Introduction to the Study of Language

This guide is written for students who are following GCE Advanced level (AS and A2) syllabuses in English Language. This resource may also be of general interest to language students on university degree courses, trainee teachers and anyone with a general interest in language science.

What the exam board says

Introduction

The aim of this module is to introduce candidates to ways of investigating and understanding better the diversity of uses and contexts for spoken and written English in the modern world and in their own lives. Candidates' proficiency in responding to uses of language in this module will be tested through their understanding of the essential roles of purposes and contexts in language use; the importance of audiences; the diversity of choices available in structure and style, and the significance of these factors in constructing meanings. This investigation of language requires the systematic application of the following descriptive frameworks to texts: lexical, grammatical (word, sentence and text level), phonological, semantic and pragmatic. These concepts and descriptive approaches together provide systematic frameworks in which candidates may learn about the nature and functions of language.

Assessment Objectives

This module requires candidates to

- AO1 communicate clearly the knowledge, understanding and insight appropriate to the study of language, using appropriate terminology and accurate and coherent written expression (10% AS, 5% AL)
- AO3i use key features of frameworks for the systematic study of spoken and written English (10% AS, 5% AL)
- AO4 understand, discuss and explore concepts and issues relating to language in use (5% AS, 2½% AL)
- AO5i distinguish, describe and interpret variation in the meanings and forms of spoken and written language according to context (10% AS, 5% AL).

Content

This module will introduce students to the central concepts described below, and to the elements of language study necessary for them to be able to identify, describe and discuss language in use (both spoken and written) on a systematic basis. Three related concepts form the basis of study for this module.

- idiolect: the language style acquired by individuals as a result of their personal characteristics, systems of belief (ideologies) and social experience
- dialect: the variations in language produced as a result of local community and regional diversity
- sociolect: language variations produced by the effects of education, socio-economic class, systems of belief (ideologies), occupation and membership of any other social groups.

The following descriptions of language will enable students to identify and discuss both the language system and its diverse uses and expressions.

- lexis: vocabulary choices available to users of English
- grammar: the fundamental structures and functions of English: the written word, spoken utterances, sentences and texts
- phonology: the contribution made by the voice to the phonetics communication of meaning, including intonation, rhythm, pace, volume, word stress and pauses in spoken English
- semantics: the ways in which meanings, implicit and explicit, are constructed and understood in English both spoken and written
- pragmatics: the ways in which social conventions and implied meanings are encoded in spoken and written language.

Mode of Assessment

- Assessment will be by one written paper of 1½ hours' duration.
- Candidates will be required to answer questions based on unseen data.
- All questions are compulsory.

Concepts explained

This guide contains only brief introductions. Most of these concepts I have explained more fully in detailed and extensive guides. You will find these listed at:

http://www.universalteacher.org.uk/contents.htm#langa

Idiolect

In short, this is the language system of an individual speaker.

The Greek prefix idios refers to that which is private. It is related, etymologically (in its origins), to the common noun idiot, but this is perhaps not helpful. More helpfully, it occurs also in idiom and idiosyncrasy. The reasons why individuals use language as we do are many and complex. And idiolects change over time. It is relatively easy to show that people may adapt their language use to a new environment or language fashion. It is also easy to show that individual differences are marked almost as clearly as a fingerprint.

In the trial (in 1997 and 1998) of the so-called Unabomber, Theodore Kaczynski, a language expert, Don Foster was asked to help the defence. Foster's task was to show that Kaczynski was not the author of the letters sent by the Unabomber. As soon as he compared Kaczynski's writing with the Unabomber letters, Foster became convinced that he was the same person. Don Foster eventually appeared as a witness for the prosecution and helped convict Ted Kaczynski. Foster has written about his work in Author Unknown: on the trail of Anonymous, ISBN 0333781708.

For a very good study of idiolect, read Professor Crystal's section on Personal Variation in the Cambridge Encyclopedia of English Language or that on Language and Identity in his Encyclopedia of Language.

Teachers and students can readily study some individual features of language use by people you know in common – for example the frequency with which a given lexical item appears. (I had a colleague who would habitually qualify one or more verbs and nouns per sentence with actual and actually. What is more interesting is the frequency with which other speakers would do the same, depending on how recently they had been in her company.)

