle of considering any text in its full context. Part 2, 'Looking a context' introduced the concepts of mode, field, function and **audience**. If you prefer to avoid confusion and to use a different term, this aspect of discourse is the same as register or formality. It is not always possible to include the *whole* text – for reasons of space – but you should always consider where an extract came from.

Now let's look in more detail at Definition 2. To avoid confusion, you could refer to this aspect of discourse as **text structure** or **genre conventions**.

Overall structure of written texts

The best way to begin analysing overall structure is to look at the way texts begin and end. Many genres follow recognisable conventions. Traditional stories begin 'Once upon a time ...' and end '... they lived happily ever after.' Newspapers put the most important news on the front page and sports reports on the back page.

The purpose and audience of the text can also affect the overall structure. Note the variety of **terms of address, greetings** (at the beginning) and **salutations** (at the end) used in interactive texts, such as letters, emails, text messages, etc.

Activity 49

- 1 Comment on the following examples of terms of address, greetings and salutations, and add some of your own.

Example A

Hello darling woman!
...
big hugs
Kath x

Example B

Dear Friend and Admirer
...
Hope in all other respects you are well. Love and cheers,
R and H and Des

- 2 What do these terms of address, greetings and salutations suggest about the context?
 - a What is the mode or genre?
 - b What is the relationship between writer and reader?
 - c Is there any clue about the field and function?
 - d What factors might explain the actual context (see below)?

The mode is straightforward, but the style of the texts may mislead you about the relationship between writer and reader.

	Example A	Example B
Mode	email to one recipient	email to a group of people
Relationship	had met once on a weekend course	are good friends
Field	the credibility of Derren Brown versus NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming)	the life and death of pet cat
Function	Both texts have a mainly social function, although they provide factual information.	

Both texts break the usual conventions because of the personal style of the writers. Kath is a charismatic, extrovert NLP practitioner. Richard is a witty and well-read teacher/examiner, with a strong sense of irony.

Overall structure of dialogue

The second aspect of discourse includes the analysis of spoken – as opposed to written – language, in particular the way conversations work. You may prefer to use the term '**conversation analysis**' for this aspect of discourse. The most important concept in any conversation analysis is **turntaking**. Some research investigates the ways speakers manage to exchange turns without speaking at the same time or leaving awkward pauses. It looks at different types of signal that the turn is passing to another, such as pauses, grammatical structures and intonation patterns.

We will look at the *types* of turn and what this can reveal about the **audience** – the participants' relationship, roles and status. It is always interesting to notice:

- who speaks first (*initiates* the conversation)
- who speaks most (has the longest **MLU** – mean length of utterance)
- who controls the subject (**agenda-setting** or topic shifts).

Conversations are essentially a dialogue. It is often impossible to understand what is going on from hearing one side of a conversation. The term '**adjacency pair**' refers to the two-part structures that occur in the interaction. A question needs an answer; an invitation needs an acceptance or refusal; an apology should be followed by an acceptance. This last example shows where the concept of adjacency pair can be significant – if one half is missing. You can analyse the effect, if one speaker's greeting is met with silence or a question is answered by a further question.

Writing about language

It is rarely interesting to comment that there are adjacency pairs in a conversation. This is what normally happens. Only use this term when there is something unusual to comment on. For example:

The two speakers have an uneasy relationship, shown by the way they often break the usual conventions of adjacency pairs. B does not reply to A's first question. Later, when B apologises, A does not acknowledge it.

Take it further

You can develop your understanding of written text structure by examining the 'middles' of texts, as well as the beginnings and ends. Look at various genres, eg essays, letters or short stories, and ask yourself these questions.

- Are there clear divisions into sections/parts?
- Do these follow a predictable order?
- How does the writer signal the move from one section to the next?

Key terms

conversation analysis
turntaking
MLU
agenda-setting
adjacency pair

Earlier in the book you were given some examples of some important concepts for analysing spoken language. These terms are also useful for discourse analysis of the ways conversations work. Here is a brief summary:

- purposefully vague language and backchannel behaviour encourage the other speaker to continue;
- filled pauses show the speaker wants to hold the floor;
- elision relies on shared knowledge;
- tag questions and markers of sympathetic circularity invite the listener to cooperate;
- discourse markers indicate a change of direction (also termed **framing moves**, eg 'well', 'moving on').

In transcripts of real spoken interactions, you will notice many non-fluency features. As well as the types of filled pause (er, erm, mm), there are often self-corrections, repetition and incomplete utterances. This is because each speaker needs to respond immediately without any advance planning. Conversations often seem chaotic on the page, with **overlapping speech** and **interruptions**. When you are listening or taking part in them, however, there is little difficulty in understanding.

Writing about language

Remember to treat spoken language as a dynamic and effective use of language in its own right. Avoid using terms like 'sloppy', 'lazy', 'vague' to suggest that spoken language is a less effective mode of communication than writing – treat it as different, but equal.

Transcription conventions

Transcriptions of conversations aim to capture the words spoken without giving a particular interpretation. For this reason, the familiar punctuation symbols of writing are not used. The term '**utterance**' refers to what is said (whereas the term 'sentence' usually applies to written language where the divisions between sentences are marked by full stops). Each speaker's name is followed by the words spoken. Other notation includes:

Notation	Meaning
(.) or (3)	brief pauses or a pause for a number of seconds
/	overlapping speech
...	unfinished utterance or interruption
SOME	capital letters indicate particular stress and volume

Key terms

framing move
 overlapping speech
 interruption
 utterance

Independent research

You can listen to the audio file of the conversation on page 59 – and other conversations with children – on www.teachit.co.uk/technonanny. The focus is often on discourse and pragmatics. There are some transcripts with suggested questions and answers.

Activity 50

Read this extract from a conversation between a 3-year-old girl and her grandmother.

1 Can you tell from the way they interact that each person has a different agenda?

	Louise: I will pick er light orange /
	Techno: /mm hmm /
	Louise: /alright
	Techno: yeah (.) can't see it at all
5	Louise: I can I am magorly
	Techno: mmm hmm
	Louise: I am really magic
	Techno: really magic.
	Louise: yes 'cos I can see the light orange can you.
10	Techno: just a little bit
	Louise: I can see it a lot
	Techno: right well you are really magic
	Louise: my mummy said that (.) do you want to pick some more.
	Techno: er no I want you to do it so I can have a rest
15	Louise: I think you should do SOME
	Techno: I'm tired I'm asleep
	Louise: YOU'RE NOT
	Techno: I am (.) Spike's sleeping I always want to have a little sleep after lunch
	Louise: can you just have a little rest like this /
20	Techno: /yeah./
	Louise: /with your eyes open
	Techno: I have got my eyes open but I can't colour as well (2) I can talk and listen
	Louise: oh <i>(both laugh)</i>
	Techno: right I'm going to take my glasses off and have a little ...
25	Louise: what.
	Techno: a little rub [yawns]
	Louise: I getting pretty tired now
	Techno: are you (.) do you want to come in bed as well.
	Louise: I think I should do looking and drawing
30	Techno: mm hmm OK

Louise wants her grandmother to join in the colouring; 'Technonanny' wants to have a nap.

2 Identify some evidence from the turntaking patterns. Here are some suggestions:

- Who uses interrogatives? Are these questions seeking information or do they have another function?
- How does each person seek to influence the other's actions? Are there any direct imperatives?
- What modal verbs does Louise use? Are they the same as Technonanny's?
- What adverbs does each person use as intensifiers or hedges (eg really, just)?
- What sort of backchannel behaviour (fillers) is going on and what is its function?
- When and why do they echo each other's utterances?
- How often does each refer to self ('I') or to the other ('you')?
- Who compliments and who 'boasts'?

In novels and plays, the fictional dialogue conveys characters – their feelings, motives and relationships with each other. These relationships often hinge around a balance of power. Literary dialogue is more orderly than real conversations, so it is a good place to start conversation analysis.

