

A level English Language. Getting Started.

What does this course require from me?

English language, most of all, requires you to be able to form opinions on a diverse range of issues that involve language: this encompasses a lot of issues as language is what we use to voice our opinions, shape our thoughts and communicate with others. Without language, there would be no world as we know it.

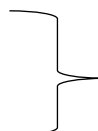
What is this booklet for?

This booklet will help you to start thinking like a student of English Language and eventually a linguist. The more you study English Language, the more you begin to inherit another sense, another power, to your personality that will always be able to see the nuances and ideas that hide behind language. You will be able to read conversations with a new level of analysis that you've never noticed before and form opinions using a far more informed, academic level of detail.

Sections

Each section is divided into the 'issues' that we explore and study throughout your two years of this course. Those sections are:

- Discourse analysis
- Media representations
- Language and Gender
- Language and Technology
- Social Groups
- Accent and Dialect
- ***Language Diversity and Change/Language Control***
- ***The History of English***
- ***Child Language Development***



Not included here:
studied in A-level.

Firstly, have a look at the key terminology below. If there are any you know, highlight them. An optional and useful task would be to look up the rest so you can apply them while using this booklet.

| | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Phoneme | Syllable | Dialect | Articulation |
| Accent | Lexis | Semantics | Pragmatics |
| Geographical | Register | Metaphor | Pejoration |
| Amelioration | Sociolect | Neology | Grammar |
| Inflection | Clause | Structure | Exclamative |
| Demonstrative | Active voice | Passive voice | Sentence function |
| Tense | 'Face' | Politeness | Ideology |
| Inference | Implicature | Deixis | Irony |
| Adjacency pairs | Discourse | Cohesion | Anaphoric reference |
| Cataphoric reference | Intertextuality | Graphology | Phonology |

Now, the following articles and tasks will allow you to start forming initial opinions within the areas that we study. It's very important that you start to form your own awareness of language and how it can impact the social and emotional behaviour that humans display: both on a personal and societal level.

For example, think about the last person you spoke to. What did you speak to them about? How did you talk to them? Why did you talk to them like this and not in the opposing manner? Did you need anything from them? If so, how did you change your language to express this need? Now, what if that person was a 5-month old baby? What if that person was your headteacher? Would your language change or stay the same? We can probably bet that it would change.

Section 1. Paper 1, Section A. Meanings and Representations.

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| <p>List as many different ways that men are represented in this text. <i>Hint: a machine due to the semantic field of processing and power: 'boost', 'burn', 'power', 'brain', 'hotwire'.</i></p> | <p>List as many different ways that women are represented in this text. <i>Hint: humans who need to be small and careful due to the instructions of 'cleanse', 'cut', 'weight-loss', 'simple'...</i></p> |

Now, how do these texts differ? What language has been used to create two totally juxtaposing representations here? Lastly, do you agree with these representations? Should both genders continue to be presented in this way? **Challenge: use the vocabulary above to support your answers.**

Section 2. Paper 2, Section A: Language and Gender.

Read the following article about how we use language to talk about gender as well as how both genders supposedly use language 'differently'.

*The idea that men and women "speak different languages" has itself become a dogma, treated not as a hypothesis to be investigated or as a claim to be adjudicated, but as an unquestioned article of faith. Our faith in it is misplaced. Like the scientists I have mentioned, I believe in following the evidence where it leads. But in this case, the evidence does not lead where most people think it does. If we examine the findings of more than 30 years of research on language, communication and the sexes, **we will discover that they tell a different, and more complicated, story.***

*The idea that men and women differ fundamentally in the way they use language to communicate **is a myth in the everyday sense:** a widespread but false belief. But it is also a myth in the sense of being a story people tell in order to explain who they are, where they have come from, and why they live as they do. Whether or not they are "true" in any historical or scientific sense, such stories have consequences in the real world. They shape our beliefs, and so influence our actions. The myth of Mars and Venus is no exception to that rule.*

For example, the workplace is a domain in which myths about language and the sexes can have detrimental effects. A few years ago, the manager of a call centre in north-east England was asked by an interviewer why women made up such a high proportion of the agents he employed. Did men not apply for jobs in his centre? The manager replied that any vacancies attracted numerous applicants of both sexes, but, he explained: "We are looking for people who can chat to people, interact, build rapport. What we find is that women can do this more ... women are naturally good at that sort of thing." Moments later, he admitted: "I suppose we do, if we're honest, select women sometimes because they are women rather than because of something they've particularly shown in the interview."

