
GCE English Language 2015: Variation over Time

A level Component 1, Section B: Variation Over Time

Introduction

This scheme of work introduces students to the historical development of English as the national language, including the extrinsic cultural, social, political and technological influences on that development, and also the intrinsic processes and features of language that afford or inhibit change.

It assumes that students will already have covered Language and Context, Individual Variation and Child Language, and that they will be familiar with the analytical language frameworks and levels that underpin the course.

The topic is assessed by comparison of two unseen texts from different historical periods and, from the outset, the scheme takes an approach that introduces students to real examples of historical language data. Teachers could supplement their range of data with the Historical Variation Data pack, which is available online.

Two lesson plans have been created to support the teaching of A level Component 1, Section B:

- Lesson 1: The nature and inevitability of language change
- Lesson 2: Phonological change

Variation Over Time

Week	Theme	Learning outcomes	Content	Exemplar resources
1	The nature and inevitability of language change	<p>Students will understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> that change is an inevitable and continuous process the relationship between variation over time, geographical variation, and language acquisition that many people have strong (often negative) attitudes to language change, but that a descriptivist viewpoint is appropriate for the academic study of variation over time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore relatively recent changes and current variation in what is regarded as acceptable usage to reinforce the idea that language is in a continual state of change and that there is no single fixed idea of correctness (descriptive versus prescriptive approach). Link to <i>Component 2: Child Language</i> by showing how tendencies in CLA (eg overextension/regularisation) are intrinsic tendencies in language that can then increasingly persist over time and thus spread throughout the language. Link back to geographical element of <i>Component 1: Language Variation</i>, and forward to the <i>Regional Language Variation</i> and <i>Global English</i> topics of <i>Component 3: Investigating Language</i>, by having students explore ways in which their own language use differs from that of their parents' and grandparents' generations. Supplement student findings from established sources (see <i>Resources</i> column) to show how regional variation is often synchronic evidence of the spread (or halting) of a diachronic change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online resources illustrating language variation and change, supplemented by key published works listed in the Getting Started teacher guide British Library <i>Sounds Familiar</i> website has examples of regional accents and dialects with transcripts and older dialect recordings.

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2	The chronological development of English	<p>Students will understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the history of English as a national language the relationship between historical and contextual factors when looking at texts from different time periods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give students (individual or pair/group work) a range of different text types from different time periods linked by theme. Students to analyse and research language characteristics and differences from current English, presenting findings to rest of class. Create an illustrated and annotated timeline of English for classroom display (online timeline also an option), with emphasis not only on the language features of the texts, but also the historical, social and cultural contexts in which texts were created, the audiences by which they would be consumed, and the uses to which they were put. Students can collaborate to produce a resource (eg in the form of a series of mind maps), beginning to summarise key features that can be expected at the different language levels in texts from each historical period. This can be extended and fleshed out, as change at the different language levels is examined in more depth in subsequent lessons. A deeper sense of historical context of language changes can be developed through the use of radio or TV programmes on the history of English. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> British Library <i>Texts in Context</i> (www.bl.uk/learning/lan-glit/texts/context.html) a range of texts from different time periods with teachers' notes Online timeline creation software, eg www.tiki-toki.com/ eg <i>The Routes of English</i> (BBC radio) or <i>Adventure of English</i> (ITV) both presented by Melvin Bragg, or the Open University <i>History of English in Ten Minutes</i> series: www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/culture/english-language/the-history-english-ten-minutes

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3	Lexical and semantic change	<p>Students will understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how and why words enter, and are lost from, the lexicon of English • how and why the meanings of words can vary over time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on developing students' understanding of lexical and semantic change. • Lexical change: borrowing, neologism • Semantic change: processes such as broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration and conversion • Explore how words and meanings rarely disappear completely, but become obviously archaic, or restricted to specific registers or 'fossilised' into idioms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students should become familiar with how to use a good etymological dictionary. • The full <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> online is available in most areas for free with a library card number: www.oed.com • A simpler alternative is: www.etymonline.com/
4	Phonological, orthographic and graphological change Syntactical and morphological change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will understand: • how and why the pronunciation, writing and spelling systems of English are related and change over time • how preferences in sentence structure, and the grammatical forms of words vary over time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore currently changing pronunciation, using Prof John Wells' pronunciation survey from 1998. • Brief overview of the Great Vowel Shift can be used to explain some of the complex phoneme/grapheme correspondences in modern spelling. (Work on phonics/literacy development from <i>Child Language</i> component can be used as the starting point here.) • Revisit the range of texts used in week 2 and explore contextual factors, such as the development of printing as a driver for standardisation, development of dictionaries and the 18th-century 'Academy' controversy. • Explore texts further for grammatical change (key features also link to children's language, ie question formation, negation, inflection of verbs, use of auxiliaries/modal verbs, pronoun use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Wells' pronunciation survey: www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/wells/poll98.htm • David Crystal's <i>Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language</i> has some accessible summaries of lexical, semantic and grammatical change. • There is also a useful online summary of some of these issues at: www.thehistoryofenglish.com/history_early_modern.html

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5	Discourse, pragmatic and stylistic change	Students will understand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how the structure and genre features of texts vary over time • how the roles and functions of English have been elaborated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on how, even by Early Modern English, most grammar rules, apart from a relatively small number of common exceptions, were established in a form that is still recognisable today. The sense of a text seeming to us 'old fashioned' is less because of the presence of lexical and grammatical forms that are obsolete, than because of changes in what is regarded as appropriate style, governed by contextual factors such as education, genre, social roles, etc. • Consolidate knowledge from previous lessons, build in exploration of discourse and stylistic changes, and begin preparation for the style of assessment by exploring a range of genres over time, comparing texts from different historical periods with current examples. • Assign a genre to different individuals/groups to research and present to class. 	Legal language: <i>Old Bailey Online</i> – records of court proceedings from 1674–1913: www.oldbaileyonline.org/ Advertising: www.advertisingarchives.co.uk/ Cookery/recipe books: www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/booksforcooks/booksforcooks.html Letters: http://www.lettersofnote.com/

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6	Exam preparation and practice	<p>Students will improve their competence in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> meeting the Assessment Objectives against which examination responses for <i>Component 1B</i> will be judged analysing and comparing texts from different time periods, using knowledge and skills acquired during this unit of work, and relevant content from previous units. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use sample question paper and mark scheme to prepare a plan for an answer. Students mark a model answer and compare their marks awarded with the actual mark. Discussion of strengths and weaknesses of model answer in light of examiner's comments. Revisit planned response, alter it in light of marking exercise then produce answer under timed conditions. Peer mark responses. Further practice can be done using other sample papers. It is also valuable preparation for students to compile their own practice papers, by finding suitable thematically linked texts from different time periods. 	<p>Edexcel Sample Assessment Materials (SAMs) for Component 1B.</p>