Activity 51

Read the extract below from the novel *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens. One of the main characters, Mr Gradgrind, is visiting a school. Comment on the following points.

- Turntaking: Who initiates? Who responds? Whose turns are longer?
- Grammar: Identify interrogatives, imperatives, negatives.
- Lexis: List the terms of address used for each of the characters.
- How does this effect the characterisation of Gradgrind, Sissy and Bitzer?

‘Girl number twenty,’ said Mr Gradgrind, squarely pointing with his square forefinger, ‘I don’t know that girl. Who is that girl?’

‘Sissy Jupe, sir,’ explained number twenty, blushing, standing up, and curtsying.

5 ‘Sissy is not a name,’ said Mr Gradgrind. ‘Don’t call yourself Sissy. Call yourself Cecilia.’

‘It’s father as calls me Sissy, sir,’ returned the young girl in a trembling voice, and with another curtsy.

‘Then he has no business to do it,’ said Mr Gradgrind. ‘Tell him he mustn’t. Cecilia Jupe. Let me see. What is your father?’

10 ‘He belongs to the horse-riding, if you please, sir.’

Mr Gradgrind frowned, and waved off the objectionable calling with his hand.

‘We don’t want to know anything about that, here. You mustn’t tell us about that, here. Your father breaks horses, don’t he?’

15 ‘If you please, sir, when they can get any to break, they do break horses in the ring, sir.’

‘You mustn’t tell us about the ring, here. Very well, then. Describe your father as a horsebreaker. He doctors sick horses, I dare say?’

‘Oh yes, sir.’

20 ‘Very well, then. He is a veterinary surgeon, a farrier, and horsebreaker. Give me your definition of a horse.’

(Sissy Jupe thrown into the greatest alarm by this demand.)

‘Girl number twenty unable to define a horse!’ said Mr Gradgrind, for the general behoof of all the little pitchers. ‘Girl number twenty possessed of no facts, in reference to one of the commonest of animals! Some boy’s definition of a horse.

25 Bitzer, yours.’

Discourse and ideology

The third definition of discourse refers to the way texts convey ideology. If you approach texts in this way, it moves language study closer to cultural studies and literary criticism. The phrase ‘ways of seeing and saying’ sums up the idea that the way we use language reveals the way we see the world. Any decision to control, or monitor, the words we choose suggests their power. For example, we might prefer not to call females ‘chicks’ or ‘girlies’ because it reflects society’s treatment of women in a child-like way. Alternatively, we may decide that words have no influence – ‘sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never harm me’.

You can explore discourse and ideology in the next activity (suggested by Keith Green and Jill LeBehan in *Critical Theory – A Coursebook* (Routledge, 1995).

Activity 52

- Write your autobiography in one paragraph.
- In small groups, discuss the questions on page 61.

The literary critic Pierre Macherey was interested in the 'gaps and silences' in a text. He claimed that what has been left unmentioned is just as significant as what has been included.

News reporting is often a good indicator of the underlying ideology of a particular culture.

Activity 53

Search online for a headline from a tabloid newspaper.

- a Which details are mentioned?
- b Which are omitted?
- c What underlying meanings does this imply?



Take it further

Read 'The Linguistics of Blame, Representations of women in the *Sun's* reporting of crimes of sexual violence', Kate Clark in M Toolan (ed.), *Language, Text and Context* (Routledge, 1992). Do you think there are similar attitudes to women shown in tabloid newspapers over 10 years later?

What you have learned

- ✓ Discourse is a complex concept, but you can use it to focus on some interesting aspects of texts.
- ✓ Written language and spoken language may draw from the same store of words and sentence structures, but there are significant differences in the overall structure.
- ✓ You can use different approaches to analyse the discourse of written and spoken texts. This part introduced various terms for each:
 - written texts structure: genre conventions for openings and closings
 - conversation analysis: turntaking patterns.
- ✓ Discourse study also gives you the opportunity to move from structure into fascinating areas of meaning. This part suggested one way of analysing the underlying ideology of texts – applying the concept of 'gaps and silences' to discuss the significance of details of content.

Summary of key levels and frameworks

- ✓ The key **frameworks and levels** of language include these levels, from 'smallest' to 'largest':
 - graphology or phonology: the sounds or visual signs of language
 - morphology: the structure of individual words
 - lexis and semantics: words and their meanings
 - grammar: the structures within sentences, including words, phrases and clauses
 - discourse: the structure of whole texts in context.
- ✓ You can use a limited 'toolkit' of terms effectively.
- ✓ You should rely on an intuitive response to select the most significant aspects for analysis.
- ✓ You gain more credit for analysis of a range of aspects.

Questions for Activity 52

- Did you begin 'I was born ...'?
- Did you include material on schoolwork, hobbies, friends, etc.
- What was your final point?
- Consider the number of words spent on one topic. Does this seem an accurate reflection of the importance of that topic?
- Are there important points missed out?
- Try to assess why you included certain bits of material and left others out.

Language and identity

In this section you study the ways language varies according to the user: their age, gender, geographical background, ethnicity, occupation or status. You explore some theories about attitudes to language use, as well as some ideas about ways that meanings are implied by language use in a specific context.

Language is closely bound up with identity in several ways. The way a person speaks or writes provides all sorts of clues about who they are – their age and gender – and where they come from – the geographical region, as well as their ethnic, social and occupational background.

Some of these aspects of language identity may be acquired unconsciously, so that the individual has very little choice or control. It is hard – but not impossible – for a person to change their regional accent, the pitch of their voice associated with gender and idiosyncratic patterns of lexis and grammar. Impressionists rely on these sorts of ingrained language habits to create recognisable impersonations.

But language use does not only tell us about fixed identity; it can also reveal something about how a person chooses to present themselves. Just as some people take elocution lessons in order to get rid of their regional accent, others may make a conscious effort to maintain all the original features – even though they no longer live among fellow dialect speakers. Margaret Thatcher was coached to lower the pitch of her voice to sound more masculine. A person, whose natural habit is to use the word 'like' repeatedly when speaking, might make a conscious effort to change this. Why?

Not only does language use reveal something about a person's background, but it causes a reaction. And this reaction is often as unconscious and ingrained as the language habits themselves. Negative judgements about people on the basis of their language are so common, but are rarely more than prejudice based on stereotypes. You can probably think of many examples, along the lines of:

I can't stand the Liverpool accent.

I hate the way people say 'innit'.

Text messaging is ruining pupils' ability to write proper English.

Standard English and Received Pronunciation

These two concepts are crucial in order to discuss language variation. Each term refers to an abstract notion. SE (Standard English) is the form of English grammar and vocabulary that is regarded as the standard, to be taught to learners of English, and used in formal situations. Received Pronunciation (RP) refers to the accent, which is provided as the standard pronunciation of individual words in a dictionary. This accent does not identify the speaker as coming from a particular geographical region, but it is recognised as a marker of social status and is sometimes called 'BBC' or 'Queen's' English. The speaker sounds 'classy' or 'posh' depending on your viewpoint. The reaction to classic RP tends to be hostile and nowadays there has been a gradual shift in pronunciation. If you watch newsreels or films from the 1950s, you will notice the difference between then and now. Accent researchers estimate that only a tiny percentage of people in the UK speak a full version of RP.

Attitudes to standard and non-standard varieties

The term 'prestige' refers to the higher status of some forms of lexis, grammar and pronunciation. Is this because the standard forms are better quality and the non-standard forms simply inferior versions? In the language **variation section**, you will explore the origins of Standard English. With Caxton's invention of the printing press, mass communication was possible for the first time, so it was necessary to choose one of the regional dialects to use as the standard form. Not surprisingly, the dialect of the south-east (including Oxford and Cambridge, as well as London) was the choice. It is important to remember that Standard English is a dialect, but it is the one with the power and status. Similarly, RP is an accent, but one which does not reveal the speaker's regional background.