It is easy enough to study individual language use by a public figure, whose speech is broadcast on radio and TV. One very entertaining way to do this is by comparing a mimic or impressionist with his or her subjects. Rory Bremner, for example (a UK comedian and mimic) often comments on the nuances (quirks or individual features) of people whom he imitates.

Dialect

Dialects are language varieties where grammar and vocabulary identify the regional and social background of the user. Some language scientists will include features of phonology in the description of a dialect. On the other hand, you should not confuse dialect with accent, which is (relatively) a much simpler and narrower feature of spoken language.

Dialect is, like many other areas of variation, subject to change over time.

Sociolect

Sociolects are language varieties that reflect social background, in terms of such things as occupation, education and social class.

You can see how any one person's idiolect might contain features of both dialectal and sociolectal variation, as well as more individual differences.

Language descriptions explained

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http://www.universalteacher.org.uk/contents.htm#langa

Lexis

The affixes lex- and -lect both derive from the Greek verb lego (=to say), which gives the related qualifier lexicos (="of words") and the noun lexicon (=collection of words). Lexis is a description of words and word element (or morphemes) in language. It is also used as a shorthand for the study of the lexicon.

Lexicographers produce reference works, such as dictionaries, while lexicologists study the lexicon historically and in the present day. For most students, lexicology will be an important area of study.

This subject occupies Part II of David Crystal's Encyclopedia of the English Language.

Grammar

This is almost impossible to describe briefly, but grammar can be seen as the rules (or a systematic account of these rules) that govern language in general and specific languages. For English, they include such things as semantics and phonology. They are NOT invented or prescriptive rules but rules observed in the ways language works in practice.

Grammar is the subject of Part III of Crystal's Encyclopedia of the English Language. For my guide see:

http://www.universalteacher.org.uk/lang/engstruct.htm

Phonology

Phonology is the study of the sound systems of languages. For the student (and the teacher), this area of study poses some special problems.

- First, any accurate and objective analysis of such systems may require understanding of anatomy (the physical organs of speech) and acoustics (the physics of sound).
- Second, scholars, in the attempt to communicate information in writing, have developed a number of systems of symbols (such as phonetic alphabets), which you may find difficult to learn and use, especially with computer software.
- Third, language scientists in this discipline will be in a state of transition between the use of (at best approximate) symbolic representations, and sound recordings, which can be transmitted as data files for computers and electronic devices. Students who are used to downloading such files may be puzzled by the way in which some experts persist with such antiquated methods and ignore the new technology.

Phonology is treated at some length in section 17 (The Sound System) of Crystal's Encyclopedia of the English Language. For my guide, see:

- http://www.universalteacher.org.uk/lang/phonology.htm

Semantics

Semantics is the study of meaning in language.

It is explained in detail in section 11 (The structure of the lexicon) of Professor Crystal's Encyclopedia of the English Language. For my guide, see:

- http://www.universalteacher.org.uk/lang/semantics.htm

Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the study of the factors influencing a person's choice of language. It is a systematic way of explaining language use in context. It includes things such as conversational maxims, modes of address, face and politeness strategies and phatic tokens. For a more detailed account of these things, see my guide to pragmatics.

There is a clear introduction of pragmatics in Jackson and Stockwell, Introduction to the Nature and Functions of Language, section 6.1. For my guide, see:

- http://www.universalteacher.org.uk/lang/pragmatics.htm

Guides which support this module

This is a brief introduction. Please make use of the more detailed guides which are appropriate to work on this module.

- http://www.universalteacher.org.uk/lang/langmodel.htm Modelling language
- http://www.universalteacher.org.uk/lang/engstruct.htm Introduction to the structure of English
- http://www.universalteacher.org.uk/lang/pragmatics.htm Pragmatics
- http://www.universalteacher.org.uk/lang/semantics.htm Semantics
- http://www.universalteacher.org.uk/lang/phonology.htm Phonology

Before the exam – ideas for teaching

Making collections of example data

In one sense this is a very easy thing to do – since any text could be used. The challenge for you as a teacher may be in some of these things:

- making a representative sample that is manageable;
- saving and reproducing the texts;
- organizing smaller samples for students to use in practice tasks.

For some kinds of work, you may wish to make photocopies of texts (having regard for laws of copyright). But for collaborative work, it may be better to scan a document to produce a digital data file, or use word processing software to create a transcript of a spoken text.

