

Sample A-level Answer 2

1. What do you like about it?
2. What would you suggest to improve it?

Focus on style as well as content.

June 2008: Language Development:

Text E = Extract from Daily Telegraph and Text F = OED (*crunk & chav*).

Referring to both texts, discuss what the texts show about language change. You may wish to comment on:

- Factors affecting language change
- Lexical and semantic change
- Prescriptive and descriptive attitudes to language

The two texts demonstrate the significant difference between prescriptive and descriptive views of language change. Neil Tweedie's attitude is signalled in the headline to his article: the use of the verb "suffers" suggests a pejorative view of the way language changes. He uses humour to mock the way in which words are "hyper-inflated".

His main complaint is that this is pretentious, taking an everyday job like post room worker and recasting it as "dispatch services facilitators". He finds such language use "ugly, exaggerated or pretentious". He uses the example of an expert being appointed to do a job for the Government being labeled a "tsar". This is an example of something very familiar in English – a loan word from another language. In this case the noun "tsar" refers to the ruler of the Russian Empire – someone of exceptional might and influence, which is why the term may seem rather hyperbolic when used to describe a government adviser.

Neil Tweedie also complains against the way in which marketing can create words and phrases that he finds embarrassing. He points to the way supermarkets will use compound words to make their products more appealing: a "dew-fresh" vegetable is a more vivid, descriptive way of labeling a product. It demonstrates a process that has been familiar since the development of early modern English, in this case putting together two words (dew and fresh) to conjure up an image in the reader's mind.

A further form of lexical change that is familiar in English is affixation, whereby prefixes or suffixes are added to existing words. Here again the author is critical of the effects of the process, citing "uber-" and "mega-" as further examples of this linguistic pretentiousness.

The point about Neil Tweedie's article is that he isn't complaining about the fact that words change; instead it is that they are deliberately being changed for hyperbolic effect. He finds the result pretentious. He takes the

prescriptivist's view that we cheapen and trivialize the language by allowing such changes to be made.

In contrast Text F provides a descriptive view of lexical and semantic change. The word "crunk" demonstrates the process whereby a word may change its meaning very significantly. Its original meaning appears to be an onomatopoeic term for a hoarse cry – the sound we might expect of a raven or crow. This meaning may well now be archaic, possibly continuing in some regional dialects but (to my knowledge) not part of the standard English lexicon. The word does continue to exist, however, in a different register. More than a century after first being noted, "crunk" has taken on a very specific meaning as a slang term associated with rap and hip-hop music. It is used as a noun ("Tonight is going to be crunk") and, with different spelling, as an adjective ("we were just too krunk for that").

The word demonstrates the way in which slang terms are often associated with taboo or non-mainstream subjects, here being associated with parties, music and sex. Slang terms develop and fade quickly and the dictionary shows that by 2005 it is taking on a more specific pejorative meaning associated with a hip-hop sub-genre. Whereas words sometimes broaden their meaning ("nice" in Shakespeare's time meant, amongst other things, particular and has since broadened into a general term of approval), "crunk" appears to have narrowed its meaning, becoming specific. The authors of the dictionary simply state this but without comment: this is the way descriptive views of language present lexical and semantic change.

The other example, "chav", demonstrates another form of slang, this one associated with social class. I had thought that chav is, technically, an acronym – the word is made up from four other words (Council house and violence), though the OED suggests its origin as a loan word from Romani. Whatever its origin, it demonstrates in its other forms the way in which affixation lends meaning – chavvy is the adjective form.

Like "crunk", "chav" demonstrates the way in which slang works, but this time rather than being associated with an informal register, it is a derogatory term used to label a group according to their dress code. This demonstrates the way a key element in slang is often the reinforcement of group identity.

Both texts explore language change. The Telegraph article takes a prescriptivist view in criticizing the trivialization of language through new coinages designed to impress. It sees this form of lexical change as pretentious. The OED shows semantic change ("crunk" entirely changes its meaning over one hundred years) and lexical change, and provides an important insight into the way in which slang works. Both texts remind us that change is an important part of the way language works.

GB: 11 October 2010

Mrs Punchard's Assessment:

Dear Mr B

I've marked your essay and this is your feedback. Please share it with year 13! I hope it is useful.

AO1

16/24

- ✓ Your answer applies and explores the linguistic methods of lexis and semantics
- ✓ You use appropriate and accurate linguistic knowledge and terminology
- ✓ You use controlled and accurate written communication

- You need to be more systematic in your application of linguistic methods. You need to take more of an evaluative approach to the data.

AO2

10/16

- ✓ You use well-selected examples.
- ✓ You discuss a number of concepts (but you do not always explore these fully) and take a descriptive approach to the data.

- In places (especially when talking about text E) you are too descriptive. You need to be more analytical
- There needs to be developed discussion of the concepts in order to move from descriptive to analytical

AO3

4/8

- ✓ Some consideration of the context of these texts

- You need to develop a greater awareness of the impact of text E's context on the attitudes towards language change. In particular the bias of the writer in text E and the demographic of the audience this text is written for.

30/48 – makes this a C/B grade.

Mrs P