STYLE

Style is derived from the Latin word 'stylus' – a pointed object used for engraving or writing. Nowadays it refers equally to written and spoken texts, and refers to that specific combination of elements of language and language features that make up the text.

When we choose to communicate our ideas, we are not entirely free to choose what we say or write; not least, we are *constrained* by what **language** and **language features** can do – by the **meanings** they can **create** or **infer**, by their **clarity** or **obscurity**, by their **precision** or **ambiguity** and, of course, by the **interest** and **engagement** they can create in our intended audience.

We are also constrained because we need to consider the needs of our **audience** and **purpose**; and humans being what they are, we are also constrained by two further aspects: **genre** (the kind of text we are creating) and **context** (the situation in which the text will be used). Although the four aspects of **audience**, **purpose**, **context** and **genre** can be said to act as constraints on language choices, they clearly act in the reverse to those on the receiving end of our 'verbalised ideas': our listener or reader. From that perspective, the choices act, of course, to aid or augment **interpretation** – the other side of the coin.

There are other terms that mean much the same as **style**: **register** and **language variety** are two most commonly heard.

Consider a news item for 'The Times' newspaper.

- *Its **genre** constrains style because it insists on the use of, for example, headings, sub-headings, by-lines, photographs, short paragraphs (because the writing will appear in narrow columns); news writing also requires quick and brief answers to the so-called '5W+H' questions of news reporting (who, what, where, when, why and how). You can surely think of more genre conventions for yourself.*
- *The **context** of the reader is important in newspaper writing as this genre is often read in less than ideal circumstances where concentration is difficult or not wanted, for example, over breakfast, on a train, in a busy office.*
- *In this example, the **audience** will likely be in an upper income bracket and well educated.*
- *The **purpose** will be to inform or persuade – aspects that require the use of particular stylistic elements.*

*Professional writers, such as journalists, often agonise over features of style, checking and rechecking what they have written as they write. They know of course, the writer's secret – that the only way to write effectively is to read their writing **not as its writer** (who will always see what they think is there), but **as its future intended reader** (who is always far more discriminating and who will notice even the smallest error).*

- *Good writers become successful because they learn, metaphorically, to put on their reader's hat, imagining themselves in their reader's context; **as they write, they read as a future reader would**.*
- *Poor writers think only of themselves – and create self-indulgent texts of little real value!*

Now, imagine the following situation where an effective style is clearly very important. You need to convince your mother that you just *have* to go on that o-h s-o c-o-o-l Italian holiday with your best friend. You will clearly be carefully selecting your **style** of language. Your **purpose** will be to create a style that will persuade a particular **audience** in a certain social **context** – *your mother*. Such a style will show close attention has been paid to:

- Language choices (i.e. aspects of **lexis, semantics** and **grammar** – see below for more on these);
- Tone – as this will help suggest *attitude* and *mood* (i.e. the **prosodic** or '**suprasegmental**' features of language, i.e. those related to rhythm, intonation, stress, pace, etc.).
- Body and facial 'language' used (i.e. the **paralinguistic features** of communication).

There is also an important but much more subtle aspect of meaning that would became quickly apparent if you were to analyse such a conversation. This is the way the **social context** (place, time, relationships,

etc.) in which the communication occurred acts to *infer* or *suggest* meaning beyond the literal content (i.e. the **denotation**) of the words chosen. This secondary aspect of meaning and interpretation arises because the semantic value of certain words and phrases alters according to the context in which it is being used. Some meanings will be influenced because of *who* is speaking, *where*, *why* and *when*, also owing to the *relationships* involved, the *shared knowledge* each knows of similar situations, the *expectations* of each participant, and so on. How complex language can be!

- This inferred level of meaning is called the **pragmatic level of meaning** – it can be thought of as **the force of an utterance** rather than its **sentence meaning**. Pragmatics comes to the fore whenever people are involved with using language. Imagine this part of the above imaginary conversation:

  You: But if you won't give me the money, mum, I'll have to work extra hours to pay for it…'

The pragmatic inference intended here is along the lines of: *I'll then not have so much time to do my schoolwork so, by refusing to pay for my trip to Italy, you will be directly contributing to my poor school results – and ruining my future prospects...* You can see how this subtle level of inference is entirely dependent upon the social context that exists at the time the conversation occurs. In his instance, the pragmatic meanings are being created by a relatively subtle use of **irony** contained within the utterance.

