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Glossary of key terms and guide to methods of language analysis

AS and A-level English Language (7701 and 7702)

Introduction

This document offers guidance on content that students might typically explore when working with the different levels of language analysis on the AS and A-level English Language specifications, as well as providing definitions of some key terms. It is designed to support teachers and students in providing examples of subject concepts and content for the new specifications.

This document does not provide an exhaustive list of concepts and terms that could be studied and there are clearly other areas of learning that teachers can share with their students. Equally, it is not simply a list of terms that need to be learnt; teachers are encouraged to use these with their students as they feel is appropriate. Further advice and guidance on supporting planning and teaching is available on AQA's website.

As with many fields, there is always debate and disagreement about definitions, such as their scope and overlap with other terms, and one example of that can be seen in the terminology used here in this introduction. While we have referred to 'methods of language analysis' in the title and 'levels of language analysis' in the first paragraph, you might also come across 'language frameworks', or perhaps 'language toolkit' elsewhere. In essence what is being described with these terms are the different elements or aspects that make up language and the ways in which those can be used to analyse language.

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Lexis and Semantics

At this level students describe and explore the vocabulary system of English. Students can study:

- the denotative and connotative meanings of words
- ideas around words as signifiers and how these relate to signified meanings (ie basic semiotics)
- how meanings are constructed through the use of figurative language such as metaphor
- sense relationships between words through the concepts of semantic fields, synonyms, antonyms, hypernyms and hyponyms
- patterns of word use and meanings across texts and bodies of data
- how individuals and groups vary vocabulary choices according to audience and purpose, and how levels of formality may vary according to these contextual factors
- how speakers may use specialist registers
- how speakers' sociolects and dialects reflect variations according to group membership and geographical locality and region
- how variation in text design reflects variation in language use between individuals, groups, communities and nations
- how new words are formed through different processes, for example through blending, compounding, clipping and the forming of acronyms, initialisms and eponyms
- how words and their meanings change over time, for example through narrowing, broadening, amelioration, pejoration, and semantic reclamation.

Key terms

This list is not exhaustive but attempts to give an indication of the terms which students are likely to encounter in their studies.

Denotative and connotative meanings: the literal (denotative) and associated (connotative) meanings of words.

Figurative language: language used in a non-literal way in order to describe something in another's terms (eg simile or metaphor).

Semantic fields: groups of words connected by a shared field of reference, eg medicine, art.

Synonyms: words that have equivalent meanings.

Antonyms: words that have contrasting meanings.

Hypernyms: words that label categories, eg animal (this category includes for example dog, cat and rabbit).

Hyponyms: words that can be included in a larger, more general category (eg the hyponyms car, bus, aeroplane as a form of the hypernym transport).

Levels of formality: vocabulary styles including slang, colloquialisms, taboo, formal and fixed levels.

Occupational register: a technical vocabulary associated with a particular occupation or activity.

Sociolect: a language style associated with a particular social group.

Dialect: a language style associated with a particular geographical region.

Neology: the process of new word formation, including the following: blends, compounds, acronyms, initialisms, eponyms.

Semantic change: the process of words changing meaning, including the following: narrowing, broadening, amelioration, pejoration, semantic reclamation.

Grammar

At this level students describe and explore **morphology** (word formation) and **syntax** (order and structure within the larger units of phrases, clauses and sentences). Students can study:

- how free morphemes combine with affixes to show tense or number (inflectional function), or to form new words (derivational function)
- how head words in phrases are modified to form larger structures to provide more detail about people, places, objects or events
- how elements are arranged in clauses to support meaning and to achieve different kinds of effects
- how significant patterns and structures can be established through the shaping of syntax throughout a text
- how point of view can be grammatically realised in different ways through writers' and speakers' use of the active or passive voice
- how English verbs show the concept of time through tense and aspect
- how single clauses form multi-clause structures through co-ordination and subordination, and how in writing, these represent different types of sentences
- how clauses and sentences function in different ways, for example to form statements, form questions, give commands or make exclamations
- how the grammar of speech and online forms of communication is not the same as that of writing.

Key terms

This list is not exhaustive but attempts to give an indication of the terms which students are likely to encounter in their studies.

Morpheme: the smallest grammatical unit.

