

DISCOURSE					
GRAPHOLOGY	LEXIS	GRAMMAR	SEMANTICS	PRAGMATICS	PHONOLOGY

Linguistic Methods

This guide will help you achieve a better grade in your English Language A-level by helping you understand how to 'engage linguistically' with the texts you study. This is a central aspect of the mark scheme yet is an area where many students fall down badly. You will not be one of them!

Your work needs to show a methodical engagement with the ideas (as well as use the terminology) of language study. To achieve this, you need to analyse texts using various linguistic methods or 'analytical frameworks', selecting from these carefully according to the particular needs of the text. The methods are shown in the table above and are explained below.

DISCOURSE

The analytical 'frameworks' have been put under an 'umbrella' heading of discourse for a very important reason: to remind you of the absolute importance of context to your analysis of any text.

A 'discourse' is a text considered along with its social context. Discourses are no more than acts of communication between people, e.g. a conversation, a piece of homework, a novel, a short story in a magazine, a newspaper ad, a business letter, a leaflet, a text book, a text message, an email... you get the message? To analyse a text at the level of discourse means taking account of the important aspects of context that came to bear on it at four points in time: its conception and production as well as its reception and interpretation.

CONCEPTION	RECEPTION
PRODUCTION	INTERPRETATION

- Can you recognise that, by their very nature, discourses must be, to a greater or lesser extent, context bound? This is why an appreciation of context is central to your work on this course.

When language is used, meanings are often created that are not immediately revealed by the surface meanings (i.e. the semantic value) of the words used; instead, fluent and experienced users of language are adept at creating meaning that exists 'between the lines'. We don't always 'spell out' what we mean; instead, we often choose to infer meanings, maybe to save time or to imply relationships, often of power. Thus, we are constantly on our guard for the inferred levels of meaning created by a text, meanings that are a part of its 'social force'. This will become clearer if you think about what is happening in the following snippet from a conversation between a teenager and his mother (// = overlapping speech):

Tony: Just combin' me hair, mum. Be down in five //minutes.
 Mum: // Your hair? Good god! But you said you'd be down
 twenty minutes ago! Get down here this minute or else!

There is quite a bit more going on here than is revealed by the surface meanings of the words used. This is an example of domestic discourse and, quite typically in such a discourse, a full interpretation involves an understanding of the way family members communicate through what are called pragmatic meanings.

- o Can you work out what some of these inferred or pragmatic meanings might be and point to parts of this discourse that suggest these?
- o Analysed at the level of this representing a piece of 'mother/son discourse', can you work out some aspects of life that the text reveals and point to the language elements that suggest this?

Pragmatic inferences will be found regularly in discourses that occur when unequal power relationships exist. Imagine a policeman overhears you swearing and says, 'That language of yours was very interesting just then.' You would easily infer there is a pragmatic value to this utterance – that the phrase 'very interesting', for example, carries far more pragmatic weight than its semantic value would otherwise suggest.

The pragmatic force of language is often directly related to our subconscious awareness of the social power relationships that exist when a particular kind of discourse is being used (in the above example, we have a piece of 'contemporary policeman/teenager discourse'). The power that exists in social relationships can be of two kinds:

instrumental power (this is power supported by the law, rules or codes of practice, as in a headmaster's right to expel a student) or influential power, which is the power of social position or personal persuasion.

- An important realisation is that many discourses are examples of 'unequal encounters' and, as such, can be analysed for the power relationships they show.

GRAPHOLOGY

Graphology is about the form of a written text, i.e. its shape, layout and appearance. These will have been chosen so that the text a) complies with genre conventions, b) accounts for the context of use and c) to make the text pleasing to the eye or more useful to the mind.

This could be especially important regarding audience – a young audience would require different graphological decisions to be made when compared with an older audience. Also, purpose will, to some degree, determine graphological style: an instructional text will require a different layout from a descriptive text, for example. Graphology includes aspects such as layout, font face, the use of colour, italics, bold, underline, letter headings, headlines, columns, tables, bullet points and much more – all aspects of its visual form.

- Where graphology can become a most useful framework is when it is realised that it is the very first aspect of a text that is perceived by its audience. Thus, it can materially affect both the reception and interpretation of a text.
- We, as audiences, have become conditioned to the generic appearance of particular texts (see genre in Part One of this handout for examples of this) – and it is at the level of a text's graphology that this process begins, well before the audience gains any knowledge of the text's content. Thus, the graphological aspects of a text can initiate a conditioned mind-set (often an ideologically conditioned response – see ideology later) that can materially affect the way the text is received and interpreted.