While you may wish to manage this collection, you should also encourage students to contribute to it, in various ways. This will include **collecting, saving and adapting** and **organizing** the texts.

Collecting texts

All of us have opportunities to acquire texts in the course of our everyday lives – for example:

- recording a broadcast on TV or radio
- noting the address (uniform resource locator or URL) of a document on the World Wide Web
- recording (with permission) social conversation of friends
- picking up information leaflets from shops or places of work
- keeping letters, private or official, that belong to family members
- retaining official forms and letters, after they are no longer needed for personal use.

These are just general examples. But a group of students will, collectively, be able to find texts that range more widely in terms of their provenance, whether in social or geographical terms, or in the time period that they cover. And if they do more of the work, this frees the teacher's time for other things.

Saving and reproducing the texts

If each student in a group makes one recording of a spoken text, and transcribes this, then he or she learns about the conventions of transcribing. But the resulting transcript can go into a collection, that will quickly grow, and be useful for all sorts of purposes. If the original speakers give their assent, then any text can be shared both as a digital audio file, and a text or document file.

Broadcast and print texts may be subject to copyright, so that you may only store them for a brief period. But within the permissions allowed by Fair Use (USA) or Fair Dealing (UK) provisions, you can make copies of things for your own use – if you don't make multiple copies and if the copying has no significant economic effect on the owner of the copyright. It is easy to scan a document and share it as an image file and/or adapt it as a text file (using optical character recognition software). It is **so** easy, that you can do this as and when you need, and discard the files after use. This method is ideal where you have the use of a data projector in a classroom, or are using Internet or other network technologies for remote or distributed learning. If you are working with older technology, then you can still scan, print onto transparent media for overhead projectors – then project these transparencies in the classroom.

For some texts there are no problems of copyright – because you own the document, or are using a document where copyright has expired or which is in the public domain with permission for you to reproduce it. You may wish to share such texts by placing them on a network (public or private) with hyperlinks to allow users to open them or save them to a local computer or other device.

Organizing the data into collections or selections

As your collection of sample data grows, then you may wish to think about how you will organize it. The way you do so may help you to produce samples like those that examiners give to students. If the examiners should change this, or if you are using the texts in some other way than exactly replicating the exam task, then you can make different kinds of collection – and provide these to students as hard (print) copy or digital data files for use with personal computers and other intelligent devices.

Organizing texts on a grid

One way to help you think of the range of possible categories into which texts could be placed is to use a grid to survey the texts in front of you. Obviously, you should let the texts help you decide the possible range of groupings, but this list (based on a range arrived at by Stubbs and Hudson) is a starting point. These are not rigid categories. A text may have features that only place it partially in a particular category.

Here are some possible tasks:

- Look at the list of with a partner and discuss what you understand by each category. Then discuss which linguistic features you would look for when categorising the texts in front of you. Make a note of any categories that you need to discuss with your teacher and other students.
- Copy the grid (you can copy and paste into a word processing application). Now edit the categories, so that you have those that you think most relevant and useful. You may decide to keep them all. You may add others. Or you may take some away. If you are doing this by hand, then printing onto A3 paper might be useful so you can make brief comments in the boxes as well.
- Complete the list of texts across the top horizontal column for any past exam paper or other selection of texts. The example grid has these filled in – replace them with descriptions that fit the texts that you are trying to categorize.
- With one or more partners, discuss which categories into which each text could be placed – tick the box or put a question mark if there are any doubts. Make a note in the box of any problems with categorising any texts. Be aware that the texts are carefully selected by the chief examiner to ensure they are not straightforward to categorise, and the best candidates realise that texts can fall into more than one category and cross boundaries.
- For practice you could write a prose answer to bullet point 1. This asks you to: **compare these texts and discuss how they can be categorised and grouped**. Talk about a range of five to six categories that prove interesting and which language features prompted you to place them there. Try to support your answer with brief quotation or illustration and comment. Write about 1500 words – you may wish to discuss this with other students, under your teacher's guidance.

If you have any problems, then ask for guidance from your teacher or other language expert.

Creating records in a database

Using a two dimensional grid is a very basic and rather limiting way to organize descriptions. And in an exam, candidates will normally find themselves writing a linear explanation. A better approach, if the students have the use of a computer, is to use a flat-file database, and make a record for each text. In this case, there will be separate fields for each logical category of description.