Free morpheme: a morpheme that can stand on its own as a word.

Affix (or bound morpheme): a morpheme that cannot stand on its own as a word, but combines with others to create a new word.

Phrase: a group of words centred around a head word.

Head word: the central word in a phrase which gives the phrase its name (eg noun phrase, adjective phrase) and may be modified by other words.

Modification: the adding of additional words to provide more detail to a head word in a phrase either before it (pre-modification) or after it (post-modification).

Clause: a group of words centred around a verb, which may be either grammatically complete (main clause) or incomplete (subordinate clause).

Active voice: a clause where the agent (doer) of an action is the subject.

Passive voice: a clause where the patient (the entity affected by an action) is in the subject position, and the agent either follows or is left out.

Tense: how the time of an event is marked (usually through verb inflection): past, present & future*.

Aspect: another element of marking the time of an event, by specifying whether they are progressive (ongoing) or perfective (completed).

Coordination: the joining of two or more independent clauses via co-ordinating conjunctions. Single words and longer phrases can also be co-ordinated.

Subordination: the joining of two or more clauses where only one is independent (the main clause) and the others dependent (subordinate clause/clauses).

Sentence: a larger unit of meaning, which may be formed of a single clause (simple sentence) or several clauses (compound or complex sentences). Minor sentences are sentences without a verb.

Sentence function: the purpose a sentence fulfils in communication: as a statement, question, command or exclamation. These are also referred to in many grammar books as (respectively): declaratives, interrogatives, imperatives and exclamatives.

Word class: the grammatical category into which words can be placed, including noun, adjective, verb, adverb, determiner, pronoun, preposition, conjunction.

*Please note that there is a debate over whether or not there is a future tense in English.

Phonetics, phonology and prosodics

At this level students describe and explore the sound system (phonology), the ways that sounds produced by users of that system are produced (phonetics), and how rhythm and intonation are used in speech. Students can study:

- the phoneme as a basic distinct unit of sound
- the different types of vowel phonemes (long, short and diphthongs)
- how consonant phonemes are formed in terms of voicing, place of articulation and manner of articulation
- how individual phonemes combine to form syllables
- how variations of the same phoneme may occur in pronunciations of certain words
- variations in speech patterns of individuals and groups in terms of regional accent, and as a result of accommodation
- the representation of the speech patterns of individuals and groups in different discourses
- the use of sound iconicity (eg onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance, consonance) for effect
- the arbitrariness of sound symbolism (eg the word 'dog' has no phonological relation to the animal which it describes)
- how speakers use variations in pitch, intonation, volume and speed depending on situational aspects
- how the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) can be used to represent and talk about the different aspects of the sound system.

Key terms

This list is not exhaustive but attempts to give an indication of the terms which students are likely to encounter in their studies.

Phoneme: the basic unit of sound.

Diphthong: a vowel sound that is the combination of two separate sounds, where a speaker glides from one to another.

Voicing: the act of the vocal cords either vibrating (voiced) or not vibrating (unvoiced) in the production of a consonant sound.

Place of articulation: the position in the mouth where a consonant sound is produced.

Manner of articulation: the extent to which airflow is interrupted by parts of the mouth in the production of consonant sounds.

Syllable: a sound unit with a vowel at its centre.

Accent: a regional variety of speech that differs from other regional varieties in terms of pronunciation.

Accommodation: the ways that individuals adjust their speech patterns to match others, either through convergence (moving towards another's language style) or divergence (moving away from another's language style).

Sound iconicity: the use of the sound system to mirror form or meaning.

International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA): an internationally recognised system of phonetic transcription.

Pragmatics

At this level students describe and explore the implied meanings of English and how language use creates meanings in interactional contexts. Students can study:

- the implied meanings of words, utterances and speech acts in their specific contexts
- face, politeness and co-operation in language interaction
- how people draw inferences from others' language uses
- the influence of different contexts on the meanings of communicative acts
- how attitudes, values and ideologies can be signalled through language choices
- how language is used to enact and reflect relationships between people
- aspects of culturally-based routines that are founded on shared assumptions and traditions.

Key terms

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Implicature: an implied meaning that has to be inferred as a result of a conversational maxim being broken.

