

Sample A-level Answer

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 difference between prescriptivist and descriptive attitudes to language. Neil Tweedie's article gives the impression that he disapproves of linguistic change. He pokes fun at the way we tend to use elevated language, using the example of "superhero" and suggesting that in the past the word "hero" would have done. His example, and the tone of his comment, suggests that he thinks we now use elevated language in a way which is unnecessary.

His text is in contrast with the OED entry which expresses neither approval nor disapproval. It demonstrates a descriptive view of language change.

These two contrasting attitudes to language have been in force for several centuries. The key moment in the standardization of English was the arrival of the printing press in 1476. This was a vital ingredient in our historical development because an earlier tolerance of linguistic variance now began to halt. Decisions had to be made in particular about spelling and word order, and the process of standardization began.

Added to this was an element of wishing to educate people – especially children – in what the standard forms were, which led to an emphasis

on prestige forms, most importantly standard English itself.

This idea that there are some forms of English that are more important than others comes through in Text E. Just as the Tudors desired more elevated language to assert their national dominance, so Neil Tweedie seems to suggest we now use 'fancy language' to make boring jobs seem more interesting: a postal worker becomes "a dispatch service facilitator".

He describes this process as "inflation" and uses lots of examples. Some of these demonstrate linguistic practices that have long been in force – such as the habit of English to borrow words from other languages. He uses the example of a "tsar" – someone who is appointed by Government to oversee a policy idea. Borrowings from other languages are very common in English – table (from French) rather than board (Anglo-Saxon); bungalow from Indian which described the type of flats houses Bengalis lived in; and many others.

Neil Tweedie does not seem to be against the idea of borrowing words. Rather, he is concerned that the word is pretentious. He makes a similar point about the influence of advertising language which, once again, he believes makes our lexis pretentious – such as "dew-fresh". This illustrates the way English creates meanings through a process of compounding words, and it is especially frequent in the 20th century onwards as advertisers try to make products memorable and attractive.

In contrast, Text F demonstrates the inevitability of language change. It shows a number of factors in lexical and semantic change. It especially shows the way in which slang – the most colloquial and colourful forms of language – can enter into the standardized lexicon and then disappear. This is because slang is a form of linguistic fashion. Words come and go, gaining brief prestige with certain groups. The word "chav" for example ...

www.geoffbarton.co.uk
October 2010