So, for example, there would be one field for the **medium** of transmission: spoken, written, signed or other/mixed. Another field could be used to show the **level of formality** on a continuum, while another could show information about the **audience, purpose** or **context** of utterance.

Example grid. The colour shading is used to group descriptions which are alternatives or choices. You may find this unhelpful, but usually if one description fits the text, then the alternative will not.

Brief description of text	Transcript of conversation	Veterinary information leaflet	Broadcast on shopping channel	Posting on message board	Extract from Queen's Speech	Instruction manual for DVD player
Spoken						
Written						
Signed						
Mixed						
Standard English						
Non-standard English						
Permanent						
Ephemeral						
Planned						
Spontaneous						
Personal						
Impersonal						
Dual/multi-purpose						
Multi-audience						
Interactive						
Non-interactive						
Technical/specialist						
Non-technical/ common register						
Message-orientated						
Socially-orientated						
Degree of (in)formality						
Face to face						
Not co-present						
Add your own ideas below						
- Your description -						
- Your description -						
- Your description -						

Teaching and Learning Points

This guidance is written for teachers.

- Repeatedly giving out texts and asking your students to group them is probably not helpful – preparation for this unit requires them to experience a range of texts and language features in a more focused way.
- When planning how to deliver the course you could decide on a checklist of features you want to teach to your students. You could plan to use a wide and varied range of texts to do that.
- Encourage your students to be data collectors. They should bring texts into the classroom – particularly texts that exemplify a language feature they have been looking at and those that show problems (by challenging what they expect to see, or being exceptions to perceived rules).
- Train the students to be questioners and investigators – they need to be aware of language in the world around them and able to see how it is working in the contexts in which it is used and understood.
- Dare the students to be open-minded – language use is constantly changing and they may find examples that challenge or change something they thought they had learnt.
- Questioning and debate are crucial – texts continually confound any easy notions of how language works and you need to be prepared for this.

What follows is a list of some of the things that might be covered in preparation for this unit. It is not intended to be exhaustive:

- The notion of register and the associated ideas of genre, field, tenor and mode
- Field, specialist language, collocation, connotation, denotation, reference
- Tenor and its associated ideas of formality, politeness and implied power
- Mode including speech features, mixed modes and cross boundary texts
- Introduction to models of lexis, graphology, phonology, semantics etc
- Situational variation and the factors affecting it (audiences, purposes, modes)
- The notion of explicit meanings and those more dependent on shared contexts
- Pragmatics and semantics and how these relate
- Discourse, cohesion and the link with cultural expectations and genre conventions
- Representation including literary representation and representations in advertising
- Idiolect and its relationship to dialect, sociolect and specialised registers
- Attitudes to standardised forms and non -standard varieties (RP/Standard English)
- Description and analysis of talk including making and discussing transcripts
- Grammatical factors affecting stylistics (e.g. sentence types, modals, pronouns)
- Polysemy (radiation or emergence of multiple meanings) including subtexts
- Multiple purposes, and meanings arising out of multiple audiences and contexts

Preparing for the exam

Here are some suggestions for ways to approach this exam paper. There are other ways to do well – don't regard these as a prescription.

Some general points

There are two tasks, which have equal marks. Spend roughly equal time on each.

Don't rush into writing answers – make sure that you spend some of your in reading and thinking about the data. Take time to plan which texts you are going to use for which bit of the paper.

When you plan which texts to use for each answer, make sure that you do not use the same text in task 2 that you have already analysed closely in task 1: you can only gain credit for explaining a given text once.

It makes sense for you to choose the texts to group for task 2 first (the examiners specify one of them). Then you can decide which texts to discuss on task 1.

You need to be very strict in your use of time. This comes with practice, but here is a possible way to do it. Spend

- about fifteen minutes reading the texts, analysing the data and planning answers,
- about thirty-five minutes on each task, leaving
- five minutes at the end for checking and adding any things you have not had time to develop as ideas.

Task 1

What you have to do

Here you have to discuss ways of grouping different texts together. You also have to consider the problems and difficulties of putting texts into categories.