LEXIS & SEMANTICS

Lexis concerns word choice; semantics concerns meaning. Clearly the two concepts are intimately bound together. A lexical item is the technical term for a word; a lexeme is a root word; a lexicon is a stock of words such as exists in a dictionary; your individual lexicon is your personal vocabulary or stock of words.

Words have two separate aspects that can be useful to your analyses: they have form and they have content. Form refers to the shape and sound of something, that is, what can be perceived by the eyes and ears (see also graphology and phonology). In one respect, therefore, lexis can be considered as being involved with the form of a word because, once the mind becomes involved, the word's content or meaning is being considered, and this is the realm of semantics, the study of meaning (but see also pragmatics).

Some important lexical and semantic aspects of language are:

- denotation – this refers to the generally accepted or literal meaning, e.g. 'That's a poodle.'
- connotation – in certain contexts, certain words can take on associated meanings beyond their denotation, e.g. 'He's sure is no poodle, so take care!'
- figurative language, i.e. the use of figures of speech such as metaphor.
- lexical or semantic 'fields' – when a series of lexical items appears in a text that are related through their semantic value, then this forms what is termed a lexical field (perhaps better called a semantic field). An instruction manual on how to use a computer mouse will, naturally, rely on the lexical/semantic field of computer technology. Where semantic fields become interesting analytically is when one semantic field is used metaphorically to describe another. So, in a report on a football match, the semantic field of war become very useful ('He gunned down the opposition shooting straight into the back of the net...'). In romantic fiction, the semantic field of food is frequently used ('She looked good enough to eat...'; 'She would have Mr Blue Eyes for main course and Mr Brown Eyes for dessert...').
- idiomatic language – a non-literal way of using language that adds colour to conversation and description. Idiomatic expressions are a natural part of everyday colloquial language but they make life difficult for learners of English. Consider a foreigner trying to make sense of: 'I'm up to my neck in you-know-what!', 'I'm utterly lost for words', 'Up yours mate!' and 'I'm all fingers and thumbs today'. Or what would a foreigner on a bus think of being told by the driver, 'Come on sunshine, get off!'

GRAMMAR

Grammar is the set of rules (more properly, 'rule-like conventions') that users of a language follow so that their sentences carry the meaning intended. Analysing a text at the level of its grammar requires knowledge of sentence structure (called syntax) and word form (called morphology).

- Standard grammar is the grammar of the prestige English dialect known as Standard English. When you encounter standard English think about its effect and the purpose of its use. Is it being used in an attempt at divergence, when a user intends to separate themselves linguistically from others? Or convergence, when a language user attempts to match other users of language? Is it suggesting 'hypercorrection' when a user tries to create prestige for themselves through over-formality?
- Non-standard grammar is a feature of some regional dialects. Compare, 'I don't want any' (standard) with 'I don't want none' (non standard – because it uses what is called a 'double negative'). As above, think about the ideas of convergence and divergence.
- Inaccurate grammar is a feature of spontaneous speech (when mistakes are easily made and language learners.
- Try to make time to work through this guide to grammar: <http://www.englishbiz.co.uk/grammar/index.htm>.

It's important to recognise that everyone regularly departs from the grammar of Standard English - and sometimes deliberately so, e.g. in advertising, text messaging and email.

Here are some important grammatical aspects of texts worth looking out for:

- Uses of STANDARD or NON-STANDARD GRAMMAR – see above. Texting, speech, emailing, advertising, for example, often 'compress' language and resort to non-standard grammar (be sure you can differentiate between non-standard and inaccurate grammar).
- SYNTAX refers to the structure and relationship of the 'coherent individual units' that make up a sentence (i.e. its phrases). Syntax can be simple, complex or highly standardised, for example. A formal text will contain many examples of complex syntax, almost certainly. When you discuss word order, therefore, use the term syntax; but when you discuss the form of words – such as the use of inflexions, prefixes and suffixes, use the term morphology – and remember that a bound morpheme (e.g. -ing, -ment, un-, dis-) is a prefix or suffix, 'bound' because it cannot exist alone as a lexical item or word as its role is to change the meaning or grammatical form of the root word to which it is attached; a free morpheme, on the other hand, is a minimal unit of meaning that is, itself, a lexical item or root word (e.g. 'interest').
- PHRASES are the minimal units of grammar that act as the building blocks for clauses (see below). They are composed of a single lexical item/word or a group of words and they fill a syntactic space within a sentence, i.e. they act as, for example, subject, finite verb, complement, adverbial or object.