Inference: the process of deriving implied meanings.

Irony: using language to signal an attitude other than what has been literally expressed.

Deixis: words that are context-bound where meaning depends on who is being referred to, where something is happening or when it is happening.

Speech acts: communicative acts that carry meaning beyond the words and phrases used within them, for example, apologies and promises.

Politeness: the awareness of others' needs to be approved of and liked (positive politeness) and/or given freedom to express their own identity and choices (negative politeness).

Face: the concept of how all communication relies on presenting a 'face' to listeners and audiences, and how the management of positive and negative face needs to contribute to interaction.

Cooperative principles in conversation: how interaction is thought to be based upon various kinds of cooperative behaviour between speakers.

Discourse

At this level students describe and explore the ways in which whole texts (written, spoken and multimodal) are constructed at a level beyond the word, phrase, clause and sentence. Students can study:

- Discourse structure: how a text is structured overall (i.e. how its parts are assembled). For example: a question and answer format; problem – solution structure; narrative structure; adjacency pairs in a spoken interaction; sequence of messages in an online/social media chat
- How references are made within and between texts using cohesive devices and referencing
- Narrative structures in texts
- How texts are related to and contribute towards wider beliefs, ideologies and values in society – ie **discourses**, in the plural (see later in this glossary).

Key terms

This list is not exhaustive but attempts to give an indication of the terms which students are likely to encounter in their studies.

Discourse markers: words, phrases or clauses that help to organise what we say or write (eg OK, So, "As I was saying…").

Adjuncts: non-essential elements of clauses (usually adverbials) that can be omitted (eg "I'll see you in the morning").

Disjuncts: sentence adverbs that work to express an attitude or stance towards material that follows (eg "Frankly, I'm appalled at what she said" or "Sadly, not one of them survived").

Narrative structures: how events, actions and processes are sequenced when recounting a story.

Anaphoric reference: making reference back to something previously identified in a text (often using pronouns to refer to an already established reference point eg "The woman stood by the door. She made detailed notes of what she could see").

Cataphoric reference: making reference forwards to something as yet unidentified in a text. Eg "It was warm. It was living. It was a rabbit."

Exophoric reference: making reference to things beyond the language of a text itself (as opposed to **endophoric**, which is within the language of the text), perhaps within a speaker's immediate physical context eg "Look at that".

Interdiscursivity (or intertextuality): the use of discourses from one field as part of another (eg the use of science discourses in the selling of beauty products, or the use of commercial discourses in education).

Critical discourse analysis: the use of linguistic analysis to explore and challenge the ideologies, positions and values of texts and their producers.

Graphology

At this level students describe and explore the visual aspects of text design and appearance. Students can study:

- how text producers use aspects of text design to help create meaning, for example through the use of layout, space, typographical and orthographical features and colour;
- how images are used on their own or in conjunction with writing and sound as multimodal texts to represent ideas, individuals or groups;
- how variation in text design reflects variation in language use within individuals and groups and across time, and as a result of advances in technology and shifting cultural practices (eg how emojis, gifs or memes might be used in online texts).

Key terms

This list is not exhaustive but attempts to give an indication of the terms which students are likely to encounter in their studies.

Layout: the way in which a text is physically structured.

Typographical features: the features of fonts used in texts such as font type, size and colour.

Orthographical features: the features of the writing system such as spelling, capitalisation, symbols and punctuation.

Multimodal texts: texts that rely on the interplay of different modes (eg images, writing and sound) to help shape meaning (see the definition of mode on the next page).

Additional shorter definitions (key terms but not levels of language analysis)

Audience: the receivers or intended receivers of a text (written, spoken, multimodal). The concept of an ideal audience/reader/narratee is often found in critical discourse. Texts might also have multiple audiences.

Conceptual metaphor: a systematic use of metaphor that maps an abstract target domain to a more concrete source domain. For example, an abstract concept such as language might be mapped to a more concrete source domain such as a tool or a doorway.

Corpus: a body of language data that has been systematically gathered and stored, to be used for language analysis. For example, the British National Corpus consists of over 100 million words and has been used to analyse patterns and trends in English usage, while a student might assemble a corpus of (say) 10 newspaper articles around a particular theme.

