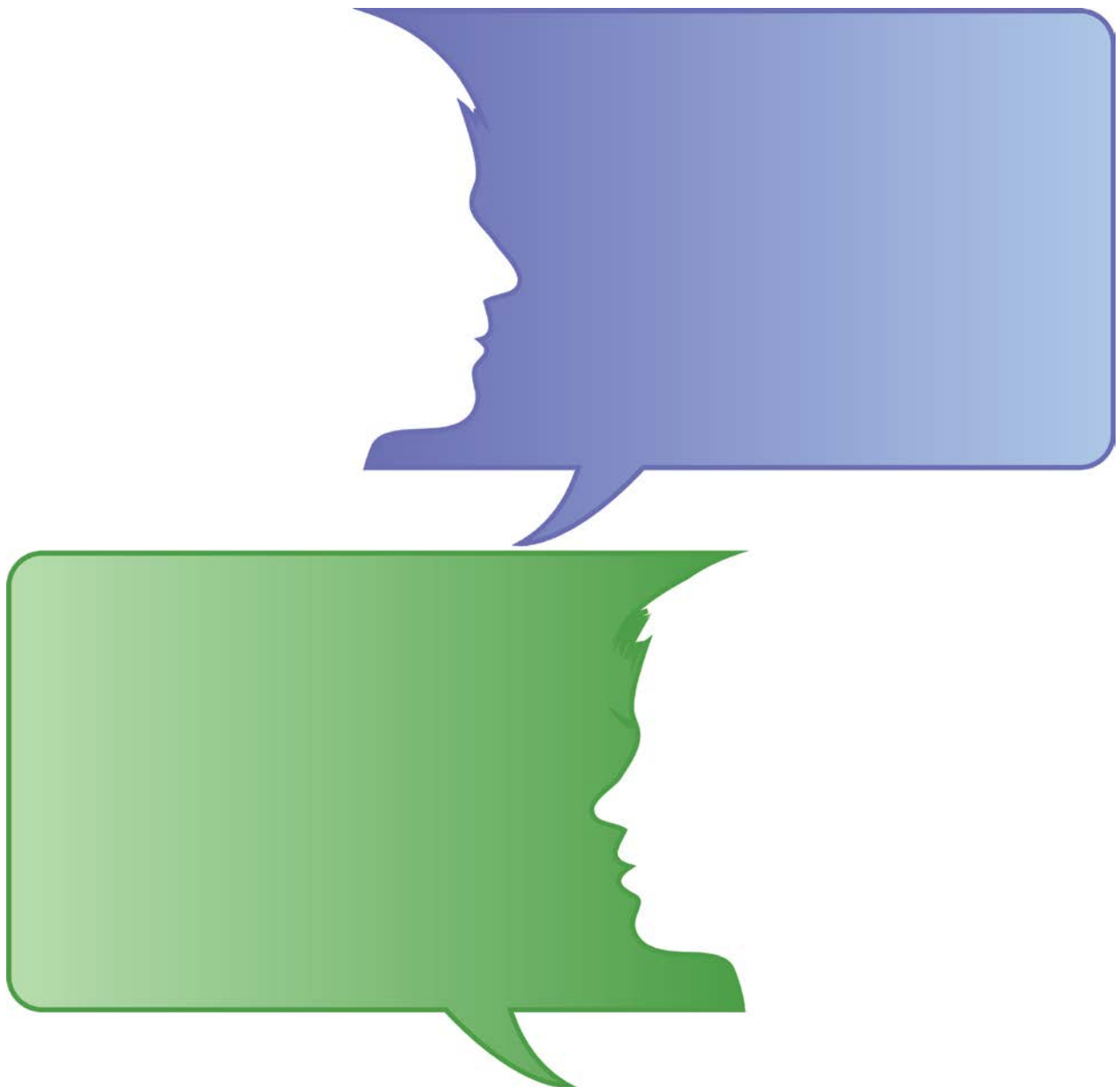


A-level English Language

Hub schools network meeting

Paper 2 Section B: Language discourses

Published: Spring 2019



Contents

Contents	Page
Assessment Objectives	4
Introduction to Paper 2 Section B material	5
Worksheet one: Introduction to language discourses	6
Worksheet two: Researching language discourses	7
Worksheet three: Demonstrating understanding of language discourses	8
Worksheet four: Evaluating and challenging language discourses	10
Worksheet five: Developing a full analysis	11
Worksheet six: Working with two texts	16
Worksheet seven: Working with two of your own texts	24
Appendix: Texts one and two	25

Assessment Objectives

A01	Apply appropriate methods of language analysis, using associated terminology and coherent written expression.
A02	Demonstrate critical understanding of concepts and issues relevant to language use.
A03	Analyse and evaluate how contextual factors and language features are associated with the construction of meaning.
A04	Explore connections across texts, informed by linguistic concepts and methods.
A05	Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English to communicate in different ways.

Language discourses

An introduction to Paper 2 Section B material

The material presented in this booklet is designed for use with Paper 2 Section B.

Discourse is a term that has developed several meanings in several disciplines. For AQA Paper 2, a useful application of the term is to view discourses as ways of thinking about, talking about, arguing about and describing how we feel about something.