The growth of call centres is part of a larger trend in economically advanced societies. More jobs are now in the service than the manufacturing sector, and service jobs, particularly those that involve direct contact with customers, put a higher premium on language and communication skills. Many employers share the call-centre manager's belief that women are by nature better qualified than men for jobs of this kind, and one result is a form of discrimination. Male job applicants have to prove that they possess the necessary skills, whereas women are just assumed to possess them. In today's increasingly service-based economy, this may not be good news for men.

-Deborah Cameron. Feminist linguist.

Thoughts and responses...

- What do you think Cameron means by 'a dogma'?
- Do you also believe that men and women speak differently is a myth? Explain your ideas.
- How can these myths have detrimental effects in the workplace?
- What did the manager say about women in particular? Would you feel appreciated if you were singled out for this reason?

Take another read of ideas around how men can dominate a conversation...

What evidence shows that male and female styles differ? Among the most compelling is a crucial piece left out of the “simple sexism” explanation: men mansplain to each other. Elizabeth Aries, another researcher, analysed 45 hours of conversation and found that men dominated mixed groups—but she also found competition and dominance in male-only groups. Men begin discussing fact-based topics, sizing each other up. Before long, a hierarchy is established: either those who have the most to contribute, or those who are simply better at dominating the conversation, are taking most of the turns. The men who dominate one group go on to dominate others, while women show more flexibility in their dominance patterns. The upshot is that a shy, retiring man can find himself endlessly on the receiving end of the same kinds of lectures that Ms Tannen, Ms Chemaly and Ms Solnit describe.

- Soraya Chemely (Huffington Post)

Thoughts and responses...

- What is ‘mansplaining’?
- What research did Elizabeth Aries carry out?
- What did Aries find from her research?
- Why was a ‘hierarchy’ established?
- How much, in your opinion, does this research reflect the stereotypical behaviour of males?

Finally, take a look at how an issue with language and gender is written about here.

Baxter, a lecturer in applied linguistics at Aston University, said women were left open to accusations that they were not fully in control of their arguments, which could lead to a complete loss of authority during meetings. "They have to work really hard to hit the right note with their colleagues", she said. "I have seen a woman use all the wrong linguistic strategies, and she lost the room".

Baxter said she had heard one woman director, who had spoken just twice in a meeting, say: "Sorry, sorry, I'm talking too much, I'm talking too much."

Baxter said: "I found very few differences between men and female leadership language, but there was this one key difference, which I call double-voice discourse. Women use this when they are facing criticism or when handling conflict. While men tend to direct and straight talking and if they are confrontational it is regarded as nothing personal, women avoid being directly confrontational and use a range of strategies to preserve a range of alliances, if not friendships, to achieve their agenda.

"I am not saying that women are more sharing and caring than men. I am not saying they are more altruistic. They are doing it to achieve their own agenda."

Thoughts and responses...

- What accusations were women suddenly left open to?
- What do you think of the idea of women 'hitting the right note'? Is this complimentary or derogatory?
- Why do you think the woman 'lost the room'? What expectations do you think she failed to meet?
- Why did the woman apologise? Do you think a 'director' should talk less?
- What is 'double-voice discourse'?
- Do you believe all women care more about friendships rather than their goals?
- What are your personal opinions about this?

Now, that was just a short snippet of the kinds of issues we discuss within language and gender. Are you frustrated and confused yet? I hope you are, because genderlect (language concerning gender) is a prominent issue in linguistics and is still studied around the world today. To get you started, read Deborah Cameron's blog or follow her on Twitter @wordspinster.