The subject tells what or who perform the action of the verb (or tells who is 'being'); the finite verb tells of action (e.g. 'The car [S] crashed [V]') or state (e.g. 'He [S] feels/seems/appears/is [V] ill [C]'); the complement 'completes' or adds meaning to the subject ('He [S] is [V] tall [C]'); the adverbial tells about time, place or manner ('He is walking awkwardly'; 'Fortunately, he's pretty cool!'); the object is affected by the action of the verb (e.g. 'He [S] hit [V] me [O]'). Some verbs take two objects, a direct object and an indirect object ('He [S] gave[V] me[IO] a kiss[DO]').

An important type of phrase is a noun phrase [NP]. These can form the subject or object of a verb, for example, or the object of a prepositional phrase [PP]. Examples are: That peculiar guy [NP as subject] over by the coffee machine [PP] called you a nerd.'). A noun phrase consists of a noun as head word along with, often, adjectives that modify their noun by add defining qualities to the head word, e.g. 'That awkward little idiot...' consisting of the head word, the noun, 'idiot', the determiner 'that' and two pre-modifying adjectives, 'awkward little').

- CLAUSES are built from two or more phrases, one of which must be acting as subject (S) to a finite verb phrase (VP), e.g. 'The cat (S) is purring (VP)'. Clauses are the building blocks of sentences. There are two kinds of clause: a main clause is one that can exist alone as a simple sentence; main clauses can also be linked to one or more subordinate clauses that act purely to add extra information to it. The combination of these two clause types is called a complex sentence, e.g. 'The cat caught the mouse [main clause] even though it had just been fed' [subordinate clause]. Subordinate clauses can be elliptical (i.e. be missing lexical items but ones that can be easily inferred) and embedded within their main clauses, e.g. 'The teacher [[who is] here today] is Mr Campsall.'
- SENTENCE TYPES – sentences can be simple (see above), compound (consisting of two or more main clauses joined by, for example, 'and'), complex (see above) or combinations (e.g. compound-complex). In conversation

especially, fragments of sentences can be used such as, 'What me?'. These elliptical sentences often lack a verb phrase even though this is always implied ('What – do you mean me?') and are called minor sentences.

- ELLIPSIS is a way of making language more compact. It refers to the omission of words from available syntactic spaces within a sentence. Ellipsis occurs, for example, in minor sentences, e.g. '[You] Shut up!'; 'He was going to come along but he didn't [come along]'; 'The car [[that is] over there] is parked badly'; 'There are six students [who are] absent from class today.' The omitted or 'ellipted' words are implied and understood.
- ACTIVE and PASSIVE 'voice'. When a sentence directly tells who is carrying out the action told of by the verb (i.e. the 'doer' of the action, properly called the grammatical agent), the syntactic space for the subject is always just before the finite verb (e.g. 'The cat [S] caught [V] the mouse [O]'). This typical kind sentence is said to be in the active voice.

A sentence can, however, be constructed so that the normal grammatical subject position is occupied by what is, in fact, the grammatical object of the verb (i.e. the recipient of its action), e.g. The mouse [S] was caught [V] by the cat [O]. This is said to be a passive voice construction.

Passive constructions are an important feature of written language and are common in news reporting. They are important because they allow the agency of a clause to be diminished or removed – as is often in a newspaper headlines: BOMBS DROPPED ON CAPITAL. Who did the dropping? The agent has been omitted. Passives can be used to reduce the sense of responsibility for an action. They are also useful in reports where the same person does a number of tasks or where the agency of the action is unimportant, e.g. '100ml of distilled water was added and raised to boiling point.'