Throughout your education, you will have studied some differences between standard and non-standard forms of English. At the level of lexis, where there are synonyms, some words are considered to be colloquial or slang, i.e. not Standard English. At the level of grammar, you may remember being taught not to use certain structures in formal situations, for example a double negative structure: 'It wasn't me what done it. I never took nothing.' Structures like this are described as 'stigmatised' – a marker of lower status.

However, social attitudes are changing in interesting ways. Regional varieties and colloquial styles are not only becoming more accepted, some are acquiring positive associations. The concept of covert prestige (meaning 'hidden' or 'underground' status) refers to the way that speakers and writers can – paradoxically – gain more status by using non-prestige forms of language. Often this is a deliberate choice of style for popular broadcasters such as Jamie Oliver. Politicians often seem to adapt their style away from the prestige forms that were part of their education. This can only be because they realise the influence of the '**demotic**' (from the same root as 'democracy', meaning language of the people).

Key terms

Received Pronunciation
(RP)
demotic

Activity 54

- 1 Provide as many alternative words as you can for these concepts:

food	sleep	uninteresting	intelligent
------	-------	---------------	-------------

- 2 Check in a dictionary to see how each is classified – colloquial, dialect or slang.
- 3 What do you think are the differences in use and meaning?

Writing about language

When you analyse texts, it is useful to notice whether language use departs from the standard. Remember that it is a misunderstanding of language to use terms such as 'proper' or 'incorrect'. Although you do not gain credit for simply identifying the features (eg **The verb 'writ' is non-standard**), you may be able to make a relevant point. For example:

The journalist represents the speaker as using non-standard forms such as the past participle - 'I haven't even really writ [sic] a tune' - and draws attention to it by adding the comment [sic] in brackets. This suggests that the writer thinks it is a mistake.

Individual style

Idiolect

The term 'idiolect' refers to 'the speech habits of an individual ... as distinct from those of a group of people (i.e. dialect)' (*A Dictionary of Stylistics* (2nd ed.), Katie Wales, Pearson, 2001). Wales also suggests that a person's speech is as individual and distinctive as their fingerprint. If you are working on a dramatic monologue you will try to create the voice of a character, by using recognisable 'voice-prints'.

It is perhaps easier to recognise a person's voice – on the telephone – than their style in writing. But idiolect does apply to written language. Of course, you will adopt a different style to suit particular situations – writing an email versus writing an essay, writing to a friend versus writing to a stranger, etc). Even so, there may be little 'give-aways' – personal language habits that other people learn to associate with your particular style.

The study of idiolect is crucial in three types of linguistic detective work: literary authorship, plagiarism and forensic linguistics.

Many literary scholars apply close linguistic analysis to texts that might, or might not be, written by Shakespeare. Others suggest that the real author of the plays must have been a different writer.

Plagiarism is the legal term for 'copying' another person's work. Universities **have** developed sophisticated computer programs, such as CopyCatch, to identify essays that are not the work of an individual student.

Forensic linguistics is the application of linguistic science to criminal cases. Now that technology can provide a vast database of language evidence and statistics, convictions can be made, or overturned, on the basis of language.

The case of the Unabomber

The basis for forensic linguistics is the claim that idiolect is the equivalent of a fingerprint, in other words, that each of us is unique in our language habits. But is this claim true? Here is an example taken from an interview with the forensic linguist Professor Malcolm Coulthard.

The Unabomber, Kaczynski, was finally hunted down to his hut in the woods of Montana, from where he had been conducting a campaign of bomb threats. Of course, he denied he was the author of the documents sent to various newspaper offices and government departments over the years. The prosecution case hinged on the occurrence of certain words in the 30,000 word manifesto, which were also in a 300-word document found in his hut. Coulthard showed me the list of words:

at any rate; clearly; gotten; more or less; presumably; thereabouts; in practice; moreover; on the other hand; propaganda; and the word roots: argue; propose

This may seem odd – surely these words are pretty common?

Professor Coulthard makes another strange claim – that most of our language use is unique, once you have a string of more than seven to nine words. He even says that an individual does not repeat themselves exactly, but uses a slightly different pattern each time.

Independent research

- Use a search engine to find out more about one of the three areas of linguistic detective work.
- Read the full article about the Unabomber in *emagazine*, issue 15, February 2002 or use a search engine to find websites about forensic linguistics. Why was this evidence accepted as proof that the Unabomber and Kaczynski were the same writer?

Activity 55

Use a search engine to check out the theory that an individual's language use is unique.

- 1 Take any sentence from your language use. For example, the first sentence in this activity: 'Use a search engine to check out the theory that an individual's language use is unique.'
- 2 Begin by typing in the first two words between quotation marks ("use a"). How many 'hits' do you get?
- 3 Add the third word. How many hits do you get now?
- 4 Continue until the result is zero. Is it more than seven to nine words?
- 5 Compare your results with others.

Using the first seven words from the sentence in Activity 50 gave 7470 hits, reducing to seven hits with eight words and zero hits with "use a search engine to check out the theory". Even though I was using language you might expect to find on the internet, my particular style became unique after nine words.

The Derek Bentley case

You may know about this murder case, where the 18-year-old Bentley was hanged in 1952 after his 17-year-old friend shot and killed a policeman. The film 'Let Him Have It' is a semi-fictionalised account. Bentley's family campaigned for a pardon, which was finally granted in 1998.

Forensic linguistic evidence formed a crucial part of the case. The appeal cast doubt on the authenticity of Bentley's statement for two reasons.

- 1 **Idiolect** – The style was not convincing, given that Bentley was 'functionally illiterate' with an IQ in the bottom 1 per cent.
- 2 **Situation** – The police maintained that the statement was generated by asking Bentley to dictate a monologue. Bentley, however, maintained that it was a mixture: some of it a record of what he said; some question and answer ('yes' or 'no') rephrased as monologue; some the police wrote themselves.

Activity 56

Writing about language

Use precise terminology for analysing the key frameworks and levels of language, for example:

The use of negative sentence structures (grammar) suggests a response to interrogatives in a dialogue, not a statement written as a monologue (discourse and context). The phrase 'shelter arrangement' is an example of formal lexis and the writer is very precise about the noun 'policeman', which is modified in two distinct ways.

Read Bentley's statement below and find evidence of:

- a Idiolect: It is not the language use of a person classed as functionally illiterate.
- b Situation: It has features of a dialogue, including answers to questions formulated by police.

Look at:

- lexis – noticeably formal words
- discourse – terms of address (ways of naming and identifying people)
- grammar – position of the adverbials 'then' and 'now'
- noun phrases – noticeably precise descriptions of places, people and times
- use of negative verb phrases.

The statement is annotated in the following way to guide you to points mentioned by the forensic linguists:

<i>italics</i>	– use of surname to refer to the friend 'Christopher Craig' – use of specific descriptive detail in noun phrases
bold	– use of adverbial 'then' and 'now'
<u>underlined</u>	– negative statements
(9)	– each sentence is numbered for ease of reference.