Section 3. Paper 2, Section A: Language and Technology.

Why are we still on section A?

That's because Paper 2, Section A is all about language diversity – this means that you'll study a range of issues in a short section of one paper: Gender, Technology, Age, Social groups, Accents and dialects...

Now, as 'Generation Z', you will know that technology has a very important part to play in terms of how we use language and why. For instance, do you still use 'lol' for when you're actually laughing out loud? Perhaps you use it ironically to suggest that you're not actually laughing: you're actually very annoyed? Strange, isn't it? Your Nan probably uses it to say 'lots of love'. Is she wrong? No, she isn't. She's just using language differently. Anyway – that's a whole other topic that we're not up to yet!

David Crystal is a pioneering linguist who is, essentially, the God of English Language study. Take a read of a short excerpt from '2b or not 2b?'

Last year, in a newspaper article headed "I h8 txt msgs: How texting is wrecking our language", John Humphrys argued that texters are "vandals who are doing to our language what Genghis Khan did to his neighbours 800 years ago. They are destroying it: pillaging our punctuation; savaging our sentences; raping our vocabulary. And they must be stopped." As a new variety of language, texting has been condemned as "textese", "slanguage", a "digital virus". According to John Sutherland of University College London, writing in this paper in 2002, it is "bleak, bald, sad shorthand. Drab

shrinktalk ... Linguistically it's all pig's ear ... it masks dyslexia, poor spelling and mental laziness. Texting is penmanship for illiterates."

Some people dislike texting. Some are bemused by it. But it is merely the latest manifestation of the human ability to be linguistically creative and to adapt language to suit the demands of diverse settings. There is no disaster pending. We will not see a new generation of adults growing up unable to write proper English. The language as a whole will not decline. In texting what we are seeing, in a small way, is language in evolution.

- David Crystal

Use the following boxes to generate some ideas for discussion about David Crystal's approach to texting and slang.

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| <p>What did John Humphrys say about texters?</p> <p>Give your opinion on this with detailed reasoning.</p> | <p>Why do you think texting makes some people believe that it is a 'digital virus'? Is this a step too far?</p> | <p>Do you text?</p> <p>Do you use slang?</p> <p>Are you illiterate, in that case?</p> |
| <p>David Crystal regards texting as 'linguistically creative'. What do you think he means by this and do you agree?</p> | <p>Can language evolve? Are there any words you used to use that you no longer use? Are there any words you now use that you didn't in Year 7?</p> | <p>Finally, if you were to describe what texting was to a person foreign to it, how would you describe it?</p> |

Yes, you are studying English Language which means we concern ourselves with lexis. However, we are also very interested in how we communicate meanings: somehow this can be done with the raise of an eyebrow, a singular 'tut' or even an emoji. Read the literature below about how emojis affect our communication.

On Twitter, new-fangled uses of punctuation open doors to more nuanced casual expression

On Twitter, emojis and new-fangled uses of punctuation, for instance, open doors to more nuanced casual expression. For example, the ~quirky tilde pair~ or full. stops. in. between. words. for. emphasis. While you are unlikely to find a breezy caption written in all lowercase and without punctuation in the New York Times, you may well find one in a humorous post published on BuzzFeed.

As the author of the BuzzFeed Style Guide, I crafted a set of guidelines that were flexible and applicable to hard news stories as well as the more lighthearted posts our platform publishes, such as comical lists and takes on celebrity goings-on, as well as to our social media posts. For instance, I decided, along with my team of copy editors, to include a rule that we should put emojis outside end punctuation not inside, because the consensus was that it simply looks cleaner to end a sentence as you normally would and then use an emoji.

Now, have a think about the top 5 emojis you would use. Next, think about **why** you use them. Do you use the smiling face because you're smiling? Or are you expressing a hidden, more ironic sense of a smiling face?