- SENTENCE FUNCTIONS – a declarative sentence has the structure S+V (subject + object) and tells directly who is doing what by making a statement: 'I burned the cake'; interrogative sentences create questions by reversing the subject and verb positions (or rely on an auxiliary verb 'do'), e.g. 'Is it a dog?' 'Do I know you?'; imperative sentences give 'commands', e.g. 'Shut up', 'Sit down' or, more politely, 'Please go away!' They are syntactically odd because they are elliptical, lacking the usual, but easily understood (i.e. 'you') grammatical subject.
- MODIFICATION – nouns and verbs are often insufficient to express the required meaning and need to be given extra qualities through a grammatical process called modification. Adjectives are used to add extra information to nouns (as in 'long and windy...'); adverbs add extra information to verbs and to other modifying words, e.g. she acted very quickly. Relative clauses add extra information by using 'that', 'which' or 'who', e.g. 'the bus that left an hour ago was late'. Subordinate clauses add extra information to a main clause, e.g. 'the train is early, even though it was running ten minutes late'. Prepositional phrases add extra information, often adverbially, to tell about time, place and manner, e.g. 'I'll look in a minute'; 'It's over there', 'He did it in an awkward way'.

Post-modification occurs as a complement following verbs of being, e.g. 'He is truly awful'; 'He was just in time'; pre-modification occurs using, often, adjectives, e.g. 'The most interesting aspect...'

PHONOLOGY and PHONETICS

Phonetics is the study of the physical production (called the articulation) of speech sounds (by the mouth, tongue and lips, for example) and also the perception of the speech sounds. For your exam, you will need only a very basic understanding of this. In contrast, you will need a much greater knowledge of phonology – the study of sound affects the meaning, reception and interpretation of texts.

If the sound of a word is broken down into the smallest parts that are distinct because they help to create meaning, the smallest distinct sound is called a phoneme. A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound that alters either the meaning or the grammatical function of a word. It is phonemes that allow us to distinguish one word from another, for example, in the word 'cod', the sound of 'c' is a phoneme. This can clearly be shown because if the phoneme 'c' is replaced by another phoneme, such as 'n' or 'p', the word changes its meaning. i.e. 'nod' and 'pod'.

Sound is important in so many ways to language; consider, for example, such phonological aspects as intonation, emphasis, stress, silence, pauses, etc. All of these are what is called the suprasegmental or prosodic features. There is a saying: 'It ain't what you say, it's the way that you say it' and sound patterning forms an interesting and often important aspect of language. Here are some of the many ways we play around as language users with sound patterns:

- Alliteration: the repetition of initial sounds: 'Softly sensuous', 'Big is beautiful'.

- Assonance: the repetition of inner vowel sounds: 'How now, brown cow'; 'Time for Brown to Step Down?'
- Rhyme: the repetition of end-sounds: 'Bush's gain means Afghan's pain'; 'Credit Crunch Hits Cost of Lunch'
- Tone: the expression of attitude through voice.
- Onomatopoeia: a word that sounds like what it tells of: 'The crunch of bone, the spatter of blood...'
- Slang: colloquial, non-standard informal language regarded as inappropriate for written or formal use.
- Taboo language: swear words depending for effect on their sound, e.g. 'Oh shit!'

PRAGMATICS

This important analytical method is covered above under discourse. Pragmatics is at the centre of all discourse analysis and should be uppermost in your mind when you analyse each and every text. Here are some more examples where a pragmatic analysis can be revealing:

- When you tell a parent, 'I'll be home by ten...', they might easily infer that you mean after midnight!
- Many social groups use language in what is sometimes referred to as 'short cut mode'. Here meaning can be inferred only from the context in which the discourse occurs, meaning that an outsider would struggle to know what is being meant. 'Cool' slang and irony are examples of language that rely on 'short-cut mode', i.e. on pragmatic rather than semantic meaning.
- In conversational 'turns' that 'flout Grice's maxims' pragmatics operates through 'implicatures'.
- Power differences exist often between participants in a conversation and pragmatic inference will feature strongly.

IDEOLOGY

Ideology is not a separate 'framework' or an analytical method; and yet it offers an important way to analyse a text at the level of discourse (see above). It is a subtle level of analysis that gains high marks.

Ideologies are the 'generally accepted' ideas about life, society and the world that most people in society share with others. Ideology is an aspect of discourse analysis (and therefore of pragmatics).