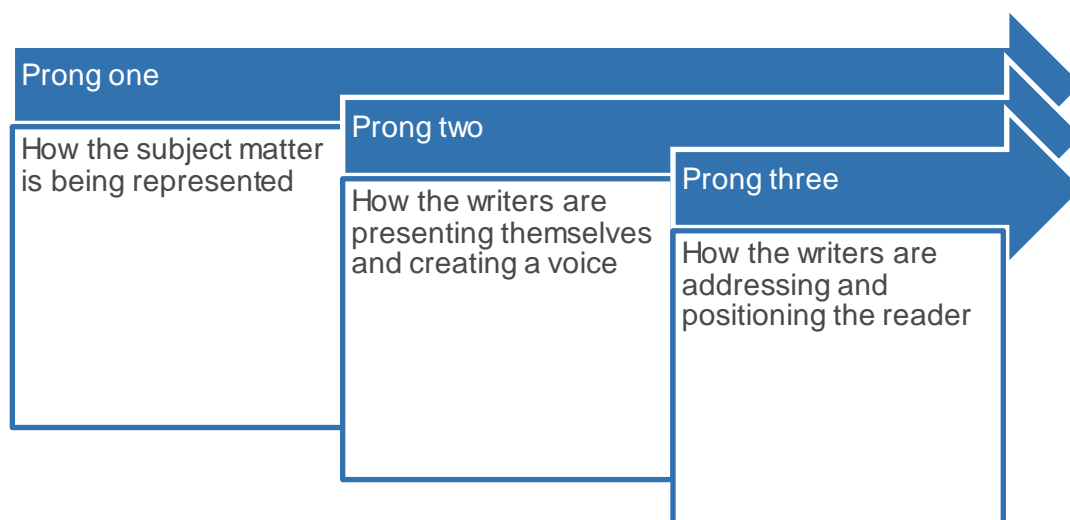
Because language, and views about language change and diversity, are under the spotlight for Paper 2, language discourses might therefore be described as ways of thinking about, talking about, arguing about and describing how we feel about language.

Norman Fairclough, a pioneer of what is termed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), focuses on the power that discourse has in influencing how ideologies are constructed and maintained, and on how personal and social identities are constructed.

The material provided here for Section B of paper 2 is designed to encourage students to:

- see how views about language are presented and framed
- help them develop an approach to the two texts they will be analysing and responding to.

One of the approaches offered here is a 'three-pronged analysis' in which students are encouraged to think about how the writers of the texts under discussion in Section B, present ideas about language, but also how they present a version of themselves as writers and address their readers.



Worksheet one: Introduction to language discourses

A discourse can be defined as a way of thinking about, talking about, arguing about and describing how we feel about something. For example, when talking about sport or politics a discourse of conflict is often used: metaphors such as *ambushed*, *attacked* and *fought* might be used to describe actions on the pitch or in parliament. When language is discussed – especially ideas around language change and language diversity – discourses are often used to put forward a particular perspective.

Activity:

Match the discourse on the left with the comment about language on the right.

Discourse	View about language
Decay	"...languages can crossbreed in a way that species do not."
Purity	"English has been infected and weakened by text messaging and online abbreviations."
Conflict	"The English language is like a crumbling castle: a once great building now on the verge of collapse."
Disease	"English has become polluted by ugly Americanisms."
Evolution	"Standard English is now in a state of war against the invaders: American English, online slang and Jafaican."

Think of the implications of each of these discourses.

- How do they shape the way we might think about language, about what it is and how it changes and varies?
- How does it affect the ways in which we might view the users of language?
- Which particular words or phrases in each example helped you to match the view with the discourse? Watch out for these in future texts and see if you can notice patterns of language emerging.
- What other common language discourses have you come across when looking at different change and diversity topic areas?

Worksheet two: Researching language discourses

One way to develop an understanding of how language is represented in the media and how common particular discourses about language can be, is to gather examples of opinion pieces about different change and diversity topic areas.

Activity:

Below, we have given you a starter article (or two) for each of the areas mentioned, and your task is to find a further three articles online (or through a library/your own resources) for that same area. Once you have gathered them, make a note of the main ways in which each language topic is represented, the viewpoints being offered and the key discourses used in the texts. Are you seeing the same discourses of decline, decay, invasion, restraint, pollution and conflict again and again or are there others too?

Technology and language change discourses

telegraph.co.uk/technology/twitter/8853427/Ralph-Fiennes-blames-Twitter-for-eroding-language.html

theguardian.com/books/2008/jul/05/saturdayreviewsfeatres.guardianreview1

Political Correctness, representation of social groups and language usage

ENGA3 June 2015 – Simon Heffer extract: Text F (available through AQA secure key materials)

pinknews.co.uk/2015/10/20/sexism-in-schools-must-be-treated-seriously-like-homophobia-and-racism/

Gender discourses

dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2782105/Men-er-women-um-Speech-markers-reveal-details-age-sex-lifestyle-scientists-claim.html

Accent and dialect discourses

huffingtonpost.co.uk/william-hanson/accents-arent-always-acceptible_b_908149.html

Accents Aren't Always Acceptable, Pet

Semantic change discourses

theguardian.com/science/shortcuts/2013/aug/14/language-literally-losing-its-meaning

Worksheet three: Demonstrating understanding of discourses within analysis

When you're analysing texts in Question 3, your examiner is looking for you to demonstrate a range of skills and knowledge. One key area is an understanding of language discourses. What's important here is to show that you can make connections between the ideas and opinions presented about language in the texts given, with the ways that language is often represented in many other texts.

There are two main ways of doing this:

- one way is to work from the outside-in ie from the discourses 'out there' back into the texts (something you will have started on Worksheet 1)
- the other way is to work from the inside-out ie from the language in the texts themselves, out to the wider discourses beyond them.

Activity:

Here's an approach that might help you to with the second of these approaches. Try this approach out, by considering the use of discourse in the texts that were provided on Worksheet 2 or that you found for the research task.

