

# English Language resources: Language change - Understanding the Assessment Objectives

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The exploration and analysis of Biblical texts is a way of developing your knowledge and understanding of **Language Change**. This topic area explores historical and contemporary changes in the English Language from the past to the present day, alongside explanations of their causes and impact.

In studying Language Change, you will focus on the following aspects:

- ❖ Changes in orthography, grammar, lexis, semantics, punctuation and layout
- ❖ Changes in register and genre
- ❖ Attitudes towards language change, the impact of language standardisation, the debates relating to language change
- ❖ The impact of social and political forces upon language usage and change

### **Assessment Objectives**

The Assessment Objectives are the way in which your responses to texts are assessed. The following Assessment Objectives are the ones that are relevant for Language Change:

**AO1 Select and apply a range of linguistic methods to communicate relevant knowledge using appropriate terminology and coherent, accurate written expression.**

This means using several ways of analysing the text ('linguistic methods'), identifying the key features, being able to label them accurately, and then being able to develop this by commenting on why each feature is there, perhaps in relation to an idea about language change or in relation to the context. Examiners always warn against 'feature-spotting' (merely finding features but not discussing them) and the top marks go to answers which show a systematic approach and

integrated response, while still focusing on the most relevant aspects of the text.

**AO2 Demonstrate critical understanding of a range of concepts and issues related to the construction and analysis of meanings in spoken and written language, using knowledge of linguistic approaches.**

This means knowing the details of the concepts and issues (the debates or controversies) but also being 'critical' - so evaluating these concepts in relation to the data. There should be a recognition that the data is paramount, and that established ideas can be challenged by referring to the evidence of the data.

**AO3 Analyse and evaluate the influence of contextual factors on the production and reception of spoken and written language, showing knowledge of the key constituents of language.**

This means identifying and exploring aspects of the context, which might include a detailed consideration of the situations of the writer/speaker and the audience, and an attempt to discuss the ideologies or cultural values expressed. Contextual factors can be many and varied, but the data chosen is usually accessible even if the text is very old, e.g. a text which gives advice to females in 1750, or letters home from soldiers in wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

**How important is each Assessment Objective?**

This depends on the exam board and specification you are studying, and can change when a new specification is introduced to replace an existing one. The information here is correct at the time of writing, but you should always check your specification to be sure of the most up-to-date arrangements:

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Exam board and specification	Unit / Section concerned with Language Change	AO1 Marks	AO2 Marks	AO3 Marks
AQA A	Unit 3 Section B	10	<b>20</b>	15
AQA B	Unit 3 Section B	<b>24</b>	16	8
OCR	Unit 3 Section A (Language and Speech)	5	<b>15</b>	10
OCR	Unit 3 Section B / C / D	5	10	<b>15</b>
WJEC	Unit 4 Section B	<b>20</b>	10	10
Edexcel	Unit 3 Section A Q. 1a	-	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
Edexcel	Unit 3 Section A Q. 1b	10	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>

### ***A checklist of features***

#### **AO1 Linguistic methods**

##### **Lexis**

Field-specific lexis, jargon (specialist lexis); formal / elevated / Latinate; informal / everyday / vernacular / dialect / colloquial / slang; 'banned' / taboo / non-PC (Politically Correct) lexis; terms of address.

##### **Lexical processes**

- ❖ **Borrowing** – New words are drawn from other languages e.g. pyjamas (India), pasta (Italy)
- ❖ **Coining of neologisms** – New words are created to label new objects, concepts, actions etc. e.g. 'texting', 'manbag', often by the following processes:
  - **Compounding** – Joining together of two words
  - **Blending** – Joining together parts of two words
  - **Clippings** – Removal of the ending or beginning (or both) of a word
  - **Acronyms** – Using initial letters of a phrase to make a word
  - **Eponyms** – Words derived from the name of a person or place

- **Proprietary names** – Become generic e.g. Hoover (brand name) becomes any vacuum cleaner
- **Affixation** – Creating a new word using prefixes or suffixes
- **Back-formation** – Loss of prefix or suffix to create word e.g. 'babysitter' used to create 'babysit'
- ❖ **Buzzwords / vogue words** – Words which are extremely popular and 'fashionable' for a certain amount of time, e.g. 'chav'
- ❖ **Desuetude of new words** – Most coinages fall out of use – only a small number remain current
- ❖ **Unfashionable / dated words** – Words used, mainly by older generations, even where the meaning has altered for younger users, or the word is considered unacceptable e.g. 'Chairman' (currently in decline)
- ❖ **Archaic words** – Words which are rarely used, and often only in very traditional and conservative contexts e.g. law and religion
- ❖ **Obsolete words** – Words which are very rarely used, if at all, and are labelled as obsolete in dictionaries (there are over 40,000 of these in *OED*).

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### Semantics

Trying to identify the meaning in the context of the overall meanings of the text: Has this changed? Have connotations changed? Is metaphor or wordplay used? Are any phrases idiomatic? Are euphemisms used to avoid offence?

