

English Language resources: How to apply AO2 concepts to your analysis

Theories, ideas, concepts, issues and debates about language – these are all aspects of **Assessment Objective 2**, which is tested in terms of how you apply these ideas to the data you are analysing.

What concepts can I use?

You will be introduced to a range of theories about Language Change as part of the A level course you are following, mostly from academic linguists and other expert commentators, but you may also have developed your own ideas from class experiments and research projects. All of these ideas can be referred to and explored in the exam. It is worth noting that, apart from the debate of prescriptivism / descriptivism, it's often quite difficult to apply the bigger ideas about Language Change to your specific data.

You can also apply AO2 concepts and theories from other areas of language study, such as ideas about Power, Gender, Technology etc. These are often more easily applied to the data than the main concepts of Language Change.

So you should be ready to consider *any* of the AO2 concepts you've learnt, and part of your task in the exam is to judge carefully which ideas are most *relevant* – you need to have a range of ideas, but you can't include them all.

If you can, when you're revising check that the concepts and theories you're using are up to date (within the last twenty years or so). Ideas and debates are always developing, with some concepts being discredited and others gaining credibility. If you're applying a theory to your data which emerged in the 1970s and has long since been superseded, then you might find it harder to gain high marks.

A top quality answer which addresses AO2 needs to show 'perceptive understanding' of the concepts, so make sure you really understand how they

work and how they are applied to data in general.

Let the data lead your analysis

You must be open-minded when approaching a text, and be prepared to find something complex. It may be that the data is inconsistent, or it may not fit at all with an existing theory, or it mostly fits but with some awkward elements.

Don't look for proof that a specific theory is correct or incorrect. In fact, it is very good practice to acknowledge and, ideally, directly engage with, parts of the data which are seemingly in opposition to an idea.

Very importantly, ideas are not *rules*, and actual language users (speakers, writers, Bible translators) are rarely aware of them. Their choices of language are instead governed by an awareness of the audience, purpose, genre and other contextual factors.

Remember: the data is 'what really happens' while the theories are 'what might happen' or 'what someone wants to happen'.

How do you write about this?

As with all aspects of your essay in the exam, you must identify the concept, theory or issue using fairly technical language, e.g. 'prescriptive', 'representation', and connect this closely with a specific part of the text, either using quotations or making clear reference to a section of the text.

This can lead into a discussion of the issue. Try to go into detail, but you should keep referring to the data rather than going off on a tangent. The amount of detail depends on your data so you might be able to write a whole paragraph or just one sentence.

In the case of concepts which are debated or very controversial, such as prescriptive and descriptive attitudes to language change, it may be helpful to

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consider the value of the concept you are applying. You can use evaluative phrases such as 'highly relevant', 'can be usefully applied', 'the data mostly supports the ideas', 'here, the data challenges the established concept of...'

Where does this go in my essay?

The discussion of concepts and issues should arise from the exploration of the data, and be part of the essay, rather than a tacked-on section.

Some students try to name-drop a selection of theories in their introduction to the essay, and this is unlikely to be successful. This is partly because it creates the impression that you are expecting the data to conform to the theories, and also because you aren't including any discussion of the ideas, unless you remember to do it later in the essay. If, however, the exam question focuses very clearly on data that supports a particular theory, then you can begin by briefly mentioning the relevant theories that you will expand on throughout the essay.

Ideally, AO2 marks will be picked up at several points in the essay. To get high marks for this Assessment Objective, you will need to include a range of concepts, and these are unlikely to be clustered together in your overall discussion of features in the data. Indeed, the best responses tend to be able to *integrate* conceptual points into language analysis and contextual awareness. Planning your answer to make sure you achieve this is really important. Otherwise it can be overlooked very easily.

An example of analysis

An example of analysis (here about the representation of gender) which includes AO2 points within the discussion of features is below. The AO2 aspects are underlined:

There are references to 'men' and 'him' as the general term for 'humans' in several parts of this passage. It has been common practice to use the word 'man' as a generic term including both men and women; this is still in use today, although there is often pressure to use gender neutral terminology. As the Bible is an historical and culturally important text, it is often considered appropriate that the traditional term should be used.

However, there are some modern translations which have moved towards gender neutrality, among them the GNB. This has 'people' and the plural 'those', 'they' and 'their' (avoiding the problem of English having no gender-neutral singular pronoun). 'Son' is also rendered as 'children' in GNB, achieving a more inclusive text, and responding to the developments in modern society.

Note that the last sentence of the example could be developed and expanded into a more contextual point (meeting the requirements of AO3), thus beginning to provide a more integrated response.