1. Identify and categorise the WHAT of each text ie the type of English that is being commented on eg women's language, regional accent and dialect, younger people's language.
2. Highlight any parts of the text that convey an opinion or view about this language type.
3. Consider whether the text producers are drawing from a discourse that you are familiar with (eg decay, invasion, conflict, purity, morality, pollution, deficiency, disease) or whether it offers a different perspective.
4. Develop your analysis by considering some of these questions (not necessarily in this order).
 - Q: Which language choices help to link to the discourse(s) you have identified (eg figurative language, semantic fields, connotations, phrases and modification, tense and aspect, complements, clause types, patterns such as contrasts and repeated grammatical/semantic structures etc)?
 - Q: Are the attitudes conveyed, more typical of those who take a prescriptivist or descriptivist approach to language? Is it possible to categorise the views in this way?
 - Q: How does the description of the language topic help put forward a view about change or diversity? (eg How are people who try to control and regulate offensive language being represented? How are regional accents being represented? How are teenagers' language skills being represented? How are the people who add new words and meanings to dictionaries being represented?)
 - Q: Whose interests are served by this representation of the language topic?

-
- Q: Whose interests are negated or made to seem less important/less valid by this representation of the language topic?
 - Q: Are wider social and political agendas at work? Is the language focus being used as a proxy for ageism, racism, xenophobia or sexism?
 - Q: Are the attitudes expressed deliberately exaggerated to a) entertain b) pander to the target audience c) create a more sensational and/or provocative story?
 - Q: Can we challenge the attitudes/assumptions/ideological position being communicated about language and language users? How might linguists respond?
5. Write up a section which focuses on the attitudes conveyed about the language variety (ie the **what**), creating links between the texts at discourse level.

Worksheet four: Evaluating and challenging discourses

Language is an emotive topic: the points of view about language in the media and advertising are often biased, include very strong opinions and do lots of complaining. You don't have to agree with these ideas and often the best responses are ones which include some thoughtful evaluation of the positions taken by the writer.

Modern linguists are also vocal about language and researching their ideas can help you to confidently evaluate the discourses used in the texts you are presented with.

Activity:

Find out what they have to say by reading their work and/or by following some of these search prompts:

1. Robert Lane Greene has plenty to say about prescriptivists and pedants in 'You are what you speak' (2012). Key words and phrases for your search: 'finger wagging', 'sticklerism', and 'declinism'. Some useful extracts can be found here: visualthesaurus.com/cm/dogearred/a-brief-history-of-sticklers/ and visualthesaurus.com/cm/dogearred/a-brief-history-of-sticklers-part-2/
2. Lesley and John Milroy focused on attitudes towards Standard English in 'Authority in Language' (1989). Key search phrase: 'complaint tradition'.
3. Jean Aitchison's lecture 'The Web of Worries' (1996) focused on describing prescriptive concerns whilst also challenging these views from a descriptivist position. Key search phrases: 'crumbling castle', 'damp spoon' and 'infectious disease'. The Reith lectures themselves can be found here: bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00gmvwv
4. Deborah Cameron explores the apparent connection between conservative social anxieties and conservative, prescriptivist attitudes towards grammar in 'Verbal Hygiene' (1995). Key phrase: 'verbal hygiene'.
5. Ian Cushing argues that those who complain about language change, often confuse informality with ungrammaticality or incorrectness. In 'Language Change' (2018) he considers how different registers are appropriate in different contexts. Key search phrase: 'Standard English appropriateness'.
6. A recent article by Rob Drummond 'Who do you think you're apostrophising? The dark side of grammar pedantry' (2017) considers which voices get championed in the press when putting forward views about language. You can access this article by following this link: theconversation.com/who-do-you-think-youre-apostrophising-the-dark-side-of-grammar-pedantry-75793
7. In an article entitled, 'Swimming with the tide in a sea of language change' (1999), David Crystal counters the metaphors used within the media to represent language. He proposed the metaphor of language change being like a tidal flow. You can access this article by following this link: davidcrystal.com/?fileid=-4873

Evaluating and challenging discourses – suggestions for exam practice

You might find it helpful to make brief reference to the ideas of linguists to help you to dissect and evaluate the representations of language you find in the texts in Question 3, but AO2 is not assessed in Question 3, so don't just offload all your knowledge about what they've said. Try to show your knowledge of wider discourses in a way that keeps you focused on the texts in front of you and how they relate to wider discussions and debates about language.

Here are three examples to help you see how this might look:

1. "In Text A, the author uses the metaphor "a worrying collapse in literacy standards". This representation of language change evidences what has been described by Robert Lane Greene as declinism: a perception that English is in an irreversible decline from a once great peak. However, Greene is also quick to point out that in the 21st century more people than ever before are literate, which suggests that such prescriptivist notions are unfounded."
2. "While the author of this text seems to believe a crumbling castle view of language (arguing that the language is 'being eroded' and the language 'falling into ruin'), as Jean Aitchison points out in her Reith Lectures, such views are often baseless because they assume that English once had a peak of perfection from which it has fallen. And the writer presents no evidence here that this was ever the case, beyond the usual complaints that things have got worse since she was at school."
3. "Many commentators in the media complain about changes such as slang terms and abbreviations spreading and damaging the language, using the common discourses of language change as disease or corruption and that is the case here. The author presents a view that "rap slang spreads from the city and infects the suburbs" which casts slang and its users as a threat. It's a common complaint but not one supported by linguistic evidence."