Ideologies are what create a society or culture's 'mind set' or 'world view'; they suggest to us that whilst life isn't perfect, we live in or are working towards 'the best possible of all worlds': that our society's beliefs are the right ones and other's beliefs are less enlightened, etc. We are conditioned into accepting these ways of thinking as we grow up – the family, religion, school and so forth instil, reinforce and maintain such values. Importantly, such ideas always come to us through the language we meet and use in our everyday lives.

Here is an obvious ideological use of language (a tabloid headline) that reinforces a particular way of thinking:

'YOB CULTURE LEADS TO DUMBING DOWN OF BBC DRAMA OUTPUT'

Texts are created by speakers and writers who share important beliefs concerning 'what is right' and 'what is wrong' or about 'the way things should be for the best' in society. Such ideas rarely have to be justified because they are seen by the majority in that society as 'natural' and 'common sense', perhaps as the result of 'history', 'progress', 'right thinking', 'enlightenment', etc.

One way of examining a text at the level of its ideological content is to look for the use of ideologically loaded language. Such language always has a judgemental value as well as meaning. Such language is often transparent and not easy to notice for we live under the spell of ideologies. It can have a seductively persuasive effect as it works 'ideologically position' you as reader.

Many 'ideologically loaded' words carry judgmental value because their meaning is relational: they exist as 'binary pairs', e.g. 'master/mistress', 'housewife/working mother', 'middle class/working class', 'freedom fighter/terrorist', 'hero/coward', 'normal/abnormal', 'gay/hetero', 'feminine/feminist', 'The West/the East', etc. Some linguists maintain that all language – all meaning and 'truth' – is an 'ideological construct'.

- This is a very useful area of study – look on the Englishbiz website to find out more about 'Ideology', 'Binary Opposition' and 'Narrative': all analytical tools guaranteed to give your work the edge!

SOME FURTHER USEFUL TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Field

The field of a discourse is simply the answer to the question, 'What is it generally about – its subject matter?' E.g. 'The field of this discourse is politics/family life/law/school-life' (see register, below). The field of a discourse will always be made evident by the existence within it of field specific lexis, i.e. words related to that particular area of human activity.

Mode

The mode of a text answers the question, 'How is this discourse being encountered?' If it is being heard directly from the speaker, the mode is 'spoken'; if it is being read the mode will be written, typed or electronically displayed. If it is being heard after having been mediated through a secondary source such as a telephone, the Internet or TV, for example, it might show features of both speech and writing and thus be 'mixed mode'.

Mode is closely linked to the channel of the discourse which refers to the medium through which the text is being transmitted. Mode should always be thought of on a kind of continuum, e.g. an email will show features of both spoken and written modes, for example.

There is a second use of the term 'mode' that is rather different. It can be used to describe a dominant aspect of the style of a text. Poetry, for example, uses a strongly metaphorical mode; story-telling uses a largely narrative mode, and so on.

Tenor

The tenor of a discourse answers the question, 'What relationship is being developed in this discourse?' It can be useful to characterise the tenor of a discourse when, for example, a speaker attempts to create a sense of, perhaps, friendliness, objectivity, solidarity or distance, for example.

The tenor is often created by the context of the discourse and the way its participants relate to each other. Questions to ask might include, 'Is the speaker sincere?', 'Is the discourse reflecting the status of the participants' (i.e. the power relationships between them might be symmetrical or asymmetrical).

Register

A register is a language variety that shows particular features that are typical of its specific social situation, for example, a legal register is clear in this extract:

'Notwithstanding the termination of the hiring under Clause 6 the Hirer shall pay all rent accrued due in respect of the hiring up to the date of such termination and shall be or remain liable in respect of any damage caused to the Owner by reason of any breach by the Hirer of any stipulation herein contained and on part of the Hirer to be performed or observed.

(Crystal, D.-Davy, D.: Investigating English Style. 1969)

- Such a register will always show examples of field-specific lexis.

Dialect / Sociolect / Idiolect

A dialect refers to a language variety that shows features typical of a particular geographical region. A sociolect refers to a language variety that shows features typical of a particular social group. An idiolect refers to a personal language variety shaped by such things as social characteristics and education.

An idiolect shows itself by lexical choices, pronunciation and grammatical patterns. E.g. 'We're just gonna sneak up on ol' Leroy. Probably he think it gonna be Shirlene at the door. I just hope he don't come to the door too happy, you know what I mean?'

(Evanovich, J: Three to Get Deadly. Introducing Great New Books from Penguin, 1997.)