### Semantic processes

- ❖ **Shift** – Considerable change in meaning, completely moving away from old meaning
- ❖ **Bleaching** – Meanings gradually disappear so the word becomes meaningless
- ❖ **Broadening / generalisation** – Range of meanings increases
- ❖ **Narrowing / specialisation** – Range of meanings decreases or becomes more specific
- ❖ **Amelioration** – Meaning changes to become more positive
- ❖ **Derogation / Pejoration** – Meaning changes to become more negative
- ❖ **Development of metaphors** - Many metaphors have become the idea they refer to (because they are so **conventional** we don't notice them) e.g. 'fighting for his life'; other metaphors are **creative**, unexpected, new or thought-provoking.

### Grammar

Looking closely at: word order (syntax), sentence length, sentence types (minor, simple, compound, complex - how much subordination?), what links the parts together (connectives), sentence functions (exclamative, declarative, imperative, interrogative), verb choices for auxiliaries, inflections, pronoun choices, use of third person where modern texts would use first, formation of negatives (double negatives used?), prepositions, regional non-standard grammatical forms (dialect).

### Grammatical processes

- ❖ **Conversion** – Meaning adapted from one grammatical category to

another, e.g. I'll text you = noun to verb

- ❖ **Simplification** of grammatical rules (**regularisation**), e.g. new verbs form the past tense in the most regular way, e.g. 'she texted' – this uses a standard inflection rather than a medial vowel change.

### Phonology

The aural quality of words: alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhyme (if the latter seems 'wrong', does it reflect different pronunciations over time?).

### Discourse (structure)

Examining how the main ideas are sequenced in the text. What cohesive devices are used? Does the text include deictic references? How much is expected of the reader? Are there patterns such as groups of three, parallel phrases or sentences, repeated elements?

### Graphology

Considering the images used (do they reflect an ideal audience?), the layout in relation to the genre (has this changed over time?), any letter forms which are no longer in use (long 's' and tall 's').

### Orthography

Spellings, capitalisation, punctuation, word boundaries, hyphenation. Are spellings consistent in the text itself? Does the use of spelling, capitals, apostrophes and hyphens differ from today's standard (be careful with US spellings)?

### A02 Concepts and issues

- ❖ **Attitudes to change** - Prescriptive and descriptive; consider any metaphors or images used to convey attitudes
- ❖ **Issues relating to language contact** – Imperialism, globalisation, the impact of World Englishes, conscious policies to reinvigorate languages such as Welsh (in direct competition with English) or English dialects such as Scouse. Also: the

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development of pidgins / creoles;  
the practice of code switching;  
using linguistic repertoires

- ❖ **Standardisation** - Processes and influences (dictionaries, policies and lobbying)
- ❖ **De-standardisation, informalisation and conversationalisation** - Are there greater distinctions made between spoken and written English than would be expected in modern texts?
- ❖ **Co-variation** of old and new forms as transitional features
- ❖ **Accommodation** - Convergence or divergence as a means to project a social identity
- ❖ **Stigmatisation** of forms
- ❖ **Economy** - Making communication more efficient and more rapid; some grammatical forms undergo simplification or regularisation (e.g. plurals and past tenses)
- ❖ **Power** and issues relating to it - What is the relative status of producer and audience of the text? Does the producer exert instrumental or influential power? Does the text seek to represent a person or group or create an identity for the producer? Does the text have overt or covert prestige? Does it use synthetic personalisation to create a relationship with the reader? Are politeness features evident in addressing the audience?
- ❖ **Gender** - Is it foregrounded in the text? How are pronouns used - is there any gendered lexis (consider lexical fields)? Equivalent and non-equivalent pairs, sexist language
- ❖ **Co-present, non-co-present and asynchronous / synchronous / immediate communications** - The impact of modern digital technology, plus multi-modality of digital communication.

### A03 Contextual factors

- ❖ **Audience** - Is it limited or general? Consider class / age / gender / occupational group
- ❖ **Purpose** - Does the text seek to entertain, inform, persuade etc.?
- ❖ **Production** - Who has produced the text? How do they relate to the audience?
- ❖ **Genre** - What type of text is it? Have the conventions of the genre changed?
- ❖ **Pragmatics / sub-text** - What does the text really mean? What shared or prior knowledge do you need in order to understand the text? Does the text use humour / irony / satire?
- ❖ **Discourse (ideas and attitudes)** - What values and assumptions are made by the writer? Are particular values and beliefs being encouraged by the text? Does the text reflect institutional values or established social norms, or does it challenge these? Have norms and cultural values changed over time? If the subject matter relates to a taboo subject, how is language used to refer to this? Are euphemisms employed (e.g. 'passed away' for 'dead')?
- ❖ **Social, political and economic context** - How are the political concerns and issues of the time expressed in the text? How are women and men presented? Does the text create or perpetuate stereotypes of any social groups? The importance of religion in society is often more evident in older texts - there is more likely to be reference made to religion / God / church going etc. than we might expect now
- ❖ **Effects of mass communication / globalisation / urbanisation / immigration**
- ❖ **Influence of media**
- ❖ **Impact of political correctness and pressure groups**
- ❖ **Effects of youth culture, education, changes in social class.**