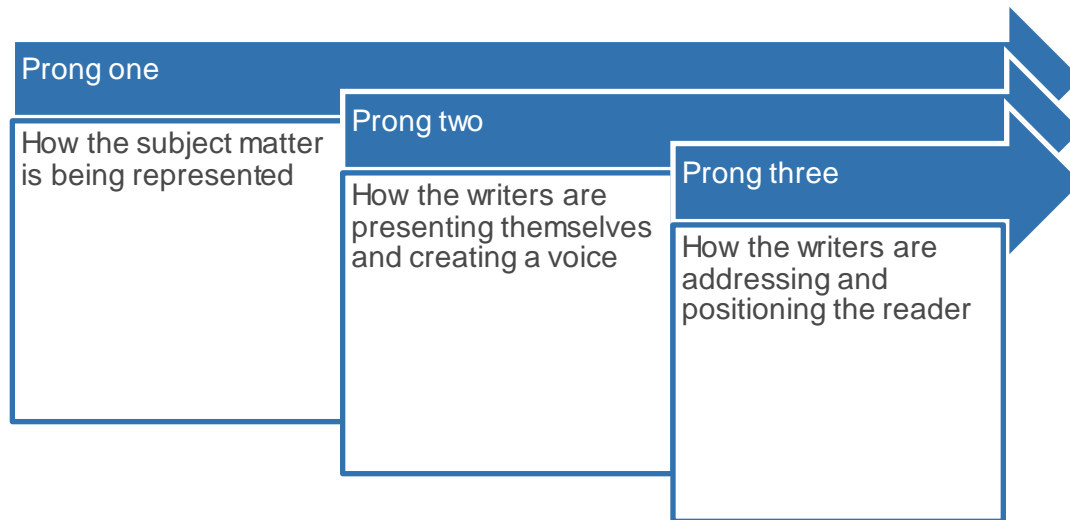
It is also worth remembering that you will need to respond to the ideas raised by the texts in your directed writing for Question 4, so it is a good idea to use your understanding of others' ideas to inform your piece. Question 4 is where AO2 is assessed, so it makes good sense to show your knowledge of ideas from language study (which includes linguists' and commentators' views about language change and diversity) in this part of Paper 2.

When planning your response to Question 3, you might also want to make notes to help you with Question 4, so write down the ideas that you encounter in the two texts and think about how you can respond to these with your knowledge.

Worksheet five: Developing a full analysis

When you are analysing the texts in Question 3, you will also need to consider the two other 'prongs' of the three-pronged analysis.

Quickly remind yourself of the three prongs and how they're being used:



All the texts in this section of the paper will be about language change or diversity (or some overlap between the two). They'll be opinionated and perhaps provocative. They might be written by non-experts, so after two years of A-level study you might well know a lot more about language than these authors.

In simple terms, the different prongs allow you to:

1. grasp what each text is about and what's being said about that
2. understand where each writer is coming from and how they are presenting their argument
3. appreciate how the readers are being persuaded to accept a particular way of seeing the subject

Here, we are still thinking about the texts separately. In the exam, you will need to deal with them together right from the start, so what's here is part of the process of building up an analytical approach that can help you in the exam.

Activity:

Read the short extract (below) and then the example analysis (over the page), for an example of these three prongs in action. The extract being analysed is from a longer article by the author and broadcaster Matthew Engel about what he perceives as the dangers of American English.

Extract from Matthew Engel's, *Say no to the get-go! Americanisms swamping English, so wake up and smell the coffee*

Nowadays, people have no idea where American ends and English begins. And that's a disaster for our national self-esteem. We are in danger of subordinating our language to someone else's – and with it large aspects of British life.

Yet no one seems to care. The stern old type of English teacher has died out and many newspapers cannot now afford 'Prodnoses', the last-line-of-defence sub-editors who used to guard the language with a thick pencil.

Sometimes, the language can be improved by the imports. The British would never be able even to define the deficit had we not adopted the American billion (a thousand million) to replace our old hardly used billion (a million million).

I accept that estate agents find it easier to sell fancy apartments rather than boring old flats. And it's right that our few non-passenger trains should carry freight not goods, because that's a more accurate description of the contents.

But the process is non-selective and almost wholly one-way. And it works very strangely. Almost all the parts of a car have different names in America, yet there is no sign of hood replacing bonnet, or the trunk supplanting the boot.

Meanwhile, the most improbable areas of activity are terminally infected. Take the law. Ask any lawyer and they will explain: witnesses in British courts do not testify, they give evidence; nor do they 'take the stand' to do this, they go into the witness box. They do things the American way in media reports of court cases, though – day after day.

We are witnessing a transatlantic takeover in politics as well. This month, Britain acquired a National Security Council. Last year, it gained a Supreme Court. There is talk that the House of Lords will be renamed the Senate.

Example analysis

Engel is assertive in his self-presentation as an expert voice on the topic of language, despite not being a linguist. His frequent use of bold declarative statements is effective in presenting his opinion as if it is fact and help to convey an air of authority on his part: for example, in the complex sentence 'Nowadays, people have no idea where American ends and English begins.' and the simple sentence 'We are witnessing a transatlantic takeover in politics as well.' In both sentences the subject of the sentence tends to generalise what is happening. In the first example, he uses the noun 'people' which tends to suggest that everyone is confused about English, while in the second example the pronoun 'we' presents an image of a man speaking for all of 'us' (whoever we are). Engel's use of the present tense, 'are' with the progressive aspect, 'witnessing' encourages the reader to view Engel as perceptive enough to realise that this apparent 'takeover' of the English language by Americanisms is something that is happening contemporaneously and therefore worthy of our attention. Engel's comments would no doubt align with the views of his target audience, (the Mail Online generally catering to a more right wing audience) who might be more traditional and prescriptive in their attitudes towards language change.