Discourses: used in many different ways in language study. Can be used to refer to a mode of language (eg spoken or written discourse), a register (eg medical or legal discourse), a way of thinking about and presenting something (eg representing language using a discourse of decay, pollution or infection).

Foregrounding: the way in which texts emphasise key events or ideas through the use of attention-seeking devices (in terms of lexis, semantics, phonology or grammar) that either repeat content (parallelism) or break established patterns (deviation). Deviation may be:
- External: breaking from the normal conventions of language use, for example in the use of nonsense words or ungrammatical constructions.
- Internal: breaking from a pattern that has previously been set up in the text for a striking effect.

Genre: the way of categorising and classifying different types of texts according to their features or expected shared conventions or functions. Genres come into being as the result of people agreeing about perceived similar characteristics in terms of content or style. Genres are fluid and dynamic and new genres continually evolve as a result of new technologies and cultural practices.

Literariness: the degree to which a text displays qualities that mean that people see it as literary and as literature. However, since many so called 'non-literary' texts display aspects of creative language use that is often seen as a marker of being literary, it is best to think of literariness as a continuum rather than viewing texts as being absolutely 'literary' or 'non-literary'.

Modality: a system of language use linked to the level of certainty, obligation, doubt or confidence towards events and actions on the part of the text producer. For example, the use of a modal adverb such as 'probably', 'maybe' or 'definitely' or the use of a modal auxiliary verb such as 'must', 'could' or 'might'.

Mode: the way in which language is communicated between text producer and text receiver, eg as an image, in writing, in digital and online forms, in speech or as a logo. The term **mode** (from semiotics and linguistics) is related to the term **medium** (from media studies) which is how messages are mediated (eg paper or digital text), and also to the term **channel** (from communication studies) which is the physical means of transmission (eg auditory, visual or olfactory). Mode also encompasses ideas around planning and spontaneity, distance between text producer and receiver, how transitory or long- lasting a text is. Mode is more than a binary opposition, is sometimes visualised as a continuum and is constantly changing as new communication technologies blur the lines between older forms.

Narrative: a type of text or discourse that functions to tell a series of events. A narrative is the organisation of experience told by a narrator to any number of narratees. A narrative has two distinctive parts:
- The story: the events, places, characters and time of action that act as the building blocks of the narrative.
- The narrative discourse: the particular shaping of those building blocks into something worth telling through specific choices in language and structure.

Patterns: a broad term that can cover a number of areas related to language use. Patterns might be (for instance) syntactical, taking the form of a repeated grammatical structure; semantic, taking the form of a number of words or phrases that are linked or contrasted in meaning; phonological, taking the form of literary devices such as alliteration and rhyme; graphological, taking the form of repeated or contrasting design features. Patterns can also operate on the level of discourses, for example where familiar ideas are constructed using repeated conceptual metaphors (eg life as a journey). Patterns can often be a useful way of exploring the internal structure of a text and the possible intentions behind such structures. See also **foregrounding**, **discourses** and **conceptual metaphor**.

Point of view: the way in which events and experiences are filtered through a particular perspective to provide a particular version of reality. Point of view may be:
- Related to how a narrative is presented in terms of space and time through the use of deixis, time frames, and flashbacks and flashforwards;
- Related to a particular ideological viewpoint, such as an individual's way of seeing the world or thinking about events (often in an extreme way). These might be shown through the use of modal verbs, adjectives and adverbs to stress belief or commitment and/or the use of idiosyncratic words and phrases;
- Related to distinguishing between who tells and who sees, as in the case of a narrative told in the third person but which seems to be filtered through a particular character's consciousness.

Positioning: how a text producer places or orientates themselves to the subject being presented and towards the audience or reader being addressed.

Purpose: the intention or objective behind a text in terms of what it is designed to do and how it is used. Texts can have many different and overlapping purposes.

Register: a variety of language that is associated with a particular field of reference, eg occupational discourse. Registers may be either written, spoken or multimodal.

Representation: how experiences, views and ideas are 're-presented' to readers, listeners and viewers through language and other meaning-making resources in order to influence their way of seeing the world.

Style: the level of formality in a text. This can be seen as distinct from its register (eg an occupational register can exist at different levels of formality).