Now, think about this: if this conversation with mum was **transcribed** and used in an English Language lesson, it might well be analysed not simply for its lexis or semantics, but much more profitably *as an example of* ***'early 21st century, middle-class, parent-son/daughter social discourse'.***

- Can you explain *why*? Try to work out what the term discourse means. (It is explained more fully below). Many people confuse **discourse** with '**discourse structure**' – the latter is merely one aspect of discourse.

Can you also recognise that certain **linguistic features** of the discourse would suggest, not just the meanings being created, but also such subtle aspects of the discourse as the *relationship* between the participants, the *power differentials* that exist between them, their *linguistic competence*… and probably much more?

- *If you looked at such an example of similar discourse in class today, as you analysed and considered it, certain words and phrases would probably seem to 'stand out' from the text – as if they had some sort of 'linguistic glow' to them. It would be these words and phrases, as well as aspects of the* ***structure*** *of the whole text that would reveal all of this rich detail.*

STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

A stylistic analysis seeks to uncover and discuss the *effective* uses of language and language features in a text. If it is to succeed, you will know by now that you must pay close consideration to aspects of **genre**, **context, audience** and **purpose**; but to this must be added two further considerations that form an important part of any discussion on a text: the **effects** it creates and the **methods** used to create these.

Also, an effective stylistic analysis always opens with an **overview** that provides a succinct sense of the text's **big picture**:

- *Before you can analyse the style of any text, you will need to have first gain a clear sense of its 'big picture'. This means gaining a rounded appreciation of it as an example of* ***society's discourse****.*
- *An exam answer that opens with a succinct overview of this 'big picture' – focused, of course, through the requirements of the exam question – sets a very natural, confident and impressive tone.*
- *A successful overview provides a 'springboard' for a more detailed analysis and commentary to follow.*
- *Here is a table that lists each key aspect of a successful stylistic analysis:*

GENRE	CONTEXT	AUDIENCE
EFFECTS	METHODS	PURPOSE

GENRE

We can thank the French for this word. It means 'kind' or 'type'. We can easily recognise genre texts, such as a novel, a poem, a newspaper article, a leaflet, a lifestyle magazine and so on because their style reminds us of aspects typical of their genre. These aspects are called **genre conventions**. A 'convention' is a 'way of doing' something that is repeated and shared with other similar 'ways of doing' something – perhaps because it creates ease and comfort with things in life? Any analysis of style, therefore, usually requires a consideration of genre. But genre influences not just the style of a text – it also influences and even shapes our approach to it and interpretation of it.

- *Theorists suggest that the **genre** of a text is one aspect that acts to **'position'** or **'construct'** us as readers or listeners in important ways – that is, genre acts to persuade us to adopt certain ways of thinking about a text. For example, the genre of a news article, perhaps quite reasonably, creates a powerful sense of **authenticity**, **trustworthiness** and even **authority**; but somewhat surprisingly, so does the genre of a lifestyle magazine; indeed, the general conventions of publishing itself acts to create similar effects whatever the content of the publication. Somehow we have come to trust the printed word more highly than the written word…*
- *Genre can build expectations that are very influential – because genre conventions seem so entirely normal, even natural, we cannot easily shake of the 'genre mind set' they create. Genre can create a powerful set of judgments about a text – it can create authority, for example, perhaps dangerously so.*

CONTEXT

This word derives from an ancient Latin word meaning 'to weave together' and, you can see that certain aspects of a writer or speaker's context will 'weave' themselves into the style of their texts; similarly, certain aspects of a reader or listener's context will 'weave' themselves into their interpretation of a text. An easy way to visualise this is to consider a letter written by a soldier from the World War One trenches to his sweetheart back home: both the language used by the writer and the interpretation of it by the reader will be strongly affected by their individual – and very different – contexts. It is not too hard to carry this analogy across to any other situation and recognise how context very often will 'insert' itself into a texts and the interpretation of that text.