At times, Engel attempts to present himself as even-handed. When he states "Sometimes, the language can be improved by the imports" he creates the impression that he is prepared to accept some American words into the English language. The modal verb 'can' offers the sense that there is the potential for improvement. However, this doesn't make up for the more extreme anti-American ideas he puts forward elsewhere.

For example, in a clear echo of the 'infectious disease' model, Engel describes English with the adjective phrase "terminally infected", presenting American English as a danger to the health of British English and with his previous description of a "transatlantic takeover" he seems to be presenting American English as an invading army.

Write your observations here

Commentary on the example analysis

This analysis is using all three approaches:

- close focus on what the author says about American English and how he uses language to describe it. This includes links between what he says here and wider discourses around language (eg language as an infection, language as an invasion)
- close discussion of how Engel presents an image of himself to his readers
- analysis of how the reader is addressed and positioned in an attempt to get them onside.

At the same time, it is hitting many relevant aspects of Assessment Objectives 1 and 3 by choosing relevant material to discuss, explaining meanings and representations effectively and labelling a range of language features with precision and accuracy. While there is only one text extract being focused on in this part of the answer, parts of AO4 are being hit as well because the text is being linked to wider ideas about other texts and the text is linked to a wider context.

You will probably notice that, at points, the discussions of how the writer represents himself and how he addresses the reader are linked (for example when Engel uses the first person plural pronoun “**we** are witnessing”). This isn’t a problem and if you can make links within the text, and also between the texts when you start to think about them together, you will be able to access the higher levels of the mark scheme.

Worksheet six: Working with two texts

As outlined earlier, you will need to work with two texts in Question 3. While you have been looking at short extracts from single texts so far, the next stage is to think about how to deal with extracts from two texts together to help you do AO4 and then to look at them together as whole texts to allow you to see the bigger picture.

There is no one right way to do this and you might find it more natural to look at the bigger picture first and then track it back to smaller sections and extracts.

The analysis grid presented here gives you the chance to look at two texts alongside each other and to identify key ideas and techniques used in each text while also connecting the texts. Look at the example extracts (see Appendix) and the example response before thinking about how you might use this yourself.

Analysis grid

	Text A	AO4 connections	Text B	
<p>Prong 1: topic and discourses</p> <p>American English and its perceived threat to British English: it's a discourse of conflict and war that is used here.</p> <p>'Intelligent Britons' cast against 'witless Americanisms' (and Americans?)</p>	<p>But it is time to fight back. The battle is almost uncertainly unwinnable but I am convinced there are millions of intelligent Britons out there who wince as often as I do every time they hear a witless Americanism introduced into British discourse.</p> <p>Stand up and say you care. Feel free to write with your favourite horrors. Come out of the closet. Or better still, the cupboard.</p>	<p>Language and topic connections</p> <p>Shared focus on decline over time but text A very general and B initially very specific.</p> <p>Both use similar discourses to present English as under threat.</p> <p>They (the writers) are defending language while 'experts' do nothing.</p>	<p>Obviously one hates to be a stick-in-the-mud about English. But occasionally it's important to speak as you find.</p> <p>When I was deeply mired in linguistic debate a few years ago (for which I was seriously unqualified), it became clear to me that the academic study of the English language (and this includes the lexicographers) was entirely concerned with looking cool and broad-minded and "descriptive", when what was required was some positive action to remedy literacy levels, and so on.</p>	<p>Prong 1: topic and discourses</p> <p>Attacks linguists for being more concerned with how 'cool' they look than the health of the language.</p> <p>Sees 'literacy levels' as under threat – evidence for this?</p> <p>A declinist discourse?</p>
<p>Prong 2: author/voice</p> <p>Clear sense of author representing himself as leading the fight and motivating others to do the same</p>		<p>Platform/genre/ discourse links</p> <p>Op-eds in UK print media.</p> <p>Both in right-leaning/ conservative papers.</p> <p>Both writers present themselves as caring about language and opinionated about its supposedly declining status.</p>		<p>Prong 2: author/voice</p> <p>Presents self as 'a stick in the mud' – aware of how she comes across as prescriptive.</p> <p>Presents a view of linguists as different to her and prepared to let language degrade.</p> <p>Careful manipulation of her own image here.</p>

<p>Prong 3: audience</p> <p>Calls for readers to join him in a battle against this incursion from US English</p> <p>Direct address and direct appeal to action</p>		<p>Evaluation of wider contexts & discourses</p> <p>Both texts put forward prescriptive views about change and use very commonplace discourses to do so.</p> <p>Typical texts of this genre in many ways but authors are adept at presenting themselves as caring about language and its future.</p>		<p>Prong 3: audience</p> <p>Little direct address to readers – more personal reflection?</p>
	<p>Text type/media platform/text context more generally</p>		<p>Text type/media platform/text context more generally</p>	

Activity:

The paragraphs below are an example analysis of the Matthew Engel text alongside a second text, by the author Lynne Truss, complaining about how language is changing. The writer of the sample paragraphs has started to analyse both texts with the approach suggested above and is now making links between them.

To carry out the tasks here, you will need to read both the Matthew Engel and Lynne Truss articles (see Appendix) and the example analysis.