I have known *Craig* since I went to school. (2) We were stopped by our parents going out together, but we still continued going out with each other – I mean we have not gone out together until tonight. (3) I was watching television tonight (2 November 1952) and between 8 pm and 9 pm *Craig* called for me. (4) My mother answered the door and I heard her say I was out. (5) I had been out earlier to the pictures and got home just after 7 pm. (6) A little later Norman Parsley and Frank Fazey called. (7) I did not answer the door or speak to them. (8) My mother told me that they had called and I **then** ran after them. (9) I walked up the road with them to the paper shop where I saw *Craig* standing. (10) We all talked together and **then** Norman Parsley and Frank Fazey left. (11) Chris Craig and I **then** caught a bus to Croydon. (12) We got off at West Croydon and **then** walked down the road where the toilets are – I think it is Tamworth Road. (13) When we came to the place where you found me, Chris looked in the window. (14) There was a little iron gate at the side. (15) Chris **then** jumped over and I followed. (16) Chris **then** climbed up the drainpipe to the roof and I followed. (17) Up to **then** Chris had not said anything. (18) We both got out onto the flat roof at the top. (19) **Then** someone in a garden on the opposite side shone a torch up towards us. (20) Chris said 'it's a copper, hide behind here'. (21) We hid behind a shelter arrangement on the roof. (22) We were there waiting for about ten minutes. (23) I did not know he was going to use the gun. (24) *A plain clothes man* climbed up the drainpipe and on to the roof. (25) The man said: 'I am a police officer – the place is surrounded.' (26) He caught hold of me and as we walked away Chris fired. (27) There was nobody else there at the time. (28) The policeman and I **then** went round a corner by a door. (29) A little later the door opened and *a policeman in uniform* came out. (30) Chris fired again **then** and this policeman fell down. (31) I could see he was hurt as a lot of blood came from his forehead just above his nose. (32) The policeman dragged him round the corner behind the *brickwork entrance* to the door. (33) I remember I shouted something but I forget what it was. (34) I could not see Chris when I shouted to him – he was behind a wall. (35) I heard some more policemen behind the door and the policeman with me said: 'I don't think he has many more bullets left.' (36) Chris shouted 'Oh yes I have' and he fired again. (37) I think I heard him fire three times altogether. (38) The policeman **then** pushed me down the stairs and I did not see any more. (39) I knew we were going to break into the place. (40) I did not know what we were going to get – just anything that was going. (41) I did not have a gun and I did not know Chris had one until he shot. (42) I **now** know that the policeman *in uniform* is dead. (43) I should have mentioned that after the plain clothes policeman got up the drainpipe and arrested me, another *policeman in uniform* followed and I *heard someone call him 'Mac'*. (44) He was with us when the other policeman was killed.

Language and gender

Sociologists and linguists have done a lot of research into the topic of language and gender over the past 40+ years. As often happens with theories about human behaviour, one person puts forward a theory and the next group challenge it. You do not have to write an essay *about* language and gender research, **but** your task is to *apply* your knowledge of theories to your analysis of texts. So, how much do you need to know about language and gender for your English Language course?

Evaluating research and theories

The most important aspect of your study of language and gender is your approach. Remember that you are studying theories, or hypotheses, not absolute statements of fact. You should keep an open mind and ask questions. For example, one theory is that in mixed-gender conversations, males interrupt more than females.

First, ask some factual questions: *who* conducted the research, *when*, *where* and *how*? The answer is Zimmerman and West, in 1975, based on statistical analysis of recorded conversations in the University of Santa Barbara, USA.

Then ask an evaluative question: Is this true in my experience? Perhaps you can think of some situations where it seems true that males interrupt more. But there may be other situations where the opposite happens. Does it depend on the individual and their particular style of interacting? Or does it depend on the people they are talking to, about what, where and why?

Then consider some critical points. Maybe the theory was true in the 1970s, but male and female roles have changed. It might be true for the USA, but not necessarily for all countries. Perhaps male university professors have a particularly dominant style of speaking. Were the women less comfortable in a formal meeting? They might behave differently in other situations. Maybe the male speakers were older than the females, had more senior positions or were simply more bossy characters.

Activity 57

Consider the following theories about language and gender in the light of your experience. Give examples that support the theory. Find examples that contradict the theory. How valid do you think each proposition is?

- Females talk more than males.
- Males use talk to be more competitive; females are more cooperative.
- Females like to gossip with each other; males prefer to discuss factual events.
- Males use more **taboo** (offensive) language than females.
- Females can't tell jokes as well as males.

A survey of research

You should have an overview of the way people have approached the subject of language and gender from the 1950s. For this, you will need a few key examples of research studies and the theories suggested. There is a catchy way to remember three important approaches to language and gender: deficit, dominance and difference.

In the early part of the twentieth century, when female roles were more narrowly defined, the 'deficit' approach assumed male language as the norm and described the ways females used language as not only different, but departures from this standard form. For example, Otto Jespersen (a man) claims:

There can be no doubt that women exercise a great and universal influence on linguistic development through their instinctive shrinking from coarse and gross expressions and their preference for refined, and (in certain spheres) veiled and indirect expressions.

From 'The Woman' in *The Feminist Critique of Language*, Cameron (ed.) (Routledge, 1998)

Key term

taboo

Take it further

- Read accounts of Zimmerman and West's research in *Women, Men and Language*, Jennifer Coates (originally published 1986, 2nd edition 1993). What does their data show about the differences between single-sex and mixed-sex conversations?

Writing about language

The terms 'deficit', 'dominance' and 'difference' are not precise descriptions of theories, but are often used in an evaluative way to refer to the underlying attitudes in research studies. You can indicate this by using the terms inside quotation marks.

Robin Lakoff (a woman) also wrote about women's language from a similar perspective, although obviously concerned about social inequalities. Her theories are interesting, but you should remember that they were not based on actual research and recorded data. In the extract below, Lakoff presents two pairs of sentences to native speakers of standard American English. Notice how she only offers suggestions about the differences between male/female language use.

Consider:

- a Oh dear, you've put the peanut butter in the fridge again.
- b Shit, you've put the peanut butter in the fridge again.

It is safe to predict that people would classify the first sentence as part of 'women's language', the second as 'men's language'.

From 'Language and Woman's Place: Extract' in *The Feminist Critique of Language*, Cameron (ed.) (Routledge, 1998)

By the 1970s, movements such as Women's Liberation analysed much social behaviour in terms of male oppression. 'Dominance' studies of male versus female speech showed ways in which female speakers took up more supportive, subsidiary roles. The most well-known research is that of Zimmerman and West on interruptions. Many of Robin Lakoff's theories fit into this category, seeing female language as 'powerless' and male language as 'powerful'. For example, she claims that women use more tag questions ('Sure is hot here, isn't it?') and interrogatives ('Will you close the door?'), instead of imperatives ('Close the door!'). She comments:

a tag question is a kind of polite statement, ... it does not force agreement or belief on the addressee. A request may be in the same sense a polite command, ... it does not overtly require obedience, but rather suggests something be done as a favour to the speaker. An overt order (as in an imperative) expresses the (often impolite) assumption of the speaker's superior position to the addressee

From 'Language and Woman's Place' in *Language: Social Psychological Perspectives*, Giles, Robinson and Smith (eds) (Pergamon Press, 1980)

Independent research

Read the two articles by Jespersen and Lakoff in *The Feminist Critique of Language* (Cameron, 1998). Note one or two key claims about female language. Then read the following chapter by Pamela Fishman. What evidence does she provide to challenge Lakoff's theories?

Activity 58

Take one of Lakoff's theories below and test it against data you have collected yourself.

Females use a greater range of vocabulary to describe colours than males.

You can use a colour chart from a paint manufacturer and obscure all the brand names.

- 1 Ask a range of people to describe or name the colours in the range.
- 2 Record and analyse their responses.
- 3 Do your results support Lakoff's theory?

The 'difference' approach shifted the emphasis to see male versus female styles of interacting as different, rather than better or worse. Often the focus was at the level of discourse, rather than lexis or grammar, identifying different communication styles, which, in turn, lead to miscommunication between the genders. This approach to language has become a thriving industry and you may have noticed popular bestsellers such as *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. Even the linguist Deborah Tannen's book *You Just Don't Understand* was serialised in a column in *Woman's Own* magazine.