- *An analysis of the style of a text must take context into consideration – both the context of its creation and of its use and interpretation.*

AUDIENCE

Audience means the particular kind of reader or listener for which a text is intended (i.e. its **target audience**). An easy but dangerous pitfall in your exam is to fail to see that the unseen texts with which you are presented are unlikely to be aimed at *you* as their target audience. Always 'put on the audience's cap' when you judge a text in any way or you will find yourself making poor judgments in it.

METHOD

Labelling a writer or speaker's methods is an important aspect of A-level exam technique. In conversation, for example, you need to identify and label such features as 'adjacency pairs', in persuasive or descriptive writing, the use of figurative language such as metaphor is often important

EFFECTS

When we use language we create effects on our audience. Important effects of language can be to engage, to surprise, to attract, to be pleasurable, to engender trust, and so on.

PURPOSE

When we use language we have a purpose in mind for our audience.

- *Don't fall into the trap of being overly simplistic regarding purpose. A newspaper article's role might well be to inform, but many so-called 'informative' articles are really persuasive.*
- *In conversation, we rarely have just a solitary purpose.*
- *There is often two levels of 'purpose': a particular use of language **at a certain point** in a text will have **a specific purpose at that point**; but texts are coherent and unified things, so an individual local effect will also be contributing to the overall purpose of the text.*

STYLISTIC ANALYSIS
USING 'LANGUAGE FRAMEWORKS' or 'LEVELS'

Analysing texts to discover interesting aspects of style is at the heart of your A-level. Doing this in a methodical manner makes sense. This means considering a text at various 'levels', e.g. at the level of its grammar, or at the level of meaning. Here are the frameworks you will be using:

DISCOURSE	LEXIS	GRAMMAR	SEMANTICS	PHONOLOGY	GRAPHOLOGY	PRAGMATICS

DISCOURSE

Discourse is such an important aspect of textual analysis that it just has to head this list of frameworks – even though lexis is usually afforded this position. Discourse has several meanings and can be confusing; but it is best to think of it as an umbrella term to cover all and every kind of human verbal interaction – in Media and other cultural studies such as sociology it is also used to cover the use of images and other things that also create 'texts' and meaning; in its biggest sense, discourse covers all the ways we humans use to create meaning within our societies and cultures.

So… analysing a text fully means considering it as an example of a type of social or cultural **discourse**; thinking of it not in the sterile vacuum of an A-level classroom, but as an example of a 'living' piece of language that was once used between real thinking, sentient and 'relating' people. After all, all texts are means to a social end of some kind or other (that is, they exist purely to communicate ideas, thoughts and other meanings *and always have a relationship* to the social context within which they are used).

When language is used, meanings are frequently developed that are not truly apparent at the straightforward semantic value of the sentences used (see **pragmatics** below); instead, users of language are very adept at 'reading between the lines'; this means we constantly make **pragmatic inferences** form what we read and hear – adding layers of meaning or **pragmatic force** well beyond the **semantic value** of the language used.

These pragmatic inferences are often related to the unequal power relationships that exist in the particular situation of language use, e.g. when you speak to a policeman, if he said 'Call me Fred', you'd start to infer things, wouldn't you? And if he says, 'Your actions were interesting just there', you would no he meant something more than 'interesting' – indeed, it's not just irony – you know without him saying exactly what he is referring to, and how important it is for you . The pragmatic inferences are often directly related to your subconscious knowledge of the social power relationships that exist with the discourse itself. This power can be **instrumental power** (i.e. backed by the law – as in a headmaster's right to expel a student) or by the power of persuasion, called **influential power**… and often both.

Discourses can also be analysed at the level of how they have been created to be connected and continuous. This means examining their **coherence** and the way **cohesive devices** have been used to 'hold them together) so that their meaning connects across the whole text.