Many areas of academic study use systems of classification – this is sometimes known as taxonomy (Greek for law of classification). The best-known example is probably the classification of living things into a hierarchy of categories that start with kingdoms (animals and plants) and end in genus, species and sub-species.

In this case, you are going to place some texts that you see for the first time in an exam, into categories that you should be aware of long before the exam.

You should have

- sufficient variety of textual experiences and knowledge of language features to be able to see similarities and differences between texts.
- enough ways of thinking about linking and grouping to be able to do a thorough comparison.

The examiners will choose texts that challenge easy assumptions about putting them in categories. You need to respond by showing understanding of the difficulties in grouping them together.

When considering how to link the texts you should refer to the data. If you don't do this, the examiners will not reward theoretical, abstract and generalised discussions.

You should realise that this first bullet point instruction is complex: responding to it with a couple of sentences before discussing the two selected groups will significantly limit the mark that can be achieved.

There are clearly lots of ways in which to group texts. You need to have access to a range of approaches and must also be able to discuss the similarities, differences and problems presented by placing texts in categories.

Some groupings may be accurate but only allow limited further linguistic comment. For example, to say that three of the texts were written since 1990 may be true. But there is not much that you can usefully say to develop that.

Very broad groupings (such as spoken texts or written texts) will lead to oversimplified comments based on everyday awareness and not on the evidence of the texts.

For example, you may assume that because a text is spoken it is necessarily informal, even when the text in question is a planned speech for a formal occasion. Some texts may combine features of formality and informality and so resist classification in just one of these groups.

Can you show that you see these things?

- Sub-categories within a broad category
- How categories may overlap or have firm boundaries
- How texts resist classification
- Differences among texts that seem at first to go together

Exploring or making clear these subtle or complex features of classification will help you earn higher marks.

Any text will belong in more than one category. Within any group where you place texts, there will be texts that differ from each other.

Some ways to link and group texts

The exam specification outlines idiolect, dialect and sociolect as the content for Module 1. When you look at the texts, try to see and explain the problems of categorizing them in terms of these descriptions of language.

Here are some features of texts that may suggest ways of grouping them:

- Use of idiolect
- Use of Standard English or other varieties
- Variation by region, nation, ethnicity, age or generation of the speaker or writer
- Variation of register, including special lexis and conventions
- Literary representations of speech and speech from contexts of actual use
- Degrees of specialisation (semantic fields and collocations)
- Degrees of formality and politeness (tenor)
- Mode features associated with speech
- Planning and spontaneity
- Degrees of explicitness and inference from context
- Degrees of interactivity
- Audiences of the texts – single and multiple
- Contexts of utterance and reception: private/domestic or public/institutional
- Persuasion in a subtext

Unhelpful and helpful approaches

What's the good of telling you things not to do? None whatsoever, unless you can use these to work out the things that you **should** do.

- Do not bring to this paper pre-conceived notions of what you should find if you see a certain kind of text. Do question and respond to the data you see. Don't force it to fit what you want or expected to write about. Do make your comments fit the data.
- Don't use the four purposes from Unit 3 (entertain, inform, persuade, instruct/advise). These are not helpful category descriptions, as they are too loose. For example, it is very difficult to think of a text that is not informative in some way, so that group tends to be very vague and general. And this approach does not acknowledge that many texts are multi-purposed. Do use methods of grouping that reveal what is important in the texts.
- Don't go through each text in turn, listing its features. Do try to show the texts in the group together.
- Don't write lengthy analyses of texts you intend writing about in task 2. If you are more confident you may want to avoid an overly broad or "simple" group, unless you are sure that you have something quite perceptive and subtle to say about it. Do try to explore differences as well as similarities among the texts in the same group and to show that you understand that any labelling of texts is problematic.

Task 2

You must write about three texts, one of which will be chosen from the two specified for you. You will be penalised if you write about both specified texts (or about neither text).

This task requires a more straightforward analysis of the texts and a suggested framework will be provided. There is no requirement for you to compare the texts in task 2.

There is no requirement to write about all of the language features given in the framework for each of the three texts you choose: the instruction uses the wording "some of the following frameworks where appropriate".

You should decide which features are relevant in relation to the context and concentrate on those. Don't use up your time in trying to find something to say about a feature that is not important or writing about something that is not there.

The examiners will tell you specifically what to look for in your analysis.