Let's look first at popular (non-academic) claims about differences between male and female language use. The general points are familiar and, if we think of gender as a spectrum, seem to fit the two extremes. At one end is the macho male, a man of action rather than words, reluctant to express emotion, brusque, monosyllabic, prone to aggression. At the other end, the girly girl, loves to gossip, is emotional (hysterical even), impractical, vague and unassertive, but great at forming family bonds. What are the theories? What research evidence are they based on? Are they true for all social groups, in all situations, in all times?

Deborah Tannen makes more cautious claims. She gives one example of a wife upset by her husband's apparently unsympathetic response to her health fears.

To many men a complaint is a challenge to come up with a solution. Mark thought he was reassuring Eve by telling her there was something she could do about her scar. But often women are looking for emotional support, not solutions.

Deborah Tannen

Her claims may also seem convincing in the light of your experience, but you should bear in mind that they are only supported by scenarios based on couples she knows, not actual recordings. However, it is generally not possible to make recordings of people having private discussions. Another criticism is that her experience is restricted to a narrow social group – probably white, middle-class, middle-aged Americans in the 1990s.

Independent research

Read *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (Tannen, 1990). There are also extracts on the internet. Note one or two theories that seem valid to you and one or two that you would challenge in the light of your experience of language use in your particular social group.

Activity 59

- 1 Set up and challenge some theories, using experience of your social group, for example:

Assertion: Females love to gossip more than males.

Challenges:

- Definition: What exactly do you mean by the word 'gossip'?
 - Counter examples: X is a female who does not gossip. Y is a male who does gossip.
- 2 How would you describe your social group in contrast to that of Deborah Tannen's?

Gender and discourse

The traditional theories of language and gender ('deficit', 'dominance' and 'difference') have been joined more recently by a 4th 'd': 'discourse'. Rather than disagreeing with a particular theory, it challenges the underlying assumption shared by all of these theories that gender is something fixed and immutable; something that we are. Instead, considerations of gender and discourse, following Judith Butler's 1990 book, *Gender Trouble*, think about gender as something we do.

In language study, discourse can sometimes be defined as structure above the level of the sentence, but in this case it is following the idea of discourse as outlined by the French philosopher Michel Foucault. Although discourse is a slippery concept to pin down, it concerns the idea that ways of defining, understanding or categorising the world, through language, produce culturally and historically understood meanings - discourse creates our sense of 'reality'. Although Foucault was concerned with relationships of power, rather than gender specifically, discourse has been very influential in thinking about gender as something we do.

Take it further

Read 'Difference-and-Dominance and Beyond' in *Language and Gender* 2nd edition, Mary Talbot 2010

Gender as an action, termed 'performativity' in Butler's work, turns on its head the idea that we use language in a particular way *because* we are a man or a woman, and instead says that *by* using language in a certain culturally approved way, we make ourselves intelligible *as* men or women.

It is important to understand that this idea of performativity is different from performance in the sense of acting in a play, for example, which is something we do knowingly and on purpose. We are not free to perform our gender in any way we chose and 'doing' gender is not necessarily something that we may even be aware of. This is because there is shared knowledge and constraints within any specific culture ('discourse practices') which regulate gender to the extent that we see the accepted 'performance' as true and natural - something that we *are* - and anything else as deviant. Think about ways in which gender roles are sometimes severely 'policed' for example in the ways that people who may not conform to gender norms are sometimes mocked or bullied, verbally or physically attacked or even murdered.

These ideas, which are broadly called 'post-structuralist' are sometimes difficult to grasp, or define, but we can see examples of how this might work by considering acts of deliberate performance, for example males presenting themselves as young females in internet chatrooms, or in the article 'Lip service on the Fantasy Lines' by Kira Hall in *The Feminist Critique of Language* (Cameron, 1998).

Even if you think that males and females are essentially different, it is important to consider other variables, such as cultural variables. Are men and women the same the whole world over, irrespective of their age or social position? Also consider situational variable. Do males and females always use language in the same way regardless of their purposes, subject or relative status?

Activity 60

- 1 Remind yourself of some claims about differences between male and female language use.
- 2 Give some examples where you 'perform' the extremes associated with each gender, for example, interrupting other speakers and sticking to factual matters or gossiping and talking about emotions in a cooperative way.
- 3 Now look again at the exchange of text messages on page 29. There was some debate about the gender of Person A (the person using the stolen mobile phone).
 - a What theories and research would support the claim that Person A is a female?
 - b Are there equally strong reasons for saying Person A is a male?
 - c Does Person B use language in a typically female way?

An example response might be:

Person A uses terms of endearment (x, love), even when communicating with a stranger, and later acknowledges and thanks the person accusing her of theft. Lakoff suggests that such politeness is a feature of women's language. However, the only participant whose gender is known (Person B is a female) does not follow this pattern. She uses taboo language and gives direct orders. Labov's research suggests that it is women who preserve the standard forms and men who spread the use of non-standard forms. Both Person A and B use slang and non-standard language, yet we know that at least one is a female. Other factors of the situation could be significant: the conventions of text messaging are more 'relaxed'; Person A could be using the language of his or her age group; Person B's language use reflects her anger, more than her gender or age.

Independent research

Read the article on non-sexist language on the Wikipedia website. Notice that there is a warning that 'the neutrality of this article is disputed'. List some examples of gender bias in language. Do you agree with the claims made? Why do you think some readers dispute the claims?

Representations of gender

The previous parts looked at theories about the ways gender influences language use. There is also a lot of research into the differences between the ways males and females are *represented* in language. Some suggests that the English language is male-centred in certain ways. Examples such as the use of the male pronoun 'he' to refer to people in general might exclude females in job advertisements, for example. The use of the suffix '-ess' to denote a female version of an actor or waiter suggests that it is not quite the authentic, original thing. There are also marked derogatory, sexual connotations to such pairs of terms, rather than a neutral male versus female equivalence.

master	mistress
courtier	courtesan

You can see this type of bias in language if you compare the number of terms that exist to describe a sexually active female as opposed to a sexually active male.

Developments in equal opportunities have produced a gradual change in language use. Some people use the cliché 'political correctness gone mad' to object to attempts to make public language use less discriminatory language, not only against females, but also against other minority, disadvantaged groups in society. (I am one of those who regularly 'goes mad' about discriminatory language use.)

Key terms

inquit/quotative
convergence
divergence

Language and age

There has been little formal research into the topic of language variation according to the age of the speaker/writer. This gives you the chance for some independent exploration of the topic. It is clear that the younger generation always invents slightly new forms of language. This is particularly noticeable at the level of lexis, but can also be seen in some grammatical structures and occasionally in pronunciation. Notice the range of terms of approval used in this extract from a **social media** website:

Back come the Tokyoblu live band as well with a couple of stonking brand ... superb!! brilliant!! wicked!! groovy!! fantastic!! wonderfull! magnificent! ...

You should consider the reasons for such constant innovation in vocabulary. One suggestion is that language acts as a badge of identity and that young people need to assert their difference from the older generation and to form exclusive 'tribes'.

Activity 61

- 1 Collect ways of expressing these concepts:

approval disapproval intoxicated short for money

- 2 Which do you associate with particular age groups?

There are fewer examples of innovation at the level of grammar. One is the use of the generic tag question form 'innit'. You may have the 'insider' knowledge to provide more examples. The next activity focuses on the changing grammatical functions of the word 'like'.

Activity 62

- 1 Use a search engine to research the use of the word 'like'. Collect examples:
 - as an **inquit**, or **quotative** (a verb that functions like 'said' to introduce direct speech with quotation marks): 'she was like "what are you doing?"'
 - as a hedge (a deliberately vague expression): 'and stuff like that', 'it was interesting like.'
- 2 Listen for examples in spoken language of 'like' as a filled pause: 'And then I like picked up my bag.'

Take it further

Use a search engine to read more about Giles' theory. Give examples from your own experience of convergence and divergence. Can you think of any examples that challenge this theory, such as a person shifting their language use to become similar to another's, yet expressing some hostility or dislike?