For example, a real or imaginary event told in the form of a **narrative** (i.e. a connected series of events told from one viewpoint) has a **discourse structure** that is very compelling and involving – it creates a a sense of **tension** because we have a natural desire to want to know 'what comes next'; a letter has a discourse structure, too, that can, when informal and friendly, be very intimate and involving, but when formal and business-like be more intimidating and powerful; a magazine or newspaper editorial has a persuasive discourse structure providing a series of 'cues' that lead us to its inexorable conclusion… and so on. All of these uses of discourse structure and means of **cohesion** relate to the particular **genre conventions** of these texts.

LEXIS

Lexis refers to the *choices of words* in a text but… its easy to confuse **lexis** and **semantics**, so it is useful to limit comment on lexis to the level of the **form** of words; the moment you find yourself considering the **content** of a word, you are considering its meaning, and that is the realm of **semantics** (and possibly even **pragmatics**).

So, for example, lexis might be described as *looking* or *sounding* complex, *being* polysyllabic (e.g. antidisestablishmentarianism), *looking* or *sounding* formal or Latinate (e.g. 'preposterous'), *being* jargon (e.g. 'reportage'), *being* colloquial or Anglo-Saxon ('Sod off!'), *being* slang (e.g. 'Shut yer trap!'), *appearing* archaic (e.g. 'thou'), *being* dialect (e.g. 'a cheese butty please'), and so on.

GRAMMAR

Grammar means examining a text at the level of its individual **sentences**; that is, at the way writers or speakers *construct* their sentences in ways they believe they will suit a particular **genre**, **context**, **audience** and **purpose**.

Looking at grammar means looking at the ways the words within key sentences have been *organised* and *sequenced* – that is, the way the 'grammatical hierarchy' of **phrases**, **clauses** and **sentences** have been used. The sequencing of the words in a sentence is technically referred to as its **syntax**.

Another aspect of grammar is to the ways individual words within a sentence are *formed* (e.g. whether they show plural or singular, present or past, possession, negation, require auxiliary verbs, are a passive construction, etc.). This second aspect is called **morphology** – and the individual parts of a word that can affect the meaning or grammatical function of the word are called **morphemes** (e.g. in the three morpheme word un-interest-ing, try changing the first morpheme (the *prefix*) to *dis–*, or the final one (the *suffix*) to *–ed*, and you will recognise what a morpheme is. Morphemes that can exist as a whole word, e.g. interest, are termed **free morphemes**; morphemes that are not full words are termed **bound**, e.g. *dis-*, *-ing.*

Grammar easily leaps into the realm of the highly complex; but you can be sure that you will not be 'tricked' in your exam. There WILL BE fairly straightforward grammatical aspects for you to find and which WILL be worthy of comment because they are relevant to style (i.e. audience, purpose, context and genre).

A key term to learn is how to describe grammar that you feel is somehow 'wrong'. The answer is to be sure you do **not** 'judge' the *writer* as 'wrong' or, for example, 'uneducated'; instead, judge the *grammar* as **non-standard.**

- *Standard grammar is a feature of the prestige English **dialect** called **Standard English** because the intention of Standard English is that it is entirely clear (i.e. unambiguous), and it is its use of standard grammar that allows this. Compare, 'I don't want any' (standard) with 'I don't want none' (non standard – because it uses what is called a 'double negative').*

In your exam, then, you should recognise that we often vary from the standard way of using grammar – especially when we speak, and in other occasions when we are forced to say as much as we can in as little space (e.g. an ad) or as little time (e.g. a txt msg, an email or a poem) as we can. Some of the texts you receive in your exam will *almost certainly* be of this kind – so use grammar as a means of grouping and categorising those texts. When you are analysing the grammar of the sentences in a text, you might find:

- Uses of **standard** or **non**-**standard grammar** – e.g. standard: 'I don't want anything', non-standard: 'I don't want nothing'. Conversation uses a good deal of non-standard grammar, as does children's language and some dialects. Txting, emailing advertising – all compress meaning and so rely on non-standard grammar – but never so 'non-standard' as for the sense to be confusing or lost. We can get away with murder with grammar – and still make meaning clear.
- **Syntax** can be straightforward or complex and suggest formality or informality, for example.
- **Clause types** – clauses are a building block of a sentence. To be a clause a group of words needs to tell what a subject (i.e. the person or thing it is mainly about – usually a **noun**, **noun phrase** or **pronoun**) is being or doing (an *action* or *state* told of by the **verb**). There are two main kinds of clause: a **main clause** can even stand on its own as a **simple sentence**; **subordinate clauses** can be added to a main clause to create an information-packed **complex sentence**, e.g. The cat caught the mouse [MC] *even though it had just been fed* [SC]. Clause choice and usage can, of course, be an important aspect of style.