In Language study there is a sort of hierarchy of the features of a text about which you might comment. That is, some comments will be worth more marks, because they will show a deeper understanding of the way the text works, and what are its stylistic features.

- At the lowest level come comments about layout and appearance – things like graphology or typography. (It is possible to make more sophisticated comments on these things, of course.)
- Comments about lexis may also be judged more basic by the examiners.
- Comments about grammatical structures or pragmatics are likely to earn more marks. (In sporting terms, they have a higher tariff of difficulty.)

Here are some examples

Things that earn low marks

- "Easy" basic semantic inference,
- simple graphological comment (e.g. "there is a bold headline to catch the reader's attention"),
- simple lexical comment (e.g." there is a lot of formal language")

Clearly all of the above could be developed into some sophisticated analysis, which could be rewarded highly. So make sure that you do develop them.

Things that earn higher marks

Comment on

- pragmatics,
- discourse structures
- relationship of author with reader or audience
- contextual awareness
- structural features (such as grammatical structures, cohesion within a text),
- subtextual issues (texts with secondary or multiple purposes)

Terminology

Do you need to use a special technical lexicon?

It is possible for linguists, like anyone else, to use special lexis unnecessarily, or to descend into a kind of jargon. But language science, like natural science, uses a technical vocabulary to name things and processes – from the physical organs of speech, to the sounds of English and on to theories of social implications of language use. You cannot get by with a vague use of everyday or common-sense English for this, any more than you can explain molecular chemistry by referring to salt rather than sodium chloride.

You should use the appropriate terminology in order to analyse the texts and write about them (this is explained in Assessment Objectives 1, 3 and 4). But you will also not do well if you simply use lots of technical terms with limited explanation. You also need to give examples (from real use – not things you have made up).

You must understand and be comfortable with the terminology you are using – many grade A answers do not need to contain sophisticated metalanguage (language about language). But they do need language that is appropriate and relevant to the ideas it explains. You need to show the examiners that you understand how to use this technical or specialized lexis.

Models and frameworks

The examiners expect you to use what they call frameworks – abstract ways of representing or modelling language.

One of the assessment objectives (AO3) requires you to use such models. But you should beware of doing so mechanically. It is important to stand back, metaphorically, from a text, and see it whole.

If you use a framework or other model to suggest things on which to comment, then make sure that you relate them to their context.

The specific, individual features that you look at may work together to create a coherent and consistent text. And that text arises out of a context (Assessment Objective 5) – which connects the purposes of the author to the audience, and to the way it receives the text. Don't lose sight of the "big picture".

Overall

You need to be equipped to think about and explore a whole variety of texts. Be prepared to think about texts in terms of similarity and difference and have an understanding of a range of features through which connections might be made. Think about how texts work in the 'real world' and understand that context is hugely important to the meanings we can take from a text (AO5).

This paper rewards thinking:

- you **are** exploring how language and texts work,
- you **are** encouraged to question and challenge what the examiners give you
- the examiners **are not** looking for one right answer.

Example questions

These example questions are based on recent module papers. The questions appear first, followed by 8 example texts (complete short texts or extracts from longer texts). I have not shown the text of the examples, as teachers may use these papers for practice or "mock" exams in school. Alternatively, teachers can retain the first two pages of the paper, and simply substitute other examples.

The range of possible language data for this module is practically infinite. Students cannot possible guess what will appear, so you must have a framework or method that will enable you to cope with any texts that examiners choose in the future.

My comments and any extra information appear below in blue type:

Outside front cover – this section contains essential information and guidance, sometimes known as the "rubric". You can usually see it before the exam starts. The questions are inside, and you are not allowed to see this before the exam begins.

Time allowed: 1 hour 30 minutes

Instructions

- Use blue or black ink or ball-point pen
- Write the information required on the front of your answer book. The Examining Body for this paper is AQA. The Paper Reference is ENB1.
- Answer both questions.

Information

- You will be assessed in your ability to use an appropriate form and style of writing, to organise relevant information clearly and coherently, and to use specialist vocabulary, where appropriate. The degree of legibility and the level of accuracy of your spelling, punctuation and grammar will also be taken into account.
- The maximum mark for this paper is 70 which will be scaled to give a mark out of 35.
- Both questions carry equal marks.