You should also be aware of the tendency for any new forms of language to be stigmatised. Attitudes towards the two examples above are overwhelmingly negative. Despite this, their use remains common, and may also have some covert prestige within a particular social group. The sociologist Giles proposed a theory of convergence, which develops these ideas of language use as a badge of identity. (This summary is taken from <http://orb.essex.ac.uk/lg/lg232/ActsIDcriteria.html>.)

- **Convergence** happens when an individual adjusts his speech patterns to *match* those of people belonging to another group or social identity. Convergence expresses unity, a feeling of shared identity.
- **Divergence** happens when an individual adjusts his speech patterns to be *distinct* from those of people belonging to another group or social identity. Divergence expresses a feeling of separation, withdrawal; it draws a boundary around the in-group that a speaker belongs to and does not wish to share with their interlocutor.

People can also adjust their writing patterns to match those of a different social group. In many cases, younger writers adopt the style of older people, for example, when writing formal essays. It is necessary to imitate this style in order to produce an effective piece of formal writing. Occasionally imitation moves into forgery, if the intention is to pass yourself off as a different person. Letters excusing a child from PE can quickly be spotted as the style of the child, not the parent. The example in Activity 63 is more sinister. The text is from a criminal case in 2007, where a 15-year-old Michael Hamer pleaded guilty to the murder of an 11-year-old boy, Joe Geeling. The prosecution claimed that a letter, apparently written by a teacher, was faked by Michael.

Activity 63

Read the text of the letter.

- 1 Is it convincing as the style of a teacher? Identify:
 - features of a teacher's style of language use
 - features that betray a younger person's language use.
- 2 Can you produce a more convincing forgery of the style of a teacher?

Joseph,

You may have heard Year 10s have started to mentor Year 7s and they have been told to take some books to understand the difficulties some people may be having.

As you may know Michael is your mentor and will start next week.

5 Unfortunately [sic] Michael has got some of your books, but will be unable to return them to you for two months due to surgery. So I have spoken to your mum and told her the situation and I have asked her if you could go with Michael to his house and collect them with the permission of your mother.

I have given the address to your mum and she will meet you at the house at 4.30pm tonight.

Sorry for the inconvenience.

10 L. Foley

Deputy-Headteacher

Do not discuss this with anyone else as this will cause confusion.

Thanks.

What you have learned

- ✓ You should be able to evaluate (not simply learn and repeat) theories. Language and gender studies can be grouped under the headings: deficit, dominance, difference.
- ✓ Many linguists today criticise these approaches because they ignore all the other variables that influence language use: cultural background, situation, age, status, purpose. They do not accept that gender (in the sense of being feminine or masculine) is a fundamental part of a person. Instead, they suggest the concept of performing gender. You may, of course, also evaluate and criticise this theory.

Wider social context

Gender and age are 'visible' personal aspects of identity, but social background also affects each person's language use. This part looks at the influence of geographical region (where you were born and brought up), occupation (your job) and power (your status).

Regional variation

English is a world language. It is the first language in many countries of the world (USA, Australia, parts of India and Africa) and the second language taught in schools in many others (most European countries, China and Japan).

You should be able to recognise key examples of variation in world 'Englishes', such as lexical differences between US and British English, **and** you should also be aware of the scope of regional variation within the UK:

- national varieties associated with Scotland, Ireland and Wales
- regional dialects of England, such as those in Yorkshire and Somerset
- city dialects, for example in London, Liverpool, Newcastle and Birmingham.

You should develop the necessary skills to describe regional variation at the levels of phonology, lexis and grammar. For this, you can concentrate on the types of variation that are within your experience.

You should also consider some contemporary debates about language variation and change. What are the social perceptions of particular regional dialects? Are differences in dialects fading these days? Why?

Take it further

Use the BBC Voices or the British Library website to hear examples of some different dialects of English. You can click on a map of the UK to hear variations in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. For example, how many different ways is the /a/ sound in 'bath' or 'mask' pronounced?

Describing features of regional variation

Standard English is used as the benchmark for describing regional variation: how does a particular dialect differ in its pronunciation, vocabulary and sentence structures? You should observe the distinctive features of the regional dialect used in your area. Try to categorise the differences under headings. The Yorkshire variety, for example, has these noticeable differences.

Activity 64

Investigate and describe the regional variety with which you are most familiar.

Independent research

List all the different regional varieties used on television during one evening. Comment on the associations of each accent: the product being advertised; the qualities suggested.

Take it further

Read (or better still, listen to) Tom Leonard's poem 'The Six O'Clock News' and discussion of its comments on the status of Standard English and regional variations. You can find it on <http://www.tomleonard.co.uk/sixoclock.shtml>. What hypothetical situation is he referring to?

Investigating attitudes to varieties

As well as noting the actual differences, you should be aware of the attitudes towards such variation. You may wonder why pronunciation in the interview is shown in non-standard spelling for speakers from Sheffield, but not for the journalist himself, who is perhaps from London. In the interview, this particular variety of English is marked out as odd in some way.

Media use of regional varieties (in the choice of presenters for particular programmes) and representations of them (in adverts and fictional characters) provide a good indication of general attitudes. The tendency is to stereotype the people of that region, often in negative ways. The Yorkshire accent is used to advertise beer, bread and tea – all basic food and drink products. The accent and dialect is connected strongly, but illogically, with a lifestyle that is honest, homely, old-fashioned, unpretentious and perhaps with people who are a little bit backward or stupid.

Some broadcasters and writers are also proud of their regional dialects. The Barnsley writer Ian McMillan was once considered too 'broad' even for Radio Sheffield, but he has not compromised his Yorkshire accent and is now regularly heard on BBC TV and Radio 3 and 4 commenting on all things literary and poetic. The novelist James Kelman represents the Glasgow accent and dialect in his novels. He is aware (because people tell him) that it alienates readers. He continues to do so, because he feels there is a deeper prejudice; it is not simply the difficulty of reading a slightly strange language. In the *Saturday Guardian*, he comments about his novel *How Late it Was, How Late*:

During the Booker Prize controversy of 1994 much of the hostility directed at *How Late It Was, How Late* derived from the astounding proposition that the life of one working-class Glaswegian male is a subject worthy of art.

This type of uncompromising pride in language as a sign of your social roots is a factor in the use of **Black Vernacular English** (BVE). The British Rastafarian poet Benjamin Zephaniah represents his language variety in writing. Take a look at *Dis Poetry* on Zephaniah's website: <http://benjaminzephaniah.com/rhymin/dis-poetry/>.

Key term

Black Vernacular English (BVE)

Key term

Estuary English

There has been a gradual shift in attitudes towards previously stigmatised varieties of English. There is covert prestige among some social groups, where young white English people use versions of Black English to acquire more 'street-cred'. There is controversy about this use of language, some people feeling that it is insincere at best and an insult to black people at worst.

Many researchers feel there is a link between language, gender and non-standard varieties. The linguist William Labov (1990) suggested that females tend to use standard forms of language and help to spread their use, for example to children in their care. On the other hand, he suggested that males lead in preserving non-standard varieties or spreading vernacular forms.

Estuary English

Another variation of English language use, which is not so much regional as social, is **Estuary English**. The term refers to a distinctive type of pronunciation that is being used by more and more people. It has some features of a 'Cockney' accent merged into a more standard RP and so probably originated around the estuary of the River Thames. It is not confined to London or the south, however. Researchers have observed the use of this accent spreading out to the north. In this sense, Estuary English is not a regional accent, but, like RP, associated more with a particular social group. Although not everyone agrees that there is enough clear evidence to say that there is a new accent, the concept of Estuary English is worth studying.

First, what are the distinctive forms? It is hard to describe an accent in writing, but imagine some speakers from the TV soap *EastEnders* as you read these examples:

- a glottal stop in place of final /t/ sound in 'about'
- changing final /l/ sounds towards a /w/ sound in 'until'
- omission of /j/ sound in words such as 'assume'.