- **Sentence types** – can be **simple**, **compound**, **complex**, **compound**-**complex** or '**minor**'. These can be important grammatical choices. Check your other notes to be sure you understand their use.
- **Ellipsis** – is the omission of understood words, e.g. '[You] Shut up!'; 'He was going to come along but he didn't [come along].'; 'There are six [students who are] absent from class today.'
- **Active and passive 'voice'.** When a sentence directly tells who carries out the action told of by the verb (the doer of action is called the **agent**), the **agent** always takes the grammatical **subject position** just before the verb (e.g. 'The cat [S-Agent] caught [V] the mouse [O]). In this usual case, the voice is called **active**. But a sentence can be constructed so that the normal grammatical subject position is occupied by what is really the object of the verb (i.e. the receiver of the action), e.g. The mouse [S] was caught [V] by the cat [O]. This is called the **passive voice**. It is a feature of written language rather than spoken language and so carries with it a sense of the extra influence of written language – *a sense of power*.

  Passive constructions are important to us in language study. Because they allow the **agency** of the sentence to be 'downplayed', reduced or even removed completely (as is often in newspaper headlines: MOUSE CAUGHT!) they can have the odd effect of *removing or reducing the sense of responsibility for an action* – it reduces or removes the **agency** of the action.
- **Sentence functions** – a **declarative sentence** is structured SV (subject + object) and is usually used to tell directly who is doing what by making a statement: 'I did it'; **interrogative sentences** reverse **the subject and verb** or add in 'do' as an auxiliary, e.g. 'Is it a dog?' 'Do I know?' – they usually are used to ask a question; **imperative sentences** such as 'Shut up' or 'Sit down' or, more politely, 'Please sit down' - are used, usually, to tell someone to do something – they are grammatically odd because they don't need a subject to be mentioned as the subject is fairly obviously the person being told what to do! Finally, **exclamatory sentences** such as 'What an amazing dog!' are used to express emotion or surprise).
- **Modification** – **nouns** and **verbs** often need extra information to be provided to make the more precise or clear ('Mind that dog! It's very dangerous'… 'Which dog'… 'The one with the long pointy teeth!!'). **Adjectives** add extra information to nouns (as in 'long pointy'); **adverbs** add extra information about other words (as in *very* dangerous), most often but not always to verbs, e.g. quickly, harshly; **relative clauses** add extra information and relate often to the subject or object of a sentence, e.g. 'the bus *that left an hour ago* was late'; **subordinate clauses** add extra information to their main clause, e.g. 'the train is early, *even though it was running ten minutes late*'; **prepositional phrases** act as adverbs (or adverbial phrases…) to add extra information about time (answering the question 'when?'), place ('where') and manner ('how') of an action, e.g. 'I'll look *in a minute'*; 'It's *over there'*, 'He did it *in an awkward way*').

SEMANTICS

Semantics refers to *word* and *sentence meaning*. Some important semantic aspects of language are:

- **denotation** – this is literal meaning, i.e. the most commonly accepted or dictionary meaning.
- **connotation** – when the meaning of a word is affected by its context; in certain contexts, some words can be used and they take on extra or 'suggested' meanings beyond what a dictionary would tell they literally mean; these words are often **metaphors**, used to describe a thing or person vividly; they might also be **symbols** or **puns**.
- **semantic field** – when a series of metaphors is used that all belong to a particular area of human ideas or action, this is called a '**semantic field'**. It can be very effective to describe a football match using the semantic field of war, for example (He gunned down the opposition shooting straight into the back of the net…); or a romantic situation using the semantic field of food (She looked good enough to eat…; She would have him as main course and the other for dessert…).
- **idiom** is so natural we fail to recognise it. Idiomatic expressions are a natural part of everyday colloquial language but really make life difficult for learners of English, e.g. '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'.