Advice

- You are advised to spend about 10 minutes reading the whole paper before you begin Question 1.

Inside front cover – first page of the questions proper.

Answer both questions.

Each question carries 35 marks.

This means that the questions, being of equal value, deserve equal amounts of time. There may be some overlapping of information. You should certainly make some notes or outline plans for both questions, as you will be looking closely at the example data for each, and may see things useful for either question.

1. Study the texts A-H on the next six pages. These extracts illustrate different varieties of language use.
    - Compare these texts and discuss how they can be categorised and grouped.
    - Choose two groups and put at least two texts in each group.
    - Give reasons for your choice.

2. Taking either Text A or Text G and any other two texts, describe some of the language features of these extracts and explain how these are affected by the speakers' or writers' attention to context. You should make use of some of the following frameworks where appropriate.
    - lexis
    - grammar
    - phonology
    - semantics
    - discourse
    - pragmatics
    - graphology

The list of "frameworks" for question 2 takes the descriptions from the syllabus, but adds two more: discourse and graphology.

Texts for example questions

January 2001 exam

Text A

A transcript of a conversation between (sic.) three speakers looking at a photograph album. Transcription conventions are listed at the end of the text.

This is one of 4 written representations of spoken data among the 8 example texts. This module (and the whole syllabus) recognises the primacy of speech in language. After the transcript is a key to the conventions that have been used to represent the spoken data. You do not need to know this particular set of conventions but should be aware of some ways in which we transcribe speech.

Text B

A copy of the text from a notice card placed by the towel rail in a hotel bedroom.

Text C

An extract from a copyright agreement issued to a publisher by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA).

Text D

Opening page of a short story.

The extract is a single paragraph of some seventy words. The first sentence contains a French noun ("wagon-lit"), which the examiners have not glossed. Few students (and perhaps few teachers) will know that this is the name for a sleeping compartment in a continental train, though you could infer this from the context. If you find unusual lexis, you may wish to record that it is outside the common register, even if you know that you don't know its meaning – this will happen with most literary texts.

Text E

Extract from a play for performance in a theatre (1987)

Text F

Re-typed extract from a training script for use with potential customers by a sales employee.

The script is for the second or "follow up" call.

Text G

Transcript of a telephone conversation. A university student is phoning to ask for help with an assignment from her tutor who has just returned from abroad.

Text H

Extract from a book about looking after geckos (a type of reptile similar to a lizard) and published in the USA (1995).

The introduction is strictly inaccurate. A leopard gecko is one of many species in the family of geckoes (gekkonidae). All geckoes are lizards (Sauria), a sub-order of reptiles that includes thousands of different species.

June 2001 exam

Text A

Extract from a vegetarian recipe book called The Enchanted Broccoli Forest, published in the USA in 1982.

Text B

The back of a ticket for the London Underground

Text C

Extract from a book about English accents and dialects with an accompanying tape: the transcript of the recording of the sample from Devon. The speaker on the recording is a farmer in his fifties, talking about various aspects of farming and rural life.

Text D

A letter sent to people staying in a hotel in the Portuguese speaking island of Madeira after their stay had been disrupted by building work.

Text E

From a transcript of a conversation between two secondary school students and a teacher: “Alan and Asif are in detention for writing on desks during lessons. They are being temporarily supervised by Mr. Chambers.”

Text F

An extract from a politician’s resignation speech given from outside 10, Downing Street, as reported by a newspaper.

Text G

From How the Grinch stole Christmas, a children’s story described as a “Dr. Seuss fable for the slightly more able”.

January 2002 exam

Text A

This is a letter from a local council's Parking Services department to the owner of a car that has been towed away after being illegally parked.

Text B

This is the opening paragraph of a book about the natural world called Nasty Nature, from a popular science series called Horrible Science written for older children and published in1997.

Text C

The text that follows is a print-out of a sequence of messages from an internet chatroom. The chatroom name of each message writer is indicated by the < > brackets to the left of the text.

(Internet is usually capitalized in written Standard English.)

Text D

The text that follows is taken from a leaflet advertising a personal organiser computer.

Text E

The passage that follows is the start of the first paragraph of a novel.

(The novel is written in a variety of Scots dialect.)

Text F

This is a transcript of magician Wayne Dobson performing his cups and balls trick on a television programme.