Example analysis

Both text producers position themselves as expert voices in the field of language change and therefore well qualified to pass judgement. Truss presents herself as an almost reluctant critic who has no option but to point out the deterioration of our language to the less alert reader. In order to guide the reader towards accepting her argument, towards the end of her article she employs a pattern of simple sentences in which a self-deprecating comment is followed by a justification, for example, 'Obviously one hates to be a stick-in-the-mud about English. But occasionally it's important to speak as you find.' and 'Ooh, I don't usually rant, I'm sorry. But New Year seemed like a good opportunity to let rip for once.' The use of a colloquial register, achieved through the use of the noun phrase, 'a stick-in-the-mud', the exclamation 'Ooh' and the coordinating conjunction, 'But' to start the next sentence (as opposed to the more formal adverb 'however') is effective in reducing the level of formality and in conjunction with these carefully balanced sentences, Truss is able to represent herself as knowledgeable without being arrogant or overbearing, therefore perhaps manipulating the audience to respond to her criticisms about the changing use of compounds as reasonable, rather than overly pedantic.

Whilst Truss carefully represents herself as an almost reluctant critic, Engel is more assertive in his self-presentation as an expert voice. His frequent use of bold declarative statements is effective in presenting opinion as if it is fact, and help to convey an air of authority on his part: for example, in the complex sentence, 'Nowadays, people have no idea where American ends and English begins.' and the simple sentence, 'We are witnessing a transatlantic takeover in politics as well.' The use of the present tense, 'are' with the progressive aspect, 'witnessing' encourages the reader to view Engel as perceptive enough to realise that this apparent 'takeover' of the English language by Americanisms is something that is happening contemporaneously and is therefore worthy of our attention. Engel's comments would no doubt align with the views of his target audience, (the Daily Mail generally catering to a more right-wing audience) who might be more traditional and prescriptive in their attitudes towards language change.

Task one

In the extract above, the writer has focused primarily on how the writers of the two texts present an image of themselves to the readers in order to persuade them to their point of view.

- Look at how the example response connects the two texts (AO4), identifies and describes language features (AO1) and creates meanings and representations (AO3).
- Use different coloured highlighters to indicate where these different Assessment Objectives are being done effectively.

Task two

Now think about the ways the texts address and position the reader.

- Choose two short extracts from each text (Engel and Truss) which you think could be usefully analysed together and copy them into the blank analysis grid.
- Use the grid to help you plan your own comparative analysis of these extracts. Concentrate on the third prong of the analysis (How the writers are addressing and positioning the reader).
- After you have made your notes, try to write it up as 1-2 paragraphs of analysis using the example above as a model.

Task three

Once you have done these first two activities, you should be well on the way to writing a good analysis of the two texts.

- Look at the complete example response below and identify where you think different aspects of the analysis are being done well. Are there any other things you would wish to add or different points you would like to make? What else has this person discussed that you think is helpful?

Example analysis (full version)

Both texts A and B are written for publication by large newspaper organisations, to be consumed by online readers. Both, arguably, are designed to position the readers to reject what are perceived to be negative influences on the development of the English language.

Engel's portrayal of American English is one that signals some of the wider discourses around language use: in this case, one of invasion and incursion. When he describes English (and by extension, Britain itself) as "being overrun... by rampant cultural imperialism" his choice of the passive voice and the verb 'overrun' suggests that he sees American English as an invading army and English people as the unwilling victims of this. In reality, British people have often chosen to use American English terms and in many cases the terms Engels claims are American are in fact much older English terms in the first place.

Truss is no different in her representation of language. In her final paragraph, she likens language change to a disease or collapse: both prevalent prescriptive discourses in commentary on language from non-specialists such as herself. So, when she compares linguists to "epidemiologists, perhaps, who just sat back with a clipboard and monitored the way we all died from contagious diseases" the relative clause "who just sat back..." seems to suggest that language change is a disease that spreads and affects users. Her follow-up sentence follows a similar grammatical and thematic pattern by comparing linguists to "architects, who collected large salaries for watching and making detailed notes while all the buildings fell down" which is a clear representation of language change as a form of decay or decline. Again, like Engel, this a very limited view of language change and diversity that doesn't reflect the true picture of how language works and what linguists actually do.

Both text producers position themselves as expert voices in the field of language change and therefore well qualified to pass judgement. Truss presents herself as an almost reluctant critic who has no option but to point out the deterioration of our language to the less alert reader. In order to guide the reader towards accepting her argument, towards the end of her article she employs a pattern of simple sentences in which a self-deprecating comment is followed by a justification, for example, 'Obviously one hates to be a stick-in-the-mud about English. But occasionally it's important to speak as you find.' and 'Ooh, I don't usually rant, I'm sorry. But New Year seemed like a good opportunity to let rip for once.' The use of a colloquial register, achieved through the use of the noun phrase, 'a stick-in-the-mud', the exclamation 'Ooh' and the coordinating conjunction, 'But' to start the next sentence (as opposed to the more formal adverb 'however') is effective in reducing the level of formality and in conjunction with these carefully balanced sentences, Truss is able to represent herself as knowledgeable without being arrogant or overbearing, therefore perhaps manipulating the audience to respond to her criticisms about the changing use of compounds as reasonable, rather than overly pedantic.

Whilst Truss carefully represents herself as an almost reluctant critic, Engel is more assertive in his self-presentation as an expert voice. His frequent use of bold declarative statements is effective in presenting opinion as if it is fact, and help to convey an air of authority on his part: for example, in the complex sentence, 'Nowadays, people have no idea where American ends and English begins.' and the simple sentence, 'We are witnessing a transatlantic takeover in politics as well.' The use of the present tense, 'are' with the progressive aspect, 'witnessing' encourages the reader to view Engel as perceptive enough to realise that this apparent 'takeover' of the English language by Americanisms is something that is happening contemporaneously and is therefore worthy of our attention. Engel's comments would no doubt align with the views of his target audience, (the Daily

Mail generally catering to a more right wing audience) who might be more traditional and prescriptive in their attitudes towards language change.