PHONOLOGY

Phonology is the study of the way the sound and pronunciation of words affects meaning (the related term **phonetics** is the study of the way we articulate sounds). A **phoneme** is the smallest unit of sound that changes the meaning or grammatical function of a word: phonemes allow us to distinguish one word from another. In the word 'cod', 'c' is a phoneme; this can clearly be shown because if it is replaced by another phoneme, such as 'n' or 'p', the word changes its meaning.

Sound is important in many other ways. Consider such phonological aspects (here perhaps more properly called **suprasegmental** or **prosodic** features) as intonation, emphasis, stress, silence, pauses, etc. As 'it ain't what you say, it's the way that you say it' is probably true, always be alert to the ways in which the phonological qualities of a text have been used for good effect:

- **ALLITERATION** is the repetition of initial consonant sounds for effect, e.g. 'Soft and silky';
- **ASSONANCE** is the repetition of similar vowel sounds following different consonants, e.g. 'How now, brown cow?' and in headline, 'Time to step down Mr. Brown'.
- **RHYMING** is the repeat of end-syllables, e.g. 'Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle'. Rhyme can be useful outside of poetry, of course – and even within lines: 'Bush's gain means Afghan's pain'.
- **TONE** is a way to express mood and attitude through language. It can be a lexical or phonological aspect of language and as it is generally subtle, it is often worthy of comment.
- **ONOMATOPOEIA** is a word formed as an imitation of the sound made. The use of onomatopoeia can be highly effective, as in, 'The crunch of bone, the spatter of blood…'.
- **SLANG** is very informal language regarded as inappropriate for certain more formal uses.
- **TABOO LANGUAGE** (the use of swear words often depends for its effect as much on its sound as on their meaning, e.g. 'Oh sh*t').

GRAPHOLOGY

This analytical language level or framework refers to those features of a text that make it 'pleasing' to the eye or which help it conform to a certain genre, e.g. the use of an attractive font face, layout, the use of headlines and columns in a newspaper; the clarity of using bullet points in a report, etc. Commenting on graphology needs care and must be restricted to *the specific ways in which the shape of a text or its layout contribute effectively to its style in some way, i.e. the way the graphology aids meaning and interpretation.*

PRAGMATICS

This aspect of meaning has been mentioned above under **discourse**. It refers to the **force** of utterances created by **social context**. In the real world of language, we are *always* aware of such aspects as our physical and psychological situations, of social and professional relationships and power structures, of political correctness, and so on. We are social creatures and adopt social roles – and naturally, our language has to cope with this and be able to carry with it messages well beyond those contained in the straightforward **semantic content** of the words themselves. Much meaning is inferred – for example, how you refer to your boss when you speak to her or him; or how you refer to your boss when talking to a friend: both styles of language will contain 'between the lines' messages. These messages allow someone analysing your language in this instance not only to tell something about the relationships involved, but also at a wider level about the kind of society in which such language with all its inferred meaning might be used.

Much of what we say is said in an *indirect* way and to uncover the real or *intended* 'meaning' behind the words spoken or written falls into the realm of pragmatics. Pragmatics is the study of the many and various – often very subtle – ways in which meaning is created 'between the lines' – or inferred. Pragmatics, therefore, is important when you are studying language in social contexts for AQA module ENB2, especially language and power, language and technology and language and occupation. If you consider the **pragmatic** and **semantic** values of the language used in the following examples, you will see that much meaning is *inferred* beyond its literal **semantic value**:

- *When you tell your mother or father, 'I'll be home by ten…', they can often tell by pragmatic inference that you won't and respond accordingly.*
- *Many social groups use language in 'short cut mode', whereby you can infer the meaning from the context in which it is used; an outsider would struggle to know what you are saying. 'Cool' slang and irony are good examples of language that often relies on pragmatic rather than semantic meaning.*
- *When someone speaks to you who has some kind of power over you (e.g. your boss who could sack you, etc.), there will be what is called pragmatic inference going on between you during a typical conversation. Certain things will be left unsaid in such a context; and other things will carry extra or different meanings simply because of the 'power relationship' that is a part of 'boss / worker' or 'management' discourse. At the very least, the relationship will cause you to choose your words with more care, and choose what you say and don't say; it might also cause you to 'read' what your boss says in various ways 'between the lines' or adding 2 + 2 to equal more than 4!*

IDEOLOGY

Ideology is a vast area of study and is a sophisticated concept to grasp – but it can lead to subtle commentaries on language. Examining a text from an ideological perspective can reveal important insights into aspects of the users of the text, of their – and their society's – 'world view'. Many theorists believe that all texts act in varying ways to reinforce important shared and dominant ways of thinking about the world. Ideologies are the conventional values, beliefs and ways of thinking that most people within a particular society share and which they perceive as 'normal', 'natural' or 'common sense' ways of thinking. Ideologies are interesting because some people are convinced that such ways of thinking, so very natural seeming, are anything but and act to restrain society and individuals from being self determining. Marxist thinkers, in particular, being anti-capitalist see dominant ideologies as keeping society from changing for the better, from an unequal power-based society towards one that is more equal, fair and free.

When we view those with wealth and power as somehow quite reasonably or naturally 'above us' in our social hierarchy, we can say that our relationship with these more powerful groups is **hegemonic**. **Hegemony** simply means the willing acceptance by a less powerful group in society of others as naturally or reasonably 'above them'.

Dominant ideologies are ways of thinking that form our 'mind set' or 'world view'; they act to convince us that because we think that way, 'we live in the best possible of all worlds', that our view of the word is the 'right' view, that what we think of as 'normal' and 'common sense' is so; and that if others hold different views, it is they, not us, who are 'unusual', 'odd', 'foreign', 'strange', 'mad', 'criminal', 'old fashioned', 'less developed', 'outsiders', and so on.

What you may not have considered is that such ideas come to us *through the language we use, read and hear*. Language *always* insinuates a belief in a certain set of ideas and values. Here are two rather obvious used of language that reinforce a particular mindset:

> **YOB CULTURE LEADS TO DUMBING DOWN OF BBC DRAMA OUTPUT**
> **MEDIA IMAGES CREATE CULTURE OF VIOLENCE**

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. Importantly, such ideas are rarely questioned or have to be justified because they are seen by most within that society as 'natural' and 'common sense' – perhaps as the result of 'history', 'progress', 'right thinking', 'progress', and so on.

One way of studying a text for its ideological content and hegemonic power is to look for what is termed 'ideologically loaded' language. Such language is that which has *judgemental value* as well as *meaning*. Look out for such language and consider its seductively persuasive effect. An important effect is to 'ideologically position' you as its reader, persuading you to accept its 'world view' or to feel as if you are somehow odd or an outsider if you don't.

Many 'ideologically loaded' words carry **judgmental value** that supports a way of viewing the world and its peoples because their meaning is *relational*: the meaning of the word carries power not so much for what it means in itself, but much more because of its opposite's meaning (that is, its '**binary opposite'**). Many ideologically loaded words exist as '**binary pairs'** in which the meaning of one half of the **binary** is related to our beliefs about the other part. In these words, one half of the binary tends to be dominant, or is 'positively marked' in important cultural ways, e.g. 'master / mistress', 'housewife/career woman', 'middle class/working class', 'freedom fighter/terrorist', 'hero/coward', 'normal/abnormal', 'gay/hetero', 'feminine/feminist', 'The West/the East', etc. Binary opposition offers a powerful and subtle means of analysing texts.

Some linguists maintain that all language, all meaning and all 'truth', is an 'ideological construct'. It is certainly quite easy to show how, once thought is converted into the symbols we call words and language – because those symbols act to represent ideas – the words themselves must to some degree be 'ideological' in the sense that they construct not entirely freely considered ideas – they, in part, must reflect someone else's way of thinking.