Independent research

- Watch a clip of Russell Brand interviewing Ed Milliband during the 2015 general election by searching online. Do you think Milliband is being insulting or complimentary? Investigate and apply communication accommodation theory to both participants in this exchange.
- There are many websites dealing with Estuary English. Use a search engine to find audio clips and try to find ways this accent varies from the standard. Try to use the phonetic alphabet (IPA).

What are the attitudes towards this variety of English? Attitudes to language use are strongly linked to attitudes towards the users. The high status of RP and the comparatively low status of Scouse (a Liverpool accent), for example, are less about the actual sounds than the stereotypes associated with the people who use each accent. An interesting aspect of changing attitudes is in the decreasing status of RP. In 1999, the Conservative MP Boris Johnson claimed he lost his job on television because his accent was too 'plummy'.

Estuary English is associated with contemporary media broadcasters such as **Russell Brand**, Jonathan Ross and Paul Merton (yet I cannot think of an example of a female presenter!) so it accrues a certain prestige. When it is used by people living in regions outside the capital, perhaps it might suggest that they too are cosmopolitan and not tied down by any regional identity.

Language and occupation

Is language use related to a person's job? In some occupations, there is certainly subject-specific lexis. The legal and information technology worlds are obvious examples, but many occupations have a distinctive vocabulary. You should ask yourself whether the field of work influences language use at other levels, such as phonology and grammar. These days, jobs in customer service emphasise language use in their training. Employees in call centres are given manuals outlining the correct way to conduct interactions. Advice on selling techniques moves on to the level of discourse, with recommendations about the use of questions to retain the upper hand in a situation. Politicians are notorious for their habit of avoiding direct answers to questions.

You might also consider whether an individual's occupation influences their use of language in general. Does a lawyer talk like a lawyer, even at home?



Language and power

Studies into language and power investigate ways that language use can establish a higher status or greater control for the speaker/writer as opposed to the listeners/readers. The use of baffling terminology is one strategy a person can take – attempting to ‘blind with science’.

Activity 65

Read the extract from Ian Brady’s letter to *The Guardian* on page 48 again. Note that he never uses plain words such as ‘kill’ or ‘murder’.

- 1 How many words and phrases are difficult to understand?
- 2 Why do you think he chooses this level of lexis?

Writing about language

When you notice the use of formal features such as technical jargon, passive voice and nominalisation, remember to consider the wider effects on meaning. On the topic of Brady’s letter, for example:

The writer of the letter uses such complex lexis and noun phrases that it hard for any reader to understand what he is saying. Rather than showing his level of intelligence, it suggests that he needs to present himself as powerful and cannot, perhaps, acknowledge the blunt reality of what he is saying. He is using language as a mask and trying to manipulate his readers.

The part on pragmatics will look at another possible effects of high register lexis – a display of insecurity or pretentiousness.

Apart from lexical choice, certain grammatical structures can be significant in analysis of language and power:

- passive voice: changing from an active structure
- nominalisation: forming a noun from the original verb
- intransitivity: using verbs that do not need a direct object.

It is interesting that the first two language features are also associated with formality and impersonal language.

You may often overlook nominalisation as it is a common feature of language use. It is helpful to try alternative ways of expressing a text to make its language choices clearer.

Activity 66

- 1 Rephrase this text in a more direct, active, personal style.

The observation of the school’s code of conduct is a requirement for all pupils. The maintenance of orderly behaviour and the choice of appropriate clothing is essential to the smooth running of the school day. It is our hope that the achievement of academic success will be of benefit to all members of the school community. Any departure from our standards will result in exclusion.

- 2 What are the different effects of the original and the rewritten version?
- 3 Now try these exercises to practise your grammatical knowledge.
 - a The underlined words are examples of nominalisation. Can you supply the original verb for each?
 - b Some of these verbs (the transitive verbs, which take a direct object) can be either active or passive. Give an example to show the contrast, for example:

Forms of words	Terminology
Observation	Noun
You must observe the rules.	Active voice (‘rules’ is the direct object)
The rules must be observed.	Passive voice

Take it further

Read *New Labour, New Language*, Fairclough (Routledge, 2000), pages 25–28. What does he suggest about the different roles of nouns and verbs?

- 4 Read these two comments on the text above. Both interpretations of the effect are well argued. Which one do you find more convincing?

Comment A

5 The writer uses nominalisation (requirement, exclusion) to create a formal tone for the text. This is because of its context: it is an official notice from the school authorities addressed to pupils and parents. It has a serious function to inform people of the rules and to warn about the penalties. The formal tone is also created by the absence of personal pronouns. The only one used is 'our hope', which creates a sense of a shared community.

Comment B

5 The choice of nominalisation (observation, behaviour) rather than verbs keeps the people and actions in the background. The verbs would be more direct and specific: 'you must observe' or 'all pupils should behave'. This creates a distant tone, which may carry more authority. I think it allows the writer to be vague about some details, for example the threat of exclusion. Rephrased as an active verb, the writer would have to say more exactly who, when, where and why this will happen. The active structure sounds more threatening: 'If you don't wear uniform, we will exclude you (transitive verb with direct object) from school for a week.'

Some language and gender studies took a sideways step into questions about power and powerlessness. As with the concept of gender, power is not an absolute, unchanging aspect. The powerful status of a judge in a courtroom, displayed by language use as well as robe or wig, changes in a different situation. That same 'powerful' language use becomes less effective on the football terraces, for example.

You should also be aware of language change – or rather, changing social attitudes. If it was ever the case that the most effective way of displaying authority was to give commands, interrupt and insist on holding the floor, there are certainly more subtle ways of taking control of an interaction. There is interesting research into the language of the classroom, for example, which shows that teachers prefer to use indirect ways of giving instructions. The term '**mitigated imperative**' refers to this concept in forms such as:

I wonder if you'd all mind stopping what you're doing and listening.
There doesn't seem to be a lot of work going on here.
Can we have a bit of quiet?
I'd like everyone to listen now.

What you have learned

- ✓ There is a great variety of language use across the regions of the English-speaking world. There is a distinction between these terms: accent, pronunciation, dialect, lexis and grammar.
- ✓ Attitudes towards regional varieties of English are not so much judgements of the sounds, but of the people who speak like this.
- ✓ There are gradual changes in the way that people speak. This is connected to changes in society: there is much more contact between previously isolated groups of people (with improved transport and communications) and, possibly, more democratic attitudes.
- ✓ Some features of grammar are significant for analysis of language and power:
 - nominalisation versus verb
 - passive versus active voice
 - transitive versus intransitive verb
 - imperative versus mitigated imperative.

Key term

mitigated imperative

Independent research

- Read Michael Rosen's article on the 'Power of the Passive' in *emagazine*, issue 15, February 2002. What does he say about the implied meanings in the use of the passive voice in a newspaper article?
- Make a note of all the different forms used to give instructions or commands in the classroom over one lesson or a week. Can you group them according to the form – interrogative, declarative, imperative, negative, modal auxiliary verb? Is there any link with contextual factors – the speaker's age or gender; the relationship with the audience; the function or topic of the lesson, and so on?

Take it further

Read *New Labour, New Language*, Fairclough (Routledge, 2000), pages 95–118. He compares the less overtly 'powerful' style of Tony Blair with that of Margaret Thatcher. Is the same true for influential politicians of the current time?

Pragmatics

Pragmatics focuses on not so much what the *sentence* means as what the *speaker* means.

In everyday language, a 'pragmatic' approach means a 'practical' approach. There is something of this meaning in its use as a linguistic term. Pragmatics signalled a shift in interest from rather abstract matters of grammar and structure to an emphasis on meaning and the full context of language use. In many ways, pragmatics is a philosophical approach to language, asking questions about how people communicate meanings through their language use. Many interesting theories originate from philosophers, as well as anthropologists (studying human behaviour) and sociologists. Sociolinguistics is now a recognised branch of language study; it includes gender studies and regional variation, as the social context is so important in these areas.