Both text producers manipulate the audience to accept what Robert Lane Greene terms a 'declinist' position, an attitude that is perpetuated by media representations of language change, however, whilst Engel's assertive stance may be more effective in persuading his target audience that our language is under threat, others may find his style overly bombastic and somewhat insulting.

Both text producers guide and position their audiences carefully. Truss guides her audience to agree with her highly prescriptivist position that the changing use of compounds is indeed an issue worthy of our attention and, more importantly, a decline in language standards. She attempts to persuade the audience to share her realisation that 'the English language as we know it was hereby doomed'. The use of synthetic personalisation, through the inclusive personal pronoun 'we' in conjunction with the post modification of 'English language' with 'as we know it' suggests that there is only one variety of English in use (or at least one variety that is deemed proper) and we, the audience recognise this as true. The reality is, however, that variations in language occur constantly and many readers would be much less affronted at the changes than Truss suggests. She goes on to position the reader as being vulnerable to attack with the declarative statement, 'So I think we should be vigilant.' The complement 'vigilant' has connotations of cautious observance, and encourages the reader to view the English language as something that needs our careful protection; a prescriptivist position much like that observed by Aitchison' and described in her description of the 'crumbling castle' approach.

Whilst Truss positions her audience to share her sense of foreboding at the perceived decline in language standards, Engel attempts to galvanise his audience into a more active resistance to language change. At the end of the article he uses a triad of imperatives to encourage the audience to reject the use of what he perceives to be American intrusions into the English language. He tells us to, 'Stand up and say you care. Feel free to write with your favourite horrors. Come out of the closet.' Whilst many descriptivists would draw attention to the way our language has always developed through the borrowing of lexical items, Engel contributes to the plethora of voices in the media who take a declinist stance, creating an skewed and highly negative representation of language change.

Blank analysis grid

	Text A	AO4 connections	Text B	
Prong 1: topic and discourses		Language and topic connections		Prong 1: topic and discourses
Prong 2: author/voice		Platform/genre/ discourse links		Prong 2: author/voice
Prong 3: audience		Evaluation of wider contexts & discourses		Prong 3: audience
	Text type/media platform/text context more generally		Text type/media platform/text context more generally	

Worksheet seven: Working with two of your own texts

Activity:

You have had an analytical approach to two texts suggested over the last few activities so now is your chance to apply this to two new texts.

Task one

Choose two texts on the same topic (either from those mentioned on Worksheet 2 or those that your teacher has provided).

- Read the two texts and make notes on them, using the blank analysis grid, if you find it helpful.
- Think about the questions from Worksheet three to help you make your notes.

Task two

Think carefully about the two texts and select two short extracts that you think will be useful to compare.

- Use the questions and approach modelled in the previous activities to analyse and compare these two extracts.
- Choose 2-3 further pairs of extracts and then work out an overall answer based on the two complete texts.

Appendix

Text one: Matthew Engel

Say no to the get-go! Americanisms swamping English, so wake up and smell the coffee

By [Matthew Engel](#)

UPDATED: 22:01, 29 May 2010

It happened early this month, shortly after the first cuckoo. I heard it, I swear I heard it. The first get-go of spring. It was on the BBC Breakfast programme on May 11: a presenter was wittering, and distinctly said that something-or-other had been clear 'from the get-go'. From the *what?* Actually, I know all about the get-go or, worse still, the git-go. It's an ugly Americanism, meaning 'from the start' or 'from the off'. It adds nothing to Britain's language but it's here now, like the grey squirrel, destined to drive out native species and ravage the linguistic ecosystem.

We have to be realistic: languages grow. The success of English comes from its adaptability and the British have been borrowing words from America for at least two centuries. Old buffers like me have always complained about the process, and we have always been defeated.

In 1832, the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge was fulminating about the 'vile and barbarous' new adjective that had just arrived in London. The word was 'talented'. It sounds innocuous enough to our ears, as do 'reliable', 'influential' and 'lengthy', which all inspired loathing when they first crossed the Atlantic.

But the process gathered speed with the arrival of cinema and television in the 20th Century. And in the 21st it seems unstoppable. The U.S.-dominated computer industry, with its 'licenses', 'colors' and 'favorites' is one culprit. That ties in with mobile phones that keep 'dialing' numbers that are always 'busy'.

My dictionary (a mere 12 years old) defines 'geek' as an American circus freak or, in Australia, 'a good long look'. We needed a word to describe someone obsessively interested in computer technology. It seems a shame there was never any chance of coining one ourselves.

Nowadays, people have no idea where American ends and English begins. And that's a disaster for our national self-esteem. We are in danger of subordinating our language to someone else's - and with it large aspects of British life.

Yet no one seems to care. The stern old type of English teacher has died out and many newspapers cannot now afford 'Prodnoses', the last-line-of-defence sub-editors who used to guard the language with a thick pencil.

Sometimes, the language can be improved by the imports. The British would never be able even to define the deficit had we not adopted the American billion (a thousand million) to replace our old hardly used billion (a million million).

I accept that estate agents find it easier to sell fancy apartments rather than boring old flats. And it's right that our few non-passenger trains should carry freight not goods, because that's a more accurate description of the contents.

But the process is non-selective and almost wholly one-way. And it works very strangely. Almost all the parts of a car have different names in America, yet there is no sign of hood replacing bonnet, or the trunk supplanting the boot.

Meanwhile, the most improbable areas of activity are terminally infected. Take the law. Ask any lawyer and they will explain: witnesses in British courts do not testify, they give evidence; nor do they 'take the stand' to do this, they go into the witness box. They do things the American way in media reports of court cases, though - day after day.