Fill in the table below to record your ideas.

| Emoji (draw/describe) | Why do you use it? (the real reason!) |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|
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I bet you never thought you'd be studying the use of emojis at A Level study; yet here you are. Now, remember that we don't just look at what emojis we use – we look at how language and graphology (keyword!) has evolved over time to a) adapt to the ever-changing needs of humans and society and b) to express levels of emotion over a smart-phone.

Section 4. Paper 2, Section A: Social Groups.

This section is one which crops up in most other sections. This is because a social group can encompass factors such as: gender, age, origin, race, hobbies, accent, music taste... therefore, we always need to be aware of how we form certain 'groups' depending on who we are. This part is great because it's always exciting to study your own, and others', identities.

Have a think about the following 'groups'. How would you **stereotypically** define them in terms of their characteristics? What do you have to be like to fit into that group? More importantly, how do you think they might **use language**?

| Group | Characteristics |
|----------|-----------------|
| Goth/Emo | |

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Chav | |
| 'Popular student' | |
| Nerd | |
| Mother | |
| Teenager | |
| 'Man' | |
| 'Lady' | |
| Performer | |

Now, do you fit into any of these groups? Is this by choice? Below, write a short summary of the type of group you think you belong to and how you fit into that group. *This does not have to be one from the list.* Think of it as a short autobiography of yourself.

Summary of myself

Lined writing area with 25 horizontal lines.

Section 5. Paper 2, Section A: Accent and Dialects

On a scale from 1-5, 1 being the ‘nicest’ and 5 being the ‘worst’, rank the following accents in terms of how ‘nice’ they are. Use the British Library database (<https://www.bl.uk/british-accent-and-dialects/collection-items>) to listen to examples.

| Accent | Rank | Reason for that ranking – describe what you hear when you hear the accent. |
|----------------|------|--|
| Geordie | | |
| Scouse | | |
| Brummie | | |
| Northern Irish | | |
| Southern Irish | | |
| Scottish | | |
| Mancunian | | |
| South African | | |
| Wigan | | |

Now, have a read of David and Ben Crystal’s book about accents ‘You Say Potato’.

The heart of the answer is the notion that accents express our identity – who we are, which part of the country we come from, or where we belong socially or professionally. And identity is a very emotional issue.

We need to be clear what we’re talking about, when we refer to someone’s ‘accent’. Accents have to be distinguished from dialects. An accent is a person’s distinctive pronunciation. A dialect is a much broader notion: it refers to the distinctive vocabulary and grammar of someone’s use of language. If you say eether and I say iyther, that’s accent. We use the same word but pronounce it differently. But if you say I’ve got a new dustbin and I say I’ve gotten a new garbage can, that’s dialect. We’re using different words and sentence patterns to talk about the same thing. This book is just about accents. Usually, when people talk about accents, they’re thinking geographically.

It tells you about a person’s social background – the social class they belong to, or their educational history, or their ethnic or religious affiliation. If we were to explore the personal histories of Ben and someone else, that girl, his ex-girlfriend, we’d find social factors in the way they were brought up that account for their different preferences. Most people

remember having some feature of their pronunciation corrected by their parents, or by a teacher in school. As adults, some go out of their way to change their accent, because they want to sound like people from a social class they aspire to. There's a third function of accent: it can tell you what job a person does.

Complete the tasks below. Use the information above to help you form detailed answers and discussions.

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| What do accents express? Why can accents be an 'emotional issue'? | Is an accent different from a dialect? If so, how? | Think about your own accent. Is it purely from one area or is it a mix of different influences? |
| How can an accent tell you about a person's job? | What does social class have to do with an accent? (Think back to your judgements of accents before!) | Would we regard the Queen differently if she had a scouse accent? If so, why? |

Thank you for working your way through these activities. Below, summarise what you were most interested in, what shocked you the most and perhaps what you'd like to learn more about.

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|---|

Hopefully this short booklet has helped gear your brain into the linguistic way of thinking and approaching issues. Be prepared to discuss and express far more ideas than you did at GCSE. A level is all about discussion, debate and criticism. The more you read and discuss, the better!