Pragmatics is not one of the 'key levels' of language, as meanings cannot be pinned down to any one level (phonology, graphology, morphology, lexis, **etc**). This quick definition captures a fundamental contrast between the study of language form and the study of meanings in use.

You will also find less technical jargon associated with pragmatics and very few fixed, right/wrong answers. Many students find pragmatics a fascinating part of their language studies – tricky to pin down, but with great potential for exploring meanings.

Before you look at some academic theories, consider how much everyday awareness there is of the way meanings are implied in language use. Phrases such as 'name-dropping' or 'battering someone up' refer to the difference between the outward form of the language and the underlying meanings. Think about the signals that tell you that a person is not telling the truth. The entertainer Derren Brown suggests these clues in *Tricks of the Mind*:

5 in normal conversation we refer to ourselves a lot. Look out for less use of 'I', 'my', 'me' and so on, as well as an increase in references to what 'everyone' or 'no one' does or thinks, what 'always' happens, and so on, which generalise away from his own particular involvement in the story and place a distance between him and the lie.

The term 'mentionitis' is used by the main character in *Bridget Jones' Diary* by Helen Fielding, referring to the way a person keeps dropping a particular name into the conversation. According to her, this implies a positive interest in that person, even if the comments are negative.

Activity 67

Think about comments such as: 'What did you mean when you said that?'

- 1 Collect examples of language use that conveys underlying meanings.
- 2 Compare your examples with other people's in the group.
- 3 What other informal terms do you use, apart from the examples given above?

Writing about language

When you analyse texts, it is difficult to include the actual word 'pragmatics' in a sentence. The examiner will understand that you are discussing this area, as soon as you write: 'this implies' or 'she suggests'. You could begin a paragraph with an introductory comment, such as 'Looking at this from a pragmatic point of view ...'

Some key theories

There are a number of pragmatic theories and terms often mentioned in A Level textbooks. It is better to understand two or three key theories than to learn a simple summary of many. You will then be able to apply a pragmatic approach effectively in the exam. As many of the theories are philosophical, you need time for thinking about and exploring the concepts.

Speech Act Theory

The philosophers Austin and Searle proposed their Speech Act Theory in a series of lectures in the 1970s. The key concepts have been outlined and discussed in many textbooks since. The important point that they made was that the outward, grammatical form of language does not necessarily correspond to its function. They used three pairs of terms to make this distinction:

- form versus function
- sentence versus utterance
- sense versus force.

They gave the example of declarative sentence structures and pointed out that most language use is in the form of declaratives, yet people are not using language mainly to make statements or provide information. For example, comments about the weather in some social groups serve as an introductory social pleasantry (phatic function):

It looks a bit like rain today.

Similarly, what looks like an interrogative on the surface can function in other ways:

What time do you call this?

The interactive function of language to create and maintain social relationships is particularly important in spoken language. The conventions for managing this will differ from one culture to another, which can be the cause of misunderstandings. The degree to which people can express themselves directly is one example. The British are notorious for indirectness – wrapping up a plain request in a lot of extra words.

Activity 68

- 1 How many different forms (sentences) can you use to ask someone to:
a lend you money **c** hurry up
b go out with you **d** stop talking?
- 2 Rank the sentences for degrees of directness and indirectness.
- 3 How does each link to aspects of the situation (context)?

For example:

'Lend us a tenner.' (Direct, between two close friends)

'I really want to go, but I haven't got any money.'
(Indirect hint, child to parent)

'Any chance of borrowing £10?' (More direct repetition to parent)

Activity 69

Read this short extract from a conversation. The three women are drinking tea during a meeting in a hotel lobby.

Shirley: Do you want a biscuit?

Alison: Yes please.

Charlotte: No thanks.

Shirley: (to Alison) Charlotte's getting married next month.

- 1 What do you need to know in order to understand what Shirley means by her last comment? She is not changing the subject by mentioning marriage in a conversation about biscuits.
- 2 In what social contexts, might the connection (between marriage and biscuits) be missed?

Austin and Searle also introduced these three terms for analysing the ways meanings can be implied in particular situations:

- presupposition: what is already known or assumed
- inference: what the listener/reader understands or guesses
- **implicature**: what the speaker/writer was implying or suggesting.

Key term

implicature

Key terms

politeness
face
positive face
negative face
positive politeness
negative politeness

Politeness theories

Many pragmatic theories are grouped under the heading of '**politeness**', but they are not concerned with manners and etiquette, in the sense of recommending the 'proper' way to behave. Pragmatics explores the ways that language users negotiate a web of human needs, such as:

- presenting a persona
- trying to be accepted/liked
- being polite/friendly to others
- managing to get what we want.

The social anthropologists Brown and Levinson have developed the concept of face (originally proposed by the sociologist Erving Goffman). **Face** refers to our public self-image. There are two aspects to this concept:

- **positive face** refers to our need to be liked and accepted
- **negative face** refers to our right not to be imposed on.

Thus politeness involves the speakers showing an awareness of others' face needs. Paradoxically, this view of politeness suggests that individuals use it to achieve their own needs. Brown and Levinson suggest that speakers use **positive politeness** strategies, such as shared dialect, informal lexis, informal grammar and more direct requests, with friends to emphasise solidarity.

Negative politeness strategies, such as more formal lexis and grammar, and indirect requests, on the other hand, emphasise respect when there is a social distance between speakers.

As with Goffman's concept of 'footing' the rapport between people can shift in subtle ways over the course of an interaction.

Activity 70

- 1 Outline a situation where the face needs of the participants shift from positive to negative, or vice versa. For example, in a teacher–student interaction, the rapport could be very friendly and relaxed, until the student breaks some rule and the teacher needs to become an authority figure.
- 2 In groups, two people role-play the interaction, while the others observe the language use.

Writing about language

- Remember that the term 'negative politeness' does not mean a lack of politeness, but a more formal, distant rapport.

Cooperative maxims

Perhaps the most well-known pragmatic theories are those of the philosopher Grice. He proposed Cooperative Principles of Conversation with four maxims. Grice uses the terms 'flout' and 'violate' to refer to occasions when a speaker does not adhere to the ideal cooperative principles, either accidentally or deliberately. He suggests that this *manner* of speaking conveys meanings as much as the actual *content*. It is helpful to think of each maxim in terms of a question.

- **Quantity** – If someone says rather more/less than we would expect, what do we infer?
- **Quality** – If someone says something factually untrue, what did they mean to convey?
- **Manner** – If someone communicates in an obscure manner, what do we infer?
- **Relation** – If someone changes the subject, what do we infer?

The answer to all these questions will depend on the specific context – who is speaking, to whom, about what and why. For example, a person who says very little may be shy, deliberately awkward or even aggressive in intention.

Activity 7 I

- 1 Produce five more maxims for conversation. For example, if a person drops a lot of taboo words into their speech, there are various implied meanings. If they are with friends, it may be a sign of solidarity; if it is with strangers, it often communicates hostility. If this use of language is not a deliberate choice, but a habit, it suggests something about their social background.
- 2 Compare your maxims with another's.

What you have learned

- ✓ Pragmatics is the study of language in use.
- ✓ You cannot say what an isolated sentence means. The meaning also depends on the context.
- ✓ Pragmatic theories help to explain the ways meanings are implied.
- ✓ Key theories and concepts include:
 - Speech Act Theory: makes a distinction between form and function and uses the terms: presupposition, inference, implicature
 - Politeness theories use the terms: indirectness, face (positive versus negative), politeness strategies (positive versus negative),
 - Cooperative maxims use the terms: quantity, quality, manner, relation.

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