We are witnessing a transatlantic takeover in politics as well. This month, Britain acquired a National Security Council. Last year, it gained a Supreme Court. There is talk that the House of Lords will be renamed the Senate.

It also used to be understood that, while American politicians 'ran' for office, British politicians always 'stood'. I liked that: it implied a pleasing reticence. Now in Britain both words are used interchangeably and in this month's General Election candidates stood and ran at the same time. No wonder they kept falling flat on their faces.

Then take sport, where Britain's national tastes are totally different from those of the Americans. I happen to belong to the .0001 per cent (approx) of the British population who count as baseball fans. This makes it even more offensive to me when politicians parrot phrases such as 'three strikes and you're out' although they haven't got the foggiest idea what it means.

Technical baseball terms are everywhere. We constantly hear about people 'stepping up to the plate'. For some weird reason, cricket coaches are especially fond of this one. And ideas keep coming from the baseball position of 'left field'. Wouldn't silly mid-on be more appropriate? And so, hi guys, hel-LO, wake up and smell the coffee. We need to distinguish between the normal give-and-take of linguistic development and being overrun - through our own negligence and ignorance - by rampant cultural imperialism.

We are all guilty. In the weeks after 9/11 (or 11/9, as I prefer to call it), British journalists, and I was one of them, solemnly reported that the planes had been hijacked by men waving box-cutters, even though no one in Britain knew what a box-cutter was. Very few of us bothered to explain that these were what we have always called Stanley knives.

But it is time to fight back. The battle is almost uncertainly unwinnable but I am convinced there are millions of intelligent Britons out there who wince as often as I do every time they hear a witless Americanism introduced into British discourse.

Stand up and say you care. Feel free to write with your favourite horrors. Come out of the closet. Or better still, the cupboard.

Matthew Engel is a columnist on the Financial Times. Send your pet hate Americanisms to englishincrisis@gmail.com.

© Matthew Engel

Text two: Lynne Truss

Lynne Truss has a grammatical axe to grind

In her weekly column, Lynne Truss argues that if something isn't done about compound words, English is doomed.

So here we are in yet another new year, and I have an especially trivial linguistic point to make. I feel it is time to take note of a lamentable development in written English, which I have decided to blame (mostly) on our effing word-processing software, because that's the kind of girl I am. The other day I received an email that included the oddly pidgin-type sentence: "It maybe time to act on this." I puzzled over the grammar of this for quite a while. I tried saying it to myself in a Sitting Bull accent, but I felt that the natural grammar in that case would have been, "Maybe it time to act on this", so I was still stumped. Did my correspondent merely mean to write, "It's maybe time to act on this?" And then I realised that her computer – ever eager to stick its oar in – had perhaps spotted the word "may" contiguous with the word "be" ("It may be time to act on this") and simply rectified the unnecessary space between the words. No sooner had I reached this conclusion than I realised that the true explanation might be even worse: my friend thought "maybe" was just a quicker and easier way of writing "may be" – and the English language as we know it was hereby doomed, and we might as well all go off and kill ourselves.

Has anyone else noticed this happening? The compound word has, of course, an honourable tradition, and we would be lost without it. In [American English](#), it has long been standard to write, "You don't love me anymore" or "Will you be free anyday soon?" British English, which is highly porous, has adopted this practice unthinkingly – and largely this is a harmless development, because "anymore" means precisely the same as "any more". But there are many existing compound words (such as "maybe") that have established themselves in the language already, and have quite specific uses. "Everyday" is a lovely adjective, meaning humdrum, ordinary or unremarkable. "Anyway" is a useful "sentence adverb" (I think), by means of which a writer can airily change the subject. "Throwaway" pertains to remarks uttered sotto voce; "Comedown" is quite interestingly related to "comeuppance". (When I was a child, by the way, I heard the word "comeuppance" such a lot when we watched TV that I once lisped, "Will he get his uppings, mummy?" Needless to say, I never lived it down.)

So I think we should be vigilant. We need to be able to write:

"Is there any way you can do this?"

"I will love you every day of my life."

"That was super natural, in my opinion."

"I've got no body!"

"One self is better than two."

"Can I have any one of these?"

"Let's think about some times."

And so on.

Obviously one hates to be a stick-in-the-mud about English. But occasionally it's important to speak as you find. When I was deeply mired in linguistic debate a few years ago (for which I was seriously unqualified), it became clear to me that the [academic study of the English language](#) (and this includes the lexicographers) was entirely concerned with looking cool and broad-minded and "descriptive", when what was required was some positive action to remedy literacy levels, and so on. A "descriptive" linguist is one that monitors the changes in language, and in case you think

there is any other kind of linguist, there isn't. "Prescriptive" does exist as a term in linguistic circles, but only as a powerful juju word used against bad people who model themselves on King Canute. Ooh, I don't usually rant, I'm sorry. But [New Year](#) seemed like a good opportunity to let rip for once. It does seem weird to me that we hear all the time about a crisis in literacy, and at the same time there are well-paid academics just sitting back and enjoying the show. Imagine if other academic fields were dominated entirely by a "descriptive" ethos: we could have "descriptive" epidemiologists, perhaps, who just sat back with a clipboard and monitored the way we all died from contagious diseases. Or "descriptive" architects, who collected large salaries for watching and making detailed notes while all the buildings fell down.

© Telegraph Media Group Limited 2014

Notes

Notes

Contact us

T: 0161 953 7504

E: english-gce@aca.org.uk

aca.org.uk