Text G

This is from a transcript of two friends talking about their children.

May 2002 exam

Text A

This is a transcript of part of a sketch from a television comedy series. The setting is a busy London pub. One man (M1) is using a fruit machine (an amusement arcade gambling machine). Another man (M2), initially seated, offers to help.

(The transcript comes from The Fast Show.)

Text B

This text is part of the packaging of a sandwich.

Text C

The lines that follow are the first two verses of the British National Anthem.

Text D

This text is taken from the horoscope pages of a magazine called Sugar.

(Boys taking the exam may know that the readership of Sugar is mostly girls. Girls taking the exam may be helped or hindered by their already knowing the magazine in terms of its content.)

Text E

This text is the from an instruction manual for a mobile phone.

Text F

This is a transcript of a television advertisement. Voice 1 is presented by a man dressed formally in a suit. Visual images and words are displayed on the screen during the advertisement. Voice 2 is also male but is not seen.

(The examiners have confused seeing the speaker with seeing the voice – as Bottom, in the character of Pyramus, does in A Midsummer Night's Dream: "I see a voice…")

Text G

This text is from the back of a till receipt.

Text H

This text is a poem written by John Keats in 1819.

(The poem is This Living Hand.)

Examiners' comments

This is a list of bullet points that summarise what the examiners said in their report on the 2001 January paper. They may suggest ways that you can succeed (or at lease please examiners, and so gain higher marks) in your response to tasks set for examination.

Successful answers to Task 1

- addressed the first bullet point with substantial coverage;
- covered a wide range of texts (but not necessarily all of them);
- reflected an open-minded and perceptive approach to the texts in focus;
- considered a range of groupings showing linguistic knowledge and understanding;
- discussed possible overlaps and cross boundary texts;
- showed an awareness of problematic and reductive categories;
- used bullet point 3 to give reasons for choices and not general stylistic coverage;
- were based on secure linguistic knowledge and contextual awareness;
- demonstrated strengths in quality of explanation and accuracy of expression.

Less successful answers

- gave little or no coverage of the first bullet point;
- used simplistic categories;
- used terms with no justification, explanation or exemplification;
- dealt with each text in turn in a manner allowing only sketchy, implicit comparison;
- gave simplistic categories and categorisation including spoken/written, audience, purpose that did
- not allow comment on mixed mode features, or multiple audiences and purposes;
- moved into stylistic analysis too early, particularly in response to the third bullet point leaving
- more danger of overlap in Task 2;
- showed insecure or inaccurate use of terminology;
- chose "catch-all "groupings such as "To Inform " and "Spoken/Written " leading to comments based on generalised preconceptions.

Successful answers to Task 2

- showed careful attention to the question prompts;
- focused effectively on contextual motivation;
- made a conscious link between context and form;
- made precise observations based on secure knowledge about language (especially in comments about grammar, discourse and pragmatics);
- used examples to support observations and analysis;
- explained observations clearly and accurately.

Less successful answers

- infringed rubric in coverage of the prescribed texts;
- repeated information already presented in Task 1;
- re-stated the context as given in the exam paper;
- described features without relating these to context;
- revealed prescriptive attitudes to language based on common sense assumptions lacked precision
- in comments about language and especially about grammar;
- gave minimal specific exemplification for assertions made;
- hinted at the presence of one or two more accessible surface features;
- relied on a sequential trawl through the categories offered by the frameworks;
- reflected formulaic pre-conceptions about the types of features to be found in a genre.

General issues

Some examiners reported that many candidates were not using the terms “pragmatics” and “discourse” with examples to show understanding and that for some “grammar”’ was only punctuation.

Some candidates were importing ideas about language study in an unreflective way.

Context needed to be explicitly addressed in task 2.

There is no need to compare the texts in task 2 and where this was done it rarely supported achievement.

Some candidates were making rather sweeping and generalised statements that were rarely helpful, such as assuming all speech is informal and all writing formal.

The best work was where candidates decided on their groupings after they had familiarised themselves with the texts and where they were open-minded as to what they might find, both on the paper and within the texts.

The best work always focused on the texts and data and related language features (AO3) to context (AO5).

Where candidates were tentative in the claims they made about the texts and showed a subtle awareness both in the explanations for groupings and in the textual analysis work they invariably scored highly.